

# Is kenya truly democratic politics essay



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The 2007 elections in Kenya caused chaos in the country consequently leading to an estimate of 1300 deaths and around 250, 000 internally displaced people (BBC, 2008). The political situation in Kenya after this post-election violence in 2007 has been and still remains very fragile and rather sensitive to the people of Kenya. Due to this, Kenyans seemed to be concerned for their safety during the latest elections which took place on 4th March 2013.

Kenya has over 40 ethnic groups hence making it a multilingual country (Washington post, 2008). According to (open democracy?????) it was during the coming of colonialists where British came with a principle of divide and rule that served as the breeding ground for negative tribal concept which was later integrated in popular belief among tribal members. It is this stereotype which served as the inciting cause of clashes between various tribes whereby each tribe agitated and fought the other. Subsequently, Kenya's politics have predominantly been based on ethnic backgrounds. This issue of ethnicity being practised in politics originated from the introduction of multiparty politics in Kenya in 1991 (Mbatia et al, 2009). This, according to Orvis and Apollos (2011 cited in Bratton and Kimenyi 2008) led to the first multiparty elections held in 1992 revolving around ethnic backgrounds. Described as the 'cancer that afflicts the politics, elections and governance in Kenya', the issue of tribalism in Kenya was the first to be raised in the presidential debate held on 11th February 2013 in Nairobi. The significance of resolving tribalism issues remains a number one priority for political leaders to tackle as this issue seems to affect the country's progress in terms of creating job opportunities, infrastructure like improving the

transport system and also technological development in the country.

Political parties that are formed before an upcoming election are mostly ethnic-based (Udogu, 1999). This essay aims to analyse ways in which tribalism began and how it is practised, covering aspects of election rigging, nepotism and favouring ethnic groups especially in elections. Moreover, this essay will also discuss the impacts of these tribalism issues on Kenya's democracy which affects the security, equality and progression of the country.

To begin with, Kinity (2009) claims election rigging in Kenya has been going on since the 1970s, therefore cannot be the reason for the post-election violence after the 2007 elections as it has been going on since then. He further posits the view that there have only been three free and fair elections since 1963, the last one being in 1979. However, several studies seem to point out the blame for the 2007 elections to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). Amongst the reasons as to why IEBC was seen to have played a crucial role in the post-election violence were: delays in the release of the results for more than a day when one candidate appeared to be leading led to suspicions on the official results and the release of different figures on the outcome of the elections both nationally and locally (BBC, 2008). These suspicions led to chaos and violence throughout the country thus questioning the country's democracy. Patently, although some sources claim that rigging does not cause violence primarily because it has been going on for a long period of time, it certainly questions the democracy of the state. The result of an election being deceitfully fixed beforehand

portrays dubious democracy in a country as the choices of the people are taken for granted.

Nepotism is another way in which tribalism is being practised in Kenya.

Nepotism in this case refers to favoring relatives regardless of merit.

Nepotism in Kenya has been going on since the era of the first president of Kenya, the late President Jomo Kenyatta who was in power from 1964 to his death in 1978. His governance was openly based on nepotism, favoring opportunities such as employment and mainly land acquisition to be accessible to his family or tribe members (West FM, 2012). The extent of this approach is seen to present, where the son of the late president Jomo Kenyatta, Uhuru Kenyatta, who is currently vying for the presidential seat, was described as one of the largest land owners in Kenya if not the largest (Standard Digital, 2013). The family of Kenyatta's dominance of land in Kenya is further contended by Kamau (cited in Odero 2011) who discusses about land being formerly owned by Europeans who had decided to sell it which was taken over by the family. It is also seen that through his power, Jomo Kenyatta had consented to the transfer of a certain ethnic group (kikuyu) from a transit farm in Rift Valley to a different area (Odero, 2011). This was also because Kenyatta's family had taken over most of the farms. With Kenyatta's family owning an estimated 500 000 acres of land according to the Ministry of Land officials, the trend went on with the second president of Kenya Mr. Daniel Arap Moi, indicating clear tribalism, nepotism and cronyism being practiced (Ibid). This seemed unfair as regardless of one's qualifications or rights, the mentioned attributes of favouritism were kept first. From this, it can be seen that tendency of favourism in Kenya is a

socio-political problem highly practiced in land grabbing where political leaders take advantage of their power. Moreover, nepotism is also being practised in employment as transport minister Amos Kimunya is said to have given his relatives and tribe members top jobs in his ministry, an investigation further resulted in the interview of applicants to be conducted again (Daily Nation, 2010). Whilst Kimunya's case is only in recent years, favourism in employment has been going on since the era of the Jomo Kenyatta where it is was common to have positions of higher authority placed for the Kikuyu than the qualified ones from other tribes. (open democracy????) This clearly highlights the fact that one has a better chance of securing a job with family connections in administrations of companies and industries.

[http://www. opendemocracy. net/alan-e-masakhalia/focus-on-tribalism-in-kenya](http://www.opendemocracy.net/alan-e-masakhalia/focus-on-tribalism-in-kenya)

In addition to election rigging and nepotism, favouring one's own ethnic group is also another feature of Kenyan politics. Weber (cited in Udogu 1999) described ethnic groups as human groups treasuring beliefs in their own common origins that provide a basis for the creation of a community. The internally displaced people from the post-election violence consisted of different ethnic groups, however, according to Migiro (2013), the Kenyan government favoured the kikuyu ethnic group from the post-election violence in 2007 by providing houses, land and financial compensation. The main reason as to why kikuyus were prioritized is because they were from the same ethnic group as the president. This obviously causes anger and frustration from other ethnic groups stoking tensions and risking another up

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rise of violence ahead of the Elections in March 2013. This highlights the fact that loyalty to the tribe is given more relevance than loyalty to the country.

The discussed tribal practices have had significant impacts on democracy in the country. As clearly illustrated from the points above, tribalism has been rooted in the country since the first president of Kenya and the trend seems to go on. Insecurity due to rigging elections is one of the major impact tribalism has on the country's democracy. Going back to the post-election violence in 2007, the controversy on the cause of insecurity in the country was that instead of a democratic state as it is termed, to highlight its democracy, the elections seemed to be the source of conflict, death and destruction of property. There were chaos all over the country at the time of the post-election violence in the country, people had to stay indoors for quite some time. School holidays were extended and working people were asked to stay home until the situation in the country improved when a mediator was involved.

Even so, arguments on rigging the elections not being the source of violence in the country have been brought forward. Kinity (2009), argues that rigging had been going on since the first elections in Kenya, therefore cannot be used as a reason for the violence in 2007. However, this claim has not been supported by enough evidence. To that end, this had been going on since the first elections in the 1970s, and the leaders had not implemented any laws on this subject, therefore, the violence could have been caused by the fact that the people were tired of this unfairness and unjustness making them take action. Now that the elections are coming up, security risks in the

country persist, major precautions are being undertaken, as the country's new constitution is being implemented, hopes for a peaceful election rise.

In addition to that, tribalism has also had a major impact on the subject of equality in the country. Inequality in the country is a result of the practice of nepotism. Equality in this case, refers to equal access to opportunities, resources and benefits (Muoki, nd). The inequality that exists in Kenya is one which a different ethnic group is treated differently depending on the leader of the country at that moment. This refers to job opportunities being easily accessed to certain known families and land being acquired by the family of the predecessor leaders so as the legacy of their family continues (west FM, 2013). The fact that only certain groups of people get the opportunities highlights a sense of inequality in the country. One may have better qualifications than an opponent in a job interview but just because the director of the company is a relative in some way, the job is guaranteed for him (Standard Digital, 2012). Inequality in Kenya is an impact of nepotism being practised. It plays a fundamental role in questioning Kenya's democracy.

Slow progression of the country is yet another impact of tribalism on democracy in Kenya. This issue of tribalism is largely associated with a battle for resources. Due to the country's slow growing economy, the resources to enhance infrastructure, technology, health and social services have decreased. Slow progression in Kenya is primarily influenced by insecurity and inequality. The exploitation of natural resources for instance, where resources in some areas are being ignored or underutilized is a factor leading to slow progression (? Open democracy?). Moreover, one of the <https://assignbuster.com/is-kenya-truly-democratic-politics-essay/>

presidential candidates who is a member of parliament (MP) explained in the debate how infrastructure development is threatened due to historical injustices of different tribes. The MP, Peter Kenneth was referring to a project of constructing a fly-over in Nairobi which was to help with easing the traffic; the project could not be completed due to distraction caused by a property of which the land owner was seeking compensation which is more expensive than the cost of the whole project. This puts the need for Kenya to have a leader who can empower and implement land use policy to best utilise the land in a country which is fast growing in population without prioritising any specific tribe. Therefore, Kenya's future is in the hands of its citizens, they are obligated to choose the right leader who will correct the historical injustices between different ethnic groups that occurred in the past. For instance, Uhuru Kenyatta, who is among the popular candidates for the next elections, is due to go on trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in April 2013 for war crimes allegedly committed during the 2007 post-election violence by making different tribes attack one another due to defeat. Although trial against Uhuru Kenyatta is yet to take place in July 2013, there is evidence from a witness who was present at a meeting where Kenyatta was involved in a plan to get the feared Mungiki sect (a terrorist Kikuyu group in Kenya) to attack ethnic Kalenjins who are seen as supporters of Odinga in 2007. (BBC???) With this in mind, if he will be elected then found guilty in the coming case, the country's progression will most likely be affected.

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## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it has been seen from the essay that Kenya being a country with many different tribes/ethnic groups, tribalism began when multi party politics was introduced. With the tribes already agitating and fighting each other following the principle of divide and rule brought about by the British during the colonial period, the forming of the political parties was ethnically based. It has been seen that practices of election rigging in elections are common with only three free and fair elections since 1963, this portrays a dubious democracy as the choices of people are taken for granted.

Nepotism in favouring relatives regardless of merit is seen to be highly practiced from the era of the first president of Kenya to recent times. It is also seen that Nepotism is not only practiced in aspects of politics but also in employment where one has a better chance of winning a job by being a relative regardless of qualification.

According to a survey conducted by Bratton and Kimanyi (2008), only less than 1% admitted to be voting prior to their ethnic groups. This is however, a contradiction to what is really happening in the country as most Kenyans reckon that the source of political and economic divisions in the country is tribalism (Ibid).

As the Commission saw it, “ high turnout in polling stations in areas dominated by one party is extremely suspicious and in the eyes of IREC is in itself a clear indication of likely fraud, most probably conducted through ballot stuffing, utilising local knowledge of who on the poorly kept voter

register is absent, deceased or for another reason unlikely to appear to vote.”