

After Negative Ethnicity: The Future of Voting in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

More than any other demographic, the question of negative ethnicity has been a scourge on the African continent. In Kenya, the ethnicisation of politics has plagued the nation since it gained its independence from the British. The ethnicised politics persisted and reached its zenith in the post 2007 elections ethnic clashes which left more than 1000 people dead. Ten years later, the August 2017 presidential elections featured the highest percentage of youth, with voters aged between 18 to 34 years old accounting for more than half the total cast vote. Kenyans hoped for an election outcome different from the previous ones where the leaders have invariably been voted for by those who share their tribes. In the past, two or more ethnic communities have formed coalitions in an effort to win this most prized position. This happened again, however; change was not to come this past year. The youth perpetuated the ethnopolitical voting, the fact that some were voting for the very first time notwithstanding. In this paper I argue that ethnicity is tied to geography; that its power is inherent in its placedness. Using Appadurai's concept of 'deterritorialization' and Appiah's 'cosmopolitanism' I shall problematize the idea of 'ethnic boundaries' in a bid to show how the more open, all-encompassing "good place that is no place" of Utopianism can break the ethnic voting patterns of negative ethnicity and finally usher in the age of issues and ideas based voting.

Keywords: Utopianism, Negative Ethnicity, Cosmopolitanism, Kenya Elections, Thomas More, Deterritorialization

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