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Interplay of institutional logics in legitimising state COVID-19 responses in Tanzania: analysis of newspaper reporting

Amid the global impact of the March 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, governments instituted measures to manage the spread of the virus and needed to legitimise these responses to appear rational and appropriate in the eyes of citizens. We focus on Tanzania, which offers an example of a particular COVID-19 response of not having instituted lockdowns or other long-lasting movement restrictions. Drawing on an institutional logics approach, and by conducting a content analysis of 738 newspaper articles in 2020 to 2022, we explore the kinds of logics through which the state legitimised diverse responses during the pandemic and how these changed over time. Results show how the health and economic logics manifested the most, but also state authority, state welfare, religion, traditional and science logics were used. We further discuss the interplay between changes in the logics and in presidential regimes in the midst of the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19 response, institutional logics, COVID-19 response legitimization, Tanzania, global pandemic governance

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 as a global pandemic on 11 March 2020, and proposed a range of public control and preventive measures to ‘flatten the curve’ that included hand hygiene, masks, social distancing, quarantine and lockdowns (Krittanawong et al., 2022; Onyeaka et al., 2021; WHO, 2023). Governments chose distinctive responsive measures at different stages of the pandemic (Anttiroiko, 2021; Hanson et al., 2021; Narlikar and Sottilotta, 2021; Sobieraj and Metelski, 2020), common among which were restrictions on gatherings, lockdowns, suspending public transport, international travel controls, contact tracing and later, vaccinations (Constantinou, 2022; Jin et al., 2020; Sobieraj and Metelski, 2020). Governments’ responses were influenced by factors such as the evolution of the

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epidemic and its impact on lives in local contexts (Sobieraj and Metelski, 2020), institutional arrangements, knowledge culture and technology deployment (Anttiroiko, 2021; Maor and Howlett, 2020), as well as pre-existing governing structures and scientists' societal roles (Hanson et al., 2021; Narlikar and Sottillotta, 2021).

State-instituted COVID-19 measures required legitimation for citizens to trust the state and comply, for instance, with the restrictions on their movement (Gisselquist et al., 2021). Additionally, the measures themselves needed to be legitimated for citizens to perceive them as appropriate. Typically, the legitimacy of the state is ensured by constitutions (Connolly, 1984), whereas legitimation of COVID-19 measures often required a combination of the legitimacy of the state as well as health experts (Weingart et al., 2022). There is a need for nuanced analysis of how various responses were legitimated and justified in each country.

This article explores the legitimation of COVID-19 responses in Tanzania, which provides an interesting case for two reasons. First, it is an example of a political system characterised as competitive, electoral and semi-authoritarian (Egboh and Aniche, 2015; Paget, 2017; Morse, 2019; Mmassy et al., 2022), where public authority also encompasses control of the media (Cheeseman et al., 2021; Paget, 2021). Second, Tanzania's COVID-19 response was exceptional, as President John Magufuli announced the country free of the coronavirus on 8 June 2020, after which the Ministry of Health stopped releasing COVID-19 data until July 2021 (Buguzi, 2021; Makoni, 2021; Richardson, 2022). A growing body of research discusses the country's unorthodox approach to COVID-19 (see Carlitz et al., 2021; Richey et al., 2021; Paget, 2022), some also addressing its intersection with state legitimation. For example, Patterson (2022) argues that the Tanzanian state used discourses of unity, nationalism and paternalism to legitimate its COVID-19 responses; Richey et al. (2021) show how the state justified the use of traditional herbs to treat COVID-19 by emphasising self-reliance and independence from the global North; Paget (2022) argues that the Tanzanian response under Magufuli was enabled by the existing authoritarian political architecture; and Selenya (2023) analyses the (de)legitimation strategies for COVID-19 vaccinations in the speeches of President Magufuli and his successor, President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

The extant literature already provides a nuanced picture of the discourses and narratives around COVID-19 responses in Tanzania, to which this article contributes in two ways. Conceptually, it scrutinises state legitimation through the lens of an institutional logics approach (e.g. Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; Thornton et al., 2015), which defines legitimation as the articulation of what is rational, reasonable and appropriate according to diverse institutional logics (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Thornton et al., 2012). Empirically, it adds to the qualitative studies of events (Richey et al., 2021) and discourses (Patterson, 2022; Paget, 2022) in Tanzania. While the previous studies have mainly focused on President Magufuli's term, this article offers a novel systematic quantitative content analysis covering a three-year period (2020–2022) including

22 months under President Hassan, enriched with qualitative examples. The main question addressed is: in what ways did institutional logics manifest in legitimisation of the state responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania? To answer this question, it explores the logics used related to the themes that emerge, and how these changed.

In Tanzania, the mainstream media were harnessed to communicate the state narratives and thus offer a feasible way to investigate state legitimisation, as demonstrated by a study on Sweden (Rautalin and Alasuutari, 2024). We analysed 738 articles published in two English-medium newspapers, *The Citizen* and *Daily News*, during the period 2020 to 2022. The selection of papers that are read mainly by urban and educated citizenry to explore legitimisation was justified because the COVID-19 response under President Magufuli created mixed reactions among the elite living in urban settings where the effects of the pandemic were stronger than in rural areas (Carlitz et al., 2021; Makoni, 2021; Richardson, 2022). In what follows, we first articulate the conceptualisation of institutional logics as a lens onto state legitimisation before revisiting the main responses in Tanzania. We then describe the methods used and present the results of the analysis. Finally, we conclude by indicating our main contributions to the literatures on COVID-19 responses and on institutional logics.

Institutional logics as a lens to legitimisation of COVID-19 responses

The extant research has investigated strategies used by states to legitimate COVID-19 measures and render them acceptable for citizens. Covering selected democracies, Wodak (2022) found that four major discursive frames – religious, dialogic, ‘trust’, and ‘leading a war’ – were legitimated by strategies relying on moralisation, rationalisation and authority. With a focus on epistemic governance in world society, Rautalin and Alasuutari (2024) found three main ways the Swedish COVID-19 strategy was legitimated: firstly, by emphasising freedom and rights; secondly, by stressing the evidence base of the Swedish strategy; and, thirdly, by pointing out that the Swedish strategy would prove right in the long run. Investigating struggles over the legitimacy of the COVID-19 response in Sweden, Giritili Nygren and Olofsonn (2021) identified three crisis narratives: health, the economy and democracy. When analysing citizens’ non-compliance in Australia, Dowling and Legrand (2023) identified consent, legitimacy, expertise, and trust as the main features of policy compliance, and found that a mistrust of science and experts was a major factor in non-compliance. In a similar vein, with a focus on 11 Western democracies, Altıparmak et al. (2021) showed the effect of political trust and partisanship on the public’s evaluations of government measures. In the context of Tanzania, Patterson’s study (2022) of the discursive legitimacy of state COVID-19 responses showed how it was enhanced through discourses of unity, nationalism and paternalism.

To add to studies on the legitimisation of state COVID-19 responses in terms of

historical (Patterson, 2022) or sociological (Rautalin and Alasuutari, 2024) institutionalism, this article employs an institutional logics approach in which legitimation refers to an articulation of what is rational, reasonable and appropriate in alignment with diverse institutional logics (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Thornton et al., 2012). Rather than focusing on the discourses whereby the COVID-19 responses were legitimated, this article scrutinises the logics on which they were based, as institutional logics guide the attention in defining problems, recognising solutions (Thornton and Ocasio 1999) and, thus, making sense of an uncertain world (Thornton, 1995; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; 2008; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). We argue that institutional logics provide a useful heuristic to understand how states constructed diverse responses as rational and appropriate.

In an organisational institutional logics approach, logics are defined as the ‘socially constructed patterns of symbols and material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals and organisations produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality’ (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999). In the early elaborations (Friedland and Alford, 1991), institutional logics were understood to originate within institutional orders in modern society, such as professions, family, religion, corporations, markets and states. In more recent literature, however, institutional logics are comprehended in a broader way as shared cultural symbols and principles of action that provide criteria for appropriateness, cognitive frameworks, and vocabularies of motive (Thornton, 2002, 2004; Thornton et al., 2012). Consequently, the identification of logics has been nuanced and not strictly tied to institutional orders. In a similar vein, this article posits that notwithstanding its being an institutional order, a state’s legitimation process can resort to multiple logics in constructing policies as appropriate.

An institutional logics approach posits heterogeneity and different cultural meanings, as well as contradictions and conflicts between logics (Thornton et al., 2012). Empirical studies have established the co-existence of multiple, sometimes contradictory logics in organisations and organisational fields (e.g. Dunn and Jones, 2010; Reay and Hinings, 2009; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005), while changes from one logic to another have also been investigated. For example, an analysis in the field of publishing scrutinised a change over time from editorial and craft logics to a market logic (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; Thornton, 2002), and a study in the finance industry found a shift from professional to market logic (Lounsbury, 2002).

Hence, the conceptual starting points of this article are, first, that legitimation of state COVID-19 responses refers to constructing them as appropriate and rational in alignment with several institutional logics; second, that in state legitimation, multiple logics are at play; and third, the logics used can change over time. Previous studies of COVID-19 taking an institutional logics approach have focused on professions and organisations. Examples include a study of the influence on new practices – such as

telemedicine – of the dominant logics of state, corporations, professions and family stemming from different stakeholders (Oborn et al., 2021); an analysis of changes in institutional logics in healthcare (Jacobsson et al., 2022); and identification of two competing emergency logics – planned and ad hoc – in a hospital at different stages of the pandemic (Kjekshus, 2023). This article provides a new angle on the diverse institutional logics used in the legitimisation of state COVID-19 responses.

COVID-19 responses in Tanzania

Tanzania recorded its first COVID-19 case on 16 March 2020 and first death on 31 March 2020, whereupon the state responded to the threats by considering people's lives and livelihoods (Salehe, 2020; Mugabe et al., 2022; Hamisi et al., 2023). At the onset of the pandemic, the response was predominantly led by the late President Magufuli, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health. A brief partial lockdown was issued from March 2020 to June 2020, including the closure of schools and suspension of visits to prisons (Buguzi, 2021; Mfinanga et al., 2021). The response emphasised the use of hand sanitisers and face masks, limiting the number of people attending burials, and the installation of handwashing facilities in public places (Mumbu and Hugo, 2020; Carlitz et al., 2021). COVID-19 screening at the airports' points of entry was introduced, and isolation and quarantine centres for all international passengers were established (Mumbu and Hugo, 2020). COVID-19 centres nationwide for testing and handling patients were opened and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for health facilities were released (Mumbu and Hugo, 2020; Carlitz et al., 2021). Churches, mosques, restaurants and pubs were allowed to remain open, and the borders were not closed (Salehe, 2020).

A remarkable shift in the state's response happened in June 2020 when the partial lockdown was removed, and on 8 June, the president announced Tanzania free of COVID-19 (Salehe, 2020; Mugabe et al., 2022; Richardson, 2022). This was followed by 'arbitrary responses' (Kwayu, 2020). Tanzania ceased to provide statistics on COVID-19 cases and restricted the media from publishing any information about COVID-19 in the country without government approval (Muakilishi TZ, 2020), articulated in regulations issued in July 2020 (Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority, 2020). Thus, all local media outlets were banned from broadcasting foreign content without official permission (DW, 2020), which remarkably limited citizens' access to COVID-19 information. Further, President Magufuli was sceptical about vaccinations and the use of imported face masks (VOA, 2021), rather advocating prayers. Meanwhile, the government started to promote the use of local herbs produced by individuals and research institutions, and steaming to deal with the respiratory symptoms (Salehe, 2020; Richey et al., 2021; Richardson, 2022).

In another shift, a U-turn in Tanzania's COVID-19 response took place when Vice President Samia Suluhu Hassan took over the presidency on 19 March 2021 after the

unprecedented death of President Magufuli. She declared that her administration would review its position on the COVID-19 pandemic, lift media bans (*The Citizen*, 2021a) and appoint a committee of experts to advise the government. The experts' report urged the government to scale up public health measures and take a science-based approach. Soon after, based on experts' reports, the president announced COVID-19 vaccines were safe and urged Tanzanians to get vaccinated (*Daily News*, 2021). Tanzania joined the global COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility and received vaccines from various governments, including the United States and China, starting from July 2021 (Chilongola et al., 2022). In the same month, the government resumed COVID-19 reporting. By September 2022, over 25 million vaccinations had been administered nationwide (Hamisi et al., 2023). Tanzania also received support from the COVID-19 recovery fund of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (IMF, 2021b; Reuters, 2021).

Hence, Tanzania's response differed from most countries in East Africa. Neighbouring countries, such as Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, implemented full or partial lockdowns, closed their borders and instituted curfews (Harrington and Ngira, 2021; Ezra et al., 2021; Kuria et al., 2024; Munu and Vlaminc, 2024). In these countries, unlike in Tanzania, global health governance shaped the domestic response. For example, the formation of national COVID-19 task forces enhanced communication with international organisations and donors, as well as distributing food relief to vulnerable communities (Harrington and Ngira, 2021).

Methods: four steps in capturing institutional logics in legitimisation

Previous studies on states' legitimisation of COVID-19 responses based on newspaper reporting have used framing analysis (Bosch and Wasserman, 2023), critical discourse analysis (Rautalin and Alasuutari, 2024) and crisis narrative identification (Giridli Nygren and Olofsson, 2021). The methodology used here follows the 'qualitative capturing' of institutional logics (Reay and Jones, 2016), where a quantitative analysis of the extent of logics is combined with a qualitative exploration of the themes to which they relate and how they were used.

The first step was to identify relevant texts (Reay and Jones, 2016, 444). In resonance with Rautalin and Alasuutari (2024), we selected newspaper articles that communicated the state's policies and responses to citizens. While others (e.g. Paget, 2022) have used selected state policies and newspaper articles or presidents' political speeches (Selenya, 2023) to analyse the specificities of the Tanzanian response, we chose to conduct a systematic analysis of COVID-19 reporting covering state positions over the three years from 2020 to 2022. Two renowned English medium Tanzanian newspapers – the state-affiliated *Daily News* and privately owned *The Citizen* – were identified

for two main reasons. First, they are examples of widespread mainstream reporting, and second, they were digitally accessible in ProQuest database, which enabled full three-year coverage. Using the keywords of ‘COVID’ OR ‘coronavirus’ OR ‘corona’, we first identified 3,381 COVID-19 related articles, which all were manually coded according to the ‘source of information’ used in the reports.¹ The sources of government (36.7 per cent) and president (8.7 per cent) combined were prevalent, compared, for example, to experts (11.4 per cent). Therefore, the total of 738 newspaper articles quoting source of information of either the ‘government’ or the ‘president’ were selected to be analysed here to focus on the logics in state legitimation.²

The second step was to develop a coding scheme for the content analysis of institutional logics (Reay and Jones, 2016, 444). Logics are constructs and thus, do not directly ‘represent reality’ (ibid., 447). Therefore, their definition and use in coding of any particular piece of data depends on researchers’ interpretation. Building on previous general categorisation of institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012), their specific use in analysing COVID-19 responses (Guix et al., 2025), and close pre-reading of the data, we identified seven relevant logics to be used in the coding scheme.

The logics included in the coding scheme were health, economic, state authority, state welfare, traditional, religious, and science. Logics were distinguished by how a certain issue, in this case COVID-19 response, was rationalised and justified. The health logic rationalised actions to be necessary for maintaining health, such as health education, health guidelines and patient care (Ten Dam and Waardenburg, 2020). It manifested in articles reporting how government advised, required, and emphasised that people follow personal protective measures, environmental measures and government COVID-19 response guidelines, and accept COVID-19 vaccination to secure their health. Economic logic rationalised actions based on the socio-economic consequences. It appeared in reports on government’s accounts of not opting for lockdown to ensure economic survival, fiscal policies during the pandemic, and emphasising economic recovery (IMF, 2021a; Jann, 2021). State authority logic rationalised actions to be appropriate due to exercise of legitimate government power. It was shown in articles that reported on using authority, for example, to restrict the mainstream press from reporting statistical data related to COVID-19. The logic of state welfare rationalised actions to be necessary for making services available to address local social needs (Pache and Santos, 2013). This logic appeared in texts discussing government decisions and actions aiming to secure social services, such as reopening schools

1 The categories of sources of information included president, government, opposition, religious institutions, civil society organisations, ordinary citizens, private sector, international and others. The results of this analysis will be discussed in a separate article.

2 The category of ‘government’ included both national and local government, as well as the ministries. However, due to the centralised nature of COVID-19 communication, it mostly referred to the Ministry of Health and the prime minister.

during the pandemic and using COVID-19 IMF loans on education and public goods. Traditional logics rationalised actions to be appropriate vis-à-vis the medicine rooted in cultural beliefs and practices that do not fall under modern biomedicine, such as use of herbal remedies (Iwu and Gbodossou, 2000). Religious logic justified actions based on assumptions of a perceived supernatural or divine being beyond this world (Gümüşay, 2017). It appeared in texts that reported emphasising prayers, faith and God’s miracles as appropriate means to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the logic of science rationalised COVID-19 responses, prevention and treatment through findings of scientific research (Dunn and Jones, 2010). Coding the newspaper articles under the seven logics, thus, had uncertainties due to interpretations. For instance, when an article manifested several logics, only the dominant one was coded. Nevertheless, the systematic coding of all articles provided a general picture of the pattern of the logics, and hindered rushing into straightforward focus only on those qualitative parts that first ‘triggered attention’ (Reay and Jones, 2016, 446).

The third step, then, was to conduct a data-driven thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2016) to capture the content of the issues legitimated. This resulted in 20 themes (see Table 3). In the fourth step, we exported coding of logics and themes to SPSS to calculate the frequencies of logics, cross-tabulate the logics with the themes they legitimated, and chart the distribution and change of logics over the three selected years. Finally, based on the patterns observed in quantitative analysis, we scrutinised the qualitative contents of logics, themes and their change.

Findings: institutional logics used in the legitimation of the state’s COVID-19 responses

Here we present and discuss our findings on the occurrence of institutional logics, the themes they legitimated and changes over time. First, we present the results of the quantitative analysis in three tables, after which we provide our interpretation

Table 1 Frequencies of institutional logics manifested (N=738)

Institutional logic	Frequency	Percent
Health logic	429	58.1
Economic logic	136	18.4
State authority logic	63	8.5
State welfare logic	61	8.3
Traditional logic	19	2.6
Religion logic	21	2.8
Science logic	9	1.2
Total	738	100.0

Table 2 Institutional logics manifested across the three years

% within year		Year * Institutional logic crosstabulation								
		Type of institutional logic								
		No. of articles	Health	Economic	State authority	State welfare	Traditional	Religious	Science	Total
Year	2020	309	51.5%	24.6%	12.6%	3.9%	3.2%	3.2%	1.0%	100.0%
	2021	273	74.0%	5.5%	8.1%	4.4%	2.9%	3.7%	1.5%	100.0%
	2022	156	43.6%	28.8%	1.3%	23.7%	0.6%	0.6%	1.3%	100.0%
Total		738	58.1%	18.4%	8.5%	8.3%	2.6%	2.8%	1.2%	100.0%

Table 3 Institutional logic legitimisation themes

Institutional logic	Legitimisation	Description
Health	Surface COVID-19 preventive measures	These include handwashing and sanitisation, mask wearing, avoiding contacts, etc.
	Social distancing measures	Keeping six feet or two metres from others and avoiding gathering in large groups
	Isolation measures	This includes quarantines
	Spatial restrictive measures	These include all kind of measures that restrict mobility including lockdown and closing borders
	Health guidelines and SOPs (gvt & WHO)	This includes government health guidelines provided
	COVID-19 screening and treatment	This includes COVID-19 testing and screening
	COVID-19 vaccination	This includes taking vaccine, vaccination certificate, vaccination charges, etc.
Economic	Non-restrictive measures	Including avoiding lockdown
	Economic recovery measures	Monetary policies measures
State authority	Regulations on COVID-19 reporting	Government only reporting, restrictions to report COVID-19 information, stopping reporting COVID-19 data
	Coercive enforcement	Arresting individuals who do not comply with government rules/decisions on how to handle COVID-19 including publishing COVID-19 data
	Others	Any other government orders e.g. directing to resume sports activities; monitoring and conducting auditing of the constructing of water wells and classrooms project financed by COVID-19 relief funds

Institutional logic	Legitimation	Description
State welfare	Education services	Opening schools. building classrooms using COVID-19 fund
	Use of COVID-19 fund on public goods	Funding water projects
	Economic relief/assistance to families	Donation and funding to families. youth and women
Traditional	Use of traditional cure	This include promoting the use of local herbs, concoction, steaming, etc.
Religious	Prayers	This includes promoting use of prayers
Science	Research on coronavirus	Emphasise on expert to research coronavirus, production of COVID-19 vaccines
	Research on local herbs	This includes urging scientists to research the quality of local herbs used
	Research on sanitisation products	This includes researching and manufacturing sanitisers

of the results vis-à-vis the pandemic trajectory in Tanzania over the two presidential regimes. The total frequencies of the logics are presented in Table 1, the cross tabulation between year and logics in Table 2 and the themes legitimated in Table 3. The cross tabulations of logics and themes with each year to illustrate their change over time is in the supplementary material.

Health logics: from handwashing to vaccinations

The analysis of the frequencies of logics used (Table 1) shows that, overall, the government’s COVID-19 responses were mainly legitimated by the *health* logic, accounting for more than half of all the articles, followed by the *economic* logic used in around one fifth. Hence, diverse policies were rationalised both as securing the health of citizens and maintaining a vibrant economy in the country, striking a balance between whether to prioritise protecting livelihoods or lives during pandemic (e.g. Mfinanga et al., 2021).

Table 2 shows that in 2021, the health logic made up almost three-quarters of all logics, higher than in 2020 and 2022 when its proportion was slightly above or less than 50 per cent, respectively. Overall, the results show that the health logic legitimated a range of different measures adopted by the government, such as screening at borders, treatment and preventive measures including handwashing, sanitisation, mask-wearing, avoiding contact, and, later, vaccination. In contrast, the health logic

was rarely used to legitimise social distancing measures, isolation measures or adopting health guidelines developed by the government and the WHO.

The following example illustrates a typical use of the health logic in legitimating handwashing:

The Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children issued a health advisory on hand hygiene to prevent the spread of coronavirus where the public is required to use alcohol-based hand sanitizer or wash hands with soap and running water. (*Daily News*, 2020a)

Themes legitimated by the health logic changed over time. We observed that in 2020, it legitimated six themes, in order of percentages: COVID-19 screening at airports and borders; surface preventive measures; social distancing measures; health guidelines; isolation; and spatial restrictions. This differs from 2021, which was mostly under President Hassan's regime, when in over half of the cases, the health logic was used to legitimate COVID-19 vaccination, followed by surface preventive measures, and screening and treatment. Subsequently, in 2022, only four themes were captured, of which the most prominent was COVID-19 vaccination, with a proportion of over 85 per cent of all themes legitimated with the health logic.

The shift in the emphasis of the health logic from handwashing to vaccination reflects the international development of COVID-19 vaccines but also highlights the shift in the official narrative regarding vaccines. In contrast with President Magufuli's sceptical view – '[V]accinations are dangerous. If the White man was able to come up with vaccinations, he should have found a vaccination for AIDS by now' (*The Citizen*, 2021c) – President Hassan emphasised the need to get vaccinated: 'The President said the vaccine is safe to take, insisting she has voluntarily agreed to be vaccinated' (*Daily News*, 2021a). This change in attitude and joining the international COVAX initiative echoed President Hassan's recognition of the presence of COVID-19 in Tanzania and her continuing to release statistics from June 2021 onwards (*Daily News*, 2021a; *The Citizen*, 2021c). In a similar vein, Magufuli's emphasis on Tanzanian national solutions, as pointed out by Patterson (2022), was also reflected in how the most frequent occurrences of the health logic in the first year of the pandemic predominantly legitimated screening at the borders to hinder importing the virus to Tanzania, and less the in-country implementation of the WHO's recommendations (Krittanaawong et al., 2022; WHO, 2023).

Economic logic: from 'economy first' to 'economic recovery'

Overall, the economic logic was used in around one-fifth of all the coded articles. However, in both 2020 and 2022 it was used in around a quarter of all articles, while in 2021, its proportion was only around 5 per cent. There was also a significant change

in themes. In 2020, the economic logic mostly legitimated avoiding lockdowns and allowing people to continue income-generating activities, whereas in 2022, the focus was on distributing international COVID-recovery funds. The use of the economic logic gained preponderance, especially during May to June 2020, before President Magufuli announced the country was free of the virus, as illustrated in the following example from one of his speeches:

We have had a number of viral diseases, including AIDS and measles. Our economy must come first. It must not sleep. If we allow our economy to sleep, we will not receive salaries [...] Church offerings will cease if we announce a lockdown [...] Life must go on. (*The Citizen*, 2020c)

The theme of economic recovery started to emerge in 2021, and in 2022 it was practically the only theme legitimated by the economic logic. This change illustrates the overall progress of the pandemic, and a shift in the state's attitude towards COVID-19 loans provided by the IMF. President Magufuli was sceptical about them, as they required implementation of the WHO's recommendations and would increase the country's debt burden (*The Citizen*, 2020a). The scenario changed in 2021, when President Hassan decided to seek IMF loans to combat the economic impact of the pandemic. As Tanzania's finance minister was quoted saying:

President Samia met Ms. Kristalina Georgieva, Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with a view to strengthening relations on economic and social issues including the issue of strategies to address the impact of Covid 19. (*The Citizen*, 2021d)

In the same newspaper article, it is also reported,

Tanzania's Finance Minister Mwigulu Nchemba has said that they have entered negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the provision of a \$571 million Rapid Credit Facility (RCF) loan. The loan, according to Mwigulu Nchemba, is a concessional one to address the economic and social impact of Covid. (*The Citizen*, 2021d)

These statements demonstrate President Hassan's government's readiness to accept IMF loans to address the impact of the pandemic on the country.

Welfare logic: securing services and allocating relief funds

Tanzania accepted and received recovery funds relatively late – see IMF's COVID-19 financial assistance tracker (IMF, 2022) – and did not use them for relief packages for citizens under lockdown, like some neighbouring countries (World Bank, 2020; Bigirimana, Rwagasore, and Condo, 2021; Kuria et al., 2024; Munu and Vlamminck, 2021).

Rather, allocation of the received funds was mainly legitimated by the state welfare logic, the use of which was highest in 2022, amounting to almost one fifth of all the logics. In 2021, the proportion was around 5 per cent, and only around 1 per cent in 2020. The logic legitimated action by stressing the importance of maintaining state welfare services. In 2020 and 2021, the state welfare logic was mostly used to legitimate the continuation of education services amid the pandemic. However, in 2021, a new theme, the use of economic relief to support vulnerable families and individuals, gained importance, accounting for a quarter of the occurrences of all themes under this logic, although there is no information on how such relief was implemented. In 2022, it was mainly directed at legitimating the government's decision to use the COVID-19 funds on public goods, such as water projects and education services, as illustrated by the following example:

He [Rukwa Regional Commissioner (RC)] further highlighted that the region has received over TZS 8.9bn/- from the Covid-19 relief package of which TZS 6.5bn/- has been channelled to the construction of 259 classrooms for secondary schools and 73 for satellite secondary schools. (*Daily News*, 2022b)

Authoritarian logic: restricting COVID-19 information

The authoritarian features of the Tanzanian state were intensified during President Magufuli's term (Paget, 2022). In contrast to other countries, where state authoritarianism appeared in legitimating lockdowns (Onyeaka et al., 2021), or in using military force to enforce them, as in the cases of Uganda and Rwanda (Munu and Vlaminck, 2021; Khisa and Rwengabo, 2024), in Tanzania it was merely used to maintain the narrative that the country was free of COVID-19, exercised through restrictions on who was allowed to report on and discuss the pandemic. Nevertheless, the legitimization of measures by appealing explicitly to the logic of authority appeared in only around 8 per cent of all articles. In 2020, it was mainly used to legitimate state regulations on COVID-19 reporting, followed by rationalising the coercive enforcement of these reporting regulations, illustrated by reports such as the following:

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation on Tuesday summoned the Charge d'Affaires of the United States (US) to Tanzania, Dr Inmi Patterson, to clarify various issues that the embassy has been sharing on its social media platforms without evidence. (*Daily News*, 2020c)

The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA), Content Committee has suspended Kwanza online TV for 11 months for allegedly generating and disseminating biased, misleading and disruptive content. (*Daily News*, 2020b)

In 2021, the use of the state authority logic continued to legitimate reporting regulations and the prohibition of mainstream media and individuals from reporting statistical data on COVID-19 without government approval (DW, 2020; Makoni, 2021), in parallel with the government's own decision not to release COVID-19 data from June 2020 to July 2021 (Makoni, 2021). In contrast, in 2022, the legitimization of COVID-19 reporting regulations ceased, influenced by IMF COVID-19 financial assistance 'health conditionalities', as the IMF's resident representative was quoted saying: 'When applying for pandemic-related emergency financing, evidence of the pandemic has to be available to substantiate the claim' (*The Citizen*, 2021b). However, other issues emerged: for example, ordering the local governments to monitor and audit the implementation of projects funded through the COVID-19 Relief Fund, as illustrated by this example:

'I want to insist that every institution which received this money [TZS 1.3 trillion IMF fund to mitigate COVID-19 effects in the country] will be thoroughly audited and I wish to reiterate that there is not any single penny that will be squandered [...] I won't spare anybody who will chop any shilling from this money and whoever will do that will know that my skin colour is not brown just as many of you may think', the Controller and Auditor General was quoted. (*Daily News*, 2022a)

Rare but influential logics of religion and tradition

President Magufuli's appeal to religion and African tradition to legitimate Tanzania's exceptional COVID-19 response has gained a lot of attention in the literature (Paget, 2022; Salehe, 2020; Mfinanga et al., 2021; Richardson, 2022). However, the logics of religion and tradition each appeared in only around 3 per cent of articles in 2020 and 2021, while they disappeared altogether in 2022. The few instances using those logics, mainly reporting on Magufuli's speeches at events, have thus 'triggered attention' (Reay and Jones, 2016, 446). They were also influential in shaping policies and citizens' conduct. In the first months of the pandemic, President Magufuli resorted to religious logic to legitimate prayers, as in the following example:

Fellow Tanzanians, following the coronavirus pandemic, I urge you to use three days from April 17–19 (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) to pray to the Almighty Lord who has power over all things to save us from this disease. Let us all pray, each in their own faith, he will listen. (*The Citizen*, 2020b)

The traditional logic was related to state advocacy of the use of traditional cures such as concoctions and steaming, and *nyungu* (steam inhalation using locally boiled traditional herbs), as the best way of dealing with the virus (Salehe, 2020; Richey et al., 2021; Richardson, 2022). President Magufuli's following statement exemplifies

this: ‘There is a medicine called Bupiji and many people who have used it have been healed, even in hospitals they use the drug; there is also a natural remedy Covidol that is a cure for many Tanzanians against corona’ (*Daily News*, 2021b).

With President Hassan’s different approach, in 2021 and 2022 state advocacy of traditional cures faded away and was replaced by expert advice based on modern medicine. However, even if the message to the citizens from the Ministry of Health rapidly changed to one of reliance on modern medicine, the previous emphasis on tradition or prayers was not explicitly contrasted or commented on.

The missing logic of science

The proportion of use of the science logic remained constantly small, around 1 per cent each year. Only a total of nine articles out of the 738 justified COVID-19 responses by appealing to science, which hugely differs from the cases of Sweden (Rautalin and Alasuutari, 2024), neighbouring Uganda (Sarki et al., 2020), and Rwanda (Karim et al., 2021). In these countries the state’s responses were explicitly justified by scientific expertise stemming from accumulating research on the variants of the virus, its spreading mechanisms, and later, vaccinations. Instead, the few instances of science logic in the Tanzanian media legitimated the government’s views on the importance of research on local herbs and sanitation products in 2020, illustrated in the following examples of President Magufuli’s statements: ‘This is important and scientific. Tanzanians must be encouraged to use other herbs including onions and other traditional chemicals’ (*The Citizen*, 2020a).

In 2021 and 2022, scattered occurrences of scientific logic promoted COVID-19 research in Tanzania, including the possibility of manufacturing vaccines in the country. These discussions, however, did not go into the specifics of COVID-19 established in scientific research, but were rather general proposals, as the following example illustrates:

‘We have a lot of experts. We will make it. We will not only produce COVID-19 vaccines but also those [vaccines] for other diseases so that even when the pandemic ends, Tanzania will still have the capacity of producing such medicines locally’, said Prof Makubi [Health Permanent Secretary]. (*The Citizen*, 2021f)

President Samia Suluhu Hassan has asked the European Union to consider funding the plan as the country seeks to become a major exporter of vaccines in East and Southern Africa. ‘Tanzania wishes to submit a proposal on the same, and I am looking forward to facilitation of this idea into a fruitful project’. (*The Citizen*, 2022)

Interestingly, while measures such as washing hands and social distancing were legitimated through the rationale of ‘maintaining health’, explanations were not provided

of the actual mechanisms of spreading the virus to justify the measures, or the advancing research on COVID-19 virus variants or different types of vaccines.

Overall, the detailed analysis demonstrated that the state's stances on the pandemic were merely reported, and the statements from the presidents or the health ministry merely repeated, rather than demonstrating any engagement in journalistic investigation.

Conclusions

Our analysis of the exceptional case of Tanzania adds to the literature on state responses to COVID-19 and their embeddedness in existing political systems (Sobieraj and Metelski, 2020; Jin et al., 2020; Constantinou, 2022). The ways in which logics were used to legitimate even opposing measures at different phases went from downplaying the seriousness of the pandemic (Kwayu, 2020; Adebisi et al., 2021; Mugabe et al., 2022; Richardson, 2022) to promoting vaccinations. How these were reported in the press without subjecting them to explicit reflection, contestation or critique illustrates the non-critical reporting style in Tanzanian newspapers, as is typical of semi-authoritarian contexts. The systematic analysis over three years adds to the previous research on President Magufuli's exceptional COVID-19 responses, evoking a historically established discourse of nationalism, paternalism and self-reliance (Patterson, 2022; Richey et al., 2021) by showing, first, how most of the state's legitimation revolved around the health and economic logics, and, second, how the themes legitimated shifted with the change of president. It also showed that the state authoritarian logic was explicitly used in legitimation in rare instances, but nevertheless, overall patterns of reporting resonated with the authoritarian features in the country's politics, as argued by Paget (2022).

In addition to providing insights into COVID-19 responses in Tanzania, the article expanded the research on institutional logics in pandemic responses from professions and organisations (Oborn et al., 2021; Flaherty and Schroeder, 2002; Jacobsson et al., 2022; Kjekshus, 2023) to scrutinising the state. While, conventionally, the institutional logics approach has conceptualised the state as one of the main logics (Thornton et al., 2012), this article shows how a state as an institution can resort to diverse logics to legitimate its policies and actions. Thus, further research is needed on the institutional logics in state–citizen relations within different forms of governance, both in times of crisis and of routine.

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Table 5 Institutional logics with legitimised themes[illegible]

Legitimation * Type of institutional logic * Year crosstabulation

[illegible]

[illegible]