

# Multipartism and Democracy are Under Test in Kenyan Politics

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**Abstract-** Democracy and multiparty politics are unique bedfellows. One cannot do without the other. While multipartism can have variations, including being replaced with single party politics, democracy can still survive. How the system is structured ultimately defines and builds democracy is what counts. Nonetheless, the understanding of multipartism – democracy relationship is best analyzed by studying the democratization process as multipartism is roped in. This study focuses on the link between multipartism and democracy in elections. This study was limited to the electioneering process, probing therefore the institutions that are and still are involved in elections in Kenya. The area of concern to the researcher was based on the foundation that multipartism is hinged on progressive development to any country. This is however, determinant on the uptake of multipartism. How it is used or manipulated determines that varied results witnessed through such avenues as elections, quality of politics and models of governance. In Kenya, multipartism was re-introduced in 1992 and has been in practise up to date. The continued varied results of elections and quality of politics regrettably portray a negation to the ideals of multiparty politics in comparison to what the general public expected. The major concern is whether there is a difference in democratic practise in elections, different from the previous elections in the single party era that were reported to be non-democratic in nature. The study uses Social Cleavage theory, propounded by Lipset and Rokkan (1968) to explain the various reasons that constitute the formation and practise of political parties. The study hence sought to understand the shortfalls of democracy that Kenya faces within its multipartism political realm.

**Index Terms-** Democracy/Multipartism/Elections/Politics

## I. INTRODUCTION

**E**lections 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. Scholarly gaps exist on the quality level of multiparty politics in Kenya in the context of quality elections, the impact of a high number of political parties; currently standing at more than 40 (Maiyo, 2008), and both positive and negative impact multipartism has had on Kenya's political realm. Kenyan political system has had coalition building, broadened democratic space and inclusivity in decision making for voters. These have led to improved quality of service delivery from public institutions. But on the flipside, ethnic violence, patron-client political management, disregard for electoral laws and dictatorial

tendencies of political parties continue to hamper Kenya's democracy.

Scholarly work on democratization in Kenya and Africa in limitedly linked to multiparty politics in the scope of the correct number of political parties, impunious political environment, dynamic social cleavages and the cost of democracy especially in Africa. Equally, progressive constitutional changes, peaceful transitions, coalition construction and management and the improving electoral management in Kenya is narrowly studied. Democracy in Kenya is widely believed as yet to be fully developed, including at party levels and is yet to be fully developed. The main reason for such aspersions is that instead of solving democratic problems, including its low levels, multipartism has brought more problems including strengthening ethnic, religious, class cleavages and party clientelism.

### 1.1. Why Multipartism and Democracy?

The study on multipartism and democratic elections beckons much attention within the African developmental agenda. The historical, social, economic and political realities shaping the development of African political party systems are however markedly different and require a new set of theoretical tools and approaches in order to fully capture the essence of their role in African politics. Normative approaches to the study and analysis of political parties in Africa tend to assume prescriptive perspectives that imply some sort of structural imposition as opposed to appreciation of organic development of parties. These approaches are therefore not best suited for the study and analysis of political parties in emerging democracies in Africa.

Secondly, little research has been done to investigate internal aspects of political party structures, functioning, and institutionalisation in general and processes of internal democracy in particular. Recent work by Mohamed Salih, (2007) and Chege, (2007) under the auspices of IIDEA, only begin to scratch the surface of an increasingly complex and pertinent area of inquiry. Similarly, political pluralism tends to be equated with the presence of multiple political parties contesting elections without regard to the political environment in which they operate and the internal institutional structures and processes by which these parties offer real choices and options to the electorate. It is this realisation that has sustained the long fight for constitutional and political reform in all three East African countries to provide a level playing field for all political parties (Musambayi, 2003). Increased civic awareness from mass civic education programmes especially since the late 1990s may have increased voter turnout and participation (or failing to as was witnessed in 2017) in elections in Kenya, but this is more a reflection of the voters' faith in the electoral process as a means of changing leadership, as opposed to faith in political

parties as institutions of democracy (Chege, 2007). This necessitates the study of the several cleavages to which the voters belong and the tag along parties follow to attract followers within several cleavages.

## II. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study employs the Social Cleavage theory as proposed by Lipset and Rokkan, (1967). The social cleavage theory is a concept used in sociology and political science to explore how society is divided into groups. Social cleavages are acknowledged divisions in society based on specific factors and are used to describe, among other things, voting behaviour.

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 researcher 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

The author, by reviewing relevant and current literature employed analytical qualitative design. The literatures were critically analyzed and conclusions made based on the relevancy of the source to the topic. As such discussions an analysis of the subject was based on the following major themes;

1. Comparison of Multiparty and Single Party Systems in Kenya
2. Penetration of Democratic Ideals into Kenya's Socio-Political and Economic Fabric

This study reviews these inquiries into the insights and advances produced by these recent studies, focussing on the key issues raised by the return of party pluralism in Kenya and on the utility of existing models, theories and approaches for its understanding on the effectiveness and internal dynamics of political parties.

## IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 4.1. Multipartism Development in Kenya

The Kenyan political Party landscape has undergone fundamental changes from the independence period to date. In explaining how the focuses of parties have changed over the years, Jonyo, (2013) points out that it is useful to divide the period into phases. To him, this offers a better understanding of major political milestones. These phases are: pre-independence; post-independence (1963-1969); 1970-1990; and late 1991 to present. This review will follow Jonyo's Phases. The researcher further

adds the multiparty phase of post-independence. They are; Pre-independence phase (pre – 1963), Multiparty post-independence phase (1963 – 1969), Single party phase (1970 – 1991) and Multiparty phase (1992 – to date)

During the pre-independence period, the main focus of political parties was magnification of the peril and promise of democratic governance. They embodied nationalist sentiments and vehemently fought for emancipation of countries from colonial subjugation. In the first years of the post-independence period era, parties developed an inclination towards one-party governance status, but in spite of this, embraced and practiced reasonable democratic practices. In the period 1970-1990, parties lost all pretensions to democracy and became personal tools of authoritarian leaders, typified by the events surrounding the formation and proscribing of the Kenya People's Union (KPU), and consequently, lost their savor as democratic institutions.

Political competition was almost entirely suffocated and only the Kenya African National Union (KANU) remained as the dominant party, and later the only political party, after it engineered constitutional changes in 1982 to make Kenya a *de jure* single party state. In 1991, Kenya became a multi-party state and hitherto, parties have had mixed results. Initially, they seemed critical in organizing public preferences and national agenda and generally performed their generic functions. Along the way, they have taken off this trajectory and there is concern that political parties still operate as personal outfits or tribal alliances, concerning themselves more with consolidation and retention of power rather than developing and implementing policies once in office or undertaking the core roles of political parties. This is cause for concern as the role of political parties is not limited to strategizing to capture and retain power. Political parties in a democracy have several functions that include leadership recruitment, political socialization, interest aggregation, and organization, policy formulation, political representation and mobilization.

However, the reintroduction of multiparty politics in December 1991, as Bosire (2010) points out, though a huge step in the country's journey towards becoming a competitive representative democracy, merely resulted in the proliferation of political parties most of which remain ineffectual. The parties have performed dismally in their traditional roles. They have also failed to articulate coherent ideologies, develop concrete political programmes, establish national following and practice internal democracy. Most of them at best serve as electoral vehicles, only heard of at election time, with no known contacts in between elections. Indeed, five multiparty elections down the line and the country is yet to transit into a full-fledged representative democracy (Bosire, 2010: 7). However, Bosire fails to give credit to political parties that have over the years contributed to the socio-political development of the country. He also fails to link political parties to positive aspects the country has gone through thanks to political parties including political transitions and two constitutional referenda.

Although political parties are expressions of social structural conflict situations (cleavages), they more than any other democratic institution have the capacity to generate positive crosscutting cleavages by aggregating diverse interests rather than articulating specific ones. Political parties in Kenya have failed to articulate socio-economic or any other democratically acceptable

ideological cleavages and have tended to articulate interests on the basis of ethnicity, thereby, intensifying already existing societal divisions, tensions and conflicts (Patel, 2001: 155; Whitehead, 2000: 3).

The absence of ideological or policy platforms has not only seen parties appeal to ethnic emotions but also indulge in patronage and corruption, which have further heightened perceptions of ethnic inequality and/or exclusion within the political system. This phenomenon was especially magnified in the period leading to the constitutional referendum in 2005, through to the 2007 General Elections when a dispute over the tallying of presidential votes resulted in widespread post-election violence that led to the death of over 1000 people and the displacement of another 500, 000 (Kriegler Report, 2008)

## V. ANALYSIS

### 5.1. Comparison of Multiparty and Single Party Systems in Kenya

This study sought to compare the state of affairs in the country in both single and multiparty era. This is important so as to ascertain which system is better and in what circumstances. The issues under scope in the comparison are; Politics and governance during the two eras, membership to political parties (here the study tried to find out if the members were enormous during either of the systems, and for what reasons) and achievements of parties in terms of mobilization, development to the country, impact on public policy, direction of the country's ideology, impact on foreign policy (relations and general image of the state as portrayed by the political party).

The main achievements that political parties can be assessed on as a basis in comparing the single and multiparty eras in Kenya are; mobilization role (under social, political and economic aspects), public policy, foreign policy, national integration, ideology conceptualization, national development, democratization, constitutionalism, institutionalism, political inclusivity, political effectiveness and party development characteristics. It is important to assess the achievements of political parties in reviewing the development of multiparty politics in Kenya. This compares the development of political parties and how they were able to perform in both eras.

Under mobilization, the extent to which a party mobilizes social, political and economic features for development is paramount. Generally, multiparty era political parties do better at mobilization as compared to similar or any political party in a single party era. The reasons for these are mainly because political parties when operating within a multiparty setup, tend to compete and in return, their image and technical knowhow is improved. This was lacking in the single party era because the patron was the leader of the country. However, the party under a single party system was found to do better in foreign policy, national integration and ideology conceptualization. Each of these features were found to be doing better than in the multiparty. Political effectiveness also did better in the single party era. It was pointed out that these four performed better owing to the centralized and unified manner of national politics. This was and still is the benefit of single party systems. States in such systems have strong foreign policies owing to the strong or towering figure the heads of state enjoy back at home; which catapults him/her to more accolade

status than their counterparts in the region. The example of Presidents Yoweri and Kagame of Uganda and Rwanda respectively can be provided as examples. These Heads of State have more status than their East African counterparts, all thanks to single party tendencies in their countries that have overpowered multiparty politics.

National development, democratization, constitutionalism, institutionalism, political inclusivity and party development do better under a multiparty system over the single party system. It is argued that national development is as a result of public participation and inclusivity, as discussed above, and directly involved in democratic principles and constitutionalism. Such features as separation of powers, creation and maintenance of strong independent institutions; does not create a vacuum for political parties to fill, as was the case in the single party era. Parties are secluded to policy and interest articulation and in the legislature only. However, it can be argued that keeping a party secluded is not the best choice. While supporting multiparty systems, there is need for strong political parties, just like in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda to be replicated in Kenya. Strong parties ensure national development, which in turn gives room for the growth of democracy an institutionalism. No system, single or multiparty will work within a poor economic environment.

### 5.2. Penetration of Democratic Ideals into Kenya's Socio-Political and Economic Fabric

Under this theme, the researcher asks, is democracy embraced by all? Does it merge/compliment Kenya's ideology? Elections, in terms of their origin in Africa, were a colonial contrivance that evolved as part of the institutional transfer of the superstructure of liberal democracy (Jinadu, 1995: 76). Although the pre-colonial political systems in Africa had some shades of democratic principles and practices embedded in them, the concept of voting and the notion of a political majority and minority were not part of the African political tradition. Consensus, dialogue and the political collective were emphasized, as opposed to individualism, atomization and the majoritarianism of the western capitalist political system (Buijtenhuijs and Rijnerse, 1993).

While electoral pedagogy took place under colonial rule, colonialism produced three sharp contradictions or paradoxes for post-colonial electoral politics and behaviour, particularly of the leadership. First, colonialism by its very nature and character is antithetical to the logic and philosophy of elections and democracy, having been constructed on a base of authoritarianism and domination. Thus, super-intending the electoral process, particularly when the colonial regime itself was deeply interested and involved in the politics of power transfer, was very complex and problematic, and the extent to which an impartial or a free and fair colonial electoral process was possible was therefore questionable. Second, although the decolonization project was woven around democratic principles and the ideals of self-determination and social justice, the emergent political elites were educated and socialized under a highly centralized and authoritarian order (Chazan, 1993). This was to later affect their post-colonial political behaviour. Third, the statist character of colonial rule, which survived the era, was later to determine the object and terrain of electoral competition. What are the

implications of the foregoing for electoral politics in post-colonial Africa?

The durability of democracy is assumed to originate from a constitutional order. However, dominant state parties tend to undermine constitutionalism. An example is in the 2017 General Elections and the many court cases regarding the Constitutional interpretation of electoral processes, including the landmark ruling of the Supreme Court of Kenya nullifying the presidential election. It may be noted that the failure of constitutionalism in Africa is not a result of lack of popular constitutions but of governments seeking to escape from constraints imposed by constitutions. Instead personal rule in Africa has become a norm. It can also be noted that where there is, in fact, the potential to resist arbitrary rule, either society is not sufficiently organised politically to challenge it, or the political and legal institutions are too weak in the quality of their personnel and in their political support from society, to resist or counter balance the executive power. In effect therefore, democracy is neither here nor there.

Executive power in Africa is overwhelming partly because the leaders do not believe in constitutional rule or those provisions that limit their powers (Makara, 2007, p57). At the same time institutions of representation simply become what is termed as "rubber stamps." In assessing African political elites, it can be observed as a paradox in their commitment to constitutionalism and their emphatic rejection of classical principles of liberal democracy. Such a paradox, it can be argued, produces the conditions where the political elite in Africa believe that instead of controlling a government, the constitution is there to serve government, leaving a room for manipulation.

Finally, liberal democracies go a step beyond, as they are strictly bound by the state's constitution and the rule of law, with horizontal accountability among officeholders, protection of pluralism and freedoms, and the lack of "reserved domains of power for the military or other actors not accountable to the electorate". (Howard & Roessler, 2006; Pp 367-368). It is this liberal democracy that Kenya strives to get to as prescribed by the 2010 Constitution and other multi-sectoral electoral reforms.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings from the data analysed the author recommends the following suggestions:

### 6.1. Social cleavages

Social cleavages are integral in political mobilization as the study finds. However, they have unique impacts if they are not directed. Since people collect themselves based on similarities owned, there is need to have caution so that these mobilizations can be controlled. If people collect themselves based on wrong similarities that exist in social settings, then there is jeopardy of the same society passing these wrong features as normal and okay.

### 6.2. Patron-Client politics

Patron-clientelist politics in Africa has become entrenched as this study reveals. Political leaders have over the years used their executive power to offer services in exchange for political support to themselves and their parties. This is a direct product of single party system countries go through. There is need to rework on ways of eliminating this political tendency that is rampant in Africa.

## 6.3. Democratization

The democratization roadmap as the study reveals is poised to offer any society positive gains in political management and Africa should be keen on this. African countries are on the right path towards this in spite of few countries that scuttle this. Nonetheless, there is need to assess democracy in the context of African political systems without heavy input from non-African societies so that African political structures can develop democracy based on continental perspectives

## VII. CONCLUSION

In most African countries, recent developments suggest that elections are only an expedient political exercise for ruling regimes, partly because of their economic implications in terms of aid flows and economic assistance, and partly because of their public relations advantage in propping up the political profile of the regime in the international arena. Even where regimes came into power through popular elections, they have since relapsed into autocratic rule, conducting "fabricated" elections. Thus, the dominant practice is that most rulers organize an electoral "coup d'état" which ensures their "selection" in the name of a popular electoral process. The tactics employed include stifling opposition parties and reducing them to docility, covertly corrupting the electoral process or embarking on outright election rigging.

This study concludes that while democratization and multipartism have each gone through divergent ecological stages, their development is more beneficial when much support comes from outside the two than when they complement each other. Other components include elections, governance, politics and constitutionalism. Their quality does a huge favour to their development than they can do by themselves. In essence, it is not just enough to have a democratic space and existent multiple party system. In themselves, political un-doings may take root as the study has shown in Kenya.

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