

# Panoramic Relationship Between Ethnic Violence and Politics in Kenya

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*Abstract- The relationship between ethnic violence and politics is explicit and inescapable in Kenya. Historically the formation of political parties in nineteen thirteen were ethnically founded. Various political parties presented their grievances as a community, not only that but also the leadership was ethnically organized. Therefore, the trajectory of early political party is what is being carried own by politician but taking a more complex and dynamics of ethnic violence and politics in Kenya. During campaign and electioneering period politicians have been involved in incitements of communities against each other especially in Rift valley and Kisumu. The study sought to unravel the relationship between ethnic violence and politics in Kenya. The study employed instrumentalism theory of ethnicity which emphasizes that elites and politicians have weaponised or devised ethnicity so as to materially gain from the society. Descriptive research design was used which provided a vivid description of experience of ethnic violence. The effect of ethnic violence is thorn in the flesh of the inhabitants of hot spot areas such as Kisumu and Rift valley. Therefore, the government should put in place policies that emphasizes unity and ethnic tolerance. It should further set policies and modus operandis of mitigating ethnic violence. The government should set stringent measures for, Politicians involved in incitement of communities against each other should charge.*

*Indexed Terms- Instrumentalism, Ethnicity, violence, Politics, ethnic violence*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Violence has become a global phenomenon affecting people of diverse political, social, geographical and economic persuasions. As a result, its violent form claims lives of many people, destroys property and

diverts human and financial resources away from development (Dejene and Aredo, 2001). For instance, The World Health Organization (WHO) observes that more than three million people die worldwide every year as a result of violence of all forms. Such forms comprise of collective, self-directed and interpersonal violence which accounts for 25% global mortality. This report further, notes that people aged between 15-44 years mostly incur death related to violence (WHO, 2014).

The WHO report further points out that since 2000, about 6 million people globally have been killed in acts of interpersonal violence making homicide a more frequent cause of death than all wars combined in any period. Violence in most cases places a heavy strain on health and criminal justice systems and social welfare services. It also erodes the economic fabric of communities as local communities are impacted by workforce absenteeism; loss of productivity and human capital (Dejene and Aredo, 2001).

At the same time another report of WHO points out that 20th century was marked by massive violence in human history. The violence during this period resulted into 191 million people losing their lives either directly or indirectly as a result of armed conflicts. It further observes that in the year 2000, 310,000 people died as the direct result of conflict related injuries such as permanent disability, torture and rape. Majority of these people were from the rural part of the world (WHO, 2015).

Kershaw observes that Europe was not exceptional in the face of violence that characterized the 20th century. In this regard, he points out ‘‘Myths legitimating massive violence towards civilian population now became part of modern warfare. By the second world war, military front and home front were scarcely divisible; this was now a popular war in

the sense of the full involvement of the peoples of Europe in the fighting and the suffering” (Kershaw, 2015). Kershaw, observes that due to this war, countries like Poland which participated in the shooting war in less than a month lost approximately a fifth of its population in the war that lasted only for six years. This was the highest percentage of civilian deaths of any country in war at that time.

In Africa, Bekoe observes that conflicts and tensions during election periods are common in African countries and are affecting between 19 and 25 percent of elections. For her, African new democracies especially those that have authoritarian legacies or deep ethnic inclinations find it difficult to manage political oppositions. This indicates that the style of managing political tensions defines the differences between peaceful elections or one that degenerates into violence (Bekoe, 2010). Furthermore, she observes that in most countries’ election violence is a risky affair, bound to recur and leads to unfavorable view of democratization. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, electoral violence became the basis for civil war. The perpetrators of this violence were never charged, victim received little or no redress and causes of violence remained unexamined. In this regard, the horn of Africa in general has suffered 32 state based armed conflicts, 179 non state armed conflicts and 22 dyads of one-sided violence campaigns (Williams, 2011). William opines that this state based armed conflicts have resulted in approximately 231,510 battle related fatalities, the non-state-based violence and armed violence has killed approximately 31,511 people in Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia.

The WHO report also indicates that approximately 25,264 have been massacred in campaigns of one-sided violence in countries such as Uganda and Burundi (OHCHR, 2008). Kenya’s proximity to countries such as Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and Eritrea which are sympathetic to Islamic groups such as al-Qaida and al shaabab has exposed the country to external violence related to high sea crime and terrorism. For instance, the sea way from the gulf of Eden has witnessed incidences of piracy which are linked to international terrorism while Somalia and Yemen have been rife in training al gaeda militants and terrorists. Factors fueling the recruitments of

young Kenyans into the terrorists groups range from social and economic conditions faced by young Kenyans such as deep level of poverty, political disenfranchisement, youth unemployment and sectarian extremist among others (WHO, 2002).

Kenya has also experienced internal conflicts that come as the result of community identities that are closely related to issues of land and borders, the transition to multiparty politics and the constitutional transition which defines the structure of governance and devolution. But the same constitution does not provide mechanism for attaining the modalities of the new governance. This has led to diverse interpretations and counter interpretations among different political elites. It has also provoked confrontations regarding to the accessibility to the national power and resources among political personalities. These feelings have resulted into political rivalries among different ethnic groups in Kenya (WHO, 2002). Kenya has also experienced violence occasioned by electioneering period in areas of Rift valley such as Narok, Burnt Forest, Molo and Kuresoi among others. Such violence was also witnessed in Kisumu, Nairobi and Naivasha. In Kisumu for example, the aftermath of 2007/2008 elections witnessed stone throwing at candidates and candidates of opposing groups (Nyawalo et al, 2011). This violence also involved local communities evicting non-local members of the community who had settled in Kisumu on account of business or employment opportunities. This violence also witnessed destruction and burning of business premises and homes. These were crimes perpetuated by both young and old members of one local community of Kisumu (Ndiku, 2015).

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Sadly, the Post-Cold War world order saw a drastic reduction of interstate conflicts and paved way for an avalanche of ethnic violence witnessed in different parts of the African continent ranging from civil wars, genocide and the emergence of ethnic based violent extremist organizations. Etefa (2019) advances that the root causes of ethnic violence are poorly understood. Literature available addresses ethnic violence from the point of either competition for natural resources, climate change, ethnic diversity and

exclusion from state services. However, the current paper advances that major ethnic violence are deeply rooted in the politics of chronic marginalization, political manipulation and polarization, monopolization of state resources and lack of democratic mechanisms to access power and governance.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

In Nigeria, *Boko Haram* continues to use the North-South politics of relative deprivation to justify their cause of existence (Agbibo, 2013). Violence perpetrated both by *Boko Haram* and by the counter-insurgency campaign against it by state security agencies resulted in the deaths of nearly 30,000 people between 2009 and 2016, extensive physical destruction, the displacement of some 2.4 million people and a severe food crisis affecting over 6.6 million in the West African Nation State (Comolli, 2017). Adelaja *et al.* (2018) research paper alludes that the root causes of *Boko Haram* are unemployment, poverty, economic problems, dislike for the incumbency, extreme religious feelings, extreme political ideology as well as manipulation by the political class. In addition, the major objective of the VEO is vengeance against state security forces. In 2014, *Boko Haram* surpassed ISIS as the world's deadliest violent extremist organization, with an estimated 7,512 casualties that year, representing an increase of 317% from the previous year (Institute of Economic & Peace, 2015).

Cameroon, a bilingual West African Nation State is slowly slipping into the politics of ethnic violence and protracted human rights crisis in the largely Anglophone North-West and South-West regions that border Nigeria. Since 2016, Anglophone minority separatists have long complained over marginalization by the Francophone majority in public spheres such as education as well as criminal justice systems Pedneault *et al.* (2018). The Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF), the Red Dragons and the Tigers are some of the ethnic insurgent groups that have sprung up to fight for secession of English-speaking parts of Cameroon. A phrase often heard among the fighters as they appeal to their supporters, inside and outside the country, for funding is:

“We need to buy sugar cane and groundnuts” (ADF Fighter)

This is a euphemism for, sugar cane refers to guns and ground nuts refer to bullets. In 2016, the conflict resulted to the loss of at least 420 civilian lives, 175 military and police officers, 100s of separatist fighters, displaced more than 300,000 people in addition to enforcing a boycott on elections. Currently, the UN estimates deaths at over 2,000 people. Ethnic separatists continue to burn schools, kidnap and kill teachers and students as a way of getting their grievances addressed.

Rwanda's ethnic conflict of 1994 epitomized the magnitude of ethnic violence in Africa with an estimated 1,000,000 people losing lives in 100 days. A number of studies have tied the carnage of the violence against the Tutsis to socio-economic and political marginalization by the state and the need for the Hutus to ascend to power (Haleform, 2017; Mwamvaneza, 2018).

In Sudan, the politics of ethnic violence manifested through the Darfur genocide with the government of Sudan accused of targeting Darfuri, Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit ethnic groups (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond, 2009). This cleansing led to an approximate loss almost 500,000 lives and displacement of over 3 million people in one of the world's poorest and most remote regions. This violence was perpetrated by the Sudanese Government in collaboration with the Arab “*Janjaweed*” militia against the Christian minority in a nation already polarized against religious lines in terms of socio-economic development (Lowery & Levy, 2016).

Gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan the world's youngest nation also fell into the politics of ethnic violence in 2013 (Nyaba, 2016). This was as a result of divisions between the Sudan's People Liberation Movement (SPLM) leadership all fighting for power. In addition, this conflict is majorly between the Salva Kiir Dinka led majority ethnic group and Riek Machar's minority Nuer ethnic group which is the second largest in Africa's youngest nation. The ethnic conflict has led to the loss of an estimated 400,000 lives and displaced over 2.3 million civilian

populations exposing the nation to slowed economic growth as well as extreme poverty and hunger.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Within instrumentalist thought, ethnic conflict does not emerge directly from differences in ethnic identity. Rather ethnic conflict arises only when ethnic identities are politicized or manipulated to generate political and socio-economic advantages for an ethnic group at the cost of depriving or neglecting other ethnics (Chandra,2004). Instrumentalism theory of conflict which emphasizes that ethnicity has been devised or weaponized to suit the needs of the politicians in Kenya.

V. METHOTOLOGY

The study utilizes survey design that generate both quantitative and qualitative data. This design was chosen because it is concerned with conditions or relationships that exists, practices that prevail, point of views or attitudes that are held, process that is ongoing, effects that are being felt or trends that are developing in regard to social issues. This design was also chosen because it involves collecting data by interviewing or administering questionnaires to a sample of individuals. Hence, the descriptive survey design assisted the researcher to receive information about people’s attitude and opinions on political power struggles and ethnic violence

VI. ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND POLITICS IN KENYA

Kenya’s history with regards to elections has become synonymous to ethnic violence. This is often associated with shootings, death, sorrow, destructions and absolute ethnic polarization by the political elites. Counties of Kisumu, Homabay, Siaya and Migori which is home to the Luo community and often associated with opposition politics is dominant and have become associated with police shootings and killings in pre, during and post-election period. Karl Marx once said, “History repeats itself, first as tragedy and second as farce”. Ethnic violence in Kenya has been perpetrated with the state through its security agencies, through verbal violence by the political elites and epitomized by violent political attacks between members of ethnic communities catalyzed by organized criminal gangs which have ethnic foundations and often used to pursue ethnic political agenda. Table 1 presents election violence since Kenya started practicing political pluralism in 1992.

In terms of ethnic violence, this paper observes that two election years stand out in terms of how violent political extremism was manifested. That is the 2007/2008 and the 2017 elections with both election periods characterized by erosion of peace, debates on inequality, erosion of the rule of law, low sense of belonging, ethnic intolerance, low public trust in electoral institutions, low public trust in state security agencies as well as slowed economic growth.

Table 1: Election Violence, Ethnicity and the Distribution and the Number of Parties at Each Election

YEAR	POLITICAL PARTY	ETHNIC COMPOSITION	ELECTION VIOLENCE
1992	KANU	Kalenjin	YES
	FORD-A	Luhya	
	DP	Kikuyu	
	FORD-K	Luo	
1997	KANU	Kalenjin	YES
	DP	Kikuyu	
	NDP	Luo	
	FORD-A	Luhya	
	SDP	Kamba	
2002	NARC	Kikuyu/Luo	NO
	KANU	Kalenjin	
	FORD-P	Kisii	

2007	PNU	Kikuyu	YES
	ODM	Luo/Kalenjin	
	FORD-K	Luhya	
	CCU	Maasai	
	PICK	Kisii	
	KADU	Pokomo/Mijikenda	
2013	KENDA	Luhya	NO
	CORD	Luo/Luhya/Kamba	
	Jubilee Alliance	Kikuyu/Kalenjin	
	Eagle Alliance	Maasai/Kikuyu/Kalenjin	
	Pambazuka Alliance	Kamba/Bukusu/Luo	
2017	Amani Coalition	Luhya/Giriama	YES
	NASA	Luo/Luhya/Kamba/Kalenjin	
	Jubilee Party	Kikuyu/Kalenjin	
	Third Way Alliance	N/A	

Source: Author, 2021

#### VII. KIAMBAA CHURCH MASSACRE OF JANUARY 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2008

This paper adopts this particular example to epitomize how deflated national and social cohesion can lead to ethnic violence. The attack happened on January 1, 2008 when armed perpetrators raided the church and torched it. They also locked the church to prevent victims from escaping.

“In less than two hours, over 35 people, mostly women and children, lay dead. Seventeen of them were burnt alive, some of whom lay in the rubble, completely unidentifiable and smoldering in smoke. Anthony (his son, aged 10 years at the time) managed to escape but with severe burns,” “Anthony told me that at around 12pm while they were grazing the sheep near the church compound, they heard people wailing and screaming loudly. When they looked around, they saw hundreds of Kikuyu people of Kiambaa village running towards the church.” Among these people was Anthony’s grandmother, who was blowing a whistle to alert the people of the attack as she came running towards the church too.” “While inside the church, everyone could hear clacking sounds of iron sheets from the church’s rooftop as the warriors hit the church with stones. Women wailed and prayed. Then Anthony heard someone say, ‘they have burnt the church! They have doused it with fuel!’ He panicked. All of a sudden, he saw a huge fire falling down from

the rooftop.” Gisesa, N. (30th May, 2019). Ex-ICC witness speaks out on Kiambaa church horror. Daily Nation.

Such narrations reveal extents which damaged social cohesion can lead to extreme ethnic violence. Among others, forceful displacement of populations, torching of homesteads, sexual and gender-based violence were reported in various parts of the country following the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya. The 2007/2008 election violence claimed over 1,100 lives and internally displaced over 600,000 Kenyans. In addition, economic growth nosedived from 7.1% to 1.7%.

#### VIII. MANIFESTATIONS OF VIOLENT POLITICAL EXTREMISM IN 2017

The excerpts hereunder from the KNHRC 2017 report reveal the extent of ethnic violence employed by different sections of Kenyans.

According to the hospital records, between 8th August 2017 and 20th August 2017, sixteen (16) unknown bodies were taken to Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Teaching and Referral Hospital (JOOTRH) mortuary by the police. Two of the bodies had been collected from Lake Victoria.

On 2nd October, 2017- three (3) police officers were injured at Kondele. Two sustained injuries after stones were thrown at them by protesters. One (1) sustained

injuries to the neck and other injuries to the left leg. During the skirmishes the third officer sustained injuries to his left thigh after a tear gas canister exploded on his leg. They were all treated and discharged at JOOTRH.

On 5th October 2017, while at a meeting at the Jubilee offices in Milimani Estate Nakuru, the Jubilee Party Chairman, Nakuru County Mr. David Manyara Njuki stated to MCAs that they should not dare electing anybody from NASA and that they would be dealt with if they did so. Stating in Kiswahili he said that *“mkijaribu kuchagua mtu ya NASA mtajua sisi ni nani. Mtajua hasira yetu na mtatuona. Serikali ya Jubilee Nakuru itafanya kazi yake”*

On 13th October 2017, Nakuru County residents woke up to leaflets warning NASA supporters against holding Anti-IEBC demos in Kaptembwa area, Jualako area and around Telkom offices. The leaflets read; *“onyo! Onyo! Onyo! Notice! Notice! Notice! Luo-nasa hooligans be warned!!!Msijaribu kufanya maandamano nakuru county!!!!Kutawaka moto!! Thaa! thaa!!!”*. (Warning, Warning, Warning, Luo-NASA hooligans be warned. Do not hold demonstrations in Nakuru County or else there will be consequences).

The aforementioned excerpts reveal the extent of ethnic violence in Kenya perpetrated by community members as well as state security agencies in executing murders in Luo Nyanza. Nonetheless, the election period was marred with pockets of violence. There were reported incidences of excessive use of force by police officers. Cases of civilians breaking into and looting business premises were also reported. During the fresh Presidential Election, the KNCHR (2017) report recorded incidents of violence in various Counties such as; Nairobi City, Kisumu, Kitui, Bungoma, Busia, Kakamega, Mandera, Meru, Migori and Siaya Counties. The recorded cases were as a result of intolerance between the two main political factions- the National Super Alliance (NASA) Coalition and the Jubilee Party, while others emanated from anti-IEBC demonstrations. Similarly, cases of gender based sexual violence were reported.

Holmquist & Githinji (2009) suggest that “the causes of the violence are to be found in deeper-rooted

historical and political conflicts.” He argues that the origins of the violence are not only political and economic but competition between ethnic groups. Hence, the maintenance of ethnic nationalism is an essential precondition for a durable democracy, state survival and sustainable development in Kenya.

The institutional explanation suggests that violence following the 1992 elections was mainly caused by ethnic conflicts between the Luo and the Kikuyu. The violence left more than 300,000 displaced internally due to loss of property. The 1992, 1997 and 2007 election violence were caused by ethnic animosity, unemployment, inequality of resources, and lack of political leaders to address the root causes of the violence and displacement.

#### IX. THE POLITICS OF SECESSION IN KENYA

Soon after the nullification of the 2017 presidential results by SCOK, political extremism would skyrocket to new heights. Opposition Member of Parliament (MP) Peter Kaluma and NASA chief strategist David Ndiu led the campaign for secession in Kenya. Kaluma’s bill called for secession of 40 counties in Kenya but for Nyeri, Murang’a, Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Embu and Tharaka-Nithi Counties (Lang’at, 2017). The latter would form the Central Republic of Kenya which would be ruled by Kalenjins and Kikuyus while the former would give birth to the People’s Republic of Kenya which would be ruled by other 42 tribes. Sections of opposition leader who spoke about the secession bid said it was an indicator of deep-rooted anger among Kenyans. According to Peter Kaluma’s bill, the 40 counties had persistently been marginalized by successive regimes.

“The objective of the Bill is therefore to amend the Constitution to split to allow for the creation of a new state to give effect to the aspirations of the people of Kenya,” (Peter Kaluma, 2017)



Figure X: Map showing the proposed secession structures of Kenya as proposed the Opposition

Source: Author, 2021

#### X. NATIONAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT, KENYA

On 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2017, the opposition formed the National Resistance Movement (NRM). The NRM was formed on the basis that they did not recognize Uhuru Kenyatta's Presidency as well as lead its supporters into a series of civil disobedience and compel the incumbency to step aside. In addition, NRM asked supporter to boycott products of companies they considered friendly to the Jubilee regime. Boycott was part of the economic liberation scheme supported by the People's Assembly. NRM was declared an organized criminal group following its involvement in the mock inauguration of the opposition chief Raila Odinga.

#### CONCLUSION

Politics, violence and ethnicity are tripartite especially during electioneering period the country has experienced conflict. Especially in Rift valley region politicians have been involved in inciting various communities against each other, this is contrary as it is expected that these leaders are symbol of unity actors of peace. The violence experienced in that country has led to loss of lives, hatred and destruction of properties leading to economic redundancy.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The government should put in place policies that emphasizes unity and ethnic tolerance. It should further set policies and modus operandis of mitigating ethnic violence. The government should set stringent

measures for, Politicians involved in incitement of communities against each other should charge.

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