



Social Media Usage: Ethnic Politics, Political Parties and Youthful Generations

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Abstract

This paper explores how digital media has solidified tribal politics through political parties hence undermining the spirit of democracy in nation-states with multiple tribes. A digital space dominated by youthful population. Since social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have developed new avenues for political participation, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of these platforms in political interaction aligned with SDG16; “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. Using qualitative and quantitative exploratory analysis combining current usage of digital media, cognitive engagement and technological determinism frameworks. This paper relies on the Kenya’s case where ethnic politics has been on the lips of many political leaders more specifically in states with multiple ethnic communities. Politicians and the electorate have mastered the art of political manipulation on ethnic grounds. The “*Mtu Wetu*” syndrome a Swahili word meaning “Our Person” has been widely used in Kenya’s political space to protect political elites and advance their agenda by their kinsmen.

Keywords: Social Media, Ethnic Politics, Political Parties, Democracy

Introduction

In Africa, the rising numbers of politicians adopting social networking sites, a popular space among young people, as an alternate method of political campaigns and reaching out to voters, serves as the impetus for this study. Social media and other digital media innovations have made communication and information accessible and inexpensive in the modern world (McQuail, 2005). Websites and social media platforms offer new avenues for political engagement. Authoritarian leaders may be threatened by the platform's robust networked design (Li & Bernoff, 2011).

In Kenya Social media's design structure allows individuals with computer skills to bypass state control and exercise their democratic rights over information. Public opinion formation and the creation of interest group forums are made possible by social media. It offers a public opinion and discourse channel by facilitating communication between politicians and engaged citizens (McQuail, 2005). Social movements have emerged due to the internet's growth in information access and idea sharing, as well as in civil society, democracy, and political engagement.

Through social networking sites, activists have created online personas thanks to social media (Qui, 2008). Rahimi (2011) argues that both anti- and pro-government organizations use social networking sites to uphold and combat the status quo, respectively. Consequently, social media use was crucial in fostering political discourse and competition in political systems (Rahimi, 2011). Teenagers in various cultures and nations have embraced social media (Lenhart and Madden, 2007).

In Africa, the number of political candidates embracing social media in their campaign plans is steadily rising. Internet platforms for political campaigns began in 1996, when there was very little internet use. This study seeks to examine the role and the effects of digital media on advancing ethnic politics in

Africa. Many scholars and authors have studied social media and politics in areas of political mobilization, activism, and participation. However, the contribution of social media to ethnic politics has received limited attention. Therefore, this study examined how social media has been used to solidify ethnicity in political parties hence undermining democracy. In order to answer the research question, this paper is structured in to five sections. The first one is introduction, second explores the theoretical framework; cognitive engagement and technological determinism. Literature review forms the third section, fourth is on discussion and the fifth section provides conclusion and recommendations.

The Theoretical Framework; Cognitive Engagement and Technological Determinism

This section presents the theoretical framework as follows;

Cognitive engagement theory

Social media has drastically changed political communication over the past few decades. These platforms have been regularly used by politicians and political parties as part of their communication strategy. The mainstream media, in turn, is very important in the social and political arenas. Political actors utilize the capacity of both communication channels to increase the reach of their message in current climate where traditional and social media coexist (Marcos-García, Alonso-Muñoz & López-Meri, 2021). This study was advanced by Ronald Inglehart (1977) cognitive engagement theory and McQuail in 2005 Technological determinism theory.

This paper relies on the cognitive engagement theory, which holds that public participation in politics is contingent upon citizens' happiness with the government's goals and policies, served as the foundation for this investigation (Bimber, 2001). Indeed political engagement, according is dependent on the availability of political information, awareness about current events in politics, and education (Conroy, Feezell & Guerrero, 2012). As a result, citizens' educational attainment determines their level of knowledge. According to Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley (2004), citizens' interest in politics rises as they absorb information that is easily available and less expensive. "Cognitive engagement is the extent to which individuals are willing to learn about politics that eventually participate in it," (Abdulrauf, Hamid, and Ishak, 2015). The cognitive engagement paradigm was first proposed by Ronald F. Inglehart in 1977 (Alaminos & Panalva, 2012). According to the notion of cognitive mobilization, educated young who had more access to information had an impact on political engagement (Inglehart, 1977). The cognitive engagement theory's central claim is that political interest, policy satisfaction, information availability, political expertise, and an individual's educational background all contribute to political participation (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2004).

Online involvement is the term used to describe political participation that occurs on the internet. There has been an increase in non-traditional digital forms of involvement over the past ten years also referred to as non-institutional or non-electoral forms (Shore, 2014). Social media offers a number of tools for online political engagement, including direct methods like wall posting, messages, and instant messaging, as well as indirect methods such posting notes and status updates (Warren & Sulaiman & Jafar 2014). Since social networking sites are part of the political cultures of young people, there is a connection among young people, political engagement and Cognitive Engagement Theory. As a result, political knowledge, political information, political interest and policy satisfaction may all be utilized to describe youth political participation online and on social media (Olabamiji, 2014). Even though CET was first proposed in 2006, interest in it has grown again because of the lower costs of obtaining political information brought about by the development of better technologies, such social media (Dalton, 2006).

Technological Determinism Theory

The central claim made by proponents of the thesis of technological determinism is that community is affected by technical advancement. As a result, society adapts and embraces the new developments and technologies. For example, new technology, the development of inventions, and their political and social ramifications are the causes of the modern information society. Social structure and cultural values are shaped by technology. The technological determinism theory's fundamental assertion is that society's

technological advancements influence the evolution of social structures and cultural values. The theory's main goal is to demonstrate how media, technology, and technological advancements are important forces behind societal change. The following presumptions of the technological determinism theory were put forth by McQuail (2005): Every society revolves around communication technology, which propels change throughout all media sectors. The type of technology is determined by the communication's forms, uses, and contents. The chronology of creation and the use of technology have an impact on social transformation. Communication revolutions lead to social revolutions. Additionally, the new media is undermining the established bases of authority.

When new systems of technology are created, culture or society instantly adapts to accommodate the senses to utilize the new technologies. It also asserts that every time new technical devices are introduced, society will change to embrace the innovation. As a result, people will quickly adopt new technology and discard outdated ones. The paradigm is predicated on the idea that the society's social standing is impacted by new technology. In order to either preserve their culture or accept new cultures, individuals of a community use technological tools. The hypothesis sheds light on how people use social media and the internet nowadays. Users, particularly young people, have increased significantly in terms of the benefits of the internet, and the convenience of contact.

As of June 2014, there were over 1.3 billion monthly active users of the internet. This study was informed by this idea since it captures the modern world's embrace of new media and how it is used. The theory of technological determinism is criticized for failing to explain how technological innovation occurs. Media technologies are invented, produced, and used by humans. As a result, there are controlling factors that establishes the guidelines for using such technologies. Furthermore, detractors point out that social and political concerns rather than technological aspects are the most significant. Critics of this idea highlight a number of important factors including production settings, modes of usage, styles, skills, choices and control.

For the case of United States of America, Websites were used extensively during the US presidential campaign of 2000, when both Bush and Gore used sophisticated websites (Shmuitz, 2010). The political matter was used to organize hundreds of groups by 2004 (Williams and Gulati, 2006). In the same year, the US presidential campaign 2004 witnessed the first notable use of social media as a political campaign weapon. This presidential campaign served as an example of how the internet could impact election results, if not campaign procedures (Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski, 2009). Howard Dean pioneered the internet, effectively mobilizing his followers and raising money for his campaign. Howard Dean used the internet to generate money for his campaign successfully. However, he failed to win Democratic primaries because he neglected to address issues of electability and extremism (Strait, 2008). Howard Dean's efforts enabled Obama to exploit the internet for his presidential campaigns (Aronson, 2012).

Methods

This study used mixed methods research method to examine how digital media solidifies tribal politics by exploring usage of social media in political parties among the youth. This approach provides a complete understanding research questions that need in-depth analysis due to their complexities. An analysis of secondary data from peer reviewed journals, research reports, and policy reviews and information from organization such as Pew research Centre enriched this study where the mixed methods research approach could have missed.

Literature Review

The Conceptualization of ethnic politics

Ethnic politics, impede the provision of public goods in developing democracies. Instead of delivering public goods to everyone, such parties are believed to consistently rely on giving co-ethnics excludable perks. Ethnic parties can differ significantly in how they rally support and conduct themselves in government, according to Thachil & Teitelbaum (2015). The range of identities they activate determines a

large portion of this diversity. The emergence of more "encompassing" ethnic parties can actually increase voter autonomy, increase the adequate size of winning coalitions, and boost spending on widely accessible public goods, even though "narrow" ethnic parties do in fact strengthen patronage politics (Thachil & Teitelbaum, 2015).

Ethnic politics are mostly post-independence, with nationalism rising to the fore and fighting the shared adversary while ethnic feelings are typically pushed to the side (A/Salam, 2008). Competition for limited resources leads to the development of ethnic groups and causes hostilities and conflicts between various tribes and regions. Traditional political parties' politics are boiled down to retaining power and gaining personal benefits by controlling the capital allocation process (A/Salam, 2008). In order to solve this problem, ethnic groups must be eradicated in order to create a united country. Partition and power-sharing are two of the deepest ethnic divisions that still exist. Only by employing peaceful or non-coercive conflict resolution techniques would multiethnic society be able to manage its ethnic disparities (A/Salam, 2008).

Indeed ethnic issues provide a significant internal state concerns (Elling, 2018). In a system that activists say is skewed against minorities and the periphery, non-Persian populations are organizing to seek representation and to assert their rights. However, little is known about modern Iranian ethnic politics (Elling, 2018). A study on the "impact of political communication using ethnic references on social media" conducted by Gremler (2025) indicates that social media posts that made reference to ethnic identities garnered more likes and shares, according to research based on social identity theory. People who had access to such internet content showed greater degrees of ethnic in-group affiliation. The results have ramifications for digital platform governance and raise concerns about whether social media exacerbates ethnic hostilities (Gremler, 2025).

The construction or reconstruction of ethnic identity, acculturation, and political engagement among ethnic communities are all significantly aided by ethnic media. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the virus was dubbed the "Chinese virus" by some news outlets and former US President Donald Trump, Zhang's (2022) study examined the moderating effects of ethnic news consumption on the associations between political ideology and presidential approval among Chinese Americans. Based on an October–December 2020 survey of Chinese Americans, the study found that although conservative Chinese Americans were more likely than liberals to support former President Trump, the impact of political ideology on presidential assessments was waning for those who accessed news more often through ethnic media (Zhang, 2022).

Political institutions in the Muslim world grew more fragmented, identity-based movements often founded on religious, ethnic, and sectarian affinities have gained relevance. When combined with electoral procedures, these factors have increased political polarization and influenced voter behavior and policy decisions (Octavianne, 2024). Social media's emergence has further changed political participation by serving as a forum for grassroots activity as well as a means of disseminating false information that widens socioeconomic gaps.

Effects of ethnic polarization

Polarization is a major danger to political and social stability since it is frequently stoked by identity-based differences and exacerbated by social media. The findings of Octavianne (2024) made clear how urgently effective measures to lessen division and advance inclusive governance are needed. These divisions impact international relations and regional security in today's globalized world, going beyond national and local politics. A comprehensive strategy that promotes candid communication, fortifies democratic institutions, combats disinformation, and increases public awareness to close social divides is needed to address these issues. Policies that involve excluded groups, guarantee equitable representation, and tackle the underlying causes of division are also necessary for inclusive governance. Muslim-majority nations can strive for greater social cohesiveness and political stability by implementing these policies (Octavianne, 2024). An increasing number of ethnic politics scholars believe that the political importance of ethnicity and the connection between ethno-linguistic fractionalization (ELF) and underdevelopment are driven by the co-

ethnics' vast social networks (Eubank, 2019). This theory holds that while social media enables ethnic parties to consume networks in sharing information and promote group activity, ethnically divided communities struggle to hold politicians accountable (Eubank, 2019).

The Conceptualization of the communication process and digital media

The process for media communication is crucial to comprehending the study's subject. Social media communication is converged by integrated sociality and roles, constitutive elements of social media (Trottier and Fuchs, 2015). Three types of social media sociality are combined in the integrated sociality feature. Modalities of social behavior include cooperation, communication, and cognition. A person can create cognitively complex multimedia content on Facebook and then share it for other users to comment on. Additionally, it enables recipients to alter and remix the material, creating new works with several authors (Trottier & Fuchs, 2015). An aspect of social media that is important to this research in examining the difficulties users have while utilizing this form of media for political objectives (Buluma, 2022).

In deed it is crucial to remember that technology allows combining all three aspects of communication, cooperation, and cognition in one area. Additionally, within a comparable social arena, Facebook offers a platform for progressing sociality from one level to the next. Facebook, which is based on a personal profiles that details the role of the user's life, is an example of social media's integrated roles. Social functions across multiple social domains converge in contemporary society (Trottier and Fuchs, 2015). However, the distinctions between private and public life, work and home have become hazier. This has led to developing a new type of porous and liquid sociality. One important issue influenced this study's attempt to comprehend how social media influences Kenyan youths' political participation.

Additionally, a range of social activities are part of social media's integrating and convergent elements. Social roles and activities are created by mapping the world's socio-cultural, socio-political, socio-economic, and private spheres into a single profile. Trottier and Fuchs (2015) observe in their examination of the communication process on social media use that an individual partially acts in a social space in several social roles. For instance, people play various roles on social media sites like Facebook. However, these roles are ultimately mapped onto a single profile viewed by several people and linked to distinct social responsibilities (Trottier & Fuchs, 2015). As a result, Trottier and Fuchs (2015) note that social networking sites is where social roles frequently come together and are incorporated into individual accounts.. According to Trottier and Fuchs (2015), these social roles encompass cooperation, communication, and cognition in various social roles that are components of an individual's behavior in state and economic systems.

Social activities and roles merge since Facebook profiles contain personal information, social networks, and communication data. Despite this, Trottier and Fuchs's (2015) study uses Facebook. This social media platform has some characteristics in common with other social networking sites, describing a thorough media communication process. This research is important because it discusses how social media affects young people in Kenya's political participation on other social media platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp, which is examined in this study. A linkage of sociality and social roles on social networking sites enables a single system to perform a variety of social activities. Citizens can use it to communicate with other people in transcendent or societal roles, as well as institutions and organizations. A citizen, on the other hand, would observe the interactions of these social actors.

Changes in political communication impacted by social media

Marcos-García, Alonso-Muñoz, and López-Meri's (2021) study on the relationship between Twitter and mass media during the 2016 Spanish elections campaigns confirmed that parties use Twitter to increase the impact of their mass media interventions, which are particularly important during television debates. This information supports the notion that in a hybrid communication environment, new and old media coexist and enhance one another (Marcos-García, Alonso-Muñoz & López-Meri, 2021). Online social networks provide a significant venue for the exchange of political and social ideas, and political leaders are increasingly relying on social media platforms to interact directly with the general public. Brady et al.

(2019) assessed the impact of political elites on social media by investigating how message factors, communication characteristics, interact with source factors, elite characteristics, to influence the propagation of elite messages on Twitter.

Moral-Emotional Language and the spread of political information

They discovered a "moral contagion" effect among all kinds of elites: the use of moral-emotional language by elites was strongly linked to a greater spread of messages. Additionally, they found an ideological asymmetry: even after controlling for ideology extreme and other source indicators, conservative elites were able to diffuse more moral-emotional language than liberal elites. While moral emotion expressions associated with religion and patriotism had a greater influence on conservative elites, moral emotion expressions associated with moral outrage, specifically moral wrath and contempt, had an impact on elites from all political stripes. These results contribute to the scientific knowledge of the causes of political division in American politics as well as political propaganda in the digital era (Brady et al., 2019).

Degree of engagement in online political forums/ thoughtful discussion

According to this study, there are differences in the degree of engagement in online political forums. Social networking sites play a fundamental role in developing online communities that offer social cohesion, team effectiveness, and a sense of reality all of which can be translated into offline political activity (Letcher, 2018). Both direct and indirect political participation have been linked to several informational uses of various media, including the internet (Shah, 2005), television (Norris, 1996), and newspapers (McLeod et al., 1999), and mobile communication technologies (Campbell & Kwak, 1996). Thus, political participation would also result from other media, including social media. Voters learn about the positions and characteristics of the candidates (Chaffee & Kaihan, 1997).

Wilhelm (1998) contends that the internet allows for more thoughtful discussion compared to in-person interactions. This is because, in contrast to internet users who may arrive at a more thoughtful assessment after contemplating and developing their opinions, participants in face-to-face contact may be compelled to answer promptly. According to this survey, even though some young people belong to virtual political forums, some do not engage in political discourse on these sites. The lack of interests in the subjects discussed on these forums and social media policies may be to blame. Warren (2002) notes that a population better aware of politics may be less likely to participate because of frustrations. The public is more willing and able to voice their political demands. However, political engagement may be hampered by the notion that engaging in the political system is not worthwhile.

Discussion

This study presents an in-depth analysis of role and effects of digital media on ethnic solidification as follows with regard to the young generation in Kenya's case;

Increased youth participation in party politics

The use of social networking sites has increased Kenyan youth's involvement in political party activities. It is crucial to note that these sites are a key component of political parties' communication strategies for party communication, membership recruitment, and mobilization. This study ascertained the respondents' degree of participation in online political forums. According to the study's findings, the number of members varies according to the type of social media site. 32 percent of respondents in Nairobi City County and 27 percent of respondents in Kakamega County who were in the 25–35 age bracket reported being active participants in an online political forum.

Voter behavior and tribal politics

Voter behavior and election results are influenced by ethnicity, particularly in parliamentary and presidential elections, which are primarily held in urban and settled areas. For instance, significant ethnic groups in Kenya have backed and voted for a member of their tribe to be president since multiparty politics were reinstated in 1992. In Kenyan politics, clans, religion, and individual power have all been significant

factors in the country's elections. For instance, in addition to ethnicity, an individual's influence, religion, and clan influence the electorate's selections in the rural constituency. A political candidate may use their clan or religious connection to sway voters, particularly in areas where those groups or religions make up the majority.

Ethnic politics is generally important to identity politics, which is a political movement or strategy that promotes the agenda of a specific ethnic community. This emphasis on identification may lead to polarized disagreement. While subordinate identity politics may result in divisiveness, dominant identity politics frequently seeks to achieve it (Leach, Brown, & Worden, 2008). There is an urgent need for research in ethnic politics since it invariably involves conflict-ridden situations where identities are jeopardized and confidence is betrayed (Fedotov, 2017). The central tenet of "the triadic thesis" is that minority elites in ethnic politics generally draw inspiration from their host governments and their kin-states when deciding how to conduct politics. However, Fedotov's (2017) ethnographic study provides an example of how minority elites use speech-based or rhetorical acts to make claims about their demands that their behaviors develop independently from above. The latter actions fall into two categories: disengagement politics or consensus politics. Therefore, we can create more space for an agency-based viewpoint by reevaluating the triadic nexus, including the connections between host governments, national minorities, and the latter's kin-states (Fedotov, 2017).

Influence of Electoral competition and ethnic politics

Electoral competition pushes rival parties to concentrate exclusively on organizing their respective core ethnic constituents in environments where ethnicity is politically salient. This tactic deepens ethnic divisions and may increase the likelihood of conflict. An alternate explanation of campaign strategy is presented in the article by Horowitz (2016), who suggests that a strategy solely focusing on core mobilization is probably not appealing in countries with a high degree of diversity. It contends that while lower-level players will be tasked with mobilizing core ethnic supporters, campaigns will be primarily driven by the chase of swing voters outside of core strongholds (Horowitz, 2016).

Youth participation in political forums

Social media use has motivated young Kenyans' involvement in political party activities. It should be noted that social media is a vital component of political parties' communication strategies for mobilization, party communication, and membership recruitment. This study went one step further and attempted to examine the extent of youth participation in online political forums and political parties. On the questionnaires, respondents from Kakamega and Nairobi City Counties were asked to whether they were members of any political parties in order to assess the levels of party membership. According to the findings, 5.6% of Nairobi City County respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24, while 13.17% of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 35. In Kakamega County, (2.63%) of respondents aged 18–29 and 7.89% of those aged 25–35 said they were officially registered members of political parties. Nonetheless, there were a lot of individuals registered as members of online political forums. For example, among respondents aged 25 and 35 from Nairobi City County and Kakamega County, respectively, 32% and 27% reported being active participants in an online political forum.

Additionally, there is considerable number of online users subscribe to online political forums. The internet can improve political communication and engagement through additional channels, like electronic communication with elected officials and information gathering through opinion polls and electronic surveys (Polat, 2005). Issue-based groups may collaborate virtually when the internet offers a chance. Building capacity and receiving information assistance from like-minded people could benefit these organizations and encourage political participation. People with comparable concerns can connect online since they can voice their thoughts anonymously, which promotes a more enlightening political knowledge exchange (Papacharissi, 2002).

Building Political Relationships on digital forums

Social media users can readily build relationships with government entities and express their opinions confidently because of its ease of use and the increase in grassroots participation (Gil de Zúñiga, 2012). Users of social media and the internet are confident enough to express themselves in a multitude of ways because they act online on a regular basis (Ostman, 2012). Young people, for example, learn how to address various audiences since they want to voice their opinions and encounter several audiences in a networked environment. The followers of a political party online page seems to be more than the actual number of registered members by the political party. Political party membership hinders young people from registration. Since it is free to join an online political forum, anyone can choose to be a part of it. However, based on their ethnic backgrounds, the respondents to this study tended to be part of online political parties. FORD Kenya, Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), the Amani National Congress (ANC), and regional forums like the Kakamega Youth Forum were linked to respondents from Kakamega County. Nairobi-based respondents who participated in Jubilee and ODM internet forums noted the same pattern.

Influence of tribal politics on party politics in Kenya

The importance of ethnicity in Kenyan party politics cannot be overstated. The transfer of ethnically based colonial political activities into Kenya's first political parties is the origin of political parties' affiliation with ethnic groupings (Jeffrey, 2006). In 1960, the associations and ethnic groups formed KANU and KADU. While KADU received substantial support from the Maasai, Kalenjin, Luhya tribal welfare societies, KANU received substantial backing from the Kamba, Kikuyu, and Luo political organizations. The first political parties were established in Kenya in the latter years of colonial rule. The two main political parties in the nation at the time were KANU and KADU. From the first elections it won in 1963 until its defeat by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) in 2002, KANU could hold onto power. Ethnicity still has an impact on party politics today. When a political candidate in charge of a party receives a resounding amount of support from the ethnic group they are from, the influence is evident during elections (Kisaka & Nyadera, 2019).

Power sharing, political parties and ethnic groupings

In order to negotiate for political power, political parties frequently align themselves with tribes. For instance, ethnic groups negotiated the power-sharing arrangement through their political parties, which resulted in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that established the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) (Kisaka & Nyadera, 2019). Whereas the Luo used LDP and other NARC members, the Luhya hired Ford Kenya. Since multiparty politics were reinstated, Kenyans have evidently tended to vote according to their ethnic affiliations and the political parties they support (Jeffrey, 2006). In 1992, Odinga Odinga led the FORD Kenya party, which was used to elect all Luo MPs. The same action was repeated in the 1997 elections, when Raila Odinga's National Development Party (NDP) served as a pathway for Luo MPs to enter the parliament. The FORD Kenya party became linked with the Bukusu community after a bitter struggle between Raila Odinga and the late Wamalwa Kijana over leadership. Wamalwa Kijana took over as the party's leader following the death of Odinga Odinga (Jeffrey, 2006).

A sizable portion of Bukusu candidates made it to the parliament through FORD Kenya. However, Central Province overwhelmingly backed Mwai Kibaki through his Democratic Party (DP). However, the agreement between the various political parties happened during the 2002 elections, which changed the nature of the contest (Jeffrey, 2006). According to the power-sharing arrangement, the member parties were prepared to back a single candidate. Mwai Kibaki was chosen to be the coalition's flagbearer because he could easily win over the public to the opposition. In other political parties, like KANU, where Uhuru Kenyatta was the preferred candidate for President Moi, the bulk of the Kalenjin people in the Rift Valley supported him for president, a similar tendency of ethnicization of political parties gained center stage (Kisaka & Nyadera, 2019). Furthermore, because Uhuru Kenyatta was born in Kiambu district, the district overwhelmingly supported him. Similar patterns were seen in other areas, such as Kisii, where Simeon

Nyachae, one of the presidential candidates in these elections, led the FORD PEOPLE party, which helped all Kisii MPs win elections.

Tribalism and Voter Behavior

According to Oyugi (1997), some Kenyans think that tribalism is ingrained in the country's political system. However, because of its emotional impact, these individuals hesitate to bring it up for debate across ethnic divides (Oyugi, 1997). Voter behavior and election outcomes are influenced by ethnicity, particularly in urban and established areas and during presidential and parliamentary elections. Since multiparty politics were reinstated in 1992, Kenya's major ethnic groupings have backed and cast ballots for a member of their tribe to be president. This conduct stems from the belief that having a community member as president increases the likelihood of obtaining additional funding for development. The president's entire community is the only group that gains from patronage politics, according to Wanyande (2006). The dismissal of a top public servant, not a member of the president's tribe, is frequently seen as a punishment to the entire tribe, a loss of presidential patronage, or a restriction on access to development resources.

To create the Kenya Peoples Union (KPU), several MPs left the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) in 1966 (Wanyande, 2006). As a result, the nation was forced to hold a "Little General Election." Jaramogi Odinga, the vice president at the time, spearheaded the defections. It is important to note that the ruling party supported the political candidates during the one-party regime. A small group of political elites oversaw and managed their nomination process, ensuring that only candidates deemed acceptable by the dictatorship were nominated and ultimately elected. Therefore, because voters had little sway, influential politicians nominated and elected candidates to parliament (Winder, 1993). For example, there was a pervasive perception in some areas that elections were rigged to benefit certain political candidates associated with the political elites.

Based on three main issues, Wanyande (2006) notes that elections have become a formality held every five years. First, elections serve as a foundation for the efforts of the governing political elites to unite and limit their authority. Since they were permitted to represent the public, the candidates thought to be affiliated with the ruling class had an advantage in winning seats in parliament. The party's presidential candidate would inevitably be the party's leader, and there could only be one presidential candidate. This explains why the Republic of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, was elected without opposition and served until his death in 1978.

Second, political leaders claimed legitimacy through one-party elections. Regardless of the formula employed to obtain power, a government would typically gain domestic and international legitimacy (Wanyande, 2006). Third, the incumbent politicians sought to demonstrate the nation's democracy through elections at the five-year cycle's end. It is important to note that under the one-party government, undemocratic elections prevented the electorate from deciding on the caliber of leadership. One example of how the voice of the electorate was silenced is the KANU government's denial of permission for Jaramogi Odinga Odinga and his former KPU colleagues to contest in the 1983 and 1988 elections. Despite being well-liked by their constituents, these MPs were disqualified for disloyalty to the current administration.

Tribal politics and Voting Trends

Voting trends are influenced by specific politicians. Raila Odinga is regarded as Luo Nyanza's political leader. Which may help to explain why the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which he led at the time, won seats in 2002 for all 18 of the country's parliamentary constituencies (Kisaka & Nyadera, 2019). Through KANU, all of the Kalenjin MPs were able to make their way to parliament. This political party, led by former President Moi, a Kalenjin, had dominated the country for almost 40 years. In addition to ethnicity, an individual's influence, religion, and clan influence the electorate's selections in the rural constituency. A political candidate may use their clan or religious connection to sway voters, particularly in areas where one or the other is dominant. However, since religious affiliation is typically a candidate's secret, learning about a political candidate's intentions may be challenging. Since he was their leader, the Legio Maria sect overwhelmingly supported the late Archbishop Stephen Ondiek, the former MP for the Ugenya

constituency. Ethnicity, clannism, and religion have all been important factors in Kenyan politics on several occasions. Based on their influence in this area, Raila Odinga helped several Luo Nyanza MPs be elected to parliament, just like his father Odinga Odinga did (Kisaka & Nyadera, 2019).

Determining the respondents' level of participation in virtual political forums is among aim of this study. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they participate in online political forums on the survey. Thirty-three (20%) and thirty-three (33%), respectively, participated in everyday conversations on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp in Nairobi City County (15.62%). Twenty-one respondents (12.9%) in Kakamega County participated on Facebook every day, twenty-four on Twitter, and twenty-five (15%) on WhatsApp. Even while 110 (66%) of the Nairobi City County respondents had accounts on Facebook, (72%) on Twitter, (75%) on WhatsApp, a sizable portion of them did not participate in any political discussions. Of the Kakamega County respondents, 134 (80.64%) did not participate in any political discourse on Facebook forums, 139 (83.7%) on Twitter and 125 (75%) on WhatsApp.

Political party membership drive

The drop in confidence in the political system could be one reason for the morale drop. It is important to keep in mind that the internet makes political participation feasible by ensuring that everyone has access to information. Going a step further, this study looked at how political groups have used social media to rally the public during membership drives. Political parties have made great use of social media platforms to entice young people to join their parties and support their objectives, the study's findings indicate. Election behavior and outcomes are influenced by party politics (Wanyande, 2006). While all political candidates had to be members of a specific political party under the previous constitution, the 2010 constitution permits independent candidates.

Recognition of political parties in Kenya/licensing

Political parties must fulfill certain standards to be recognized and registered in Kenya. According to section 7 of the Political Parties Act 2011, a party must have 1,000 or more registered voters in at least 24 counties to be considered registered. Political parties must, among other things, have a geographical balance and include minorities, both sexes, ethnic diversity, and marginalized groups. After this law was passed in 2012, the political parties started registering many members; however, because recruiters could gather voters' personal information, including phone numbers, membership registration efforts were conducted strategically. Names, phone numbers, voting places, constituencies, wards, counties, genders, and dates of birth were among the information gathered throughout the registration process. The drive to register new members was prompted by the requirement that political parties reach the membership threshold set forth in the Political Parties Act.

Merging of Political Parties and Digital membership

In 2016, twelve political groups merged to become the Jubilee Party. Later, the party started a digital membership campaign where candidates and employees registered members using electronic smartcards. Voter information, including names, phone numbers, polling place, and identity card numbers, was stored on the smartcards. In order to ensure that the nominations made during the primaries were appropriate and to prevent resentment among the eleven combined parties, the party adopted the usage of these cards. However, there was a price associated with the cards: Ksh. 20 was needed for each card. However, as the candidates and lawmakers purchased the cards in large quantities before moving on with the membership recruiting campaign, several difficulties were encountered throughout this procedure.

Numerous allegations surfaced that the scheme was vulnerable to voting fraud because less wealthy candidates could not afford to purchase the cards in large quantities like their wealthier competitors. Furthermore, candidates were not assured security because the system's acquisition was opaque. The opposition was alarmed by the system's direct connection to the Registrar of Political Parties database because they believed it might be a digital plan to manipulate the election. Later on, though, the method was dropped, and the Jubilees party primarily did not use it. During the 2017 Jubilee and ODM membership drives, aspirants and other leaders were essential.

In order to accept the political merger and launch a national membership registration drive, the Jubilee party had to rally its most important members to attend the conference of national delegates in Nairobi. The Coalition for Reform and Democracy (CORD) merged to become the National Super Alliance (NASA) in February 2017. Since the member parties maintained their independence, the coalition was not registered. Notably, ODM, a constituent party, used a mobile app to conduct a membership drive, registering 3 million members. This smartphone app was used by volunteers, grassroots party leaders, and party candidates to register members on the party's behalf. The application was created so that mobile money could be used to collect registration costs. After that, a code would be created to activate the new members' membership cards. These individuals can get an SMS with confirmation feedback on their registration.

It is worth noting that many politically inactive individuals were taken aback by the methods by which politicians and candidates acquired their names and phone numbers. Many people were shocked to see that their names were on political party membership lists without their knowledge, and the Registrar of Political Parties also made the list of political parties available online in accordance with the rules.

Conclusion

This paper examined how ethnic politics has undermined democracy through political parties and the digital media spaces. Using Kenya's political parties, this study found that political parties use this social networking sites to solidify their popularity by aligning themselves with various tribes. This study draws its analysis based the historical background of party politics and the current political scene of Kenya's politics. Social media was crucial during Kenya's presidential campaigns in 2013 and 2017. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were utilized by dominant political parties and political aspirants to inform voters and followers about political campaigns. This study concludes that although social media has played a critical role mobilization of young voters in Kenya. Politicians and their supporters now use it as an alternate means of communication. This platforms are now used to solidify political parties based on ethnic backgrounds and identities as aspect that undermines the spirit of inclusivity in a democratic state.

Recommendations

Further studies should be done in relation to how digital media can be used in promoting best practices in advancing democracy in developing countries. The digital space is widely used by the youthful generation, this age group are the majority in Africa, and future leaders for this continent. Therefore, a responsible foundation for the use digital media specifically on political issues would be an opportunity for a democratic society.

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