

Electoral Mobilisation Strategies and Electoral Conflict in Emerging Democracies: The Case of Kenya's Multi-Party Political Era

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ABSTRACT : Kenya's return to multiparty politics in 1991 opened electoral competition without eliminating the high distributive stakes attached to control of the state. Since then, political actors have repeatedly altered the means through which they organise voters, construct political identities, distribute resources, communicate claims, and contest electoral outcomes. This article examines those changes across Kenya's general elections from 1992 to 2022, using 1991 as the institutional starting point. It develops the concept of mobilisation technologies to describe the organisational and communicative mechanisms through which political actors convert social identities, material resources, institutional opportunities, and information into coordinated political action. The study uses a desk-based qualitative design drawing on official commissions of inquiry, electoral and judicial records, election-observation reports, human-rights documentation, institutional reports, peer-reviewed scholarship, and research on digital political communication. Through longitudinal process tracing and thematic analysis, the article examines the relationship between political incentives, ethnic and regional coordination, patronage, coercion, institutional reform, populist rhetoric, and digital communication. It argues that Kenya's trajectory is best understood as adaptive continuity rather than either institutional stasis or linear democratic consolidation. Constitutional reform, devolution, judicial oversight, and improvements in electoral administration have produced genuine constraints on political competition and contributed to the reduction of large-scale electoral violence. Yet political actors have repeatedly adapted older organisational logics to new institutional environments. Ethnicity has remained an important coordination mechanism without being a complete explanation of voter behaviour; patronage has been redistributed rather than eliminated; and digital platforms have expanded political communication without replacing local brokerage, physical campaigning, or conventional media. The article concludes that durable electoral peace depends not on suppressing political mobilisation but on altering the incentives under which mobilisation occurs, so that peaceful competition, institutional accountability, political inclusion, and credible dispute resolution become more rewarding than exclusionary and coercive strategies.

KEYWORDS : *Electoral Conflict, Mobilization; Political Clientelism; Political Patronage; Ethnic Politics; Kenyan Politics*

I. INTRODUCTION

Kenya's return to multiparty politics in 1991 created a political contradiction that has remained central to the country's democratic development. Political competition became more open, but the material and symbolic value of controlling the national state remained exceptionally high. Elections were therefore not merely mechanisms for selecting officeholders. They became contests over access to public resources, representation, security, recognition, and the distribution of political opportunity. The resulting political environment encouraged parties and candidates to mobilise through combinations of ethnicity, regional networks, patronage, political brokerage, campaign rhetoric, media, and, increasingly, digital platforms.

The history of electoral conflict since the early 1990s nevertheless cannot be reduced to a story of ethnic voting or recurring violence. Kenya has experienced intense electoral competition without violence, most notably in 2002, 2013, and 2022, alongside elections associated with severe conflict, particularly 2007. Institutional reforms have also mattered. The 2010 Constitution altered the distribution of political authority; devolution created new centres of power; the courts became more consequential in electoral disputes; and the electoral administration acquired new technological and procedural capacities. These developments complicate interpretations that portray Kenyan democracy as merely reproducing an unchanged political order.

This article asks how electoral mobilisation in Kenya has adapted to these changing political and institutional conditions and how those adaptations have affected the risk and character of electoral conflict. The central argument is that political mobilisation has undergone substantial transformation, but transformation has

occurred through layering rather than replacement. Older mechanisms—ethnic and regional coordination, patronage, local brokerage, personalised leadership, and the strategic distribution of resources—have not disappeared. They have been combined with new institutional arrangements, populist narratives, judicial strategies, professional campaign techniques, and digital communication. Political actors therefore adapt to reforms rather than simply resisting them.

The article advances the concept of mobilisation technologies to capture this process. A mobilisation technology is an organisational or communicative mechanism through which political actors convert resources, identities, relationships, information, or institutional opportunities into coordinated political action. Ethnicity can function as a mobilisation technology because it provides networks and expectations of collective representation. Patronage can function as one because material benefits can organise political loyalty. Coercion can function as one when threats or violence are used to constrain political choice. Digital platforms can function as mobilisation technologies when political actors incorporate them into persuasion, amplification, coordination, targeting, or counter-mobilisation.

The concept is deliberately broader than digital technology. It allows political mobilisation to be analysed as a changing repertoire rather than a succession of isolated innovations. It also avoids technological determinism. A platform does not produce a political outcome independently of the institutions, actors, audiences, incentives, and social identities within which it operates. The same infrastructure can facilitate propaganda and counter-speech, political participation and harassment, misinformation and fact-checking. What matters is how political actors embed communicative technologies within wider systems of organisation.

The argument proceeds in five steps. First, it develops the theoretical relationship among clientelism, ethnicity, political incentives, and information. Second, it explains the desk-based qualitative methodology and the use of longitudinal process tracing. Third, it traces the changing repertoire of mobilisation from the restoration of multiparty politics through the crisis of 2007–2008. Fourth, it examines the effects of constitutional reform, devolution, electoral institutionalisation, populist economic rhetoric, and digital politics on later elections. Finally, it develops a composite explanation of why electoral conflict has declined in its most violent forms while political competition remains highly intensive.

The study employs a desk-based qualitative research design. It does not present original interview data or a survey dataset. Instead, it reconstructs the evolution of electoral mobilization through systematic analysis of documentary and scholarly evidence covering Kenya's multiparty period from 1991 to 2022. The documentary corpus includes official commissions of inquiry, electoral and judicial records, election-observation reports, human-rights reports, constitutional and government documents, institutional research, peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and authenticated research on digital political communication.

II. CLIENTELISM AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ELECTORAL COMPETITION

Clientelism provides one of the most useful starting points for understanding electoral mobilisation in contexts where state resources and political office are closely connected. Lemarchand (1972) demonstrated the analytical importance of competing solidarities in African political systems, while van de Walle (2007) showed how clientelistic practices have evolved rather than simply disappeared with democratisation. In electoral systems characterised by strong executive authority and high distributive stakes, political leaders may use public and private resources to construct networks of support. Such relationships can involve employment, contracts, access to services, political appointments, protection, or expectations of future benefits.

Kenya's experience demonstrates why patronage should not be treated as a static exchange between an individual politician and an individual voter. Political mobilisation operates through layered networks. National leaders rely on regional brokers, governors, members of parliament, party officials, community leaders, business interests, and local organisers. These actors mediate access to political resources and translate national competition into local expectations. The result is a political economy in which elections can become contests over the anticipated distribution of resources rather than simply competing policy programmes.

This does not mean that Kenyan voters are passive recipients of patronage. Voters can strategically accept benefits while supporting different candidates, punish incumbents for unmet expectations, or use ethnic and regional identities selectively. The analytical point is instead that the distribution of political resources changes the incentives surrounding electoral competition. Where the presidency or another powerful office controls substantial distributive resources, losing an election can be perceived as materially consequential for political networks and communities. Such high stakes can intensify mobilisation and make electoral defeat harder to accept.

The 2007–2008 crisis illustrated the dangers of this structure. Mueller (2008) links the crisis to the political economy of competition, while the Kriegler and Waki inquiries documented institutional failures, disputed electoral processes, and the violence that followed. The lesson is not that patronage mechanically produces violence. Rather, high-stakes competition creates conditions in which other mechanisms—identity, misinformation, organisational capacity, elite rhetoric, and coercion—can become particularly consequential.

III. ETHNICITY AS AN ORGANISATIONAL MECHANISM

Ethnicity has occupied a central place in scholarship on Kenyan politics, but its analytical use requires care. Posner (2005) shows that political institutions can shape the salience of ethnic identities by altering the scale at which individuals calculate political interests. Berman, Eyoh, and Kymlicka (2004) similarly emphasise that ethnicity is politically constructed and embedded in institutional and economic relationships. Kenya's electoral history supports this relational interpretation. Ethnic identities provide political actors with pre-existing networks, historical narratives, leadership structures, and expectations of representation, but voters do not respond to them uniformly.

The concept of ethnic arithmetic is useful because it describes the strategic calculation of coalition size and geographic distribution. Presidential elections require broad coalitions, and political entrepreneurs frequently attempt to assemble alliances across several communities. Lynch (2011, 2014) demonstrates how ethnic and regional identities have been incorporated into changing political alliances rather than functioning as fixed party identities. The Jubilee coalition, for example, showed that previously antagonistic political communities could be reorganised within a new electoral alliance.

Ethnicity therefore operates simultaneously as identity, organisational infrastructure, and political language. It can provide a shorthand for representation and security, but it can also be challenged by socioeconomic narratives, generational identities, policy preferences, and perceptions of government performance. The 2022 election is especially important in this respect because the Hustler–Dynasty narrative attempted to construct a cross-ethnic socioeconomic identity while still operating through a presidential coalition system in which regional and ethnic mobilisation remained important.

Information and the Transformation of Political Mobilisation

Information infrastructures have always shaped political competition. Radio, newspapers, television, rallies, political meetings, and interpersonal networks determine which political claims become visible and how quickly they circulate. Howard (2010) argues that information technologies can reshape political organisation and the relationship between citizens and political institutions. In Kenya, the digital transition did not replace conventional political communication; it expanded the repertoire available to political actors.

The significance of digital platforms lies partly in speed and scale. A political claim can move from a campaign event to television, Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, or other platforms within minutes. The distinction between producer and consumer also becomes less stable because citizens can reproduce political content themselves. This creates opportunities for participation and counter-speech but also for misinformation, harassment, manipulation, and coordinated influence.

Research on Kenya's 2017 and 2022 elections provides evidence of cyber propaganda and platform-related disinformation. Maweu (2020) documents the use of cyber propaganda and disinformation around the 2017 election. Madung and Obilo (2021) and Madung (2022a, 2022b), together with Mozilla Foundation (2022), document disinformation-for-hire, political influence operations, and problematic content on Twitter and TikTok during the 2022 electoral environment. These findings demonstrate the importance of digital communication but do not establish that online content determines electoral outcomes. The stronger conclusion is that digital platforms change the conditions under which political information is produced, circulated, contested, and regulated.

Electoral Mobilisation and Conflict, 1991–2007

The restoration of multiparty politics transformed Kenya's electoral environment without immediately transforming the political economy inherited from the one-party period. Political competition expanded, but the presidency retained substantial distributive and symbolic power. Branch and Cheeseman (2009) describe the resulting democratisation dilemma in terms of institutional weakness, political incentives, and state capacity. The early multiparty elections demonstrated that political liberalisation could coexist with intense ethnic and regional competition.

The 1992 and 1997 elections were characterised by the importance of ethnic and regional coalition-building. Political parties often lacked deep ideological organisation, and electoral competition was strongly structured around personalities, communities, and access to state resources. The use of identity did not mean that every voter simply followed an ethnic leader. Rather, political entrepreneurs mobilised existing networks and narratives to reduce the organisational costs of building electoral coalitions.

The 2002 election provides an important counterexample to any deterministic theory of electoral violence. The National Rainbow Coalition defeated the incumbent KANU government and power changed hands without the large-scale violence seen in later elections. This demonstrates that competitive politics does not inherently produce conflict. Political institutions, coalition structures, elite incentives, and expectations about the legitimacy of the result can alter the consequences of electoral competition.

The stakes became particularly dangerous in 2007. The presidential contest between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga was exceptionally close and was followed by allegations concerning the counting and declaration of results. The Independent Review Commission documented serious weaknesses in electoral administration and concluded that the credibility of the presidential result could not be established with sufficient confidence. The Waki Commission and human-rights investigations documented extensive post-election violence, including killings, displacement, sexual violence, and other abuses.

The crisis demonstrates how different mobilisation mechanisms can interact. Political competition was structured by ethnic and regional alliances; patronage increased the perceived value of victory; disputed electoral administration weakened trust in formal institutions; and political rhetoric contributed to perceptions of threat and exclusion. In some areas, organised groups and political actors became involved in violence. Kagwanja (2009) and Mueller (2008) demonstrate how political competition, ethno-nationalism, and informalised violence became intertwined.

The lesson of 2007–2008 is therefore not that ethnicity caused violence in isolation. Violence emerged from the interaction of high political stakes, institutional failure, political mobilisation, historical grievances, elite strategies, and weak mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes. The crisis also exposed a fundamental vulnerability in the pre-2010 political system: when electoral institutions failed to establish credible results, there were insufficiently trusted mechanisms through which competing political claims could be reconciled.

Institutional Reform and the Reconfiguration of Political Competition

The post-2007 reform settlement changed the institutional environment in which mobilisation occurred. The 2010 Constitution redistributed authority, strengthened rights protections, created county governments, and introduced a more elaborate system of checks and balances (Republic of Kenya, 2010). The creation of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission and the strengthening of judicial review altered the architecture of electoral administration and dispute resolution.

Devolution was particularly consequential. Rather than merely moving administrative functions away from Nairobi, it created elected county governments with political resources and public legitimacy. Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2016) argue that devolution produced stronger countervailing power against the centre and gave governors incentives to defend county interests. D'Arcy and Cornell (2016), however, show that decentralisation did not eliminate patronage and corruption. Political competition and rent-seeking could be reproduced at county level.

These findings are complementary. Institutional reform can simultaneously strengthen accountability and create new arenas for political competition. Devolution reduced the absolute concentration of political authority at the centre while preserving the importance of political control over public resources. This changed the geography of patronage without eliminating the underlying political incentive.

The 2013 election was an important test of the new order. The election remained highly competitive and ethnoregionally organised, but large-scale post-election violence did not recur. Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2014) identify several factors that contributed to the outcome, including political realignment, the new constitutional structure, and a strong peace narrative. The election therefore demonstrates that institutional reform can alter political behaviour even when underlying identities remain relevant.

The 2017 election provided a different institutional test. The Supreme Court annulled the presidential election and ordered a fresh election after finding that the election had not been conducted in accordance with the Constitution and applicable law. The decision was historically significant because it demonstrated that judicial institutions could impose a meaningful remedy in a presidential electoral dispute (Supreme Court of Kenya, 2017). It also revealed the vulnerability of electoral legitimacy when procedures, technology, and institutional communication are contested.

The significance of the 2017 case lies in the interaction between technological administration and political trust. Electoral technology can increase transparency, but it can also create new objects of contestation. When voters and political actors do not trust the institutions operating the technology, technical complexity may intensify rather than resolve disputes. Maweu (2020) further demonstrates that the election occurred within a growing digital environment in which cyber propaganda and disinformation complicated the information landscape.

Populism, Economic Grievance, and Hybrid Mobilisation

The political environment between 2018 and 2022 demonstrated another form of adaptation. The 2018 political rapprochement between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga altered the configuration of national alliances and contributed to the Building Bridges Initiative. William Ruto, previously associated with the governing coalition, subsequently developed a political strategy centred on the distinction between 'hustlers' and 'dynasties'. The new vocabulary reframed political competition around economic marginalisation and opposition to established political families.

Karanja (2022) provides empirical evidence that the Hustler–Dynasty rhetoric resonated with particular social and economic groups. The study should not be treated as nationally representative evidence of electoral causation, but it demonstrates that the frame had measurable political salience. Lockwood (2023) adds an important corrective to explanations that interpret the 2022 election simply as the victory of populism. His ethnographic analysis identifies an anti-Jubilee backlash and economic dissatisfaction as important elements of the political realignment, particularly in central Kenya.

The 2022 campaign therefore illustrates how political identities can be re-semantised without disappearing. The ‘hustler’ identity attempted to create a broad socioeconomic category that could cross ethnic boundaries. Yet the campaign still depended upon coalition-building across regions and communities. The new language did not replace older forms of organisation; it supplemented them.

This is a recurring pattern in Kenya’s electoral history. Political actors innovate rhetorically when existing identities or alliances become less effective, but innovation occurs within institutional and social structures inherited from earlier periods. Economic grievance can coexist with ethnic coalition-building. Populism can coexist with patronage. National political narratives can coexist with local brokerage. The result is hybrid mobilisation rather than political rupture.

Digital Politics and the Changing Information Environment

Digital platforms became increasingly important to the 2017 and 2022 elections, but their significance should be understood as part of a broader communication ecosystem. Political actors continued to use rallies, television, radio, newspapers, party organisations, local leaders, and face-to-face networks. Digital platforms added new channels through which political claims could be amplified and contested.

The digital environment altered three features of mobilisation. First, it increased speed: political claims could spread nationally before conventional media or electoral institutions responded. Second, it increased scale: a message produced by a relatively small network could reach large audiences through platform recommendation and user sharing. Third, it increased informational opacity: citizens could find it difficult to distinguish official political communication, partisan advocacy, satire, manipulated material, and coordinated disinformation.

Research by Madung and Obilo (2021) documented disinformation-for-hire in Kenya, while Madung (2022a) examined foreign groups using Twitter to influence Kenyan political discourse. Madung (2022b) documented problematic political content on TikTok ahead of the 2022 election, including hate speech, incitement, and disinformation. Mozilla Foundation (2022) subsequently reported shortcomings by major platforms in addressing misinformation during and after the election.

These findings establish an important transformation in political communication, but they do not justify technological determinism. The existence of misinformation does not demonstrate that misinformation changed the election result. High engagement does not necessarily equal persuasion, and platform visibility does not reveal whether audiences accepted or rejected a message. The stronger argument is that digital platforms alter the informational conditions of competition. They make it easier for political narratives to circulate rapidly, harder for institutions to control the information environment, and more difficult to distinguish centralised campaigning from distributed partisan activity.

Digital mobilisation can therefore be simultaneously democratising and exclusionary. It lowers barriers to political expression and enables citizens to produce and circulate information. At the same time, unequal access to resources, coordinated influence operations, harassment, and algorithmic amplification can privilege particular actors. The regulatory problem is consequently not simply to suppress misinformation but to establish greater transparency and accountability around political advertising, platform governance, campaign finance, and access to relevant research data.

The 2022 Election and Institutional Resilience

The 2022 election is critical because it complicates both pessimistic and technological interpretations of Kenyan electoral politics. The election was highly contested, but it took place without the large-scale violence associated with 2007–2008. European Union observers reported a generally peaceful environment, while the Carter Center documented an election in which institutions operated under intense scrutiny. The presidential result was challenged in court, but the Supreme Court upheld the election after reviewing the petitions (Carter Center, 2023; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2022; Supreme Court of Kenya, 2022).

The significance of 2022 is therefore not that electoral conflict disappeared. Political disagreement remained intense, the electoral commission faced public scrutiny, and competing narratives about the legitimacy of the process circulated widely. What changed was the capacity of institutions and political actors to contain disagreement within constitutional mechanisms. This is a substantive democratic development.

The election also demonstrates why the article’s argument should not be framed as a simple story of elite adaptation defeating reform. Institutional adaptation can produce genuine constraints. Courts can intervene,

electoral bodies can improve procedures, civil society can monitor elections, and political actors can accept judicially determined outcomes even when they remain dissatisfied. Democratic institutions are not merely symbolic. Their effectiveness is uneven, but their presence can alter the costs and expected consequences of political strategies.

The post-election launch of the Financial Inclusion Fund in November 2022 should also be treated carefully. It cannot be presented as a campaign instrument in the August election because it was launched after polling. It is more appropriately understood as a post-election policy expression of the economic vocabulary associated with the Kenya Kwanza campaign. Whether such programmes constitute patronage requires evidence concerning targeting, conditionality, political networks, and implementation; the existence of a digitally administered benefit does not by itself establish clientelism.

IV. DISCUSSION: ADAPTIVE CONTINUITY RATHER THAN POLITICAL STASIS

The longitudinal evidence points to a pattern that can be described as adaptive continuity. Kenya has changed substantially since 1991, but political mobilisation has changed with it. Political actors have repeatedly recombined older resources with new institutional and communicative opportunities. The relevant continuity is therefore not institutional sameness. It is the persistence of high political stakes and the organisational usefulness of social networks within a changing political system.

Three forms of continuity are especially visible. First, control over public authority remains highly valuable. The presidency continues to carry substantial symbolic and distributive importance, even after devolution. Second, identity remains organisationally useful. Ethnicity and region continue to shape political coalitions, although they coexist with socioeconomic and generational identities. Third, political brokerage remains important. National campaigns still depend on local organisers, community leaders, party structures, and networks that connect national messages to local constituencies.

Three forms of change are equally important. First, political authority has become more dispersed because of devolution and stronger institutional checks. Second, judicial and electoral institutions have become more consequential in managing disputes. Third, political communication has become increasingly hybrid, combining conventional media and physical mobilisation with digital platforms.

These changes matter because they alter the incentives attached to conflict. If political losers have credible legal avenues through which to challenge results, the expected benefits of extra-institutional mobilisation decline. If county governments provide alternative sites of political power, the presidency becomes less monopolistic even if it remains highly consequential. If political actors can build cross-ethnic coalitions through socioeconomic narratives, identity competition may become less exclusively communal. None of these mechanisms guarantees peace, but together they can shift the political equilibrium.

The concept of mobilisation technologies captures this dynamic. Mobilisation technologies should be understood as layered and relational rather than sequential. Ethnic networks can carry digital messages. Digital platforms can reinforce local political brokers. Patronage can be discussed through populist economic narratives. Courts can become objects of political communication. Electoral technology can become both an administrative tool and a political symbol. The same political system can therefore contain several mobilisation technologies operating simultaneously.

This approach also helps explain why the decline of large-scale electoral violence does not mean the disappearance of political conflict. Conflict can move into institutional, rhetorical, informational, and legal arenas. Political actors may challenge results in court, contest electoral technology, circulate competing narratives, mobilise supporters online, or frame opponents as threats to economic and political inclusion. These forms of contestation are not equivalent to physical violence, and democratic systems should not treat disagreement itself as a pathology. The central issue is whether institutions can channel conflict into procedures that protect political competition without allowing coercion and exclusion to become effective substitutes for political participation.

V. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The article makes three principal theoretical contributions. First, it connects the literature on clientelism and ethnic politics with the emerging literature on digital political communication. Political mobilisation should not be divided into 'traditional' and 'digital' systems. Digital communication operates within existing political economies and social networks. Understanding online political influence therefore requires attention to the offline institutions and relationships that determine who can produce, amplify, and benefit from political narratives.

Second, the article proposes adaptive continuity as an alternative to deterministic accounts of institutional failure. Reform does not automatically transform political incentives, but neither is reform necessarily cosmetic. Political actors adapt to institutional changes, while institutions constrain some strategies and enable others. The outcome is an evolving political field in which old and new practices coexist.

Third, the article redefines mobilisation technologies as mechanisms of coordination rather than technologies in the narrow digital sense. This enables comparative analysis across different periods and political settings. The concept can encompass patronage networks, ethnic organisation, coercive groups, political parties, mass media, judicial processes, and digital platforms while maintaining attention to the specific mechanisms through which each converts resources or information into political action.

Policy Implications

The findings suggest several priorities for strengthening electoral peace and democratic accountability. Electoral institutions require continued investment in independence, transparent procedures, public communication, results management, and accessible dispute-resolution mechanisms. The 2017 and 2022 experiences show that credibility depends not only on technical competence but also on the public's ability to understand and trust institutional processes.

Devolution requires equally sustained attention. County governments have reduced the concentration of authority at the centre, but county-level patronage and corruption can reproduce some of the same incentives that previously operated nationally. Transparent procurement, public participation, auditing, and accessible accountability mechanisms are therefore important components of conflict prevention.

Digital campaign regulation should prioritise transparency rather than broad political censorship. Requirements concerning political advertising, campaign sponsorship, influencer relationships, platform accountability, and researcher access to relevant data can help citizens identify the interests behind political communication. Regulation should also protect legitimate political expression and avoid giving governments excessive authority over contested speech.

Civic education should extend beyond voter registration and polling procedures. Citizens increasingly navigate information environments containing campaign communication, journalism, satire, manipulated media, and user-generated content. Democratic resilience therefore requires information literacy and the capacity to evaluate political claims critically.

Political finance also requires broader scrutiny. Campaign influence increasingly operates through consultants, advertising, digital services, influencers, and informal networks as well as formal party structures. Transparency regimes that focus only on conventional campaign expenditure may therefore fail to capture important forms of political influence.

Finally, peacebuilding should be continuous. The relatively peaceful elections of 2013 and 2022 demonstrate that prevention and institutional learning can matter. Electoral peace should not be treated as an emergency project activated immediately before polling. It should be embedded in ordinary governance, political-party development, civic education, judicial capacity, electoral administration, and digital-platform accountability.

Limitations and Future Research

The article is limited by its desk-based design and cannot establish the causal effect of individual campaign messages on voter behaviour. It also relies on publicly available evidence, which means that private campaign strategies and proprietary platform data are often inaccessible. Claims about microtargeting, sentiment analysis, psychographic profiling, and algorithmic influence should therefore be treated cautiously unless supported by direct evidence.

Future research could test the mobilisation-technologies framework using systematic comparative data from the 2013, 2017, and 2022 elections. Social-media datasets could be combined with constituency-level electoral results, campaign expenditure, survey evidence, and qualitative interviews to examine whether particular narratives travel across ethnic and socioeconomic groups and whether online exposure is associated with changes in institutional trust.

Comparative county-level research could also examine whether devolution has changed the relationship between patronage, identity, and conflict. A further avenue concerns digital misinformation: rather than asking whether false information directly changes votes, research could examine whether repeated exposure to contradictory electoral claims reduces confidence in electoral institutions or increases resistance to official results.

VI. CONCLUSION

Kenya's electoral history from the restoration of multiparty politics in 1991 to the 2022 election demonstrates that political mobilisation is neither static nor endlessly transformative. Political actors have repeatedly adapted their strategies to changes in institutions, political alliances, communication technologies, and voter concerns. Ethnicity, patronage, and local brokerage remain relevant, but they operate within a substantially different institutional environment from that of the early multiparty period.

The most important change has been the development of institutional mechanisms capable of containing some of the conflicts that once escaped institutional control. Constitutional reform, devolution, judicial review, electoral administration, civil-society monitoring, and political learning have contributed to a

political environment in which electoral disputes can more often be managed without large-scale violence. The 2013 and 2022 elections are particularly important evidence of this change.

At the same time, institutional progress has not eliminated the incentives that make elections highly consequential. Political office continues to carry substantial distributive value; social identities remain useful for political organisation; and new communication technologies create opportunities for both democratic participation and manipulation. The resulting political system is best understood as one of adaptive continuity. Political actors change their methods because the environment changes, while older organisational resources remain available for recombination.

This conclusion also cautions against treating digital politics as either democratic salvation or technological domination. Digital platforms have expanded the speed, reach, and complexity of political communication, but they have not replaced the institutions and social networks through which Kenyan politics is organised. The central democratic challenge is therefore not to stop mobilisation. Mobilisation is indispensable to democracy. The challenge is to ensure that political mobilisation occurs within an environment in which peaceful competition, accountable institutions, political inclusion, and credible dispute resolution offer greater returns than coercion, exclusion, and manipulation.

Kenya's experience ultimately demonstrates that electoral peace is produced not by the disappearance of political conflict but by the increasing capacity of institutions and citizens to contain and channel it. The durability of that progress will depend on whether future reforms continue to reduce the perceived existential stakes of political defeat, strengthen the credibility of electoral institutions, widen meaningful political inclusion, and ensure that new communication technologies deepen democratic participation rather than reproduce older inequalities through more sophisticated means.

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