

CAUSES OF POLITICAL COMPETITION DURING THE ELECTIONEERING PERIOD IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Political competitions within and between political parties in a society and other forms of violence have negatively affected many African societies, Kenya included. This has led to deaths, destruction of property and displacement of citizens. The specific objective of the study was to establish the causes of political competition in Nakuru County, Kenya. The study was guided by the structuralism theory. The study used descriptive research design. Using probability and non-probability sampling techniques, a sample of 417 respondents was involved. This included 384 residents of Nakuru County and 33 key informants who comprised of 9 Members of County Assembly, 8 Religious Leaders, 8 Civil Society Organisations and 8 Administrators. Both secondary and primary data were collected. Primary data was collected by use of questionnaire, focus group discussion, interview schedules and field observation. Secondary data was obtained through desk research, libraries and journals. Data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 21 and presented using two measures of distribution; percentages and frequencies. Key findings for the study were that the main cause of conflicts in Nakuru County was the competition between political leaders, which was within or between political parties, where some were formed along ethnic lines. The study findings would contribute to helping policy makers in coming up with new policies or modifying the existing ones to address influence that political competition has on ethnic conflicts and add knowledge in the field of peace and conflict studies. (262 words)

Keywords: *political competition, ethnic conflict, electioneering period, ethnic tensions*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

According to Moser and Clark (2001), the acts of violence can be as a result of conscious or unconscious desire to maintain or obtain political power. Thus, the motive behind violence is that of the pursuit to attaining political objectives (Hibbs, 1973). Defining political violence is typically dependent on a typology, which separates the socially and economically motivated from the politically motivated forms of violence. Hansen (2009) argues that, violent acts take place in the collective sphere where a certain group of individuals, against another group, commits them just because the targeted individuals happen to fall under that particular group, and typically takes the form of murder, assaults, sexual abuse such as rape, forced pregnancy or sterilization.

Studies such as that of Driscoll (2009) indicate that ethnicity and ethnic affiliations in African societies are the main causes of political conflict and domestic instability. Rivalry in various communities in Africa is viewed by Driscoll (2009) as often of a political nature where a particular ethnic group or community would prefer a particular person to ascend to power, failure to which violence and conflicts erupt.

Ntshoe (2002) views political unrest, rivalries within various ethnic groups in a society and other forms of violence to have negatively affected many African societies. In Kenya, such rivalry has affected the Kikuyu and Luo relations, and more recently has developed to include other ethnic groups.

Although political violence in Kenya is often at its extreme during election periods, it also exists as an 'everyday phenomenon'. Assassinations of political leaders, prominent businessmen, civil society leaders, and other figures that possess significant influence on the allocation of resources or political development in the country are far from exceptional (Wabala and Mukinda, 2009). While researches on ethnic conflicts in Nakuru County have been done and, there is very little documented research on the causes of political competition in the County. This study attempts to contribute to filling this gap.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Many people in Nakuru County have been affected by ethnic conflicts which have resulted in deaths and destruction of property worth millions of shillings, and displacement of many citizens. These conflicts are majorly experienced during the electioneering period and take an ethnic dimension where different ethnic groups rise against each other. The Kikuyu ethnic community in Nakuru County has been at the centre of these conflicts where the Kalenjin ethnic community believes should migrate back to their ancestral land in central Kenya. Nakuru County being cosmopolitan, other smaller ethnic communities have tended to side with either, making conflicts assume an ethnic dimension. According to Klopp, 2002; Ndegwa, 1997, ethnic tensions have only typically evidenced themselves during electoral contests. Ethnicity *per se*, however, is not the cause of conflict, but politicized ethnicity.

During non-electioneering period, business partners' work together as suppliers and buyers irrespective of their ethnic background. This relationship dramatically changes during the electioneering period. Each supports their own, whom they believe will protect their business interests. On the other hand, opposing ethnic groups perceive their political leaders as people who shall instigate violent acts against their otherwise business partners who happen to be affiliated to different political parties. Ethnic communities are by and large affiliated to particular political parties which become voting blocs.

Nakuru County has, for a long time been the epicenter of what is generally referred to as "Ethnic Conflict" (Klopp, 2002 & Ndegwa, 1997). The researcher, however, opines that on serious relook,

at this conflict, is apparently a manifestation of political rivalry and competition amongst protagonists. This thesis therefore sets out to interrogate this conception. Simply put, what are the main causes of political competition in Nakuru County.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The specific objective of the study was to examine the causes of political competition during electioneering period in Nakuru County, Kenya.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature

Yieke (2008) notes that, Kenya has always been a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic community and the different communities have had peaceful co-existence for a long time and the kind of ethnicity experienced had been positive and had always added to the kind of diversity that Kenya had. However, ethnicity has been a resource in the hands of light-hearted “political tycoons” who because of corruption, mismanagement and greed for power have manipulated ethnicity and used it to achieve their personal agenda.

A lot has been written about ethnicity as a source of conflict in Africa. It is suggested that ethnicity per se, in the absence of its politicisation, does not cause conflict. There is evidence to suggest that where ethnic conflict has emerged in Africa, there has always been a political machination behind it. According to Amisi (2007), politicisation of ethnicity often takes place in a situation characterised by an inequitable structure of access. Such a structure gives rise to the emergence of the “in-group” and the “out-group” with the latter trying to break the structure of inequality as the former responds by building barriers to access that ensure the continuation of its privileged position.

According to Azam (2011), civil conflicts in African states is due to the failure of African Governments to deliver the type of public expenditure that the people want which is provision of social goods such as education and healthcare. This results in their reliance on ethnic elites to redistribute state resources on their behalf. This view places the ethnic elite as the necessary intervening agents between the weak state Government and the people under its rule.

Ogot (2000) argues that the underlying causes of the ethnic conflicts in Kenya have not been comprehensively explained. He asserts that people hoping to get political mileage by dominating the debate have hijacked even the discourse on ethnic conflict in Africa.

Politics is at the heart of violence in Kenya. In the past, politicians have significantly contributed to violence by inciting people and using hate speech as a tool to disqualify political opponents and their followers. The highest goal for political leaders is to gain and maintain political power, even if this goal is achieved by sacrificing the lives of hundreds of ordinary Kenyans (Wambua, 2013).

KNCHR (2007) argues that ethnic protagonists have abused Kenya’s voting rules in order to influence the outcome of elections. This is because Kenyans must cast a ballot where they registered as voters. One strategy that has been used has been to incite violence to displace “outsiders” who are perceived to support certain candidates based on their ethnicity.

According to Macharia (2006), ethnic conflict follows the pattern of forcible alienation and appropriation of land by the colonial and subsequent post-colonial Government. This combined while the unequal distribution of resources, the suppression of dissent, and selective distribution of public positions, to ethnic groups allied to those in power, has been a powerful historical driver to conflict. Perceptions that communities benefit from having one of their own in power, is backed by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) audit on the degree of ethnic discrimination in public offices, it was established that the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities had benefited most in appointments in public offices (NCIC, 2012). In view of the foregoing, the current study sought to establish the causes of political conflicts during the electioneering period in Nakuru County.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The study was guided by the structuralism theory. Structuralism is the theory that argues that elements of human culture must be understood in terms of their relationship to a larger, overarching

system or structure. Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009) argued that the "savage" mind had the same structures as the "civilized" mind and that human characteristics are the same everywhere. It works to uncover the structures that underlie all the things that humans do, think, perceive, and feel. The Structuralism theorists are normally interested in identifying and analysing the structures that underlie all cultural phenomena. Structuralism rejected the concept of human freedom and choice and focused instead on the way that human experience and thus, behavior, is determined by various structures.

In line with structuralism theory, this study presupposes that, for political competition to be effectively managed or eliminated in the community, the community members must willing say no to structures that do not uncover the structures that underlie all cultural phenomena. Political competition will end if, in the words of Galtung (1973), basic human needs, such as survival, physical wellbeing, liberty and identity are respected. The Human Rights Watch report (2005), concluded that, violence during electoral period in Kenya developed as a result of a combination of factors including "winner-takes-all" form of politics perceived as benefiting one ethnic group to the detriment of all others with the perceptions that communities benefit from having one of their own in power. Harmonious coexistence will only be realized if there is respect for all.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive research design, which is concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or a group, with specific predictions, with narration of facts and characteristics concerning individual, group or situation (Kothari, 2011). The descriptive design was ideal because the study involved different kinds of fact-finding enquiries and was important in description of the state of affairs as it existed at that particular moment. The design was considered an efficient way to obtain information needed to describe the attitudes, opinions, and views of the people in the establishment of the dynamics of political competition and ethnic strife within Nakuru County in Kenya.

From the population, a sample was selected within each group in proportionate numbers of the whole using the stratified random sample, which gave every item within the population a fair chance of being selected. Random selection was determined objectively by means of random number tables. According to Cooper and Schindler (2003), random sampling frequently minimizes the sampling error in the population.

A multi-stage cluster sampling procedure was used during this survey. First, the identification of the sub-counties and the hotspots was done with the assistance of the County Commissioner's office, four sub-counties of Nakuru County, were included where ethnic conflict had been experienced. These were Molo, Nakuru, Naivasha, and Kuresoi. In every hotspot, 3 starting points with unique identity, such as school, bus stop, a physical feature (tree), boda boda shed etc, were identified making sure that all the population within the hotspot were represented. The researcher then selected the household systematically where every fifth household on the left was selected for interview. Simple random sampling procedure was used to get respondent from the household. This method involves giving a number to every subject or member of the accessible population, placing the numbers in a container and then picking any number at random (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

The researcher used simple random sampling procedure to sample MCAs and Local administrators, CSOs and religious leaders in Nakuru County. Purposive sampling was also used to get members to participate in the FGDs from the CSOs, who were considered *as par* the positions they held in these organisations and especially those in decision making positions, and residents (men and women). According to Mugenda & Mugenda (2003), purposive sampling allows a researcher to pick from the

population samples that are either knowledgeable in a particular area or possess required characteristics for his/her study.

The selection of the respondents was done using a sampling approach with a statistical significance at the 95% confidence level and 5% confidence interval. The study sample size was 417 respondents: 384 residents of Nakuru county and 33 key informants. The key informants included: 9 Members of County Assembly, 8 Religious Leaders, 8 Civil Society Organisations and 8 Administrators.

The researcher collected both primary and secondary data. Primary data was gathered using questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs) and interview schedules. Questionnaires were considered a suitable method of data collection because they allowed the researcher to reach a larger sample within limited time (Orodho, 2003). The questionnaires were designed to give a brief introduction of respondents. The questionnaires were divided into sections representing the various variables adopted for the study in either closed or open-ended questions. The interviews were semi-structured giving the researcher a chance to use probing techniques to get in depth information in case there was need for any clarification.

The FGDs were structured in a way that they allowed further probing wherever clarification was necessary. Observation checklist was used to observe certain aspects and behavior during data collection. This permitted the observer to spend time thinking about what is occurring rather than on how to record it and this enhances the accuracy of the study (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). The researcher observed and took photographs of some of the houses, shops and hotels that were burnt down or destroyed during the conflicts. This was to support the information collected from the respondents on the destruction and loss experienced during the violence.

The researcher carried out a pilot study to pre-test and validate the questionnaires and the interview guides. According to Cooper & Schindler (2003), the pilot group can range from 25 to 100 subjects depending on the method to be tested but it does not need to be statistically selected.

The pilot study allowed the pre-testing of the research instruments in order to familiarize with research and its administration procedure as well as identifying items that require modification. The result helped the researcher to correct inconsistencies that arose from the instruments, which ensured that they measured what was intended. To establish the validity of the research instruments, the researcher sought opinions of experts in the field of study especially the supervisors.

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed in data analysis. Likert type scale items were analyzed depending on whether they were favourable or unfavourable. Inferential data such as charts and frequency tables were basically applied in the presentation of findings by use of SPSS in all objectives. Quantitative analysis was used to interpret patterns in numeric data using graphs, tables and diagrams as items of analysis.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to establish the causes of Political competition during electioneering years in Nakuru County from the entire study sample of 417 respondents.

4.1 Causes of political competition according to residents, Nakuru County

The study, through a questionnaire administered to 384 respondents sought to establish the causes of political competition from the residents of Nakuru County. The findings showed that, 204(55.7%) respondents cited political favours as one of the triggers. This was dependent on the political affiliations where those in power favour their supporters and fellow ethnic members in resource allocations and job opportunities, leaving others marginalised. Political favours has also

brought in the issue of nepotism and corruption, which is 37(10%) of the other causes of political competition in Nakuru County. This confirms what Obasanjo (2002) asserted that, people fight and sometimes shed blood to achieve and attain political power because the political kingdom has far too long been gateway to economic kingdom where political positions are associated with monetary benefits.

At least 142(38.7%) saw land boundary dispute as a cause of political competition in Nakuru. Being a cosmopolitan County that has both farmers (mostly Kikuyu) and animal keepers (mostly Kalenjin) communities, during the dry seasons when grazing areas are few, the animal keepers let/put their animals to graze on peoples farms. There has been cattle rustling 23(6.2%) among the herders which has caused tension and fights among them. Land was used as a trigger in these conflicts where Kalenjin community was made to believe that Rift Valley belonged to them and that the Kikuyu were given the land free by the first President, Jomo Kenyatta, while others believed that the Kikuyu grabbed land from their people.

Hate speech was cited by 109(29.7%) of the respondents as a contributor to the violence. This was mostly used by political leaders especially during campaigns. For instance, one of the administrators in Molo, revealed that the Kikuyu referred to the Kalenjin as '*Rumbwa*' which they interpret to mean 'dog', and take it to be an insult, without proper understanding of how it came to be. The finding agrees with a report by Wambua, (2013), which indicated that politics is in the heart of violence in Kenya and that politicians have significantly contributed to violence by inciting the people and using hate speech as a tool to disqualify political opponents and their followers as they compete for different positions in the political sphere. Corruption / nepotism were revealed to be causes of competition by 39(10.6%) of the respondents.

Political favourism, nepotism, corruption and unemployment which were cited as other causes of political competition emanated from the political party that one was affiliated to. Therefore this agreed with the main cause of competition where 230(62.5%) of the respondents reported to have differences in political party affiliation. This findings agreed with a more recent research, 2011 audit research by National Cohesion and Integration Commission on the degree of ethnic discrimination in public offices that established that the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities had benefited most in appointments in public offices (NCIC, 2012).

4.2 Causes of political competition according to MCAs and Administrators

The study sought to determine the causes of political competition in Nakuru County from the MCAs and Administrators, where 11(62.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that political competition is as a result of differences in political party affiliation among the community members. This agrees with a report by International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect in 2008, which pointed out that Kenya's elections since independence have been dominated by ethnic affiliations, which have resulted in exclusion and discrimination of those affiliated with the opposition.

Another 10(58.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the political competition is as a result of election results, where much of the violence is experienced after announcement of results. Another 9(50.5%) of the respondents agreed strongly that it is as a result of leaders' instigation which start during the campaign period and this has been so common. The leaders' incite their supporters by giving them false promises of what their expectations would be once elected to the position, which they claimed to have been denied because they either did not support a particular political party or the candidate from a particular ethnic group.

In addition, 7(38.4%) strongly agreed that political competition resulted in rigging of election results. On the same note 6(33.3%) of the respondents gave no response on rigging of the election results being a cause of the violence experienced in Nakuru County.

4.3. Causes of Political Competition according to the Children

The study carried out on children aged between 16-18 years revealed that 6(40%) of the respondents reported that the main causes of political competition is tribalism/ethnicity among the community members, where political parties are formed on ethnic lines. Another 5(30%) of the respondents indicated that violence is caused by political incitement, especially during the campaigns where the political leaders would always talk ill of other ethnic groups and their opponents. This agrees with 5(29.7%) of MCAs and Administrators who cited hate speech and 163(44.4%) of men and women interviewed who cited political instigation as being main causes of violence in Nakuru County due to the political competition between the political leaders. In addition, 3(20%) of the children revealed that the violence is caused by misunderstanding among leaders, who share the same political ideologies with their supporters and this is translated to violence. Poor/unfair counting of votes was cited by 3(20%) of the children as a cause of conflict in Nakuru County, where political leaders feel they have lost unfairly, which agrees with 82(22.2%) of women and men who reported rigging of election results as one of the main cause of violence in the County.

On the same note 2(10%) of the children reported corruption as a cause of violence caused by political competition among the leaders. The findings agreed with a report by Azam (2011), that conflicts are as a result of Government failure in provision of social goods such as education and healthcare, which resulted in their reliance on ethnic elites to redistribute state resources on their behalf.

4.4 Causes of Political Competition according to CSOs and Religious Leaders

The study sought to establish if the main causes of competition cited by men and women were the same as with 16 members of the CSOs and Religious Leaders. From the CSOs and religious leaders 12(72.9%) strongly agreed their differences in political party affiliations to be main causes of violence experienced in Nakuru County, which was also the leading cause for men and women at 230(62.5%). Another 11(69.2%) of the CSOs and religious leaders strongly agreed that violence was caused by leaders' instigation during their campaigns, which was the leading factor unlike for men and women where it was in the third position with 186(50.5%).

Election results was cited by 10(64.3%) of the respondents from CSOs and Religious Leaders who strongly agreed that it caused violence. On the same note, 6(36.4%) agreed strongly that campaigns are causes of violence which normally happened before the election through the leaders' instigation who gave false promises. This was due to competition among the political leaders to their opponents in their parties or from different political parties.

Another 3(20%) agreed strongly that election rigging, which comes about due to competition amongst the political leaders, was a cause of violence. This agreed with 82(22.2%) of men and women who cited rigging of elections results as a cause of violence in Nakuru County. However, none of the respondents strongly agreed that polling causes violence in Nakuru County but 3(20%) agreed that it does and 3(20%) strongly disagreed that polling is a cause of violence.

Other triggers cited included political divide and ethnic stereotyping where 8(50%) of the respondents revealed it as the highest contributor. Lack of openness in election results was reported by 2(14.3%) of the respondents as a cause of violence where people were left with the feeling that the elections were rigged thus raising tension among the community member, who were affiliated to different political parties, and more often led to violence.

Media was also reported to flare up the violence by concentrating more on the ills than the good which motivated people to revenge on behalf of their own ethnic members from others far away areas as one of the respondents in a focus group discussion in Kuresoi reported;

“...the media used to report the incidences but in a more exaggerated manner and this provoked others who revenged on behalf of their fellow ethnic member who had been attacked in other places far away from our area. This would come as a surprise because majority of us would be attacked unaware of what is going on especially those of us not keen to follow the news...” (Field data, 2016)

The media, especially the vernacular stations were cited by 1(7.1%) of the respondents where each ethnic group used their language to inform and incite against their competitors, taking the advantage of those who did not understand the language.

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Summary

The study revealed that 230(62.5%) of men and women, 13(72.9%) of CSOs and religious leaders, 6(40%) of children and 11(62.5%) of the MCAs and administrators reported the difference in political affiliation to be the main cause of ethnic conflict in Nakuru County. Another 214(58.2%) of men and women, 10(64.3%) of the CSOs and religious leaders, 5(30%) of the children and 10(58.2%) of the MCAs and administrators reported that elections results caused ethnic conflict especially in the 2007/2008 and 2002 post-election violence. This was followed by leaders' instigations at 185(50.5%) of men and women, 11(69.2%) of CSOs and religious leaders, 9(50.5%) of the MCAs and administrators respondents. These seemed not to be the only reasons why there has been violence in Nakuru County but there are other underlying causes and elections only trigger, such as favourism, nepotism, land, resource allocation, media reporting, job opportunities among others. This has brought in rivalry among the community members, implying that the main causes are not necessarily related to elections but they are used as trigger.

5.2 Conclusion

The study established that political competition and ethnic alignments were the nexus of violence in Nakuru County. Similarly, it was clear that ethnic conflict can be avoided if only the underlying issues that are used by the political leaders to trigger violence during electioneering periods were addressed. The study found out that the competition between political leaders from the same or different political parties, where some are based on ethnic lines, is perceived to be competition amongst the ethnic groups. As such these other issues that came into play are only used as triggers for violence. Most Kenyan believe that public positions bring advantage to the entire ethnic community which has encouraged communities to promote and protect their own. Political positions in Kenyan politics means power and access to economic wealth and as such these other factors emerge. These are land issues, political favourism, nepotism, unequal distribution of Government resources as leaders try to pay back those who voted them in.

5.3 Recommendation

The findings of the study indicated that the Government should address the issue of political competition where political parties are formed on ethnic lines. This political competition results in competition between the ethnic groups which can be countered by moving back to a single party system where the competition would be minimal. The Government should address the issues, such as land and resource allocation, that are used as campaign tools against their opponents by the political leaders, bringing division and hatred among the community members. Civic education

should be offered to all the community members and their leaders to empower them with information to avoid being misguided by the leaders who take advantage of their ignorance through incitement.

5.4 Suggestions for further study

Similar study should be replicated involving larger samples of participating residents, chiefs and assistant chiefs, at regional level in communities that experience ethnic violence as a result of political competition between and within political parties to confirm whether the same findings hold.

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