MEGAWATTS AND MANIFESTOS: POLITICAL ELITE PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN URBAN ZANZIBAR IN DIALOGUE WITH CHINESE DEVELOPMENTALISM

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ABSTRACT

How political elites view social development is a key question in comparative sociology. Elite perceptions bridge development doctrines and the policies shaping citizens' well-being, yet the two main evidence bases research on China's party-state and studies of competitive Global South politics rarely engage each other. This article bridges them through a qualitative study of urban political elites in Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous, multi-party state with six decades of Chinese development cooperation. Using an exploratory approach with 22 key informants from Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM (10), Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT-Wazalendo (8), and Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA (4). The study applied a thematic approach to analyse interviews and focus group discussions. Utility services, employment, good governance and democracy, and political manifesto shape elite perceptions of development. Read against modernisation theory and the capability approach, the findings show Zanzibari elites understand development in a performance-based way. A modernisation-influenced way, where services and employment mainly signal governing competence. Participation and freedom function chiefly as tools for electoral gain rather than ends in themselves. This resembles the 'performance legitimacy' documented among Chinese cadres but differs in accountability. Zanzibari politicians answer voters intermittently through manifestos, while Chinese cadres answer superiors continuously through evaluation targets. The comparison suggests that elite perceptions of development are shaped less by development theories than by the accountability arrangements through which such claims support political survival, with wider implications for elite-mass (mis)alignment in China, Africa, and beyond.

Keywords: Social development, political elites, perception, global comparative sociology, performance legitimacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social development, though central to well-being, remains contested. Its definition in the literature differs from its application in specific contexts. Scholars

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typically associate it with strengthening human capability so people can decide, express themselves, and live the lives they value. Amartya Sen and Walter Rodney insisted that growth, freedom, welfare, and participation are constitutive of development rather than by-products of it[346]. Scholars from low-income countries tend to emphasise poverty reduction and basic needs, while those from high-income countries emphasise social protection and quality-of-life differences that shape what governments measure, fund, and celebrate. The richest literature on this concerns China, where the party-state has built performance legitimacy through observable delivery of growth, infrastructure, and services rather than procedural mandate, enforced through a cadre evaluation system tying targets to career incentives[347]. A separate literature examines competitive African systems, where survey evidence reveals gaps between citizens' priorities and rulers' performance[348]. Both ask what shapes rulers' views of development and their alignment with the governed, yet they rarely engage with each other. Hence, a study that fosters that dialogue from an African perspective is essential.

Two frameworks anchor the theoretical stakes. Modernisation theory views development as a linear, elite-driven progression from traditional to modern society, evident in industrialisation and technological progress[349]. The capability approach instead treats development as expanding substantive freedoms what people are truly able to do and become with growth and infrastructure as means whose worth depends on the capabilities they create[350]. Rather than adopting either as definitive, this study treats them as competing predictions. Modernisation implies material change will dominate elites' view of development. Capability implies participation, agency, and

[346] Praise Chasela, *Reconsidering Sen's 'Development as Freedom' through a Black existentialist lens*, Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2026.

[347] See:

1. Dingxin Zhao, "The mandate of heaven and performance legitimation in historical and contemporary China", in *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 53(3), 2009, pp. 416–433;
2. Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, "Performance legitimacy, state autonomy and China's economic miracle", in *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 24(91), 2015, pp. 64–82;
3. Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, "Does performance matter? Evaluating political selection along the Chinese administrative ladder", in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 51(8), 2018, pp. 1074–1105.

[348] See:

1. Afrobarometer, *African insights 2024: Democracy at risk – the people's perspective*, Accra, Afrobarometer, 2024;
2. Olle Folke et. al., "Politicians' neighbourhoods: Where do they live, and does it matter?", in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 86(3), 2024, pp. 953–967.

[349] See:

1. Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: The human development sequence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005;
2. Ruth Lister, Ruth Patrick and Kate Brown, *Understanding theories and concepts in social policy*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2024.

[350] See:

1. Amartya Sen, *Development as freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999;
2. Darley Jose Kjosavik, "Sen and development as freedom", in Gordon Crawford and Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai (coord.), *Research handbook on democracy and development*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021, pp. 79–97.

freedom will be valued as ends in themselves. As the findings show, neither prediction survives testing intact, a double failure that is itself instructive.

Zanzibar is an unusually good site for this exercise. Its blend of Persian, Arab, Indian, and African heritage makes it a centre of multiculturalism, and its dense urban politics pits a long-dominant ruling party (CCM) against strong opposition formations (ACT-Wazalendo, CHADEMA) in genuinely competitive elections[351]. At the same time, Zanzibar holds one of Africa's oldest relationships with China. Chinese medical teams have served the islands since 1964, the TAZARA railway made Tanzania an emblematic site of Maoist-era cooperation, and Belt-and-Road-era projects from the airport terminal to health infrastructure keep Chinese state-led developmentalism visibly present in Zanzibari life[352]. Zanzibari politicians thus sit at the exact intersection this article examines. They compete for votes in a liberal-institutional idiom while governing amid the evidence of a rival, performance-based model of development.

The study aimed to explore the factors shaping urban Zanzibari politicians' perceptions of social development and to inform the comparative debate on elite-mass misalignment. Three questions guided it. What factors organise these perceptions? Do they follow modernisation theory, the capability approach, or neither? And how does this repertoire compare with that documented among Chinese local cadres? In response, the study develops the theoretical framework, describes the methods, and presents the findings and a comparative discussion, which leads to an impactful conclusion with implications for theory and policy.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Modernisation theory and its critics

Modernisation theory remains the implicit framework through which many Global South elites interpret development. Societies progress along a linear path from traditional to modern organisation, driven by modernising elites, with progress visible in industrial growth, services, infrastructure, and technology[353]. On this view, leaders drive transformation through policy execution, and their perceptions of social development can be inferred from the modernisation indicators they prioritise.

[351] Moh'd Juma Haji, *The institutionalisation of power sharing in Zanzibar*, Doctoral dissertation, The University of Dodoma, Tanzania, 2024.

[352] See:

1. Jamie Monson, *Africa's freedom railway: How a Chinese development project changed lives and livelihoods in Tanzania*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2009;

2. Deborah Brautigam, *The dragon's gift: The real story of China in Africa*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009;

3. Ching Kwan Lee, *The specter of global China: Politics, labor, and foreign investment in Africa*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2017.

[353] Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *op. cit.*

The critical literature challenges modernisation theory's universality on three levels. First, its teleology is Eurocentric, turning Western industrialisation into a universal sequence, a move the dependency school exposed decades ago and recent reviews reaffirm. Second, its causal chain is empirically flawed. China achieved sustained modernisation without the predicted democratisation, because its legitimacy rests on performance rather than procedure[354]. Third, its elite-centred epistemology permits a politics of display, where 'development' is whatever can be demonstrated, such as roads, megawatts, terminals, rather than experienced[355]. This study therefore treats modernisation theory not as an explanatory framework but as a folk understanding elites draw upon, asking whether, how, and why Zanzibari politicians reproduce it. If so, visible material provision should dominate their development narratives.

2.2. The capability approach as a counterpoint

Sen developed the capability approach precisely in response to this reduction[356]. Development, on this view, means expanding substantive freedoms the real opportunities people have to lead lives they have reason to value with income, infrastructure, and services serving only as means to capabilities such as being healthy, educated, mobile, and politically effective[357]. However, the approach has its critics. Its ontology is arguably individualist and insufficiently attentive to social structure. Its operationalisation into measurable indicators remains disputed, and most relevant here, its vocabulary is susceptible to co-option, allowing terms such as 'empowerment' and 'participation' to circulate in political rhetoric stripped of their original purpose as ends in themselves[358]. These critiques, however, do not disqualify the framework for the present purpose; if anything, they sharpen it, since a vocabulary this easily borrowed is precisely the kind of language elites might deploy instrumentally without ever adopting its underlying commitments. The approach therefore yields a second diagnostic expectation, parallel to the one derived from modernisation theory. If elite perception follows a capability logic, participation, agency, and freedom should feature in elite accounts as integral to development in their own right. If it follows a modernisation logic instead, these same terms will, when they surface at all, function as tools to garner support or to legitimise material provision after the fact. Distinguishing the constitutive from the merely instrumental use of capability language in elite discourse is one of this study's central analytical contributions. This distinction separates genuine critical engagement with these theories from their superficial invocation.

[354] Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*
[355] Ruth Lister, Ruth Patrick and Kate Brown, *op. cit.*
[356] Amartya Sen, *op. cit.*
[357] Darley Jose Kjosavik, *op. cit.*
[358] Praise Chasela, *op. cit.*

2.3. The elite-mass misalignment debate

A growing body of comparative literature examines whether those in power perceive development in the same way as those they govern, and what follows when their perceptions diverge. The Chinese case offers some of the most surprising findings on this question. Whyte challenged the widespread elite assumption that rising inequality was turning Chinese society into a 'social volcano', showing through national survey data that ordinary citizens were far more accepting of inequality than elites feared, which means the misperception ran top-down, not bottom-up[359]. Later research shows that the party-state invests heavily in monitoring and responding to public preferences. This is precisely because its legitimacy depends on performance rather than procedure, and that officials' own sense of what 'development' requires is shaped by measurable evaluation targets tied directly to their promotion prospects[360]. Elite perceptions in China, in short, are structured by a relationship of upward accountability, in which what cadres notice and prioritise is disciplined by what their superiors will later audit.

Research on competitive African polities reveals a different pattern of misalignment, one shaped less by upward audit than by the electoral calendar. Afrobarometer's pan-continental data show a persistent gap between citizens' expressed priorities, such as jobs, water, health, economic management and their governments' perceived performance in precisely those areas[361]. Folke et al. show that even politicians' residential geography shapes which issues they come to recognise and prioritise, while Haji shows how Zanzibar's power-sharing agreement directs elite focus toward managing political competition itself rather than toward the developmental content of that competition[362]. What this debate still lacks, and what this article aims to supply, is research that treats elite perception itself as a phenomenon to be explained, comparing it across fundamentally different accountability regimes rather than assuming its content follows automatically from regime type. This is the gap this study aims to fill by setting a competitive, electorally accountable elite against the bureaucratically accountable elite described in the Chinese literature.

2.4. Chinese developmentalism as a comparative mirror

Using China as a benchmark for an East African context is more than analytical convenience. Zanzibar offers a substantive reason for the comparison. The

[359] Martin King Whyte, *Myth of the social volcano: Perceptions of inequality and distributive injustice in contemporary China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010.

[360] See:

1. Wenfang Tang, *Populist authoritarianism: Chinese political culture and regime sustainability*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016;
2. Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

[361] Afrobarometer, *op. cit.*

[362] See:

1. O. Folke *et al.*, *op. cit.*;
2. Moh'd Juma Haji, *op. cit.*

connection is longstanding and visible in everyday public life. Chinese medical teams have served the islands continuously since 1964. The TAZARA railway, celebrated as 'Africa's freedom railway', made Tanzania an emblematic site of Maoist-era development cooperation and left a lasting image of Chinese state-led delivery in the country's political culture. The current engagement ranges from concessional infrastructure funding to health and port projects[363]. The relationship also shapes perception directly. Lee argues that, for Zambia, Chinese state capital matters. State capital changes not only what gets built but also how local elites come to view development as something quick, visible, state-managed, and legitimised through successful delivery rather than procedure[364]. The domestic Chinese model underpins this engagement. What the literature calls performance legitimacy is itself enacted through a cadre evaluation system that rewards measurable delivery, tempered by considerable flexibility for local improvisation in how targets are actually met[365].

The analytical framework of this study can now be stated briefly. Elite perceptions of social development sit at the intersection of two dimensions. A development ideology (modernisation-demonstrative versus capability-constitutive) and a structure of accountability (episodic-electoral versus continuous-bureaucratic). Modernisation theory and the capability approach each forecast the content of elite perception. Elites' accounts of what development consists of are shaped by their political and institutional context. Comparative literature on China suggests instead that the form this perception takes, including what elites feel they must demonstrate, to whom, and within what timeframe, is shaped less by ideology than by the structures to which they are accountable. The empirical sections that follow apply this framework to Zanzibar, and the comparative discussion draws out its wider implications for studying political elites elsewhere.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used an exploratory design to gather detailed insight into the factors shaping perceptions of social development among urban politicians in Zanzibar. It involved 22 political leaders from Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), and the Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT-Wazalendo). These are the three most popular parties in Zanzibar's urban areas. Participants were selected through purposive sampling,

[363] See:
1. Jamie Monson, *op. cit.*;
2. Deborah Brautigam, *op. cit.*

[364] Ching Kwan Lee, *op. cit.*

[365] See:
1. Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*;
2. Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*;
3. Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

supplemented by snowballing, to capture diverse political experience by party, tenure, and gender. Recruitment ran through political associations and contacts who helped identify eligible participants and build trust. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation. The final sample comprised 22 participants, and data collection continued until no new information, concepts, or themes emerged from participants' responses. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and invited to take part voluntarily, with confidentiality, consent, and the right to withdraw strictly observed.

All participants took part in interviews, and some also joined focus group discussions (FGDs) exploring gender and political ideology. Although invitations went to equal numbers of men and women, more men responded. FGDs let group perspectives be compared with individual views. Analysis was thematic. Data were transferred into structured templates, reviewed for familiarisation, coded for key phrases, and grouped into broader themes, with particular attention to whether a participant treated a given factor (*e.g*., participation or employment) as an end of development or as a means of demonstrating performance a distinction that operationalises the framework in Section 2.

The comparative strategy is asymmetrical, in the tradition of work reading primary material from one society against a well-documented reference society. Primary qualitative data from Zanzibar are read against the secondary literature on Chinese local elites[366]. No symmetrical fieldwork is claimed. The unit of comparison is the perceptual repertoire of urban elites under different accountability structures. The conclusion addresses these limitations, including the use of a single primary case, an elite-only sample, and secondary evidence for the Chinese side.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Factors influencing social development perception of urban politicians

Four main factors emerged, including utility services, employment prospects, democracy and good governance, and political manifestos. Perceptions of social development among urban politicians depend on the current state of these factors and how effectively they are delivered, ultimately linked to citizens' trust in government to provide reliable services. Each factor is discussed below with illustrative data, situated within the literature, and read against the diagnostic expectations from Section 2. Section 4.2 presents the comparative synthesis.

[366] See:
1. Martin King Whyte, *op. cit.*;
2. Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

4.2. Available utility services

According to 15 participants, utility services such as water, electricity, fuel, education, health, and transportation are the main factors shaping perceptions of social progress in urban Zanzibar. Politicians described these as vital to social and economic growth. Improvements in education and health foster innovation and productivity, so when the government enhances services, well-being improves. When services decline, it worsens. During an interview at his office, a CHADEMA political leader explained:

> "For me, social development means dependable, diverse, and accessible utility services provided within transparent and accountable regulatory frameworks… As a politician, I must do my best to promote improvements in these services to enhance people's well-being".

Another politician (CCM) was also quoted:

> "Recognising the importance of utility services… we have been receiving more than 100 megawatts of power from mainland Tanzania. This will help meet the demand for economic and social services. As government leaders, we welcome investors… to invest in Zanzibar to improve our people's living standards".

These findings align with evidence that African politicians use utility services to persuade citizens ahead of elections[367]. Their theoretical significance lies in form, whereas the second quotation cites a measurable quantity of delivery (megawatts received), attributes it to government effort, and pivots to investment promotion. A performance claim structurally identical to those through which Chinese local cadres justify their tenure[368]. The diagnostic expectation from modernisation theory (Section 2.1) is thus confirmed. Services appear in elite discourse not as welfare inputs but as evidence of governing competence, while in capability, what people are enabled to do with water, power, or schooling goes unasked. Such performance claims, moreover, can coexist with and obscure politically selective delivery.

4.2.1. Employment opportunity

Employment was the second factor. Politicians believe it improves living standards and happiness by giving people access to better health, education, food, water, and electricity. An interview with a politician revealed the following quotations:

> "We use the concept of employment to motivate urban society to accept our manifesto because we understand that employment is a vital factor in improving their well-being. My role is to do my utmost to ensure the social well-being of society… by creating more employment opportunities."

[367] France Khutso Lavhelani Kgobe *et al*., "Comparative analysis of selected political party manifestos in South Africa", in *International Journal of Business Ecosystem & Strategy*, Vol. 6(4), 2024, pp. 373–383.

[368] Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

The above quotation is notable for its frankness. Employment is explicitly valued as a tool to motivate society 'to accept our manifesto'. The authors use capability language instrumentally, exactly as outlined in Section 2.2. Yet the gap between rhetoric and labour-market reality in Zanzibar remains wide. Youth unemployment stands at 27.4%, disproportionately affecting women. Over 80% of employment in developing countries is informal, limiting access to health insurance, pensions, and legal protections[369]. The comparison with China cuts both ways. Chinese cadres face strict, audited targets where failure carries career penalties, whereas Zanzibari politicians face soft, episodic electoral judgment on promises voters can barely verify. So, employment functions for Zanzibari elites mainly as a campaign asset rather than a delivery commitment[370]. Thus, for Zanzibari political elites, employment primarily serves as a strategic campaign promise used to attract electoral support, rather than as a clearly measurable commitment subject to implementation and accountability after elections.

4.2.2. Democracy and good governance

Good governance and democracy formed the third key factor. Participants emphasised that transparency and accountability guard against corruption and discrimination and are crucial to social well-being. Thus, good governance ensures citizens' equal rights, peace, and opportunities for livelihood. A politician from CHADEMA was quoted:

> "Without democracy, accountability and good governance, development may exist, but it will not necessarily improve people's lives".

The quotation highlights that political leaders perceive democracy, good governance and accountability as essential conditions for effective social development, because development should ultimately promote people's wellbeing and quality of life.

This factor marks the most distinct departure from the Chinese perceptual repertoire and should be read with care. Zanzibari elites claim legitimacy through a procedural framework of rights, transparency, and accountability, with no real counterpart in Chinese officials' performance-based vocabulary[371]. Read through the capability approach, this might suggest political freedoms are valued as fundamental to development, as Sen argues[372]. One consideration counsels scepticism, however, is that the local settlement matters, since Haji shows Zanzibar's power-sharing arrangements turn the language of inclusion and tolerance into currency for inter-party competition[373]. The procedural framework, in other words, may serve

[369] Yashodhan Ghorpade, Camila Franco Restrepo and Luis Eduardo Castellanos Rodríguez, *Social protection and labour market policies for the informally employed*, Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2024.

[370] Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

[371] Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*

[372] Amartya Sen, *op. cit.*

[373] Moh'd Juma Haji, *op. cit.*

electorally accountable elites much as delivery statistics serve bureaucratically accountable ones, certified evidence of fitness to govern, which clarifies why capability language is common here yet scarce for material provision.

4.2.3. Political manifestos

Only two participants highlighted this factor, noting that manifestos set out development strategies for the coming electoral period and address citizens' challenges. An interview with a political leader at the CCM office explained:

> "Our manifesto plays a crucial role in promoting human well-being within civil society. It clarifies the concept of human development, from which the idea of social development arises".

These findings align with evidence that politicians in developing countries use manifestos to outline strategies for social services and development [374]. The manifesto functions as the equivalent of the Chinese cadre's target contract. Both translate development into quantifiable commitments against which performance can be measured. However, they differ sharply in enforcement. Cadre targets are audited annually by superiors with career consequences, while manifesto promises are judged only once every five years by voters with limited information[375]. The predictable result is a widening gap between rhetoric and realisation, breeding scepticism and undermining trust[376]. In Zanzibar, parties such as CCM and ACT-Wazalendo emphasise improved services, inclusive development, and poverty reduction. Yet, many urban residents see these promises as symbolic rather than durable, with residents reporting limited access to reliable services despite initiatives since 2020[377]. The manifesto thus emerges as the institutional hinge of the perceptual system, where a performance-based understanding of development meets an accountability structure too weak to discipline it.

4.3. Zanzibar's developmental elites in comparative dialogue with Chinese developmentalism

Bringing the four factors together against the Chinese literature yields three comparative outcomes. The first is a convergence in development ideology. Zanzibari urban politicians, like Chinese local cadres, view social development primarily through modernisation and demonstrative measures. Development is what can be delivered, quantified, and showcased as megawatts, jobs, services, and projects. This is not accidental. It partly reflects the direct influence of Chinese state-led developmentalism in Tanzanian and Zanzibari political culture. From TAZARA to medical teams to Belt-

[374] France Khutso Lavhelani Kgobe *et al*., *op. cit.*
[375] Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*
[376] Zoha Shawoo *et al*., "Political drivers of policy coherence for sustainable development: An analytical framework", in *Environmental Policy and Governance*, Vol. 33(4), 2023, pp. 339–350.
[377] Moh'd Juma Haji, *op. cit.*

and-Road infrastructure, offering local elites a nearby, prestigious model of infrastructure-focused, delivery-legitimated development [378]. African elites do not encounter modernisation theory as an academic abstraction; they experience it as built form, financed and delivered by a partner whose own legitimacy depends on performance[379]. The second difference lies in how accountability is structured, with systematic perceptual effects. Chinese cadres answer consistently upward. Evaluation targets make development perceptions clear, measurable, and career-relevant, so their accounts of development resemble audits[380]. Zanzibari politicians answer intermittently downward. The manifesto-election cycle renders their perceptions rhetorical, promotional, and hard to verify. Employment as a tool to 'motivate urban society to accept our manifesto', services as demonstrations, governance as an approved sign of legitimacy. The same ideologically driven performance, filtered through different accountability systems, thus yields audited delivery in one context and promotional display in another. The study's core argument remains that ideology sets the content of elite perception, but accountability dictates its epistemic form.

The third issue concerns elite–mass misalignment, which this article addresses. In China, Whyte found elites misjudged the masses, fearing a social eruption that survey data showed did not exist, while performance accountability kept material delivery broadly aligned with popular priorities [381]. In Zanzibar, the situation is reversed. Elite and mass priorities on services and jobs nominally align, as Afrobarometer data would predict, but weak verification between elections lets delivery drift from rhetoric, breeding scepticism and eroding trust[382]. Misalignment, the comparison suggests, is not an inherent trait of regime type. Electoral competition aligns agendas but under-enforces delivery. Bureaucratic evaluation enforces delivery but can misread agendas. Neither modernisation theory nor the capability approach explains this, since both ignore the accountability structures that shape elite perception. A gap this comparative sociology needs to fill.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored what shapes urban politicians' perceptions of social development in Zanzibar, whether those perceptions follow modernisation or capability logics, and how they compare with the repertoire documented among

[378] Jamie Monson, *op. cit.*
[379] Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*
[380] Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*
[381] See:
1. Martin King Whyte, *op. cit.*;
2. Wenfang Tang, *op. cit.*
[382] See:
1. Afrobarometer, *op. cit.*;
2. Moh'd Juma Haji, *op. cit.*;
3. Zoha Shawoo *et al.*, *op. cit.*

Chinese local elites. Empirically, four factors emerged which are utility services, employment, good governance and democracy, and political manifestos. These factors are grounded in Zanzibar's political environment and shape livelihoods and community well-being.

Theoretically, the findings challenge both frameworks examined. Zanzibari elites reproduce modernisation theory as a folk belief in demonstrable results rather than the developmental sequence it describes. The elites use the vocabulary of the capability approach, such as well-being, opportunity, and participation. Instrumentally, as campaign currency rather than ultimate goals. The comparison with Chinese developmentalism helps explain why accountability structures shape elite perception. Continuous bureaucratic evaluation yields audited delivery, whereas episodic electoral judgement yields promissory displays. The debate on elite–mass misalignment should therefore distinguish agenda alignment from delivery enforcement. Zanzibar exhibits the first without the second, while China arguably exhibits the second with managed approximations of the first[383]. This two-dimensional framework is the study's contribution to comparative sociology and is testable beyond the cases examined here.

The study's limitations point to future directions. It relies on a single primary case read alongside secondary literature, an elite-only sample means citizens' perceptions are inferred rather than directly observed, and the comparison with China is uneven. Paired primary research, interviewing African urban politicians and Chinese local officials with a common instrument, and comparing both against citizen surveys such as Afrobarometer and the national surveys used by Whyte, would let the accountability argument be tested directly[384]. Zanzibar, with six decades of Chinese engagement and competitive politics, is well placed for this, but the core argument travels further. Wherever elites must translate development claims into political survival, accountability structures will shape what they can perceive.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

From a policy perspective, governments should build politicians' capacity to promote inclusive social development, formally recognise community-based initiatives, and invest in urban infrastructure, roads, public spaces, and services to boost welfare and economic activity. Most importantly, the study's key finding highlights the need for stronger mechanisms to monitor implementation between elections. Independent audits of political manifesto commitments could provide an important way to assess whether promised actions are delivered. Regular publication

[383] See:
1. Martin King Whyte, *op. cit.*;
2. Wenfang Tang, *op. cit.*

[384] Martin King Whyte, *op. cit.*

of service-delivery statistics would also improve transparency and allow citizens to assess government performance. Supporting participatory monitoring by civil society would strengthen accountability beyond the electoral period. Together, these measures could narrow the gap between political promises and actual delivery, strengthen public trust, and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals on decent work, reduced inequalities, and strong institutions.

Academically, the study points to a research programme on the comparative sociology of developmental elites. Research on political leadership and institutional accountability should treat elite perception as a key explanatory variable. Future work should combine elite interviews with residents' lived experiences, pairing qualitative methods with surveys, to confront the capability approach and modernisation theory with elite practice across African, Chinese, and other Global South contexts.

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