DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF KENYA, 2007 - 2012

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, elections have become one of the most accepted ways of demonstrating democracy. The importance of a good electoral system cannot be underestimated in Africa where elections are more often than not reported to be marred by irregularities. A new constitution, passed in a peaceful referendum in August 2010, aims to fortify democracy and temper zero-sum competition for the presidency by checking executive powers. As of now, the new Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) enjoys public trust. Judicial reform, including the appointment of a respected new Chief Justice, also augurs well for a more robust response to electoral fraud and disputes. Despite the reforms, many structural conflict drivers – continuing reliance on ethnicity, competition for land and resources as well as poverty and youth unemployment – underlying the 2007-2008 violence remain unresolved and may be cynically used by politicians to whip up support. The study explored maximalist and minimalist concepts that are set out as being at opposite ends of the spectrum; maximalists defining democracy as a regime that seeks to protect and promote human rights that are understood broadly to encompass individual, civil, social, economic and political rights whereas minimalist conceptions are basically procedural, formal and institutional.

The research was conducted by the use of interview and observations. The study employed a consultative approach to this review to ensure interactive engagement with various stakeholders. The methodology consisted of literature review of relevant documents produced by relevant organizations, scholars, academia, development partners, media organizations; interviews, observations and in-country consultations with relevant institutions. The findings were analyzed on a desk review basis from where conclusions and recommendations were drawn. The study argues that the realization of the democratic promises that underpinned the struggle for pluralistic politics are yet to be achieved; it is on this premise that this study critically observes the root causes of undemocratic general elections and proposes that adopting the basic part of institutionalization, participation, transparency, and accountability are plausible way forward to sustainable democratic election processes. It is within these broad democracy discourses and progress made thus far that the debate about the various types of electoral systems and their implications and/or impact on multiparty democratic governance becomes central and timely. All said and done, democratic consolidation is not dependent solely upon elections and the nature of electoral system(s) in operation given that various other ingredients are crucial.