

Contestation over Political Space: The State and Demobilisation of Party Politics in Kenya

Abstract:

Appraises political liberalization and subsequent contestation over political space in Kenya. The discussion centres on how, from the colonial period, elite politics have precluded organization and crystallization of popular democracy. The paper specifically examines the historicity of political factionalism and attendant decline of multi-partyism. It also looks at the socio-economic conditions responsible for the weakening of opposition politics. From the 1980s, interest in the study of practice of politics in Africa has centred around interrelations between Africa's weak civil society, neo-patrimonialism, and the continent's development problems. Neo-liberalism has dominated in these studies a majority of which tend to emphasize that neo-patrimonialism and weak civil society, within a restricted socio-political pluralization, are responsible for Africa's economic and political problems. Since the beginning of the 1990s, several countries have implemented economic and political liberalization in different forms. The extent to which the unfolding reform corresponds to aspirations of the society is debatable however. It is apparent that economic and political liberalization has continually glossed over popular demands in the rush to reconstruct neo-liberal ideals of competitive politics and power of the markets.