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Intra-Elite Influence towards Kenya's 2022 General Elections

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ABSTRACT

As Kenyans headed to elections in August 2022 which characteristically mirrored political alignments and re-alignments, it elicited mixed recitations and tensions among the political class. The two frontrunners, Raila Odinga and William Ruto saw a loss as a great threat to their political and economic interests. This was propounded by the nature of Kenyan elections that is always a high stakes affair since the political class is eager to protect their careers and business interests. The previously witnessed social tensions seemed low compared to the previous year's elections that may be attributed to changes in political dynamics where the political elites have relatively resorted to political agendas. The issue based politics however does not elusively promise peaceful transition, but creates optimism. Despite the efforts for peaceful elections by the political elite, the intra-elite tensions possess a threat to the outcome of the vote. A highly prime scenario is the increasing verbal attacks on one another by the political class as election date drew nearer that ethnicity and economic cleavages could drive voters into unrest; a situation that could be easily overcome by conceding defeat. The already witnessed public pronouncements by the top presidential contenders to accepting the poll results and the public view of the Kenyan Judiciary being regarded one of the best in Africa creates an avenue for contestation where candidates unhappy with the election outcome resort to in limiting the possible threats of violence. The interdependent institutions at the election period have to support each other while maintaining strict neutrality. Both internal and external actors have and should even work harder to address potential sources of unrest as the country moves closer to transition. Kenya is currently the main transport and commercial hub in the East African region hence any form of violence impacts negatively much parts of the region. Use of social media sites contribute positively in political passage of information despite the risk of misinformation. It is therefore postulated that government institutions, civil society and political elites influence on their supporters will greatly sway their actions for stability, good economy, education, and external linkages afterwards.

Keywords: Elite Influence, Development, Intra-Elite, Election, Observers, Kenya's Election

OVERVIEW

The Kenya's post-independence history reminds of the months to and after an election witnessing violence leading to displacements and even death. Ethnically mobilized alliances has been the norm in Kenyan politics since the 1992 multiparty democracy that has continued to pervade the Kenyan electoral landscape today despite of the effort towards a political ideology. Kenyan elections have been characterised by strong contest pitting at least two strong contestants. The August 9, 2022 general election has promised to be a bitterly contested one as the serving president, Uhuru Kenyatta, being on his last second term does not seem on the same political path with his Deputy, William Ruto regarded as the propeller of the presidents presidency in 2013 and 2017. The president has shifted political alliance and allegiance to the Kenya's former Prime Minister, Raila Odinga. This has placed Ruto against the state machinery that has warmly

embraced the candidacy of Odinga. Ruto has assembled his populist narrative against the dalliance of President Kenyatta and Odinga while promising to accept the outcome but at the same time calling on his main opponent to do the same.

Political elites are however having a role in influencing the election and their stand informs the possible outcome of peace or violence. They have a role of publicly committing to accept election outcomes or following the judicial arbitration to avert a possible crisis. All accredited observers whether domestic or international have the role of guarding election integrity to assist preventing from issues of disputed vote and the possible resultants. There are existing recommendations towards reforming the electoral institutions. Whereas there is a substantive effort towards the same, there are some that have not been settled. This may be viewed in the negative thus positioning the electoral body as the weakling towards a transparent election. One may quickly see the financial underfunding of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) that may impede their elections performance making them to operate at the whims of the executive with some of the commissioners being appointed to office less than a year to election. The high intra-elite tensions and the weak electoral body creates a possible ground for contestation of the election outcome.

A point of concern is when a key political player uses ethnic and economic crevice to drive supporters to the streets through mass action without conceding defeat or even accepting the possible outcomes of the courts. The bad relationship between the president and his deputy is a possible cause of worry despite the progressive steps undertaken by the electoral institutions that seem to be struggling towards offering free, fair, transparent and verifiable election. The substantive changes in the electoral body guided by the 2017 judiciary decision to nullify the presidential election and the trust that the institution gained creates hope to Kenyans for a lesser risk of violence vested on elections. There is a belief by vast majority of Kenyans that the outcome would be contested through the courts and the intra-elite tensions managed through accepting the outcomes of the courts.

METHODOLOGY

This article found necessity to use desk top research since most of the information required for this study are readily available in library, online depositories, and documentaries that deal with electoral matters. Such articles offer qualitative information that the researchers used to review their arguments and thought lines. Several evidential merits exist on qualitative research in hitherto unexpected fields. Mack, Natasha et'al (2005) broadly assert that, the strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the "human" side of an issue that is, the often contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent. Qualitative research methods are gaining in popularity outside the traditional academic social sciences, particularly in public health and international development research. Whereas quantitative research methods once dominated these fields, researchers have now begun drawing from a more diverse repertoire of methodologies as they tackle international public health problems. Qualitative methods have become important tools within this broader approach to applied research, in large part because they provide valuable insights into the local perspectives of study populations. The great contribution of qualitative research is the culturally specific and contextually rich data it produces. As Zohrabi (2013) notes, qualitative research is a form of social action that stresses on the way people interpret, and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals.

Elite Theory

The theory classifies the society as containing two groups of people that comprises the ruling and the ruled. Whereas the ruling are minority and those ruled are majority, minority group are able to impose decisions

on the majority. Elite theorists strive to explain how the minority are able to control resources from all angles including economic, intellectual, and cultural arenas that they use to exercise power on the rest of the population. Pareto who is among the contributors of this theory asserts that elites are the governors of the people. Elites according to him are people with intelligence, character and capacity qualities. Pareto categorizes people in the top hierarchy of class as elites (Pareto, 1935). Within the elite group are subgroups that play different roles geared towards consolidation of power. Mosca similarly agrees with Pareto on the two classes of people consisting of the ruling and those ruled with one person as the leader of political organization among the ruling class. It is through the influence of the masses that the ruling elite gain support and the entire system (Mosca, 1939). The assertion is that the minority are able to be organized than majority enabled by power and wealth domination that tend to be hereditary.

Another contributors called Michels noted that the best way to creating a collective will is through organizations. It is by it that the elected dominate over the electors, delegates over delegators, and the mandates over the mandators (Michels, 1966). Michels further states that not all set up organizations are for autocratic aims but they tend to portray oligarchic tendencies irrespective of their different ideological concerns. Leaders therefore have qualities that include the force of will, knowledge, and strength of conviction although majority of them abuse the authority for their personal gain.

This research embraces the ideas of elites theory in explaining the quest for power in Kenya whereby there are the governing elite who are individuals having a considerable role in the running of the state whether directly or indirectly. The non-governing elites define other individuals in the ruling class while the political elite are those that exercise political power directly like the winner of presidential election. Just as Mosca writes, the ruling elite use a political organization to ascend to power. There are those individuals with different roles all directed towards assumption of power. In the Kenyan context for example, there are different players with different roles. There are those who strategize on how to win through ideological formulations aligned to a single political party or umbrella of political parties. Others play the role of financiers while others act as the mouth piece by co-joining the feeling of the masses with their policies thus becoming attractive and convincing. Elites tend to extend their control through power hereditary seen through political, financial and intellectual support just as Kenyan retired president Uhuru Kenyatta threw his political and financial weight behind the Azimio Leader, Raila Odinga.

Kenyan leaders for instance after the election strategically positioned themselves to a Supreme Court battle. This is a way of justifying power through moral and legal also called a “political formula” by Mosca. Leaders are driven by what Michels called natural greed for power which explains why leaders may arise spontaneously but with time they become professional leaders and later on they end up being very stable and irremovable. The political leaders as a way of seeking to control create regulations like party discipline. The state can be categorized as a single gigantic oligarchy where the few who constitute the ruling class as soon as they gain power emancipate themselves from the masses and even act against the majority. The old elites amalgamate with the new elites through engagement, exchange of ideas and realignment and in most instances the old elites assimilate the new ones thus becoming a continuous process from one government to another.

THE INTRA-ELITE ELECTIONS PLAY AND CORRUPTION

The electoral violence in Africa and precisely Kenya lays out the ground to understanding the generality of violence. Many scholars have written on the perilous nature of institutional framework of electoral bodies and their role in the electoral contest that is prone to manipulation of the entire competition (Salehyan and Linebarger, 2015). The powerful political elites are key players in any election cycle and their influence is of high magnitude. They are the players in mobilizing ethnic alignments to which some scholars have observed as behind the Kenya’s electoral violence recurrence (Burchard, 2015). There is observation however by other scholars that ethnicity has limited role in electoral violence and instead it is perceived to

interact with a flawed electoral system (Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero, 2012). The Kenyan elections is among the most competitive not only in East but Central Africa. A competition mostly surrounding personalities and money. Despite existing challenges, candidates competing against government side campaign freely with little resistance as compared to neighbouring states.

The judiciary is key in any democracy an aspect that requires high competency level. It is observable through exercising their duties independently and rendering timely judgement that is not biased. This if practiced would do away with the long held presumption by developing states that the judiciary is an extension of the executive. Such a notion creates a negative perception that the laws made by parliament are not to the advantage of the citizens and so, citizens have no protection. Since elections have adverse effects to competitors and by extension their supporters, the courts have a role of resolving electoral disputes through a substantive judgement. Such a way creates trust rather than those made through a narrow technical criteria. Timely judicial process is important as it minimises anxiety that goes with it which at times may lead to spontaneous violence in a disputed election. The case of Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election violence was greatly as a result of independent judiciary that would offer timely judicial decisions as compared to the post-2010 general elections that has seen an establishment of Supreme Court with a two weeks' timeline in resolving petitions. Neglecting such key institutions creates room for weakening elections and being prone to violence (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Elections have been viewed by many electorates especially in Africa to benefit more the political elites than resolving the existing problems of the voters. The importance of the voters is when the elites are competing for their votes. In such a case, the voters expectation is that the end of an election and the accepted outcome whether rigged or fairly won should contribute to reduction of goods to the bottom of the system. The intra-elite competition has created a perception that power is taken and not given hence the outcome is important and not the means. This explains why in many countries for example Nigeria and Kenya huge sums of money and other resources are incurred by candidates towards voters and their communities. Charles documents the looming ethnic related violence but opines that economic reforms towards Kenya's 2022 elections prevail. Corruption remains an important issue as they affect the economy negatively (Charles Ray, 2022).

The constitution has been used by political elites in many African states to gain power and their privileges. These elites include political parties' leadership, distinguished business personalities and top-ranking bureaucrats. Kenyan regimes prior to the 2010 constitution would subject the minority say to the will of the winning party or coalition. The history of seeking to legitimise political process through the law dates to colonial history (Anyang Nyong'o, 1989). This is demonstrated by the many amendments or by-laws created and adopted around the times of regime change just as was the case of amendment on the constitution of coalition political parties by the national assembly of Kenya defining coalition exits to be six months before an election and three months after general elections are held. The elites should regulate their desires and interests that drive them to subvert the reasoned legal order that in most instances determines stability not only in Kenya but also in Africa as documented by Nicolas van de Walle (2001).

The political elites are prone to abuse of critical information that they access as a way of taking control of the electorates by creating tensions through their talks and engagements yet they are able to contain violence among themselves. The intra-elite tensions creates animosity among the electorates especially in a conflict prone society or areas. In a Kenyan perspective, it increases the ethnic tensions that arise from a political contest that has become seasoned at political periods. Intra-elite uncertainty therefore lays ground for either institutional stability or instability. Kenyan politics has continued to be affected by unstable elite bargains that creates inequality and greater weakening of accountability as well as abuses of power which has been witnessed already in the run up to the 2022 general elections (Brechenmacher and Sambuli, 2022). Elite polarization is exuberated by the deteriorated relationship between President Kenyatta and his deputy, Ruto.

They both command substantial voter zones that has a mixed reaction from Ruto's side not being endorsed, and Uhuru's in case of Ruto win. Just as was advised by the Catholic Church in September 2021 that such open differences risks dividing the country hence interfering with peace and tranquillity. The desire to only but win, is the biggest challenge to stability as the election gets closer. The security services has been labelled biased by United Democratic Alliance officials to be seen as agents for state backed candidate. Such a conduct would escalate tensions that if not contained would easily blow to violence. A by-election in Kiambu in July 2021 for instance saw disruption at the tallying centre by Jubilee party candidate accompanied by the police, a behaviour that UDA officials saw as potential conduct in August 2022 elections (International Crisis Group, 2022).

The Kenya's 2022 general elections canters on long-time opposition leader Odinga with the support of the outgoing president together with other political heavyweights in comparison to Ruto, the deputy president who has premised his campaign on being dapped as outsider of the "dynasty" community. This has created political alignments and realignments as opposed to the 2013 and 2017 elections where president Uhuru relied on the strong political base of Kenya's Central and Rift Valley strongholds. The alignment of the president to Odinga his nemesis splintered the ruling party with factions aligned to the president and the deputy president, Ruto who sought to run on a newly formed political vehicle under the umbrella of Kenya Kwanza Alliance competing with Azimio La Umoja coalition, the Kenyatta and Odinga's coalition political party. This kind of coalition is not new in Kenyan politics as the elections has been coalesced around coalitions centred on individual political leaders since the advent of multiparty democracy in the 1990s (Brechenmacher and Sambuli, 2022). These political elites compete creating intra-elite tensions as the effort is put forth towards a promise to deliver votes from their mapped strong holds affiliated to regions or ethnic leaning in order to safeguard their interests and access state resources. This has created a culture of political deals often steered by political elites that engage in closed door bargains and limelight announcement of the deal. This is further attributed to the weak political parties lacking a constant logically guiding ideology hence the political engagements on convenience of power gain. The Jubilee party for instance was used to bring together two rival communities while the aftermath Azimio La Umoja coalition was to end the 2017 rift and possibly block Ruto from ascending to power or end the long standing rivalry between the Odinga's and the Kenyatta's.

The intra-elite relations have been shaped by the rift between presidents Kenyatta and his deputy Ruto. As August 2022 election nears, the two state officers have escalated their verbal attacks with the Ruto side accusing the president of state intimidation (International Crisis Group, 2022). The replacement of the elite General Service Unit from guarding Ruto's residences is such an example of choreographed stories. Such tones if amplified could easily divide the country and become breeding point for violence. If there is going to be calm after the elections, it will largely depend on politicians behaviour. The fall out of the president and his deputy has for example shifted elite allegiance, alliances and counter-alliances. Due to such high-stakes state influences, one side may end up mobilising street protests if all does not go well or in another scenario engagement by the public on authorities for fear of elections manipulation.

The political elites engage in negotiations to choose candidates to participate in election of certain positions by engaging in several tactics like zoning especially within coalitions. This portrays the weakly set up coalitions that further erode democratic participations. Such a practice creates discontent as a result of perceived favouritism among party hopefuls and so increasing potentiality of independent candidates. In so doing, there are groups especially the youth, women and marginalised that will feel left out or struggle as the coalitions are personality centered due to the masculinity of contributed resources overtaking policy ideas or even well experienced leadership as witnessed in the selection of Karua and Gachagua as deputy presidential candidates of Odinga and Ruto respectively.

The deal making among the elite has been observed by scholars, commentators and analysts to solely serve

their economic and political interests at the latitude of political accountability. This is witnessed when politicians use all available means including providing incentives as a way of mobilizing voters. It creates room for bargaining with the elites a move that once secured, the voter needs are left and instead their personal interests secured. The inequality gap is widened by fast growing rich group across the world at the expense of the majority middle and poor class (Brechenmacher and Sambuli, 2022). This makes it difficult to improve the economy as well as tackling of the widening robust corruption. Those in power oversee wealth growth of their family business empires as they are protected and sheltered from the various agency's scrutiny. Offshore companies are used to hide the illegally acquired proceeds a move that explains the succession matrix at the apex position of the presidency as the strong contenders are billionaires whom connected business elites seek to support. The support that Odinga has received from Kenyatta and other Mount Kenya billionaires for instance shows a potentiality of his tenure as president being unlikely to investigate and bring to justice graft allegations surrounding jubilee administration if not selectively conducted. Similarly, Ruto administration may not truly prosecute graft as already the presidential candidate is marred with corruption allegations and investigation.

Electoral Body Preparedness

The electoral system of a state refines the behaviour and choices of voters and the political class that seeks for the citizenry favour of representation in any democratic set up. Several scholars have documented on effectiveness and resulting impacts from various electoral systems as divulged by Maurice Duverger (1950). Many scholars in their writings about democracy strive to show the possible best way to conduct an election and choose representatives. On the contrary, countries that embrace democratic values may be faced with different challenges that call for different electoral and representational systems in handling them. The electoral system in the Democratic Republic of Congo for instance was designed with the aim of solving problems such as getting the militias ethnically aligned to the ethnic minority from such terror acts to becoming voters, create a strong sense of belonging especially for the perceived to be remote local communities, proportional distribution of legislative positions due to their persistent lack of census, and to address the citizenry fear that the strong national political party elites would impose Members of Parliament contrary to the wishes of the electorates. The best electoral system is one that is shaped to any best practice and outcome which some of the scholars regard as supporting the views of the public as expressed through the ballot devoid of violence (Reilly and Ellis, 2005).

Election is necessary as is a requirement for the public to choose leaders of their choices. This requires an electoral body that is competent and impartial keeping in mind the challenging nature in conducting an election despite the imperfection nature of the entire election process. There is tendency for most African countries towards influencing the electoral bodies to act in favour of those in power. This is done in many ways not limited to financial suppression and provision of incentives to the key officers. There is for instance a culture of mistrust in Kenya's electoral institutions that is always supported by the elite alliances that continuously shifts guided by their struck bargained deals on potential power. Electoral body preparedness does not overly rely on capacity as much of it lies on the political interference through other institutions that are supposed to provide supportive services (Brechenmacher and Sambuli, 2022). The IEBC in 2017 adopted Kenyan Integrated Election Management System (KIEMS) for purposes of biometric voter registration and identification and eventual result transmission. Timely procurement, testing and other preparations mostly attributed to the executive's unwillingness to provide support especially the financial part contributes negatively to the process of election. Moreover, the failure to timely test the kits could contribute to widespread transmission problems on the Election Day. This may also open more grounds for challenging the election outcome just as was the case in the 2017 general elections that was nullified by the Supreme Court.

Such nullifications of the presidential results and an order for fresh elections or whatever the directives

including a recount or declaration on the meeting of 50% plus one vote negatively affects public confidence on the electoral process. The failure to address 2017 elections shortcomings is a concern. Political leaders should be at the forefront in committing themselves to a smooth election process. The government has been slow in releasing the funds for the IEBC preparedness that delayed the voter verification exercise which sets ground for dissatisfaction by the political participants. Brechenmacher and Sambuli (2022) for instance point to the National Assembly failure to pass the campaign finance regulations and their rules on early campaigns ignored and subsequent attempt to interfere with its operations. This was also witnessed when IEBC effort to implement the gender quota on party candidates list was quashed by court order. Some other witnessed challenges include delayed appointments of IEBC commissioners, the effort to amend the electoral laws in the near end to election, failure to enforce integrity standards as advised by the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC), the agency mandated in implementing chapter six of the constitution, and the unclear plan to securely transmit electoral results.

Brechenmacher and Sambuli (2022) further shows that although trust deficit on the electoral body exists it may not affect the voter turnout. This was demonstrated by the 2020 United States election that signals polarization from lacking trust in electoral process especially on closely contested elections. This is no similar to the Kenyan 2022 general elections that is closely contested by Odinga and Ruto as opposed despite having Wajackoya and Mwaure. Mistrust easily births suspicion on the electoral body that gives room for those seeking power to quickly abuse it and advance their agenda. The ever seen attempts to interfere with electoral bodies as election nears is only but an effort to weaken their operation towards a free, fair, transparent and verifiable election. The leaders that have chances of benefiting from centralization of political power quickly embrace attempts to weaken other institutions that provide checks and balances as set out in the 2010 constitution. The Kenyatta regime for example oversaw disregarding of court orders, reduced judiciary budget and even utter refusal to swear in judges as recommended by the Judicial Service Commission even though there were court orders on the same.

The judiciary as expected should safeguard the constitution other than the executive. The judges have vast experiences including ruling against the executive just as it annulled the 2017 election results and ruled against the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI). This has not however resolve the issue of election based violence. This is therefore a concern as the country heads to 2022 elections (International Crisis Group, 2022). The electoral management institution has not been fully empowered hence insufficiently prepared for the polls. For instance, the four commissioners to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) were appointed on September 2, 2021 less than one year to the August 9, 2022 general elections. It implies that they would not have sufficient time to prepare for the forthcoming elections. An independent Review Commission formed after the 2007/2008 violence and headed by South African retired judge Johann Kriegler had recommended two years to elections timeframe for electoral laws and personnel establishment, an advice that has greatly been ignored. There are adverse effects from such delays that may negatively affect the general elections. The government has been unwilling to financially support the IEBC on their requests to enable elections preparedness. At some point, the electoral body would be seen complaining to have received a quarter of requested amount by end of 2021 and by March 2022 when voter verification should be done, the commission had received funds way below the expected amount. The elections preparation can adversely be affected by such shortcomings and worse off being the resistance by national authorities for direct external support by international partners to IEBC.

The elections management bodies do not act alone as they are supported by other institutions such as the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who play various roles like educating the voters and acting as election observers. The international observation teams like Elections Observation Group (ELOG) that has expressed interest of participation in the August 9 elections play an important role. Some states have however the tendency of discrediting the works of such observer missions at times because of their strength of resource availability or by acting on the interest of view political elite

groups. The international observers have to be transparent and truthful in submission of their reports without being compromised.

Elections are among the universally recognised practices of setting up a government and a successful process minimizes the potential conflicts in society. It provides a field for political contests thereby setting the ground for government accountability to its citizens. This implies that elections should be conducted in a modest manner that shall be acceptable to the citizens and the elected leaders. The failure to conduct elections in a proper manner is likely to perpetuate the conflicts that they should be assisting in managing. The election bodies should therefore be impartial which applies by extension to the courts and security services. Governments and those in power should avoid use of coercion and intimidation to such election bodies towards a desired outcome that may become escalators of violence.

DEVELOPMENT TRAJECTORY

Democracy is regarded by many scholars as an enabler of citizens to engage in informed decisions regarding their lives (Sen, 1999). It gives citizens direct control in terms of political dynamics of their lives. An environment that is peaceful thrives economically because services and activities are conducted with limited interferences. Ineffective electoral bodies may entertain patronage politics that may fail to deliver national economic policies especially in improving lives of the people. It may encourage wealth amassing by the rich at the expense of the poor. Such situations will enable a government that is not accountable to the people. Elite oriented policies would therefore encourage corruption and national economic policies that are inconsiderate of the majority.

Elections are a stimuli for either peace or conflict. Well managed elections leads to peaceful existence hence the need for it to be conducted in the best way possible, a competent manner full of integrity just as espoused by Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) that a well-managed election advances domestic peace. When peace prevails, development progresses since the environment is conducive for business to thrive. Kenya has avoided coups and an all-out civil war compared to other African countries. One wonders then why Kenya has continued to witness ethnic tensions and violence despite its growing economy and a robust civil society. Kenya has remained relatively peaceful and stable except violence related to elections that has proven to be common due to the pattern that has been witnessed after elections despite her recognition as a beacon of peace in Africa. The tensions and conflicts have always been around ethnic identities because of the nature of Kenyan politics that is segmented along ethnic origins.

The August 9, 2022 elections are occurring in the midst of greater economic displeasure that has created anxiety among the citizens on many issues including food insecurity, unemployment, fuel prices and the high cost of living. These issues have dominated political agendas although many Kenyans have reservations on these campaign promises as a means to tangible change. These challenges have not only been attributed to bad governance but also to the corona virus pandemic that the World Bank according to Brechenmacher and Sambuli (2022) expects a recovery to pre-pandemic in 2022 although this is yet to be felt by many Kenyans as poverty still reigns, worsened by droughts in some regions of the country. Although the jubilee administration focused on robust infrastructural developments, these failed to provide well-paying jobs especially to the youth as government data shows that 38.9% of Kenyans majority being university graduates remain jobless. It could be worsened by the ever increasing public debt from around 16 billion dollars in 2013 to 9 trillion in 2022.

The causes relating to violence in the various elections keep recurring in the Kenyan society to the extent that tensions arise in certain areas in every electioneering period. It is also worth noting that the inaction by the relevant authorities especially to the perceived strongholds of the opponent or even action based discrimination on others creates an environment for possible human rights violations. Similarly, elections related violence are complicated by the different levels of power struggle across the board (Human Rights

Watch, 2013). The Kenyatta government has witnessed his deputy and political allies decrying openly on the use of state institutions to fight them, an observable behaviour and acts that are likely to plunge the country into chaos after the August 2022 general elections. The perceived rewards that are handy with political office such as protection from criminal prosecution are in part motivation factors for some candidates using all methods to achieve power. It includes mobilizing supporters to act violently against opponents, a behaviour that breeds violence.

As the country gears towards August 2022 general elections, the cost of living continues to rise due to the various government measures like tax hikes on petroleum products and basic commodities subsequently leading to increased food prices on food items. The impacts are highly felt by the low income households. This is also worsened by the Russia and Ukraine conflicts as they are the leading exporters of wheat to which Kenya is an importer. The recent shortage of fuel and the increased prices makes matters worse than anticipated. The economy has become an issue of concern that the citizens want the next government to address as a priority. Economic concerns have shaped to a great extent the 2022 general elections with the majority of the youth driven by the desire to achieve their interests surrounding employment opportunities, and the country's general economic outlook through those they wish to vote in. This, in addition to the economy leaning recovery strategies by the presidential contenders may shape the politics of ideas away from ethnic alignments. It may contribute to a peaceful society after elections that will promote developments and attract more investors. Brechenmacher and Sambuli (2022) avers that the "hustlers" against the "dynasties" narrative has been used by Ruto as an association with the majority having humble origins against Kenyatta and Raila's elite upbringing. Additionally, the effort to focus political competition on ideas as the bottom-up economic model surrounding small businesses, informal workers and farmers has resonated well with the citizens. Odinga has come up with political messaging around manufacturing sector, bolstering social protection through monthly cash transfers, job creation among others.

These ideas lack detailed ways of ensuring the promises are attained but they give a glimpse of hope and enlightens the public through economic growth dimension. As the political competition heightens in the final stretches, the fight against corruption has appeared prominently, a vice that if well tackled will yield more to the economy. It calls for action to ensure that they are not perceived by the electorates as but only pledges against the lived reality by many. The culture of unfulfilled promises should be tackled for trust by the citizens to prevail in order to back up the assertion that voting counts to reflect through delivered promises hence achieved development milestone. The March 2018 "handshake" agreement by Kenyatta and Odinga for instance was regarded as a way of ending the rivalry that interfered with development agendas. This political cooperation mutated the famous BBI that sought to bring constitutional reforms to prevent electoral tensions and conflicts. Such an initiative may be sought by the next regime if it truly promotes a culture of peace after elections resulting in promotion of economic development. There are outright income disparities yet Kenya's economy keeps declining an aspect that can easily convince unemployed youth to engage in gangs or be used to cause disruptions and violence during elections. The high cost of living is a concern to many Kenyans with a shifting blame by government to the Russia and Ukraine war and the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Kenya is in a debt crisis that consumes larger portion of 2022-2023 budget (International Crisis Group, 2022).

The 2022 Kenya's political campaigns has greatly focused on matters economy which may be the turning point this year. It is in line with other governments' efforts to prevent atrocities an effort that if successful will lead to a peaceful transition and result in continued development activities (Human Rights Watch, 2013). The efforts by other actors like the United Nations, African Union and the East African Community may play a role in shaping the behaviour of the government with potential consequences.

Multi-Level Election Observation and Beyond

International actors have the role of ensuring electoral processes meet the integrity standards thereby

making the players in question to feel part and parcel of a fair process. The electoral body and other institutions display of genuinely enforcing efforts aligned to fairness of the set arrangements creates a possible long term success that definitely contributes to eco-social progress (Leonard and Straus, 2003). Democratically conducted election calls for committed powerful players that should not end at an election cycle but continuously promote long term peace.

The judiciary as an election actor is the arbitrator through court rulings and orders. This is a move to preventing possible outbreak of violence. Kenyan judiciary in the contested 2017 general elections set the bar higher by overturning the elections and ordering for repeat elections. This was after the political players led by Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) mounted a rigorous contestation over the disputed elections. Such a move by the judiciary is good as it creates a culture of transparency and accountability by the electoral management bodies. The resultant challenges that should shape the 2022 general elections giving room for contesting parties to fully participate. For instance, the overturning of the 2017 general elections led to Odinga boycotting the repeat elections and subsequently calling for mass movements thus polarising the country along political, tribal, ethnic and regional lines while refusing to recognise Kenyatta's win that resulted in violence (Brechenmacher and Sambuli, 2022).

The ground for violence is at times laid before the election period through the actions of those perceived to be in power against the classified "outsiders". For instance prior to 2017 elections, opposition supporters and the police clashed violently in some parts of the country led by Nairobi. The aftermath of the 2017 elections led to civil society organizations, Human Rights Watch and other non-governmental organizations getting concerned with the violations and excessive use of force by the police. The social media platforms were used by politicians to drive their messaging which was prone to abuse hence creating a polarizing rhetoric (The Conversation, 2017). This is still common as the country heads to 2022 general elections. Bloggers from all political factions use social media platforms like Tiktok, twitter and Facebook to reach their target. However, social media has become leeway for attacks meted against opponents and spread of propaganda creating intolerance that is likely to breed chaos. There were for instance chaos in some parts of Murang'a and Githurai related to BBI that set high level campaigns before the main election. Such chaos and tensions may precipitate to violence after the general elections and need careful balance between the state apparatus, political class and the public. The politicization of state agencies by those in power may create resistance and the general public view that it targets specific people in line with the ethno polis nature of politics.

The Kenyan democratic move may be viewed from different angles as some may argue that it is on an upward scaling based on institutional standards. It can be assessed through level of accountability and governance despite the continuous democratic challenges. The elite bargains are to the disadvantage of democratic process yet the electoral management bodies still face challenges from the political parties and the executive thus interfering with their credibility. Political competition at the ballot should ensure accountability and minimise power abuses. Majority Kenyans hope that there are no disruptions after the August 2022 vote as they are aware of continuous violence after elections and instability in the already crippling economy. If this is the case, the public choice of leaders is likely to be informed by socioeconomic issues that would call for solutions hence a possible vote out of non performing leaders despite weakening of institutions that provide checks and balances. The economic issues facing the electorate are those directly affecting their livelihoods. Despite of mention by the political class, it needs immediate action to whoever gets the power to lead after the August elections. The focus by many actors towards the election greatly lies on prevention of conflict after it. A look at the 2017 observers report by Brechenmacher and Sambuli (2022) shows that the international observers deemed it to be free and fair yet the Supreme Court nullified it. It poses a challenge to the credibility of international observers.

The Kenyan political elites need to focus on addressing the various underlying causes of conflict.

Institutions should be left to fully operate independently devoid of interference. The international institutions and foreign governments need to continue their constant advice and when necessary pressurise and petition the state for elections to be conducted in a free and fair manner that will absent violence and human rights abuses. The recommendation by Human Rights Watch (2013) that the national police should perform their duties impartially should be adhered. The rule of law if not followed sets up the pace for violence but where institutions perform their duties independently, the decision reached for example by the Supreme Court would be acceptable by all even where reservations are hence prevalence of peace. The observers both local and international should continuously be on a mission for effective elections monitoring even to the post-election period. Other international organizations condemnation of human rights violations and demanding of criminal acts accountability will influence the government behaviour and policies.

Since the elections could favour any of the two front runners, Odinga and Ruto, the losing side would be source of worry as the risk lies on how they will react to the loss. The race is tight and the institutions should court and display public confidence while arresting the potential dangers. The prominent personalities should be at the front in sending hope signals to their supporters (International Crisis Group, 2022). Although politicians have endeavoured to accept defeat, they have cautioned that it should be resultant of a transparent, free and fair process. Their acceptance that a process is transparent, free and fair is unknown unless they would engage through the relevant institutions like the judiciary and further commit to accept the end result by not mobilizing for street protests in the entire process beginning with voting and results transmission.

CONCLUSION

Elites play cuts across the political units with the county governments being no exception. It therefore calls for deeper reforms that will enable the citizens to exercise their political rights freely by voting out leaders that fail to perform. The reforms should go handy in tackling graft, reducing the ever growing gap of regional inequalities and the existing economic inequality as opposed to the competing elite interest that spirals to violence that is resultant of elite tensions and protection of their interests.

Institutions should be functional free from interference by others especially the executive arm of government. The push and pull by the executive against the judiciary as witnessed in the second term of president Kenyatta should not be seen in the next regime and possibly onwards so that institutions may operate freely and through cooperation. These institutions should therefore be reinforced to ensure smooth operations across the spectra devoid of domineering one arm of government.

The government should ensure peace in the whole electoral process by working with various actors and setting up peace building initiatives. There are however peace caravans that has brought together several groups including the religious organizations to enlighten and educate the public. The action by some of the actors is expected to bear fruit by advocating for peaceful election process. It can also be done by countering misinformation and spread of harmful rumours. Such actions and the focus shift to socioeconomic agendas will to a large extent mitigate the ever occurring after-election violence and propagate for peaceful coexistence.

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