‘Hustlers versus Dynasties’: contemporary political rhetoric in Kenya

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Abstract
Politicians have always been fascinated by the power of language and rhetoric in their quest to influence voters. For decades, ethnic-based political rhetoric has dominated African politics. In Kenya, the rhetoric of “Hustler versus Dynasty (HvD),” coupled with a powerful personal narrative is shifting the debate from ethnic to class-based politics setting up a face-off between the rich and poor. In light of the fierce competition between “hustlers” and “dynastic elites,” this study aims to investigate the media role in popularization and framing of Hustler versus Dynasty rhetoric, risks of class-based social conflict, lessons and future implication of this rhetorical approach for Kenya and other Africa societies. Using an online survey of 140 Kenyans, the results indicate that the media has popularized the rhetoric by making it the center of their agenda through episodic and thematic framing. This has earned ‘hustler narrative’ massive support particularly among the poor and unemployed youth creating fears of social conflict in future. The rhetorical approach has created a new class-based voting pattern (2022 elections). The effectiveness of Hustler-versus-Dynasty class-based approach in mobilization and persuasion in Kenya means it could be replicated by other countries struggling with powerful political dynasties in Africa and beyond.

Keywords Political rhetoric · Ethnopolitics · Hustler versus Dynasty · Post-election violence · Kenya

Introduction

The topic derives its foundation from an ongoing political rhetoric of ‘Hustler versus Dynasty (HvD)’ popularized by Kenyan politician William Ruto. In the Kenyan context, the name ‘hustler’ is associated with an employed or unemployed youth, struggling to survive in a harsh economic environment. They are known to come
from poor and low-income families and are eager to engage in all manner of income-generating activities to earn their bread and butter. On the other hand, ‘dynasties’ are wealthy political families that have enjoyed the benefits of power stretching back to 1960s when Kenya gained independence (Onyango 2021). Ruto has coined the phrase ‘Hustler Nation’ to represent people like him who do not come from wealthy or well-connected families. Though currently very wealthy, he claims his father was unknown and poor. He claims that due to poverty, he went to school barefoot and that he hustled his way up by hawking chicken (Onyango 2021). On the contrary, his opponents in the political arena are sons of former presidents, ministers among others. The leading opposition figure Raila Odinga, son of Kenya’s first vice president Jaramogi Oginga Odinga is working with fourth president Uhuru Kenyatta, son of Kenya first president. Others include Gideon Moi (son of second president) and Kalonzo Musyoka a long-serving politician among others.

To win favor with the populace bearing the brunt of harsh economic conditions caused by, among others, high cost of living, the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing debt burden, climate change, and rampant corruption, William Ruto has proposed a bottom–up economic model he claims will help eradicate poverty. He believes the ‘top–down’ economic approach has failed to alleviate economic hardships. He has promised handouts in the name of ‘Hustler Fund’ to the poor to start businesses if necessary. His critics and political opponents have termed his approach unrealistic and populist (Otieno 2021). Given the ongoing HvD political rhetoric in Kenya, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission recently warned that ‘Hustler versus Dynasty’ could create class conflict in future. They asked for stricter laws to be enacted to avert class wars (Wanga 2021).

“My concern is not really the usage of the term ‘hustler’. The danger here is the dichotomy between hustlers and the dynasties. If you come up with such a dichotomy, then you become confrontational. And when you become confrontational, there is the likelihood of explosion. NCIC would not like to see Kenyans go the route of Rwanda” (NCIC 2021, p.1).

In-order to fully understand the severity of the situation on the ground, empirical research is needed. Politics and media are inseparable in Kenya (Somerville 2011). Politicians are not only stakeholders in the media industry but also key shareholders and owners. In the 1990s, the media played a key role in what is known in Kenya as ‘Second Liberation’ that saw the country shift from a one-party state to a multi-party democracy. In 2007, after disputed elections caused post-election violence, the media was blamed for allowing politicians to use their airwaves to incite the public (Ogenga 2008). It is estimated that more than 1200 people died and an additional 660,000 were displaced. Ismail and Deane (2008) compared the skirmishes to what happened in Rwanda in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Kenyan voting patterns have always leaned towards major tribal blocks (Cheeseman et al. 2019; Kagwanja and Southall 2009; Kanyinga and Odote 2019; Lynch 2013; Taylor 2016; Wolf 2013). The success of William Ruto approach becomes the first time social class issues have played out in Kenyan politics (Kinoti and Mwita 2021). History teaches us that class-based politics breeds conflict (Pike 2021). The
French revolution of 1789, which ended King Louis XVI reign, was instigated by the peasants against the wealthy elite who controlled political power and wealth (Hampson 1986). The 7th President of the US, Andrew Jackson, used a similar approach to win over the masses, especially the working class, to take power in 1828. He used his Tennessee humble background to defend himself as the protector of the people against the wealthy aristocrats in US Congress. He ruled with an iron fist, isolated the ruling class, and shaped the principles of democracy and the party (Morse 1886).

In light of the fierce competition between “hustlers” and “dynastic elites” in Kenya politics, this study aims to investigate the following: (1) How was the polarizing HvD rhetoric coined? (2) How is HvD currently being shaped and promoted? (3) Is there a possible ‘unintended’ interpretation of ‘HvD rhetoric’ by Kenyans? (4) What lessons can be learned from this political rhetorical approach? (5) What are the potential future implications of HvD rhetoric for Kenyan society? This study examines the media role in popularization of HvD, and whether there is a clear difference in support between employed and unemployed Kenyans. The answers to these questions are essential to shed light on the current political and social situation in Kenya, which may have an impact on Sub-Saharan Africa politics and beyond.

**Literature review**

Political rhetoric has always been tossed to the sidelines by many scholars. The argument is that what ultimately makes the difference is not what people say but what power they can amass using material resources (Krebs and Jackson 2007). However, rhetoric can be a powerful tool when used in a top–down way. It is an effective mobilization tool especially when used by influential politicians, top government officials, and social movement leaders (Snow et al. 1986). Rhetoric can also be useful in persuasion. Its impact, particularly when utilized by social movement leaders, can trigger cooperation and acceptance of new ideas from a constructivist angle. However, this is only possible when a mutual understanding is reached between the political actor and the targeted populace (Risse 2000). Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) argued that persuasive rhetoric can give rise to new social paradigms, as new ideas get adopted and subjectivity is transformed.

To succeed in politics, one must be able to mystify rather than dominate, to persuade rather than compete. It might be a fundamental truth to say that rhetorical commitment is an important ingredient in politics, just as it is in the other spheres of social life (Tileaga 2013). Undoubtedly, the political value of rhetoric is a position that does not need to be justified. What needs to be justified is how politicians think about it and approach it empirically. People can identify politicians and their political agenda through rhetoric and dialog (Habermas 1984). In an effort to win masses over, politicians use ‘language games’ to encapsulate ideas. This is their way of scoring political points and selling unique political imaginations to the people. However, such ideas must be put to test in an open-minded engagement to set them apart. This creates a general agreement that is much more than few lines of persuasive language game (Roderick et al. 1990).
Kenyan media, HvD agenda, and framing

Politics and media are inseparable in Kenya. The coverage of local, national, and international issues is usually comprehensive, in-depth, and authoritative (Obonyo and Nyamboga 2011), in fact, Kenyans trust media more than institutions like parliament and Judiciary (Maina 2006), however, the local media heavily relies on temporary political interests (Ugangu 2015). This makes it easy for politicians to sell their agendas to the general public through catchy rhetorics like ‘Hustler versus Dynasty’ (Iyengar and Simon 1993; Kiousis and McCombs 2004; Lopez-Escobar et al. 1998; McCombs and Shaw 1972).

The popularity of social networking sites has created new communication avenues for the masses (Casero-Ripollés 2012). Social media in particular Twitter has become one of the most powerful tools for ordinary Kenyans to engage in political and policy issues (Njuguna et al. 2020; Tully and Ekdale 2014). However, according to King et al. (2017), mainstream media remain the main player in the agenda-setting process. Therefore, this study poses the following hypothesis to test for agenda transfer between the Kenyan media and the public:

Hypothesis 1 (Agenda Setting) High-level exposure to political content in Kenyan media space is associated with the popularity of HvD political rhetoric.

In their analysis of framing theory, Davis and Goffman (1975) argue that natural frames can be manipulated to convey different meanings. Social frames stand for something in the eyes of the public and this can be engineered by social players. Framing techniques include using metaphors, stories, traditions, slogans (catchphrase), artifacts, contrast, and spin (Fairhurst and Sarr 1996). People start to formulate meanings to a topic or shift their perception of a given issue. Frames can be new meanings created about an issue, making an existing meaning about an issue more salient or strengthening the applicability of certain beliefs in the mind of the target audience. They are usually linked to a certain ideology (Chong and Druckman 2007).

In reality, the public interaction with utterances of political actors in Kenya is very limited. Public opinion is largely shaped by the media through reporters and political analysts. They can either frame an issue episodically (single hustler) or thematically (hustlers versus dynasties). They interpret rhetorics like ‘hustlers versus Dynasties’ based on professional standpoints, personal understanding, level of reliability in the eyes of their audience, audience needs, and sensationalism intentions (Iyengar 2005; Iyengar and Simon 1993).

Equivalency framing uses different but logically similar words to break down a similar issue (Druckman 2001). On the other hand, emphasis framing seeks to illuminate part of a bigger issue based on its importance to the interests of the political actor (Iyengar 2005). The latter can be seen in the catchphrase ‘Hustler Nation’ that emanates from a normal word ‘Hustlers’ that for years never meant much to the general public. This goes hand-in-hand with the interpretation of ‘Dynasties’ as wealthy families determined to retain power within their circles.
(Matthes 2011). Therefore, this investigation poses the following hypothesis to test for the relationship between exposure to HvD frames in the media and its general public support:

**Hypothesis 2** (Framing) Respondents reporting higher rates of exposure to HvD politics in Kenyan media space will express greater support for HvD political rhetoric.

**Kenyan media, HvD rhetoric, and social conflict priming**

Hustler versus Dynasty agenda prominence transfer from media to the public gives life to the first level of agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw 1972). However, in their attempts to interpret the meaning of the agenda, specific issues like the economy and risks of social divisions which could result in social conflict also become more salient (Weaver et al. 1981).

The debate on whether ‘Hustler versus Dynasty’ is potentially divisive and whether it could create problems for Kenyan society in future particularly during electioneering period mean that issues like risks posed by this rhetoric have become more noticeable in the media. The more the Kenyan public gets exposed to these debates the more weight they place on their seriousness (Iyengar et al. 1982; Iyengar and Simon 1993). Therefore, this study poses the following hypothesis to test for relationship between social conflict concerns and HvD rhetoric:

**Hypothesis 3** (Priming) Increase in respondent’s social conflict concerns is positively associated with the popularity of HvD political rhetoric.

**Hustler versus Dynasty persuasion and narrative paradigm theory**

Narrative Paradigm theory posits that stories are more persuasive than arguments. The most important task for the narrator is to make the story coherent, accurate, and believable. It is also important to make sure the listeners relate to the story if the intention is to influence them (Fisher 1984, 1985, 1987; Kirkwood 1992).

Hustler versus Dynasty narrative is pegged on William Ruto (now very rich) life story. He calls himself the chief hustler who understands the challenges of poor Kenyans because he started off as a chicken hawker, and his father was not rich and famous (Onguny 2020). Unlike his opponents, most of whom are sons of former presidents, vice presidents, ministers, or prominent chiefs. He says they are insensitive to the needs of the poor because they have never experienced hardships in their lives. In his view, the problem is these dynasties (influential) families, not tribes. He has narrated this story many times on his campaign platforms across the country. The narrative is resonating with the youth, who are relatively poor as well. HvD class-based approach aims to transform Kenya, politically and economically. In that regard, this investigation poses the following hypothesis to test the relationship between William Ruto HvD narrative and shift in voting pattern:
Hypothesis 4 (Narrative Paradigm theory) Respondents’ exposure to HvD narratives is associated with shifts in voting patterns in the general elections.

HvD ‘bottom–up’ economic model and popular support

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the global economy since 2020. According to Trading Economics (2022), the unemployment rate in Kenya stands at 6.6% which translates to about 5.4 million Kenyans. In his HvD economic agenda, William Ruto has proposed a ‘bottom–up’ economic model which he claims will help eradicate poverty. He believes the ‘top–bottom’ approach has failed to alleviate economic hardships. He has excited the masses with handout promises which have been termed populist by his opponents (Onyango 2021). In this study, we gauge whether his rhetoric and economic model will resonate more with unemployed Kenyans by asking the following question:

RQ1: Is there a difference in support for the ‘Hustler versus Dynasty’ economic agenda between employed, self-employed, students, and unemployed Kenyans?

Method

This study used online surveys to collect data. This approach was recently adopted by Nayak et al. (2021) and Gutierrez et al. (2019) to link divisive political rhetoric with physical, mental, emotional (anger), political actions (donations), and eventual voting patterns. This aligns with the aims of this study.

The survey was administered to a convenient sample made up of 140 Kenyans in December 2021. It was created and designed using Microsoft forms. Respondents were reached through social media platforms which include WhatsApp, WeChat, Twitter, and Facebook. Participation was voluntary, no token was used. Response rate: 70%.

Media exposure to political content and ‘Hustler versus Dynasty’ rhetoric was investigated using the Content-based Media Exposure Scale (C-ME) developed by Hamer et al. (2017). The scale covers all media channels, and a wide variety of media content, and allows for standardization. The standard question in the scale is How often do you watch, read, listen to…(on the internet, TV, Radio, Newspaper, Magazine) with responses: 1—Never, 2—Incidentally, 3—Sometimes, 4—Often, 5—Very Often. Scale reliability test (Cronbach’s alpha) was 0.840.

To understand Kenyans’ interpretation of ‘Hustler versus Dynasty’ rhetoric statements, and whether it will cause social strife/conflict, this study adopted questions and measurements utilized by Aaroe (2011) and Kuklinski and Hurley (1994). Survey respondents were exposed to statements (quotes) made by prominent politicians (for and against HvD), NCIC Chair, political commentators, Journalists, and activists. They were asked ‘How much do you agree with …viewpoint/statement?’ The scale ranged from ‘completely disagree (1)…completely agree (5).’ Concerning
shifts in voting patterns, the question “Tribe will not be a factor when I vote for
president in the next general elections” was included with responses ranging from
‘completely disagree…completely agree.’ Scale reliability test (Cronbach’s alpha)
was 0.826. The analysis of data collected was analyzed using social science sta-
tistical package (SPSS). The following tests were run: simple regression, multiple
regression, and One-way ANOVA.

**Results**

**Demographics**

This study attracted more male (65%) respondents as compared to females, 86% of
the participants were aged between 18 and 35 years with 54% aged 26–35 years,
while 32% aged 18–25. The respondents were also well educated, only 9% reported
an education level of “High school and below.” The sample was fairly balanced in
regard to employment status with 55% saying they were neither employed nor run-
ning their own business (Mean 2.14 and SD 1.11).

To test the four hypotheses, we run several multiple regression tests. To answer
the research question, we run One-way ANOVA to examine whether there are varia-
tions between the groups.

**Kenyan media and HvD agenda**

The study hypothesized that a high level of exposure to political content in Ken-
yan media space is associated with the popularity of HvD political rhetoric. To test
Hypothesis 1 which was anchored on agenda-setting theory, we combined and aver-
aged all five statements (for and against HvD) to create the vpopularity variable. We
also averaged all general media exposure (legacy and online) responses to create the
exposure to the political content variable. We used the level of education as a control
variable. We then run multiple regressions to test the relationship.

- HvD popularity = 12.72 + 0.181 Exposure to political content + − 0.831 Level
  of education.

The regression equation has a slope of $B = 0.181 \ (SE = 0.058, t \ (136) = 3.13,\ p = 0.002)$, meaning that 1-point increase in exposure to political content is related
to 0.181-point increase in overall HvD popularity. The standardized correlation
between the two variables is $\beta = 0.251 \ (p = 0.002)$. Exposure to political content
accounts for approximately $R^2 = 13.8\%$ of the variation in overall HvD popularity,
which suggests a large effect size. See Fig. 1.

The regression model of exposure to political content predicting overall HvD
popularity is found to be significant at the $\alpha = 0.05 \ (F \ (2, 136) = 10.88, \ p < 0.001)$
level. Exposure to political content in Kenyan media (online and offline) is a
significant predictor of overall HvD popularity among Kenyans surveyed, which is in line with agenda-setting theory.

**Hustler versus Dynasty rhetoric, media, and Framing**

The study hypothesized that ‘Respondents reporting higher rates of exposure to HvD politics in Kenyan media space will express greater support for HvD political rhetoric.’ To test Hypothesis 2 which was anchored on framing theory, we averaged the three Hustler versus Dynasty support variables (For HvD) to create HvD_Support. We also averaged all HvD media political content (legacy and online) responses to create the Exposure to HvD political content variable. We used employment status as a control variable. We then run multiple regressions to test the relationship.
- HvD_Support = 4.91 + 0.257 Exposure to HvD Political Content (Media) + 0.079 Employment Status.

The regression equation has a slope of $B=0.257$ ($SE=0.059$, $t$ (136)=4.32, $p=0.001$), meaning that a 1-point increase in exposure to HvD political content (Media) is related to a 0.257-point increase in Support for Hustler versus Dynasty political rhetoric. The standardized correlation between the two variables is $\beta=0.356$, $p<0.001$. Exposure to HvD political content (Media) accounts for approximately $R^2=13.4\%$ of the variation in support for Hustler versus Dynasty political rhetoric, which suggests a large effect size. The regression model of exposure to HvD political content (Media) predicting support for Hustler versus Dynasty political rhetoric is found to be significant at the $\alpha=0.05$ ($F$(2, 136)=10.51, $p<0.001$) level. Exposure to Hustler versus Dynasty political content (Media) in Kenyan media (online and offline) is a significant predictor of overall support for Hustler versus Dynasty political rhetoric among Kenyans surveyed, which is in line with framing theory.

**Kenyan media, HvD rhetoric, and social conflict priming**

The study hypothesized that “an increase in respondents’ social conflict concerns is positively associated with the popularity of Hustler versus Dynasty political rhetoric.” To test Hypothesis 3 which was anchored on priming theory, we averaged the HvD support variables (For HvD) to create a single HvD_Support variable. We also averaged HvD opposition (Against HvD) variables to create a single HvD_Opposition variable. We used a level of education as a control variable. We then run multiple regressions to test the relationship. See Fig. 2.

- HvD_Social conflict (polarization)= 3.299 + 0.027 HvD_Support (Rhetoric) + 0.662 HvD_Opposition (Rhetoric) + $-0.259$ level of education.

The regression equation for HvD_Support (Rhetoric) has a slope of $B=0.027$ ($SE=0.054$, $t$ (135)=0.507, $p=0.613$), and HvD_Opposition (Rhetoric): $B=0.662$ ($SE=0.058$, $t$ (135)=11.38, $p<0.001$), meaning that 1-point increase in Hustler versus Dynasty opposition rhetoric is related to 0.662-point increase in Hustler versus Dynasty social conflict (polarization) perceptions. HvD_Support rhetoric did not have a significant impact on social conflict (polarization) perceptions. The standardized correlation between HvD_Opposition (Rhetoric) and HvD_Social conflict (polarization) perception is $\beta=0.711$, $p<0.001$. HvD_Opposition (Rhetoric) and HvD_Support (Rhetoric) account for approximately $R^2=50.3\%$ of the variation in HvD_Social conflict (polarization) perception, which suggests a large effect size. The regression model of HvD_Opposition (Rhetoric) and HvD_Support (Rhetoric) predicting HvD_Social conflict (polarization) perception is found to be significant at the $\alpha=0.05$ [$F$(3, 135)=45.55, $p<0.001$] level. Hustler versus Dynasty opposition (Rhetoric) in Kenyan media (online and offline) was a significant predictor
of perceptions of possible social conflict (polarization) among Kenyans surveyed, which is in line with priming theory.

**Hustler versus Dynasty persuasion and narrative Paradigm theory**

The study hypothesized that ‘Respondents exposure to Hustler versus Dynasty narrative is associated with shifts in voting patterns.’ To test Hypothesis 4 which was anchored on narrative Paradigm theory, we averaged the voting pattern and HvD End tribalism variables to create a single HvD_Voting_Pattern_Impact variable. We also averaged exposure to HvD political content (legacy and online) variables to create a single exposure to Hustler versus Dynasty political content. We used the level of education and employment status as control variables. We then conducted multiple regression analyses to test the relationship.

- \( \text{HvD}_\text{Voting Pattern Impact} = 4.765 + 0.149 \times p < 0.001 \) Exposure to HvD Political Content (Media) + ⎯ 0.354 \( p < 0.001 \) Level of Education + ⎯ 0.032 \( p > 0.05 \) employment status.
The regression equation has a slope of $B = 0.149$ ($SE = 0.033$, $t (135) = 4.53$, $p = 0.001$), meaning that 1-point increase in exposure to HvD political content (Media) is related to 0.149-point increase in HvD_Voting_Pattern_Impact. The standardized correlation between the two variables is $\beta = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$. Exposure to HvD political content (Media) accounts for approximately $R^2 = 23.1\%$ of the variation in HvD_Voting_Pattern_Impact, which suggests a large effect size. The regression model of Exposure to HvD political content (Media) predicting HvD_Voting_Pattern_Impact is found to be significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ ($F(3, 135) = 13.54$, $p < 0.001$) level. Exposure to Hustler versus Dynasty political rhetoric and William Ruto hustler narrative in Kenyan media (online and offline) is a significant predictor of the voting pattern in Kenya according to the surveyed respondents, which is in line with narrative Paradigm theory.

**HvD ‘bottom–up’ economic model and popular support**

This study also investigated whether there is a difference in support for ‘Hustler versus Dynasty ‘bottom–up’ economic model’ rhetoric between employed, self-employed, students, and unemployed Kenyans. An analysis of variance was run to compare group means. According to Levene’s test, the homogeneity of variance assumption was satisfied at $F(3, 135) = 2.32$, $p = 0.078$. The mean level of HvD rhetoric support increased from employed at 6.34 to unemployed at 8.01. The analysis of variance revealed a significant difference in the means of the groups, $F(3,135) = 2.54$, $p < 0.05$, with the unemployed group showing more support for HvD rhetoric. Tukey’s HSD post hoc analysis revealed support for HvD rhetoric was lower for employed respondents (Mean = 6.34, SD = 2.74) compared to that of unemployed respondents (Mean = 8.01, SD = 2.66, $p = 0.071$). The effect size was $\eta^2 = 0.054$, indicating a small effect size, which suggests that about 5% of the variance of HvD support is due to differences in employment status (see Fig. 3).

**Discussion and conclusion**

This study investigated ‘Hustlers versus Dynasties’ rhetoric general support and interpretation among Kenyans, media’s role in its popularization, risks of social conflict, and its impact on voting behaviors. The analysis shows, in line with agenda-setting theory, the Kenyan media has played a key role in popularizing Hustler versus Dynasty rhetoric by making it the center of their focus (Iyengar and Simon 1993; King et al. 2017; Maina 2006; McCombs and Shaw 1972). Episodic and thematic framing of the Hustler versus Dynasty rhetoric has majorly contributed to its overall popularity among Kenyans which corroborates with Iyengar and Simon (1993). Local media aired news pieces showing William Ruto distributing wheelbarrows and carts to poor Kenyans which together with interviews serve both types of framing techniques. These kinds of gestures have a huge influence on the youthful population looking for hope. The handouts promise through ‘Hustler Fund’ has also
endeared Ruto to the majority poor looking for all help they can get to stay afloat in harsh economic conditions.

Interestingly, unlike the popular opinion, it is those opposed to Hustler versus Dynasty rhetoric that are priming fears of class divisions and social conflict. Political opponents of the rhetoric, political commentators, church leaders as well as chair of the national cohesion and integration commission (NCIC 2021) have expressed fears regarding the rhetoric/narrative. This could be because Kenya has experienced similar politically instigated tribal skirmishes before, during, and after 2013, 2007, and 1997 general elections (Kagwanja and Southall 2009; Kanyinga and Odote 2019; Lynch 2013; Taylor 2016; Wolf 2013) and this means they are more alert to early signs. In addition, Hustler versus dynasty rhetoric opponents have compared the narrative to class wars that were largely blamed for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda that claimed more than a million lives (Ismail and Deane 2008). This is in line with Robertson (2014), who argued that the use of hateful rhetoric by powerful political figures increases the likelihood of political violence, provide a focus for the violence, hinder law enforcement’s ability to respond effectively, and causes fear in already vulnerable populations. These are important findings that may enlighten political scientists and spark interest in further research on the relationship between political rhetoric and violence in African societies.

The proponent of the HvD narrative, William Ruto, likes to portray himself as the only politician who, as a former poor ‘Hustler,’ truly understands the plight of Kenyans living in poverty. His hustler stories of how he attended school barefoot and his chicken hawking hustle has boosted his popularity. In line with Fisher (1984, 1985), his narrative success is anchored on the coherence of the story and relatability to ordinary people. This coercive rhetorical approach denies his opponents an
opportunity to fight back because most of them are sons of former senior government officials like presidents, vice presidents, and ministers. This indicates that if used well, the narrative rhetorical strategy could be useful in political persuasion across Africa and beyond. It also implies that narrative paradigm theory is applicable in political scenarios. In addition, over half of the respondents said tribe will not be a factor when they vote for president. This may shift Kenyan voting patterns from tribal to class-based which corroborates the prediction of Kinoti and Mwita (2021). In Kenya, there is a general feeling that influential families have captured the state (Frontline 2022). They have mastered ethnic-based politics using tribal kingpins.

The findings suggest Hustler versus Dynasty rhetoric has resonated more with unemployed Kenyans. This could be because the proponents of this narrative promise a ‘bottom–up’ economic revamp that will prioritize the poor. There is also a promise for cash transfers to the poorest in the society to boost their economic activities (Onyango 2021). This aligns with the prediction of Pike (2021) that ‘Hustler versus Dynasty rhetoric’ could be translated into greater economic justice. However, Kenyan politicians like all politicians know how to utilize political rhetoric using messages and slogans that appeal to electorates emotions (Fairhurst and Sarr 1996; Snow et al. 1986) and also help in voter mobilization. It is also a strategy for persuasion and acceptance (Risse 2000) especially when the ideas in the rhetoric are new (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Therefore, it could turn out to be another political promise that may never be delivered but has been highly effective in persuading Kenyan voters, particularly those unemployed.

The success of the Hustler versus Dynasty class-based approach could be replicated by many other African countries still struggling with powerful political dynasties. The problem of dynasties is not unique to Kenya, it spreads across Africa. Other influential dynasties include the Bongos of Gabon, the Debys of Chad, Gnassingbes of Togo, the Akufos-Addos of Ghana, and the Nguemas of Equatorial Guinea. Some long-serving presidents are also positioning their sons to take over by appointing them in powerful political and military positions. They include Congo’s Denis Sassou-Nguesso appointment of his son Denis-Christel in cabinet, Franck Biya, son of Cameroon President Paul Biya, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba son of Uganda President Yoweri Museveni among others (Frontline 2022; Melly 2021; Najimdeen 2022).

This study has two limitations. First, convenience sampling comes with disadvantages such as possible bias, and possible under-or-over representation, as a result, these findings may not be generalized to the Kenyan population. Second, even though Baxter and Babbie (2003) notes a response rate of 70% is good enough for analysis, this study acknowledges the sample size used for analysis might be subject to criticism.

However, the findings of this study align with theories relied upon and literature. Therefore, the results and findings are credible and they also advance knowledge on several fronts. First, the media plays a crucial role in African politics and democratization process. Class-based rhetoric like Hustler versus Dynasty could be an effective tool in political mobilization and persuasion. The electorates are more informed on their political choices which are not based on their ethnic inclinations. Finally,
economic hardships and poverty are associated with the hustler movement which may be used by other politicians in Africa and beyond to challenge dynastic regimes. Future studies could investigate other ways narrative paradigm theory and new media could be utilized in political mobilization and persuasion in other African countries particularly those with powerful dynastic regimes like Gabon, Togo, Guinea, Uganda, Congo, and Equatorial Guinea among others.

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