The role of political parties in the transition to democracy in Kenya, 1990-2002

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Abstract:
The main objective of the study is to assess the role of political parties in the transition to democracy in Kenya, 1990 - 2002. In pursuit of this objective, the research answered the following questions: To what extent have political parties promoted meaningful and extensive competition for state power? How have they enhanced political participation and sufficient civil and political liberties? It is hypothesised that the deepening of democracy and the widening of the democratic space is a direct consequence of the activities of political parties. The implication is that Political parties have a role to play in the transition to democracy. Political parties are treated as independent variable, while democracy as a dependent variable. The study found that political parties to some degree enhanced political freedom, participation and inclusiveness in the democratic transition in Kenya. Their contribution to constitutional reforms from 1990 - 2002 led to improved and widened political space, minimal voter education, nomination and selection of candidates during the 1992, 1997 and 2002 general elections, enhanced registration of many political parties, NGO's, CBOs, women organisations and welfare associations. Furthermore, political parties promoted media freedom and women empowerment. Never the less, they experienced serious obstacles that included lack of institutional framework, limited financial resources, ethnic cleavages and personality cults. It is the recommendation of this research that political parties should provide good leadership to inspire the people; the leaders should be honest, transparent, accountable and committed to the ideals of democracy. On the other hand, the government should provide a conducive environment for political parties to actively engage in political processes. It should avail an impartial free press in order to raise political awareness among the citizens. Furthermore, the government should provide adequate funding to all registered political parties. Voter education should be fully funded by the government.