

Unravelling the Political Parties' Role in Kenya's Multiparty and Democratization Roadmap

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Abstract- A political party is a key component of the democratization process. Political parties can equally be abused by the political system, members and environmental structures within which the party is situated. This study investigates the understanding of the political party, so as to correctly review multipartism, democracy and electioneering in Kenya. It purposes was to locate the function of political parties in democratic governance, examine the problems encountered by political parties in the process of building and sustaining competitive political systems and look back at the conditions that have led to a resurgence of multiparty democracy. In so doing, key questions that need answers are: How is a political party supposed to be constituted? Are the universal theoretical understandings of political parties affect or apply in Kenya (and Africa)? (To what extent either for or against)? What structural challenges do political parties face? What is the assessment of these parties in terms of management, membership, duty, role and what is their future? This study seeks to expand existing knowledge on the role of political parties in elections with specific reference to how processes of centralisation, inclusiveness and institutionalisation influence levels of participatory democracy. As such therefore, the role of political parties is critical in unravelling these in the context of the political landscape and democratic structure of Kenya. This study uses Kenyan political scenery as a unit of analysis in investigating the level of democratic development in the country since the inception of multipartism and comparing them with the era of single party politics. This is then based on the democratic structure of politics, the place and contribution of political parties and the manner of electioneering.

Index Terms- Political Party/Democratization/Multipartism

I. INTRODUCTION

Political parties are vital political institutions for the functioning of a modern democracy. They are essential for the organization of the modern democratic polity and are crucial for the expression and manifestation for political pluralism (Mutua, 2006; 109, 113). Political parties are presumed to be central to the democratization of any state. Defined as an organization whose prime objective is to mobilize its supporters to assume a leadership role, a political party of any significance is viewed or views itself in terms of providing alternative policy platforms, ideological direction, as well as redefining the agenda of government (Makara, 2007; 44).

1.1. Rationale

The search for peaceful, transparent and credible elections has had a long history to the people of Kenya. This search started with the advent of independence and has gained momentum ever since. Elections and indeed the principle of democracy being new to Kenyans has had several predicaments in its development due to the societal injustices accrued upon the Kenyan citizenry, first by the colonialist and later on by the independence leadership.

Elections in Kenya still remain critical to the societal fabric. Over the past two decades, each election cycle has resulted to not only loss of property and human rights abuses, but loss of life. Political parties being at the centre of the whole process are important in the determinations of as to whether peaceful, transparent and credible elections will be held. Toerell, (1999) points out that democratic theorists and policy makers generally concur on the critical role that political parties play providing a link between their members and elected representatives. This process is nonetheless undertaken within certain socio-political factors that any community has that distinctively provides a challenge to the role of political parties.

II. THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION

The theory used is Rokkan and Lipset's (1967) Social cleavage theory. It is of relevance to study the concept of multipartism using social cleavage theory, as did Lipset and Rokkan do in the 1960's because it responds well to the understanding of social constructions in Kenya. The theory helps the author understand such questions as why people choose to be under specific cleavages, and demand that their political representations including political parties be established as so. Secondly, is the discussion of how much developed or underdeveloped is multipartism under such cleavages. Thirdly, what are the socio-political and economic issues that contribute to the founding of such cleavages, and how are they relevant to political parties and political processes like democratization. Fourthly is the attempt to answer if there is a triangular relationship between the above questions as regard the development of politics in Kenya.

III. METHODOLOGICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION

This study sought to establish a working explanation of political parties as institutions of political organisation as key determinants to the success, definition and determination of electioneering processes in Kenya. It explores the various conceptions of political parties in comparative political thought

and literature and contextualizes this within the broader debate on democracy and more specifically participatory democracy. It pays particular attention to the historical, socio-economic and cultural determinants of the evolution and development of political parties. The author consequently applied analytical qualitative design, critically reviewing relevant literature and analyzed conclusions and discussions.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sartori aptly describes a political party as “any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office” (Sartori 1976: 63). This definition however still falls short of capturing the organisational as well as interest aggregation and articulation dimensions of political parties. It is thus preferable, for the purposes of this discussion, to adopt the definition by Maliyamkono and Kanyongolo (2003:41) that “a political party is an organised association of people working together to compete for political office and to promote agreed-upon policies”. This definition, in the view of the author fits the description and tenets of the social cleavage theory that are used as the study’s theoretical framework.

The foregoing conceptualisation of political parties is derived from a general consensus on the utilitarian and functional view of their perceived “usefulness” in modern democracies. The importance of political parties lies in the functions they perform in modern democracies by linking citizens to government. These include the articulation and aggregating of diverse interests, recruitment and preparation of candidates for electoral office, crafting policy alternatives and setting the policy agenda, organising and participating in electoral competition and forming effective government and thus integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process.

Consequently, political parties not only provide the means by which citizens can participate in the governance process, but also structure the political landscape to enable competition between varying interests and policy objectives (Arowolo and Aluko, 2012; 1, 6).

The modern analysis of politics in Kenya began as part of the studies on “political development” that flourished during the 1950s and, especially, the 1960s. Despite the fact that such studies often downplayed the role of political institutions, political parties were rapidly acknowledged as an important role, both as manifestations and instruments of political development. However, it is imperative to point out that during this time, parties were just taking shape in most of Africa and their scientific study was based on the development of other established parties in the developed world since African parties were expected to follow in their trend. Thus, several collective and individual works were produced on the subject.

The new, recent wave of studies of Kenyan parties clearly marks a break. The reforms of the 1990s postulate the centrality of democracy as a value and a goal in itself, something whose achievement cannot be negotiated – at least not in principle – nor ‘traded’ for economic progress or national unity. In this sense, multiparty reforms denote a significant (if far from clear-cut) discontinuity not only in the political life of the continent, but also in the study of this reality. They contributed to a growing

integration of the study of politics in Kenya within mainstream political science.

Political parties are pre-eminent institutions of modern democratic governance. The general consensus in comparative political thought and among policy makers is that political parties play a central role in deepening and fostering democracy in both established as well as emerging democratic polities (Maiyo, 2008: 13). This is aptly captured by the assertion that “political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable, save in terms of the political parties” (Schattschneider, 1942: 1). The relevance of political parties in the organisation of modern politics and governance is not a recent phenomenon of contemporary societies. Political parties have been part and parcel of political organisation since the creation of the nation state.

The paradox of the majority of African political parties is that most of them are poorly organised and lack institutional capacity, their decision-making processes are unstructured and power often lies in the hands of the party leader and a few cronies who are usually wealthy enough to bankroll the party (Wanjohi, 2003). The role of the party membership is reduced to a bare minimum, usually to endorse decisions already made by the elite. Political mobilisation assumes the form of personality cults and loyalty is often to the party leader as opposed to the party as an institution. This encourages the politics of “party hopping” where leadership disagreements may lead to one leader jumping from one party to another and carrying his supporters with him/her. On the other extreme are the well organised, highly centralized and structured parties that have been in power since independence such as Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) in Tanzania (Mutua, 2006; 120). Centralisation then takes away decision making power from lower party organs and branches and concentrates it on a core group of party oligarchs such as the Central Committee of the CCM. Such parties are usually found in single-party regimes where the party and the state are so fused that they became indistinguishable from each other. Whatever the case may be, both categories of parties, either by default or design, are considerably lacking in internal democracy (Maiyo, 2008: 18).

V. DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Structural, Philosophical and Theoretical Components of Political Parties in Kenya

The political party mechanisms in their universal nature contain unique features regarding structural, philosophical and theoretical features. The performance or relevance of political parties is determined by how these mechanisms are constituted. In the Kenyan context, party financing, ideology, internal democracy, internal mechanisms and political mobilization were studied and their findings presented as follows.

5.1.1. Party Financing

Party funding remains to be a contentious issue in democratization process in Kenya as it is in other developing countries. To function well, they have to perform and run like an organization, hence requiring finances (Kriegler Report, 2008: 8-9). The question raised therefore are who provides these resources? This question is important since the bankrollers of parties have to be equally motivated by the need for democracy since it is the key mandate of political parties. On the flipside, what

if the bankrollers are not interested in democracy as an end, but the means to attaining it? This is the situation that Kenyan political parties find themselves in.

A major finding is that those sources of income that are low, such as party investments and membership contributions are sincere and desired at democratization. Whilst they come in little dosages, they don't have strings attached to. However, those that contribute the most have hidden agendas, especially from local partners. A good example are the friends of the current president who contributed millions in two hours to facilitate his re-election (Daily nation, 11th June, 2017; pp1). The financial and technical support given to the Kenyan opposition from international friends has over the recent years alarmed the government. Mr George Soros who is an international funder of reforms in the developing world has been quoted as having supported the Kenyan NASA Coalition with intent to facilitate regime change; a tag he supposedly carries. He has also been mentioned in the US (Daily Nation, Monday, 7th August, 2017).

5.1.2. Ideology of Political Parties

As pointed out in the literature review, political parties come as a result of citizens who feel the pull to create an organ that they use to express certain ideas to the public for communal progression and development. At an advanced level, these ideas form concrete political ideologies either fronted by an individual who pulls followers to the said ideology or events necessitate the creation of a particular ideology for example the need for peace after long and exhausting periods of conflict.

This is however lacking in Kenya. Analysis points out that political parties are no longer established because of ideologies. In fact, the only parties established using concrete ideologies in Kenya's party history are KANU, KADU and APP. These are pre-independence parties. The rest are established with minimal intonations or semblance of ideological realms. It is also argued that FORD, although ideologically created to take up KADU's ideology of devolution, lost it to ethnic clientelistic politics. Since then, all parties created by leaders that were under FORD tended to prefer socialist democracy and devolution while all those parties that were formed by leaders from KANU tend to be advocates of liberal democracy and centralization. These are the only semblances or intonations parties have to ideologies. In reality, they are established to serve the client – patron structure of politics in the country, representing different social cleavages.

5.1.3. Political Party Internal Democracy

Intra-party democracy entails how parties implement democracy within their party organizations, a process that impacts on political socialization, recruitment, membership, political communication, policy-making, among other party functions. A major finding is on two perspectives seek to answer the question as to how parties run their internal affairs. One of the perspectives favours the elite model, which posits that the elite make decisions for the party. The second perspective views intra-party democracy as a bottom-up process, whereby ordinary party members fully participate in the party's decision-making processes. This perspective requires real involvement of the rank and file in intra-party decisions, irrespective of party hierarchy. These in the context of Kenya is a reflection of the former model. It is what

kills parties making them not go past ten years on average, examples being URP, TNA, NARC and other small parties.

Political parties in Kenya have certain characteristics that influence intraparty democracy. Most parties tend to draw their support mainly from their ethnic base; they tend to be dominated by their founders or key funders; their activities revolve around influential personalities; most of them have no registered membership and have not been keen to recruit members; have weak ideologies which are often unknown and are of little influence in policy-making; have difficulties organizing functions, even party elections are often flawed and infiltrated by rival parties; and they do not have structures that strongly link them to the citizenry.

5.1.4. Internal Mechanisms of Political Parties

These include checks and balances, appointment of officials amongst other features. Kenya's political parties exhibit functional weaknesses, compounded by patrimonialism, ethnic loyalties and political insecurity, leading to their ineffectiveness in performance of political parties. In Kenya and most of Africa, the party is often subordinated to the state and thus energies are not directed toward strengthening the party, to make it the crucible of policy initiation and agenda setting. The current party structure Kenya still puts the president or party leader at a position higher than the party. The quality of its personnel and the technical nature of the policy process, especially the drawing of development plans and evaluation of policy impact and holding implementing officers accountable, are some of the major bottlenecks. Under this milieu, political parties' role is limited to that of ratifying decisions made in the executive or other circles.

5.1.5. Political Party Mobilization Structure

The mobilization role of parties in Kenya is often effective depending on issue saliency and on ethno-cultural cleavages, especially ethnicity to concretize their appeal and impact. Issue-based mobilization such as the independence struggle, the agitation for multi-party democracy in early 1990s, and constitutional review referendum (2005 and 2010) or any other issue of national importance, have often attracted phenomenal support from the citizenry (Masime & Oesterdiekhoff, 2010). However, such mobilization is not based on enduring party loyalties. Rather, it is often a temporary phenomenon, which fizzles away 'shortly' after realization of the specific purpose. It has often been the case in Kenya that the party in power or the dominant member of a coalition often uses state resources, including government vehicles and funds, the Provincial Administration and other civil servants, and security agents to campaign and mobilize support for the party/government position in a struggle between the government and opposition parties.

5.2. Functionality of Political Parties in the Kenyan Political Environment.

Any political environment keeps changing and brings with it a set of demands that political parties and other stakeholders must live up to. The study sought to assess how political parties function in three broad categories which were the capability of political parties, efficiency of political parties and professionalism in political parties. These are analysed below.

5.2.1. Capability of Political Parties

Voters can give more effective direction to government by supporting a team's program rather than an individual's. By holding entire parties rather than individual politicians accountable for what government does, voters create an incentive for responsible governance that might not otherwise exist. In this regard therefore, political parties are by their nature supposed to tap the broad spectrum or variety of support they get from members to gain a particular standing in political realms. In spite of the hegemonic clientelistic approach Kenyan politics are, political parties have found ways to survive and represent members. However, their capability has been dogged down by the same paternalistic- client oriented politics.

The capabilities of parties were tested based on the following parameters; having a strong social base, prescription of appealing platform to voters, attraction/retaining of party activists, attraction/retaining of political leaders, party organizational strength, party organizational complexity, institutionalized mass support, strong linkage to social organizations/groups, accessibility to finances, ownership of strong manifesto, ownership of internal democracy, coming from a strong historical background, and having a strong linkage to international platforms. While Kenyan political parties are capable can and ought to do more, their assessment is an average on the various parameters provided. It is only the lack of a strong social base that is regarded as worst performing. Parties were also praised for their capabilities to attract/retain of party activists, access finances and have strong historical backgrounds.

5.2.2. Efficiency of Political Parties

This study sought to find out how parties are efficient in performing their roles. These roles according to Bosire, (2010) are; aggregating diverse interests, recruitment and preparation of candidates for electoral office, crafting/setting policy agenda and policy amendments/alternatives, organizing and participating in electoral competition, forming government, integrating groups/individuals into the democratic process, how political parties provide means through which citizens can participate in the governance process and how political parties structure the political landscape to enable competition between varying interests and policy objectives. However, political parties have not been as efficient as they are supposed to be.

Aggregating diverse interests, provision of means through which citizens can participate in the governance process and integrating groups/individuals into the democratic process are ranked as the weakest performance of parties. In terms of structure the political landscape to enable competition between varying interests and policy objectives, recruitment and preparation of candidates for electoral office and crafting/setting policy agenda and policy amendments/alternatives are ranked as fair. Organizing and participating in electoral competition and forming government are equally observed to be doing fairly well.

5.2.3. Professionalism in Political Parties

Sebastian Elischer, (2008) in his study of political parties in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria concerning democratic party behaviour, both within parties and among them and systemic consequences of party types concludes that programmatic parties behave most democratically and that, moreover, there seems to be

a relationship between a party's internal democracy and the way it interacts with other parties. Political parties cannot be running in a healthy manner unless they are well constituted and run well just like any other public organization. The perils that Kenyan political parties face in terms of professionalism including poor administration, presence of briefcase parties, threat of political brokers to parties and the acute access to infrastructure and finances among others. These are compounded by the lack of professional leaders to lead and advice political parties.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study shows that there are factors which greatly impact on the advancement of political parties. Among other factor that impact political parties and multipartism in the country include: the internal party mechanism, social cleavage/grouping which enhance ethnicization of political parties and historical injustices in the Kenyan political history which are all important aspects of political party development in the county.

Political parties and the environment they exist within are crucial in understanding party systems. How parties organize themselves depends greatly on their ecologies. If the political environment is positive; either legally, democratically or otherwise, then the parties that come out are generally regarded as progressive. In Kenya, and in Africa generally, political environments are not steady, more often being dictated upon or redefined by the political and circumstantial factors like conflicts.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends a review of the manner with which social cleavages are constructed, political party development and the entrenched patron client politics that are now part of political culture. This study argues that while multipartism offers an opportunity for political development in Kenya, democracy needs to be natured so that it can be fruitful.

Secondly, regardless of the constitutional changes (2010), the political structure in Kenya does not seem to have regard for legal structures that have been put in place. The institutional character and internal dynamics of political parties need reform so as to be in tandem with the demands of democratization and that the electoral processes in Kenya needs more reform and development to international standards.

As regards the manner and style of establishing political parties, the study espouses that the structure put in place by the political parties are insufficient to meet and carry out their mandates as expected of them by their members and as stated by their manifestoes. Party members feel that the issues revolving around features like youths and women are well catered for and that these (youth and women) have equal and fair chances to leadership within and in the party. However, a concern is in the structure as it does not sufficiently address certain issues of interest such as violence, party nomination, corruption, bribery, favouritism, voter buying among others. Other quarters also argue that much more could be done to better improve the party structure.

Fourthly, while parties have good grassroots mobilization for voter registration and education, there is a strong urge for better

structures and manifestoes and some of the issues that have been stressed upon across the divide including equity, integrity, sober leadership and real time change especially concerns addressing social issues like education, medication, security, cohesion and economic development.

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