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Political Parties Primaries 2017: Youth in Kenya Win

Youth participation in political parties and political processes in Kenya has been limited. The main reason is a governance order within political parties that lacks inclusive democratic structures. Although political parties constitute youth leagues, major policy decisions are made by the party leadership without involvement of the youth wings. The youth perform administrative duties, manage online platforms, conduct campaigns as well as provide militant security or counteract militant attacks.

Despite their lack of campaign resources, a number of youth between the ages of 24 and 30 years won the nomination ticket for elective positions. This trend can be partly attributed to the devolution system. Devolution means decentralization of power, resources and representation at the local level. This system has contributed to bridging the gap between citizens and their leaders.

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POLITICAL PARTIES PRIMARIES 2017: YOUTH IN KENYA WIN*

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“The revolution taking place at the global level in elections, for example in the United States of America and France whereby citizens are rebelling against the status quo as they want change is also taking place in Kenya,” said Prof. Herman Manyora, lecturer at the faculty of linguistics and languages at the University of Nairobi.

Herman Manyora analysed the recently concluded party primaries in Kenya that saw many incumbents losing their seats to little known individuals at the county level. These included cooks, security guards as well as former student leaders.

The party primaries took place between 13th April 2017 and 26th April 2017. Political parties in government (Jubilee) and opposition (NASA) alliances elected their representatives to vie for elective positions in the upcoming August general elections. These positions are the President and the Deputy, Senator, Member of National Assembly, Women Representative, Governor and the Deputy and the Member of County Assembly (MCA) as stipulated in the Constitution of Kenya.

In a telephone interview, Herman Manyora indicated that Kenyans are frustrated with the establishment thus voting for politicians who understand

their problems on the ground. The youth were among the big winners of the primaries.

A number of young people who were mostly former University student leaders won to vie for the MCA ticket of their respective parties.¹ Young candidates, between 24 and 30 years old beat their opponents despite their lack of campaign resources. In Starehe constituency, two youth candidates namely Steve Mbogo and Charles Njagua, both in their early 30s, won to vie for the seat of Member of Parliament in the August general elections. In Nandi county, senator Stephen Sang, 31, won the gubernatorial race, a step that will make him the youngest governor in Kenya if he wins the forthcoming elections.

Okoth Opondo, head of governance and events at the media company Well Told Story, cited that the youth were the driving force behind the primaries. “Youth in Kibra constituency were the major decision makers of who was going to win,” said Opondo in a telephone interview.

In his Kibra constituency that constitutes five wards, the MCA seat was won by youth in three wards. He said most youth in his constituency decided to vie for the MCA seat due to its importance in

proximity to the people. Opondo cited that due to financial constraints to conduct campaigns, the youth employed the door-to-door campaigns to woo voters. “Many youth with political aspirations will be inspired by these results to vie for elective positions in the next general elections in 2022,” he concluded.

Unlike any other party primaries conducted in the past, the 2017 nominations were unique as the unprecedented results they produced depicted a new wave of confident electorate that voted for leaders that deliver as opposed to the past where the electorate voted for close allies of the political establishment.

For instance, in Nandi County, the incumbent Governor Dr. Cleophas Kiprop Lagat, Woman Representative and 22 MCAs were all trounced. In Nairobi, the current senator Mike Mbuvi Sonko won to clinch Jubilee Party’s gubernatorial ticket after beating the 2013 presidential hopeful Peter Kenneth, who resonates well with the middle and upper class electorate. Senator Sonko is an entrepreneur turned politician who has attracted Kenyans across the political and tribal divide. To many Kenyans, especially the lower class, Sonko is their ‘saviour’ or their ‘robin hood’ who understands their problems and always rescues them.

“People are tired of rhetoric. They want fresh and energetic blood that can deliver and there is a revolution taking place in Kenya especially through social media,” said Victor Ayugi in a telephone interview. Victor Ayugi is a young politician who is a beneficiary of training provided to political parties youth leagues

funded by the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) Kenya & Ethiopia. Victor Ayugi lost his bid for the Member of Parliament of Kibra constituency at a very narrow margin. He however vowed to vie again in the 2022 general elections.

Political analysts in Kenya have concluded that devolution played a major role in influencing voters’ decision during the primaries as those aspirants with the knowledge of the people and their needs won.

In the Daily Nation newspaper, Prof. Karuti Kanyinga of the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi opined that devolution has given voters the confidence to exert themselves in the electoral process.² He also pointed out that voters have realised that they don’t have to support the government or the opposition in order to get services as devolution has paved way for unconditional resources at the county level.

Kenya’s primaries could be seen as a revolt of the ordinary people.³ The voters seemed to question the political establishment with the intention of shaking up the status quo by punishing the non-performing leaders in their respective counties. Prof Nyaga Kindiki of Moi University attributed these results to Kenyans becoming more and more aware of their rights and power.

These latest development has also led a large number of incumbents and aspirants who lost in the primaries to vie during the August general elections as independent candidates. Estimates show that the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) has cleared 4,000 aspirants to run as independent candidates. This number is high

compared to only 350 running as independent candidates in the 2013 general elections. The chairman of Centre for Multiparty Democracy, Omingo Magara, says that independent candidates who lost in the primaries are likely to win during the August elections. This, he warns, will pose problems to Parliamentary speakers as these leaders have no parties to guide them on the positions to take regarding issues in Parliament.⁴ Such leaders, he argues, are not loyal to any party.

In a Standard Newspaper article, experts cite that in the long run there would be need for legislation⁵ to redesign how Parliament and County Assemblies operate should the independent candidates form the majority in Parliament.

“When these independents are the majority in Parliament, the traditional roles of the majority and minority might be redefined,” said Elijah Ongoya, the Dean of Kabarak University Law School. He added that in light of such, successful independent candidates might impact on prevailing power structures (the two horse race) and contribute to an unexpected election outcome going forward.

A recent report published by the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) shows that the primaries were marred by bribery, violence, missing names of candidates, harassment, intimidation as well as manipulation of the voter register.⁶ Due to this, many fear that such incidences would be reflected in the general elections. Prof. Nic Cheeseman, faculty of Democracy and International Development at Birmingham University, does not foresee a repetition of chaos and violence to take

Projects of the HSF

The Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) Kenya contributes to the institutional strengthening of political parties and their youth wings both in government and opposition. HSF's partner organization, the Institute of Communication and Development International (ICDI) provides capacity building for young politicians.

The capacity building interventions are aimed at improving knowledge about the Constitution of Kenya, structures and roles of the national and county governments, the rule of law, principles of transparency and accountability, democratic party structures and public participation.

In addition, trainings feature practical components to develop skills in political communication, campaign strategies, networking, digital technology as well as to step-up self confidence among young politicians.

The HSF also conducted a study exchange trip for six young politicians in December 2016 to Berlin and Munich in Germany. Studies included various aspects of German politics. Participants also had the opportunity to network with like-minded young politicians from Germany. In March 2017, members of an international umbrella organization conducted a follow-up visit to Kenya as a way of continuing the exchange.

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place during the August elections.⁷ The consolidated opposition will be a prominent opponent and predictions expect a narrow victory margin.

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REMARKS

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