

Challenges to Peaceful Nominations: Youth Participation in Politics in Homa Bay County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This research article underscored challenges to peaceful nominations by focusing on youth participation in politics of Homa Bay County Kenya. The research reviewed various literatures that informed the findings of the study. The article was informed by two theories; institutionalism theory and pluralism theory. Since it was a qualitative study, it adopted cross sectional research design. Data was collected by use of interview guides, focus group discussions and secondary sources. It was analyzed by use of content and thematic analysis. The analyzed data was presented by use of themes and verbatim quotations. The researcher found out that; Political violence, fueled by socio-economic and ethnic tensions, disrupts peaceful nominations in Homa Bay, compromising democratic integrity and limiting youth participation. It concluded that; Political violence undermines Homa Bay's democratic stability, fostering fear and exclusion. Institutional and pluralism theories support reforms for inclusive electoral processes. Therefore, the researcher recommended that; Strengthen electoral institutions, ensure transparency, foster socio-economic development, and promote dialogue to reduce political violence and support youth engagement.

Keywords: Nominations, Politics, Participation, Youths

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, youth participation in politics is seen as essential for promoting democratic governance and fostering inclusive societies (UNDP, 2014). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights the importance of youth engagement in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with youth playing a crucial role in enhancing democratic institutions and bridging governance gaps. However, the full involvement of youth in political processes is still hindered by various barriers, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where socio-economic challenges, political violence, and systemic exclusion limit their ability to participate (Adebayo, 2021). Countries such as India, Brazil, and South Africa have also faced similar barriers, but youth involvement remains critical for ensuring sustainable democratic growth across the globe (UNDP, 2014).

At the continental level, Africa presents an acute case of youth exclusion, where political violence and lack of access to resources exacerbate the difficulties young people face in participating in politics. In countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, political violence is deeply ingrained, especially during electoral periods, significantly impacting the youth's participation in political processes (Mwenda, 2023). In Kenya, ethnic tensions and competition for resources often trigger violent clashes that disproportionately affect marginalized groups, including youth, thereby preventing their active engagement in political nominations and elections. Similarly, in South Africa, historical political exclusion of black youth continues to hinder their full participation, despite the country's post-apartheid democratic frameworks.

Regionally, East Africa struggles with issues of youth political exclusion, despite the fact that youth constitute a significant proportion of the population. Countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda share similar challenges, where entrenched political systems and economic constraints prevent young people from taking active roles in political life (UNICEF, 2022). In Uganda, for instance, youth movements seeking greater political inclusion have faced considerable resistance from political elites who maintain a tight grip on power, restricting youth's ability to influence political outcomes (UNICEF, 2022). While regional efforts, such as those in Tanzania, have aimed at enhancing youth participation, these efforts remain undermined by systemic challenges like limited access to education and economic opportunities.

In Kenya, the situation in Homa Bay County, located in the western region of the country, exemplifies the challenges faced by youth in political nominations. Despite the large youth population in Homa Bay, they continue to be excluded from political decision-making processes, especially during the nomination phase of elections. The political landscape in Homa Bay, like in many other parts of Kenya, is marred by ethnic rivalry, violence, and financial constraints, which disproportionately affect the youth (Oral interview, 2024). These issues result in their marginalization during political nominations and limit their participation in shaping the future of their communities.

This study will investigate the impact of independent variables such as political violence, exclusion, and resource constraints on the dependent variable of youth participation in political nominations in Homa Bay County. From a global perspective, the broader socio-economic factors, including poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education, often hinder youth participation (UNDP, 2014). Continentally, African countries face compounded challenges due to institutionalized political systems and persistent inequalities that exclude young people from mainstream political processes (Adebayo, 2021). Regionally, East Africa has seen youth-led movements calling for greater political inclusion, but these efforts are often met with resistance from entrenched political elites who manipulate the political landscape to maintain power (UNICEF, 2022).

The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges youth face in Homa Bay and the broader implications for youth political engagement across Kenya. By examining the interplay of these variables, this research seeks to provide insight into the processes that can promote youth political empowerment and strengthen democratic governance in Kenya and beyond.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

A democratic nomination process should ideally offer equal opportunities for all political aspirants, particularly youth, ensuring fairness and inclusivity. However, in Homa Bay County, the real situation reveals that youth participation in political nominations faces significant challenges, including limited resources, political manipulation, and interference from established political elites. These obstacles hinder young people's ability to compete effectively in the nomination process, thereby marginalizing their involvement in the political sphere. Despite institutional frameworks aimed at promoting youth participation, these barriers persist, creating an environment where only well-funded and politically connected individuals can thrive. The gap in existing research is the insufficient exploration of how these challenges specifically affect youth during the nomination stage in Homa Bay County. This study addresses this gap by interrogating the factors that hinder peaceful nominations and offering insights into enhancing youth engagement in the political process, contributing to a more inclusive and democratic political environment in Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

The research objective was to interrogate the Challenges towards peaceful nominations in the Context of Youth Participation in Politics in Homa-Bay County, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research article adopted two theories. These are institutionalism theory and pluralism theory. They are discussed as follows:

2.1.1 Institutionalism Theory and Pluralism Theory

Institutionalism, largely attributed to Douglass North (1990) and James G. March & Jon Elster (1989), examines how formal institutions shape political behavior. The theory focuses on how political institutions—rules, laws, and norms—impact political behavior, suggesting that individuals' actions are influenced by institutional arrangements, which can change political outcomes when reformed. The theory emphasizes that these systems are not static but evolve, shaping political behavior over time (North, 1990; March & Elster, 1989). Institutionalism is relevant to the study as it examines how political structures (e.g., electoral laws, nomination processes) in Homa Bay affect youth participation. It highlights the exclusion of youth in political systems due to institutional weaknesses and manipulation, which control access to political participation. This theory guides the exploration of how reforms to these systems can improve inclusivity. Institutionalism's strength lies in its ability to analyze the impact of formal and informal rules on political participation, offering pathways for reform to enhance inclusivity (Wainaina, 2022). The theory is vital for this study as it provides a framework to understand how existing political institutions contribute to youth exclusion in Homa Bay, offering insights for targeted reforms to make the political environment more inclusive (Mwenda, 2023).

Robert Dahl (1956) introduced Pluralism, arguing that power in a democracy is distributed across various interest groups, preventing dominance by any single group. Pluralism asserts that power is dispersed among diverse groups—political parties, advocacy groups, and others—that compete and cooperate to influence policy (Dahl, 1956). It advocates for inclusive, responsive political systems where all groups, especially marginalized ones like youth, can participate. Pluralism is relevant as it addresses the exclusion of youth in Homa Bay's political nominations. The theory suggests that interest groups, political parties, and civil society can create opportunities for youth involvement, addressing the systemic barriers to their participation (Njogu, 2023). The strength of pluralism lies in its focus on ensuring diverse interests are represented in politics, protecting the voices of marginalized groups, like youth, against dominant elites (Karanja, 2023). Pluralism is crucial for the study, as it provides a framework for advocating youth inclusion in political processes and supports reforms like youth quotas to ensure greater representation in Homa Bay's political system (Otieno, 2022; Kiptoo, 2022).

Therefore, both Institutionalism and Pluralism offer valuable insights into youth participation challenges in Homa Bay. Institutionalism emphasizes the need for reform in political structures to increase inclusivity, while Pluralism advocates for the inclusion of diverse voices, particularly marginalized groups like youth. Together, these theories provide a robust framework to address barriers to youth participation and support reforms for a more inclusive political environment in Homa Bay (Mwenda, 2023; Wainaina, 2022).

2.2 Empirical Literature

Political violence in Homa Bay County disrupts peaceful nominations, particularly targeting marginalized youth. Wanjiku (2022) argues that violence often stems from socio-economic inequalities and ethnic divisions, which fuel fierce competition for power. Mwenda (2023) highlights how political elites manipulate violence to secure electoral victories, marginalizing less-resourced candidates, particularly youth. This study fills a gap by examining how such violence deters youth involvement in nominations and perpetuates cycles of exclusion, limiting democratic engagement. It emphasizes the need for strengthened electoral processes and socio-economic development to address these issues.

Youth representation is a key challenge in Homa Bay, despite youth constituting a significant portion of the population. Karanja (2023) asserts that excluding youth from political decision-making fosters alienation, while Njogu (2023) emphasizes the role of political parties and civil society in creating pathways for engagement. This study addresses the gap by focusing on how exclusion from political structures exacerbates youth disenfranchisement. It highlights the need for legislative reforms, such as youth quotas, and sheds light on the systemic barriers that prevent youth from shaping political discourse in the region.

Limited access to political information is another barrier to youth participation. Muthoni (2022) advocates for media literacy, while Omolo (2023) emphasizes better access to information, especially in rural areas. This study fills the gap by exploring the intersection of information poverty, technological limitations, and geographic isolation. The findings suggest that the digital divide exacerbates youth disenfranchisement, emphasizing the importance of infrastructure development and civic education in empowering youth for greater participation.

Resource constraints hinder youth candidates, with many unable to compete with wealthier incumbents. Wanjiku (2022) discusses resource disparities, while Mumo (2022) explores the reliance on corrupt practices like vote-buying. This study highlights how financial limitations perpetuate disenfranchisement and emphasizes the need for transparent campaign financing, capacity-building initiatives, and equitable resource distribution to foster an inclusive political environment in Homa Bay.

III. METHODOLOGY

Since this is a qualitative study, which adopted a qualitative approach, it thus adopted cross-sectional research design. The study was conducted in Homa Bay County, located in Kenya's former Nyanza Province. Geographically, it lies between latitudes 0.5273° S and 0.7197° S and longitudes 34.45° E and 34.78° E, covering an area of approximately 3,154.7 square kilometers. The study targeted 551,071 registered voters as per the IEBC (2022) register. From the target population, the sample size derived using Yamane's (1967) formulae was 400 respondents. Research instruments that were used included, interview guides, focus group discussion and secondary sources. Data was analyzed by use of themes and based on content. Thereafter, it was presented thematically. The researcher adhered to ethical issues that make the research objective. For example, confidentiality, acknowledgement of sources and beneficence was observed.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The research discusses the findings of the research thematically by addressing the Political Violence, Lack of Youth Representation, Limited Access to Information, Resource Constraints and Interference and Manipulation. They are discussed as follows:

4.1.1 Political Violence

Political violence in Homa Bay County poses a significant barrier to peaceful nominations, undermining democracy. This violence manifests in forms ranging from intimidation to physical harm, affecting the integrity of the nomination process and perpetuating cycles of fear and instability. The underlying causes include socio-economic inequalities, historical grievances, and fierce competition for power, often exacerbated by ethnic divisions (Oral interview with a household head in Homa-Bay town, 10/4/2024). Past electoral violence, such as the 2007-2008 post-election violence, continues to fuel mistrust, while political elites manipulate violence to secure victory, particularly exploiting vulnerable youth (Oral interview with ANC political party official in Oyugis town, 12/4/2024). This creates an atmosphere of fear, deterring political participation, particularly among marginalized groups like youth and women (Oral interview with a household head in Kendu-Bay town, 20/3/2024). Addressing political violence requires strengthening electoral institutions, promoting socio-economic development, and fostering dialogue (Oral interview with a church leader in Rodi town, 1/4/2024). Theories like institutionalism and pluralism offer frameworks for reform by improving electoral processes and promoting inclusivity, reducing violence, and enhancing legitimacy (Okinda, 2022; Mwenda, 2023; Wainaina, 2022). These approaches are crucial for achieving democratic stability in the region.

4.1.2 Lack of Youth Representation

Youth representation in Homa Bay County is crucial to ensuring inclusive political processes, yet despite comprising 60% of the population, young people are often excluded from political decision-making (Oral interview with a CJPD official in Oyugis town, 15/4/2024). The lack of youth representation exacerbates social unrest and undermines trust in the electoral process, fostering alienation and perpetuating a generational divide where power remains concentrated in the hands of older elites. This exclusion hampers the political participation of youth, further entrenching socio-economic inequalities and hindering community development (Oral interview with an NCIC official in Homa-Bay town, 20/3/2024). To address this, legislative reforms, such as youth quotas or reserved seats, should be introduced to ensure youth inclusion in the political sphere (Mwenda, 2023). Political parties and civil society organizations play vital roles by creating structured pathways for youth involvement, such as youth wings and mentorship programs, which help navigate the complexities of political engagement (Njogu, 2023). Furthermore, investing in education and job creation can reduce youth disenfranchisement and the appeal of political violence (Oral interview with a FORD-K official in Kabondo-Kasipul, 2024). Institutional and pluralism theories provide frameworks for enhancing youth participation, advocating for inclusive political structures and recognizing diverse youth needs (Wainaina, 2022; Karanja, 2023).

4.1.3 Limited Access to Information

Limited access to information is a significant barrier to youth participation in the political nomination process in Homa Bay County. Despite technological advancements, many young people in rural areas struggle with inadequate access to reliable political information, hindering their ability to make informed decisions (Oral interview with a police officer in Rangwe town, 27/3/2024). This information poverty, driven by factors such as poverty, low literacy, and geographic isolation, contributes to disengagement and vulnerability to exploitation by political elites (Focus group discussion with church leaders in Mbita, 13/4/2024). The digital divide further exacerbates this issue, leaving rural communities at a disadvantage compared to urban areas. Addressing these challenges requires infrastructure development, such as community information centers and mobile libraries, to improve access to communication technologies, especially in marginalized areas (Oral interview with an IEBC official in Sori, 2024). Media literacy and civic education programs are essential to empower youth with the skills to critically evaluate political information (Muthoni, 2022; Omolo, 2023). Collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector can facilitate information dissemination and enhance civic engagement (Mutuku, 2023). The application of institutional and pluralism theories emphasizes creating transparent structures and fostering inclusive political processes, ensuring that all youth have the opportunity to participate in a democratic and peaceful nomination process (Otieno, 2022; Kiptoo, 2022).

4.1.4 Resource Constraints

Resource constraints present significant challenges for youth candidates in Homa Bay County, hindering their ability to mobilize the financial, human, and material resources necessary to run effective nomination campaigns.

Poverty and inequality, coupled with high unemployment, limit the capacity of young aspirants to compete on an equal footing with well-funded incumbents (Oral interview with a household head in Sindo, 23/3/2024). The unequal distribution of resources further exacerbates this issue, leaving youth from disadvantaged backgrounds marginalized in the political process (Oral interview with a youth leader in Homa Bay town, 26/3/2024). Resource constraints also increase vulnerabilities to corruption, with candidates from poorer backgrounds resorting to illicit practices like vote-buying to fund their campaigns, undermining electoral integrity (Wanjiku, 2022). The lack of financial resources perpetuates youth disenfranchisement, particularly in rural areas where political power is concentrated in urban centers (Mumo, 2022). To address these challenges, the study advocates for transparency in campaign financing, including clear guidelines and oversight to level the playing field for all candidates (Ochieng, 2023). Additionally, capacity-building initiatives such as training and mentorship programs can help young politicians mobilize and manage resources effectively (Nduku, 2023). Leveraging institutional and pluralism theories, the study emphasizes creating an inclusive political environment through strategic partnerships and equitable resource distribution (Kamau, 2023; Makori, 2022).

4.1.5 Interference and Manipulation

Interference and manipulation in Homa Bay County pose significant challenges to the integrity and fairness of the nomination process. Political elites and party leaders often manipulate the process to favor certain candidates, sidelining youth aspirants and undermining democracy (Oral interview with an IEBC official in Karachuonyo, 24/3/2024). This is driven by powerful incumbents who use coercion, bribery, and intimidation to secure their electoral victories, perpetuating cycles of corruption and exclusion (Oral interview with an NCIC official in Homa Bay town, 2024). The culture of patronage and clientelism in the region exacerbates this issue, with elites controlling key institutions, further marginalizing youth candidates who lack resources and networks (Mumo, 2022). The lack of transparency in the electoral process fosters manipulation, including vote-buying and intimidation, which erodes public trust and political engagement among young people (Ochieng, 2023). This manipulation also contributes to a culture of corruption, where aspiring politicians feel pressured to compromise their integrity (Oral interview with a religious leader in Ndhiwa, 2024). To combat these issues, strengthening electoral institutions and promoting transparency through civic education and media freedom are crucial (Nduku, 2023; Ombaka, 2022). Institutional and pluralism theories underscore the importance of regulatory frameworks and inclusive representation to reduce manipulation and foster a more democratic political system in Homa Bay County.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study reveals significant challenges to peaceful nominations in Homa Bay County, highlighting key issues including political violence, limited youth representation, restricted access to information, resource constraints, and interference in the electoral process. Political violence, driven by socio-economic inequalities and ethnic tensions, discourages active participation and perpetuates instability. Youth representation remains limited despite young people comprising a large portion of the population, leading to disenfranchisement and distrust in political processes. Inadequate access to information further hampers youth participation, particularly in rural areas, while resource constraints limit young candidates' ability to compete effectively. Finally, interference and manipulation by political elites undermine the fairness of the nomination process, maintaining cycles of patronage and corruption. Institutionalism and pluralism theories provide essential frameworks to understand these issues, underscoring the need for structural reforms and inclusive representation. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering a democratic political environment that promotes youth participation and reduces barriers to peaceful nominations. By promoting transparency, inclusivity, and equitable resource distribution, the county can build a more resilient and participatory political landscape that empowers marginalized groups, especially the youth, to participate meaningfully in the nomination process.

5.2 Recommendations

To promote peaceful nominations, the study recommends strengthening electoral institutions in Homa Bay County through enhanced transparency and accountability measures, addressing political violence by fostering socio-economic development and dialogue initiatives to mitigate underlying grievances. To increase youth representation, legislative reforms, such as youth quotas or reserved seats, should be implemented, while political parties and civil society organizations could create structured pathways for youth participation through youth wings and mentorship programs. Enhancing access to information in rural areas is essential; thus, establishing community information centers, mobile libraries, and media literacy programs can empower youth to make informed political decisions. To alleviate resource constraints, campaign financing guidelines should be clarified, and capacity-building programs for

young politicians should be prioritized. Lastly, countering interference and manipulation necessitates robust regulatory frameworks, civic education, and promoting media freedom.

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