

An Assessment of Public Perceptions Regarding Power-Sharing Mechanisms in Promoting Social Cohesion in Migori County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic diversity and political competition in Kenya continue to present challenges to social cohesion, particularly in counties where perceptions of exclusion, unequal resource distribution and ethnic tensions persist. Despite constitutional reforms and devolution, empirical evidence on county-level power-sharing arrangements and social cohesion remains limited, particularly in Migori County. This study sought to identify the existing power-sharing structures in Migori County, Kenya; assess the perception of the people on power - sharing in promoting social cohesion in Migori County, Kenya; evaluate the role on power - sharing in resolving conflicts in Migori County, Kenya; and recommend strategies that can enhance effective social cohesion in Migori County, Kenya. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding on power - sharing and social cohesion. Structured questionnaires were administered to residents, while key informant interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders. The target population comprised 1,116,436 residents of Migori County. A sample of 400 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula, while purposive sampling was used to select key informants. Stratified random sampling was used to select questionnaire respondents from the eight constituencies in proportion to their population sizes, followed by simple random sampling within each stratum. Of the 400 questionnaires administered, 311 were fully completed and returned, representing a response rate of 77.8%. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The questionnaire used Likert-scale items to measure perceptions of representation, participation, inclusion, conflict resolution and social cohesion. The study considered validity and reliability of the research instruments before the main data collection. The findings indicated statistically significant positive associations between existing power-sharing structures and social cohesion ($r = .532, p = .001$), public perceptions on power - sharing and social cohesion ($r = .113, p = .047$), the role on power - sharing in conflict resolution and social cohesion ($r = .348, p = .001$), and proposed strategies and social cohesion ($r = .168, p = .003$). These findings indicate associations rather than causal relationships because the study employed a descriptive, cross-sectional design. The study distinguishes between power-sharing arrangements as institutional and governance structures and public perceptions of those arrangements as experienced and reported by citizens. The study contributes to the literature by examining county-level power - sharing and social cohesion from the perspective of residents, thereby extending existing research that has largely focused on political negotiations, elite agreements and political inclusion.

Keywords: power-sharing, social cohesion, perception and Migori County, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Power-sharing has increasingly been used as a governance approach for managing diversity, reducing political tensions and promoting cooperation in pluralistic and ethnically heterogeneous societies. In diverse societies, differences in ethnic, religious, social and political identities can create governance challenges where institutions do not provide adequate opportunities for participation and representation. Krampe et al. (2020) observe that weak governance, competition over resources and the proliferation of illegal small arms can intensify communal

tensions and localized conflicts. Kanyinga and Okello (2019) further note that ethnic identity, socio-economic inequalities, exclusion and governance failures can aggravate tensions within communities.

International experiences demonstrate that power-sharing arrangements can produce both positive and mixed outcomes. Switzerland has used federalism and consensus-oriented governance to accommodate linguistic and religious diversity, contributing to political stability (Vatter, 2021). Belgium has employed proportional representation and linguistic parity to manage relations between Flemish and Francophone communities, although political tensions have continued (Deschouwer, 2019). In Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement established shared governance between Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists and contributed to a reduction in sectarian violence (McGarry & O'Leary, 2021). Bosnia and Herzegovina similarly adopted consociational governance following the Dayton Peace Agreement, which helped prevent renewed large-scale conflict but also maintained ethnic segmentation within governance institutions (Bieber, 2019).

Despite these reforms, political and communal conflicts continue to occur in different parts of Kenya. Musau *et al.* (2023) document continued conflict involving cattle rustling, land disputes, resource competition and illegal small arms in areas such as the Kerio Valley. At the county level, devolution in Kenya has created opportunities for greater participation and representation, but it has also generated new forms of competition over political power, resources and ethnic representation. Cheeseman *et al.* (2021) note that devolution has brought governance closer to communities, while Bosire and Gikonyo (2022) observe that devolved governance can also produce localized ethnic competition, elite patronage and unequal access to resources.

An important analytical distinction is therefore necessary. Formal or actual institutional power - sharing refers to arrangements established through constitutional, statutory, administrative or political structures, including devolved institutions, representation in governance, participation in planning and decision-making, and resource-allocation mechanisms. Public perception on power - sharing, by contrast, refers to how citizens understand and evaluate the inclusiveness, fairness, transparency and accessibility of those arrangements. The present study primarily measures the latter through respondents' reported perceptions while also examining their views regarding existing governance structures. The findings should therefore not be interpreted as an independent audit of whether institutional arrangements objectively provide equal representation to all communities.

The literature further indicates a gap between elite-level political settlements and citizens' experiences of governance. Existing scholarship has extensively examined national political negotiations, coalition governments, constitutional reforms and elite settlements. However, relatively limited attention has been given to how negotiated or power-sharing arrangements are experienced by ordinary residents within individual counties. In Migori specifically, Bondo's study of negotiated democracy addresses political inclusion, while the broader literature on Kenyan devolution examines institutional and political dynamics. The present study extends this discussion by examining how residents perceive representation, participation, conflict resolution and social cohesion.

Migori County presents an important context for examining power-sharing and social cohesion because of its ethnic diversity and history of political competition in Kenya. The county is home to communities including the Luo, Kuria, Suba, Kisii, Luhya and other groups. Political competition in the county has been associated with questions of representation, leadership, access to county resources and development opportunities. The existence of formal and informal power-sharing structures therefore raises an important question concerning whether these arrangements are associated with greater inclusion, trust, cooperation and peaceful coexistence among the county's diverse communities.

Although power-sharing, devolution, political inclusion and social cohesion have been widely discussed, empirical evidence on whether county-level power-sharing arrangements promote social cohesion remains limited, particularly in Migori County. Existing studies have largely focused on national political settlements, constitutional reforms and devolution, with less attention to localized experiences of power-sharing, representation, conflict resolution and intergroup relations under county governments. This study therefore, addresses this gap by examining existing power-sharing structures, public perceptions of power-sharing, the role of power-sharing in conflict resolution and strategies for enhancing social cohesion in Migori County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Kenya has undertaken significant political and constitutional reforms to address political exclusion, ethnic tensions and unequal distribution of resources. The National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008 established a coalition government following the 2007/2008 post-election violence, while the Constitution of Kenya (2010) introduced devolution to decentralize political power, enhance public participation, promote equitable development and recognize diversity. Despite these reforms, political and ethnic competition, perceptions of exclusion and unequal access to leadership and public resources continue to present challenges to social cohesion in some parts of the country. Cheeseman et al. (2021) note that devolution has increased local participation and representation, while Bosire and Gikonyo (2022) observe that devolved governance can also generate localized ethnic competition and elite patronage.

Migori County is characterized by ethnic diversity and political competition among different communities. Political contestation may influence access to leadership, decision-making processes and county resources. The existence of formal and informal power-sharing structures has created opportunities for representation and participation, but it remains unclear whether these arrangements are associated with stronger social cohesion among communities. Kibicho and Mwangi (2023) indicate that county-level governance arrangements may be affected by political patronage, ethnic divisions and weak institutional performance.

Bondo (2025) examines negotiated democracy and political inclusion in Migori County, providing evidence on local political inclusion. However, the present study focuses on a related but distinct question: how citizens perceive power-sharing mechanisms and whether those perceptions are associated with social cohesion. The study therefore moves beyond an exclusive focus on political actors and elite-level agreements by examining the experiences and assessments of residents.

The problem addressed by this study is consequently not simply whether power-sharing institutions exist, but whether citizens perceive representation, participation, conflict resolution and governance arrangements as inclusive and whether these perceptions are associated with social cohesion. This distinction provides the basis for examining power - sharing from both an institutional and a citizen-perception perspective.

The existing literature has concentrated largely on national-level power-sharing, constitutional reforms and devolution, with limited empirical attention to the relationship between county-level power-sharing arrangements and social cohesion. In particular, there is limited evidence on how existing power-sharing structures, public perceptions of power-sharing, conflict-resolution roles and strategies for strengthening social cohesion operate in Migori County.

This gap has implications for inclusive governance and peaceful coexistence because inadequate representation, perceptions of exclusion and unequal participation may weaken trust and cooperation among communities. Ghai and Cottrell (2020) emphasize the importance of examining governance arrangements in understanding how diverse communities can be brought together socially. Therefore, this study was undertaken to examine power-sharing and social cohesion in Migori County by identifying existing power-sharing structures, assessing public perceptions of power-sharing, evaluating its role in resolving conflicts and recommending strategies that can enhance effective social cohesion.

General Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study was to examine Power-sharing and Social Cohesion: A Case of Migori County, Kenya.

Specific Objective

To assess the perception of the people on power-sharing in promoting social cohesion in Migori County, Kenya.

Research Question

To what extent do people perceive power-sharing as contributing to social cohesion in Migori County, Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical Literature Review

Power-sharing is frequently used as a conflict-management and conflict-resolution mechanism because political exclusion can intensify competition for authority and resources. Lijphart (2019) argues that institutional inclusion can reduce incentives for violent competition by incorporating major social groups into decision-making. McGarry and O'Leary (2019) similarly contend that inclusive governance can transform adversarial political relationships into cooperative engagement. These arguments suggest that power-sharing can create institutional channels through which competing groups resolve disagreements without resorting to violence.

However, scholars differ on the extent to which power-sharing resolves conflicts beyond the immediate crisis. Horowitz (2020) argues that political settlements may suppress conflict without addressing structural grievances, while other scholars contend that elite-negotiated settlements may provide short-term stability without producing deeper social and political transformation. Evidence from Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrates this tension: Bieber (2019) associates the Dayton arrangements with the reduction of large-scale violence, but also notes their contribution to continued ethnic segmentation. In Lebanon, Salamey (2021) similarly demonstrates how sectarian power-sharing can maintain political accommodation while leaving communal divisions unresolved.

African experiences reinforce this mixed evidence. Habib (2020) identifies South Africa's Government of National Unity as an important component of political transition and reconciliation, while Mehler (2019) cautions that African power-sharing agreements may remain elite dominated and provide limited grassroots participation. Lederach (2019) emphasizes that sustainable peace requires meaningful participation by local communities, women, youth and civil society. This suggests that power-sharing is more likely to contribute to conflict resolution when formal political accommodation is accompanied by broader participation and mechanisms for addressing underlying grievances.

Kenya's experience following the 2007/2008 post-election violence provides an important example. Kanyinga and Long (2022) associate the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008 with the establishment of a coalition government that helped restore political stability. Constitutional reforms that followed introduced devolution and other mechanisms aimed at reducing exclusion and expanding participation. However, Murunga and Nasong'o (2020) argue that negotiated political settlements may remain concentrated among elites and may not fully address structural inequalities and exclusion.

Research on negotiated democracy provides an additional perspective relevant to Migori County. Bondo (2025) examines interventions of negotiated democracy in political inclusion in Migori County. The study is relevant to the present research because it focuses on local political arrangements and inclusion. The present study, however, places greater emphasis on the perceptions of residents concerning power - sharing and their reported levels of social cohesion. Thus, the present study does not replace research on negotiated democracy; rather, it extends the discussion from political inclusion and negotiated arrangements to citizens' perceptions of representation, participation, conflict resolution and social cohesion.

Community-based conflict-resolution mechanisms have also been used in Kenya. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR, 2014) documents the role of peace committees, interfaith dialogue and interethnic reconciliation initiatives in promoting coexistence in different counties. However, the interaction between such grassroots mechanisms and devolved power-sharing structures remains inadequately examined in Migori County.

The literature demonstrates that power-sharing can contribute to conflict management by encouraging inclusion, negotiation and political accommodation. However, what remains insufficiently understood is how county-level power-sharing arrangements interact with local conflict-resolution mechanisms and whether they contribute to resolving conflicts in Migori County. The resulting gap is an empirical and contextual gap concerning the role of devolved power-sharing in resolving conflicts at the grassroots level.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Consociational Theory

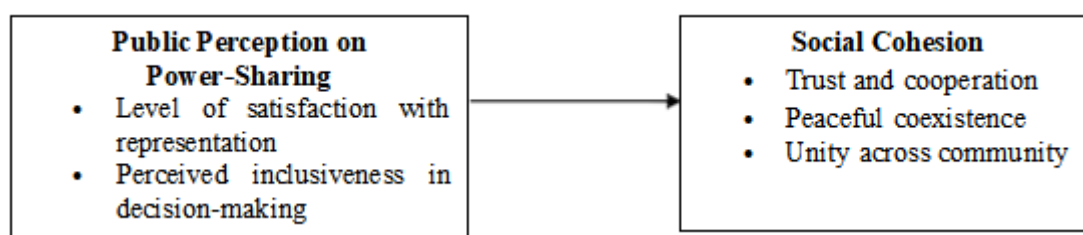
Consociational Theory was developed by Arend Lijphart to explain how deeply divided societies can achieve political stability through institutionalized accommodation among major social groups. Lijphart (1977) identifies four principal mechanisms: grand coalition, proportional representation, segmental autonomy and minority veto. The theory challenges majoritarian governance on the grounds that winner-takes-all arrangements may exclude minority groups and intensify political competition in divided societies. Lijphart (2018) further emphasizes inclusive representation and cooperation as mechanisms for managing diversity and reducing political instability.

The theory is relevant to this study because its core mechanisms correspond closely with the dimensions of power-sharing examined in Migori County. Inclusive executive participation relates to existing power-sharing structures; proportional representation relates to political inclusion and equitable access to public institutions; segmental autonomy provides a basis for understanding decentralization and devolution; and minority protection provides a framework for examining the participation of smaller communities in decision-making. These mechanisms provide an analytical basis for examining whether inclusive governance arrangements are associated with trust, cooperation, peaceful coexistence and unity among communities.

However, Consociational Theory has important limitations. Horowitz (1985) argues that institutionalizing political representation along communal lines can reinforce ethnic identities rather than promote broader integration. Reilly (2021) similarly contends that excessive reliance on ethnic representation can encourage identity-based political competition. Horowitz (2000) further highlights the limitation of relying heavily on elite accommodation because important political decisions may be negotiated among political leaders while ordinary citizens have limited influence. These criticisms are particularly relevant to Migori County because formal inclusion may coexist with informal political bargaining, patronage and perceptions of exclusion.

The theory therefore provides a strong framework for examining the formal architecture of power-sharing but does not fully explain the informal political negotiations through which these arrangements are established, maintained and modified. This limitation creates the rationale for complementing Consociational Theory with Elite Bargaining Theory. In this study, Consociational Theory explains the institutional dimensions of power-sharing, including representation, inclusion, decentralization and minority participation, while Elite Bargaining Theory explains the negotiations and political relationships that influence how those institutional arrangements operate in practice.

Conceptual Framework



Independent Variables

Dependent Variable

In interpreting the empirical relationship, the study distinguishes between the institutional existence of power-sharing arrangements and citizens' perceptions of those arrangements. Existing power-sharing structures refer to governance mechanisms such as devolution, representation and resource-allocation mechanisms. Public perception refers to respondents' assessments of satisfaction with representation, inclusiveness in decision-making and fairness of implementation.

The quantitative findings concerning public perception should therefore be interpreted as evidence about citizens' views rather than as an independent institutional measurement of actual power distribution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The mixed-methods approach was used because the study required both quantitative measurement of relationships among the study variables and qualitative understanding of the experiences and explanations underlying those relationships. The quantitative component provided descriptive and inferential evidence from questionnaire responses, while the qualitative component provided contextual information from key informants. The design was cross-sectional in nature. Consequently, the statistical relationships identified in the study are interpreted as associations observed among respondents at the time of data collection and not as evidence that power - sharing caused changes in social cohesion.

Target Population

According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, Migori County had a total population of 1,116,436 persons, comprising 536,187 males, 580,214 females and 35 intersex persons (KNBS, 2019). The County is administratively divided into eight sub-counties with varying population sizes. The target population of this study included all citizens aged 18 years and above in Migori County, with keen consideration of community or clan elders, advocacy personnel and stakeholders working for NGOs and CBOs and National and County Government officials in Migori County.

Sampling Design

The study employed the Yamane (1967) formula to determine the sample size from the target population of 1,116,436 residents of Migori County. The application of the formula produced a sample size of 400 respondents at a 5% level of precision.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size.

N is the population size.

e is the level of precision (0.05).

In this research, the sample size is calculated as: $N=1,116,436$.

$$n = 1,116,436 / (1 + 1,116,436 * 0.05^2), \text{ giving a sample size of } 399.85$$

Sample Size, $n = 400$.

The 400 respondents were drawn from the eight constituencies in Migori County, Kenya as indicated in the sample size table below.

Constituencies	Population Size	N*(400/1,116,436)	Sample Size
Kuria West	208,513	208,513*(400/1,116,436)	75
Nyatike	176,162	176,162*(400/1,116,436)	63
Uriri	141,448	141,448*(400/1,116,436)	51
Suna West	128,890	128,890*(400/1,116,436)	46
Rongo	124,587	124,587*(400/1,116,436)	45
Suna East	122,674	122,674*(400/1,116,436)	44
Awendo	117,290	117,290*(400/1,116,436)	42
Kuria East	96,872	98,872*(400/1,116,436)	34
TOTAL	1,116,436		400

Source: Researcher (2026)

Stratified random sampling and purposive sampling were used in the study. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure that respondents were selected from the eight constituencies in proportion to their population sizes. Within each constituency stratum, individual respondents were selected using simple random sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants who possessed relevant knowledge and experience concerning county governance, power-sharing, conflict resolution and social cohesion.

Data Collection Tools

This study also made use of primary data gathered through questionnaires and an interview guide. The questionnaire items were developed in line with the study objectives, conceptual framework and operationalization of the study variables. The items covered representation, participation, resource allocation, inclusiveness in decision-making, conflict resolution, civic education, interethnic collaboration, trust, cooperation, peaceful coexistence and unity.

The measurement approach focused on respondents' perceptions. Consequently, questionnaire responses concerning existing power-sharing structures indicate how respondents assessed those structures rather than providing an independent institutional audit of the actual allocation of political authority.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, medians and standard deviations, were used to summarize the responses to the Likert-scale items. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between the dimensions of power-sharing and social cohesion. The level of statistical significance was set at 0.05. The qualitative data obtained through the key informant interviews were analysed thematically.

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to determine the direction, strength and statistical significance of the relationships between the dimensions of power-sharing and social cohesion. The level of statistical significance was set at 0.05. The analysis was based on 311 completed questionnaires.

The study used Pearson correlation because the inferential objective was to examine associations between the study dimensions. The analysis does not establish causal relationships. The assumptions considered for Pearson correlation included the appropriateness of the variables for correlation analysis, linearity, independence of

observations and distributional considerations. The source study does not report separate numerical diagnostic statistics for these assumptions; therefore, no additional diagnostic values are inserted here.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

No. of Respondents	No. of Questionnaires Returned	Response Rate (%)
400	311	78

A total of 400 questionnaires were issued to the selected respondents, out of which 311 were fully completed and returned, representing a quantitative response rate of 77.8%, which was rounded to 78%. This provided sufficient responses for the quantitative analysis.

Perception of the People on Power-Sharing in Promoting Social Cohesion

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
Frequency (%)	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Power-sharing promotes equal representation of communities.	23	7%	27	9%	13	4%	125	40%	123	39%
Power-sharing helps reduce ethnic tensions in the county.	15	5%	17	5%	24	7%	119	38%	136	44%
Residents believe power-sharing fosters unity and cooperation.	22	7%	22	7%	14	4%	111	36%	142	45%
Citizens in Migori County feel fairly included in local governance.	24	7%	19	6%	26	8%	122	39%	120	39%
Local leaders promote power-sharing in a transparent manner.	32	10%	32	10%	20	6%	106	34%	123	39%

From the findings, 40% (125) of the respondents agreed that power-sharing promotes equal representation of communities, followed by 39% (123) who strongly agreed, 9% (27) who disagreed, 7% (23) who strongly disagreed and 4% (13) who were neutral. These findings indicate that the majority of the respondents agreed that power-sharing enhances equal representation among communities.

Further, 44% (136) of the respondents strongly agreed that power-sharing helps reduce ethnic tensions in the county, followed by 38% (119) who agreed, 7% (24) who were neutral, 5% (17) who disagreed and 5% (15) who strongly disagreed. This shows that most respondents believe that power-sharing is effective in minimizing ethnic conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence in Migori County.

On whether residents believe power-sharing fosters unity and cooperation, 45% (142) of the respondents strongly agreed, followed by 36% (111) who agreed, 7% (22) who disagreed, 7% (22) who strongly disagreed and 4% (14) who were neutral. These findings imply that a large majority of the respondents perceive power-sharing as a key factor in enhancing unity and cooperation among the diverse communities in Migori County.

Additionally, 39% (122) of the respondents agreed that citizens in Migori County feel fairly included in local governance, while 39% (120) strongly agreed, 8% (26) were neutral, 7% (24) strongly disagreed and 6% (19) disagreed. These findings suggest that most respondents perceive power-sharing as having enhanced inclusivity in local governance and decision-making processes.

Finally, 39% (123) of the respondents strongly agreed that local leaders promote power-sharing in a transparent manner, followed by 34% (106) who agreed, 10% (32) who strongly disagreed, 10% (32) who disagreed and 6% (20) who were neutral. This indicates that while the majority of respondents believe that leadership encourages power-sharing in a transparent manner, a notable proportion still expresses concerns regarding transparency and accountability in governance.

These findings were supported by the views of the key informants. **KI1** indicated that power-sharing plays an important role in promoting peace and unity by ensuring that all communities have a stake in leadership and decision-making processes. **KI2** observed that community involvement in governance increases cooperation, mutual respect and collective problem-solving, thereby strengthening social cohesion. **KI3**, however, noted that although the current power-sharing arrangements provide opportunities for participation, minority groups, women and youth continue to feel marginalized and excluded from key decision-making positions. **KI4** further explained that dominant ethnic groups occupy most leadership positions, giving them disproportionate influence over resource allocation, policy formulation and community development projects, while smaller communities remain underrepresented. **KI5** emphasized that these governance dynamics, if not deliberately addressed through equitable participation and inclusive policies, may undermine social cohesion and sustainable peace within Migori County.

The findings that the majority of the respondents agreed that power-sharing promotes equal representation of communities, reduces ethnic tensions, fosters unity and cooperation, enhances inclusivity in local governance and promotes transparent leadership are consistent with Lijphart (2019), who argues that inclusive governance, and proportional representation strengthen social cohesion by ensuring the participation of all groups in decision-making processes.

The findings also agree with McGarry and O'Leary (2019), who maintain that institutionalized power-sharing arrangements promote trust, cooperation and peaceful coexistence among diverse communities. However, the findings differ from those of Horowitz (2020), who contends that power-sharing arrangements may reinforce ethnic identities and divisions rather than promote long-term national integration.

Correlation Analysis

Role of Power-Sharing	Pearson Correlation	.532**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
	N	311

The relationship between existing power-sharing structures and social cohesion was positive and statistically significant ($r = .532$, $p = .001$, $N = 311$). This indicates a statistically significant positive association between respondents' assessments of existing power-sharing structures and their reported levels of social cohesion.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Conclusion

The study concludes that residents of Migori County generally perceive power-sharing positively in relation to representation, reduction of ethnic tensions, unity, cooperation and inclusion in governance. The statistically significant positive relationship between public perception of power-sharing and social cohesion indicates that more favourable perceptions of power-sharing are associated with higher levels of social cohesion.

The findings should be understood as evidence of relationships among the measured variables rather than as evidence of causal effects. In addition, the findings on public perception reflect respondents' assessments of power-sharing arrangements. They should not be treated as an independent institutional verification of the actual distribution of political power.

The study therefore contributes to understanding power - sharing and social cohesion in Migori County by bringing citizens' perceptions into a literature that has given substantial attention to political inclusion, negotiated democracy, elite bargaining and formal governance arrangements.

Recommendations

The Migori County department responsible for civic education, together with the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), civil society organizations and community leaders, should strengthen civic

education programmes on citizen participation, representation and governance rights. Regular public forums should be organized at the ward and sub-county levels to give citizens opportunities to raise concerns about inclusion, representation, and transparency in county governance.

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