



Who represents citizens in Tanzania and why? Evidence from the Socio-Economic Profiles of the 12th Parliament (2020-2025)

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Abstract

This study examines who represents citizens in Tanzania and why, by analysing the socio-economic backgrounds of elected members of the 12th Parliament. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines documentary review of Members of Parliament (MPs) with surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions to generate both quantitative and qualitative insights. The results show that most MPs are government employees with diverse professional and educational backgrounds. Key motivations for contesting parliamentary seats include achieving socio-economic impact, addressing community needs, and participating in governance. The findings indicate a Parliament composed of both first-term and experienced legislators, reflecting a balance between renewal and continuity. Career politicians (31.4%) and former public servants (20.9%) dominate, suggesting that party structures and bureaucratic experience serve as key pathways into politics. In terms of tenure, 41.4% of MPs are serving their first-term, while 58.6% have served multiple terms, indicating continuity alongside periodic renewal. Demographically, middle-aged MPs dominate, while youth and older groups are underrepresented. Gender representation remains imbalanced, with males at 62.8% and females at 37.2%. Educationally, 55.5% of MPs hold higher qualifications, 41.4% have secondary to diploma-level education, and only 3.1% have primary education, indicating an elite bias. The Parliament is also dominated by a single party, with limited opposition representation, reflecting a one-party dominant multiparty system. Despite financial constraints and socio-economic barriers affecting access to the office, the findings highlight the need for inclusive reforms to strengthen representation and parliamentary effectiveness in Tanzania.

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Introduction

Members of Parliament (MPs) in Tanzania play a crucial role in representing citizens and upholding democratic governance. As outlined in the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (1977), MPs are elected to voice the interests and aspirations of their constituents through a democratic process (Tanzania, 1977). Parliament consists of various categories of members, including those elected from geographical constituencies, women appointed through proportional representation (special seats), representatives from the Zanzibar House of Representatives, the Attorney General, and



presidential nominees. This structure is designed to promote inclusivity and ensure that a broad spectrum of social groups is represented in governance.

The 12th Parliament, elected during the 2020 general elections, reflects these constitutional ideals, bringing together MPs from a range of professional and socio-economic backgrounds (Crewe 2021). However, the existence of formal inclusivity mechanisms does not necessarily guarantee equitable access to political office, as informal institutions and structural barriers continue to shape political recruitment. This distinction between formal constitutional inclusivity and actual political access is essential, in dominant-party politics, where recruitment is often filtered through party gatekeeping, resource asymmetries and unequal control over nomination procedures. In Tanzania, the 2020 electoral cycle also unfolded under conditions literatures describes as a substantial tightening of competitive space, making the question of who entered parliament inseparable from the wider organisation of electoral competition itself (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997; Cheeseman, 2018; Sulley, 2022; Paget, 2021)

Even though Tanzania's constitution encourages inclusive and representative government, socioeconomic factors still have a significant influence on who can hold political office. People with significant wealth and solid professional networks are often favoured by high campaign expenses, intricate party politics, and implicit expectations such as constituency financial support (Tarimo, & Dominico, 2024). These dynamics align with broader political economy arguments that electoral competition in developing democracies is mediated by resource asymmetries and patron-client relations (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997; Lindberg, 2010). Research on campaign finance in Uganda shows that electoral competition has become increasingly expensive, regulatory enforcement remains weak, and incumbent candidates markedly outspend opposition rivals. While studies of Tanzanian campaigning show that costs are being pushed upward not only by clientelist expectations but also by the growing capital intensity of rallies and campaign organisation. These studies suggest that access to parliamentary office is conditioned not simply by popular support, but by the ability to mobilise costly forms of political competition (Paget, 2024; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Dalton, 2017).

This implies that the social and economic diversity of the people that Parliament is supposed to represent may not actually be reflected in practice. This discrepancy calls into question the effectiveness, inclusivity, and fairness of Tanzania's democratic representation. It also raises critical concerns regarding the gap between descriptive representation (who is present) and substantive representation (what they do), as articulated by Pitkin (1967) and later expanded by Mansbridge (2003). Studies in African shows that legislators often resemble the broader public in some respects while differing in others, especially in education, age, gender and occupation, with MPs disproportionately drawn from older, male, professional and business backgrounds (Mattes et al., 2024). In Tanzania, candidate selection has been shown to be centralised and frequently undemocratic (Sulley, 2022); opposition organisation has been constrained by a hostile dominant-party environment (Paget, 2022); and studies of gendered access show that women's parliamentary advancement still depends heavily on special-seat pathways rather than direct constituency competition (Wang, 2018; Lihiru, 2024; Yoon & Swai, 2025).

Private wealth has become more and more important in politics since the economic liberalisation of the 1980s. Economically disadvantaged people now find it even more difficult to compete due to political patronage, expensive campaigns, and the expectation that MPs will provide financial support to their communities (Collord, 2022; Babeiya, 2015). This reinforces the commercialisation of politics, where electoral success is increasingly tied to financial capacity rather than representational merit (Cheeseman, 2018).



To understand who gets to represent citizens and why, this paper characterises the Nature of the Socio-Economic Background of Groups of Elected Members of the 12th Parliament. It advances the analysis by linking socio-economic characteristics with structural determinants of political access, thereby moving beyond descriptive profiling toward explanatory understanding.

Methodology

Sampling and Population

All 382 elected Members of Parliament (MPs) in Tanzania's 12th Parliament were the study's target population. To guarantee sufficient representation across various constituencies, political parties, genders, and professional backgrounds, a purposive sampling technique was used. This approach was selected to record a wide variety of viewpoints and experiences pertinent to the goals of the study. Although there are more MPs overall, the 382-member sampling frame did not include the Attorney General, presidential appointees, and some special-seat members whose positions are not directly related to constituency representation or who were not available at the time of data collection. Therefore, the chosen sample was purposefully created to concentrate on elected Members of Parliament who actively serve in both legislative and constituency capacities, guaranteeing the findings' applicability and relevance to Tanzania's larger democratic representation framework.

Materials and Methods

Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from a large sample of Members of Parliament (MPs), specifically those elected from constituencies with varying geographic locations, political affiliations, and professional backgrounds. Demographic data, reasons for running for parliamentary seats, and specifics of their socio-economic standing were all recorded in the survey. Focus groups, in-depth interviews, and documentary reviews were used to collect qualitative data.

Interviews were used to explore individual experiences, motivations, and the monetary and social constraints encountered while serving in public office, while observation was used to capture MPs' real-time interactions, participation in parliamentary activities, and behavioural patterns within their working environment.

The study's cross-sectional design allowed for the analysis of MPs' social, economic, and professional diversity by gathering data at a single point in time.

Statistical tools were used to analyse quantitative data and identify trends and correlations among variables. The data were summarised using descriptive statistics such as means and frequencies. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed recurrent themes and insights about the socioeconomic backgrounds of MPs.

Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework is grounded in Pitkin's (1967) theory of political representation. As shown in Figure 1, systemic factors such as electoral systems and party structures shape the nature of representation. Political representation begins with descriptive categories, which reflect the socioeconomic backgrounds of MPs, including age, gender, occupation, and education.

According to Pitkin, descriptive representation influences substantive representation, expressed through legislative activities such as questions raised and bills proposed. For MPs to deliver substantive representation effectively, clarity of their representation role, defined by motives and expectations, is a critical prerequisite.

Ultimately, these motives and expectations shape public perceptions of representation outcomes, fostering citizen trust and legitimacy in representative institutions such as parliament.

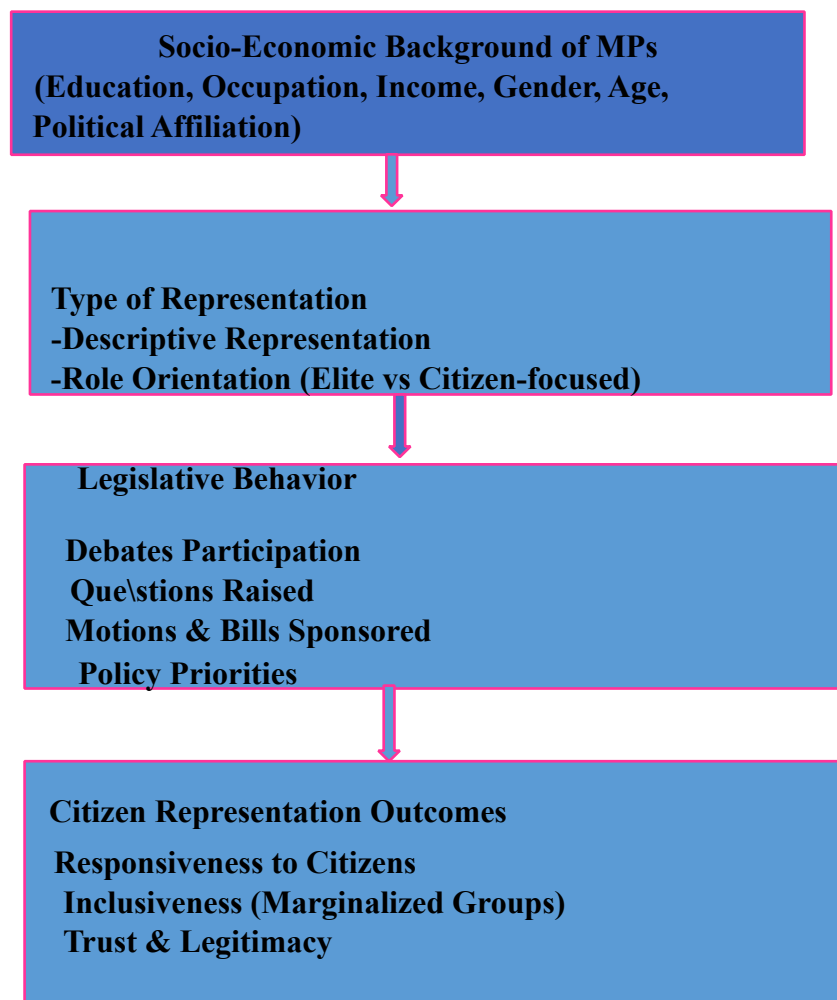


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

Results and Discussion

Characterising the Nature of the Socio-Economic Background of Groups of Elected Members of the 12th Parliament

To characterise the socio-economic backgrounds among the elected members of Tanzania's 12th Parliament involves descriptive representation, which is expected to translate into substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967). Therefore, the socio-economic background characterisation included demographic information on age, sex, level of education, occupation, legislative experience, and political affiliation for all elected MPs in Tanzania's 12th Parliament.

Representation by Age

Age groups were categorised as youth, middle-aged, experienced, and older citizens. As presented in Table 1, the dominant groups were middle-aged, with age categories of 36–45 (28.8%) and 46–55 (31.0%), comprising 59.8% of the total number of MPs.



Table 1: Age Distribution (N = 382)

Age Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
21-35	63	16.5
36-45	110	28.8
46-55	119	31.1
56-65	69	18.0
66-75	21	5.5
Above 75	1	0.2
Total	382	100

Source: Field data, 2023

The analysis of the descriptive representation by age above indicates that the largest group of MPs falls within the middle-aged and experienced categories with 36-45 and 46-55 age range, comprising 59.8% of the total number of MPs. These results suggest that the 12th Parliament of Tanzania was dominated by mid-career and experienced politicians. From the results, the MPs had considerable experience and a substantial background in politics and public service. This dominance reflects a structured pattern of political entry in which individuals at mid-career stages possess the necessary combination of professional experience, financial resources, and political networks required to contest elections successfully. In this regard, age is not merely a demographic variable but a proxy for accumulated political capital.

The youth group aged 21-35 (16.5%) is relatively under-represented. This under-representation suggests that youth face significant entry barriers, including limited access to financial resources, weaker party integration, and lower political visibility. Despite constituting a large proportion of the national population, young people are less likely to translate demographic strength into political representation, indicating a gap between demographic reality and institutional access. This finding reinforces broader evidence from developing democracies where electoral politics tends to favour individuals with established socio-economic standing rather than emerging actors.

Given the under-representation of young people in the 12th Tanzanian Parliament, it is worth reconsidering their representation because they are a more varied group than the rest of the MPs. In an interview, one of the Participants commented:

Although the majority of voters and citizens are young people aged 18 to 35, who are the workforce within the nation (Tanzania) yet are under-represented in the Parliament. There is a need to increase youth participation in decision-making bodies to represent the workforce of the nation. Elderly people are another important group within the Parliament particularly, on their experience, maturity and mentorship. Their problems are similar because of their age, and perhaps even people with disabilities should be categorised and given additional seats. I'm talking about youth representation being very limited in the Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania and considering they play a significant role in many aspects." (Interview with honourable member 01 from 12th Parliament, June 2024.).

Youth representation remains limited despite constitutional provisions supporting inclusion, corroborating Genda (2024), who notes that actual representation of youth often falls short of expected levels. This reflects limited opportunities for younger candidates and the high level of experience required for parliamentary roles.

In contrast, the 55–65 age bracket (18.0%) comprises many senior legislators with extensive experience, highlighting the value of expertise in governance while also emphasising the need for fresh perspectives. The 65–75 age group (5.5%) shows a gradual decline in older representation, while those aged 75 and above (0.2%) represent a minimal share, indicating low participation at very advanced ages.



The age distribution shows a dominance of experienced MPs alongside a deficit in younger representation. This imbalance underscores the importance of incorporating diverse generational perspectives to enhance inclusivity and effectiveness in legislative processes.

Representation by Sex

Differences in the representation of male and female MPs can have significant implications for policymaking and governance (Erickson & Verge, 2022). Therefore Sex-based representation was a crucial issue that reflects broader societal attitudes toward gender equality. Table 2 presents the statistical distribution of respondents by sex.

Table 2: Sex Distribution (N = 382)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	240	62.8
Female	142	37.2
Total	382	100

Source: Field data, 2023

The findings indicate that 240 (62.8%) of the respondents were males, while 142 (37.2%) were females. This illustrates that female Members of Parliament were disproportionately represented within the legislature. Although the proportion of women is relatively high compared to several African countries, this outcome must be interpreted within the context of Tanzania's quota system (special seats). The presence of women in parliament is therefore institutionally supported rather than purely driven by competitive electoral success.

This suggests that descriptive representation has improved numerically; however, it raises important questions regarding the extent to which this translates into substantive representation, particularly in terms of influence over legislative processes and policy outcomes.

The results align with some African parliaments, which have shown a gradual increase in the number of women in parliament despite significant disparities persisting. For example, Rwanda has made remarkable progress in gender representation in parliament, with women currently holding 61.3% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies (Záborszky, 2017). This progress can be attributed to the implementation of gender quotas and strong political institutions that promote women in leadership positions (Rwanda National Institute of Statistics, 2021). However, other African nations, such as Nigeria and Kenya, continue to face challenges in addressing gender imbalances, with women holding only 7.3% and 22.2% of parliamentary seats, respectively (Nzomo, 2003).

Women's representation in European parliament's varies significantly between countries. Nordic countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland are at the forefront of achieving gender parity, with women occupying approximately 47%, 42%, and 39% of parliamentary seats, respectively (Muhammad et al., 2023). These countries have implemented a series of measures, including gender quotas, parental leave policies, and other supportive initiatives, which have collectively contributed to a notable increase in women's political participation (Htun & Weldon, 2018). Conversely, other European nations demonstrate less progress in this regard. For example, Italy and Hungary have lower female representation, with women holding approximately 36% and 13% of parliamentary seats, respectively (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2022). These discrepancies illustrate the varying levels of commitment to gender equality across Europe and the influence of differing national policies and cultural attitudes.

Gender representation in African and European parliaments has improved, yet persistent issues remain. The case of Rwanda demonstrates that significant advances in liberal policy initiatives can be achieved to increase women's representation. Conversely, the European experience shows that high levels of female representation are often the result of sustained gender equality policies and cultural



endorsement. The discrepancy in gender representation impacts both the legislative process and policy outcomes. The presence of diverse perspectives in parliamentary bodies, where both genders are adequately represented, has been shown to result in the formulation of more inclusive and comprehensive policies (Krook & O'Brien, 2012). Consequently, addressing gender imbalances is not merely a matter of fairness but also a crucial aspect of effective governance and policy-making. The issue of gender representation in parliaments remains a critical concern across continents. While some regions have made notable progress, others continue to face significant challenges.

Level of Education

Levels of education in the discussion regarding political representation elaborate the extent to which the educational backgrounds of representatives mirror the entire populace. Level of education matters because it shapes the framing and quality of political debates in which representatives are expected to participate (Schakel & Van der Pas, 2021). In this study, levels of education were characterised in the following categories: Primary, Secondary, Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and Doctor of Philosophy Degree.

Table 3: Levels of Education of Members of Parliament (N = 382)

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary	12	3.1
Secondary	38	9.9
Tertiary (Certificate & Diploma)	120	31.5
Bachelor's Degree	142	37.2
Master's Degree	58	15.2
Doctor of Philosophy Degree	12	3.1
Total	382	100

Source: Field data, 2023

The results in Table 3 indicate that educated MPs describe political representation in Tanzania's 12th Parliament. While the minimum criterion is the ability to read and write, most MPs hold a tertiary qualification, ranging from a Diploma to a Doctor of Philosophy. This concentration of highly educated individuals suggests that education functions as a key gatekeeping mechanism in political recruitment. Candidates with higher education are more likely to possess the skills, confidence, and institutional knowledge required to navigate parliamentary processes and engage in policy debates.

As presented in Table 3 above, 41.4% have a considerably lower level of education (secondary, certificate, and diploma), the majority (55.5%) possess higher levels of education (bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees), while only 3.1% completed primary education. Based on the results above, Tanzania's 12th Parliament can be considered highly qualified. However, this pattern may also reinforce elite dominance by limiting the inclusion of individuals from lower educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby reducing the diversity of lived experiences represented in parliament.

This implies that citizens prefer being represented by people with considerable education who can potentially execute the representation role, which is principally technical.

Arguably, citizens prefer well-educated representatives who can navigate complex legislative processes, participate in evidence-based debates, and exercise oversight of the executive. Meanwhile, skewed educational consideration may reduce experiential diversity in representation, potentially leading to elite-centred policy priorities (Nyathela & Makhado, 2014). In the context of this study, these discussions enrich the need to consider the binary between descriptive and substantive representation. As argued by Pitkin (1967), considering educational attainment strengthens governance outcomes, notwithstanding the normative questions of inclusivity, equality of political opportunities, and representational balance.



In an interview, one of the respondents highlighted that:

“I am a teacher who works as the regional spokesperson. I have a master's degree in education, which I find useful in my field of politics. I ran for and won both the primary and general elections shortly after completing my master's degree. My master's degree provides me confidence in carrying out my responsibilities as an MP “(Interview with honourable member 03 from 12th Parliament, June 2024.).

The findings, show that the majority of the sampled members of parliament had master's degrees according to the findings. In the interview one participant asserted that a member of parliament needs to have strong analytical skills, which implies a postgraduate degree, he said:

The master's education that many MP's have access to is important as it increases knowledge and skills in research. The study allows many MPs to be active while representing their constituencies. (Interview with honourable member 03 from 12th Parliament, June 2024)

The findings show that only 3.1% of MPs have primary-level education, indicating a preference for higher educational attainment within Parliament. This suggests a potential elite bias that may marginalise individuals with lower levels of formal education. While higher education is important for debating bills, oversight, and reducing reliance on technocrats, an overemphasis on academic credentials may limit inclusivity and practical perspectives. This contrasts with the view that effective legislatures require a balance between academic and practical knowledge.

The MPs' educational backgrounds reflect a generally well-educated cohort, with 83.9% holding Tertiary education, bachelor's degrees and a significant proportion having postgraduate qualifications. About 32.7% possess Master's degrees, while 3.1% hold Doctorates, indicating a smaller group with the highest academic specialisation. Additionally, 9.9% have Advanced Secondary/O-Level education, suggesting that some MPs rely on practical experience alongside formal education.

Diversity in educational attainment contributes to varied expertise in legislative processes and policymaking. Studies from Ghana, Nigeria, the Netherlands, and Belgium similarly indicate that higher educational qualifications are associated with improved legislative effectiveness, as MPs with advanced degrees tend to demonstrate stronger analytical and decision-making capabilities. This highlights the importance of education in shaping parliamentary performance and the quality of governance.

Occupation Status

It was important to obtain the career backgrounds of political representatives to understand the economic roles and social identities that shape their contributions to governance. As indicated in Table 4 below, occupational status in this study included the following: career politicians, public servants, business elites, academics and educators, career farmers, civil society and activists, and medical professionals.

Table 4: Occupational Status of Members of Parliament (N = 382)

Occupational Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Career Politicians	120	31.4
Former Public Servants	80	20.9
Business Elites	70	18.3
Academics/Educators	40	10.5
Career Farmers	30	7.9
Civil Society/Activists	25	6.5
Medical Professionals	17	4.5
Total	382	100

Source: Bunge, 2023



The results presented in Table 4 above show that career politicians (long-serving MPs and party officials) and former public servants (administrators and bureaucrats) dominate the legislature, accounting for 31.4% and 20.9%, respectively. This indicates that political recruitment in Tanzania is strongly linked to prior engagement in state institutions. Public service experience provides individuals with institutional familiarity, access to networks, and strategic advantages in party nomination processes.

This pattern reflects a structured pathway into politics where bureaucratic and political elites are more likely to transition into parliamentary roles, reinforcing continuity within governance systems.

These results suggest that a significant number of career politicians communicate strategy to trust party cadres, implying that party patronage provides an institutional pathway into politics that helps explain the dominance of the two categories of occupational status (Bunge, 2023). Likewise, these results imply that experience in public bureaucracy is a common pathway to parliamentary positions. Government employees typically possess skills and knowledge relevant to legislative functions, such as an understanding of public policy and administrative procedures. Reflectively, these results align with Josefsson, (2014), whose study in Uganda finds that former public bureaucrats with diverse professional backgrounds were elected to parliament. The study notes further that this category has significant experience with how government works. Therefore, MPs' prior experience in public bureaucracy better prepares them for legislative duties, thereby enhancing their effectiveness in addressing policy issues and governance challenges (Opalo & Smith, 2021).

The two groups above are followed by business elites (18.3%), including company owners, traders, and private-sector leaders. This indicates that several MPs come from a business background, having been involved in entrepreneurial activities or corporate management before their parliamentary roles. Their experience includes running businesses, managing operations, and engaging in economic planning and development. As Taylor et al. (2022) argues, business background provides them with insights into economic challenges, market dynamics, and business regulations, which can be valuable in shaping economic policies and fostering a favourable business environment. Reflectively, this implies that citizens trusted business elites to represent them on economic related issues in the course of seeking economic empowerment.

The conducted in-depth interview with one of the respondents confirmed that:

“... before I became a Member of Parliament, I was a senior lecturer at the University of Botswana from 1998 until July 2005 when I decided to terminate my contract prematurely in favour of a political career... Interview with honourable member 01 from 12th Parliament, June, 2024.

Furthermore, the 12th parliament had MPs from academic backgrounds (10.5%), comprising university lecturers, teachers, and education specialists. This occupational category offers expertise that can contribute to informed discussions and policy-making related to education and youth development, thereby enriching parliamentary debate with diverse viewpoints and expertise (Davis, 2022). The presence of academicians, particularly university lecturers, in Parliament highlights the importance of educational perspectives in policy-making. Academics contribute valuable insights into educational policy, funding, and curriculum development. Their firsthand experience in the education sector enables them to advocate effectively for policies that improve educational outcomes. Additionally, academics' commitment to public service and community development further enriches legislative deliberations (White, 2023).

Reflectively, these results corroborate Novak and Lajh (2019), whose examination of the impact of MPs' previous occupations on their performance reveals that MPs with backgrounds in academia or business, such as university lecturers or entrepreneurs, often bring specialised knowledge and



strategic thinking to their roles. This implies that citizens feel well represented when their representatives are well-educated and experienced.

The category of career farmers (7.9%) included large-scale farmers, cooperative leaders, and rural representatives; civil society (6.5%) included NGO leaders, unionists, and community organisers; and medical professionals (4.5%) included physicians and health administrators. Agriculture, as a backbone of Tanzania's economy, provides constituency connection and grassroots legitimacy to career farmers; lobbying and advocacy pathways can be associated with a civil society score as an occupational status. Public trust in the medical profession is associated with the election of medical professionals as political representatives (IPU, 2021). Overall, various professional experiences provide their perspectives on many issues of interest to their respective constituencies. Their knowledge and expertise fundamentally contribute to the legislative process by offering a thorough understanding of legal principles, regulatory frameworks, and the implications of proposed legislation (Davies, 2019).

Legislative Experience

The legislative experience entails the knowledge and skills acquired by MPs through their direct involvement in representation activities in the parliament. In the context of descriptive representation, legislative experience matters because it helps shape the navigation of political institutions in representing their respective constituencies (Hansen & Treul, 2025). As presented in Table 5 below, legislative experience was characterised by the number of terms served in parliament as constituency representatives, categorised into four groups: One Term, Two Terms, Three Terms, and Four Terms.

Table 4: Legislative Experience of Members of Parliament

Terms Served	Frequency	Percentage (%)
One Term	158	41.4
Two Terms	104	27.2
Three Terms	73	19.1
Four Terms	47	12.3
Total	382	100

Source: Field data, 2023

The frequency data in Table 5 above shows the political experience of different Members of Parliament. The distribution of parliamentary terms among the 382 MPs varies in length of service.

The findings indicate that, 41.4% of MPs, are first-term. Those serving a second term account for 27.2% of all elected MPs, and third term number 19.1%, while a smaller group (12.3%) of all elected MPs were serving their fourth term. This distribution reflects a balance between renewal and continuity; however, the higher proportion of experienced MPs suggests the presence of incumbency advantage.

Incumbents benefit from established political networks, visibility, and access to resources, which increase their likelihood of re-election.

Put together, the majority (58.6%) served in the second, third, or fourth term, suggesting continuity in their representation, whereas MPs serving in their first-term (41.4%) indicate a change of representation, as citizens thought for a fresh mind to represent them in the legislature. Although few in number, those serving in their fourth term (12.3%) underscored the sense of continuity, which may be explained by the need to be represented by experienced MPs, perhaps due to their track records in their constituencies. Indeed, Osolun (2015) argues that MPs' experiences tend to translate into effective oversight that challenges executive dominance.

From a descriptive representation perspective, the significant number of new MPs suggests that citizens are introducing new societal experiences, issues, and priorities requiring representation attention in their respective constituencies. On the contrary, long-term serving MPs suggest



representation dominance that may favour a certain social group over others (Pitkin, 1967). In this regard, representative institutions ought to be dynamic in terms of the nature of representatives rather than being dominated by a particular social group.

Political Affiliation

In this study, party affiliation refers to the political party that sponsored the representative for the office they hold. As presented in Table 6, political affiliation involved three parties whose candidates won and occupied seats in their respective constituencies.

The three parties are Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), ACT Wazalendo, Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA) and Civic United Front CUF

Table 5: Political Affiliation of Members of Parliament

Political Party	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM)	355	93.0
ACT Wazalendo	4	1.0
Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA)	20	5.0
Civic United Front CUF	3	1.0
Total	393	100

Source: Parliament of Tanzania, 2023

Results from Table 4.6 above show that only three political parties (CCM, ACT Wazalendo, CHADEMA) secured elected seats among all members of parliament ($N = 382$). The presence of more than one party representative in parliament qualifies a multiparty parliamentary system, which Tanzania has practiced since 1992 (Mkilanya, 2011). About 93% of all elected MPs entered in the legislative house via CCM, while the rest came from ACT Wazalendo (0.1%) and CHADEMA (5.0%). The descriptive representation of party affiliation reveals that the 12th parliament of Tanzania was one-party dominant. Indeed, the parliament is CCM-dominated, while opposition parties were extremely under-represented (TEMCO, 2020). Compared to the 11th Parliament (2015–2020), the Tanzanian parliament displayed a relatively competitive multiparty composition. Although Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) held the majority with 253 seats (64.5%), opposition parties had a visible and measurable presence. CHADEMA secured 70 seats (17.9%), making it the largest opposition party. Other parties, such as CUF 42 (10.7%), ACT Wazalendo 1 (0.3%), and NCCR Mageuzi 1 (0.3%), also increased representation. This distribution reflected a functioning multiparty parliamentary system with meaningful opposition participation and a relatively pluralistic legislative environment.

In the 12th Parliament, the ruling party (CCM) enjoys overwhelming dominance, while the negligible representation of elected opposition MPs marks a departure from the competitive multiparty tradition. Indeed, a multiparty parliamentary system requires a strong opposition bloc capable of offering alternative perspectives on citizens' representation and influencing agenda-setting, committee leadership, and legislative outcomes (IPU, 2021). This pattern of descriptive representation implies constrained representation of citizens who support opposition political parties, which is inconsistent with Tanzania's pronounced pluralistic political system. Consequently, a one-party dominant parliament tends to foster intra-party rather than inter-party competition due to the supremacy of party discipline and priorities, ultimately undermining substantive representation.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the 12th Parliament of Tanzania reflects a relatively diverse socioeconomic composition in terms of age, education, professional experience, gender and political affiliation, though certain imbalances persist. While this diversity suggests a degree of inclusivity within the parliamentary system, the findings indicate that representation is not evenly distributed



across all social groups, with middle-aged, highly educated individuals and those with public service backgrounds being more represented. This pattern points to the influence of structural and institutional factors that shape access to political office.

The predominance of MPs with prior government service highlights the continued importance of public sector experience as a pathway to political leadership, while the presence of members from varied professional backgrounds contributes to a breadth of expertise within the legislature. The findings also indicate a mix of first-term and experienced legislators, suggesting a balance between renewal and institutional continuity in parliamentary representation.

However, disparities remain evident in gender representation, educational attainment, and socioeconomic inclusion. While women are represented, they remain disproportionately fewer than men, and higher educational qualifications dominate among MPs, indicating a preference for elite credentials. Similarly, the under-representation of individuals from lower socio-economic and informal occupational backgrounds points to potential barriers to equitable access to political office. Age distribution further shows a concentration in middle-aged groups, with limited participation from youth and older citizens.

The study underscores the need to move beyond descriptive representation towards a more inclusive and substantively representative parliamentary system. This requires targeted reforms aimed at reducing structural inequalities in political participation, strengthening internal party democracy, and broadening access to political office. Enhancing inclusivity is essential not only for democratic legitimacy but also for ensuring that Parliament effectively reflects and responds to the diverse interests of Tanzanian society.

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