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Toward an assessment of the relevance of proposed public policy in contemporary African society: A retrospective review of Kenya's now-defunct building bridges initiative, with special reference to post-election violence

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Abstract

Whereas competing interests characterize the African public policy sphere today, the lens of mass-elite differences has hardly been employed to study electoral violence. Accordingly, this article juxtaposes the lived experiences of ordinary Kenyan citizens, obtained through focus groups, with the content of the now-defunct Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), a comprehensive set of public policy changes proposed by Kenya's political protagonists Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga in 2017. It poses the following broad question: did the BBI proposals truly intersect with the opinions and lived experiences of the masses? I find that various factors, including the lack of electoral and judicial integrity, and a winner-takes-all democratic system, are responsible for post-election violence according to citizens. A comparative analysis of citizen perspectives and the BBI Report reveals considerable congruence in the understanding of the causes of post-election violence. The study partly concludes that African leaders should continue to engage in policy entrepreneurship.

KEYWORDS

Africa, building bridges initiative, classical democratic theorists, democratic elite theorists, democratization, elite–masses divide, grassroots public opinion, Kenya, Kenyatta, modern elite theorists, Odinga, political participation, post-election violence, public policy

Related Articles

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INTRODUCTION

Do political leaders, in general, craft public policy to subtly serve their own selfish (elitist) interests, or are they genuinely driven by the desire to meet the needs of their people (the masses) when engaging in this important exercise? While the foregoing question is debatable, contemporary scholarship appears to strongly suggest that the former scenario (be it at the local, national, or transnational level) may be predominant (see Hooghe, 2003; Lesschaeve, 2017; McElwain, 2020; Page & Barabas, 2000). Importantly, as explicated in the *Routledge Handbook of Public Policy in Africa* (a volume edited by Gedion Onyango, which covers a myriad of public policy areas, including health and disease control; food security and social protection; women and gender issues; education; and research, theory, and teaching), competing motives, pitting society's elites on the one hand, and the largely impoverished masses on the other, characterize the public policy arena in the African context today (see Onyango, 2022).

In the area of health and disease control, for example, Allen and Parker's (2022) analysis of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in sub-Saharan Africa raises various important issues that cast doubt on the genuineness of parties that seek to alleviate NTDs. First, the idea of mass drug administration through a collective effort by African health ministries, donors, and international pharmaceutical companies, stemmed from a singular study (conducted in Kenya), whose data were used as justification to extensively roll out the exercise in other parts of the continent, without regard for particularity. Second, proponents of the approach are more concerned about funding than they are with evidence-based medicine. Third, the free drugs offered on a massive scale by pharmaceutical companies to facilitate mass drug administration help the latter to safeguard patents and serve as a mechanism of getting around tax payment. Fourth, the top-down approach associated with the administration of drugs is largely disrespectful, for local communities and leaders are seldom consulted before the exercise is carried out (Allen & Parker, 2022).

When it comes to food security, there is the argument that there are two competing features within the food security terrain. The first is the public good concept that views food as a human right that the nation-state should accord to its citizens and neoliberal interests. The second is that profit has supplanted the concept of food as a human right because a globalized agri-food system controlled by powerful players has incorporated the African continent into a food value chain scenario in which processors and distributors control and exploit producers and consumers (Siebert & May, 2022).

Concerning women and gender issues, Madsen and others (2022, p. 525) reveal an interesting North–South divide in the perception of the term "gender": "understandings of 'gender' in the global south emphasize framings of 'complementarity' and 'difference' in a heteronormative context challenging the norm of 'gender equality' and 'sameness' originating in the global North," they argue. Accordingly, they caution, gender mainstreaming efforts in Africa may fall prey to neocolonial machinations if the continent's policy makers are not careful.

In the education sphere, Paulo (2022) has noted that Angolan authorities have invested disproportionately in the provision of classroom buildings and related physical infrastructure at the expense of teaching staff. This scenario is the typical representation of African governance,

where politicians prioritize investments that boost their political standing and enhance their longevity and survival prospects. Whereas physical infrastructure can easily be seen by the electorate, and fronted as a fulfilled promise during campaigns, the enhanced capacity of educators is a less lucrative venture since it is not immediately discernible by the electorate (The World Bank, 2019, cited in Paulo, 2022, p. 399).

And regarding research, theory, and teaching, it has been noted that there has been extensive external influence on African social science research mainly because it is funded largely by donors and international development organizations that have their own vested interests, which include controlling the direction that Africa takes. Notably also, African governments, fearful of research that could contribute toward toppling them, make it difficult for researchers to obtain public data and research permits. To boost government legitimacy and enhance accountability, the aforementioned two issues should be addressed (Laakso, 2022). There is certainly an "elite–masses divide" that characterizes public policy formation and implementation both in Africa and elsewhere in contemporary society.

Noticeably, however, the lens of this "elite–masses divide" has hardly been employed in African public policy research to study electoral violence. This article, therefore, seeks to contribute toward addressing this gap by giving prominence to the often ignored voices of citizens at the grassroots level of society in Kenya, with special reference to post-election violence. This is important for, as argued by renowned African social scientist, Archie Mafeje (2002, p. 63, emphasis added), "there are now numerous texts on 'ethnicity' *and electoral violence in Africa* and yet the supposed subjects of… *violence* remain invisible and their representations are conspicuous by their absence in scholarly discourse, as if they are simply automatons." The present study juxtaposes the lived experiences of citizens at the grassroots level of Kenyan society, obtained through focus groups, and the content of the now-defunct Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), with the objective of assessing the relevance of the BBI, with a special focus on post-election violence. The BBI, as will be discussed later, was a comprehensive set of public policy changes that was proposed by Kenya's political protagonists, former president Uhuru Kenyatta, and opposition chief, Raila Odinga, following yet another contentious election cycle in 2017.

The study is based on field research that was conducted throughout the month of May 2021, which saw significant events associated with the BBI occur in Kenya. To begin with, the BBI Bill (Constitution of Kenya [Amendment] Bill, 2020) was passed in both the National Assembly (May 6, 2021) and Senate (May 11, 2021). Notably, "President Uhuru Kenyatta and ODM leader Raila Odinga's allies united in passing the document amid rejection by allies of Deputy President William [Ruto]" (Nyamori & Ng'etich, 2021, para. 4). However, a couple of days later, before President Kenyatta could assent to it and pave the way for a referendum within 90 days, the country's High Court would declare the process "illegal, null and void" (Wangui, 2021, para. 1), bringing the BBI to a screeching halt. This article addresses the following broad question: did the approaches and suggestions fronted by Kenya's political elites toward solving the conundrum of electoral violence truly intersect with the opinions and lived experiences of the masses? Inspired by the foregoing "elite–masses divide" that characterizes the public policy arena, it tests the following research assumption: owing to the elitist interests of Kenya's political class, the solutions proposed in the now-defunct BBI, with regard to addressing the problem of post-election violence, were largely incompatible with the opinions and lived experiences of citizens at the grassroots level of society.

The rest of the article is organized as follows: the next section reviews scholarship on political decision making in general, with the view to deriving theoretical insights to aid in the assessment of Kenya's BBI. Thereafter, a background to the BBI is provided, alongside the conceptual framework that guides the study. This is followed by the specifics of the research design and methodology employed in the study. Subsequently, the study's findings are presented, followed by a discussion section. Finally, the study presents its conclusions. It has been argued

that "[p]oliticians, officials, academics and researchers in Africa encounter public policy texts, theories and curriculums that are blind, deaf and dumb to 'their own history, lived experiences—and their dreams' with 'little exposure to their own continent and all its complexity'" (Heleta, 2016, quoted in Khan & Adonis, 2021, p. 41). It is hoped that the approach taken in this study, particularly the prioritization of the voices of ordinary Kenyans at the grassroots level, contributes toward addressing this worrisome anomaly.

LITERATURE REVIEW: TRACING THE "ELITE–MASSES DIVIDE" IN SCHOLARSHIP

Historically, political elites have been favored in scholarship, as opposed to the mass public, when it comes to political decision making. It has been thought and argued that ordinary citizens have not troubled themselves enough to obtain sufficient information to develop the intellectual capacity required to make important political decisions. This constitutes a lack of "resources" which, apparently, political elites wield (see McAllister, 1991). In explicating the foregoing argument, McAllister (1991) in his insightful work, titled "Party Elites, Voters and Political Attitudes: Testing Three Explanations for Mass-Elite Differences," presents the following three distinct groups of theorists who, over time, have grappled with the phenomenon of political decision making, as seen through the lens of mass-elite differences: (i) early classical democratic theorists; (ii) later democratic elite theorists; and (iii) modern elite theorists.

Fundamentally, the foregoing three groups of theorists exude skepticism with regard to tasking ordinary citizens with making political decisions. However, their opinions on the solutions to mass ineptitude and the governmental consequences of this supposed attribute differ noticeably (see McAllister, 1991). According to McAllister (1991), early classical democratic theorists such as Plato and Aristotle inspired a significant lack of faith in the common or ordinary person, whom they did not see as capable of handling typical political decisions. Nonetheless, these theorists were optimistic about the prospects of change. With education, they contended, ordinary citizens could develop an appreciation for democratic institutions, rise to the "resource" level of political elites, and assume the same degree of political responsibility. This would help solve the paradox of political representation—constricting decision making to a select elitist group, while simultaneously emphasizing that supreme political sovereignty belongs to the masses (see McAllister, 1991, p. 237).

Later democratic elite theorists (see Bachrach, 1967; Kariel, 1975; Pateman, 1970; Sartori, 1987, as cited in McAllister, 1991, p. 238) largely based their lack of conviction in the masses on the latter's support for fascism in Europe prior to the Second World War (WWII)—an act they considered to be misguided. Their views were also informed by survey research carried out after WWII, which indicated political ignorance and apathy among a large section of Europeans. Accordingly, they adopted the stance that all society requires to be politically stable is consensus among the elites, especially with respect to how politics is conducted (McAllister, 1991, p. 239). This group suggests that successful political decision making and policy formulation are largely dependent on society's elites and have little to do with the masses.

On the other hand, modern elite theorists (see Field & Higley, 1980; Higley et al., 1979; Higley & Moore, 1981, as cited in McAllister, 1991, p. 238) take a multifaceted approach to intellectualizing relations between the mass public and political elites. Fundamentally, they contend that political stability arises more when political elites disagree on various matters than when the aforesaid scenario occurs amid the masses. While they, like later democratic elite theorists, attribute successful political decision making and policy formulation mostly to society's elite class, their emphasis on elite cooperation as a prerequisite for longstanding political stability is most noteworthy (McAllister, 1991, p. 240).

Evidently, the phenomenon of an "elite–masses divide" in either the formulation or implementation of public policy is not new in scholarship (see McClosky et al., 1960; Pitkin, 1967). In recent times, however, it has increased in prominence as a lens in public policy research; captured largely within the purview of the catchphrase "congruence of mass–elite policy preferences" (see Shim & Gherghina, 2020), the lens has been popularly employed in the non-sub-Saharan African jurisdictions of Eastern Europe, Latin America, North Africa, and East Asia, yielding important empirical and theoretical insights that either challenge or support the suppositions presented in the preceding paragraphs of this review (see Freire et al., 2014; Golder & Stramski, 2010; Granberg & Holmberg, 1996; Luna & Zechmeister, 2005; Page & Jacobs, 2006; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016; Walgrave et al., 2024). For instance, Monroe's (1998) study indicates that the public's preferences in the United States—concerning issues such as social welfare, defense, political reform, civil rights/liberties, and energy and the environment—have become less important to policy makers over time. The foregoing findings are consistent with those of Page and Bouton (2006) who, in their assessment of American foreign policy, also find policy preference incompatibilities, despite their observation that the American public is considerably knowledgeable about foreign policy issues. The disagreements that often characterize the American masses and their leaders in this sphere should therefore be attributed to differing preferences and moral principles, as opposed to greater intellectual wherewithal on the part of the country's political elites, they conclude. However, Page and Barabas (2000) attribute policy preference incongruence in the United States to two different reasons. First, there are relatively lower interest and information levels among the mass public as opposed to the political elites. Second, office-bearers have not sufficiently enlightened and convinced the electorate.

Significantly, there is broad consensus in the scholarship on voter-elite preferences that for any democracy to be considered mature and legitimate, political office holders must represent and advocate for policy preferences of those who put them in office (i.e., the voters; see Carroll & Kubo, 2018; Dalton, 2017; Karyotis et al., 2014; Powell, 2013). Accordingly, the relationship between political parties and/or officeholders and their supporters has been profoundly scrutinized in the research, generating thought-provoking arguments and findings too. It has been established, for example, that officeholders respond differently to various sections of the voting populace based on the social status of the latter. The opinions of wealthier, more educated citizens are taken more seriously and their preferences are prioritized (see Bartels, 2002; Flavin, 2012; Gilens, 2005; Walczak & van der Brug, 2013). According to Walgrave and Lefevere (2013), discrepancies between voters and their parties occur because of the former's ignorance concerning the latter's policy postures. Freire and Belchior (2013) attribute this citizen ignorance partly to indolence and a lack of sufficient motivation. Geering and Häusermann (2011) take the debate further and remind us that political parties may fail to represent the wishes of their supporters for three additional reasons: the restrictions brought about by globalization; the increasing prominence of culture over the economy that characterizes party competition in contemporary society; and the elitist nature of today's party politics that has birthed considerable disinterest in the desires of voters. The findings of recent research also suggest that voters and policy makers largely view emerging issues of a cultural nature, such as immigration and gender, from different perspectives (Dalton, 2017; Lefkofridi & Horvath, 2012). In another interesting study, Walgrave and Soontjens (2023) found that political elites look more to traditional news media and people-to-people contact, than they do social media, in their quest to determine what the masses want.

There is also a section of literature in this domain that espouses noticeably critical insights on congruence (e.g., André & Depauw, 2017; Fiorina & Levendusky, 2006; Reher, 2014; Rosset et al., 2017). For Reher (2014), to increase the chances of the masses participating in a voting exercise, it is incumbent upon the political elite to ensure that the issues that press the former are prominently captured in the campaign process. High levels of elite-citizen policy congruence

could reduce apathy. Rosset and others (2017) allude to an element of selfishness among a section of the masses. They argue that as long as their beliefs and philosophical postures are well embodied in government policy, people seldom insist that the government must prioritize the wishes of the majority. Elsewhere, André and Depauw (2017) acknowledge the importance of policy congruence in democratic practice. Nonetheless, they contend, policy congruence is only but one aspect of congruence. It is therefore minimalist to put all the focus on it. Rather, attention should also be accorded to the representational process and citizen-elite differences and similarities in this regard. In other words, it is not possible to fully comprehend citizen satisfaction without considering the nature of policy formulation processes. Karyotis and others (2014) bemoan the fact that, despite the popularity of the concept of "congruence" in political science, scholars have failed to reach a consensus on what it really comprises and how to quantify it: whereas some preoccupy themselves with the left–right dimension, others concern themselves solely with ideology. Fiorina and Levendusky (2006) contend that ideological differences between members of the political elite class do not necessarily manifest themselves among their followers (the mass public). This study draws largely on the insights shared above, as and wherever appropriate, throughout the remainder of the text, in its assessment of Kenya's BBI.

DECODING THE BBI: A FUSION OF BOTTOM-UP (*CLASSICAL DEMOCRATIC THEORISTS*) AND TOP-DOWN (*LATER DEMOCRATIC ELITISTS*) APPROACHES TO POLICY FORMULATION AND GÖRAN HYDÉN'S "POLICY PARADOX"?

The BBI was the product of a March 9, 2018, political truce between President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition chief, Raila Odinga. Following a deeply contentious and violent election cycle in 2017 that featured an annulled presidential election and a re-run boycotted by Odinga, the two leaders would engage in a public handshake at the steps of the president's office in Harambee House, Nairobi. It has been argued that the handshake was significant for two major reasons. First, "it ended the months-long campaign of civil disobedience that Odinga had launched after the repeat presidential election" (Fabricius, 2018, para. 2). And second, the "deal conferred on Kenyatta the legitimacy he sorely needed as the country's president, [and] defused the potential for more violence" (Fabricius, 2018, para. 3).

More importantly for the purposes of this study, the BBI cast the two leaders as agenda setters in a public policy formulation process, for their public handshake was accompanied by a joint communique—titled "Building Bridges to a New Kenyan Nation" (Presidential Taskforce on Building Bridges to Unity Advisory [PTBBUA], 2019)—that was issued shortly thereafter. In the joint communique, the two leaders contended that, besides making significant strides in the pursuit of the vision of its founding fathers, the country was yet to bestow full dignity, fairness, prosperity, and security to all its citizens. Unilaterally, without the involvement of any other stakeholders, they identified nine issues, which, according to them, stand in the way of a cohesive Kenyan society. They are: ethnic antagonism and competition; lack of a national ethos; inclusivity; devolution; divisive elections; safety and security; corruption; shared prosperity; and responsibilities and rights. The duo would then, as stated in the communique, proceed "to roll out a programme… [to] implement their shared objectives" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 8). However, this approach failed to meet the requirements for constitutional amendment by popular initiative, as envisaged in Chapter 16 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, according to the High Court of Kenya, which eventually nullified the BBI and declared it unconstitutional.

Nonetheless, Gazette Notice No. 5154, through which the BBI Taskforce—dubbed the "Building Bridges to Unity Advisory Taskforce"—was established and operationalized, appears to have considered the idea of public participation in the policy formulation process.

It mandated the taskforce to "conduct consultations with citizens, the faith-based sector, cultural leaders, the private sector and experts at both the county and national levels" (The Kenya Gazette Vol. CXX–No. 64, 2018, p. 1658). The methodology was employed by the BBI Taskforce to carry out its mandate of assessing the nine issues raised by the two leaders in the joint communique and making reform suggestions geared toward establishing enduring unity. That methodology involved the engagement of the following stakeholders: "7,000 citizens from all ethnic groups, genders, cultural and religious practices, and different social and economic sectors"; "400 elected leaders past and present"; "prominent local voices from the community"; "young people"; "123 individuals representing major institutions, including constitutional bodies and major stakeholders in the public and private sectors"; "261 individuals and organisations who sent memoranda via (e)mail"; and "755 citizens who offered handwritten submissions during public forums in the Counties" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 2).

At the time of the handshake, which "fractured the opposition, giving… [Kenyatta's] Jubilee party a much better chance in the 2022 elections" (Fabricius, 2018, para. 3), many were at a loss to see what Odinga stood to gain from the truce. Nonetheless, the events associated with Kenyatta's succession depicted the duo as policy entrepreneurs. Approximately 6 months before Kenya's 2022 general elections, Kenyatta endorsed Raila Odinga's presidential bid under the umbrella of the *Azimio la Umoja* (Quest for Unity) Coalition that brought together close to 30 political parties. For this reason, the BBI could be considered an elitist endeavor, driven by succession politics, despite the various elements of stakeholder participation it showcased.

Indeed, the BBI depicted a mixture of bottom-up (*classical democratic theorists*) and top-down (*later democratic elitists*) elements of policy formulation and implementation and the "Policy Paradox" concept advanced by Hydén (2006). Essentially, as partly explicated in the preceding section, bottom-up approaches to public policy derive their inspiration from the fact that "political outcomes d[o] not always sufficiently relate to original policy objectives and that the assumed causal link [i]s thus questionable" (Pülzl & Treib, 2007, p. 92). Proponents of this perspective have "suggested studying what [i]s actually happening on the recipient level and analyzing the real causes that influence action on the ground" (Pülzl & Treib, 2007, p. 92). On the other hand, "[t]op-down models put their main emphasis on the ability of decision makers to produce unequivocal policy objectives and on controlling the implementation stage" (Pülzl & Treib, 2007, p. 90). Under the top-down approach, "policy *formulation and* implementation starts with a decision made by central government" (Pülzl & Treib, 2007, p. 90, emphasis added). And Hydén's "Policy Paradox" fundamentally argues "that the policy process from agenda-setting to decision-making and eventually to policy implementation is characterised by political logics of clientelism and Big Man rule" (Hydén, 2006, cited in Kjær, 2022, p. 80). Kenyatta's eventual proclamation of fellow BBI protagonist, arch-rival Odinga, as his preferred successor, suggests that the now-defunct initiative was a case of political patronage camouflaged and packaged as "reconciliation for the sake of the populace"—lending credence to the argument postulated by Hydén. This interpretation of the BBI, which serves as the conceptual framework that guides this study, is depicted in Figure 1.

With the objective of assessing how the "elite–masses divide" in public policy formulation and implementation plays out with regard to electoral violence, it is worth reiterating the research question driving this study: did the approaches and suggestions fronted by Kenya's political elites toward solving the conundrum of electoral violence truly intersect with the opinions and lived experiences of the masses?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To meet its objective, the study employed a qualitative design comprising two distinct phases. The first phase was anchored in focus group methodology (see the Appendix for the

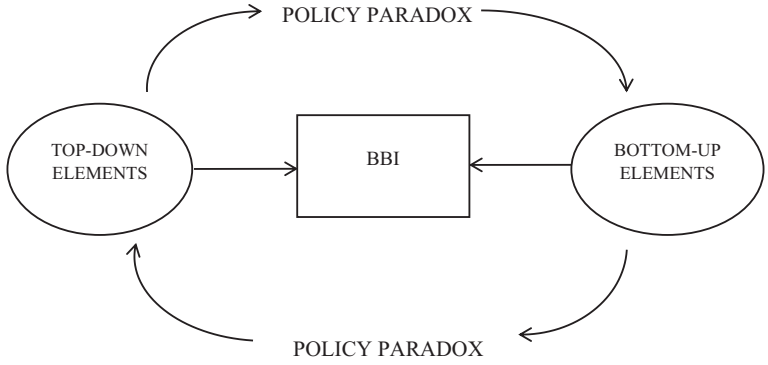

FIGURE 1 An interpretation of Kenya's now-defunct BBI.

focus group guide). It is important to mention that, whereas ordinary citizens may not be considered "experts," views emanating from their lived experiences matter immensely, especially in the context of the epistemological philosophical assumption on which this study is grounded. As articulated by Creswell and Poth (2018), "[w]ith the epistemological assumption, conducting a qualitative study means that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied. Therefore, subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views. This is how knowledge is known—through the subjective experiences of people" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). I conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) in three of Kenya's 47 counties—Homa Bay (Odinga stronghold), Kiambu (Kenyatta stronghold), and Kericho (former Deputy [now] President Ruto stronghold). More specifically, the FGDs were carried out in the urban and peri-urban areas of Mbita, Juja, and Kericho. Purposive sampling was used to select the aforementioned areas and participants for the FGDs. In purposive sampling, "the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2013, pp. 299–300). The purpose here was to ensure a balanced study by capturing views from the enthusiasts of each of the three protagonists in the Kenyan political story, hence the selection of their strongholds.[1] And, to ensure the complexity of views, I made the FGDs heterogeneous, by mixing males and females in each session held. Additionally, to enable in-depth discussions, each of the FGDs involved a small number of participants ranging from 4 to 12 (see Liamputtong, 2011). Despite the challenges occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, I was able to source participants from marketplaces, residential areas, and villages. Once participants had been identified and assembled, the discussions took place on-site (in the locations where the latter were found). The inclusion criteria were quite unrestrictive; one only had to be a consenting adult of sound mind. At the time the study was conducted, discourse on the BBI was rife in Kenyan society, as it was being discussed in Parliament and the Senate and the case on its legality was being heard in court. As it had captured the attention of many Kenyans, most participants were willing to voice their views without fear of repercussion. Nonetheless, to encourage participation, I still offered a small monetary incentive. I moderated the FGDs myself, with the help of two assistants who took notes and ran the recorder, respectively, as I facilitated the discussions.

[1]Kenya, which is now administratively divided into 47 counties, each under the leadership of a governor, has historically, up to 2013 when Kenya's new Constitution was operationalized, comprised eight provinces, viz.: Central (Kikuyuland, where Kiambu lies), Coast, Eastern, Nairobi, North Eastern, Nyanza (Luoland, where Homa Bay lies), Rift Valley (Kalenjinland, where Kericho lies), and Western. These provinces were essentially the result of European colonial mapping and land policy which "most decidedly intersected with the creation of 'native reserves,' a concept that embedded ethnic identity in geographical space, assigning specific parts of the country to specific ethnic groups" (Shutzer, 2012, p. 348).

The discussions were conducted in both English and Swahili and each session took anywhere between 45 and 90 minutes. A total of 29 FGDs were carried out; I was guided, in this regard, by the principle of "theoretical saturation," that is, the juncture where fresh enlightenments ceased (see Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The FGD audio files were thereafter transcribed, and translated where applicable, following which the text was subjected to inductive data analysis, which entails "build[ing]… patterns, categories, and themes from the 'bottom-up,' by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information" (Creswell, 2013, p. 38). Thereafter, I "work[ed] back and forth between the themes and database until… a comprehensive set of themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 38) was set up. The patterns discovered were reinforced in narrative form using the experiential tales of the participants. Narrative analysis and writing were found to be appropriate, for they accurately represent the voices of Kenyans at the grassroots level of society. Narratives shift the focus from statistics, taxonomies, tables, and models to "reflect[ing] what the natives really say" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6), thus ensuring thick description and originality. The second phase involved scrutiny and analysis of the contents of the BBI Report, vis-à-vis the opinions and perspectives raised by citizens at the grassroots level of society, to assess if and how the concerns of the masses had been captured in the document commissioned by two of Kenya's political elites. The verdict on whether Kenya's now-defunct BBI would have been an effective mechanism for eradicating post-election violence in the country, had it been adopted, was pegged on the idea of congruence, or lack thereof, between grassroots perspectives and the content of the BBI Report.

FINDINGS

Explaining electoral violence from citizens' perspectives

The findings of the first phase of this research, the opinions of the masses on the causes of post-election violence in the country, are hereby sequentially presented under six broad themes: (1) lack of electoral and judicial integrity; (2) poverty; (3) unequal distribution of state resources or the national largesse; (4) police impunity and prejudice; (5) lack of democracy within political parties and a winner-takes-all democratic system; and (6) political tribalism.

Lack of electoral and judicial integrity

The findings of this study indicate that there is a strong feeling among a significant portion of the Kenyan populace that electoral theft characterizes the country's elections. This phenomenon, participants alleged, is a major contributor to electoral violence. There appears to be a strong belief that adherence to the tenets of procedural democracy would solve Kenya's electoral violence conundrum. Many participants in this study expressed a desire for transparent and trustworthy elections. They pointed to various factors that have made them lose faith in the electoral process in Kenya. First, the failure of the country's Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) to deliver election material in certain areas, made it impossible for some people to cast their votes. Second, an opaque tallying process—after the ballots are cast, they alleged, the votes are counted and the totals at the polling stations are given. However, when the tallying is conducted at the national tallying center, the figures given are often different. Third, disobedience of court orders by the IEBC. When the disputed 2017 election was petitioned in court, the Supreme Court judges ordered the IEBC to open their servers for scrutiny. To date, however, those servers have not been opened. Fourth, scenarios where the turnout is greater than the number of registered voters. Fifth, the alleged issuing of

IDs and voters' cards to minors to enable them to cast votes for the incumbent. According to many participants, these are some of the major issues that make people question the process and reject the results. They lead to street protests by the masses, one of the elements of Kenyan post-election violence.

Conspicuously, the conversation on the supposed lack of electoral integrity in Kenya revolves around what many referred to as the "deep state." Concerning the deep state, also referred to as the "system" in emerging political parlance at the grassroots level in Kenya, one participant had this to say:

> There's a day the Deputy President, Ruto, mentioned that he is aware of what the system does and is up to. So this means that there's a system in place that selects leaders. His sentiments are analogous to those expressed in a song released by the Kenyan artiste, *King Kaka*, entitled *Wajinga Nyinyi* [You Fools], which admonishes the general Kenyan populace against preoccupation with elections and vote casting when, in actual fact, the system already knows the person it has selected as the next president. (Focus group discussion, Kiambu County)

In the eyes of many participants in this study, Kenya is a captured country that serves the interests of a few elites. Regarding the power wielded by the system over the country's electoral body, some participants contended that the IEBC officials, especially its chairman, are closely monitored, and operate under extreme duress. Others were of the opinion that officials are given two choices: either to take a bribe and announce the results prepared for them or to face dire consequences. As stated by one participant, "the IEBC officials are given plenty of money, in millions, to announce the results in a certain predetermined and dishonest way. Can they reject the huge sums of money?" (Focus group discussion, Homa Bay County). To address this alleged form of corruption, some suggested foreign intervention in the management of the country's polls as a mechanism for ensuring credibility.

The supposed lack of integrity that characterizes the country's institutions allegedly extends to the judiciary too. There is a strong feeling at the grassroots in Kenya that the country's judicial arm of government is not independent and that this hampers access to justice, especially for the poor. At the time of conducting the FGDs, this sentiment was significantly premised on the belief that the decision of the High Court that declared the BBI process null and void—which had been appealed—would be overturned. However, this did not happen, as the Supreme Court later upheld the lower court's verdict. Nonetheless, for the weak to get justice, many participants contended, court decisions must be respected by everyone including the president.

Poverty

A significant portion of those who took part in this study attributed post-election violence in Kenya to poverty. To quote one participant: "When the economy is poor, citizens are prone to engaging in violence for they are highly susceptible to incitement. But when the economy is doing well, the common person can buy some maize flour and be contented" (focus group discussion, Kericho County). Participants decried inflation and high levels of taxation. According to them, the Kenyan masses are overtaxed and exploited. Consistently lamenting their heavy burden, they referred to the prices of basic commodities such as sugar and maize flour, which they said had skyrocketed, making life extremely difficult for common people. The findings show that, to a very large extent, most ordinary citizens at the grassroots level of Kenyan society are extremely hard-pressed when it comes to meeting their daily needs. With reference to inflation, another participant had this to say:

> Money has lost its value to the extent that a thousand shillings' worth of shopping from the supermarket will only fetch you stuff that can be carried home by a 2-year-old toddler. The country has gone to the dogs, literally. If you want to do shopping that will be ferried home by a grown man, you will have to carry money in paper bags. (Focus group discussion, Kericho County)

Most participants attributed this state of affairs to the then Jubilee Administration, which they lambasted for allegedly being out of touch with the ordinary citizens' plight, as epitomized by one participant's comments: "If you tell President Uhuru that you have slept hungry, he will be surprised at your sentiments. Uhuru has never slept hungry" (focus group discussion, Kiambu County). Although the coronavirus pandemic may have been used as an excuse, they stated, things have worsened because of dereliction of duty and unconscionable levels of corruption at the highest levels of government in Kenya. The national government has failed them in a big way, they contended. This feeling was so strong that many participants were nostalgic about the days of the Kibaki (former president) regime.

Discernible from the responses of participants in this study, are the paradoxes of development as a phenomenon: "At present, money is visible at the grassroots in the form of development projects," as argued by one participant. "However, on a personal level, for essential commodities that I personally purchase with money from my pocket, I have seen the situation become very difficult. But development projects are proceeding well" (focus group discussion, Kericho County). Whereas the country has witnessed tremendous infrastructural growth in the form of an expanded road network, for instance, Kenyans appear to be really hard-pressed and are finding it extremely difficult to subsist. Notably, some respondents appeared to be subconsciously aware of the conversation surrounding equality of opportunity and equality of outcome (see Bourne, 2018). One stated as follows: "You know, it's not necessarily the government's responsibility to meet my personal needs. I have to be creative and maneuver my way around life. There's nowhere the government will help. But the problem is they're not facilitating our efforts" (focus group discussion, Kiambu County). Another noteworthy point is that patriotism seems to be fading away in Kenya because of frustration and hardships. Whereas one respondent wanted the Jubilee Administration to "finish their tenure and go," another stated as follows: "We are miserable in Kenya; it would be better to live in another country" (focus group discussion, Kericho County).

Unequal distribution of state resources or the national largesse

The unequal distribution of state resources or the national largesse features strongly in the grassroots understanding of what causes post-election violence in Kenya.[2] As one participant put it,

> The voters have come to firmly believe that access to the national largesse is strongly dependent on one of their own being in power. If your tribesman climbs up the tree, you'll get to eat of its fruit. Only then. So, if someone else has already

[2]With a population of approximately 50 million people, Kenya comprises over 40 ethnic groups, the largest being the Gikuyu/Kikuyu (17.13%), Luhya (14.35%), Kalenjin (13.37%), Luo (10.65%), and Kamba (9.81%), respectively, according to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census. The Kikuyu have produced three out of the country's five presidents so far. The other two have been from the Kalenjin ethnic group. William Ruto, the current president, is Kalenjin. And the opposition has, since 1966, been spearheaded by the Luo community (first under Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, and now under his son, Raila Odinga). The country's politics is heavily ethnicized, featuring tribal alliances, and its elections are largely ethnic censuses. The Mt. Kenya area is home to the Gikuyu, Embu, and Meru (GEMA) bloc of communities—a Bantu organization formed with founding father Jomo Kenyatta's approval to advance the socio-economic-political interests of the Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru ethnic groups, especially in relation to the perceived Luo threat.

> climbed the tree, and my tribesman cannot get to the top, I'd rather cut down the tree. (Focus group discussion, Homa Bay County)

Kikuyu domination of government, most participants contended, epitomizes this phenomenon. In the opinion of many, the element of tribalism significantly characterizes Kenyan leadership. Top appointments have all been dominated by one tribe, the Kikuyu, and closely associated ethnic cohorts from Mt. Kenya. As noted by participants, this situation prevailed at the time of this research, for the President, Uhuru Kenyatta, was from Mt. Kenya; in Parliament, the Speaker, Justin Muturi, was from Mt. Kenya; and so was the new Chief Justice, Martha Koome. According to most participants, "this kind of arrangement discourages other tribes, for they feel left out. Leadership positions should be distributed in a way that reflects ethnic and regional balance. What we currently have generates hate and evil thoughts" (focus group discussion, Homa Bay County). So profoundly noticeable was Kikuyu (Mt. Kenya) domination of the Kenyan government in the eyes of many participants that such sentiments repeatedly emerged during this study. "Look at how the national government is composed in terms of the ethnicity: CBK [Central Bank of Kenya] Governor, Kikuyu; KRA [Kenya Revenue Authority], Kikuyu; NIS [National Intelligence Service], Kikuyu; KEMRI [Kenya Medical Research Institute], Kikuyu; the majority of parastatal heads are also Kikuyu; Attorney-General, Kikuyu," it was stated elsewhere. "They're all from the same tribe and can hold a meeting in their dialect. They sit down, discuss, make a decision, and move on. Like a family meeting. That's why violence occurs during each and every election cycle" (focus group discussion, Homa Bay County). Participants in this study further alleged that accountability at the national level of government is completely lacking, and the violence that accompanies elections will not come to an end because the country's authorities do not adhere to the principle of ethnic and regional balance in government appointments.

Police impunity and prejudice

Various allegations made by participants in this study suggest strongly that the police contribute in a significant way toward electoral violence in the country. Most Kenyans, for instance, believe that the police force, as an institution, does not operate independently. Rather, it takes its orders from the executive. During election time, the police are deployed strategically by the government to meet certain objectives, according to most participants in this study. In the words of one participant:

> As we head towards the general elections, the police aren't dispersed throughout the country to ensure security in a broad sense. Rather, they are distributed in accordance with their ethnicity to safeguard the establishment's interests. For example, if the system has decided that the current Deputy President (a Kalenjin) won't be in leadership in 2022, policemen from another ethnicity will be sent to the Rift Valley to suppress possible Kalenjin dissent at the grassroots. In Nyanza, an opposition stronghold, officers from ethnic groups that are in competition with Luos are sent to brutalize the latter. We need a fair police force in this country; not one based on negative ethnicity and tribalism. (Focus group discussion, Kericho County)

Also this study shows that, in the eyes of most Kenyans, the police employ excessive force. Their alleged savagery is accompanied by arrogance and impunity. During Kenya's violent election cycles, participants said, they often kill citizens carelessly and as they please without regard for the law. According to one participant, "when the masses engage in protests, it is the very police who

shoot them; they even go as far as pumping bullets into innocent children who don't even understand what is happening. We have lost faith in them" (focus group discussion, Kericho County). They exhibited similar behavior in implementing curfews during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants alleged, and this has tremendously soured police-citizen relations in the country.

Participants also alluded to an element of partisanship in police operations in the country, informed by ethnic identities. Concerning the 2007 debacle, they spoke of cases where police got absorbed into the country's political divisions, sparing citizens from their ethnic groups and roughing up those from other ethnicities. During that time, they further alleged, some of the security personnel took sides and acted in accordance with the political party they sympathized with. Although the 2017 post-election violence was milder, it was also alleged that the receipt of assistance from police was dependent on one's ethnicity—an often accurate determinant of an individual's political stance, given Kenya's ethnicized politics.

Others stated that police engage in mischievous deeds, such as taking leftovers for themselves, of their own accord in cases where protesters engage in looting. Whenever they are sent to restore order, they go with their own agendas in mind—personal and not governmental. For instance, in the words of a participant, "if they find you in your house with your wife, they take you outside and beat you up. Others remain in the house with your wife and rape her." Also, "if they find you with money and phones in the house, they confiscate these items and make away with them" (focus group discussion, Homa Bay County). In general, Kenyans appear to have a very negative image of the country's police force.

Lack of democracy within political parties and a winner-takes-all democratic system

Some participants viewed electoral violence in Kenya as systemic, arguing that it begins at the party level and intensifies during the general election. They contended that in Kenya there is a lack of democracy within political parties: party nominations are often carried out in a manner devoid of transparency, leaving aspirants and their supporters feeling like their rights to a free and fair process have been violated. Participants attributed the problems experienced during party nominations to party leaders themselves. They argued that in many cases an aspirant cannot succeed without the endorsement or backing of the party leader. Following the voting process at the party level, for instance, a particular candidate may emerge as the outright winner. However, at the behest of the party leader, party officials often award the nomination certificate to a different person who lost the party primaries. This leads to disappointment, acrimony, violence, and the emergence of bad leaders.

Closely related to the issue of undemocratic political parties is what participants saw as a winner-takes-all democratic system. One argued as follows:

> Well, it's not really about the results per se; it's the nature of politics and democracy. We all know that there'll never be two winners; no matter what, there'll always be one winner. If you were amongst the competitors, and you happened to lose, would you accept to be left out in the cold for five years? (Focus group discussion, Kiambu County)

Proponents of this view held that politicians spend plenty of resources when campaigning for political seats, with the hope of recouping their losses upon accession to power; defeat spells doom for it hampers their access to state resources, resulting in wasted investment. Also, they argued further that it has reached a point where common people have come to realize that state resources are largely accessed along ethnic lines in Kenya. Consequently, they vote with the conviction that their tribesman must win for them to get the opportunity to "eat."

According to their thinking, if their co-ethnic fails to secure state power, they will lose the opportunity to eat and will stay out in the wilderness for 5 years. They therefore adopt a do-or-die attitude or posture toward elections—which are akin to war, where the victor takes the spoils.

Political tribalism

According to most participants in this study, Kenyans generally relate well with each other prior to the election season. However, politicians, especially the presidential aspirants, mobilize support along ethnic lines during their campaigns for office, and this results in tribal hatred, which leads to violence both during and after the elections. In sentiments that could validate the important question posed by African social scientist, Archie Mafeje (2002)—whether multi-partyism is compatible with ethnically diverse societies—another participant observed as follows: "Tomorrow, when election season comes, everyone will start assuming a tribal posture. Yet we have been living in peace and eating together. What happens? What gets in between us?" (Focus group discussion, Kericho County).

Participants contended that political tribalism manifests itself in various other ways, especially in the aftermath of the elections. For instance, co-ethnics of losing candidates are incited by the latter to reject the results on the premise of stolen votes. In the process of demonstrating on behalf of the losing candidates, the common man is clobbered by the police. Also, gullible masses are often bribed by the political elites to beat up and evict supporters of rival candidates from their landholdings. To curtail political tribalism, the masses should stop following politicians' instructions and behaving as fanatics who do not have the capacity to think independently, they contended. Figure 2 summarizes the findings of this study on citizens' perspectives on the causes of post-election violence in Kenya.

The next section presents the findings of the second phase of this research, which assessed the BBI in relation to the issues raised by participants in this study, as summarized in Figure 2.

Analysis of the BBI report in relation to citizens' concerns

The BBI Report contended that corruption is endemic in Kenyan society and put forward proposals that suggested that the country's institutions, including its electoral body and judiciary, are, to a large extent, devoid of integrity. While acknowledging the importance of an independent judiciary, it nonetheless called for accountability. It also recommended the following: (i) the appointment of Special Magistrates and Judges to handle serious criminal offenses such as drug trafficking, corruption, and terrorism; (ii) the allocation of more power to the Judicial Service Commission to enable the body to discipline errant judges; (iii) an overhaul of the Office of the Judiciary Ombudsman to make it more friendly and alert to citizens; and (iv) the sensitization of Kenyans about their right to present their complaints to either the Judiciary Ombudsman or the Commission on Administrative Justice. On the other hand, the BBI, while recognizing that the IEBC enjoys extremely low levels of trust from the public, proposed several further elements. First, a way should be found for leaders of political parties represented in parliament to contribute toward the employment of IEBC Commissioners. Besides being accomplished, non-partisan persons of good moral standing, the latter should neither be activists nor supporters of the aforesaid political parties. Second, "[a]ll IEBC staff should be employed on a three-year contract, renewable only once, if their performance is good" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 54). And third, the electoral system should be restructured "to ensure it is simple, accurate, verifiable, secure, accountable and transparent as mandated by Article 86 of the Constitution" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 55).

While lamenting what it referred to as "the lack of jobs and income" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 7), the BBI acknowledged in a profound way that poverty is a problem in Kenya. The high prevalence

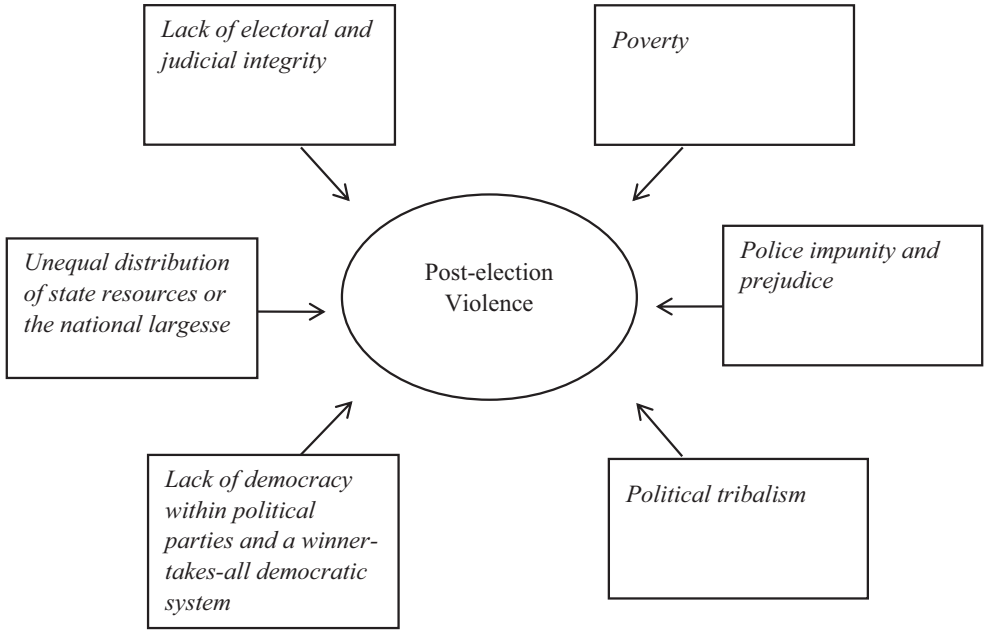

FIGURE 2 Citizens' perspectives on the causes of post-election violence in Kenya.

of youth unemployment and underemployment was projected as a great concern. Besides, according to the document, untold inequality (especially in regard to access to health care, education, and clean water) characterizes the country. Dishearteningly, it contended, the economic growth witnessed in Kenya does not seem to be lessening the gap between the rich and the poor. Among those hampering poverty alleviation are gatekeepers and rent-seekers in government, who hinder the efforts of potential investors. Young entrepreneurs engaged in small businesses are also met with a myriad of related hurdles. To alleviate poverty, the BBI argued, Kenya's economy should transfer its focus from value extraction to value creation. An economy based on value creation, it posited, would comprise the following major features: (i) "accountability by economic actors—companies, entrepreneurs, and regulators—to consumers, customers, clients, employees, and the broader community"; (ii) it "would use the SGR [Standard Gauge Railway] to export more goods to the world, rather than just to import for consumption"; (iii) it "would be globally competitive in terms of skills, production costs, quality standards, logistics, and regulatory burdens"; (iv) "it would reward companies building value, keep taxes at a minimum, enable small businesses to compete against larger ones, and safeguard its economic policymaking and regulation from capture by major companies and cartels"; and (v) it would be "deeply integrated with the rest of the region" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 25).

According to the BBI, the country's citizens "want to see the 'Face of Kenya' in ethnic terms included in the high table of power, at the National and County levels" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 49). Moreover, "[d]espite the decentralisation of decision making and resource allocation through devolution, there is still a strong belief across the country that winning the Presidency will lead to an equal allocation of public resources and service delivery with the ethnic group of the winner taking a disproportionate share" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 48). Indeed, noted the report, "[d]espite the constitution's attempt to entrench inclusivity, in general the political elite and its followers and supporters are certain that missing being represented in the Executive branch is exclusion" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 57). The report also acknowledged that "economically disadvantaged Kenyans who have been brought up on systems of patronage… seem to demand that one or more of their own must be in power for their lot to improve" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 57).

Interestingly, Kenyans do not confine the meaning of inclusivity to ethnicity; they want to see the youth, people living with disabilities, and women included in government appointments. Similarly, they urge the authorities to ensure appreciation for cultural diversity and the different religions practiced by Kenyans when making appointments (PTBBUA, 2019).

In its "Safety and Security" chapter, the BBI contended that Kenyans do not feel safe and secure partly because of "mistreatment at the hands of security personnel and a lack of trust in policing" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 88). The document also stated that "the value of a Kenyan life impacted by violence, insecurity and poor safety standards should be the same across Kenya in terms of police response, investigation and prosecution" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 15). These attributes imply that the BBI acknowledged the presence of police impunity and prejudice in the country. Nonetheless, the issues of safety and security were discussed broadly, within an international context (regionally and globally), with less emphasis being placed on the domestic front (the setting in which post-election violence occurs). Security issues such as "continuing threats of terrorism" and Kenya's location around "failing or fragile states" appeared to trump concerns around "police abuses and rogue illegal actions that violate human rights" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 15). Although a strong emphasis was also placed on the mental health and wellness of police officers, the following two recommendations may have served to alleviate the negative role played by the latter in fostering electoral violence: (1) "eliminat[ion] [of] corruption in recruitment by instituting heavy penalties for corrupting the process"; and (2) ensuring "[t]he standards of promotion into leadership and management must reflect measurable past performance, including internal courses and exams as well as citizen complaints of abuse and corruption" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 92).

The BBI saw ethnic antagonism and competition as an impediment to the achievement of Kenya's national goals and objectives and called for the country "to do away with a winner-take-all model for the Presidency" (PTBBUA, 2019, pp. 9–10). Appearing cognizant of the need for consideration of context in the formulation of public policy, it noted that "[i]n a rush to adopt, and even mimic, foreign models, particularly from the democratic West,… [Kenya has] forged a politics that is a contest of us versus them" and proposed "a more consociational model that works best for ethnically divided societies" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 10). The "autochthonous, home-grown executive structure" it called for would comprise the following components, among others: an executive president; a deputy president; a prime minister; a leader of the official opposition; and a shadow cabinet. The BBI also recommended measures that suggested a lack of democracy within political parties such as: (1) "Individuals included in any Party lists shall initially have undergone a process that uses transparent public participation in the Counties even before any other vetting procedure is used"; (2) "Parties will be compelled through the Political Parties Act to be consistent with the Constitution to meet the Gender Rule and other Constitutional measures of inclusion through their party lists"; and (3) "The nomination lists through parties should be completed in a transparent process governed by the political parties overseen by the Registrar of Political Parties and the IEBC" (PTBBUA, 2019, pp. 53–54).

And while acknowledging that political tribalism characterizes competition for state power in Kenya, the BBI argued that the phenomenon is not sui generis to the country, but also experienced both regionally and globally. It explained the origins of political tribalism thus: "[t]he coming of the modern State as a colonial enterprise—which was racially defined and placed in opposition to our African nations—led to the recruitment of ethnic division and manipulation as a tool for the exploitation and governance of the colony" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 44). To overcome political tribalism, the BBI recommended deeper integration with neighboring countries to attain political federation as envisaged by the East African Community. Also, it contended, Kenyans have to strengthen the ties that bind them. This, it further argued, could be achieved through "[s]chool curriculums [which] should feature compulsory components on

history, cultural diversity, knowledge of the major religions including traditional ones, and the relationship between the Constitution and our cultures/religions" (PTBBUA, 2019, p. 45).

DISCUSSION

From the foregoing sets of findings—citizens' perspectives on the one hand, and the BBI Report on the other—two distinct patterns are discernable. First, to a considerable degree, there is congruence as to what causes post-election violence. Second, points of divergence are to be found in the details on how to address the causes and find a lasting solution.

Whereas the proposed grassroots solution to the lack of electoral and judicial integrity is partly externally oriented, the BBI offered internecine proposals. There was a strong feeling at the grassroots that foreign intervention in the conduct and management of the country's polls was the most credible way of ensuring free and fair polls. This suggests that some of the country's institutions have lost instrumental legitimacy (see Jana, 2014). Their performance is seen as wanting in the eyes of many Kenyans. Importantly, also, while the country's leaders may have ascended to power constitutionally, the grassroots opinion that for the weak to get justice, court decisions must be respected by everyone including the president, suggests that these leaders are seen to be misusing the juridical legitimacy (see Jana, 2014) they enjoy. If this is the case, then the BBI's internecine approach to handling corruption both at the IEBC and the judiciary, particularly the proposition that awareness should be raised among the country's citizens on their entitlement to submit their grievances to some of the country's judicial institutions, might not have borne much fruit in the wake of an apparent legitimacy deficit.

Regarding poverty, there is not much difference in terms of what causes it. Whereas at the grassroots it is perceived to be partly the result of unconscionable levels of corruption at the highest levels of government in Kenya, the BBI contended that gatekeepers and rent-seekers in government—who hinder the efforts of potential investors—are most responsible for the phenomenon. But while the ordinary Kenyan feels the solution largely lies in efforts to control inflation and reduce taxation, the crafters of the BBI contended that Kenya's economy should transfer its focus from value extraction to value creation to alleviate poverty. Again, as the specifics of the suggested solutions in the findings sections above depict, the grassroots vision in this regard is centered on the nation-state, while the BBI proposals are characterized by a broader, external component.

The grassroots opinion stresses that unequal distribution of state resources or the national largesse is a prominent cause of post-election violence and this phenomenon is also well-captured in the BBI. Decrying Kikuyu (and Mt. Kenya) domination of government, during the Uhuru Kenyatta era, participants in this study called for adherence to the principle of ethnic and regional balance in government appointments as the solution to this problem. And so did the BBI, when it talked about the "face of Kenya." Nonetheless, the BBI went a notch further and noted that Kenyans did not confine the meaning of inclusivity to ethnicity. They want to see the youth, people living with disabilities, and women included in government appointments.

The police impunity and prejudice spoken of at the grassroots level were discussed in the BBI. While the grassroots sentiments featured the employment of excessive force by the police, and elements of partisanship in police operations in the country, informed by ethnic identities, the BBI mentioned mistreatment of Kenyans by the police and alluded to double standards in police response, investigation, and prosecution. The BBI proposals, however, were largely concerned with terrorism, discussing the issues of safety and security broadly, within an international context (regionally and globally), with less emphasis being placed on the domestic front (the setting in which post-election violence occurs). The BBI call for greater transparency

in police recruitment and promotion processes may have nevertheless served to alleviate the negative role played by the police in fostering electoral violence.

There seems to have been an appreciation by the BBI of the element of the lack of democracy within political parties and a winner-takes-all democratic system expressed by citizens as well. Appearing to comprehend the grassroots concerns about dictatorship demonstrated by party leaders, especially during party primaries, the BBI put forth several suggestions that could have aided in solving this problem. Among them was the proposal that party nomination lists be prepared in a transparent manner under the supervision of the IEBC and the Registrar of Political Parties. Its recommendation of an "autochthonous, home-grown executive structure," comprising an executive president, a deputy president, a prime minister, a leader of the official opposition, and a shadow cabinet, was also compatible with grassroots concerns. Indeed, this might well have made elections in Kenya less fatal by addressing what citizens referred to as a do-or-die attitude or posture associated with the country's polls, which are akin to war, where the victor takes the spoils.

While both sets of findings attribute post-election violence partly to political tribalism, the participants' views on its causes and possible solutions to the vice are divergent but compatible. At the grassroots political tribalism is simply attributed to politicians, especially the presidential aspirants who mobilize support along ethnic lines during their campaigns for office. However, the BBI's understanding of this egregious phenomenon goes much deeper, for it associates political tribalism with colonialism which, it contends, was founded on the principles of racial segregation and the manipulation of ethnic identities—these iniquities would then be passed on to the African nation-states at independence. These views are similar to the "bifurcated state" thesis propounded by Mamdani (1996). Notably though, the solution proposed at the grassroots is rather internecine: to curtail political tribalism, participants contended, the masses should stop following politicians' instructions, and desist from behaving as fanatics who do not have the capacity to think independently. On the other hand, the BBI recommendation partly looks beyond the nation-state. Besides making the issue part of school curriculums to sensitize Kenyans, the document called for deeper integration with neighboring countries to attain political federation as envisaged by the East African Community.

From the foregoing comparative analysis of citizen perspectives and the BBI Report, there appears to be considerable consonance in the understanding of the causes of post-election violence, notwithstanding some differences on how to solve the puzzle. The divide between the two groups (the elites and the masses), which has been typical in the formulation and implementation of public policy in Africa, especially in cases where the principle of all-inclusiveness is not adhered to, is not very pronounced.

These findings are largely antithetical to those of several other studies that have been premised on the "elite–masses divide" (see Hooghe, 2003; Lesschaeve, 2017; McElwain, 2020; Page & Barabas, 2000). A study by Hooghe (2003), for instance, shows that public opinion in Europe generally differs from the elitist stance when it comes to European integration: elites are more welcoming to the idea of yielding national sovereignty than citizens. According to Lesschaeve's (2017) study of Belgium, two social groups—privileged groups that are better educated and earn more, and underprivileged groups that are less educated and earn relatively less than their privileged counterparts—often take opposing policy postures. When this happens, the country's legislators side with the privileged lot and articulate the latter's preferences at the expense of the underprivileged. McElwain's (2020) analysis of Japan finds that the visions of two leading political parties, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Japan, concerning constitutional change, are largely incompatible with those of their respective supporters. Page and Barabas (2000) examine the American scenario and find incompatibilities between leaders and citizens, in terms of policy preferences. In part, they note

that while citizens consider the fight against crime, health care, and social security as important areas that require more funding, leaders attach a lesser value to them. Also, the public supports multilateralism and the United Nations more than the leaders.

Yet there are several other studies premised on the lens of the "elite–masses divide" that have yielded similar outcomes (of convergence between elites and the masses) to the ones presented in this study (see Dolný & Baboš, 2015; Farag, 2020; Giger & Lefkofridi, 2014; von Schoultz & Wass, 2016). Concerning the issue of salience, for instance, Farag (2020) has found that in Tunisia, there is consensus among the voters (masses) and the leading political parties (elites) that the economic situation is the most significant problem facing the country. Giger and Lefkofridi (2014), who studied Switzerland, find that voters get attached to parties that espouse or champion the issues that citizens consider to be important. These issues include immigration, social policy, law and order, the environment, EU membership, economic liberalization, and social values. Incidentally, niche parties are more successful at capitalizing on this element of salience to garner support than mainstream parties. With regard to Finland, von Schoultz and Wass (2016) find that both voters and elected representatives or candidates for office consider national interests to be more important than those of territories, parties, or social groups.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study are also diametrically opposed to a section of the little scholarship that has analyzed the BBI (see Akech & Mading, 2021; Katiti, 2020; Onguny, 2020; Roznai & Munabi, 2022). They particularly contradict the extreme pessimism expressed by Onguny (2020, p. 559), whose contribution overwhelmingly castigates the BBI, terming it a case of "'sound and fury, signifying nothing,' insofar as it s[ought] a solution/settlement to political violence" for the following reasons, among others. First, he saw it as Kenyatta's subtle way of controlling state bureaucrats and fellow political elites as he sought an arrangement that would cater to his interests following the 2022 polls. Second, he argued that the BBI introduced nothing outside the purview of the knowledge of Kenyans. Third, not only was the initiative introduced tardily, but it also reiterated matters that had been exhaustively discussed and highlighted by other prior commissions that had produced similar documents such as the Kriegler, Ndung'u, and Waki Reports. Fourth, it did not, in his judgment, unambiguously show how the autochthonous governance structure it proposed would curtail the financing of violent acts associated with Kenyan elections.

Ultimately, however, in light of the findings presented earlier, the study's assumption comes across as being largely deviant. Based on the evidence adduced in this article, it is not possible to unequivocally argue that the solutions proposed in the now-defunct BBI, with regard to addressing the problem of post-election violence, were largely incompatible with the opinions and lived experiences of citizens at the grassroots level of society. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings of this study appear to support the argument espoused by modern elite theorists that when political elites cooperate, they can yield long-term political stability (see McAllister, 1991, p. 240). Also, the high levels of congruence between citizen perspectives and the elite proposals demonstrated in this study could be linked to possible proper and sufficient civic education about the BBI. Though arguable, if this was the case, then the role of education in eliminating mass–elite political differences, as espoused by early classical democratic theorists, cannot be gainsaid. Walgrave and Lefevere's (2013) argument that discrepancies between voters and their parties occur because of the former's ignorance concerning the latter's policy postures must be considered thoughtfully. Furthermore, given the high compatibility levels of the two sets of findings, one could draw the inference that many Kenyans would have shown up to vote in the BBI referendum had it seen the light of day. This insinuation is based on the contentions of Reher (2014), who suggests that voters are likely to participate in elections if their concerns are captured in campaigns.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of the chasm inherent in the public policy domain, especially in the African context (featuring elitist visions on the one hand and the conflicting desires and expectations of the largely impoverished masses on the other) this article set out to assess whether Kenya's now-defunct BBI—initiated by political protagonists, former president Uhuru Kenyatta, and opposition chief, Raila Odinga in 2018—would have been an effective mechanism for eradicating post-election violence in the country had it been adopted. Pegging the idea of effectiveness on compatibility, or lack thereof, between grassroots perspectives on what causes post-election violence and the content of the now-defunct BBI Report, it sought an answer to the following broad question: did the approaches and suggestions fronted by Kenya's political elites toward solving the conundrum of electoral violence truly intersect with the opinions and lived experiences of the masses? It has tested the following assumption: owing to the elitist interests of Kenya's political class, the solutions proposed in the now-defunct BBI, with regard to addressing the problem of post-election violence, were largely incompatible with the opinions and lived experiences of citizens at the grassroots level of society.

It finds that, according to citizens at the grassroots level of Kenyan society, six major factors are responsible for the post-election violence witnessed in the country since the re-introduction of multiparty politics: (1) lack of electoral and judicial integrity; (2) poverty; (3) unequal distribution of state resources or the national largesse; (4) police impunity and prejudice; (5) lack of democracy within political parties and a winner-takes-all democratic system; and (6) political tribalism. Scrutiny of the BBI reveals that the foregoing issues were comprehensively covered in the report. A juxtaposition of the two sets of findings further reveals two important elements. First, to a considerable degree there is congruence as to what causes post-election violence. Second, points of divergence are to be found in the details on how to address the causes and find a lasting solution. The research assumption advanced in this study is therefore largely deviant and it is possible to argue, owing to the foregoing high levels of compatibility, that the BBI could have been useful for establishing societal harmony in Kenya. Its nullification should consequently be seen as a missed opportunity for furthering social cohesion in the country.

The study's findings raise an important question. Given the possibility that, despite the usual dialectics that characterize the two groups, in some instances there will be high congruence in mass–elite policy preferences in the African public policy sphere—as depicted in this study—how should public policy formation and implementation be approached in Africa? An answer can only be suggested here. In his analysis of the problems of economic development and the challenges to democratic consolidation facing Africa, Mamadou Dia (1996, p. vii, cited in Englebert, 1997, pp. 768–769) attributed the continent's woes to "a crisis of structural disconnect between formal institutions transplanted from outside and indigenous institutions born out of traditional African culture" and called for "institutional reconciliation." To optimally craft public policy in an environment characterized by competing interests, I submit that concerned entities in Africa could borrow from Dia's (1996) concept of "institutional reconciliation" and ensure the fusion of bottom-up and top-down approaches to policy formulation and implementation. As suggested by the findings of this study, a hybrid strategy could yield satisfactory outcomes and aid in stabilizing the continent. Nevertheless, since the citizens' concerns presented in this research appear to have been mostly captured in the BBI, it is also possible to argue that the initiative was driven by genuine intent and that the two leaders had the interests of the Kenyan masses at heart. Accordingly, it would be advisable for the country's citizens and other stakeholders to approach proposed public policy proposals with an open mind, should similar initiatives be forged in the future—even if they remain skeptical of political elites and are confounded by the vicissitudes of political realignments. Moreover, as long as the objective is political stability and the advancement of the socioeconomic conditions of the masses, "windows

of opportunity to push… pet projects onto a national agenda for action" (Kumah-Abiwu et al., 2022, p. 192) should certainly be taken advantage of by current and future African leaders.

The main limitation of this study is that it was not designed to carry out a comparative analysis of the opinions of the enthusiasts of the three protagonists in the Kenyan political story—Kenyatta, Odinga, and Ruto. Future studies of this nature could adopt a more comparative approach and yield additional significant and nuanced findings that could help us understand the dynamics of power associated with public policy formation and implementation in Kenya. Nonetheless, as stated earlier, two major anomalies in particular inspired this study. First, there is a dearth of research that shows how the "elite–masses divide" in public policy formulation and implementation plays out with regard to electoral violence. Second, scholarly resources (including texts and curriculums) on public policy in Africa have seldom prioritized the lived experiences of the continent's peoples (Heleta, 2016; Mafeje, 2002). It is hoped that, by attempting to correct the foregoing irregularities, this study has made a contribution toward filling knowledge gaps inherent in the African public policy sphere.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest to disclose.

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APPENDIX

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to participate. The purpose of this study is to examine the nature and causes of post-election violence in Kenya, a phenomenon that has taken root in the country since the reintroduction of multiparty elections in 1992.

We are very interested to hear your valuable opinion on why and how post-election violence occurred in 2017. We intend to use the insights gained from you to assess the relevance of the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) Report.

We would like to tape the focus groups so that we can make sure to capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas we hear from the group. The information you give us is completely confidential,

and we will not associate your name with anything you say in the focus group. No names will be attached to the focus groups and the tapes will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed.

You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time. We understand how important it is that this information is kept private and confidential. We will ask participants to respect each other's confidentiality.

If you have any questions now or after you have appended your signature to this informed consent form, you can contact my research assistants and me: we can also be reached via telephone; our names and phone numbers are provided on this form.

Please sign below to show that you agree to participate in this focus group.

_____

Signature of participant

1. Let us begin this discussion by hearing your general thoughts on post-election violence in Kenya. Why do you think it continuously occurs in the country? Why don't citizens just accept the results, whichever way they go?
2. What is your opinion on Kenyan leadership in general? Do you think that the Kenyan government fulfilled its promises to the people from 2013 to 2017 before the elections were held? Why?
3. Would you say that your socio-economic needs and rights as a citizen are being met? If not, would you still lay blame on the central government, given that the country has since adopted a devolved system of government that enables communities to take greater charge and control of their socio-economic destinies?
4. Why was there unrest following the announcement of the results of the August 8, 2017 elections?
5. What informed the chaos during the repeat poll on October 26, 2017?
6. What activities did the citizens engage in during the protests and riots of the 2017 election cycle?
7. How do the activities of citizens, including protests and riots, compare with the situation in 2007?
8. How did the police and other state security agents react to the citizens' riots during the 2017 election cycle?
9. How does the police reaction to citizen protests and riots compare to the situation in 2007? Was it more or less severe? Why?

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