

The Mirage of Issue-Based Politics in Africa. A Case Study of Kenya's Presidential Election Campaigns from 2013-2022

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ABSTRACT

Political analysts have often described elections in Africa as nothing but an ethnic census. However, the results of the 2022 Kenyan presidential elections showed members of the most populous ethnic group (Kikuyus) overwhelmingly vote against a member of their own ethnicity and sitting President. This raises the question: Is issue-based politics finally the main determinant of Kenyan presidential elections? Since the 2022 presidential elections is a fairly recent event, there is scant information on this supposedly new phenomenon. This study uses a combination of quantitative data, such as the outcome of the presidential elections and subsequent analysis from election observers and non-governmental agencies, and qualitative data, like opinion pieces from political scientists, politicians, academics, and the fourth estate. The research examines voting patterns of the largest ethnicities in Kenya for the past five elections in a bid to highlight any major changes in the voting patterns to justify claims of Kenyans embracing issue-based politics. The study reveals that although the Kikuyu voted against the candidate endorsed by one of their own in the 2022 presidential elections, what they were doing was voting against a candidate from an ethnicity they have always rejected. It confirms that although the results of the 2022 presidential elections seem to suggest otherwise, Kenya's electorate has a long way to go in terms of embracing issue-based politics and making it a reality.

INTRODUCTION

General elections in Kenya are held every five years in a highly emotive period, as it does with several African countries. The elections are preceded by long periods of campaigns characterized by promises from aspiring leaders in a bid to lure the electorate to vote along ethnic lines. However, many of these promises are never fulfilled as ethnicity and not meritocracy always has its way in Kenya's elections and politics in general. This study argues that although the 2022 general elections did not follow past trends, issue-based politics is still a pipe dream. The study focuses on the campaign and post-campaign periods and the ever-present cycle of high expectations and disappointment with each successive regime. Though focused on Kenya, the study is a reflection of African democracies.

The first part of the study analyzes the textbook realities of issue-based politics versus the ethnic polarization that dominates Kenya's political landscape, especially during the campaign period. The second part delves into the factors that inform political party formations, the main players, and the factors that draw political leaders in Kenya together. Part three looks at party manifestos as campaign promises vis-à-vis the performance of new regimes once they are in office.

Finally, the paper looks at voter behavior influenced by: poverty, illiteracy, and voter apathy that are key in shaping the African Politician's perception of the electorate. The recommendations in the paper focus on the

involvement of electoral bodies and civil society in addressing the challenges expressed in part three of this study through voter sensitization on the importance of healthy politics and good citizenry and how all these can be achieved during and through intentional voter registration as an ongoing process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before and during President Moi's era, Kenya's politics were distinctly shaped by patrimonialism (Kwatemba, 2008, p. 90). The theme persisted even after repealing Section 2A of Kenya's Constitution in 1991, which ushered in a new era of multipartyism. It was hoped the advent of democracy would herald a new wave of electoral freedom, which would curtail patrimonialism and shatter deep-seated despotism. Some argue that doing away with patrimonialism, despotism, and other social struggles would bring Kenyans closer to true democracy. Taking such a stance would, however, be missing the point because political divisions based on ethnicity is the main issue, at least in sub-Saharan African societies. Carey (2002, p. 58) argues that patronage and ethnicity played a major part in the formation of political parties since independence in Kenya.

Since it was the early days of multipartyism in Kenya, some political analysts played down the role of ethnicity and tribalism in Kenya's elections. Cowen & Kanyinga (1998, p. 133) stated that although communal politics did play a part in the election outcomes of 1997, they were a constituent part of something else. Two elections later, it became clear that ethnicity played a major role in Kenyan politics, with Bratton & Kimenyi (2008, p. 287) labelling them an "ethnic census." Kisaka & Nyadera (2019, p. 162) concur, averring that most communities tend to collate along homogenous language, culture, perceived ancestry, and territory and need to distinguish themselves and disparage each other. Community Aid International (2011, p. 24) points out that politicians often use tribalism to set previously peacefully existing communities against each other.

A Kenya Human Rights Commission (2018, p. 16) publication recounts how politicians have abused ethnic identity so much, it is impossible to have a discourse about politics in Kenya without mentioning ethnicity. Cowen and Kanyinga (2002, p. 169) noted that tribalism operated from above and below, with politicians and electors seeking power to gain territorial development. Gibson & Long (2009, p. 499) highlight how the leading presidential candidates chose running mates from the most populous tribes that did not field candidates to sway the swing votes.

Results of the 2022 elections showed that members of Kikuyu ethnicity went against the then President Uhuru, a Kikuyu, who had endorsed the candidature of Raila, of Luo ethnicity. They voted for Ruto, of Kalenjin ethnicity, leading to speculation that Kenya had finally liberated itself from the yoke of tribal elections and embraced issue-based politics. However, (Kwatemba, 2008, p. 108) contends that one should not be so hasty to jump to such conclusions because supposedly issue-based elections in Kenya is often laced with ethnicity as the driving factor. For instance in the 2007 elections, MacArthur (2008, p. 228) notes that members of the Luhya community denied supporting Raila based on ethnicity, but rather on equitable development and resource distribution of their region.

Moreover, Young (1976, pp. 12-13) cautions readers to understand that ethnic groups can and do change when circumstances call for it, and not all the ethnic attributes, such as common language, territory, and values, will be present across all ethnic groups. In a bid to explain how ethnicity affects politics, several schools of thought have emerged. Firstly, the primordialists (Teka, 2020, p. 196) contend that ethnic communities tend to coalesce among themselves and vote according to their instincts based on fixed ethnic identities assigned at birth. Kisaka & Nyadera (2019, p. 163) resuscitate a subset of that school of thought which fronts the notion that primordial tendencies only applied to the uneducated rural masses, not the educated voters. However, that concept has been disproved since evidence shows ethnicity transcends

educational modernization as the political elite continue to leverage ethnic affiliations even among highly educated populations.

Secondly, we have the instrumentalists, who posit that ethnicity only gains traction when there is competition over scarce resources. Young & Turner (1985, pp. 139-140) assert that a group of people only whip out the ethnicity card whenever a commodity is to be acquired, so they use it to gain political mileage or evade political marginalization or persecution. Berman (1998, p. 328) notes that since most people perceive proximity to power as a chance to gain political favors, this incentivizes individuals and ethnic groups to align themselves with political vehicles that enhance their chances of acquiring power and economic gain.

To constructivists, ethnic groups are simply a social construct that people can manipulate to gain political and economic advantages (Ajulu, 2002, p. 252). Members and non-members of the group, consciously and with premeditation, manipulate it to come up with a definition of a group for political purposes (Vine, 1997, p. 50).

Lastly, we have the situational school of thought, which mirrors instrumentalists' notions. However, Isajiw (1993, p. 3) differentiates the two by pointing out that under situational perspective, different groups will shift their definitions and alliances to ethnicity based on the promised reward. Proponents of the situational perspective view ethnicity as a malleable, volatile concept that keeps transforming depending on each situation.

From the foregoing schools of thought, one can clearly see each one play out in different situations, especially at the micro-level of the ethnic makeup. A brief examination of Kenya's voting patterns reveals they historically vote along tribal lines. That came to a head in the 2007 elections when Kagwanja & Southall (2009, p. 262) noted the "42 tribes against 1" rhetoric. As some political observers have noted, political communication and its derivative meanings have the ability to be more volatile than people imagine (Edelman, 1999, p. 82), but any political observer should grasp the contingent meanings the voters attach to the communication to determine or predict the actual consequences of the rhetoric.

Cantril (1942, p. 151) puts forth the reality that given a set of facts and encouraged to interrogate those facts, most voters only consider their self-interest as it relates to their democratic community to reach a political decision. As such, Kisaka & Nyadera (2019, p. 161) affirm that Kenyan politics is all about ethnicization of politics and politicization of ethnicity.

Realities of issues-based politics versus the ethnic polarization that dominates Kenya's political landscape during campaign period

It has been argued in some quarters that multiparty democracy premised on utilitarianism could be the cure for ethnicity in politics (Behr, 2022, p. 201) and usher in issue-based politics. A US task force thought the best way to achieve multiracial democracy was to build stronger, inclusive political networks among marginalized communities, and strengthening community organizations (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2022, pp. 6, 8, 21). As the then-president Kibaki unveiled the Vision 2030 final report, he hoped Kenya's political pillar would have its political system anchored on a democratic, people-centered, issue-based system focused on accountability to the people and fostering ethnic harmony (Government of Kenya, 2007, p. 158). He hoped Kenya would have an entrenched system of equality, regardless of ethnicity, and the country reflected the expectations and aspirations of the citizens. However, some have faulted multipartyism as the panacea for ethnic polarization and the vehicle for ushering in issue-based politics in Kenya. Bayart (1993, p. (iii)) likened multiparty politics in Africa to fig tree leaves, figuratively meant to cover the nakedness of African politics of the belly from the West.

The aftermath of the 2007 election vindicates this assertion. Post-election violence erupted throughout the country, bringing to light the extent of the ingrained ethnic divisions (Behr, 2022, p. 210) largely ignored by the ruling elite (Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2018, p. 47). The violence directly resulted from the structural decay eating into the fabric of Kenya's society, fueled by the ethnicization of politics and a dysfunctional electoral institution (40) (Behr, 2022, p. 208). After the violence ended in 2008, it became apparent that some politicians and radio personalities might have fanned the flames of violence, culminating in the "Ocampo 6" facing charges of crimes against humanity at the ICC (Taylor, 2011) (Mochama, 2021, p. 155). One of the accused was Joshua Sang, a KASS FM presenter accused of using coded language ostensibly to incite violence against opposing ethnic groups, a move employed by Hutu radio personalities prior to the Rwanda Genocide in 1994 (Bartels & Lawson, 2019, p. 12).

Before the 2017 elections, multi-award-winning photojournalist turned human rights activist and politician Boniface Mwangi felt the country was ripe for issue-based politics. He thought the country was moving toward the desirable issue-based politics and hoped subsequent years would follow the same script (Wadekar, 2019). Mwangi campaigned on a platform of issues affecting youth and anti-corruption and hoped his messaging would resonate with the demographic that accounts for more than half (51%) of the registered voters in 2017 (Masinde, 2017). Mwangi was optimistic that his message resonated with the majority of the voters, but once the results started streaming in, it became pretty clear it did not, as he lost by a significant margin.

Dr. Nic Cheeseman's advice provided insight into what might have happened. According to the University of Birmingham professor of democracy and international development, any politician would be wise not to overestimate the ability of the youth to overturn the system of entrenched tribalism in the country. He observes that ethnic identity matters more than their generation. The youth will say they are against voting along tribal lines, but in the end, it shows they align with their ethnic identities when voting (Wadekar, 2019).

In a way, one does empathize with the general Kenyan populace for thinking along tribal lines, bearing in mind the years of entrenched tribal politics (Community Aid International, 2011, p. 141). During the Kenyatta and Moi eras, a culture of cronyism and tribalism was developed (Kwatemba, 2008, p. 81), where discriminatory practices and persecution of political opponents were the order of the day (90). Tribes and regions opposed to the leadership suffered years of economic deprivation, while those aligned with the leaders benefitted from state-sponsored infrastructural projects (Community Aid International, 2011, p. 190) (Behr, 2022, pp. 197-198).

After the 2007 election and in the wake of the 2008 post-election violence, it became clear that a centralized government would not solve the issue of tribalism (Mutua, 2008, pp. 249-250). Kenyans clamored for a way to share the national cake that would possibly eradicate the need for having one of their own as president and, therefore, commence a new era of issue-based politics (Community Aid International, 2011, p. 141). To that end, President Kibaki oversaw the promulgation of the new Constitution in 2010, which provided for a devolved government. Under the new arrangement, the central government must give a guaranteed amount of cash to regional governments (Muwonge et al., 2022, p. 132), thereby, in theory, eliminating the need for a benevolent leader at the head of the central government (Ngigi & Busolo, 2019, p. 15). It was hoped that from then on, the electorate would concentrate on issues when electing the president, as the need for having one of their own at the political helm to guarantee development projects was no longer a pertinent focal point.

2013 ushered in the first election after the new Constitution came into effect and provided a chance for Kenyans to banish past tribal-laced elections marred by ethnic violence. However, Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta, as he then was, teamed up with the then-former Agriculture and Higher Education

minister, William Ruto. The coalition brought together two of the three largest tribes; a move not lost on political pundits (Lynch, 2014, pp. 107-109). Mutahi Ngunyi, a political analyst, penned his now infamous theory ‘Tyranny of numbers’ based on bankable ethnic votes (Maina, 2013, pp. 3-11). According to his theory, Kenyans historically vote along tribal lines. Therefore, the Uhuru and Ruto JUBILEE alliance would win in the first round of voting (Amukowa & Atancha, 2013, p. 72).

Ngunyi asserted that JUBILEE had a “bankable” and “unassailable” 6.2 million votes, guaranteeing them a minimum of 43.2% of the votes. Using the same logic, Raila’s Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) only had a bankable 2.74 million votes (19.2%). He thought it impossible for CORD to double their numbers and beat the opposition. An assessment of the poll results shows most Kenyans voted along ethnic lines (Amukowa & Atancha, 2013, p. 76), with the rest of the unaffiliated communities splitting their votes between the two, thereby confirming issue-based politics was on the back burner in the 2013 election. Further evidence came from results in Rift Valley. In the 2007 election, Odinga garnered over 1 million votes in the region but registered less than a hundred thousand in 2013 (Kisaka & Nyadera, 2019, p. 172), a development attributed to Ruto shifting his allegiance from Odinga to Uhuru’s camp.

As for the 2017 election, Mr. Odinga presented himself as the reformist candidate and launched an anti-corruption campaign against the ruling party. He hoped the anti-corruption messaging was cross-cutting and would give him an edge against the sitting president. To drive the point home, he fashioned himself as the biblical figure Joshua, on a mission to deliver Kenyans to Canaan (Wabende, 2021, p. 120), away from the corrupt and dysfunctional regime of the incumbent. The government had suffered a series of damaging corruption allegations, such as the March 2017 report by the anti-graft watchdog (EACC), which implicated 175 government officials, with four ministers voluntarily stepping aside to pave the way for an investigation (Reuters, 2015). Mr. Odinga promised to “nasa hao,” Swahili for capture the corrupt elements in the opposing camp, and also a word play on the National Super Alliance (NASA), the coalition vehicle he fronted in a bid to topple the ruling JUBILEE alliance. At their respective launches, both coalitions claimed they primarily aimed to unite Kenyans and repair ethnic fault lines (Oruko et al., 2017).

On election day, though, the results reflected the fact that little had changed as both frontrunners in the 2017 presidential election retained the same lineup, with Raila Odinga maintaining Kalonzo Musyoka as his running mate, while the incumbent president, Uhuru Kenyatta, did the same with his deputy president (Cheeseman et al., 2019, p. 218). According to an analysis from VOA, most Kenyans voted along ethnic and geographic lines, reflecting the presidential makeup of the candidates. For instance, President Kenyatta, of Kikuyu ethnicity, backed by his running mate of Kalenjin ethnicity, garnered 96% in six counties and won in 12 counties out of the 14 counties in regions in the Rift Valley where the Kikuyu and Kalenjin are the predominant tribes. The same was true for the other faction, where Raila, of Luo origin, and Musyoka, of Kamba ethnicity, won all seven counties in predominantly Luo and Kamba regions, managing a 95%-win rate in the four counties in the Luo region. (Solomon, 2017)

With foresight, that was predictable because, in their unguarded moments among people of their own ethnicity, politicians typically brandish the ethnic card and seek the status of ethnic patron and ethnic spokesperson (Cheeseman et al., 2019, p. 221). Take the then Deputy President Ruto, who, on January 10, 2017, implored his Kalenjin group to vote for President Kenyatta to the last man because they had a stake in the JUBILEE government. To him, his Kalenjin tribe had no other party, so they needed the political goodwill of the Kikuyu in JUBILEE to succeed in 2022. He urged his tribespeople to place all their votes in one basket to guarantee support from other communities, especially from Central Kenya, if he was to stand any chance of succeeding the president.

That statement takes us back to an analysis by Bratton and Kimenyi (2008, p. 20), who noted that although Kenyans abhor defining themselves along ethnic lines, their voting patterns betray what they assert. A

survey of election voting patterns reveals that Kenyans predominantly vote along ethnic lines. They also display deep distrust of people from other ethnic groups, as they believe that others only act under the influence of their ethnicity. With these observations in mind, they described the Kenyan election as nothing more than an ethnic census at its core. In the lead-up to the 2022 elections, the campaigns seemed to strike a different chord from the previous elections, as the two protagonists both expressed a need to make it an issue-based election. As reported in an October 2021 Nation Newspaper article, the former Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, was of the view that the upcoming election should be one based on a platform of giving hope to Kenyans and not causing divisions.

On his part, Deputy President Dr. William Ruto, as he then was, pledged to drive an issue-based political campaign aimed at furthering development as far back as October 2019. He even coined the now famous “Hustlers versus Dynasties” narrative, proclaiming him as a fighter for the oppressed people of Kenya because he did not come from a privileged background while his opponent and his backer, the incumbent President Kenyatta, were all sons of former presidents or vice presidents (Karanja, 2022, p. 5). Deputy President (DP) Ruto leveraged the populist approach, promising to implement the bottom-up economic model, which emphasizes concentrating power and wealth on people at the bottom of the pyramid. In the end, President Ruto won by 50.5% of the votes after garnering almost 80% of the votes from the Mt. Kenya region, an area from which the then President Uhuru not only hailed but had also endorsed Mr. Odinga (BBC, 2022).

The question then arises if issue-based politics has finally found a foothold in Kenyan politics and whether this model will feature in upcoming elections (Karanja, 2022, p. 3) (Opalo, 2022, p. 3). However, it is worth noting that it is not an isolated case, considering Odinga himself broke that long-held belief in the 2007 elections when he won the bulk of the Luhya vote against the presidential candidature of Musalia Mudavadi, himself of Luhya descent. So is the Ruto win in central Kenya an isolated case where that region’s people went against their perceived kingpin and voted for an outsider, or will it be the norm going forward?

As Opalo (2022, pp. 6-7) posits, ethnic blocks often change their voting patterns due to prevailing economic and demographic conditions after logical consideration of several non-ethnic factors. Indeed, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, p. 914) noted that persons in power often seek to alter the set ways of their target audience to mirror a fresh normative paradigm. Rhetoric is the mechanism through which agent activities evolve into societal constructs, concepts morph into convention, and the personal transforms into the shared.

DP Ruto exploited the “handshake” between President Uhuru and Mr. Odinga to push the hustlers vs dynasties narrative and drive a wedge between the hustlers and their kingpins in the Mt. Kenya region. His messaging resonated with Kikuyus, as President Uhuru had instituted several measures that had directly hurt his own people (Lockwood, 2023, p. 207). For instance, Uhuru had enacted policies to curb counterfeits and tax avoidance, which majorly affected the Kikuyu community, who are predominantly traders. Ruto also accused Uhuru’s government of facilitating state capture, which seemed only to benefit the Kenyatta family and other elites (Shilaho, 2022), basing his argument on occurrences like the rapid expansion of the Kenyatta family dairy business.

The economic depression following the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war months before the election did nothing to endear President Uhuru to his own ethnic group (Opalo, 2022, pp. 21-22). President Ruto also fashioned himself as a teetotaler, in contrast to the drunkard President Kenyatta, to bolster his image. Uhuru had also failed to groom a potential kingpin in case he failed, and the prospect of another Kikuyu taking over after him as president, making it three presidents in a row from the same ethnicity, didn’t seem like a sellable option. In the end, Uhuru Kenyatta had isolated himself so much from his ethnic group, leaving the door open for DP Ruto to take over as the new kingpin, winning central province by a landslide (Lockwood, 2023, p. 207). President Uhuru had also spent nearly a decade smearing Odinga, so it seemed disingenuous to make a U-turn so close to the elections and start supporting him.

Party manifestos as campaign promises vis-à-vis the performance of new regimes once they are in office

Win or lose, democratic practice dictates that political parties find ways to implement the ideas they present in their manifestos. Downs (1957, pp. 36, 261, 268) posits that rational voters will generally follow the basic principle of voting, which he christened the rational choice perspective. That is, they will vote for the party or candidate that offers the most benefits once they win (Jenke & Huettel, 2016, p. 10). To a large extent, most African political parties try to follow this maxim by creating enticing messaging in their manifestos, as these documents typically contain their policy positions and priorities (Eder et al., 2017, p. 75). Generally, Kenyan parties have had an abysmal record of implementing manifestos (Centre for Governance and Development, 2010, p. 17), often ending up with watered-down versions of their election promises or outrightly ignoring of some clauses.

Although many African parties create manifestos under the guise of selling their ideals and roadmap for transforming the lives of voters from every walk of life, deep down, there is a sense that the average voter's understanding is that a party can only meet their needs if their ethnic kingpin is in the upper echelons of that party. Africans are more likely to relate politically to ethnicity than programmatic ideas, with parties based on non-ethnicity virtually nonexistent (Horowitz, 2000, p. 301). It seems to back the claims that Africans predominantly vote along ethnic lines, regardless of the quality of the promises their kingpin places in the party manifesto. This explains why politicians are prone to party-hopping and still manage to register the same number of votes.

In a statement to Nation Media Group, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) emphasized that a party should deliver a manifesto based on a clear understanding of what a government ought to do rather than providing the fanciest stories (Owino & Kemboi, 2022, p. par. 6). They made this assertion because, during the 2022 elections in Kenya, the Azimio coalition showed little recognition of the effective roles and limits of government. To them, it showed the coalition did not have a bearing on the distinction between state activity and other sector activities (par. 16).

The IEA also made similar remarks about the Kenya Kwanza coalition in a later critique, noting that the drafters of the manifesto had a murky understanding of the legitimate role of government. Both manifestos gloss over or hardly elaborate key assertions, are hazy on mechanisms for achieving their goals, and are silent on some fundamental issues (Owino & Kemboi, Hits and Misses of Ruto Manifesto, 2022). Moreover, scrutiny of most African parties' manifestos reveals significant similarity for any keen voter to point out issues representative of their interests that the other party does not address (Elischer, 2008, p. 179), further eroding the credibility of party manifestos.

Once in office, most parties face difficulties implementing their promises as envisioned in their manifestos. In recent Kenyan history, the ruling JUBILEE alliance released its manifestos in 2013 and 2017. Among the promises it made in 2013 was the relocation, resettlement, or return to the homes of internally displaced persons, those evicted from the Mau Forest, and squatters in the coastal regions. Additionally, the party pledged to eradicate corruption, create 1 million new jobs for youths, and achieve 7-10% economic growth within the first two years (Kindiki & Wambu, 2015, p. 177) (Aligula & Kamau, 2013, p. 3). By the end of the four years, the government faced several accusations of corruption, heavy debt borrowing, high youth unemployment, and failure to follow through on the resettlement promises (Masinde R. , 2017).

In 2017, the same party retained power on the strength of three pillars: transforming lives, society, and the nation. Under these pillars, they promised to revolutionize healthcare, housing, education, improve governance, security, devolution, and transform agriculture, the economy, and infrastructure (Odete, 2017). A few months into office, they realized the promises were too far-ranging with no real way to gauge

performance, so the party decided to provide the specifics by launching the “Big 4” agenda focused on enhancing nutrition, manufacturing, food security, and universal health care. Keen observers noticed the omission of other key promises like devolution, inclusivity, and good governance (Otieno, 2020).

Due to several reasons, like a lack of political goodwill and vested interests, the JUBILEE government failed to deliver on most of its promises, only performing as promised on developmental outcomes. Women, minority ethnic groups, the youth, and PWDs remained marginalized as the party abandoned its commitments to inclusivity, governance, and youth and women empowerment (Mzalendo Trust, 2020, p. 35). Overall, JUBILEE was on the spot for failed promises it made to Kenyans ever since it came to power, amplified by the then DP Ruto, who took advantage of the “handshake” between President Uhuru and Mr. Odinga to distance himself from the broken promises and instead heaped blame on the two (Lockwood, 2023, p. 211).

As for the 2022 elections, President Ruto’s Kenya Kwanza Manifesto promised 250,000 affordable new houses every year, doubling allocations for the school feeding program, disbursing 50 billion annually to SMEs, a 50-50 gender share cabinet, and lowering the cost of living within the first 100 days (Kwanza, 2022, pp. 18,19,22,53). So far, a year has elapsed without fulfilling any of these promises (Omulo, 2023). Although President Ruto rubbished President Uhuru’s claims that the Russia- Ukraine war led to an increase in commodity and fuel prices during the election period, he has since adopted the same reason to explain away the reasons for further rises in the cost of fuel and commodities. He instead pleaded with Kenyans to give him more time to fix the issue, as his predecessor did before him.

However, instances where the ruling party does not fulfill its manifesto goals as promised during the campaign period are not unique to Kenya. As Elischer (2010, p. 23) found in his study of party manifestos in sub-Saharan countries like Ghana and Namibia, most of the winning parties will campaign on issues like democracy, human rights, gender and youth equality, social and ethnic harmony, and the eradication of corruption. Once in office, though, they cool their enthusiasm and generally concentrate on one or two noncontroversial and easy-to-accomplish issues, calling to question the point and practicability of election promises (Ndubi, 2023).

Netswera (2016, p. 261) examined the rhetoric of South Africa’s African National Congress (ANC) local government manifestos from independence in 1995 until 2011 and discovered similar failures. In all four manifestos, Netswera uncovered a trail of unfulfilled promises to supply water and electricity, land ownership, job creation, and foster togetherness. Stating these in the manifesto promises reveals a lack of understanding of local government functions vis-à-vis national government functions. Unsurprisingly, the ANC failed to deliver on its local government manifesto. Even at the local level, the local government manifesto regurgitates the national government manifesto in an attempt to foster allegiance to the political party (262).

Ayee (2016, p. 107) studied the manifestos of the two major parties in Ghana, National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) and found familiar dropped promises. Ever since independence, the parties have made promises concerning education, agriculture, electricity, water, improving the economy, reducing poverty, safety and security, and the equitable distribution of national resources, which continually set the national policy agenda, but politicians show little commitment to fulfilling their objectives. With all these in mind, it begs the question: why do politicians Africa-wide expend so much resources crafting these promises when there’s no link between manifestos and the election outcome (108)?

Manifestos generally come across as a window-dressing venture for politicians. Similarly, parties know unfulfilled promises will hardly make or break their chances of seeking re-election, so they make the promises with no concern as to whether the country’s financial position would enable them to fulfill the

promises (Gumede, 2021). For instance, Kenya's DP, Rigathi Gachagua, claimed the recently installed Kenya Kwanza government inherited empty coffers from the Kenyatta administration. Therefore, they could not fulfill their 100-days-in-office promises and disburse cash to government institutions, leading to delayed salaries. The then Treasury Cabinet Secretary (CS) rubbished his claims, affirming they were made in ignorance since the government does not store money earned but disburses it daily (Murimi, 2022).

Factors that inform political party formations, the main players, and factors that draw political leaders in Kenya together

Kenya's political landscape has experienced several far-reaching changes, providing ample reasons for leaders to form new political parties and collaborations (Kadima & Owuor, 2014, p. 169). Before independence, Kenyan politicians launched small ethnical and regional parties to fight against issues like economic inequality, alienation of land, and political repression that affected their tribes (Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2018, p. 20). The movement birthed the earliest forms of political parties, such as the Young Kavirondo Association, formed in 1921 in Nyanza; the Kikuyu Central Association, which came into existence in 1924 in Central Province; and the Ukamba Members Union in 1938 in Eastern Province (Centre for Governance and Development, 2010, p. 5). These parties fought for issues unique to their regions and for representation at the Legislative Assembly (LEGCO) (Institute for Education in Democracy, 2015, p. 10).

With time, the agitators realized it would serve their interests better if they combined forces into a singular, national-outlook outfit and spoke with one accord, birthing the Kenya African Union (KAU) in October 1944 (Widner J. A., 1993, p. 51). It had a Kenyan-wide membership, including leaders like James Gichuru, Simeon Mulandi, Tom Mbotela, Albert Owino, and Francis Khamasi. The party's objectives included better working and living conditions, constitutional reforms, and the advancement of their people's interests by uniting Kenyans toward a common cause.

In 1959, Masinde Muliro, Daniel Moi, Taaita Towett, and five other members of the LEGCO formed the Kenya National Party (KNP), a multiracial party consisting of African, European, Indian, and Arab members. Other politicians like Tom Mboya, Oginga Odinga, James Gichuru, and Gikonyo Kiano had formed the rival party Kenya Independence Movement (KIM), which had declared that only an African movement could deliver independence to Kenyans. KIM joined KAU and other minor parties to become the Kenya African National Union (KANU) a year later (Centre for Governance and Development, 2010, p. 6). The KNP, wary of the domination of the two major tribes (the Kikuyu and Luo in KANU), coalesced with other smaller parties to form the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) (Kadima & Owuor, 2014, p. 175) (Ajulu, 2008, p. 47) (Maina D. M., 2017).

A year after independence, KADU dissolved into KANU, ushering in the first instance of a one-party state in Kenya and the first alliance post-independence (Oyugi et al., 2003, p. 61). Within a few years, there were ideological and political rifts between Kenyatta and Oginga, with the latter openly critical of the government's policies on issues like land, dalliance with the West, and the suspected assassination of Pio Gama Pinto. In 1966, Oginga quit KANU and formed the Kenya People Union (KPU) (Wanyama et al., 2014, p. 176). Animosity between the two escalated and set in motion a chain of events leading to the ban of KPU and the beginnings of a *de facto* and, later, *de jure* one-party state until 1991 (Widner, 1994, p. 58).

Until the 1990s, politicians primarily joined KANU as a matter of political survival, with the legal circumstances imposing a group of President Moi sycophants upon the electorate. Political dissidents like Charles Rubia and Martin Shikuku were openly rigged out of clear victories during the farcical *mlolongo* (queueing) elections of 1988 (Mochama, 2021, pp. 54-55) (Behr, 2022, p. 208). Most members of parliament had their roles relegated to nothing more than rubber stamps for the central government, abandoning all pretenses of parliamentary supremacy. After the repeal of S. 2A of the Constitution in 1991 to allow for multipartyism, many of the politicians in opposition to President Moi soon coalesced around the

Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD) party under the tutelage of Oginga Odinga. The then-Vice President- Mwai Kibaki- resigned from KANU and announced his new party, the Democratic Party, presumably to distance himself from the politically poisoned chalice that KANU was. Or so it seemed, as there were murmurs of President Moi's "invisible hand" in his decision-making (Oyugi et al., 2003, pp. 26-27).

Several prominent figures from Central and Nairobi, such as Njenga Karume and George Muhoho, and several MPs followed suit. Similarly, KANU politicians from Nyanza all defected to FORD, with the Central and Nairobi leaders either electing to join FORD (Widner J. A., 1993, p. 196) or Democratic Party (DP). A few months before the 1992 elections, a rift developed between Oginga and Matiba, with the aging Jaramogi refusing to give way to Matiba as the presidential candidate for FORD, leading to Matiba announcing he'd run for the presidency. Inevitably, FORD fragmented into tribal factions (Kwatamba, 2008, p. 92), with the Kikuyu leaders rallying around Matiba and Luo doing the same with Jaramogi (Mochama, 2021, p. 83). The Matiba faction registered for the 1992 election as FORD-Asili, while Jaramogi's party became FORD-Kenya. In the run-up to the 1997 elections, rifts emerged in FORD-Kenya after its leadership fell into the hands of Michael Kijana Wamalwa, who took over from Jaramogi. Since he was Luhya, the Luo felt alienated and decided to rally behind Jaramogi's son, Raila Odinga, who took over the floundering National Democratic Party after failing to unseat Wamalwa.

A notable presidential candidate then was Charity Ngilu, who decided to rally the Kamba and women vote behind her candidacy under the Social Democratic Party (SDP) (Mochama, 2021, p. 127). Shikuku was locked in internal wrangling with Matiba, and rather than watch himself lose his party to Shikuku, Matiba announced he had not registered to run for the presidency, opening the door for Shikuku to become the FORD-Asili flag bearer.

Early in 2002, Raila's new National Development Party (NDP) merged with KANU (Kadima & Owuor, 2014, p. 155), with the understanding that the retiring president Moi would pronounce him the party's presidential candidate. However, President Moi endorsed Uhuru Kenyatta's candidacy a few months later, apparently in contradiction to their merger agreement. Raila bolted, abandoning his NDP party, and after forming the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), joined the DP, FORD-Kenya, SDP, and other multi-ethnic leaders under the umbrella party, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) (Mutua, 2008, p. 240). They fielded Mwai Kibaki as the presidential candidate, perhaps finally realizing they needed to band together if they were to stand any chance of unseating President Moi and his choice of leader (Oyugi et al., 2003, p. 129). During the 1992 and 1997 elections, President Moi had secured roughly 40% of the vote compared to 60% of the total opposition vote (Ajulu, 2008, p. 43).

During President Kibaki's reign, he reneged on his promise as laid down in the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the NARC leaders prior to the 2002 elections. Raila and other leaders within NARC formed the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) in protest in the run-up to the 2007 elections (Kadima & Owuor, 2014, p. 158). There was resentment against the Kikuyu as they were perceived to have taken up most of the opportunities in the economic, political, and diplomatic sectors, perhaps exemplified by his kitchen cabinet, which consisted of leaders who hailed from the same Mt. Kenya region as the president (Ajulu, 2008, p. 49). As a result, most politicians basically fell into two camps: those from the Mt. Kenya region out to protect their and their tribes' interests joined or remained in the Party of National Unity (PNU), President Kibaki's new party, and the outgroup who predominantly joined ODM to oust the Kikuyu.

The announcement of President Kibaki as the winner of the 2008 elections sparked post-election violence in some parts of the country particularly the Rift Valley and other key opposition strongholds, culminating in the prosecution of the then MP William Ruto, Uhuru Kenyatta, and four others in the ICC, facing charges of crimes against humanity (Mochama, 2021, p. 187) (Kadima & Owuor, 2014, p. 162). By then, President Kibaki had formed a coalition government with Raila, who had assumed the post of Prime Minister, in a

compromise deal to quell the chaos that rocked the country, and the two led the push to have leaders who instigated the violence to face the charges at the ICC.

As the ICC case dragged on for years and the next election cycle in 2012 approached, Uhuru and Ruto perhaps sensed that they could beat the charges if they won the presidential election. Bugged down by the shackles of the unpopular regime, Prime Minister Raila opened the door for Ruto and Uhuru to join forces under the JUBILEE Alliance and successfully hammered home their martyrdom rhetoric. They pulled at the heartstrings of their followers and drummed up support and sympathy along ethnic lines (Wanyama et al., 2014, p. 170), which the political analyst Mutahi Ngunyi termed a “Tyranny of Numbers” (Mochama, 2021, p. 187).

The 2017 elections remained essentially unchanged as JUBILEE fielded the same candidates while the opposition grouped under the National Super Alliance (NASA) coalition led by Raila (Mochama, 2021, p. 208). Politicians who felt left out of and tired of the dominant Kikuyu and Kalenjin alliance joined the opposition alliance. For any Kalenjin leaders who felt uneasy dealing with the Kikuyu, the then DP pleaded with members loyal to him to be patient so that come the next general election, they would receive the support of the Kikuyu in return.

A few months after the 2017 election, President Uhuru and Raila had the infamous handshake, signifying a willingness to work together (Abade et al., 2022, p. 26). The gesture created a rift between the president and his deputy, eventually turning to full hostility and an ideological parting of ways between the two not long after. A series of economic blunders that negatively impacted his own Kikuyu community and the twin tragedies of the recession caused by the COVID pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war meant the Kikuyu, who are predominantly businessmen, bore the brunt of the resultant economic downturn. These events happened close to the 2022 elections, which meant the president became quite unpopular among his own people, casting doubts about his status as the Kikuyu kingpin (Lockwood, 2023, p. 220).

His DP took advantage of circumstances and constantly reminded the Kikuyu of his loyalty and the betrayal of the president to honor his pledge to support him in the coming election, as promised in 2012. Kikuyu politicians took notice of the president’s unpopularity and endorsement of Raila, a man he had spent the better part of a decade demonizing and was burdened by a name with a history of animosity among the Kikuyu since the early days of independence, decided they stood a better chance at the ballot by supporting the increasingly popular DP (Lockwood, 2023, p. 219). They decamped from the president’s JUBILEE party *en masse* to the DP’s new party, the United Democratic Alliance (UDA), the leading party under the Kenya Kwanza coalition.

With President Uhuru’s blessings, Raila maintained the same group of politicians under the Azimio la Umoja alliance, except Moses Wetangula (FORD-Kenya), Justin Muturi (DP), and Musalia Mudavadi Amani National Congress (ANC) who defected to join Kenya Kwanza, as they felt what the Azimio camp was offering was not commensurate to what they thought they were worth. When the DP offered Musalia the Chief Cabinet Secretary, Wetangula the Parliamentary Speaker, and Muturi the AG posts, they signed pre-election agreements and decamped.

Voter behavior and how poverty, illiteracy, and voter apathy are key in shaping the African Politician’s behavior towards the electorate

One of the best practices political parties should subscribe to, as defined by the Political Parties Leadership Training Source Book (Office of the Registrar of Political Parties, 2022, p. 28), is to develop a set of ideologies distinctly different from the others. As envisioned in S. 14(5) (e) of the Political Parties Act, subscribing to the ideologies of a different party is a ground for ceasing membership in one’s current party. Different parties should also have varying policies drawn from their manifestos, which should sway a

politician's decision to join one political outfit over another.

In practice, this is hardly the case in most African countries, as most turn to ethnicity to rally voters to their cause, with ethnicity becoming a determinant for state policy. They typically sacrifice ideologies and public issues at the altar of personal interests to gain power and state resources (Speijcken, 2011, p. 5). One can hardly blame politicians, as this seems to yield the best results. As Eifert et al. (2010, p. 465) noted, politicians use ethnicity and experience positive results, with voters complicit to this as they recognize the relation between ethnic lines and allocation of resources in Africa, triggering a cycle of using ethnicity to mobilize voters. Arriola et al. (2017, p. 30) assert that politicians realized they can minimize electoral competition if they coordinate across ethnic cleavages.

As Downs (1957, p. 36) points out, rational citizens will cast their vote for the politician who offers them the most benefits. Governments go to great lengths to make voters aware of the benefits they are providing (38). Similarly, the government will engage in spending that gains it the most votes and only finances that which loses it the least votes (52). This opens up political warfare, as all the opposition has to do is wait for the government to reveal its hand, and then they can create a manifesto promising more or better options to voters. Therefore, opponents often have to snoop around to find out what the other plans to promise and devise ways to better their promises.

One of the ways politicians try to get the upper hand is to exploit the voters illiteracy. The word illiteracy herein takes on a narrow meaning as it infers the voter's lack of knowledge on matters elections because some nations have high literacy levels but still fall victim to politicians "electoral malpractices. For instance, Zimbabwe has a 96% literacy rate, but it is debatable whether they comprehend the content of political debate, which extends to their ability to question electoral malpractices (Zembere, 2020, p. 59).

Electoral illiteracy includes not only the inability to cast their ballots properly but also understanding election processes and engaging with them correctly. Despite the high literacy levels, most Zimbabweans have low participation levels since they have not familiarized themselves with the electoral process. That has triggered the debate for the ages: Should we let (politically) incompetent citizens vote as they often elect incompetent persons into positions of power who burden everyone with inept decisions (Brennan, 2009, pp. 535-537)? After all, the goal of holding a democratic election is to have a competent electorate that understands well enough their rights and what they are being asked to determine in order to make informed choices (United Nations, 2005, p. 56).

The average Zimbabwean citizen does not have the knowledge to identify a properly run election and question the legitimacy or integrity of the polls. To illustrate this point, Zembere (2020, p. 60) notes that on polling day, most politicians picked election agents to man polling stations during the 2008, 2013, and 2018 elections. It proved an exercise in futility, as most didn't know what was expected of them since they had only been selected at the last minute, so they did not undergo any training. Their selection was made based on party loyalty.

When faced with an illiterate electorate, politicians often practice electoral manipulation to gain the upper hand since voters cannot recognize discrepancies. In some African countries, the government mobilizes government officials and state machinery to vote for the incumbent or their preferred candidate, especially in rural areas where illiteracy is usually higher. In Zimbabwe, for instance, traditional chiefs, kraal heads, and headmen intimidated rural residents into voting for the president. They demanded voters present their ballot paper's serial numbers after voting for a follow-up to verify that they voted for the president (Zembere, 2020, p. 60).

Before election reforms in Kenya, voters would select their preferred candidate by placing an "X" beside

their name. Some “enterprising” politicians would send emissaries among the uneducated citizens and encourage them to place the “X” beside the candidate they did not want to elect since the mark universally signifies a particular item is wrong or rejected. Politicians’ party agents occasionally misguide the illiterate because the electoral body allows this group of people to receive help at the polling stations. The agents mislead them into voting for the wrong candidate or ensure they mark it in a way to make it an invalid vote on the rare occasion the voter places their mark on their preferred candidate. On the other hand, African politicians will often push manifestos with unrealistic promises, expecting no pushback from an electorate none the wiser about the role of politicians and governments (Nwagwu et al., 2021, p. 4).

As for poverty, African politicians have, for ages, preyed on the poor majority. Instead of spending the cash on economic activities that will uplift their people, politicians would rather pocket the money and engage in vote-buying during the election period (Kramon, 2013, p. 29). There is a suspicion that leaders would prefer it if the electorate remained poor, so they continue relying on handouts rather than having a more enlightened and prosperous society that would demand accountability and better service. Given a choice, most politicians in poor, agricultural-based economies typically settle on subsidies for consumption and agricultural production as a poverty-reduction strategy rather than improving public services that will produce higher returns, spur economic growth, and reduce poverty at a higher rate (Keefer & Khemani, 2005, p. 15). Suboptimal policies often receive greater public resources.

Poverty hampers access to education, affecting the electorate’s political intelligence to resist mortgaging accountability and good governance. Indeed, in the developing world, vote- buying is seen as an integral part of an election campaign (Nwagwu et al., 2021, p. 3). Resnick (2010, p. 22) observes that politicians encourage loyalty by distributing items like t-shirts and food during campaigns, which is an indicator to voters of future benefits if the said politician gets into power.

In urban areas, populist strategies typically attract the economically challenged more because they advance an anti-elitist discourse. Packaging your messaging around social inclusion and affinity for the downtrodden will resonate with that target audience (Lockwood, 2023, pp. 217, 220). If a country has such a demographic that is sufficiently large to swing the vote, then politicians will likely adopt this approach. Politicians such as Michael Sata in Zambia leveraged rapidly expanding poverty to push a populist strategy to gain support among the economically challenged urban population (Resnick, *Populist Strategies in African Democracies*, 2010, p. 8).

The same goes for rural areas. These often witness rampant vote-buying as politicians line up to offer gifts. The practice is rampant in Zimbabwe because it would find little traction among the relatively literate population in urban areas (Zembere, 2020, p. 64). Overall, one would liken African politicians to investors who only place their “investment” in projects requiring the smallest outlays yet achieve the greatest return on “investment.” The politician will give handouts promising more once they get into power, fostering clientelism that influences voter behavior (Wantchekon, 2003).

However, most politicians who engage in this practice only provide further tokens once in power rather than the more expensive projects that would improve the electorate’s economic position. They will splash more gifts near the elections to remind people of their generosity and promise more once re-elected. Powerful politicians often use government jobs for political patronage, ensuring cronies occupy plum leadership positions in public office (Colonnelli et al., 2018, p. 26).

Voter apathy arises from several issues, such as rampant unemployment, electoral violence, and the lack of impartiality and incompetence of the electoral body. Potential voters shun voting because they feel politicians are self-serving at the public’s expense (Mfundisi, 2006, pp. 85-86). People are increasingly not seeing the connection between politics and their problems. As the standard theory posits, for voters to be convinced into participating in an election, they must think politics is relevant, and their participation could

potentially make a difference (Huntington & Nelson, 1976, p. 158).

For example, opposition leaders in Malawi changed their positions and supported the government after a monetary or ministerial position enticement. The electorate feels powerless because opposition politicians cross the floor and support the government without consequence. Politicians only appeal to the people during elections. Moreover, political parties impose politicians on the electorate (Chinsinga, 2006, p. 17). This is especially rampant in countries where a party has gained immense popularity in certain areas, so unpopular candidates, rather than try to appeal to voters, buy that party's candidacy during primary elections. During the 2004 elections in Malawi, voters were disappointed by politicians who centered their campaigns on handouts and de-campaigning each other rather than addressing the core socio-economic problems affecting the electorate (20).

Politicians sometimes use political violence and militarization by threatening opposition voters, ensuring low turnout during campaign rallies (Kekana, 2023, p. 41). They will start skirmishes near voting stations on voting day to scare voters away and secure a win. Even when they lose, politicians point to the violence to discredit the results (141).

Another tactic favored by politicians that leads to voter apathy is political marginalization. Women, the youth, and minor tribal groups are often the main groups to suffer from active participation in nation-building (Mfundisi, 2006, p. 85). Although several African countries have expressed a willingness to address issues such as unemployment, unequal access to opportunities, and increased youth representation, politicians have ensured there's no legislation to that effect, or if there is, it lacks an enforcement mechanism to implement the legislation. Institutions tasked with enforcement are starved of the capacity to hold politicians accountable (Kekana, 2023, p. 12). A population stripped of political attention has no incentive to vote (41).

Young people are particularly prone to voter apathy. This is hardly surprising, considering they bear the brunt of exclusionary citizenship that undermines their rights, disintegrating the social contract between them and the state (Essa, 2000, p. 2). For instance, they account for 60% of the continent's unemployed population, often double that of adults (Mills et al., 2020). Therefore, young people generally record lower turnouts due to their lack of confidence in politicians and the electoral process (Kekana, 2023, p. 28).

The youth view politicians as corrupt and politics as corrupting, and despite holding the most significant demographic, the youth remain largely underrepresented. On the other hand, politicians argue that since the older generation votes the most, they are more important to political parties (Berry, 2012, p. 10). That typically translates to the older generation snapping up most employment chances after elections while the youth and apathy remain locked in a seemingly never-ending cycle.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Electoral bodies and civil society in Africa must increase their involvement in enhancing voter sensitization and addressing the electorates challenges. They should empower citizens through civic engagement, ensuring voters actively participate in political and socio-economic institutions affecting their lives. The only way to achieve democratic citizenship is if voters receive adequate information on their political rights and have the leeway to exercise them. As was seen in Zimbabwe, a citizenry with a high literacy level counts for little if they have inadequate political rights knowledge because politicians would capitalize on their ignorance and manipulate them.

Civil society, politicians, and electoral bodies ought to jumpstart voter education and launch civic education programs with ample funding and support from the government. Civic education must be part of the national

learning curriculum from primary to secondary schools to instill a sense of civic duty in the next generation of voters. The civic and voter education programs must address electoral process issues unique to each country to be most effective. Voter education programs ought to commence months before an election and run the breadth of the election process.

Civil society must check on electoral bodies to ensure the information provided is accurate and politically neutral. Voter education is one of the best ways to ensure a free, fair, and cost-effective election. Although voter education alone won't sustain democracy, it can protect it since educated voters might overcome election administrative deficiencies. Voter education will help the electorally illiterate gain sufficient electoral knowledge to become politically active. Electoral bodies need to institute special voter civic education programs targeted at vulnerable groups like women, youths, minorities, people with disabilities, and displaced people.

In addition, the government and electoral bodies should facilitate civic participation and spearhead the push for electoral law reforms to bring them in line with international standards. Changes in laws could also provide working mechanisms for tackling problems definitively, like electoral violence and political intimidation, which are catalysts of voter apathy. Part of the changes in electoral laws is ensuring the electoral bodies are independent of government control and are empowered to deliver their mandate against any player in the election, be it politicians or government officials.

Part of the reason African parties fail to follow through on their manifestos is the lack of an explicit mechanism to force them to fulfill their promises. In India, the High Court at New Delhi in the *Najma v. Government of NCT of Delhi* suit ruled in favor of the applicant who had legitimate expectations from political manifestos by public officers, even in the absence of governmental policy. Africans could draw inspiration from the twin cases of *South African Veterinary Council v. Szymanski* and the *Communications Commission of Kenya & 5 others v. Royal Media Services Limited & 5 others*, where the courts spelled out the requirements for the legitimacy of expectation. The court asserted that the decision-maker should induce the representation; the expectation must be reasonable; a representation based on the expectation must be clear and ambiguous; and the representation must be lawful and competent. Electoral bodies and civil society should seek to have these entrenched in their country's laws and sensitize the public on the same.

Decentralization could also play an essential role in improving social service delivery and decision-making for service providers, which will combine to enhance citizen participation and reduce voter apathy. Further, decentralization can alleviate information and credibility issues as voters find it easier to hold politicians accountable, as they are much closer to communities.

Vote buying is one of the most difficult electoral vices to eliminate because it is the illegitimate lovechild of various issues like illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty. Civil society and electoral bodies should take proactive measures to prosecute errant politicians, their agents, and political parties who engage in the malpractice. Moreover, they should educate voters on the correlation between vote buying and poverty, unemployment, electoral fraud, bad governance, and infrastructure deficits, ensuring voters resist and report incidences of vote buying. Political engagement is a proven strategy for improving development and governance outcomes and the chances of selecting politicians with better leadership qualities to govern public resources and provide additional benefits for poverty reduction, health, and education.

Electoral bodies ought to ensure voter registration is a continuous exercise, with the voter register containing at least 90% of eligible voters per international standards. Voter registration is a great way of fostering healthy politics as it involves the registration of all qualified citizens, including marginalized groups like minorities, youths, and persons with disabilities. The exercise should be understandable to all eligible persons and be within reasonable access and geographical reach. It must be conducted transparently,

free from political manipulation.

The voter register must be accurately kept, be available for scrutiny, updated regularly to reflect all registered voters, and be available for internal and external audit. It also helps to provide physical and digital copies of the voter register for easy access and protect it from unauthorized access and manipulation. To this end, keeping a continuous voter register helps keep it up-to-date by adding the names of new voters, deleting the names of dead ones, double-registered voters, or those declared unfit to vote, and transferring voters to different voting stations.

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