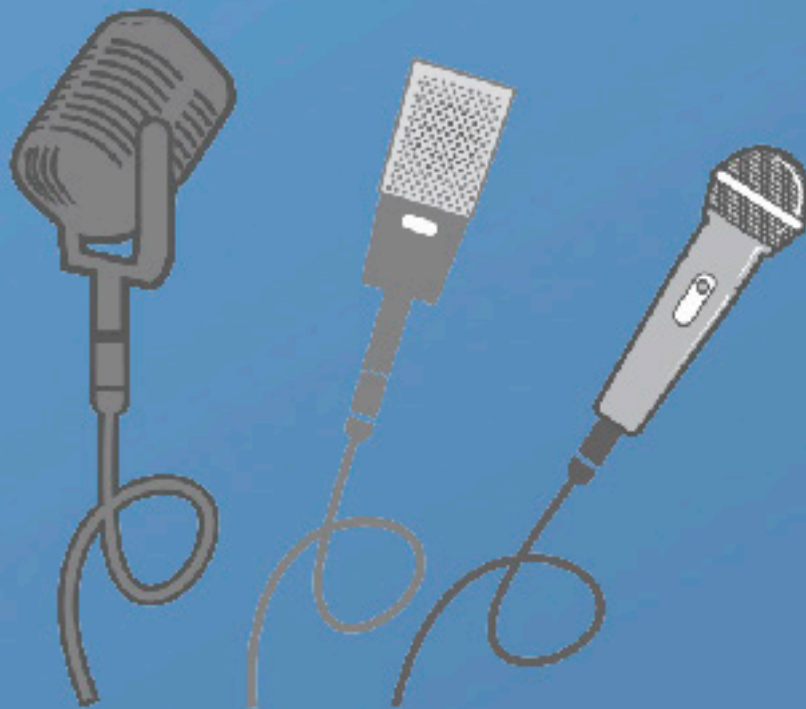




# Journal of Media, Journalism & Mass Communication (JMJMC)

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1 (2026)



PUBLISHED BY  
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

## Framing Development Diplomacy: An Analysis of Tanzania's Newspapers' Coverage of President Samia Suluhu Hassan's International Trips

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### Article Information

**Received:** September 10, 2025

**Accepted:** December 13, 2025

**Published:** January 18, 2026

### Keywords

*Diplomacy, Framing, International Trips, Newspapers, President Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania*

### ABSTRACT

This study examined Tanzania's newspapers' framing of President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips during 2024, focusing on HabariLeo and Nipashe. The study employed a descriptive case study research design that provided a comprehensive understanding of how President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips were portrayed in the Tanzanian newspapers in the period of 2024. Entman's Framing Theory guided this study. The population of the study consisted of all hard news stories and editorials related to President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips published by Nipashe and HabariLeo newspapers in 2024. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting HabariLeo and Nipashe newspaper editions that covered President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips. The sample size for the study was 739 articles from both HabariLeo and Nipashe newspapers. The study applied qualitative content analysis in collecting data, which was analyzed thematically. The study's findings showed that both HabariLeo and Nipashe newspapers considered President Samia's international trips to be part of the nation's diplomatic-economic agenda. Development framing was dominant in both HabariLeo and Nipashe newspapers. HabariLeo underlined the economic opportunities resulting from President Samia's international trips as a major step toward the country's modernization. Nipashe indicated more editorial independence by providing factual accounts without added praise. The dominant frame was economic development, which accounted for 79.8 percent. by incorporating critical, policy-oriented, and citizen-centered perspectives.

### INTRODUCTION

Media framing plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding of political leaders and their actions, particularly in the sphere of international diplomacy. By emphasizing specific aspects of events while downplaying or omitting others, newspapers and other media outlets guide how citizens interpret political developments, thereby shaping attitudes toward leadership, governance, and national priorities (Entman, 1993; Ayuku, Ochieng, & Mudavadi, 2018). Framing not only influences the selection and prominence of information but also shapes how audiences assign responsibility, evaluate performance, and form opinions about political actors. Studies in African contexts, such as Kenya, demonstrate that both state-owned and private newspapers strategically frame political events to influence public perception, highlighting the media's central role in agenda-setting and in shaping the broader political discourse (Ayuku, Ochieng, & Mudavadi, 2018). This strategic framing extends beyond domestic politics, often impacting how citizens interpret international relations and the actions of their leaders on the global stage.

Despite the rapid growth of digital media and social platforms across Africa, traditional newspapers continue to wield significant influence in constructing narratives about presidents, government policies, and foreign relations. How these narratives are framed can profoundly shape public perceptions of political authority, legitimacy,

and effectiveness. Gender also plays a pivotal role in media framing, as the representation of female political leaders can either reinforce or challenge prevailing societal norms and expectations (Trimble, 2017). Coverage of women in leadership positions is often scrutinized for traits, competence, and decision-making styles, making gendered framing a critical factor in understanding public reception and credibility. In both traditional and digital media contexts, framing shapes the lens through which citizens interpret political leadership, highlighting its significance for governance, policy communication, and civic engagement.

Tanzania provides a particularly compelling case for examining media framing, especially under the leadership of President Samia Suluhu Hassan, the country's first female head of state. Since assuming office in March 2021 following the passing of her predecessor, President Samia has embarked on numerous international trips to strengthen Tanzania's diplomatic relations, promote regional integration, and advance economic development. These diplomatic engagements have received extensive media coverage, making them an important lens through which to analyze how the press constructs images of leadership, diplomacy, and national identity. Examining how Tanzanian newspapers frame President Samia's international activities offers insights into the intersection of gender, political leadership, and media representation, revealing the ways in which media narratives can influence

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public perception of leadership both domestically and abroad.

### Problem Statement

The coverage of international activities by public figures, especially heads of state, is fundamental to shaping public perception and understanding of a nation's foreign relations. This is particularly true in the case of Tanzania, where President Samia Suluhu Hassan's diplomatic engagements have the potential to significantly influence both domestic and international perceptions of the country. However, there exists a notable gap in scholarly research that systematically analyzes how newspapers, such as HabariLeo and Nipashe, portray these important diplomatic engagements. As a result, people are not aware of what is going on, even sometimes cause misleading. Understanding how the media represents President Samia's international trips is critical because media coverage plays a crucial role in informing the public about the significance and outcomes of such engagements. Without a clear and unbiased portrayal, the public may develop misconceptions about diplomatic efforts. Therefore, there is an urgent need to assess how HabariLeo and Nipashe newspapers in Tanzania report on the importance and results of President Samia's international trips.

### Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Entman's (1993) conceptualization of framing, which identifies four key functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. First, problem definition involves identifying which issues or events are highlighted as significant. Causal interpretation explains why these issues occur and assigns responsibility. Moral evaluation judges whether actions are right or wrong, while treatment recommendation suggests solutions or responses.

Framing theory suggests that the media do more than simply report facts; they shape how audiences understand and interpret events by highlighting certain aspects of reality while downplaying others (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Frames act as "cognitive shortcuts" that help people make sense of complex or unfamiliar information (Tuchman, 1978). In the context of political communication, the frames chosen by journalists can strongly influence how leaders are perceived. For instance, a political leader might be framed as a visionary reformer, a controversial figure, or a neutral administrator, depending on which aspects of their actions are emphasized. By selecting certain angles or stories over others, the media guide public attention and interpretation, shaping both the perception of events and the reputation of political actors.

Framing theory is particularly useful for understanding the portrayal of female leaders, such as President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania. It helps explain why certain narratives like development, national pride, or gendered commentary gain prominence in media coverage, and

why other angles, such as conflict or criticism, might be minimized. In this way, framing theory provides a lens to examine the interplay between media practices, leadership representation, and public perception.

By applying these functions to Tanzanian newspapers, this study investigated how President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips were represented. For example, trips could be framed as opportunities for economic growth, foreign investment, and national development; as symbols of patriotism and national pride; or simply as neutral diplomatic engagements with no evaluative commentary. Each frame emphasizes different aspects of the same event, shaping how readers interpret the significance of her leadership and diplomatic agenda. Framing theory is therefore highly appropriate for this study, as it allows a systematic examination of how media selection, emphasis, and presentation influence public understanding of political and diplomatic events, and how these interpretations may vary across different newspapers and audience groups. Frames in political and diplomatic reporting.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Framing in the African context

In Africa, media systems are often shaped by political histories, with ruling parties playing a significant role in determining editorial priorities. This influence affects how leaders and their diplomatic activities are portrayed. In Tanzania, for instance, state-owned newspapers such as HabariLeo frequently act as extensions of government policy, presenting President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips as clear successes and emphasizing progress, development, and national achievements (Sturmer, 1998). By focusing on positive outcomes, these outlets contribute to legitimizing her leadership and framing her presidency as capable and forward-looking.

Private newspapers, like Nipashe, provide a contrast by offering more neutral coverage. While they still report on her diplomatic activities, they are less celebratory and focus more on facts, allowing readers to form their own judgments. Similar patterns are visible in other African countries. In Kenya, The Daily Nation balances development and conflict frames, while the state-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation emphasizes unity and national pride (Nyabuga & Booker, 2013). Uganda's New Vision highlights presidential trips as achievements for development, downplaying dissent or criticism (Nassanga, 2008), and Nigeria's press alternates between development and conflict frames depending on ownership (Oso, 2012). Comparing these examples shows that both political context and media ownership strongly shape diplomatic framing across Africa. In Tanzania, this means that while state media highlights Samia's developmental achievements and portrays her leadership positively, private media provides a more measured account. Together, these patterns reveal how audience perceptions are influenced not only by the president's actions but also by the perspectives and priorities of the newspapers

reporting on them. This situates Samia Suluhu Hassan's coverage within a broader African media landscape, where government influence, ownership, and political context determine how diplomacy and leadership are presented to the public.

### Gender and media framing

Gender plays an important role in how leaders are portrayed in the media, and it often shapes the way the public perceives them. Female leaders, in particular, tend to receive coverage that emphasizes their gender, sometimes more than their achievements or policies. For instance, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia was frequently described in maternal terms, highlighting her nurturing qualities rather than her political skills, while Joyce Banda of Malawi was often labeled a "caretaker" leader, suggesting her authority was temporary or secondary (Trimble, 2017; Adams, 2010). These examples show how media narratives can subtly reinforce gender stereotypes, framing women leaders in ways that their male counterparts rarely experience.

### Ownership and institutional influence

The ownership of media outlets plays a key role in shaping how news stories are framed. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988) propaganda model, media organizations often reflect the priorities and interests of the institutions or groups that control them. Media ownership can influence the lens through which political events are reported. In Ethiopia, for instance, Addis Zemen, a government-owned newspaper, often promotes state policies and perspectives, whereas private media outlets provide a wider variety of viewpoints and are more likely to include critical or alternative perspectives (Skjerdal, 2011). These patterns suggest that the source of news, whether public or private can strongly shape how leaders and their actions are portrayed, affecting the public's understanding and perception of political events.

### Audience agency

Audience agency is an important factor to consider when analyzing media framing. Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model emphasizes that audiences are not passive receivers of information; instead, they actively interpret and make sense of media messages based on their own experiences and perspectives. Even when newspapers promote specific frames, such as highlighting development achievements or fostering national pride, different people may interpret these messages in very different ways. This shows that media framing can guide public perception, but it does not fully control it. Individuals bring their own knowledge, values, and priorities to the news they consume, which means that the same story can be understood in multiple ways. Recognizing this audience agency is crucial for understanding the limits of media influence: while newspapers can highlight certain aspects of a leader's work, the ultimate interpretation depends on how citizens actively engage with and make sense of

these messages.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a descriptive case study research design, which seeks to answer the "how" and "why" questions about a phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2002). The design enabled the researcher to examine how HabariLeo and Nipashe newspapers in Tanzania reported President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips and their significance. According to Chowdhury (2016), a descriptive case study aims to provide a complete description of an issue within its context. This design was particularly suitable for the study as it allowed the collection of extensive information to provide an in-depth picture of the newspapers' coverage, facilitated the examination of multiple units of study, and offered flexibility in exploring different aspects of reportage.

The population for the study consisted of all hard news stories and editorials related to President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips published in Nipashe and HabariLeo newspapers from January to December 2024. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected newspaper editions that specifically covered these international trips. The final sample comprised 739 articles from both newspapers, representing the complete range of reportage on the President's diplomatic engagements during the year.

Data were collected through qualitative content analysis, which allowed for a systematic examination of elements within the articles that portrayed President Samia's international trips. This approach provided a structured framework for understanding how the diplomatic trips were represented in HabariLeo and Nipashe newspapers, offering insights into public perception and the broader significance of the coverage. Limiting the study to the year 2024 ensured a focused analysis of the narrative surrounding the President's international activities.

For data analysis, thematic analysis was employed, a technique that involves systematically coding, identifying, and classifying themes within rich textual data to interpret patterns and meanings (Mayring, 2014; Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2016). The results were presented using simple tables alongside thick descriptive statistics to provide a clear and comprehensive account of the findings.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The coverage of President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips differed noticeably between Tanzanian newspapers. HabariLeo, which is government-owned, overwhelmingly used positive development frames, making up 81.8% of its reporting. Headlines like "Samia Opens New Era of Trade with China" and "Tanzania Secures Billions in Investment Deals" consistently highlighted economic opportunities and painted her diplomatic visits as major steps toward the country's modernization. The newspaper rarely included critical or conflict-oriented perspectives, reflecting its close alignment with government priorities.

By contrast, Nipashe, a privately owned newspaper, offered a more balanced approach. Many of its headlines, such as “Samia Meets with EU Officials in Brussels,” presented factual accounts without added praise or celebration. While development framing was still dominant, the paper allowed room for neutral and descriptive reporting, giving readers the information without overtly guiding their interpretation. This reflected a degree of editorial independence and offered a different perspective from the highly celebratory tone of HabariLeo.

The findings revealed that development framing overwhelmingly dominated coverage, underscoring how Tanzanian newspapers positioned the country’s diplomatic agenda as primarily economic in nature. Conflict frames were almost entirely absent, suggesting a deliberate reluctance to highlight controversy or criticism in reporting on presidential diplomacy. National pride frames appeared but remained marginal, indicating that symbolic achievements were secondary to narratives of economic progress. Moreover, ownership played a decisive role in shaping coverage: while the state-owned HabariLeo adopted a consistently celebratory tone that reinforced government priorities, the privately owned Nipashe tended toward more neutral reporting, reflecting a measure of editorial independence.

The results show development framing dominated coverage (79.8%). Neutral frames accounted for 14.3%, national pride 4.8%, and conflict 1.2%. HabariLeo overwhelmingly applied development frames (81.8%), while Nipashe provided a more balanced mix with higher neutral coverage

**Table 1:**

Frame Category	HabariLeo	Nipashe
Development	81.8%	72.4%
Neutral	12.7%	20.7%
National Pride	5.5%	6.9%
Conflict	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%

**Discussion**

The overwhelming reliance on the development frame suggests that Tanzanian newspapers positioned President Samia’s diplomacy as an extension of the national development strategy. This reflects broader trends in African political communication, where diplomacy is framed as instrumental for economic growth (Ayuku *et al.*, 2018). By emphasizing investment and trade, newspapers reinforced her image as a pragmatic reformist leader. HabariLeo’s framing choices demonstrate the influence of state ownership. By framing nearly all of Samia’s trips as development successes, the newspaper contributed to legitimizing her administration’s agenda. This mirrors patterns observed in state-owned media across Africa, where celebratory framing replaces critical journalism (Sturmer, 1998). For instance, Uganda’s New Vision similarly portrays presidential trips as triumphs for

development and integration, sidelining dissenting voices (Nassanga, 2008).

Nipashe’s more neutral coverage highlights the subtle role of privately owned outlets in providing alternative perspectives. Although it did not employ overtly critical frames, its balanced tone contrasted with HabariLeo’s overwhelmingly positive reporting. Comparable findings emerge in Nigeria, where privately owned newspapers like The Guardian often provide more nuanced coverage compared to government-aligned outlets (Oso, 2012).

The near absence of conflict frames suggests self-censorship or a deliberate editorial strategy to avoid controversy. This has implications for media pluralism, as the lack of critical narratives limits public debate. It also reflects Tanzania’s broader media environment, where political sensitivity discourages confrontational reporting. In contrast, Kenyan outlets such as The Standard have occasionally employed conflict frames when covering foreign policy, highlighting a more contested media space (Nyabuga & Booker, 2013).

From a gender perspective, the findings are significant. Rather than emphasizing stereotypes or maternal imagery, newspapers framed Samia primarily through development narratives. This normalized her leadership within Tanzania’s developmentalist tradition, avoiding the gendered frames that female leaders elsewhere often face (Trimble, 2017). This stands in contrast with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s coverage in Liberia, where symbolic representations of her “motherhood” often overshadowed her policy initiatives (Adams, 2010).

Framing Samia’s diplomacy as development-focused may resonate positively with citizens seeking economic improvement. However, it risks narrowing public debate by excluding critical perspectives. Following Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model, audiences may still resist celebratory narratives, interpreting trips as costly or politically motivated. The interplay between framing and interpretation remains complex across African contexts. The dominance of development framing has consequences for public policy. By consistently linking diplomacy with economic growth, newspapers help justify government expenditures on international travel. However, the absence of conflict or critical frames reduces accountability by shielding leaders from scrutiny. Tanzanian policymakers should consider how to balance positive diplomatic communication with transparency and responsiveness to public concerns.

**Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study carry significant implications for Tanzanian journalism, political communication, and public engagement. First, the overwhelming reliance on development frames in coverage of President Samia Suluhu Hassan’s international trips highlights the role of media in reinforcing government priorities. State-owned newspapers, such as HabariLeo, overwhelmingly emphasize economic progress and investment opportunities, presenting diplomatic visits as unqualified

successes. This aligns with broader trends in African political communication, where state-aligned media often frame presidential activities in celebratory terms, thereby legitimizing government agendas and shaping public perceptions of leadership efficacy (Ayuku *et al.*, 2018; Sturmer, 1998). The framing of diplomacy in exclusively positive terms may strengthen national cohesion and confidence in leadership but simultaneously risks reducing accountability by limiting public scrutiny of governmental actions.

The contrast between state-owned and privately owned newspapers, exemplified by Nipashe, underscores the influence of media ownership on editorial framing. While Nipashe adopted a more neutral tone, providing factual reporting without overt praise, the dominance of development frames across both newspapers indicates that critical perspectives remain marginal. This imbalance highlights potential constraints on media pluralism, as the scarcity of conflict or critical frames limits opportunities for public debate and diminishes the space for dissenting voices (Oso, 2012; Nyabuga & Booker, 2013). Consequently, Tanzanian audiences may receive a narrow view of the nation's foreign policy activities, shaped more by institutional priorities than by diverse societal perspectives.

From a gender and leadership lens, the findings have additional implications. By framing President Samia's international engagements primarily in terms of development, newspapers normalize female leadership within Tanzania's developmentalist tradition, avoiding gendered narratives that focus on maternal or symbolic roles, which female leaders in other African contexts have frequently encountered (Trimble, 2017; Adams, 2010). This framing strengthens the perception of Samia as a competent and policy-oriented leader, shifting attention from gender stereotypes to her governance capabilities. The study also has implications for public policy and civic engagement. By consistently linking diplomacy with economic outcomes, newspapers implicitly support government expenditures on international travel and related initiatives. However, the absence of alternative perspectives, such as policy critiques, fiscal accountability, or citizen-centered concerns, may limit informed public discussion and oversight. According to Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, audiences may still resist celebratory narratives, interpreting government actions through personal or contextual lenses, yet the media's dominant framing can influence the baseline understanding of diplomatic activities and national development.

Finally, these findings suggest broader lessons for media practice and regulation in Tanzania. Media organizations must consider the balance between promoting national development narratives and maintaining journalistic independence. Excessive alignment with state priorities can risk eroding trust in journalism as an impartial public watchdog. Similarly, policymakers and media regulators need to foster an environment that encourages critical

reporting while respecting responsible and ethical journalism, ensuring that media coverage informs rather than simply legitimizes government actions.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Tanzanian newspapers, particularly the state-owned HabariLeo, predominantly framed President Samia Suluhu Hassan's international trips through a development-oriented lens. This emphasis on progress, economic growth, and national achievements reinforced her legitimacy and strengthened the public image of her leadership as competent and forward-looking. By highlighting the positive outcomes of her diplomatic activities, the media contributed to shaping a narrative of effective governance and national pride.

However, this strong focus on development also meant that other perspectives, such as potential challenges, criticisms, or alternative interpretations of her trips, were largely underrepresented. Private newspapers, such as Nipashe, offered more neutral coverage; however, the overall framing landscape was heavily skewed toward positive, state-aligned narratives. This suggests that while media can play a key role in promoting national cohesion and confidence in leadership, it can also limit the diversity of public discourse and reduce opportunities for critical engagement.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, it is recommended that Tanzanian media adopt a more balanced and diverse approach to reporting on diplomatic and political events. Media outlets should expand their frames beyond development, incorporating critical, policy-oriented, and citizen-centered perspectives, while journalists balance celebratory narratives with accountability-focused reporting to encourage informed public debate. Policymakers could collaborate with media houses to ensure that coverage of diplomacy highlights both national progress and transparency, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of leadership. Future research should also broaden the scope to include television, radio, and online platforms, and comparative studies across East African countries could shed further light on how media ownership and political environments influence the framing of diplomatic activities across the continent.

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