



International Journal of African Studies

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Case Study

Open Access

Voter Education for Women in Multiethnic Kenyan Society: The Case Study of 2017 General Elections

Maria Piotrowska¹*

¹Department of African Languages and Cultures, University of Warsaw, Poland. E-mail: maria.j.piotrowska@gmail.com

Article Info

Volume 1, Issue 3, September 2021

Received : 21 February 2021

Accepted : 22 August 2021

Published : 05 September 2021

doi: [10.51483/IJAFRS.1.3.2021.1-15](https://doi.org/10.51483/IJAFRS.1.3.2021.1-15)

Abstract

Communication through or with images has emerged into one of the main methods people engage to 'talk' in XXI century. It is engaged in many everyday life situations to replace or enhance oral communication and is now commonly used not only by social media, but also traditional ones, business and in widely understood politics. Image communication enhancing oral one has been engaged by Kenyan electoral commission, IEBC, to prepare multimodal voter education addressed to women. In this article I analyze multifaceted content present in video spots IEBC aired before 2017 Kenyan general elections. Spots were published on modern communication platform i.e. Twitter and YouTube and were designed to encourage civic involvement of Kenyan women, whose presence in public life in Kenya is noticeably smaller. To analyze video spots I engaged methodology of cognitive linguistics, especially metonymy, metaphor & conceptual blending theory. It enables to pursue beyond what is explicitly said and conduct in-depth understanding of electoral spots. Chosen analysis also allows to perceive unique Eastern-African cultural values and comprehend their conceptualizations in the analyzed videos. I argue, that IEBC created modern campaign and encouraged women to vote by creating images they can effortlessly identify with, as they were capable to show that traditional women's social roles merge well with contemporary, democratic requirements. This article confirms that cognitive linguistics mechanisms can be used in the analysis of varied, multimodal texts, including of political character and they successfully trace cultural conceptualizations embedded in them, allowing audience to fully comprehend given source material.

Keywords: Kenya, Elections, Conceptualizations, Multimodality, Metaphor, Metonymy, Conceptual integration

© 2021 Maria Piotrowska. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

1. Introduction

Republic of Kenya is the Eastern-African multicultural, multiethnic and therefore multilingual country. The regular presidential and parliament elections have been taking place in Kenya since the country reintroduced multiparty system in the 1992. 2017 elections made a momentous shift in the modern history of the country—electoral results were challenged by the opposition coalition NASA (National Super Alliance) in Kenyan Supreme Court. Judges annulled results and called for 'fresh elections' Year 2017 was special not only because of Kenyan elections, but also because Africa celebrated

* Corresponding author: Maria Piotrowska, Department of African Languages and Cultures, Poland.
E-mail: maria.j.piotrowska@gmail.com

the 10th anniversary of the “African Charter for Democracy, Elections and Governance”. Though certain countries still face structural difficulties in achieving fully democratic electoral environment, African countries have undergone remarkable changes. These days not only international community, but also citizens demand higher electoral standards holding Electoral Management Bodies (EMB) accountable. Kenyan Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), delivered in 2017 modern education campaign addressed to female voters, what can be seen as a milestone towards achieving fair voter education in the future—under this term I understand addressing needs of all, also marginalized groups, women being one of them. In this paper after discussing Kenyan political and social context, I introduce cognitive linguistic tools (metaphor, metonymy and blending theory), applied in the analysis of the only two video spots encouraging women to vote. As previously argued by Hart (2017), cognitive methodology is indispensable tool in analyzing linguistic source materials in the context of political and social realm. This methodology helps delivering my argument, that in Kenyan, and largely African context, only educational campaign merging local values and schemas with modern communication channels can help establish effective electoral education communication in ethnically, highly divided countries like Kenya. I argue, that IEBC managed to create modern, multi-modal campaign, even though figure of woman in the IEBC ads was framed using stereotypes, what might be perceived as enforcing women’s traditional role in patriarchal society.

1.1. Cognitive Linguistics Methodology. Metaphor and Metonymy and Conceptual Blend Theory

In cognitive linguistics interdependencies between language and culture are known and researched and they refer to a cognitive processes which are seen in a given society and are reflected in language and social behaviors. Those linguistic and cultural ties are reflected in constant language usage and shape mental representations.

In this analysis I use two basic tools in the cognitive linguistics – metaphor and metonymy understood as in Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and later Panther and Radden (1999), Barcelona (2000), Croft and Cruse (2004) and Kövecses (2010). In this approach metonymy is a tool with a referential nature—it is a conceptual projection based on mapping within single source domain or matrix. Metonymy means that “X” source domain represents “X target” domain, by using the most distinguishing character of the whole domain, that speaker is referring to. The example of metonymy is “The White House took the decision” or “Iraq nearly cost Tony Blair the premiership”, where “White House” stands for the American politicians and administration governing at the White House and “Iraq” stands for the war against terrorism Great Britain joined as the American ally. Conceptual metaphor is a tool associating the conventionally structured target (the domain being described) with the source (the domain in terms of which the target is described). Metaphor is a mapping, but between two separate source domains “X” and “Y”. Examples of the well-known (in the Western cultures) metaphors are TIME IS MONEY or ARGUMENT IS WAR, from the Lakoff and Johnson’s study (1980).

Conceptual Integration/Conceptual Blending Theory in its pioneer approach by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) is based on assumption, that meaning construction typically involves integration of structure that gives rise to more than sum of its part (Evans and Green 2008, 400). In blending theory at least two separate input spaces are merged (I1 and I2), which entities share common features linked in generic space. Generic space must abstract enough to be common to both (I1 and I2). Out of the integration of common features in generic space, fourth space emerges—the one called “blend”. The most important to acknowledge is that elements from input spaces do not simply sum up, but give rise to entirely new entity.

Above discussed linguistic phenomenon are present in people’s language and cognition and used frequently without even noticing. Cultural practices and ideals are reflected in linguistic structures, metaphors, proverbs, riddles, idioms and others everyday linguistic usage. They emerge in images created by media, in cartoons, satire, movies, graffiti and many others. Images can be, as well as linguistic structures, analyzed using the cognitive approach and “image schema analysis addresses the basic structuring of situations and events through the imposition of image schema” (Hart, 2017: 189). Hart suggest merging cognitive linguistics analysis with critical discourse analysis and stresses the importance of analyzing multimodal cultural texts. IEBC’s videos are example of this kind of source, therefore they serve as an excellent material to analyze. The cognitive linguistic analysis in reference to multimodal sources has been applied frequently by Bergen (2003), Górska (2014, 2018), Hart (2017), Forceville (2008) among others and has been a topic of a special issue of *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* “Multimodality and Cognitive Linguistics” (Sanz, 2013).

2. Electoral, Demographic and Socio-Cultural Kenyan Background

2.1. In the Heart of Swahili Civilization. Kenya’s Social and Cultural Heritage

The Republic of Kenya is one of the biggest countries in East African and its political and economic leaders. There are more than 54 million people living in Kenya, what makes it 27th biggest country in the world in terms of country’s population¹. Over 83% of its citizens are Christians, 11,2% Muslims, 1,7% traditionalists. The religious diversity exists

¹ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kenya/#people-and-society> [access 28.02.2021].

alongside the ethnic diversity, where ethnicity is defined as feature of group sharing cultural values like language, culture, kinship, and also physical features (Lijphart, 1995). Main groups are Kikuyu (21.6%), Luhia (51.3%), Kalenjin (12%), Kamba (11.7%), Luo (11%), less numerous Kisii (5.8%), Meru (5.7%), Mijikenda (5.3%), Somalis (2.5%), Maasai (1.9%), Turkana (1.2%), Taita (1%) and Embu (1%). The official number of ethnic groups reached 46 in national census 2019. Ethnic groups coexist, but multiethnicity led to tensions, especially, but not limited to election period. Kenyan society is characterized as ‘deeply divided’ (Sisk, 1996), composed from many separate segments (multi-ethnic, multi-religious), disagreements among them result in periodic tensions and clashes².

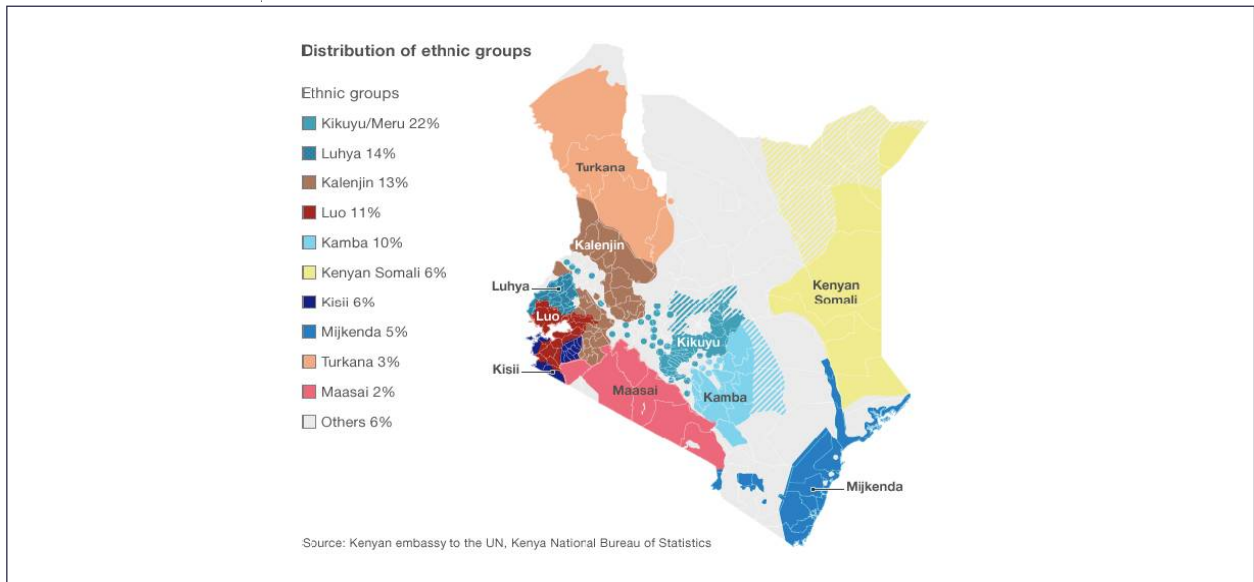


Figure 1³: Distribution of ethnic groups in Kenya

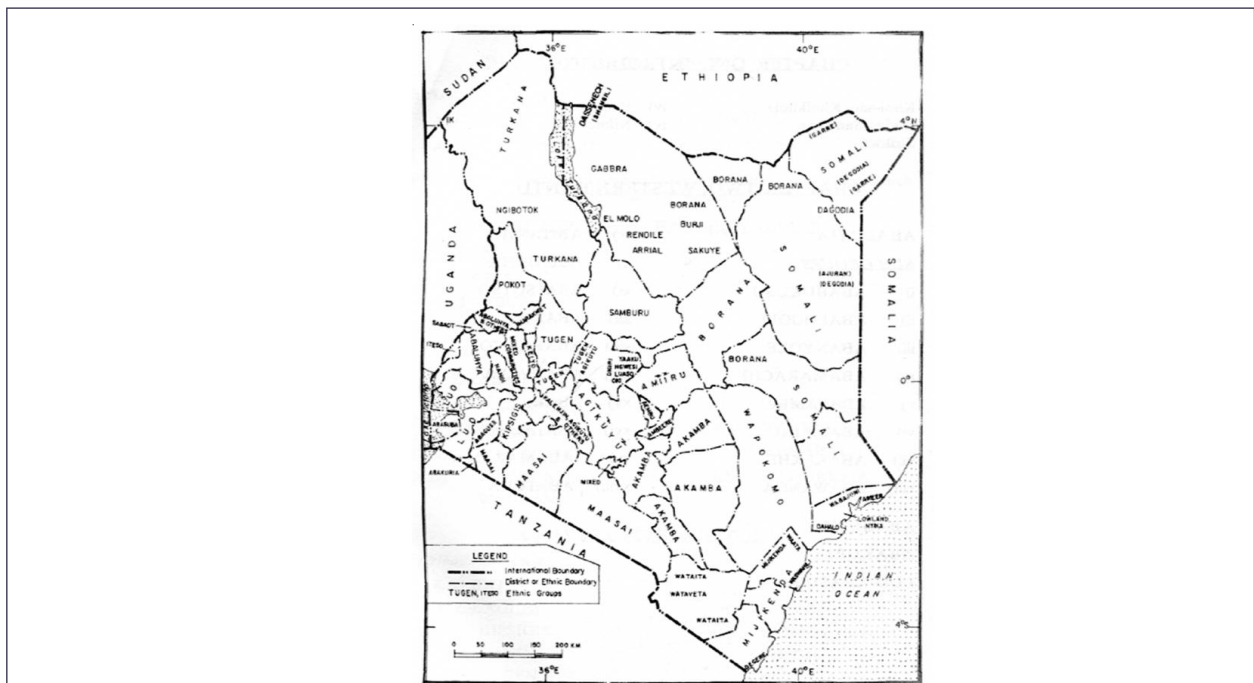


Figure 2⁴: Distribution of ethnic groups in Kenya

² <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html> [access 08.02.2021]

³ <http://mcimaps.com/kenyas-presidential-results-were-fair-but-its-ethnic-divide-is-concerning/> [access 28.12.2019]

⁴ Wangūhū Ng’ang’a, *Kenya’s Ethnic Communities. Foundation of the Nation*, Nairobi 2006, p.9.

Ethnic division of the country is followed by the linguistic diversification, as it is estimated there are 68 different ethnic languages spoken in Kenya, and 60 of them are local ethnic languages. State law says there are only two official languages Swahili and English, widely spoken and understood in Kenya. There are more than 16 million users of Swahili language in Kenya – 111,000 thousands are using it as their first while 16.5 millions as their second language. The literacy rate is high and ranges from 70% to 80%⁵.

Swahili has a unique status in Kenya and East African. Starting from VIII century it was used by coastal people to identify themselves within Swahili civilization. With the expansion of Swahili city-states and growth of economic relations, it has become regional *lingua franca* until the British colonial rules. People were building their pan-ethnic identity based on Swahili language, that served as the vehicle for spreading common values, also empowered people to build communication platform transcending the local partitions (Maganda and Moshi, 2014).

Swahili pan-ethnic character was used to serve interests of not only colonial administration, but later also of independent Kenyan government. In 1919 English administrators prohibited education in Swahili, English was taught as a foreign language for a narrow group of people co-operating with colonial administration. After Independence in 1963 linguistic policy has not changed immediately – English was the official language, while Swahili was used only for broadcasting⁶. It was not till 1974 Swahili became second official language. Kenyans had to wait for over twenty years for introducing Kiswahili into school curriculum basics (Mazrui and Mazrui, 1993). The current status of Swahili language is guaranteed by the Kenyan Constitution adapted in 2010 in Article No. 3.

The policy of promoting English as the main language of communication in Kenya with simultaneous downgrading the importance of Swahili was decades-long. Promotion of English without stressing the importance of Swahili, especially its role as pan-ethnic platform, led to further fragmentation and reinforced political tribalism and clientelism strengthened by the first president Jomo Kenyatta and his successor Daniel arap Moi, who both merged business with politics making public servant dependent to their wealthy contributors (Pawelczak 2004). This subject will not be further discussed, but for the sake of my analysis it is crucial to comprehend that Kenya’s cultural and linguistic diversification was used to particular, political interests of highest public servant and the concept of ethnicity has been distorted.

2.2. Women in Kenya’s Demography

Kenya has experienced immense population growth since the mid 20th and currently more than 40% of Kenyans are under age of 15. Slightly more than 50% of citizens are women. The gender distribution in age groups is balanced what is seen in the graph below⁷:

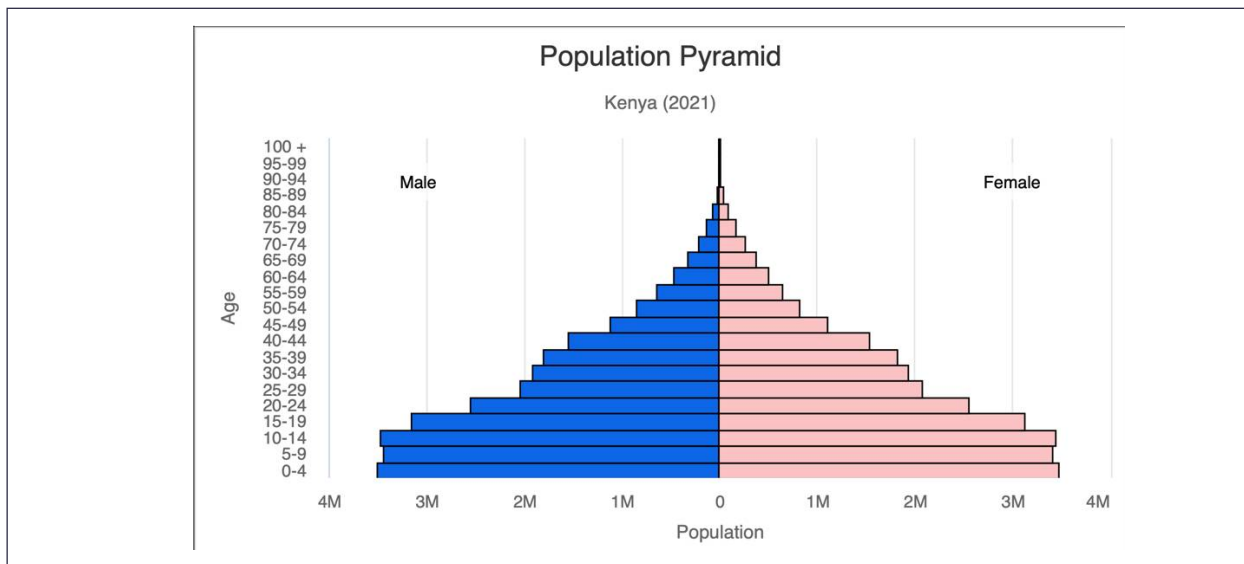


Figure 3⁴: Population pyramid in Kenya

⁵ Source: Ethnologue: languages of the world, <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/KE> [access 01.11.2018].
⁶ Though Swahili has not become official language immediately, broadcasting was and is still considered as one of the most important medium used for communication in African countries, therefore presence of an African language in this sector was crucial in the given circumstances.
⁷ https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/32ef234dc10128722e62fb372270f535/KE_popgraph2021.pdf[access 28.02.2021].

In 2012 Kenya has voted new, progressive Constitution providing legal framework helping to provide basic rights for marginalized groups, including women. However, to the date they face challenges to fully participate in decision making process. Country’s economy remains vulnerable and unemployment continues to be a challenge, especially for women. It is noted, that while over 80% of Kenyan women are engaged in small holder farming, only 1% of them owns the land on their own, access less than 10% of available credit. This situation is aggravated by gender-based violence. Traditional customs including polygamy, early marriage and female genital mutation (FGM) are still practiced. Women often face challenges accessing justice system, politics, high-ranked public positions. Their access is limited not only due to ignorance of those in power, existing traditional power system (underlying male traditional position), but also due to the illiteracy. Though Kenya notes high level of literacy reaching an average 78.73%⁸, the disproportion among illiterate males and females in the age of 15 and older is huge with the rate of 81,1% of literate men and 74.9% of literate women (Figure 4⁹):

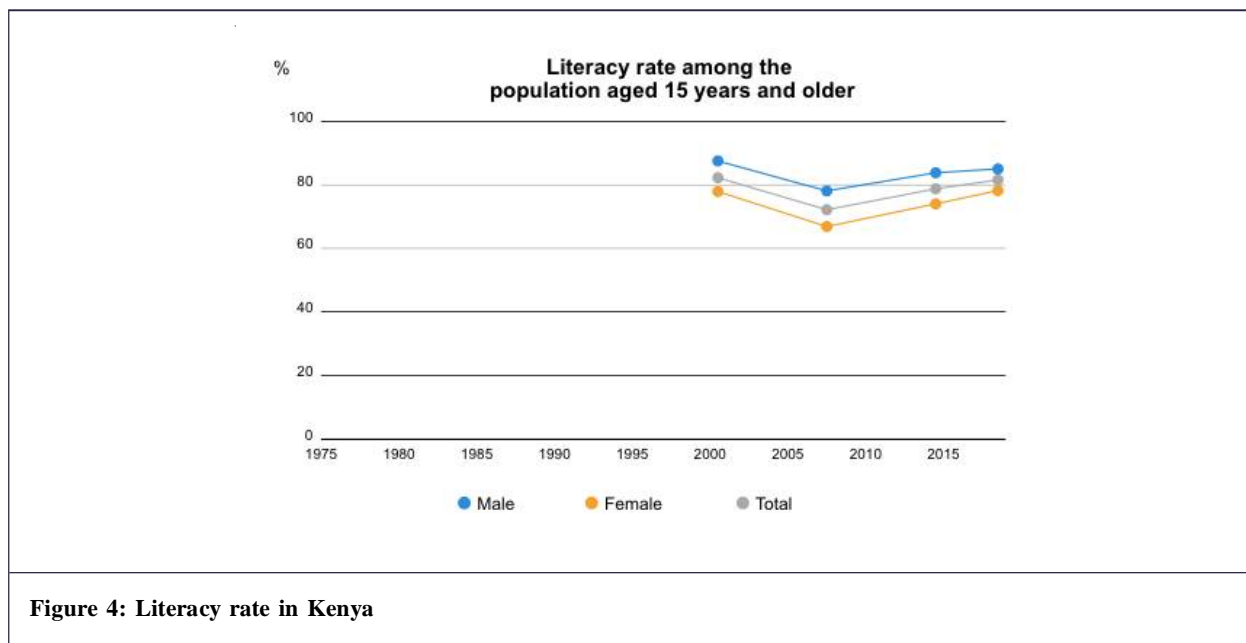


Figure 4: Literacy rate in Kenya

Girls note fairly equal access to primary education comparing to boys, yet rates indicating their participation in secondary and especially tertiary education decrease. While the total enrolment rate in primary education for both sexes reached 79.97% in 2012 with 81.69% females and 78.27% males, secondary education rates in 2009 reached 45% and 49,04% respectively for females and males. In 2009 rate of students who enrolled for tertiary education reached only 3.9% with 3.28% females and 4.72% males, the gap aggravated in 2017 reaching total rate of 11.46% students reaching tertiary education with 9.73% females and 13.2% males¹⁰.

Kenya is party of multiple international and regional treaties on human and political rights, namely International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1996), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) and the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2003) among the most significant ones¹¹. Consequently, Kenya is obliged to seek and to promote legal solutions prohibiting discrimination against women, youth and people with disabilities, as well as to increase awareness and social mobilization to prevent and to end violence against women and girls and to ensure that public institutions and service providers are accountable to women for prevention, protection and response. Kenya shall also continue working on programs enhancing gender-responsive initiatives, including promotion of women’s engagement in public sectors, also in politics. Hitherto, Kenya has introduced progressive legal, constitutional solutions enhancing women’s presence in Parliament, but the absence of vibrant non-governmental movement supporting gender equity case is noted.

⁸ Source: CIA Factbook, Kenya, [access 29.12.2019]

⁹ Source: UNESCO <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ke> [access 29.12.2019].

¹⁰ <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ke?theme=education-and-literacy> [access 28.02.2021].

¹¹ Source: <https://indicators.ohchr.org> [access 02.01.2020].

2.3. Kenya 2017 General Elections and Women's Participation

Kenyan voted in General Elections on August 8, 2017 and elections included races for the presidential office as well as seats of members of the National Assembly and the Senate. County-level races included those for governors in 47 counties, members of County Assemblies in 1,450 wards and women representatives in 47 counties. As in all previous Kenyan votes, the contest was mainly 'two-horse race'—this time between incumbent president Uhuru Kenyatta and leader of the opposition Raila Odinga.

Kenyatta run under the flag of newly consolidated Jubilee Party, the successor to The Jubilee Alliance and brought together several parties, i.e., Kenyatta's The National Alliance and Ruto's United Republican Party. Kenyatta had a mixed record in the office—economy noted 5% growth, however government has been seen as corrupted and protested by independent activist including Boniface Mwangi and protests of medical staff. Odinga, leader of Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) consolidated with Musalia Mudavadi from National Supreme Alliance (NASA), hoping for support from Western Kenya and Rift Valley (Cheeseman 2008; Cheeseman et al. 2019).

The electoral campaign was highly competitive with its biggest focus on presidential race, though other elections stayed in the center of the public interest. According to European Union Election Observation Mission, candidates could generally campaign freely, including in the strongholds of their opponents, freely exercising their freedoms of association, assembly and movement. At the same time tensions, mutual accusations, violent incidents (including brutal murder of IEBC IT manager Chris Msando¹²) were recorded, as spreading leaflets against ethnic minorities in some regions and misuse of state resources¹³.

Presidential results were declared on August 11 at the national tallying center and announced Kenyatta's victory with 54.27% support with 77.48% turnout; Odinga with the second position received 6 762 224 votes (44.74%). Presidential results were overall in line with other races—Jubilee won 29 gubernatorial seats whist NASA won 18 out of 47. Raila Odinga questioned the results and challenged Kenyatta's victory at the Supreme Court, that consequently nullified them 1st September. Transparency of results transmissions to national tally center was disputed¹⁴. Fresh presidential elections were scheduled for October 26, campaign period was characterized by uncertainty, hate speech in public discourse, mutual accusation, protests, rashness, but most importantly undermining by NASA overall preparedness of IEBC to conduct the process, that led to withdrawal of Raila Odinga, what let Kenyatta win with 98,3% of the votes with 39% turnout.

2017 general elections were the second held under 2010 Constitution and the first organized by IEBC. The 2010 constitutional reform was accompanied by devolution and was a part of peace agreement brokered by Kofi Annan in 2008 (Nyanjon, 2011). Then, in post-electoral turmoil 1,500 people died casualties and almost became 600,000 IDP-s. The analysis of 2007 elections and reforms implemented afterwards was carried out by number of researchers, therefore I will not further discuss it in details¹⁵. Nonetheless, for the sake of this paper it is crucial to notice regulations on women's representation in Parliament present in 2010 Constitution – Article 27(b) and Article 81(b) quoted below:

Article 27(8):

“The state shall take legislative and other measures to implement the principle that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender.”

Article 81(b):

“The electoral system shall comply with the following principle – ... not more than two thirds of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender.”

Constitution clearly stipulates, that not more than two-thirds of the members of any appointive body should compose of the people of the same gender, what undoubtedly aimed in limiting male dominance in this sector. However, as noted both by The Carter Center (TCC Kenya 2017 Final Report) and European Union (EU Election Observation Mission Kenya 2017 Final Report), there has been a failure in establishing efficient enabling mechanisms and women are still underrepresented in legislative assemblies thus “(...) Kenya's commitments under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa remain unfulfilled [...], similarly for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women” (EU EOM Final Report Kenya 2017: 46). Overall, women

¹² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40807425> [access 29.12.2019, published 02.08.2017].

¹³ European Union Election Observation Mission Kenya 2017 Final Report, 2018.

¹⁴ For further details see European Union Election Observation Final Report, 2018 and The Carter Center Election Observation Mission in Kenya Final Report, 2018.

¹⁵ See among others: Cheeseman (2008), Owuor (2008), Abuya (2009).

candidates numbered 1,300 out of total 14,523 candidates (9%) with 172 (13%) elected. Women won 23 out of the 290 constituency-based seats in National Assembly and 96 county assembly seats out of 1,450. However, in 12 county assemblies not a single woman was elected¹⁶. Consequently, women comprise 21.8% of National Assembly members and 31.3% of Senate members, including 16 nominated seats reserved for women. The progressive case must be noted of three women elected as the governors, though none female candidate took part in the presidential race ([TCC Kenya 2017 Final Report: 42](#)). This could be perceived as positive shift when comparing this data to the one from 2013 elections, when a single woman was elected as governor or senator and for 1,450 ward representatives only 82 (6%) were females; only 16 won constituency-based seat in National Assembly. Several additional positive trends were observed and noted by several election observation missions, i.e., nomination fees for female candidates were lowered by half (the same rule applied for youth and people with disabilities) and so called “zebra strategy” was applied (political parties list alternate female and male candidates with the top nominee being a woman). Additionally, despite facing hostile political environment comprised of violence, harassment, smear campaigns and propaganda, almost 50% of the 86 female incumbents ran for the office again in the August 8th election.

Women are also underrepresented on the candidate lists. In 2017 women composed 47% of all registered voters, though 2017 adult population projections shown slight disproportion in favor of women reaching 51%. EU EOM noted, that it was greater gender differential than in 2013, when 49% of registered voters were women. It seems possible, that female eligible voters did not even register and therefore could have not exercise their right to vote, or for various reasons they might have not been aware of having this fundamental political right. In order to claim it as a fact, an extensive field research shall be conducted in each of country’s region at the sample group. Nonetheless, women exercise their political rights, both as a voters and candidates, in a political and social patriarchal culture limiting their opportunities:

The marginality of women in political leadership and their continued exclusion in political decision making is a product of a history of the patriarchal state in Kenya. This is true both for the colonial and independent state. The story of the colonial state is too well known to detain us here. It is a story in which the role and place of women was defined by very specific ideas of gender roles. This idea was not simply western, it was more precisely Victorian. It understood society to be split into the public and private realms. These realms were also gendered; the female occupied the private domain, also understood to be the domestic realm. It was a realm of reproduction in the biological and social sense. It was, above all, an apolitical realm.

(Kamau, 2010)

The perception of women in Kenyan society is slowly progressing, what is also discussed in an above quoted report. Though Kenyan women still face numerous obstacles in accessing public and political domain, it is due to the role of social activism, multiple non-governmental initiatives that awareness to women’s unique role in modern societies rises. It is reinforced by international obligations, like Millennium Development Goals (MDG), with one of its eight goals was “to promote gender equality and empower women” and followed by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), with “gender equality” as one of them. In the forthcoming paragraphs I will narrow my attention to voter education in Kenya addressed to women as an example of promoting above discussed values.

3. Voter Education and Electoral Management Body in Kenya

3.1. Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission and its Role in Voter Education

In modern societies responsibility to educate and inform about fundamental political and civic rights in reference to elections lies with numerous stakeholders including media, political parties, religious organizations, schools, non-governmental organizations, activists but also EMB. Their obligation to educate voters is often specified state law. In general, main tasks in terms of voters educations includes information on citizens’ rights and responsibilities in the electoral process what includes knowledge on how to vote and how the system works (from registration, through e-day, counting, tabulation, to means of judicial complaints), on new technologies included in particular election, education of pooling officials and reassurance they are sufficiently prepared to conduct their duties, and shaping strategies to address specific populations such as women, elderly, youth and , minorities (ethnic, religious).

¹⁶ These are Embu, Garissa, Isiolo, Kajiado, Kirinyanga, Mandera, Narok, Samburu, Taita Taveta, Turkana, Wajir and West Pokot.

IEBC is constitutional organ responsible for voter education in Kenya. Current rights and responsibilities of Commission are found in the 2010 Constitution in the Article 88 (a) to (k) and they are: delimitation of constituencies and wards, regulation of political parties process, settlement of electoral disputes registration of candidates for elections, facilitation of the observation, monitoring and evaluation of elections, regulation of money spent by a candidate or party in respect of any election, development of a code of conduct for candidates and parties monitoring of compliance with legislation on nomination of candidates by parties and most importantly for the purpose of this analysis - voter education¹⁷. Hitherto, IEBC conducted two general elections in Kenya in 2013 and 2017. Its enactment in 2017 was widely discusses and caused numerous controversies discussed in academia and in media, which will not be discussed here, as my goal is to focus on their performance regarding voter education with the special focus on women.

3.2. Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission Performance in 2017

In 2017 IEBC performance was closely followed by numerous election observers from international election observation missions (i.e., The Carter Center and EU EOM), and by domestic organizations (i.e., Election Observation Group, ELOG). It recruited 2,900 voter educators, adding 47 county and 290 constituency-based educators, whose responsibility was to implement voter education program. They published literature explaining voters their obligations and rights and registration and voting procedures. Despite these efforts IEBC’s performance was critically assessed by observers. Though TCC’s, EU’s and ELOG’s observers noticed IEBC’s efforts, especially in establishing communication channels with citizens, the measures taken by Commission were not sufficient (TCC Final Report Kenya 2017: 31). In some areas deployment of the educators took place only few days before elections and consequently “(...) it was not comprehensively undertaken throughout the country” (EU EOM Kenya 2017 Final Report: 58), though Carter Center assessed polling staff made a significant effort to deliver as many trainings as possible. Overall, both EU EOM and TCC reported significant lack of voters education before October 26th election, especially taking into account the importance of so called “fresh elections” and uniqueness of annulling August election by Supreme Court. ELOG’s research conducted during electoral campaign and published in August 2017¹⁸ also revealed information on civic voter education. Voters witnessed or heard of education activities, though remarkably less of specific campaigning addressed to women, youth and people with disabilities (Figures 8 and 9)¹⁹:

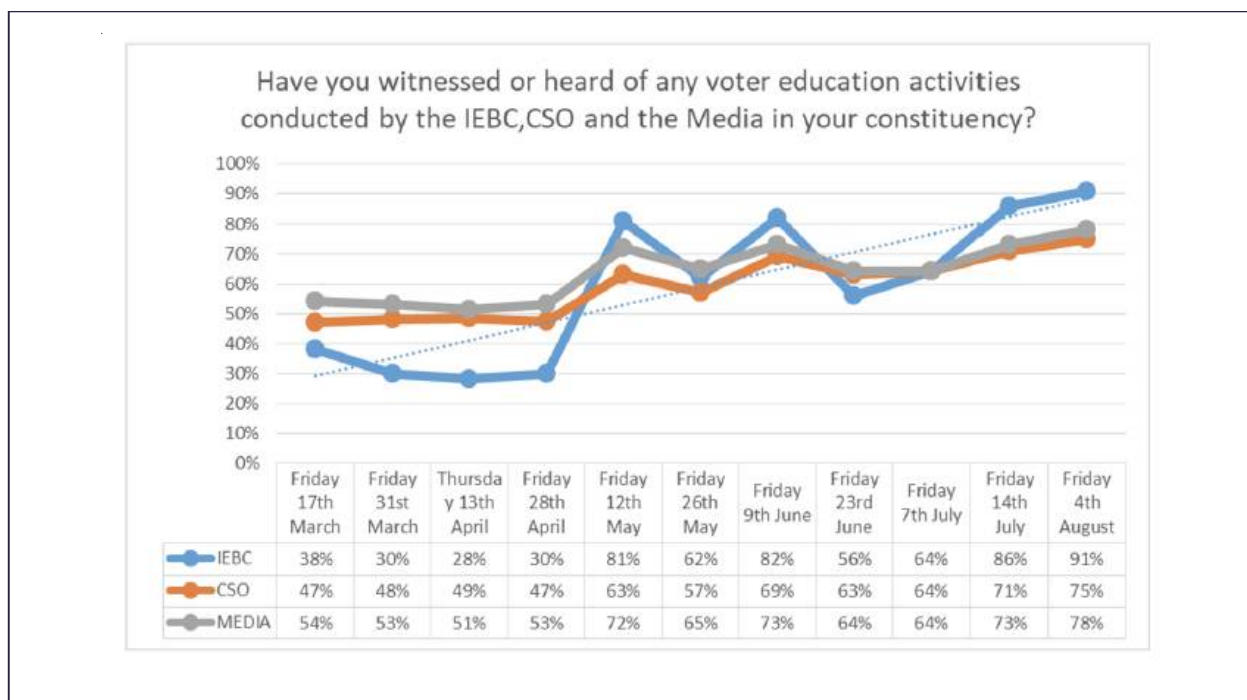


Figure 5: Electoral education activities perception rate in Kenya (March-August 2017)

¹⁷ See: The Constitution of Kenya, Chapter Seven - Representation of People, Part 2-Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission and Delimitation of Electoral Units, art. 88.

¹⁸ There is no precise date of the publication of the interim report at the ELOG website, see: <https://elogs.or.ke/index.php/resource-centre?start=28> [access 29.12.2019].

¹⁹ ELOG LTO Key findings in the months July and August, 2017.

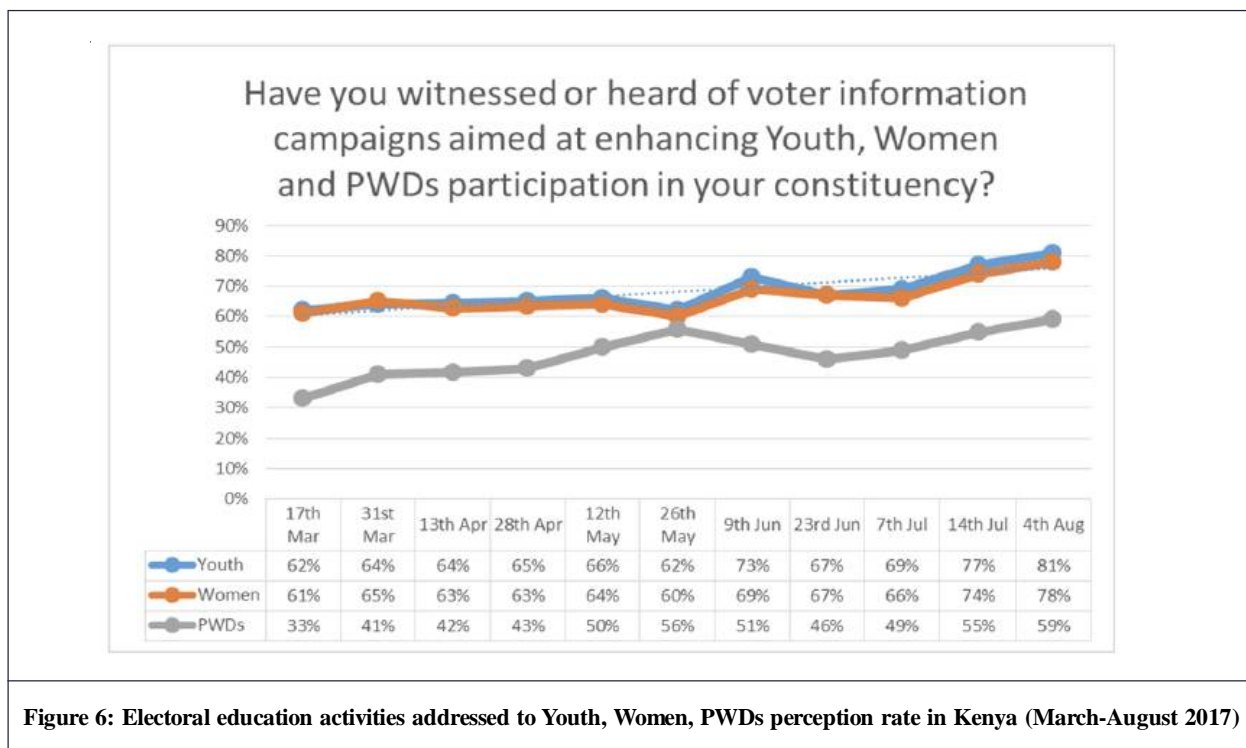


Figure 6: Electoral education activities addressed to Youth, Women, PWDs perception rate in Kenya (March-August 2017)

Overall IEBC’s performance was criticized by both international and domestic election observations missions. Several recommendations were delivered, including developing and implementing multi-stakeholder civic education, which can enhance citizen’s engagement and build trust in state’s democratic institutions. This also applies to voter education of minority groups, including women. Nonetheless, I would like to stress certain promising remarks on voter education launched by IEBC and there are at least three crucial aspects that must be mentioned.

Firstly, IEBC launched their voter education campaign using multiple platforms and reaching for multimodal methods. Their voter education campaign was in traditional media, including newspapers “*Daily Nation*”, “*The Standard*” and “*Taifa Leo*” (the only Swahili daily in the country), as well as on the radio and on numerous online platforms and television. IEBC communicated with voters and all stakeholders via their website, where they published crucial documents including “Voter Education Manual” and “Voter Education Curriculum”. Most notably, IEBC’s campaign was present on the most popular Kenyan social media²⁰ – Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (though the latter is not always perceived as social media). This strategy proves that IEBC recognizes communication trends and choices of the dominant source of information of Kenyan people. “*Daily Nation*”, the most popular newspaper has 200,000 copies printed per day, though the estimated number of its readers reaches up to 1 million and is most popular in big cities—the same pattern applies to “*Taifa Leo*” and other titles. At the same time it is estimated that 83% of Kenyan people has an access to the Internet and Kenyan online newspapers (of the above mentioned dailies) reaches 1.5 millions of entrances daily—this number has increased by 53% since 2014²¹. Taking into consideration additional indicators as lower price of the Internet package comparing to the one of the newspaper, and also dominance of youth to whom the choice of the Internet as the primary source of information is perceived as a natural—IEBC’s strategy to move its campaign online should be recognized and appreciated. The digital character of IEBC campaign is associated with the second aspect—in 2017 Commission took measures to respond fake news danger. International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES) supported IEBC in their efforts and listed measures taken by Commission to actively fight with online disinformation. Among others myth busters, real-time feedback and multiple digital tools like digital banners, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube ads, graphics and videos, content production were applied²². Thirdly, IEBC’s campaigning was conducted not only in English, but also in Swahili—both printed materials, as well as spots available online and in the television. The role of the Swahili as an East African *lingua franca* was already discussed, as well as its status assigned by the Constitution, therefore the choice of Swahili was coherent and Kenyan citizens had a chance to learn about elections in African language spoken

²⁰ See: Digital 2019, Kenya: <https://www.slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2019-kenya-january-2019-v01> [access 01.01.2020].

²¹ See: Internet World Stats 2018 for Kenya, <https://www.internetworldstats.com/af/ke.htm> [access 31.12.2019].

²² For more see: <https://www.ifes.org/news/how-kenya-used-social-media-inform-voters-and-counter-fake-news> [access 29.12.2019].

in the country. This choice, in the context of previously observed ethnicity based electoral violence can be seen as nation consolidating tactics. Yet, considering high number of other languages speakers living in the country (estimated number of, i.e., Kikuyu speakers is 7 million, Kamba 4.3 million, Dholuo 4.3 million, Kalenjin 1.6 million, Oluluhya 6.6 million), this can be seen as omission in addressing Kenya's citizens who cannot speak any of the official languages. This issue will be discussed in greater details later.

4. Cognitive Analysis of IEBC Videos “*Mama mboga*” and “Housewife”

In the next paragraphs the cognitive linguistic analysis of the two video spots published by IEBC on their Twitter and YouTube profiles is conducted, as explained in the opening paragraph in this article. I briefly report the content found on IEBC websites and finally I analyze two videos shot by IEBC in 2017 “*Mama mboga*” (swah. literally: Vegetable Lady, refers to “female hawker”), and “Housewife”.

4.1. IEBC Voter Education Material Online in 2017

IEBC produced and published variety of videos and they are all available on its accounts on Twitter and YouTube. Viewers can access material both in English and Swahili, and majority of films have Sign language translation added (visible at the right bottom corner of the videos). Material can be categorized into blocks. First, “IEBC News” contains cartooned movies discussing all election regulations, voting procedures, and types of votes that took place in August 8th, second is “*Ndani ya Debe*” (swah. During Campaign) containing recording from multiple real-life meetings of IEBC staff with voters during pre-election period, thirdly, there are small-scale movies imitating the right procedures and course of action in polling stations on e-day. Further, there are videos containing messages to citizens from IEBC board members, including Chairman, and footages from conferences and meetings with public. Lastly, there are four campaigns encouraging to vote addressed to three groups: youth, male mechanics and females. They are all in Swahili, accompanied by Sign language translation and were circulated under hashtag “#WeweNdioKusema” (swah. lit. ‘Now you talk’).

4.2. Women Voters in IEBC Electoral Ads

IEBC produced two videos addressed to women encouraging them to vote in general (“Housewife”) and to vote for women representatives in County Assemblies (“*Mama mboga*”). Both ads were popular on Twitter (TT) and YouTube (YT) reaching high record of total views – “Housewife” has 227,000 views on Twitter and 100,300 on YouTube, while “*Mama mboga*” has 246,000 views on YouTube (the number of views on Twitter is not available)²³. Both films are relatively short, first lasts 28 seconds, latter 46 seconds and they both in Swahili. Films have similar structure—they open with song, later lead to woman’s monologue and end again with a song repeating campaign lead “*Wewe ndio kusema*”. The scenes are taking place inside the plenary room of county assembly, evoked metonymically with the characteristic semi-round shape of the room, with the governor’s highest place surrounded by chairs of other members of the assembly. There are some differences that can be spotted-in “*Mama mboga*” women is entering the plenary session room and is taking the random seat, while in “Housewife” the character is taking Chairperson seat. Both women, *Mama* and Housewife are dressed in a modest and traditional East African way—they have headbands made from colorful textiles, most probably African wax commonly used in the continent to produce clothes. Housewife is also dressed in colorful dress with geometrical print, while *Mama* is dressed in turquoise t-shirt, grey cardigan and skirt made of tremendously popular and traditional East African textile “*kanga*”. This textile has been present in the region since the end of the XIX century and has a unique importance in the Swahili culture – the textile is decorated in the bottom with an inscription in Swahili language, very often in the form of riddle, proverb or poetry line. Therefore, *kanga* has been used not only in households, but also thanks to the note it carries women have been using them to communicate socially restricted messages (Podobińska 2004. *Mama mboga* is carrying typical East African basket made of sisal, used to transport heavy loads. Being “*Mama mboga*” means, that she works as a small-scale fruit and vegetable seller, who often vend their merchandises in wooden stalls at the corner of the streets. The social position of the second character cannot be described in so many details, though her name “Housewife” indicates that she is a home-stay mother, whose responsibilities are to take care after kids and home. Most probably she does not work outside household, though her work is crucial in terms of keeping the integrity of her family. In the ad she is holding a baby wrapped in the blanket, what emphasizes her social role. The apparel of both women is visible in Figures 7 and 8.

²³ “*Mama mboga*” on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7I2ch7kElo> [access 31.12.2019], and “Housewife” on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM4_Y1NiQy4 [access 31.12.2019].

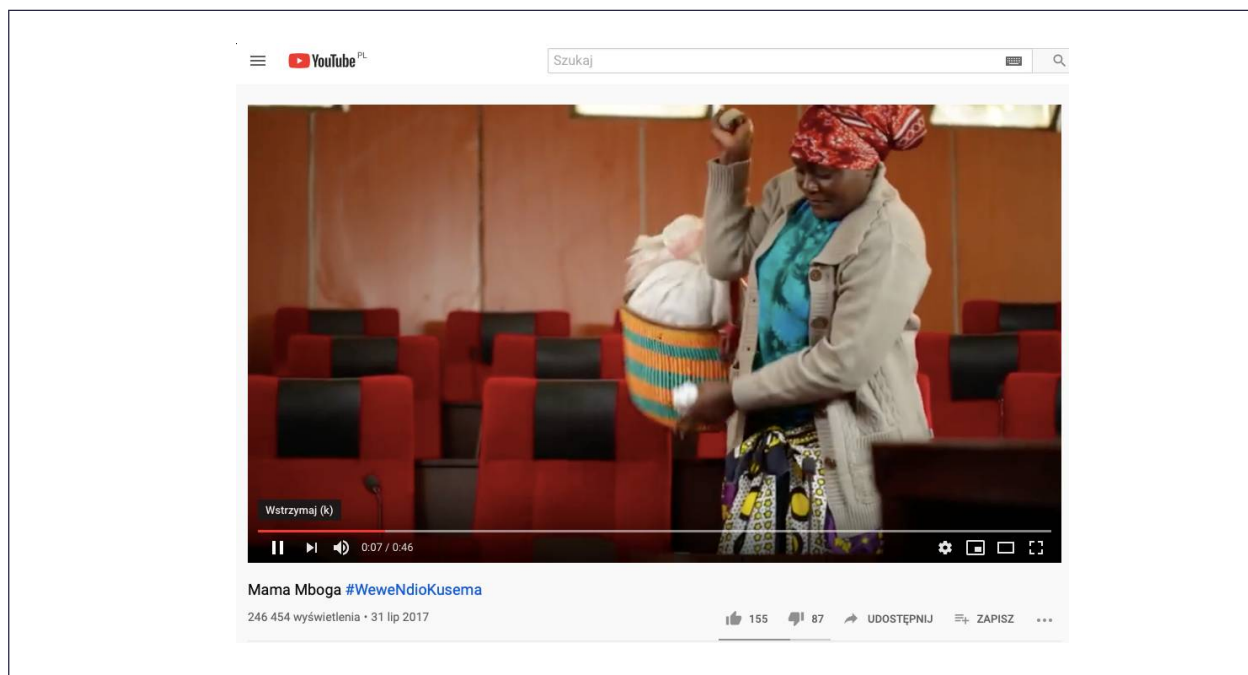


Figure 7²⁴: Snapshot of “Mama Mboga” IEBC spot

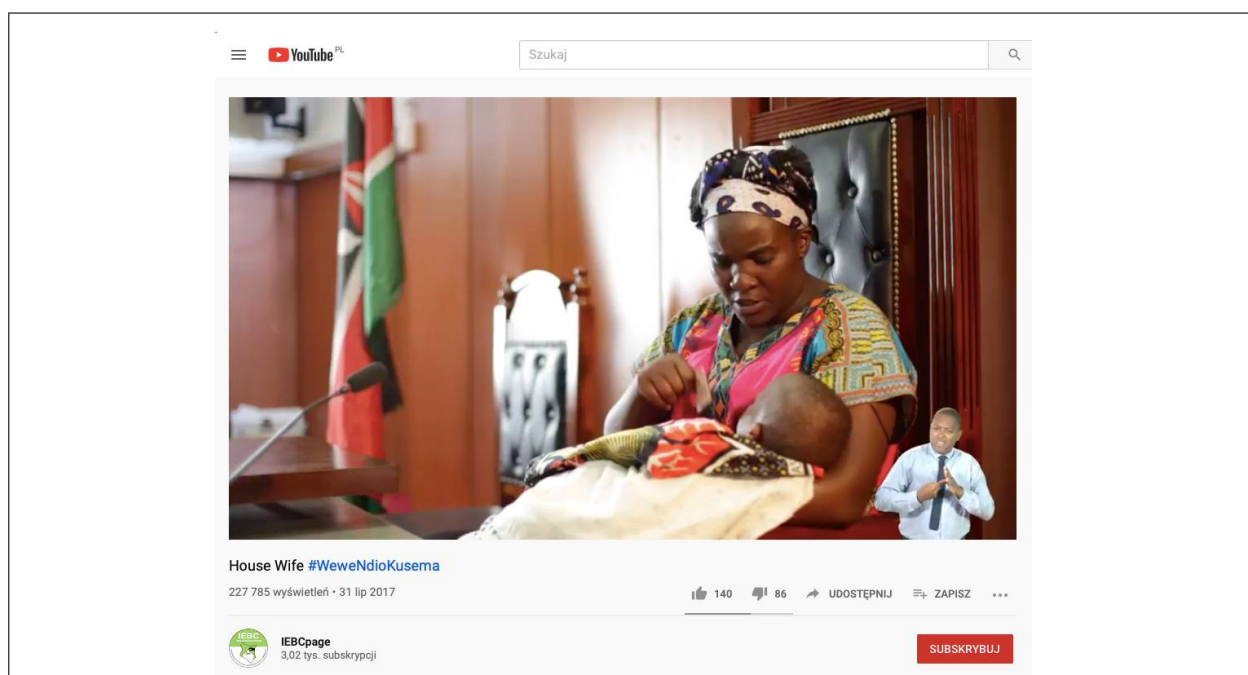


Figure 8²⁵: Snapshot of “House Wife” IEBC spot

Viewers familiar with the Swahili culture (to whom ads are addressed), can easily recognize women’s social position, as intended by IEBC. It is possible due to the metonymy phenomenon—creators perfectly captured the most salient features of depicted women and their attributes: headbands, colorful textiles, basket and child. Viewers use them to mentally activate large-scale thinking about female figures, including perception of their roles in the society. The role of the metonymy is to conceptually “awaken” the figure of “Mama mboga” and “Housewife”. The characters do not have to present themselves or talk about their occupation, family, age as viewers are familiar with those details and the role of

²⁴ Source: You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7I2ch7kElo> [access 31.12.2019].

²⁵ Source: You Tube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM4_Y1NiQy4 [access 31.12.2019].

the well-directed commercial (and this are examples of such) is to offer a leverage stimulating previously acquired knowledge embedded in mind through (self) experience. The visual realm enables viewers to instantly recognize the characters and their social role, what is possible thanks to aptly selected visual attributes and looks.

The verbal aspect of ads is uniquely activating women not only to vote on 8th of August, but also to vote for Women Representatives to the County Assemblies and Parliament. Transcriptions of the female monologues are quoted below²⁶, first “*Mama mboga*” (a), secondly “*Housewife*” (b):

(a)

Song: Choose Kenya you will be proud of, chose Kenya you want.

Mama mboga: My fellow ladies! The time has now come for our voice to be heard via the ballot. Who knows the problems of ladies better, if not women themselves. We are stuck in homes but [loh!] ... we haven't insisted [enough]. Or maybe you want men to be “women rep[resentatives]”. There is one thing I want you to understand: we are the ones who will hire the ones who preside here! My fellow ladies—meet us on August 8th. Let's vote. It is your responsibility to decide!

IEBC, your vote - your future.

(b)

Song: Choose Kenya you will be proud of, chose Kenya you want.

Housewife: Dear All! We are responsible for all those leaders. We must know, how our children's life will continue. Therefore, 8th of August, it's your turn to speak. My vote and your vote – they will build Kenya!

IEBC, your vote - your future.

Monologues are constructed in a way, that enables creation of an emotional connection with the audience and simultaneously pass the message of the non-partisan electoral engagement. They both start with direct address to viewers with respectful greetings “Dear All” and “Fellow ladies”, what ultimately creates bond and the sense of the community between the character – the narrator, and the viewers – recipients. This electoral community is built on the concept of nation and state as a whole, not tribe or any particular ethnic group, what is particularly important giving the history of an ethnical electoral violence in the country (Fjelde and Höglund, 2018). Linguistically, ads are created using simple and captivating declarative sentences, and also direct address to recipients done by the speaker. This creates personalized and candid message. The notion of common responsibility for the country is achieved by applying often first person plural “we”, instead of “you” (plural). Additionally, monologues (but especially “*Mama mboga*”), depict August election as an approaching turning point of women's participation in Kenyan politics with the metaphor TIME IS MOVING OBJECT (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Election, the moment of taking the lead and the decision, takes the features of moving object—it is physical, it is moving towards us and can no longer be ignored, as its motion is imminent and irreversible. Election is depicted as a peak of this movement and it requires taking precise action—casting a ballot paper. Another important metaphor, commonly known and applied in political discourse in many languages is NATION IS BUILDING in a *Housewife*'s statement “(…) My vote and your vote—they will build Kenya!”. This is derived from the popular conception of seeing states or a nations as containers, as this enables speakers to talk about and address complex, sophisticated and abstract terms using vocabulary originally associated with the physical, basic concepts. The use of those two metaphors in Swahili language proves, that East African *lingua franca* applies similar metaphors as for example English (ex. “create a nation”, “fix the problem of nation”), which are common metaphors applied in political discourse²⁷.

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to the fact, that in two ads women are placed inside building of the Country Assembly. I analyze it with conceptual integration theory approach. In the video, viewer sees two separate domains – first input space is space related to power and ruling metonymically represented with the County Assembly plenary room, with seats usually occupied by men. Second space related to women and their daily activities—households management and running small-scale businesses. In ads those two input spaces are blended, offering newly invented space that has never existed before. It is the space built from previously known, realistically existing elements, yet set in brand new schema, which is power-related space reigned by women, who solely conquere and lead in County Assembly.

²⁶ All original texts originally in Swahili are of my own translation.

²⁷ Cognitive linguistics researchers recognize different types of metaphor, some of them present in multiple languages of different origins - most commonly associated with physical and bodily experience, yet some of them are culturally dependent. An example of universal metaphor is ANGER IS HEAT, derived from embodied process associated with this emotion (high pressure, fast blood circulation results in rise of body temperature and sweating). See more on cultural linguistics among others Sharifian, 2017).

In this integrated space, especially in case of “Housewife”, women are powerful, standing alone figures, equipped with their previous experiences and qualifications and ready to make decisions at the highest legislative level. The blend offers a powerful image of women, who regardless their background, possible lack of education, are equally qualified to choose their representatives and to stand for their future.

The cognitive linguistic analysis of IEBC election spots enables to show, that Commission managed to produce sophisticated films activating different levels of cognition and awareness of their audience. IEBC created short, captivating ads employing universal, linguistic metaphors and visual schemas embedded in East African culture. The popularity of the videos (counted with the number of viewers) also proves, the IEBC artistic and aesthetic choice was noticed by Kenyan audience, yet without further research it cannot be unequivocally determined, if it encouraged voters (and if so, how many), to exercise their political right to vote. Nonetheless, it can also be argued, that Commission produced only two videos addressed to women, therefore they did not manage to show the variety of female social profiles. Consequently, it narrows viewers’ conceptualization of the role of Kenyan women in social structure. Their social functions are no longer limited to “Housewife” and “*Mama mboga*”, as they are also teachers, independent scientists, graffiti artists, movie stars and directors, teachers, nurses, doctors and many other, yet IEBC did not offer an opportunity to esteem women also in those different roles. The figure of mother and women working on her small-scale business are fulfilling ones, but if IEBC limits Kenyan women are to them, it offers over-simplified image country’s society. Yet, the choice of IEBC made it possible for multiple typical Kenyan women, to understand that to become an active citizen, responsible for their political representation and own future, every women is adequately prepared for the role.

Furtherly, IEBC applied two languages to launch their campaign – Swahili and English, what is justified taking into account that these are only two official languages in Kenya. Yet, considering country’s ethnic diversion and linguistic mosaic, campaign could have been launched also in other indigenous languages, so that people to whom neither Swahili nor English serve as mother tongue, could learn about elections in their own language. Bearing in mind, that 2007 post-election violence was (allegedly) triggered by, i.e., inflammatory ethnic language, launching the election-awareness campaign in those languages could offer a change of optics towards them. Such campaign could also help initiate a nation-wide debate on the role of indigenous identities in constructing coherent Kenyan pan-ethnic identification.

5. Conclusion

Voter education in modern societies is a key tool enabling setting mature pre-electoral discussion on stakeholders’ rights and responsibilities. It is principally important instrument in countries where minorities (i.e., gender, age religious or others) suffer from discrimination. Kenya, though is an example of a country successful on multiple levels, does not always offer equal opportunities to women who constitutes more than half of its society. The decades-long discrimination continues, and is especially visible when it comes to high-ranked public positions including political ones and this situation in Kenya has been changing slowly, but progressively, with multiple initiatives including legal ones. Despite this, in all elections since 1992 women were underrepresented not only as candidates, but also as voters. In 2017 IEBC decided to respond to it, by launching campaign addressed to women and encouraging them to vote. Though campaign was produced in a modern way, using new technologies and present in multiple media, it offered vaguely over-simplified image of Kenyan women that stressed their traditional roles. Though IEBC missed the opportunity to influence the society by sharing inspirational and motivating image of other – than two mentioned – successful positions women can exercise, it made a huge step forward launching modern type of voter education campaigning in the region. Also, I recognize the choice of English and Swahili, two official languages and the latter East African *lingua franca*, as measure taken towards building pan-ethnic society in Kenya. If it helps in the future to all stakeholders to focus more on assuring fair, democratic process, rather than avoiding ethnic clashes, Kenya could start creating engaged society. Further discussion and analysis of the IEBC performance in scheduled for 2022 presidential elections will help understand, if 2017 campaign has been a starting point towards reaching those goals.

Funding

This article was funded by Narodowe Centrum Nauki grant no. 2018/31/B/HS2/01114’

References

- Abuya, Edwin O. (2009). *Consequences of Flawed Elections*. *Legal Studies*, 29(1), 127-158, March.
- Barcelona, Antonio. (2000). *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bergen, Benjamin. (2003). *To Awaken a Sleeping Giant*. *Cognition and Culture in September 11 Political Cartoons*. In: Michael Achard and Suzanne Kemmer Language (eds.). *Culture and Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- CEDAW. (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008).
- Cheeseman, N., Kanyinga, K., Lynch, G., Ruteere, M. and Willis, J. (2019). Kenya's 2017 Elections: Winner-Takes-All Politics as Usual?. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(2), 215-234.
- Cheeseman, Nic. (2008). The Kenyan Elections of 2007: An introduction. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2(2), 146-164.
- Croft, William. and Cruse, Alan, D. (2004). *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Evans, Vyvyan and Green, Melanie. (2008). *Cognitive Linguistics: an Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Fauconnier, Gilles and Turner, Mark. (2002). *The Way We Think. Conceptual Blending and The Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fjelde, Hanne and Höglund, Kristine. 2018. Ethnic Politics and Elite Competition: The Roots of Electoral Violence in Kenya". In: Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, and Jesper Bjarnsen (Eds.). *Violence in African Elections*. Uppsala: Nordic African Institute.
- Forceville, Charles. (2008). Metaphor in Pictures and Multimodal Representations. In: Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. (Eds.). *Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Santa Cruz: University of California.
- Górska, Elżbieta. (2014). Why are Multimodal Metaphors Interesting? The Perspective of Verbo-visual and Verbo-Musical Modalities". In: Kuřniak, Marek, Libura, Agnieszka and Michaś Szawerna (eds.). *From Conceptual Metaphor Theory to Cognitive Ethnolinguistics. Patterns of Imagery in Language*. Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, pp. 17-36.
- Górska, Elżbieta. (2018). A Multimodal Portrait of Wisdom and Stupidity. A Case Study of Image-schematic Metaphors in Cartoons. In: Rafaś Augustyn and Agnieszka Mierziwińska-Hajnos (eds.). *New Insights into the Language and Cognition Interface*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 98-117.
- Hart, Christopher. (2017). Cognitive Linguistic Critical Discourse Studies. In: Bernard Fortchner and Ruth Wodak (eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics*. Routledge.
- ICCPR. (1966). *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.
- Kamau, Nyokabi. (2010). *Women and Political Leadership in Kenya*. Nairobi: Heinrich Böll Foundation.
- Kövecses, Zoltan. (2010). *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lijphart, Arend. (1995). Multiethnic Democracy. In: S.M. Lipset (eds.). *The Encyclopedia of Democracy*, pp. 853-865. London: Routledge.
- Maputo Protocol. (2003). *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*.
- Maganda, Dainess. and Moshi, Lioba. (2014). *The Swahili People and their Language*. London: Adonis& Abbey Publishers Ltd.
- Mazrui, Alamin, M. and Mazrui, Alamin, A. (1993). Dominant Languages in a Plural Society. English and Kiswahili in Post-Colonial East Africa. In: *International Political Science Review*, 14(3), 275-292.
- Nyanjon, Othieno. (2011). *Devolution in Kenya's New Constitution*. Nairobi: Society for International Development.
- Owuor, Felix, O. (2008). The 2007 General Elections in Kenya. Electoral Laws and Process. *Journal of African Elections*, 7(2), 113-123.
- Panther, Klaus Uwe. and Radden, Gunther. (1999). *Metonymy in Language and Thought*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Pawelczak, Marek. (2004). *Kenia*. Warszawa: Trio.
- Podobińska, Zofia. (2004). *Kanga – kulturowy fenomen Wschodnioafrykańskiego wybrzeża*. w: Nina Pawlak and Zofia Podobińska (eds.), *Języki Afryki a kultura*. Warszawa: AGADE. 249-269.

Sanz, Maria (eds). (2013). *Multimodality and Cognitive Linguistics*. In: *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*. Vol. 11:2. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Sharifian, Farzad. 2017. *Cultural Linguistics*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Sisk, Timothy. (1996). *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Documents:

Constitution of Kenya, 1969.

Constitution of Kenya, 2010.

European Union Election Observation Mission to Kenya 2007, Final Report

European Union Election Observation Mission to Kenya 2013, Final Report.

European Union Election Observation Mission to Kenya 2017 Final Report.

The Carter Center Election Observation Mission to Kenya 2017, Final Report.

Voter Education Curriculum. 1999. IFES: Nairobi.

Internet sources:

CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html> [access 03.01.2020]

Digital 2019 Kenya: <https://www.slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2019-kenya-january-2019-v01> [access 03.01.2020]

Election Observation Group: <https://elog.or.ke> [access 03.01.2020].

Ethnologue Languages of the World: <https://www.ethnologue.com> [access 02.11.2019].

Internet World Statistics: <https://www.internetworldstats.com/af/ke.htm> [access 03.01.2020].

Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics: <https://www.knbs.or.ke/ethnic-affiliation/> [access 01.11.2019].

MCI Maps: <http://mcimaps.com/kenyas-presidential-results-were-fair-but-its-ethnic-divide-is-concerning/> [access 01.01.2020].

UNESCO: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ke> [access 02.01.2020].

United Nations Human Rights: <https://indicators.ohchr.org> [access 03.01.2020].

ICCPR. (1966). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

CEDAW. (1979). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008).

Maputo Protocol. (2003). Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

Cite this article as: Maria Piotrowska (2021). *Voter Education for Women in Multiethnic Kenyan Society: The Case Study of 2017 General Elections*. *International Journal of African Studies*. 1(3), 1-15. doi: 10.51483/IJAFRS.1.3.2021.1-15.