

The Decentralised Governance in Kenya: Implications on Citizen Participation in Local Governance

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the extent to which decentralisation efforts have affected citizen participation in local governance in Kenya. A survey research design that integrated a mixed-method approach was employed to collect data. The study used Krejcie and Morgan's table to select a sample size of 371 respondents from four counties for the questionnaire instrument. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 16 interview respondents, including critical institutions and organisations in the field. The findings revealed that decentralisation influences citizen participation in local governance. 77.3% of the respondents agreed that decentralisation had promoted political entrepreneurship, while 75% contended that decentralisation had influenced citizen participation in developing policies and legislation. Moreover, 57.2% of the respondents felt that citizen participation in decentralised policy-making was high, while 69% were satisfied that decentralisation had made it possible for citizens to participate in county budgeting. However, only 49% approved the effectiveness of decentralisation in promoting citizen participation in promoting participatory budgeting and planning process. Therefore, the study recommends that the national and county governments put in place measures to safeguard the independence of the counties in realising the objective of citizen participation in local governance.

1. Introduction

In many developing countries, decentralisation has become an essential component of political reform processes (Grävingholt et al., 2006). Governments of varying ideological hues in Africa, Latin America, and Asia have experimented with it (Robinson, 2007). According to Crawford and Hartmann (2008), decentralisation transfers power, responsibilities, and funding from the central government to provincial and local government levels. It construes a process of restructuring the authority to create a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity (UNDP, 2004). Therefore, based on this principle, the functions are transferred to the lowest institutional or social level capable of completing them. It relates to the relationship between central and sub-national institutions, whether public, private or civic (UNDP, 2004).

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Buam (2015) defines citizen participation as to how public concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision-making. As such, citizen participation, especially in governance, has been a central issue for many development partners who support good governance agenda. Citizen participation has to do with some people's power and influence over other people or some classes over other classes (Fong, 1986). While there are many reasons for the decentralisation, the primary justification is that a decentralised environment is an optimal condition for citizen participation and inclusivity (Hart, 1972). A successful decentralisation requires some degree of local citizen participation as one of its preconditions. At the same time, however, decentralisation is also supposed to create new and sustainable opportunities for more such participation. Therefore, the relationship between decentralisation and participation is mutually reinforcing (Grävingholt et al., 2006).

Theoretically, the decentralisation of government to a more local level, with improved citizen engagement with the state officials, is meant to create more participatory and deliberative spaces for decision-making and lead to more effective and efficient service delivery and better policies (Mohmand & Loureiro, 2017). Civil Society Organisations and rights groups have often invoked decentralisation and citizen participation to demand better governance, based on the assumption that devolution of power and people's involvement in decision-making are yardsticks of good Governance (Chemmencheri, 2013). Francis and James (2003) summarised the potential benefits of decentralisation: improved efficiency of public service provision, more appropriate services, better governance, and empowerment of local citizens. Cheema and Rondinelli (2007) posit that decentralisation provides a conducive way of achieving sound governance principles. It provides an institutional framework at the sub-national level through which groups and citizens can organise themselves and participate in political and economic decisions. According to Falleti (2010), decentralisation improves democracy by bringing the government closer to the people, and this position has been supported by the promoters of decentralisation, who draw their support from the local government theories. In a way, the pro-decentralists argue that decentralisation provides the local people with the legitimate right to voice their concerns in matters which affect their lives (Saito, 2011).

In 2010, Kenya promulgated a new constitution based on various principles and key amongst them that enhance people's centrality in governance. The new constitution was, however, operationalised in 2013 by the government. It established a devolved system of governance, with the move creating 47 local counties across the country encompassing three different forms: deconcentration, where central agencies previously located in the capital city of Nairobi were relocated to the different counties to facilitate administrative functions; delegation, where certain services were transferred to specialised semi-autonomous local units; and devolution, where the central government transferred fiscal and political functions/ responsibilities to independent sub-national units which enjoy autonomy under state law (Mbate, 2018). Devolution has permitted counties to identify problems, make policies, plan, collect revenue, execute the budget, audit, monitor, and evaluate citizen participation in decision-making (Ngigi & Busolo, 2019). In addition, to facilitate access to public services closer to them, the citizens adopted the devolved system of government in Kenya (Omollo, 2012).

However, over the last ten years of its implementation, the country has witnessed variations in outcomes related to the devolution objectives. Some counties perform well while others' performance has deteriorated, casting doubt on its application as a governance innovation (Omollo, 2012). Moreover, despite the clear constitutional threshold for citizen participation in governance,

the reality on the ground is that very little effective citizen participation is taking place (Centre for International Enterprise (CIPE), 2018). Indeed, scholars concur that devolution is not without its risks and does not necessarily lead to improved citizen participation in governance and economic performance. This raises doubts about the effectiveness of the devolved system of governance in Kenya in promoting citizen participation in local governance. Therefore, the study needed to examine the extent to which decentralisation efforts in Kenya have affected citizen participation in local governance, which could be beneficial in informing the national government policy on devolution and citizen participation in Kenya's county governments. Accordingly, this research paper begins with an introduction that explicates decentralisation and citizen participation in governance. It then briefly examines the theoretical framework used in the study to explain the phenomena and then presents a conceptual framework. The methodology aspect of the study is also explained. After that, it presents and critically analyses the study findings. Lastly, the study concludes by giving recommendations on what should be done to ensure the decentralisation in Kenya fully meets its intended objectives.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study utilised the Systems Theory propounded by a biologist Ludwig von in the 1940s (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). The central idea of systems theory is based on an analogy with biology, which states that just as the heart, lungs, and blood function as a whole, so do the components of social and political systems. According to Bertalanffy (1972), there are two different types of systems: closed systems and open systems. Closed systems are isolated, while open systems interact with their environment. However, a ground-breaking work employing the approach was advanced in 1953 by David Easton, who conceived the political system as integrating all activities through which social policy is formulated and executed; that is, the political system is the policy-making process (Easton, 1957).

According to Easton (1957), the study of politics involves understanding how authoritative decisions are made and executed for a society. The system theory holds that organisations cannot be studied in the abstract; they are not found in a vacuum; they are part of particular environments that affect and are affected by them. Easton's conception of the system emphasises linkages between the system and its environment. Inputs (demands) flow into the system and are converted into outputs (decisions and actions) that constitute the authoritative allocation of values. The system's processes convert these inputs into outputs, which have consequences for the system and the environment in which the system exists (Easton, 1957).

Though not an empirical political theory, Easton's system theory provides a practical conceptual framework to analyse, understand, and compare the Third World countries' politics, the critics of system theory have limited mainly themselves either to external criticism of his model of the political system in terms of its range and possible application or to doubts about the whole enterprise of constructing a science of politics (Evans, 1970). According to Kress, Easton's analysis lacks an empirical basis and is empty of facts. Runciman regards it as a shield against Marian's analysis to protect western capitalist society. Gvishiani regards it as a symbol of bourgeois attitudes to maintain the status quo (Pooja, 2014). Additionally, the system theory does not recognise the possibility of heterogeneity or diversity in political systems. It is not interested in knowing the impact of a political system 'on individuals who constitute the system.

However, despite the weakness or criticism of the theory, the System theory applies to this research since it acknowledges the importance of observing the organisation's environment while making a decision. The decentralisation reforms in Kenya aim at enhancing the relationship between state and society with the hope that successful outcomes are inextricably linked to closer public participation (Conyer, 1990). The decentralised structures permit a local government to modify its internal structures and other regulatory mechanisms to achieve desired goals, which may be reformulated to cope with the prevailing environment. In Kenya, through devolution, the central government confers or recognises the self-governing capacities of local communities. The critical attributes of local self-government include locality, representativeness, governmental character or responsibilities and institutional autonomy.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

The main concern of this research work was to examine the extent to which decentralisation has affected citizen participation in local governance in Kenya. The research was guided by the following study concepts: Decentralisation and Citizen Participation. Figure 1 depicts the variables of the study: decentralisation and citizen participation. The independent variable is decentralisation, and the dependent variable is citizen participation. According to the study, decentralisation affects citizen participation. As a result, it is possible to conclude that decentralisation impacts citizen participation, which results in improved local governance.

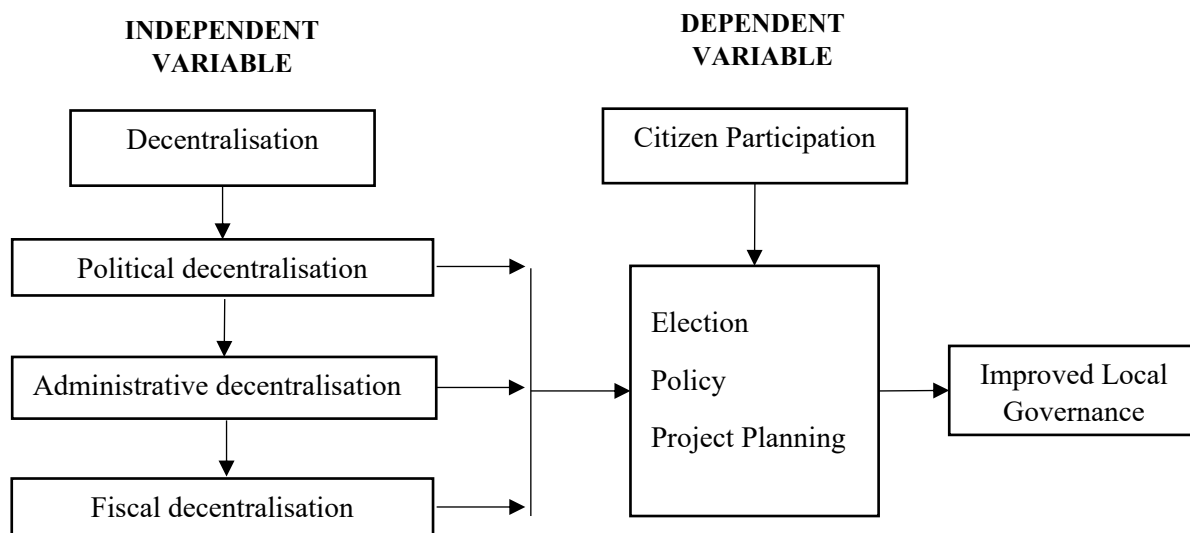


Figure 1. The study's conceptual framework (Source: Authors' construction)

2.3. Empirical Review

According to UNDP (2004), local governance encompasses a set of institutions, mechanisms and processes through which citizens and their groups can exercise their rights and obligations at the local level by articulating their interests and needs, mediating their differences, and exercising their rights and obligations favourably. The building blocks of good local governance are citizen participation, partnerships among key actors at the local level, the capacity of local actors across all sectors, multiple flows of information, institutions of accountability, and a pro-poor orientation. In addition, decentralised governance structures provide conducive conditions for participatory

decision making and better accessible and responsive state institutions at the local level (Hans, 2007).

The adoption of decentralisation reforms in Africa, just like the rest of the world, has also been informed by several reasons: In South Africa, decentralisation was an essential component of promoting inclusive governance, especially after the transition from apartheid to democracy, demanded by a white National Party that could hope to hold on to power in certain jurisdictions as it lost power nationally to the African National Congress. The majority- Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party- also demanded national federalism (USAID, 2009). In Mozambique, decentralisation was adopted to unify the nation; thus, it has enabled the former warring factions some local autonomy to participate in the political process and integrate them faster into the whole system (Shah & Thompson, 2004). Moreover, in Uganda, decentralisation was conceived as a democratic reform which sought to transfer political, administrative, financial and planning authority from central government to local government councils and to promote widespread participation, empower local people to make their own decisions and enhance accountability and responsibility (Government of Uganda, 1994).

Muriu (2013) argues that even though several African countries are increasingly pursuing citizen participation in governance to improve the performance of governments at the local level, it should be noted that the reality of decentralisation can be measured by the amount of authority delegated to the subnational units to initiate policy independently and the willingness of the delegating authority to support the decentralised units in those independent decisions (Hart, 1972). Undoubtedly, the decentralisation reforms adopted in Africa have created an institutional framework for citizen participation. Arguably, this has improved citizen participation (Kessy, 2013). However, when pursued through devolution, decentralisation can result in an autonomous entity with the power to make its own decisions.

According to Blais et al. (2011), when power is decentralised in a given country, one of the consequences is that subnational governments that are granted more power are expected to be more important in voters' eyes. Consequently, subnational elections that produce these governments are also expected to be more salient, resulting in a higher turnout. Conversely, central governments in decentralised countries lose some of their authority, making them less 'important,' contributing to a lower turnout in national elections (Blais et al., 2011). However, as far as one can tell, this simple and intuitively plausible idea has never been put to a systematic empirical test.

Von Lieres and Coelho (2010) believe that within this decentralisation discourse, the citizen's notion has gained a central place in the policies of many local government bodies worldwide. The early literature on participation was broadly optimistic about what participatory governance could achieve in terms of public policies and democracy, often assuming that participation could contribute to more viable and just policies and positively impact poverty, inequality, and development processes. More recently, studies have become more focused on the actual conditions under which forms of participatory governance have evolved (von Lieres & Coelho, 2010). According to Fung and Wright (2003), the institutional design narrative argues that the poorest and most marginalised people can be encouraged to participate through decentralisation by reducing the costs involved in political mobilisation as it would be easier for an ordinary citizen to influence a decision made in their neighbourhood than the federal government.

On the contrary, while, in theory, decentralisation can be a powerful tool to initiate improvements in instruments and policies for the poor, the reality looks less promising. Based on a comprehensive

review of experiences in 19 countries, an OECD Development Centre study finds that decentralisation leads to improvements in poverty reduction in only one-third of the analysed cases (Jütting et al., 2005). In the majority of the countries, decentralisation had no impact at all. Even more worrying, in countries where the state cannot fulfil its essential functions and in environments with high inequalities at the outset, there is a definite risk that decentralisation will increase poverty rather than reduce it. The ambiguous evidence suggests that the link between decentralisation and poverty reduction is not straightforward and that the outcome is primarily influenced by country specificities and the process design (Jütting et al., 2005).

Furthermore, there seems to be little systematic evidence relating to the outcomes of decentralisation processes in the development literature which examine how it affects citizen participation in decentralised decision making. The little evidence reviewed in many case studies is partial or piecemeal, and little systematic comparison has been made. Moreover, decentralisation is complex in its goals, design, and implementation, making it challenging to measure the degree and outcomes/effects (Vedeld, 2003). As a result, most publications tend to rely on theoretical assumptions or anecdotal evidence. A likely reason for the lack of research in this area is linking decentralisation and citizen participation in local governance (Scott, 2009). This study seeks to bridge this gap.

3. Methodology

The study used a Survey research design since it allowed the researcher to employ qualitative and quantitative approaches (Ponto, 2015). The study was conducted in Nairobi, Nakuru, Kakamega and Migori counties. They were purposively selected due to their peculiar characteristics and importance to the research results. Nairobi and Nakuru counties were regarded as elite counties due to their level of industrialisation, as manufacturing is the main economic activity of the people in the two counties. On the other hand, Kakamega and Migori are largely considered rural counties since most of their population resides in rural areas. Farming is the main everyday economic activity of Kakamega and Migori, with the majority practising subsistence farming.

A sample of 371 respondents was used in this study for the questionnaire and 16 respondents for the interview guide. Data was collected using questionnaires and an interview guide. The quantitative data collected was coded and analysed using SPSS version 20 and presented in the form of pie charts, bar graphs and frequency distribution tables. Qualitative data were categorised according to specific themes and analysed using content analysis. The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling methods. To achieve the desired sample representing the population under study, the study adopted stratified random sampling techniques to distribute the questionnaire instrument. Moreover, the study adopted a purposive sampling technique to select participants for the interview guide in the national government Ministry of Devolution and Planning, county government officers in the department of government and administration, members of the county assembly and civil society organisations in the selected counties. Finally, the study linked the study's findings with the reviewed literature to enable the researcher to discuss the data findings, draw implications and make recommendations.

4. The Study Findings and Discussions

4.1. The Influence of Decentralisation on The Number of Participants in Local Elections

The study objective sought to establish whether the decentralisation process had increased the number of participants in the elections in the counties. The results are shown in Figure 2 below.

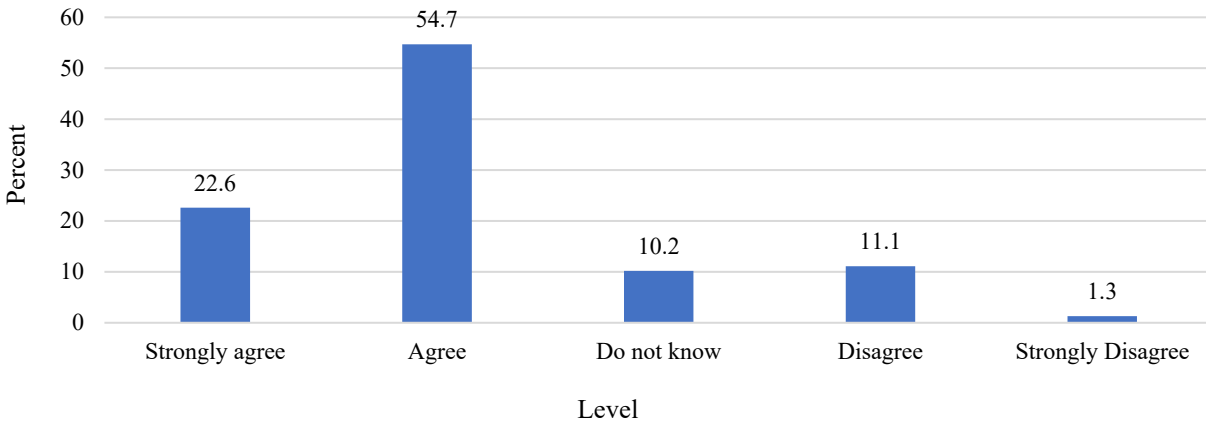


Figure 2. A bar graph indicating decentralisation's influence on participants in the local election (N=371). Source: Fieldwork, 2021.

The finding in Figure 2 indicates that the majority of the respondents agreed that the decentralisation/devolution framework in Kenya had increased the number of participants in elections. This was supported by 54.7% and 22.6% who agreed and strongly agreed. However, a smaller group of 10.2% had no idea, while 11.1% disagreed that the decentralisation framework in Kenya had increased the number of participants in elections. The minority, 1.3%, strongly disagreed. Therefore, it can be concluded that the devolved system being implemented in Kenya has attracted the interest of many participants, as was revealed by 77.3 % of the respondents.

Mbate (2018) supported the study results and posited that decentralisation is associated with increased political entrepreneurship, where more avenues and opportunities are created for individuals to join the political arena and compete for electoral positions. Besides, Roberts (2004) maintained that a robust sub-national structure garners more significant participation incentives because citizens know and care more about local politics. Furthermore, there is a notion that decisions made at the local level more directly greatly influence people; as a result, more qualified people tend to seek local public office after decentralisation as the local office becomes more critical. The decentralisation also allows local officeholders to establish a record of doers, resulting in more trust, confidence, and responsiveness (Spina, 2014).

In support of this, the interview with the study key informants further corroborated the quantitative findings. The majority, if not all of the participants, indicated that the devolved system had attracted more participants in the elections since its implementation across the county. For instance, they argued:

The devolution has expanded government structures and created many positions, especially at the local level. It is a fact that we now have a position of a Governor, women representative, and Senator, all of which were not in the old dispensation. We also have an increased number of wards in the counties. All these posts require people to be filled and, as a result, have attracted many candidates for many reasons. Many participants are now willing to compete in an election because of the closeness of those posts to the people in the community, raising high hopes of winning. Moreover, there is a perceived sense of belonging among the candidates, and they feel they should be part and parcel of their local government and most of them feel the best way to be part of it is by winning an election, forcing them to contest for a seat in the election. This, in a way, increases the number of participants in the election.

According to Gaventa & Valderrama (1999), citizen participation is about power and its exercise by different social actors in the spaces created for the interaction between citizens and local authorities. Moreover, it should also be understood that elections are about power, and they designate who will control power and lead the community in identifying their needs (Onyalo, 2020). However, controlling the structure and processes for participation in defining spaces, actors, agendas, and procedures are usually in governmental institutions' hands. Therefore, they can become a barrier to citizens' effective involvement. In their case study in India, Crook and Manor (1998) illustrate how control over participatory procedures affects citizens' opportunity to participate. The councillors in most places abandoned Gram Sabha meetings after the first year or two, while some resorted to subterfuge holding unannounced meetings when most villagers were away at work or the market or staging Gram Sabha meetings in the Mandal office.

4.2. The Effectiveness of The Decentralisation Framework in Promoting Voter Participation in Local Elections

While the initial analysis indicated that decentralisation had influenced political entrepreneurship in the counties, this section aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of decentralisation in promoting voter participation in the election, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

The effectiveness of the decentralisation framework in promoting voter participation in local elections (N=371)

Effectiveness	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very effective	29	7.8	7.8	7.8
Effective	235	63.3	63.3	71.2
Undecided	48	12.9	12.9	84.1
Ineffective	42	11.3	11.3	95.4
Very ineffective	17	4.6	4.6	100.0
Total	371	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors' computation using SPSS 20, 2020.

The study findings revealed that the decentralisation framework in Kenya had effectively promoted vote participation in elections; 63.3% of the respondents agreed that it was effective, while 7.8% of the respondents felt that it was very effective. Conversely, 11.3% of the respondents indicated that it was ineffective, while 4.6% viewed it as very ineffective. In addition, 12.9% felt undecided about the statement. In support of the findings, Stoyan and Niedzwiecki (2018) illustrate that decentralisation promises to enhance democratic participation through increased proximity between governments and citizens. Hence, it has been heralded as a strategy for deepening democracy and democratic participation in developing countries.

Furthermore, international organisations have argued that by devolving power to subnational levels, the citizens will communicate their preferences more effectively through elections. Moreover, these findings concur with the analysis of Sujarwoto and Tampubolon (2015). They affirmed that since the introduction of decentralisation reforms in Indonesia in 2005, there had been a significant step forward for the Indonesian political system, giving local citizens the freedom and responsibility to choose leaders they believe will best represent their aspirations.

Furthermore, in support of the findings, interviews with the key respondents revealed that the majority, if not all, agree that the decentralisation framework in Kenya has made it possible for the voters to participate in the County election effectively. They argued:

The greater self-rule brought about by decentralisation in Kenya and the close association of devolution with vertical accountability where citizens can hold their leaders responsible has improved voter registration and turnout in elections. Unlike in the former system with centralised decision making, this new system has brought the government closer to the people, and they now feel they are part and parcel of the government. Therefore, the citizen feels obliged to take part in its formation. However, it should also be noted that in those counties with more excellent service delivery and robust citizen participation, the voter participation in elections is considerably higher because they are interested in voting in good leaders, especially during their re-election, maintaining the grip.

Roberts (2004) supports the findings by postulating that a robust sub-national structure will garner more significant participation incentives because citizens know and care more about local politics. In addition, there is evidence that local and regional issues, such as education, policing, social services, and community development, attract significant citizen participation. Moreover, Inman and Rubinfeld (1997) suggest that devolved political units facilitate a greater democratic community among residents. Therefore, reducing the gap between centralised decision-making and local citizens thus allows for more intimate community bonds to form and, ultimately, offers a greater incentive to contribute to the political sphere. Central to this perspective is that smaller localities contain and produce more robust civil societies than larger political units (Treisman, 2007).

In contrast, some study key informants, especially from the civil society organisation, argued that although decentralisation has positive effects on the effectiveness of voter participation in elections; however, this positive relationship masks the fact that it does not entirely matter. This is supported by Meguid (2007), who postulated that researchers who study voter turnout have, over the years, drawing a connection between efficacy, political interest and rates of voter participation in elections, found out that efficacious people who feel that their political activities can influence what the government does are more likely to vote than non-efficacious individuals. This also suggests the influence of political parties in influencing voter participation in the election.

Similarly, Abramson's (1983) and Teixeira's (1992) study in the American case departs from the study findings by intimating that voters with higher levels of interest in politics and those who trust the government to do what is right are more likely to participate in elections. The basic idea is that people vote when expected benefits are higher than expected costs and abstain otherwise. In terms of rational choice theories, Norris (2004) suggested that the primary considerations for citizens to vote in elections relate to the costs of registering and voting, the time and effort required to register and vote, the party choices available to voters and the degree to which casting a ballot determines who forms the government and controls the parliament. In this regard, the electorate would weigh up the registration process, accessibility of voting stations, ease of voting procedures, voter safety, supportive electoral staff, domestic issues, child care while voting and provision for voters with special needs (Norris, 2004).

4.3. The Influence of Decentralisation in Promoting Citizen Participation in Developing Policies and Legislation

Besides investigating the effectiveness of decentralisation in promoting voter participation in elections in the counties, the study further sought to investigate the level of agreement on whether the decentralisation framework had influenced citizen participation in developing better policies and legislation in the counties, as shown in Figure 3. Figure 3 indicates that the most significant

proportion of the respondents stated that they agreed with 60% and 15% strongly agreed. However, another proportion of respondents, 15%, disagreed, while only 3% strongly disagreed. It was further noted that 6% were not aware of whether the decentralisation framework had influenced citizen participation in developing policies and legislation in the counties. Hence, this generally implies that the decentralisation framework in Kenya has dramatically influenced citizens participating in the formulation of policies and legislation in the counties. These findings are supported by a study by Ostwald (2019), who linked decentralisation to control of resources and other decision-making power to lower levels of government to a range of beneficial outcomes, including more rapid economic growth, improved governance and better-formulated policies.

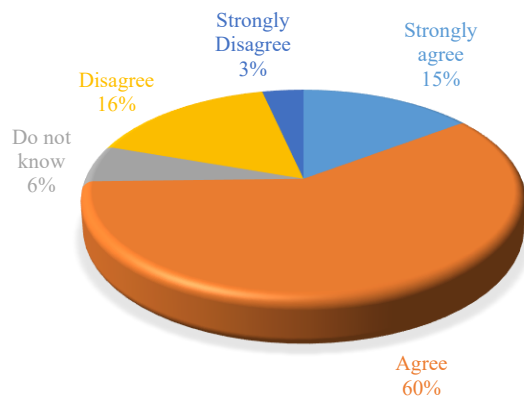


Figure 3. A pie chart indicating the decentralisation framework's influence on citizen participation in developing policies and legislation in the counties (N=371). Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Moreover, work (2002) contended that decentralisation brings decision-making closer to the people and yields programs and services that better address local needs. As such, the evaluative study of Belo Horizonte municipality in Brazil concludes that forming a health council composed of various stakeholders in the community led to the development of inclusive policies, thus enhancing immunisation rates and lower infant mortality.

In support of the findings, key interview informants acknowledge that decentralisation had largely influenced citizen participation in the development of policy and legislation. This is because participation in the county policy-making process and legislation is a constitutional requirement, and all the counties must involve the citizens. They argued:

Decentralisation is an incredible governance innovation and has influenced citizen participation in governance because public participation is now a requirement of the constitution. Similarly, we have additional legal requirements that advocate for citizen participation in all aspects of governance, such as public participation activities. With these, county governments have no option but to engage the citizens in policy formulation, project planning and implementation as it is a requirement. According to the constitution, sovereign power belongs to the people, and it is exercised through participation in governance. Furthermore, public participation is mandatory for any bill to pass in the county assembly and avoid litigation. As such, through citizen participation in the county, the marginalised groups get the opportunity to express their views and share their agenda with the county leaders and how their agenda should be addressed.

4.4. Rating The Level of Citizen Participation in The Decentralised Policy-Making

Moreover, the study endeavoured to rate the effectiveness of citizen participation in decentralised policy-making, as shown in Figure 4. Policy-making in the counties is considered a necessary process and involves the residents being given a chance to deliberate and input proposed policies and laws that govern their daily lives. Section 87 of the county government act 2012 stipulates the principles of public participation, which include timely access to information and reasonable access to the planning and policy-making process.

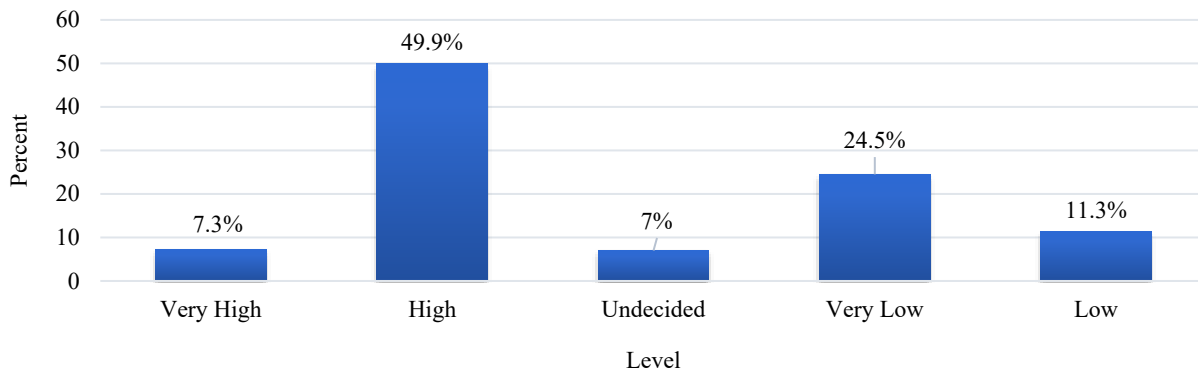


Figure 4. A bar graph showing citizen participation in the decentralised policy-making (N=371). Source: Fieldwork, 2021.

The findings revealed that 49.9% of the respondents rated it high, while 7.3% were very high. Conversely, 24.5% of the respondents rated it very low, while 11.3% were low. A smaller group of 7% were undecided on whether decentralisation has promoted citizen participation in the decentralised policy-making. Hence, it can be concluded that decentralisation has averagely promoted citizen participation in decentralised policy-making, especially as 56.3% of the respondents rated it high.

However, the qualitative data obtained from the key respondents revealed mixed feelings regarding the level of effectiveness of decentralisation in promoting citizen participation in the decentralised decision-making process. While some interviewees rated it high, others rated it low, and those who rated it high lauded it in terms of legal provision, which has made it mandatory for the citizens to participate in decentralised policy-making. This is contrary to the previous centralised system of government, which, although it had a provision for citizen participation, was not mandatory. Thus it excluded the public from policy-making. On the other hand, other respondents who rated it low cited the loopholes in public participation, negatively affecting public participation. They argued:

Decentralisation is a suitable governance mechanism. It has enabled the community members to discuss policy issues with the policy-makers. However, it has many loopholes that allow for manipulation of the whole participation process, reducing its effectiveness in promoting decentralised policy-making. For instance, no parameters are in place to measure what constitutes public participation; thus, where we have a county government that is reluctant to engage the public, it is carried out as a mere formality. Moreover, in some counties, Citizen Participation in policy-making is hampered by the reasons such as wrong timing and choice of the venue for public participation.

According to Kimutai and Aluvi (2018), the legitimacy of decision-making can only be justified through open and appropriate deliberative processes. This requires the creation of autonomous

democratic spaces in which citizens can freely process their social demands and, as a necessary consequence, engage public authorities in making sure that the outcomes of such processes resonate deeply with their social development needs. This should turn them into architects of their destinies and makers of their history. The study established that most counties provide participation opportunities by inviting experts and members of the public to deliberate on bills and proposed policies before submission to the County Assembly. This formalised process is usually conducted at the designated places convenient for the residents in a conference model. Additionally, the County Government has devolved this pursuit of public opinion on policies and legislation to the Sub-County levels, whereby the Sub-County Administrators spearhead these exercises.

4.5. The Implication of Decentralisation on Citizen Participation in County Budget-Making

The study sought to assess whether the decentralisation framework had made it possible for citizens to participate in their respective counties' budget-making. In Kenya, the process of budget making for county governments is a continuous process and an essential part of county government planning and decision-making. It is a comprehensive process carried out in several stages: formulation, approval, implementation, and audit/evaluation. Notably, in all the stages, the public inputs are indispensable as stipulated by the country's laws: the Constitution; Public Finance Management Act; Public Finance Management Regulations; County Governments Act. Therefore, the respondents were asked whether decentralisation had influenced their participation in the county budget, and the response is shown in Figure 5.

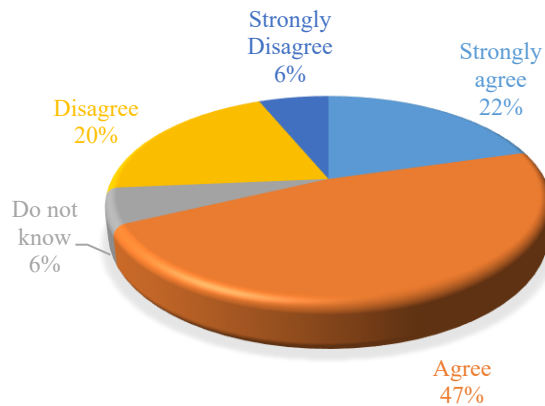


Figure 5. A pie chart showing the influence of decentralisation in promoting citizen participation in county budgeting (N=371). Source: Fieldwork, 2021.

According to the findings in Figure 5, 47% and 22% agreed that the devolution in Kenya had made it possible for the citizens to participate in the county budgeting-making process in their areas. However, 20% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. Moreover, it was also established that 6% had no idea whether the devolution in Kenya had made it possible for the citizens to participate in the county budgeting making process in their counties or not. Hence, it can be concluded that the decentralisation has made it possible for the citizens to participate in the county budget-making process as cumulatively, 69% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the findings.

In support of the findings, key Interviewees from the civil society organisations acknowledged that devolution had made it possible for counties to develop their budgets, which reflect the needs of the local people. They also noted that citizens must participate in project management under

devolution. This is done with the assistance of county officers; however, it is community members who identify the needs, prioritise them, and propose workable solutions. They argued:

The decentralisation framework has created semi-autonomous regions and made it possible for the counties to develop their budget; however, it requires citizen input to realise. The devolution has necessitated cascading citizen involvement up to the lowest level in the county to ensure that every point of view is captured during the budget-making process. For example, in Nakuru County, whenever there is a budget-making process, ward-level meetings with citizens are held to ensure that every citizen participates and that their concerns are discussed.

Furthermore, the findings are corroborated by the study of Work (2002) in Uganda, which found that implementing the decentralisation reform in Uganda has enabled collaborative planning and budgeting in decentralised units. For instance, all the districts are now expected to compile respective District Development Plans (DDP) reflecting the grassroots people's needs. In the previous centralised system, local administrators made the "sector" plans but reported to the central ministries; now, they report to their Local Council, which is held accountable to the people in each jurisdiction. This shift in the relationship between accountability and leadership style contributes to enhancing that people feel more relevant to the Local Council system (Work, 2002). Moreover, SIDA (2015) maintained that decentralisation in Kenya had permitted counties to identify problems, make policies, plan, collect revenue, execute the budget, account, audit and monitor and evaluation and citizen participation in decision-making.

4.6. Decentralisation/Devolution and Participatory Budgeting and Planning Process

While the preceding section has established that decentralisation had positively influenced citizen participation in the county's budget-making process, this section sought to examine the effectiveness of decentralisation policy in promoting participatory budgeting and planning process. Table 2 indicates the results.

Table 2.

The effectiveness of decentralisation in promoting participatory budgeting and planning (N=371)

Effectiveness	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Effective	23	6.2	6.2	6.2
Effective	161	43.4	43.4	49.6
Undecided	28	7.5	7.5	57.1
Ineffective	114	30.7	30.7	87.9
Very ineffective	45	12.1	12.1	100.0
Total	371	100.0	100.0	

Source: Computed by the author (2021) using SPSS 20

Study findings in Table 2 revealed that 43.4% of the respondents stated that decentralisation is effective. In comparison, 6.2% of the respondents felt it was very effective. However, the policy was considered ineffective by 30.7% and very ineffective by 12.1% of the respondents. A smaller proportion, 7.5%, of the study participants were undecided about the statement. Generally, this implies that the effectiveness of decentralisation in promoting citizen participation promoting participatory budgeting and planning is low despite the constitution threshold for citizens to participate in the budget process actively. Cumulatively, 50.3% of the respondents termed it ineffective or undecided about the statement.

In support of the findings, the interview with key informants attributed this lack of effectiveness to several factors such as lack of capacity to articulate budget issues, corruption, lack of information, and awareness of what happens in the county and what areas of the budget the citizens should participate effectively when called upon, for example, how to contribute to budget discussion and policies. They explained:

Many citizens are unaware of county activities. They do not usually have the opportunity to interrogate the county budget because it is never shared with them in time. In Nakuru County, for example, the budget document is often shared within seven days, out of which citizens are expected to scrutinise it and give a recommendation, yet the budget document itself is voluminous and requires more time for understanding and consultation.

However, Guèye's (2010) study reveals that one of the most extensive versions of participatory budgeting can be found in the Senegalese region of Fissel. A qualitative study of the region reveals how participatory budgeting is conducted. In the first stage, participants attend courses to prepare for the participatory budgeting process. This is followed by village fora, where the rural council presents the budget, and the most critical problems and highest priority actions are identified and agreed upon. The village-level lists are then synthesised and presented at a community forum alongside budget estimates for the upcoming year. The lists are then turned into concrete investment proposals in special budget meetings. The last phase of the budgeting stage is the budget vote and implementation. Following this process are three community feedback fora: one to present the new budget for the community to assess how well it aligns with the identified priorities, and one mid-term forum to assess budget implementation. The last forum is held at the end of the fiscal year to present and collectively evaluate the budget results (Guèye, 2010).

5. Conclusions

This study sought to examine the extent to which decentralisation efforts had affected citizen participation in local governance in Kenya. The descriptive statistics results from the study revealed that the majority (77.3%) agreed that decentralisation had increased the number of participants in elections in Kenya. In comparison, 75% of the respondents contended that decentralisation had influenced citizen participation in developing policies and legislation in Kenya. Similarly, an average percentage of 57.2% of the respondents felt that since decentralisation, citizen participation in decentralised policy-making was high. On the other hand, 69% of the respondents were satisfied that decentralisation had made it possible for citizens to participate in county budgeting. However, only 49% approved the effectiveness of decentralisation in promoting citizen participation in promoting participatory budgeting and planning process in the Kenya counties. Hope (2014) concludes that the realisation of decentralised citizen participation in decision-making is likely to positively contribute to political stability, improved governance, and improved citizens' welfare.

Consequently, by engaging in public participation, the public does exercise their constitutional right, and the decision-making process becomes more representative. In addition, openness to the public provides a platform to present their concerns. Conversely, insufficient public engagement limits the power of the people to participate in democratic governance.

6. Recommendation

Based on the study findings, the researcher came up with recommendations aligned with the study objective. These recommendations could assist the two levels of government, the national and

county government, and the stakeholders such as the civil society organisations and the international development partners to ensure the decentralisation in Kenya fully meets its intended objectives. The study established a positive relationship between decentralisation and citizen participation in local governance. Therefore, it recommends that national and county governments put in place measures to safeguard the independence of the counties in realising the objective of citizen participation in governance. Further, the study recommends that the county assembly members use this study's findings to align better or revise the existing county legal framework to promote citizen participation in the counties. Moreover, this study also recommends that the national government further enhance decentralisation by allocating more funds to the counties to promote improved local governance.

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