

Ethnic dimension in electoral violence: case study of Kenya from 1992-2007

Abstract:

Although democracy made a historical leap forward in Africa the last few years, many daunting challenges and obstacle are still threatening its consolidation. These impediments include, inter alia, violence and ethnic conflicts. Hence ethnic conflicts and the encompassing civil wars are among Africa's most savior societal crises. Since the 1990s violence and conflicts have become endemic in Africa. This fact is evident in the recent massacre in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra leon, Liberia, Somalia and Algeria, among others. In Kenya the governments unwillingness to expand the democratic space for political participation is being challenged by several prodemocracy movement though political actions and citizens campaigns at various levels. The wave of democratic political change appears to have led to the identification of democracy in terms of multi-party politics. This drive towards western liberal democracy has engendered the polarization of particularistic groupings as parties crystallize, mostly on the basis of ethnic and regional interests rather than common ideology or political principles. Ethnic conflicts in Kenya appear to be the inevitable consequences of the unresolved political and economic contradiction behind apparently partisan political system. This system seems to place a higher premium on ideological or sectional interests at the expense of national interests. The "politics of the belly" syndrome appears to have been perfected by the Kenyan political elite. Political conflicts generally radiate around the imperative of accumulation and the problem of legitimization. This study shows the correlation between governance, politics, ethnicity and violence in Kenya. There has been an upsurge in cases of conflicts and violence In Kenya since the re-introduction of political pluralism in 1991. These have taken the form student protests, labour unrest, ethnic violence, banditry and cattle rustling. Such violence has caused death, destruction of property, dislocation of populations and has added lawlessness to statehood in Kenya. Such violence poses a threat to the proper resolution of the conflict between citizenship and statehood and among the diverse ethnic groups in the country. The study re-assesses the presupposition of violence, ethnicity and governance and it guided by the assumption that of violence to be political, there must be an intention to change the political process. Thus when the state feels threatened and resort to aggression to protect itself this amount to the state violence.