ABSTRACT

Struggles to influence the balance of power and the distribution of economic resources in Kenya have a long history of violence: national and local, actual and threatened, physical and psychological. Somewhat controlled by sophisticated legal, administrative and political institutions and strongly tempered by a deep fund of intercommunity cooperation, violence has been kept in check, but remains persistent. The levels of violence vary from place to place and year to year, and seldom break out into full-scale clashes or war. Nonetheless, different forms of violence combine with politics to form a resilient chain that exerts powerful control over people's lives and resists straightforward policy prescriptions or easy practical resolutions. This case study uses a definition of political settlements to frame the inquiry (Parks and Cole 2010). This approach defines political settlements as the informal agreements that govern the formal negotiation and distribution of goods, rights and responsibilities within the state. The study aims to show one manifestation of how the political settlement in Kenya is upheld by a variety of interlinked forms of 'normal' violence, themselves linked to economic dependencies. Today's political settlement is founded in the new constitution of Kenya and structured by the new system of devolved government. We show how the informal rules of the political (un)settlement in operation at the most local level play a role in sustaining a violent political system.