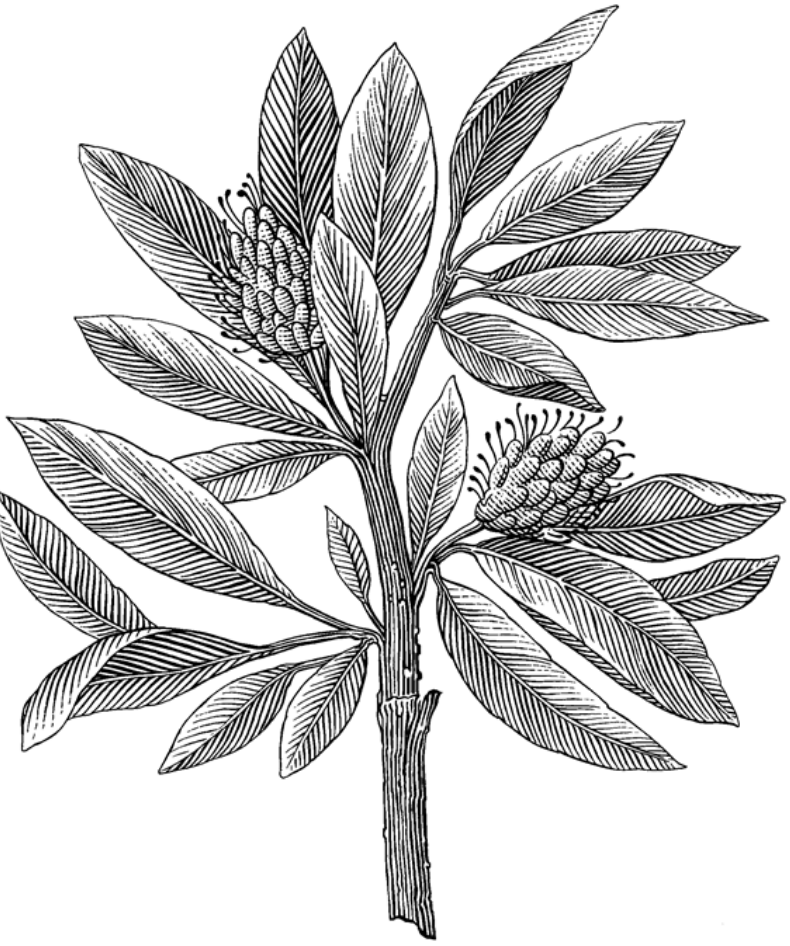
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Bachelor Thesis.

Negotiated 'Peace', Neglected People.

Citizens Perceptions of Political Settlements, Elite Pacts and Power-Sharing as Peacebuilders in Kenya.



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Abstract

Power-sharing arrangements are frequently promoted as mechanisms for stabilising divided societies following episodes of political conflict. In many cases, such arrangements are negotiated among political elites with the expectation that elite inclusion will prevent renewed violence and facilitate development. However, less attention has been paid to how these elite-driven settlements are perceived by ordinary citizens whose everyday lives are shaped by their outcomes. This thesis examines how Kenyan citizens perceive power-sharing agreements as peacebuilding mechanisms and whether such arrangements translate into meaningful improvements in security, development, and democratic participation at the grassroots level.

The study focuses on Kenya as a case where coalition governments and elite political settlements have repeatedly been used to manage ethnopolitical tensions following contested elections. Drawing on fifteen semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations conducted across urban and rural communities, the research adopts a qualitative interpretivist approach. The analysis is guided by political settlements theory, the African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) governance domains framework, and the peace–development nexus to trace how elite bargains negotiated at the national level are mediated through institutions and experienced in everyday life.

The findings indicate that while power-sharing arrangements may stabilise elite political competition and reduce large-scale electoral violence, their legitimacy among citizens is primarily evaluated through everyday governance outcomes such as service delivery, security, and economic opportunity. The study further reveals an important divergence between elite political narratives and grassroots experiences: while ethnopolitical bargaining remains central to coalition formation at the national level, citizens more frequently experience marginalisation through socio-economic inequalities and unequal access to institutions.

By foregrounding citizen perceptions, the study contributes to political settlements scholarship by demonstrating that the durability of elite-driven peace arrangements depends not only on elite inclusion but also on how these settlements shape everyday experiences of development, security, and institutional fairness.

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Chapter 1:Introduction

1. Introduction and Research Problem

Efforts to resolve political conflicts and maintain stability are increasingly challenged by polarization, recurrent violence, and demands for more inclusive governance. Power-sharing has emerged globally as a key strategy for managing conflict in deeply divided societies. By distributing political authority among rival groups, power-sharing aims to prevent domination, reduce grievances, and build legitimacy for post-conflict governance (Sisk, 1996; Papagianni, 2008).

While contemporary scholarship highlights its potential to reduce violence and increase representation, critics argue that power-sharing can entrench elite control, delay democratic reforms, and leave social divisions unaddressed (Mehler & Tull, 2018; O'Flynn, 2018; Juon, 2025). This tension raises important questions about whether the benefits attributed to power-sharing at the elite and institutional levels translate into meaningful improvements for citizens.

Kenya provides a compelling context for examining these dynamics. Power-sharing arrangements introduced during electoral crises and political settlements have been widely analysed in terms of elite bargains, constitutional reforms, and institutional outcomes (Cheeseman et al., 2019; Kanyinga & Utas, 2020; Paget & Thomsen, 2022). Yet far less is known about how citizens themselves perceive and experience these arrangements in everyday life.

This gap presents a puzzle: Power sharing is designed to enhance stability, legitimacy, and representation, and elite narratives consistently portray these arrangements as mechanisms for peace and national unity. However, public surveys across Kenya continue to show declining trust in political institutions, persistent feelings of insecurity, and dissatisfaction with service delivery (Afrobarrometer, 2025).

If power-sharing is intended to promote peace and inclusion, why do many citizens report experiences that appear to contradict these expected outcomes? What explains this disconnect between elite design and everyday experience?

Existing surveys provide broad patterns of dissatisfaction but offer limited insight into how citizens interpret power-sharing, or how they navigate its implications in their daily lives. Emerging qualitative research, such as studies of protest mobilization in consociational contexts (Nagle, 2025), primarily focuses on episodic moments of contestation rather than routine engagement. From the perspective of political settlement theory, this leaves a critical gap in understanding how negotiated elite bargains shape experiences of security, development, and democratic participation at the grassroots.

This thesis addresses this puzzle by examining how Kenyan citizens perceive and experience power-sharing arrangements, and how these perceptions reflect the credibility or fragility of elite political settlements. By adopting a bottom-up perspective, the study seeks to illuminate how power-sharing shapes everyday life, affects feelings of security, and influences the broader peacebuilding landscape.

1.1 Kenya Background.

Kenya provides a particularly relevant context for examining elite-driven power-sharing because of its history of high-stakes elections, ethnopolitical competition, and repeated use of negotiated political settlements. Since the transition to multiparty politics in the 1990s, national elections have been closely tied to access to state power, contributing to periodic tensions and contestation. These dynamics became most visible during the 2007/08 post-election crisis, which resulted in widespread violence and the formation of the 2008 Grand Coalition government, the country's first formal power-sharing arrangement. Subsequent elite bargains, including the 2018 "handshake" and the 2025 cooperation agreement, demonstrate how power-sharing has evolved into a recurring mechanism for managing political conflict and maintaining stability.

These repeated settlements make Kenya an ideal case for this study: they offer a clear pattern of elite accommodation, strong public expectations around coalition politics, and visible gaps

between national elite consensus and citizens' everyday experiences of governance, security, and development.

Kenya's political landscape is also shaped by the long-standing interplay between ethnicity, electoral competition, and access to state resources. Electoral contests often double as contests over regional inclusion, producing strong expectations that political alliances or coalitions will deliver tangible benefits to co-ethnic constituencies. These dynamics have contributed to recurrent episodes of tension during tightly contested elections, most notably in 1992, 1997, and 2007/08, and continue to influence how citizens interpret elite cooperation today. Even after the introduction of devolution and expanded civic rights under the 2010 Constitution, public trust in institutions remains uneven due to persistent gaps between formal reforms and informal governance practices. This mixed institutional environment further underscores Kenya's relevance as a case for examining how ordinary citizens understand the promises and limitations of elite-driven power-sharing arrangements.

1.2 Objective

This thesis examines how Kenyan citizens perceive and experience elite-driven power sharing arrangements by analysing their everyday evaluations of legitimacy and effectiveness across key domains of governance including safety, development, and democratic participation. By treating these dimensions as interconnected aspects of how citizens interpret the outcomes of power-sharing, the study explores the trade-offs that ordinary people navigate in post-conflict settings and assesses whether power-sharing delivers the stability and inclusion it promises.

1.3 Research Questions.

- How do local communities perceive the legitimacy and effectiveness of elite-driven power-sharing deals in promoting community safety and conflict prevention?
- How have power-sharing arrangements shaped citizens' everyday experiences of local governance especially in relation to development outcomes, access to public services, and opportunities for democratic participation and accountability?
- Through what mechanisms do Kenyan citizens evaluate and respond to the trade-offs inherent in elite power-sharing arrangements following episodes of political conflict?

1.4 Relevance

Relevance

This study makes three key contributions.

Academic relevance:
It addresses a well-recognized gap in peacebuilding and political settlements literature by examining power-sharing from the perspective of ordinary citizens rather than political elites. Existing studies overwhelmingly focus on institutional design, elite bargains, and constitutional outcomes, leaving limited understanding of how such arrangements shape everyday life in divided societies. By foregrounding grassroots experiences, this study contributes empirical evidence that helps explain why the anticipated benefits of power-sharing may not always materialize on the ground.

Policy relevance:
Insights from citizens' perceptions are essential for designing peacebuilding interventions that are legitimate, contextually grounded, and responsive to public needs. Understanding how communities interpret and experience elite-driven political settlements can help policymakers refine governance reforms, strengthen accountability, and ensure that peace agreements translate into tangible improvements in safety, development, and participation.

Social relevance:
By amplifying citizens' voices, the study elevates perspectives often marginalized in political discourse. It also enhances civic visibility and may indirectly strengthen democratic engagement by validating the experiences of communities whose everyday realities are rarely captured in elite-centric analyses of peace and governance.

1.5 Disposition

Following the chapter one's introduction, chapter two presents the literature review, situating the study within existing scholarship on power-sharing, political settlements as peacebuilders both globally and kenyan specifically as our case study. This chapter identifies key debates,

theoretical gaps, and tensions in current research, thereby establishing the academic relevance of the study.

Building on this foundation, chapter three outlines the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the analysis. It introduces the core theories underpinning the study including political settlement theory, the ACRC framework and security-development nexus. It clarifies the key concepts used throughout the thesis. This chapter establishes the analytical lens through which the empirical material is interpreted.

To increase the study's reliability, chapter four details the methodological framework to explain the research design, case selection, data collection methods, and ethical considerations. It also reflects on positionality and limitations, thereby ensuring transparency and academic rigor. Having established the theoretical and methodological foundations, chapter four further elaborates the analytical framework. It operationalizes the theoretical concepts into analytical categories and clarifies how the empirical material will be examined. It serves as the bridge between theory and findings.

Chapter five presents the empirical findings derived from interviews and field research. The findings are structured thematically in alignment with the analytical framework outlined in the previous chapter.

Building on these findings, chapter six provides the analysis and discussion. Here, the empirical results are interpreted through the theoretical lens introduced earlier. This chapter evaluates how Kenyan citizens perceive and experience power-sharing and political settlements as peacebuilders.

Finally, Chapter seven concludes the thesis by summarizing the main findings, reflecting on theoretical contributions, and outlining policy and research implications. The conclusion also identifies limitations and suggests directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter situates the study within existing scholarship on power-sharing, political settlements, and the relationship between peace, development, and governance. It reviews the key theoretical and empirical debates that inform the analytical framework of the thesis and identifies the gap addressed by examining citizen perceptions of elite-driven power-sharing arrangements in Kenya.

Power-sharing arrangements are widely used as a key mechanism for conflict resolution and peacebuilding across the globe. Power-sharing generally refers to the distribution of political power among different groups within the same government, such as in coalition governments. Formally, it refers to a governance system that allocates temporary or permanent power to all major societal groups (Sisk, 1996). Scholars agree that the primary objective of power-sharing in peacebuilding is to reduce political violence in regions of conflict by dividing power among rival groups. The overarching goal is to prevent the concentration of executive, legislative, judicial, bureaucratic, military, or cultural power in the hands of a single party, as such monopolization poses a threat to the security and political inclusion of other groups (Papagianni, 2008; Kanyinga & Okello, 2010; McEvoy and O'Leary, 2013;Dlamini, 2010; Noyes, 2013).

Taken together, this body of work establishes power-sharing as a central peacebuilding tool grounded in the logic of inclusion, moderation, and conflict de-escalation. Yet the literature also reveals important conceptual tensions, particularly between power-sharing as a formal institutional arrangement and power-sharing as a broader process of building legitimacy and stability. While most studies evaluate success in terms of elite bargains or institutional design, fewer examine how these arrangements are understood or legitimised from below. This tension between top-down institutional goals and bottom-up experiences provides the foundation for the analytical gap this study engages with.

Power-sharing is particularly effective in contexts where conflict stems from ethnic, racial, religious, or other group-based divisions. It can help quell violence a vital prerequisite for negotiations. Additionally, if structured properly, it can promote moderation and deter extremism (Kanyinga & Okello, 2010). However, according to Sisk, (1996) and Lijphart, (1969)

lasting peace through power-sharing depends on two factors: the cultivation of societal moderation grounded in shared goals, and the rise of leaders who bridge divides and represent diverse voices across the political landscape. However Juon, (2023) argues that these can be achieved only when power-sharing is maintained for a prolonged period of time.

Sriram and Zahar, (2009);Cammett and and Juon, (2023);Allison and McCulloch, (2024) highlight that the concept of power-sharing can be explored through various theoretical lenses primarily focusing on managing deep societal divisions.

Firstly, one of the most influential foundational frameworks for understanding power-sharing is Arend Lijphart's, (1969) consociational democracy. Consonciationalism or power-sharing is viewed as a mechanism for making democracy viable in societies divided along ethnic or cultural lines. It entails political cooperation among elites despite the deep cleavages separating them. Power-sharing under this lens aims to establish positive peace (Galtung, 1969) through a long-term solution plan where negotiated terms are meant to be embedded within the constitution to provide a durable democratic stability (Sriram and Zahar, 2009). Consociational power-sharing has been a success in countries such as Belgium and Switzerland while failing in

Nigeria and Cyprus due to a lack of inter-subcultural relations at the elite and mass level and elite-mass relations (Lijphart's, 1969). While this model has shaped much of the early scholarship, it is not the primary lens through which this study approaches Kenya's post-election arrangements. Instead, the analysis draws on alternative frameworks better suited to Kenya's political dynamics, as discussed in the analytical framework section. While early scholarship emphasized consociational models in stable democracies like Belgium, more recent work has shifted toward post-conflict and post-election arrangements in deeply divided societies.

Overall, the consociational literature frames power-sharing as a normative model for governing deeply divided societies, highlighting elite cooperation, constitutional design, and long-term democratic stability as markers of success. However, these evaluations tend to privilege institutional architecture and elite behaviour, often assuming that legitimacy flows from formal inclusion and negotiated settlements. This creates a conceptual tension between power-sharing as a set of elite-brokered institutional arrangements and power-sharing as a lived political order

whose legitimacy must also be constructed from below. These tensions further underscore the need for analytical approaches that move beyond design principles to examine how citizens interpret and experience such pacts in practice.

As aforementioned, power-sharing is also frequently used as a mechanism during active conflict primarily to serve as short-term objective in halting violence (Allison and McCulloch, 2024;Siram and Zahar, 2009). In this context, power-sharing arrangements are commonly employed as transitional or temporary so that the opponents work together to create a more democratic system consolidated through trust and unity. It has been widely accepted at the international level as a mechanism to resolve civil conflicts such as in Sudan, where leadership roles have been granted to non-state actors such as former insurgents and rebel groups (Elfversson and Anders, 2019 and Haass, 2019). However, critics such as Kanyinga & Okello, (2010); Elfversson and Anders, (2019); Salihu, (2010) contend that this is difficult to maintain and fail to address underlying issues. Moreover, it is elite focused, undermines democracy, promotes rent seeking and creates a toxic dynamic where elites prioritize short-term economic gain and self interest over long-term institutional and democratic consolidation.

Similarly, in cases of post-election unrest, like those witnessed in Kenya and Zimbabwe, power-sharing has been used to address disputes among major political parties and democratically elected elites. These agreements are usually brokered to resolve political legitimacy and or democratic deadlock (Kanyinga & Okello, 2010; Salihu, 2010). Yet despite its growing popularity, power-sharing remains deeply contested. A critical reading of the literature reveals persistent concerns about its democratic, institutional, and distributive consequences.

Once institutionalized, power-sharing governments often exhibit patterns of elite consolidation and constrained democratic reform, a dynamic frequently described as a politics of collusion (Cheeseman and Tendi, 2010). Another key critique to power-sharing lies in its political economy dimension. The integration of rival elites, particularly former rebels or the opposition into executive positions grants privileged access to state resources, effectively transforming the state into a vehicle for economic extraction (Haass, 2019). Given the transitional or uncertain nature of many power-sharing arrangements, elites tend to adopt short time horizons,

intensifying rent-seeking behavior and prioritizing immediate gains over long-term democratic and institutional development.

Overall, the consociational literature frames power-sharing as a normative model for governing deeply divided societies, highlighting elite cooperation, constitutional design, and long-term democratic stability as markers of success. However, these evaluations tend to privilege institutional architecture and elite behaviour, often assuming that legitimacy flows from formal inclusion and negotiated settlements. This creates a conceptual tension between power-sharing as a set of elite-brokered institutional arrangements and power-sharing as a lived political order whose legitimacy must also be constructed from below. These tensions further underscore the need for analytical approaches that move beyond design principles to examine how citizens interpret and experience such pacts in practice

In response to external pressures, especially from international donors, elites often pursue what scholar Haass, (2019) terms as "second-best" strategy: implementing surface-level democratic reforms such as cleaner elections to satisfy conditionalities, while simultaneously preserving mechanisms that entrench their political dominance. This strategic compliance reflects what he also terms as the rent-seeking/democracy dilemma (Haass, 2019).

Moreover, these pacts can sometimes be unconstitutional and frequently weaken accountability institutions through constraints on judicial independence and the rule of law, enabling elites to navigate electoral uncertainty with minimal oversight (Haass, 2019). In Kenya, the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) proposals were nullified by the High Court and declared unconstitutional, illustrating how elite-driven power-sharing negotiations can sideline constitutional safeguards and public participation. Framed as a national unity effort, the BBI process was largely steered by political elites, raising concerns about its legitimacy, transparency, and alignment with citizens' priorities (Noyes, 2025). Its collapse underscores the risks of power-sharing arrangements that prioritize elite consensus over inclusive democratic processes.

Spending decisions often follow the same pattern, with leaders directing resources toward their political supporters rather than investing in services that benefit the broader public (Haass, 2019). In the Kenyan context, repeated elite inclusion has facilitated the formation of

cross-party alliances that shield political actors from prosecution, thereby entrenching impunity and obstructing meaningful anti-corruption efforts (Cheeseman and Tendi, 2010).

Although power-sharing can deliver short-term peace, it often fails to secure lasting stability or democratic consolidation. Critics argue it postpones conflict without addressing root causes like inequality and exclusion. By incentivizing electoral manipulation, it undermines democratic competition. Its benefits tend to concentrate among elites, with limited grassroots reconciliation. Moreover, the temporary nature of such arrangements shaped by political ambition and electoral cycles fosters instability. When institutionalized along societal divisions, power-sharing risks entrenching those very cleavages, obstructing the emergence of inclusive national identities and deepening fragmentation (Elfversson and Anders, 2019;Kanyinga & Okello; Salihu, 2010). These limitations underscore the need to examine how power-sharing unfolds in specific contexts. Thus, the thesis narrows its focus to Kenya, where power-sharing has been employed as a response to post-election crises and contested political legitimacy.

Together, these critiques illuminate a second major analytical debate in the literature: whether power‑sharing transforms conflict dynamics or merely repackages elite competition in more institutionalised forms. Political economy analyses emphasise how the distribution of executive positions and state resources can create powerful incentives for collusion, patronage, and strategic compliance with democratic norms. Meanwhile, institutional critiques highlight the weakening of accountability mechanisms and the concentration of authority within elite networks. Yet across these strands, evaluations of success or failure remain predominantly top‑down, focused on elite behaviour, formal institutions, and constitutional performance. What remains underexplored is how these elite bargains resonate among citizens themselves, and whether their everyday experiences reflect or contradict the forms of legitimacy assumed in the literature.

Kenya offers a critical case of post-election power-sharing in Africa distinct from civil war settlements involving non-state actors. The impetus for this arrangement arose from the catastrophic 2007/2008 post-election violence triggered by a fiercely contested presidential election. The crisis led to over 1,000 deaths and displaced nearly 700,000 people. However, the violence was not solely electoral, it was deeply rooted in structural divisions, including the

concentration of power in an often "imperial presidency", a winner-takes-all political system, and longstanding issues of ethnic inequality and land injustice (Cheeseman and Lynch, 2016;Kanyinga & Okello, 2010; Salihu, 2010).

International mediation, led by Kofi Annan, culminated in the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008, which established a Grand Coalition government between the two main rivals Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga effectively sharing executive power. The Accord aimed to defuse contestation over state control and committed political elites to pursue structural and institutional reforms, notably the push for devolution, later enshrined in the 2010 Constitution (Cheeseman and Lynch, 2016; Cheeseman and Tendi, 2010; Kanying and Okello, 2010).

Beyond the internationally mediated 2008 National Accord, Kenya has witnessed subsequent elite-driven pacts and political settlements appropriated as peace building power-sharing negotiated without external oversight. Notably, the 2018 handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga marked a formal political truce that gave rise to the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) , an ambitious institutional reform agenda aimed at addressing systemic governance challenges. More recently, the 2025 Memorandum of Understanding between President William Ruto and Raila Odinga, signed in March 2025, established another explicit cooperation framework that resulted in strategic appointments and the formation of a “broad-based” government. In addition to these high-profile agreements, Kenya’s political landscape has been shaped by a series of smaller, informal elite bargaining deals, including pre-election coalitions, cabinet-level bargains, and executive appointments designed to neutralize rivals and consolidate political stability. These developments reflect the evolving nature of elite bargaining in Kenya, where the appropriation of power-sharing has become a recurring mechanism for managing political contestation (Noyes, 2025).

While elite-centered frameworks offer valuable insights into the mechanics of power-sharing, they often overlook how these arrangements are perceived and lived by ordinary citizens. As demonstrated, scholarly discourse on power-sharing has largely centered on elite negotiations and institutional design, leaving a critical gap in understanding how these pacts are experienced

by ordinary Kenyan citizens. This study addresses that gap by foregrounding bottom-up perspectives and citizen narratives often sidelined in formal peacebuilding analysis.

The Kenyan literature illustrates how power-sharing has evolved from an externally mediated response to crisis into a recurrent, elite-driven tool for managing political contestation. This scholarship provides rich insights into the incentives, strategies, and institutional consequences of elite bargains, yet it remains overwhelmingly focused on high-level negotiations and constitutional engineering. What is far less examined is how these recurring settlements shape popular understandings of legitimacy, accountability, and everyday governance. Thus, the Kenyan case not only exemplifies broader debates within the power-sharing literature but also reveals a deeper analytical gap: the disjuncture between elite-centric evaluations of stability and the lived realities through which citizens make sense of political order.

The literature on power-sharing centres on two core tensions: stability versus elite entrenchment, and democratic inclusion versus accountability erosion. Political economy studies highlight how power-sharing can incentivise collusion and rent-seeking, while institutional analyses focus on constitutional design and reform. Yet across these strands, success is typically measured through elite behaviour and formal institutions. Legitimacy is often assumed rather than examined as a lived and constructed process. This creates an analytical gap: limited attention to how citizens interpret these settlements and how power-sharing shapes everyday governance and political trust. This study addresses that gap by foregrounding bottom-up perspectives.

Chapter 3:Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework guiding the study. It introduces Kelsall and von Hau's (2020) redefinition of political settlements theory, complemented by the African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) framework and the security-development nexus. Together, these frameworks help situate the study across macro, meso, and micro analytical levels.

However, it is important to clarify that this thesis does *not* empirically analyse political settlements at the macro level or governance domains at the meso level. These frameworks are used strictly as conceptual scaffolding to contextualise and interpret citizens' perceptions. The empirical analysis is conducted exclusively at the micro level. The macro and meso frameworks therefore serve to illuminate the structural and institutional environments within which citizens form their experiences and assessments of power-sharing, without requiring data collection or direct analysis at those levels.

Political settlements analysis provides a lens for understanding how elite-driven power-sharing arrangements are negotiated and maintained at the national level, while the ACRC framework extends this perspective by tracing how these arrangements are transmitted through national systems and institutional structures, ultimately shaping citizens' everyday experiences. Each framework operates at a different analytical level, influencing and reinforcing the others. While political settlements theory has been critiqued for emphasizing elite bargains over citizens' agency or broader social dynamics (Bell 2015; Behuria, Buur & Gray 2017), it remains particularly useful for this study because it illuminates the mechanisms through which macro-level agreements are embedded in meso-level institutions and made visible in local governance outcomes

3.1 Macro Level: Political Settlements and Elite Bargains

At the national level, power-sharing is understood as an elite bargain embedded within a broader political settlement. Political settlements refer to the underlying agreements among powerful groups or ruling blocs that determine how power and resources are distributed. Their primary purpose is to ensure stability and prevent a return to violence by offering minimally acceptable benefits to elites (Khan, 2010; Kelsall, 2018). Drawing on existing political economy analyses, this study understands Kenya's political settlement as broadly dispersed and competitive

clientelist, in which organisational and political power is fragmented among multiple elite coalitions that compete intensely for control of the state through elections, patronage networks, and periodic elite bargains. Political settlements can be examined through observable indicators such as the composition of ruling coalitions, the frequency of elite negotiations, and patterns of resource allocation among key ethnic groups.

Building on this foundation, Kelsall and von Hau (2020) offer a critical reassessment of political settlements theory and introduce additional concepts that help explain the durability of elite bargains. Three elements are central:

1. Political Settlement as the overarching agreement that stabilises elite relations by establishing rules of competition and cooperation.
2. Power Configuration determines the distribution of de facto power among ruling blocs, which shapes the capacity of leaders to enforce decisions and implement long-term policy.
3. Social Foundation refers to the range of groups incorporated as insiders whose potential to disrupt the settlement incentivizes elites to deliver some benefits. In Kenya, this

   primarily includes co-opted voters, making their perceptions and feedback a crucial leverage point for elites.

While the power-resources traditionally emphasises class-based organisation as a determinant of institutional outcomes, Kenya's political economy is more accurately explained by the ethnic power relations approach, which highlights how access to state power by different ethnic groups shapes institutions, resource distribution, and the logic of mobilisation. Kenyan elites frequently deploy narratives of peace and development to justify power-sharing arrangements to their co-opted ethnic constituencies, framing these bargains as essential for stability, security, and prosperity, even when they serve elite interests more than public welfare.

As Kelsall and Von Hau, (2020) argue, the way peace is achieved and the character of the resulting political settlement impose strong constraints on the types of development that become politically feasible. This insight underpins the study's analytical approach, guiding the expectation that development and security outcomes in Kenya are shaped by the incentives and

limits embedded in elite bargains. Finally, political settlement at this level provides the structural context within which citizens experience governance and assess legitimacy.

This level is contextualized through secondary sources, including elite statements, media reports, ministry and presidential appointments, and national databases to track coalition composition and ethnic representation in key institutions. These sources are used to contextualize elite power-sharing arrangements rather than to generate primary empirical findings.

Critics argue that political settlement theory is limited by its strong focus on elite bargaining, which risks overlooking broader social dynamics and reinforcing an elitist and gender-blind perspective. By prioritizing stability among powerful actors, the framework may inadvertently naturalize structural inequalities as fixed features of political order rather than outcomes subject to contestation. Moreover, its emphasis on elite accommodation can sit uneasily with democratic principles, as it privileges elite stability over inclusive participation and development. The theory has also been criticized for underestimating the autonomous role of state bureaucracies and the agency of individual leaders in shaping institutional change and governance outcomes (Khan, 2010; Kelsall, 2018).

3.2 Meso Level: Urban Transmission (ACRC Framework) as a Conceptual Bridge

The ACRC framework (Kelsall et al., 2021; Collord, Goodfellow and Asante, 2021) identifies governance domains through which citizens experience the effects of elite bargains, allowing perceptions of legitimacy to be contextualized against observable outcomes. In addition, Tsubura (2022) also highlights the usefulness of the ACRC's multi-scalar approach for operationalizing political settlement theory.

Although the ACRC framework was developed for analysing political settlements in African cities, its underlying logics, domain politics, system interactions, and multi-actor coalitions are equally applicable in rural settings. This study therefore adopts ACRC conceptually rather than spatially and will only focus on three key domains, security, basic services and land and housing. The framework is used to interpret how national elite bargains are mediated through locally embedded governance domains across both urban and rural Kenya, recognising that the

form of these domains varies by place but the underlying mechanisms remain comparable. It advances three interrelated concepts:

- National Systems which are infrastructures and institutions (e.g., finance, transport, policing) through which resources flow and rules are enforced.
- National Development Domains are arenas such as housing, security, land, or health where politics, service delivery, and development intersect. These domains generate rents, legitimacy, and electoral support for elites, making them critical spaces where national settlements are reproduced.
- Political Settlements as the national elite bargains that filter down into systems and domains, shaping how contestation and resource allocation unfold at the national level.

Elite appointments and resource allocation within these domains make the underlying political settlement visible to citizens. At the same time, citizens' experiences in these domains translate the dynamics of the social foundation into observable signals of legitimacy.

When institutions in a domain are weak or contested, they become visible arenas of struggle. In these spaces, citizens' perceptions reveal whether elite bargains are accepted or challenged, reinforcing the connection between macro-level agreements and micro-level experiences.

Governance domains will be analyzed using institutional records, policy documents, and media coverage to understand how elite bargains shape service delivery and institutional control. These materials are used to situate citizen perceptions within broader governance arrangements.

3.3 Micro Level: Outcomes and Citizen's Perceptions (Security-Development Nexus)

At the micro level, the security-development nexus (Buur, Jansen, & Stepputat, 2007) provides an outcomes-oriented lens focused on how citizens' experience the effects of elite bargains. The nexus emphasises the reciprocal relationship between peace and development: insecurity undermines livelihoods and welfare, while development deficits can fuel renewed insecurity.

Two domains are central to this study:

- Safety and Security including reductions in violence and crime, feelings of safety, inclusion, and perceptions of fairness in security provision. Understanding what “peace” means to citizens, and whether power-sharing enhances or undermines this, is essential.
- Development, Poverty Reduction, and Wellbeing where security deficits restrict mobility, livelihoods, education, and overall wellbeing, producing cumulative disadvantages, especially in ethnically polarised urban areas.

Citizen experiences will be captured through interviews and perception surveys, focusing on indicators of safety, security, and wellbeing. Micro-level experiences and perceptions serve as indicators of legitimacy and as a measure of the social foundation underpinning elite power-sharing arrangements, signaling whether power-sharing is perceived as credible or fragile.

Although the study is bottom-up, macro-level political settlements and meso-level governance domains provide necessary context. The political settlement defines the structure and logic of elite power-sharing, while governance domains are the arenas through which citizens experience the outcomes of these bargains. Micro-level perceptions can only be meaningfully interpreted with this contextual understanding. By connecting all three levels, this study operationalizes political settlements as a multi-scalar process.

Taken together, these frameworks provide a complementary analytical lens for examining power-sharing in Kenya. By linking elite political settlements with governance outcomes and broader security-development dynamics, they enable an analysis that moves beyond institutional arrangements to consider how power-sharing shapes citizens’ experiences of governance, stability, and development

Chapter 4: Methodological Framework.

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used in the study, detailing the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, and analytical procedures employed to examine citizens' perceptions of elite-driven power-sharing arrangements in Kenya.

The research employed a qualitative field study to fulfill its aim of incorporating grassroots perspectives into the discourse on peacebuilding. This approach prioritizes narrative and descriptive data over numerical analysis, emphasizing the exploration of how individuals construct meaning within their social contexts and perceive their lived realities (Bryman, 2021:33-34).

This study is grounded in an interpretivist epistemological framework and employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore participants' experiences in depth. The interpretivist stance emphasizes understanding individuals' lived realities through the lens of their unique social and cultural contexts, prioritizing meaning-making over the pursuit of objective truths (Bryman, 2021:7). Complementing this, the descriptive qualitative approach facilitates the detailed documentation and presentation of these contextualized meanings, allowing for a rich and nuanced portrayal of participants' perspectives (Sandelowski, 2000).

4.1 Sampling

The study adopted a purposive sampling strategy, consistent with its non-probability design, to deliberately select participants with relevant experience, knowledge, or expertise aligned with the research focus. Key informants were identified through personal networks such as family, friends, and colleagues as well as professional platforms like Linkedin, ensuring rich, context-specific insights and diversity across key characteristics (Bryman, 2021:378). Due to time constraints and the anticipated number of participants, snowball sampling was employed, allowing referrals from initial contacts to facilitate recruitment. This technique was particularly appropriate given the sensitive ethnopolitical nature of the study, where trust and established networks are crucial for accessing diverse perspectives (Bryman, 2021:384).

For the focus group component, spontaneous recruitment classified as convenience sampling was used for ease of access. This is justified by the open format of the focus groups, which do not require specific participant criteria or impose restrictions (Bryman, 2021:176-178; 459-460).

Three focus groups discussions were conducted using purposive and snowball sampling adapted to local contexts. The first group, consisting of women engaged in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), was recruited through direct engagement at a local market, where participants were approached within their business premises and invited to participate. The second group involved members of *Bunge la Wananchi* ("Street Parliament"), a grassroots civic forum where community members regularly meet to discuss political and social issues. Initial contact with two members facilitated the recruitment of additional participants through network-based inclusion. The third focus group, comprising Generation Z youth living in an informal settlement, was recruited through snowball sampling using existing community networks. This approach helped build trust given the sensitivity of the research topic. Across all groups, participation was voluntary and informed verbal consent was obtained.
Finally, nonprobability sampling suits qualitative, exploratory goals, prioritizing data-rich cases and depth over breadth, suitable for the study gap identified for this research (Bryman, 2021:378).

4.1.1 Potential Bias and Recruitment Limitations

The recruitment strategies used may introduce certain limitations. Participants were recruited through public spaces and existing networks, which may have favoured individuals who are more socially or politically engaged than the broader population. Similarly, snowball sampling among youth may have produced participants with shared social networks and perspectives. While these approaches were necessary for accessing community groups and building trust in sensitive discussions, the findings should therefore be interpreted as reflecting the experiences and perceptions of engaged community members rather than as statistically representative of the wider population. To mitigate these risks, recruitment was conducted across multiple public locations and community settings to capture a broader range of perspectives, and efforts were made to include participants of varying ages, occupations, and backgrounds. Nevertheless, these approaches were primarily intended to facilitate access and build trust in discussions around sensitive political issues. As such, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting the

experiences and perceptions of engaged community members rather than as statistically representative of the wider population.

4.2 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through semi structured interviews, focus group discussions and secondary data collection.

Semi-structured interviews were well-suited for this study due to their open format, which encouraged participants to provide detailed and reflective responses. This flexibility allowed the researcher to probe deeper into specific issues and follow up on emerging themes, while guiding questions ensured consistency across interviews and supported comparability of responses without compromising individual perspectives (Bryman, 2021:426-428). Key informants included development specialists, representatives from local NGOs, constitutional experts, community workers, citizens, and peacebuilding practitioners.

Three focus group discussions were conducted to explore how individuals construct meaning through social interaction, particularly in a context where group identity shapes political experiences. The group dynamic fostered nuanced and realistic insights as participants built on shared experiences and shaped the conversation, aligning with the study's qualitative aim of capturing authentic viewpoints. Additionally, the informal, non-hierarchical nature of these focus groups promoted diverse opinions and collective meaning-making, which was vital for examining the ethnic dimensions of the research (Bryman, 2021:453-455)

Secondary sources such as peer-reviewed articles, reports, online commentaries, academic journals, newspapers, and social media platforms were also examined to enrich the data and ensure accessibility to a broad range of insights on perceptions and discourse surrounding power-sharing as a peacebuilding (Bryman, 2021:521).

4.3 Ethical Considerations.

The study adhered to strict ethical standards to ensure the protection and dignity of all participants. Informed verbal consent was obtained prior to participation, with clear

communication about the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of involvement. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout, with all personal identifiers removed to prevent invasion of privacy. The research avoided any form of deception and took all necessary precautions to prevent harm or distress to participants. Sensitive or potentially triggering material were excluded from the study to uphold ethical integrity. Additionally, the research was conducted under the approval and licensing of National Commissions for Science Technology and Innovation, in compliance with the Kenya national research regulations and ethical guidelines.

4.4 Delimitations

To clarify the boundaries of this study, several deliberate choices have been made to define its scope and focus. As a Kenyan researcher, I chose Kenya as the case study because its deeply ethnopolitical context aligns closely with the research question, and my familiarity with local dynamics, languages, and networks provides a comparative advantage in accessing diverse perspectives and navigating sensitive issues more effectively than an external researcher could. In addition, the case was chosen in order to emphasize depth over breadth to generate evidence-based insights into power-sharing as a peacebuilding mechanism, insights that may be applicable to other Sub-Saharan African contexts facing similar challenges. The geographic scope is intentionally confined to regions where political leadership, both governmental and opposition, is most prominent, allowing for a targeted analysis of elite-driven power-sharing dynamics. The study also adopted a strictly bottom-up approach, prioritizing citizens' perspectives that are often overlooked in formal peace negotiations. Through fieldwork and interviews, the research sought to capture firsthand experiences and perceptions, yielding rich, context-specific data while recognizing the limitations in broader generalizability

4.5 Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations that may shape its scope and findings. Time and financial constraints restricted fieldwork, resulting in a smaller sample size. The geographic focus was limited to regions where political elites are most active, which may exclude voices from other areas and affect generalizability. Although purposive and snowball sampling were

suitable for this qualitative inquiry, they carried the risk of bias if key informants recruited participants with similar ideological or socio-economic backgrounds. While a smaller sample may limit broader applicability, it provided rich, in-depth insights.

As a Kenyan researcher from a specific ethnic group, I also recognise the potential for positional bias; however, adherence to theoretical and analytical frameworks, ongoing reflexivity, and regular engagement with my academic supervisor helped mitigate this risk.

Although the study initially planned to conduct interviews across five counties, participation levels varied significantly by political context. In two counties historically associated with ruling coalitions, recruitment proved difficult, with most potential participants declining to speak despite repeated engagement efforts. In contrast, participants in counties associated with long-standing opposition politics were more willing to engage, articulate grievances, and speak critically about power-sharing arrangements.

Rather than treating this disparity solely as a limitation, the study interprets differential openness as a field-level observation that reflects variation in political confidence, perceived risk, and the social foundations underpinning elite power configurations.

These limitations do not undermine the value of the study but instead situate its findings as context-specific insights into how citizens interpret power-sharing, rather than claims of broader political behaviour or institutional performance.

4.6 Operationalization of the theoretical framework

The study adopted a thematic analysis approach to examine both pre-identified themes from the research questions and any new themes that emerge during data collection. According to Bryman, (2021:538), thematic analysis is particularly well-suited to qualitative research due to its methodological flexibility and transparency, allowing researchers to remain theoretically grounded while being responsive to the data. This makes it especially effective for exploring complex social phenomena such as this one where unanticipated insights may surface during analysis**.** In this study, these frameworks guided interpretation rather than serving as empirical levels of analysis.

A qualitative analytical approach grounded in political settlement theory, the Africa Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) analytical domains and security-development nexus were used. These frameworks provided a structured lens for examining how elite power-sharing arrangements function within broader political settlements and how they are experienced across different levels of social and institutional life.

4.6.1 Coding

To operationalize this framework, a coding matrix (Q1-Q7) was developed to capture four analytical dimensions.

The matrix captured four analytical dimensions:
(1) macro-level political settlements and elite pacts;
(2) meso-level security, governance, and service delivery processes;
(3) micro-level lived experiences of peace and development; and
(4) temporal and cross-cutting social differences, including age, gender, livelihood, and rural-urban context.

While the coding framework was deductively informed by theory, analysis remained open to inductive insights emerging from participants' narratives. This ensured that citizen perspectives were not forced into predefined categories but were interpreted in dialogue with existing theoretical debates. In practice, this meant that themes were both theory-guided and grounded in lived experience.

4.6.2 Analysis

Analysis proceeded through iterative coding and cross-case comparison. Rather than treating interviews as isolated accounts, patterns were examined across social groups to identify both shared perceptions and meaningful variation. Particular attention was paid to how different constituencies such as youth, women entrepreneurs, older citizens, and rural residents understood the relationship between elite power-sharing, stability, inclusion, and development.

The final stage of analysis synthesized recurring patterns into higher-order themes that directly address the study's core research question: whether elite power-sharing arrangements function

as peacebuilding mechanisms from the perspective of ordinary citizens. This framework therefore enables a systematic yet flexible examination of the gap between elite-level political stability and everyday experiences of peace, security, and inclusion.

4.7 Methodological Reflection

Finally, The study reflects the strengths and inherent limitations of small-sample, interpretivist research thus some methodological considerations should be acknowledged. The study draws on a relatively small number of interviews and focus group discussions, and the findings therefore reflect in-depth qualitative insights rather than statistically representative patterns. While this approach enabled a detailed exploration of citizen perceptions across different social groups, further research with a broader geographic and demographic scope would help assess the extent to which these dynamics are observable across other regions of Kenya.

5. Findings

This chapter presents the findings from qualitative interviews and focus group discussions conducted in urban and rural settings in Kenya. The analysis explores grassroots perceptions of elite-driven power-sharing arrangements, focusing on their legitimacy as peacebuilding tools and their perceived effects on security, development, and democratic participation. Guided by an interpretivist epistemological framework, the chapter foregrounds participants' lived experiences, meanings, and evaluations of political settlements rather than institutional or policy outcomes.

The findings draw primarily on fifteen semi-structured interviews, supported by three focus group discussions: one with youth from an informal settlement, one with women small and medium enterprise (SME) operators, and one Street Parliament group in the Nyanza/Lake region (including a woman community worker, a person with disability, a retired elder, and middle-aged male participants). Due to a technical recording failure, the youth focus group was documented through detailed contemporaneous fieldnotes capturing key statements and group dynamics. These observations are used to corroborate and deepen themes identified in the interview data, rather than to independently generate analytical claims.

The themes presented below emerged through iterative coding and cross-case comparison of interviews and focus group discussions. Initial codes were organised using the pre-developed analytical matrix (macro, meso, micro, and cross-cutting social differences), after which recurring patterns were clustered into higher-order categories. Through repeated engagement with the data, five themes were identified as most analytically salient across participant groups. These themes reflect both theory-guided dimensions of political settlements and inductively derived concerns raised consistently by participants.

Five interrelated themes emerged:

(1) Elite capture and contested legitimacy of power-sharing,

(2) Conditional peace and everyday insecurity,

(3) Uneven development and exclusionary service delivery,

(4) Democratic trade-offs and structured exclusion, and

(5) Adaptive citizenship under constrained political space.

Together, these themes illustrate how peace is widely experienced as politically negotiated but socially uneven.

5.1 Elite Capture and the Contested Legitimacy of Power-Sharing

Across interviews and focus groups, power-sharing arrangements were predominantly understood as elite-driven political settlements rather than inclusive peacebuilding mechanisms. Participants consistently described coalitions as serving the interests of political leaders, with limited concern for grassroots realities. One interviewee remarked that *"There's always a hidden interest behind the whole thing,"* another *"They bargain for their stomach,"* reflecting a widely shared perception that power-sharing is motivated by access to power and resources rather than public welfare.

The Street Parliament discussion in the Nyanza/lake region added a more structural dimension to this critique. Participants argued that power-sharing is ultimately about access to centrally controlled state resources. Several referenced the concentration of fiscal authority at the presidency, suggesting that *"you cannot share power without sharing resources."* In this framing, coalitions are meaningful not because they create unity, but because they grant entry into the executive core where resources are concentrated. A human rights lawyer similarly argued that many coalition arrangements operate outside formal constitutional processes, noting that *"many of these political agreements are not anchored in the constitution… they are arrangements between leaders rather than institutional processes."*

However, participants were careful to distinguish between symbolic ethnic representation and material redistribution. Even where members of their own ethnic group obtained high-level appointments, respondents insisted that ordinary citizens did not benefit. As one participant noted, *when "luos are given positions,"* it is *"not the majority who benefit, but the few individuals up there."* This distinction challenges elite narratives that equate ethnic inclusion with broad-based community advancement.

Women SME participants articulated a nuanced but critical view of legitimacy. While some acknowledged that power-sharing can symbolically promote unity at the national level, they

strongly distinguished this from lived realities at the community level. As one SME participant noted, conflicts may stop *"up there,"* but *"down here nothing happens."* Several women described how political conflicts directly affect their businesses through destroyed stock and lost income, while political leaders later appear reconciled and unaffected. This disconnect reinforced the perception that power-sharing prioritizes elite stability over citizen wellbeing.

Youth participants echoed this critique, openly acknowledging that political elites mobilise them during periods of contestation, often through direct cash payments. Although the youth accepted responsibility for participating in such mobilisation, they strongly attributed it to poverty and marginalisation rather than political conviction. Group laughter in response to hypothetical cash for chaos scenarios suggested a normalisation of political exploitation, reinforcing the view that Power sharing sustains elite dominance through structural inequality.

Concerns about accountability further undermined legitimacy. Participants across datasets argued that power-sharing weakens democratic oversight by absorbing opposition figures into government. The Street Parliament group explicitly raised concerns about the merging of executive and legislative authority, arguing that when *"the implementer and the legislature coincide,"* citizens lose confidence that budgets reflect public demands. In this context, legitimacy was judged not by constitutional arrangements on paper, but by whether political settlements preserved meaningful opposition and responsiveness.

5.2 Conditional Peace and Everyday Insecurity

Although participants acknowledged that power-sharing arrangements can reduce large-scale political violence, peace was widely perceived as fragile, temporary, and unevenly experienced. Security was frequently described as uncertain or partial, with several participants characterising it as "50/50." This ambivalence reflected a distinction between elite political calm and everyday safety.

Women SME participants highlighted the economic dimensions of insecurity. Many described how political instability and weak policing directly threaten their livelihoods, particularly in informal trading spaces. Women running businesses such as M-Pesa outlets reported being targeted for theft and violence, with some recounting incidents where traders were followed and

attacked despite closing early. As one remarked, *"I think there are some businesses that when run by women like M-pesa, there is no safety."* It is very dangerous. Sexual harassment by municipal workers and law enforcement officers further intensified feelings of vulnerability.

The Street Parliament group added institutional nuance to this theme. Participants described tensions between administrative chiefs and police following constitutional reforms, arguing that weakened local authority structures have contributed to insecurity. Witness intimidation and fear of testifying were identified as barriers to justice, with one participant noting that even victims fear appearing in court due to potential retaliation.

Participants also highlighted how political tensions continue to surface at the grassroots level through demonstrations and mobilisation. One respondent reflected on the consequences of recent protests, noting that *"most of the people got injured and some died… crippled, paralysed because of something like that."* These accounts suggest that while elite agreements may temporarily stabilize political leadership, citizens often remain exposed to the social and physical risks associated with political contestation.

At the meso level, participants repeatedly emphasised corruption within policing institutions as a factor undermining public safety. Everyday encounters with law enforcement were frequently described through the language of informal payments. One interviewee described routine bribery during traffic stops, explaining that when overloaded public transport vehicles are stopped, *"the conductor starts looking for money,"* adding that *"nowadays they don't even hide it."* Similar concerns were raised in the Street Parliament discussion, where participants described situations in which individuals arrested by community authorities were released after paying bribes at the police station. As one participant explained, offenders may simply *"pay the police maybe 20k… and skip due process."*

Youth participants similarly linked insecurity to unemployment, marginalisation, and political manipulation. Observational data indicated that lack of livelihoods creates vulnerability to both criminal activity and elite mobilisation for violence. In this sense, insecurity was framed not simply as a policing failure, but as a consequence of economic exclusion and weak institutional enforcement.

Together, these accounts suggest that elite-driven peace does not automatically translate into equitable protection. Political calm at the national level does not eliminate everyday insecurity shaped by corruption, unemployment, and institutional distrust.

5.3 Uneven Development and Exclusionary Service Delivery

Development emerged as a central lens through which participants evaluated the legitimacy of power-sharing arrangements. However, development was understood less in terms of visible infrastructure alone and more through access, reliability, and fairness.

Participants did not reject development outright; rather, they described it as selective. As one SME participant noted, *"They focus on big places like Kisumu, Nairobi, Mombasa where they know they have votes."* Another added that when new trading stalls are allocated, *"those at the top divide among themselves… they will sell them or rent them out."* These accounts suggest that access to opportunities is uneven and often dependent on proximity to power. Development, therefore, is experienced not as a universal entitlement but as something distributed through networks of influence and political loyalty. In this sense, what appears as selective distribution at the micro level reflects politically mediated allocation processes embedded within broader elite bargaining dynamics

Access to economic opportunity was frequently described as mediated through informal patronage networks. As one SME participant explained, *"You have to look for a godfather to get contracts."* In this framing, public procurement and business opportunities are not experienced as transparent or merit-based processes, but as relationship-dependent. Formal procedures may exist, yet participants perceive that meaningful access requires sponsorship from politically connected intermediaries. Development, therefore, was seen as reproducing patronage networks.

Street parliament participants explicitly referenced constitutional safeguards intended to ensure communities benefit from development projects. As one member explained,

"The constitution provides us with something good called public participation," adding that projects meant to benefit a locality should ensure that "70% of citizens participating must be from that community and 30% from outside."

However, this principle was described as routinely undermined. The same participant noted that *"all these projects end up being done by the same leaders and their companies."* The gap between constitutional design and implementation was therefore interpreted not as technical failure, but as patronage capture. Development funds intended for local inclusion were perceived to circulate within politically connected networks, reinforcing distrust in the distributive fairness of power-sharing arrangements.

The Street Parliament discussion further highlighted structural disparities in resource allocation. One participant compared constituencies of unequal population sizes receiving identical development funds, arguing that such budgetary design reproduces inequality. Others noted that devolved resources are sometimes mismanaged at the county level, suggesting that uneven development cannot be attributed solely to national exclusion but also to local leadership practices. He noted:

> *"The amount of resources directed to development is very little… leaders instead take development money to over-employ mostly their relatives and there is also mismanagement."*

Development was therefore not rejected outright. Instead, its legitimacy was judged by whether it translated into tangible improvements such as working sewer systems, reliable water supply, fair employment processes, and accessible healthcare. Participants repeatedly emphasised that *"Small things"* functioning services matter more than large headline projects.

Performative development was also evident across datasets. One young respondent described a road that appears as fully tarmacked on official maps, yet *"when you get there it is different."* He similarly pointed to street lights installed along a major road that *"have never lit up."* These examples illustrate a disparity between the formal recording of development and its lived functionality. Development, in this framing, is not judged by announcement or mapping, but by whether it operates reliably in everyday life. As the same participant noted, *"development should not just be big projects, at least correct the small small things."* The emphasis on functionality over symbolism suggests that citizens evaluate progress through practical usability rather than infrastructural visibility.

Youth focus group observations supported this interpretation, particularly regarding social services. Clinics were cited as emblematic of performative development: buildings exist, but medicine and personnel are absent. Participants mocked initiatives that appeared symbolic rather than functional, reinforcing scepticism toward coalition-linked development announcements.

Not all accounts framed development as merely symbolic. One urban interviewee observed that certain projects which had stalled following electoral tensions resumed after the recent power-sharing arrangement. Referring to a local airport expansion, the participant explained that *"after the handshake things started moving again."* In this account, elite reconciliation was associated with renewed administrative momentum. Development was therefore perceived as politically conditioned. When elite conflict subsides, projects progress; when tensions escalate, implementation slows. This suggests that power-sharing may facilitate sustained project implementation, yet in a manner dependent on elite cohesion rather than institutional resilience

5.4 Democratic Trade-Offs and Structured Exclusion

Participants expressed unease about the democratic implications of elite power-sharing. Across interviews and focus groups, coalitions were perceived to narrow political space by weakening opposition and concentrating executive power. Street Parliament participants argued that personality-driven coalitions risk undermining the multiparty system by reducing party-based accountability.

Gendered political exclusion emerged strongly. The woman community worker in the Street Parliament group stated:

"We as women do not have any freedom of expression… when a woman tries to get an audience with a leader, you might get calls from goon leaders,"

describing informal constraints on women's political participation. Public political space was described as masculinised and women often face harassment, moral suspicion, and sexualised accusations when they engage leaders. Women SME participants similarly described limited political voice and fear of expressing dissent in public forums.

Several participants also framed democratic institutions as unevenly applied depending on status and political connections. A human rights lawyer remarked *"there is a law for the small fellow and another for the big fellow,"* noting that politicians accused of incitement often face few consequences while ordinary citizens experience stricter enforcement. Such perceptions reinforce the view that formal democratic institutions exist but operate unevenly, contributing to the sense that political settlements stabilise elite competition without strengthening accountability for ordinary citizens.

The participant with disability emphasised the gap between constitutional representation and substantive inclusion. *"There should be more PWD at the table where ideas and solutions are being discussed."* Another member added that persons with disabilities *"do not have the opportunity to elect one of their own."* Although the Constitution provides for representation of marginalised groups, persons with disabilities were described as underrepresented in executive decision-making spaces. Representation was characterised as symbolic rather than influential.

Beyond concerns about weakened opposition politics, participants described more subtle democratic trade-offs that shape everyday political life. Freedom of expression emerged as conditional and uneven. One participant from the Street Parliament noted*,"Freedom of expression especially at this time… can land you in trouble."* A rural female participant also remarked, *" It depends, if it's issues touching the government you are not very free."* This perception was particularly pronounced in politically dominant regions, where criticism of local leaders was described as socially and politically risky.

The commodification of justice further complicates democratic legitimacy. In discussions of policing and courts, several participants described how outcomes are shaped by financial capacity. As one respondent observed, *"If you have money… there is this level of treatment you get."* Thus, while democratic institutions formally exist, their accessibility is structured along socioeconomic lines.

At the same time, silence was not framed as apathy but as a calculated survival strategy. An individual male interviewee noted that most people *"just say let it be"* rather than report misconduct, fearing retaliation or future victimisation. Such accounts suggest that formal

democratic rights exist in principle, but their exercise is constrained in practice. When citizens must weigh personal safety against civic engagement, accountability mechanisms become undermined, and democratic participation gradually erodes from within.

Democratic trade-offs were also evident in gendered experiences of justice. A young female participant described taking her former partner to court over GBV and child neglect. She explained that he had arrived earlier, and by the time she reached the court, *"I was vilified, harassed and no one wanted to hear my side of the story."* She later concluded, *"I left because it was obvious that I was not going to get justice,"* advising other women that *"there is no need to go there."* In this account, the issue was not the absence of legal rights, but the procedural dynamics that shaped whose voice was heard. Conversely, some male participants expressed concern that certain laws, such as the Children's Act, favour women. Together, these accounts reveal a broader erosion of trust in institutional neutrality. When justice is perceived as shaped by influence, timing, or social power, democratic guarantees appear conditional rather than secure.

These perspectives suggest that democratic trade-offs extend beyond institutional design to social norms and power hierarchies. While coalitions may create elite-level unity, they do not necessarily expand inclusive participation at the grassroots.

5.5 Adaptive Citizenship Under Constraint

Despite widespread scepticism, the findings do not indicate political apathy. Rather, they reveal adaptive citizenship shaped by constrained opportunity structures.

Youth participants emphasised that change depends on constitutional literacy and civic awareness. Street Parliament members similarly argued that citizens often fail to challenge leaders using constitutional provisions, highlighting the importance of civic education.

Coping strategies were a recurring theme across datasets. Participants described diversifying skills, hustling, and relying on self-initiative as necessary responses to institutional abandonment, with one youth participant stating, *"To cope you need to diversify your skills…*

get up and do something. No one is coming." Rather than expecting state responsiveness, participants described adapting individually to systemic uncertainty. Democratic participation, in this context, becomes secondary to economic survival.

Economic adjustment also emerged as a coping mechanism. A respondent described reducing daily consumption, noting how households had moved from *"sausage with bread"* to simply bread in the morning. Such changes were not framed as temporary, but as necessary adaptation.

Some participants internalised responsibility for insecurity, attributing crime to parental failure rather than institutional breakdown. A female street parliament participant said, *"As parents we are also to blame… mothers refuse to accept that their children engage in crime."* This reframing shows coping by shifting responsibility downward rather than upward, reflecting how structural issues are absorbed at the household level, reducing pressure on state accountability.

Withdrawal from formal accountability mechanisms was also described as a survival strategy. One interviewee explained that most people *"just say let it be" rather than report misconduct, particularly when those involved are "connected to the above office."* Similarly, in discussions on insecurity, a Street Parliament participant observed, *"We are scared of standing up for ourselves,"* referring to the fear associated with giving statements or testifying in court. Some participants advocated structural reforms aimed at rebalancing executive dominance. One argued:

> *"We should just have a true parliamentary system… there shouldn't be power-sharing. That power comes from the people, not at the top shared by a few people."*

Another emphasised the need for clearer separation of roles, stating, *"Whoever passes the budget should be different from the implementor."* At the same time, others expressed conditional support for coalitions. As one participant noted, *"I'm for power-sharing because it will make us all be able to sit at the table."* Importantly, these positions differed from the survival-oriented coping strategies discussed earlier; rather than adapting individually to institutional constraints, these participants were articulating systemic redesign. These exchanges suggest that grassroots actors are not uniformly anti-coalition but are attentive to how power is structured, monitored, and implemented.

5.6 Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings indicate that elite-driven power-sharing arrangements are perceived as partially effective but fundamentally limited peacebuilding tools. While they may reduce overt political violence in the short term, their legitimacy at the grassroots level is undermined by elite capture, conditional security, uneven development, structured exclusion, and weakened democratic accountability.

Across youth, women entrepreneurs, civil society actors, and Nyanza Street Parliament participants, peace was not rejected as a goal. Rather, it was understood as meaningful only when accompanied by fair resource distribution, accountable institutions, inclusive representation, and secure livelihoods. Peace, as experienced by participants, is therefore less a durable transformation than a negotiated pause shaped by elite interests and structural inequality.

6. Analysis

This chapter interprets participants' accounts of governance, development, security, and democratic participation under elite-driven power-sharing arrangements in Kenya. While the previous chapter presented empirical narratives, this section analyses those experiences by drawing selectively rather than densely on the conceptual frameworks introduced in Chapter 3. The aim is to show how citizens themselves make sense of elite bargains, and only then to relate these meanings to broader political and institutional dynamics.

Variations in political openness across counties serve as an important backdrop for interpreting the data. In opposition-aligned regions, participants openly critiqued elite bargains and expressed strong views about governance failures. In contrast, in historically ruling‑coalition counties, citizens were more cautious, often declining interviews. This disparity does not merely reflect sampling difficulty; it reveals how political context shapes expressive space, with some communities feeling freer to critique power than others. This difference suggests that legitimacy and silence can coexist: people may comply with elite bargains not because they affirm them, but because speaking risks social or political repercussions.

The themes below draw directly from participants' voices, before offering short analytical reflections on how these experiences relate to Kenya's broader political settlement.

6.1 Elite Capture and the Contested Legitimacy of Power-Sharing

Participants overwhelmingly interpreted power‑sharing arrangements as elite‑driven settlements rather than inclusive governance mechanisms. While official narratives frame power‑sharing as peacebuilding or unity‑enhancing, respondents described these agreements as instruments for redistributing political access among leaders while leaving underlying inequalities intact. Many participants framed coalition‑making as negotiations "*for the stomach*," suggesting that access to state resources, particularly positions and appointments, is the primary motivation. This view reflects a broader understanding of Kenyan politics as patronage‑based, where political inclusion at the top does not necessarily translate into social inclusion below.

Youth participants described how economic instability makes them vulnerable to political mobilisation, reinforcing their perception that elite bargains are sustained by structural

inequality. Women SME participants highlighted the disconnect between national reconciliation and local economic vulnerability, especially in contexts where political instability disrupts livelihoods, while leaders reconcile without consequence. Members of the Street Parliament similarly emphasised how the centralised concentration of national resources shapes coalition incentives.

Participants across demographic groups expressed concerns that political participation is structured less around programmatic or ideological considerations and more around survival-oriented rationalities shaped by chronic deprivation. In this context, democratic choice appears embedded in transactional logics that political elites strategically exploit.

An additional observation emerged through visual data from opposition-aligned counties, where images depicting the 2018 "handshake" between the opposition leader and the former president were displayed in everyday spaces such as business premises. The visibility of these images, alongside vocal critiques of the coalition's outcomes, suggested that elite power-sharing can be simultaneously normalised and contested at the grassroots level. These displays appeared less as endorsements and more as markers of political belonging or stability within a negotiated order.

Participants also expressed concern that the convergence of executive and legislative actors under coalitions reduces opportunities for contestation and representation, weakening multiparty oversight. They noted that while constitutional provisions for public participation exist, they are seldom meaningfully operationalised, reinforcing perceptions that constitutional mechanisms are selectively applied.

At the same time, several participants acknowledged that coalitions can help prevent violent escalation in Kenya's historically polarised electoral environment. However, this support was conditional: peace was accepted pragmatically rather than as a sign of structural transformation. Together, these narratives illustrate a tension widely noted in political settlements research: elite accommodation may stabilize high-level political competition but does not necessarily generate broad-based legitimacy or accountability. Participants' emphasis on distributive outcomes, symbolic inclusion, and weakened oversight reflects how elite bargains can consolidate stability while narrowing democratic space.

6.2 Conditional Peace and Everyday Insecurity

Although coalitions were acknowledged as mechanisms for reducing large-scale political violence, participants distinguished sharply between elite-level peace and everyday security. Many noted that while political leaders may reconcile, this does not resolve the persistent insecurity that shapes daily life. Peace, in the grassroots imagination, was defined not merely as the absence of electoral conflict but as the presence of economic opportunity, functioning services, and personal safety.

Across datasets, insecurity was linked to unemployment, weak policing accountability, bribery practices, and fear of retaliation. Participants described layers of fear that limited reporting of crime, shaped interactions with authorities, and reinforced a sense that the state responded unevenly across regions and social groups.

In Nyanza specifically, respondents highlighted perceived tensions between administrative chiefs and police authority following the institutional restructuring introduced by the 2010 Constitution. They felt that formal reforms intended to clarify roles instead produced overlapping lines of authority and gaps in responsibility. Moreover, the constitutional shift did not eliminate informal practices such as bribery and patronage. Instead, formal reforms now operate alongside entrenched informal networks, producing blurred accountability and inconsistent service delivery. Participants described insecurity emerging not only from institutional weakness but also from the underlying political logic that shapes where and how state capacity is deployed.

Participants identified different layers of insecurity:

- **Economic insecurity** (youth unemployment, vulnerability to mobilisation)
- **Gendered insecurity** (harassment, informal coercion)
- **Institutional insecurity** (limited trust in police or judicial impartiality)
- **Witness protection insecurity** (fear of testifying or reporting)

Despite these constraints, participants did not present themselves as passive victims. They recognised civic fear, limited civic education, and community complicity as part of the problem.

Several noted that insecurity persisted partly because communities lacked information, feared retaliation, or had internalised a sense of powerlessness.

These accounts demonstrate that electoral calm does not equate to lived security. Rather, peace under power-sharing appears conditional, uneven, and stratified. While coalitions may help subdue elite confrontation, they do not address the structural drivers of everyday insecurity drivers that participants identified as deeply tied to governance failures, local power dynamics, and economic deprivation.

These experiences reflect observations in peacebuilding and political settlements literature that elite bargains often secure macro-stability without transforming the underlying conditions that produce everyday vulnerability. Participants' accounts illustrate how the absence of conflict coexists with institutional fragility and uneven state presence, reinforcing the idea that peace must be understood through citizens' lived realities rather than elite agreements alone.

6.3 Uneven Development and Exclusionary Service Delivery

Development functioned as the primary metric through which participants evaluated the success of Power-sharing. However, development was not equated with large infrastructure projects alone. Instead, respondents emphasised everyday functionality: water billing accuracy, sewage management, street lighting, school funding, health facility reliability. From a political settlement's perspective, these everyday service delivery experiences represent critical sites where the incentives and constraints shaping elite bargains become visible at the grassroots level. Rather than being peripheral, uneven development and the monetisation of access are symptoms of how power and resources are allocated and protected within Kenya's competitive clientelist settlement.

This distinction is analytically important. Political settlements literature often focuses on macroeconomic stability and elite coordination. Yet the data here suggest that grassroots legitimacy is determined by meso-level institutional performance.

Participants repeatedly described:

- Selective allocation of CDF funds
- Patronage in procurement and project distribution

- Regional disparities in development outcomes
- Nepotism in county-level employment
- Unequal capacity to convert fiscal allocations into tangible outcomes

Beyond disparities in allocation and implementation, participants also highlighted a more systemic concern regarding the monetisation of access within public institutions. Participants' accounts also point to the commodification of public authority at the meso level. Several described situations in which access to services appeared dependent on informal payment including alleged charges for civil service appointments. Male rural participant said.

"Somebody asked me for 400k to get a child to be a prison warden… and I said no, I cannot do that. I don't have that money. But the slots for this… those slots were sold for that much. The people who gave the money got those things, same thing with the police recruitment. They are just selling this thing."

Youth in informal settlements also reported being asked to fund police fuel before receiving assistance, as well as making payments to bypass due process. In such contexts, public services were experienced less as rights-based entitlements and more as transactional exchanges. Participants understood these practices not as isolated incidents but as part of wider institutional patterns in which informal payments shape access to state services. These perceptions align with insights from political settlement and governance-domain analysis, which note that such forms of rent extraction often become embedded across different levels of government rather than occurring as individual acts of corruption.

Such practices also help sustain loyalty networks that link frontline bureaucratic actors to higher-level political patrons. Media coverage of the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission's systems examination of the National Police Service further alleged that resources collected at local levels do not remain within those institutions but are informally channelled upward, reinforcing perceptions that lower-level extraction feeds higher-level political networks(Maina, 2024: EACC, 2026). Whether verified or not, this perception contributes to the belief that governance operates through monetised hierarchies rather than rule-based administration. This reinforces citizens' perception that rent circulation serves as a stabilising mechanism for elite cohesion.

Participants' accounts pointed to a pattern where everyday interactions with the state often felt transactional rather than service-oriented. They described how accessing public office or basic services increasingly depended on payments, connections, and loyalty networks, making these practices feel normalised rather than exceptional. In this environment, ethnopolitics was understood less as identity expression and more as a strategy communities use to secure protection or resources within unequal systems. These experiences suggest a reinforcing cycle in which dependency and patronage become mutually sustaining. This interpretation is consistent with insights from political settlement analysis, which highlights how elite-level bargaining can shape the incentives and behaviours embedded in local governance.

An illustrative meso-level contradiction emerged through observational data in the public transport sector (See appendix D). In everyday commuter spaces, vehicles affiliated with transport associations closely linked to political elites displayed messages encouraging citizens to speak up against reckless driving and unsafe road practices. These public calls for civic responsibility coexist with widely acknowledged patterns of traffic policing characterised by routine bribery and informal payments instead of upholding the law. Media investigations documenting the upward circulation of such rents from frontline enforcement officers to higher institutional levels further contextualise this tension.

This juxtaposition reflects a form of performative accountability, where citizen voice is rhetorically encouraged while structural conditions that undermine safety and fairness remain largely intact. Within the logic of elite-driven political settlements, such symbolic gestures allow institutions to signal responsiveness without fundamentally disrupting entrenched rent-sharing networks. For citizens, this reinforces the perception that responsibility for governance failures is individualised, while institutional accountability remains constrained. Such arrangements illustrate how intermediary institutions operate within the constraints of a political settlement that prioritises elite cohesion over institutional autonomy, limiting the scope for meaningful reform at the enforcement level.

Youth and women participants further emphasised performative development facilities do exist, but lack medicine, staff, or fair access. As one community health worker said:

"When I visit homes and advise them to go to the hospital they tell me there's no need because there is no medicine at the hospitals and doctors can't do anything for them."

The recurring gap between visible development and functional delivery can be understood through the concept of isomorphic mimicry, a concept used in development studies to describe how institutional forms can mimic functionality without delivering substantive outcomes. A situation where reforms look adequate on paper but fail in practice (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2013) reflecting the incentives of a political settlement in which institutional form is prioritised over functional performance.

In competitive clientelist settlements, elites may create the appearance of reform building facilities, launching initiatives, or restructuring ministries without shifting the underlying incentives that shape implementation. These actions signal responsiveness and help maintain legitimacy, even when everyday outcomes remain limited. Participants' accounts of health and education services reflected this pattern, especially where visible infrastructure existed but functionality remained weak. Such forms of symbolic responsiveness also intersected with the ways in which rents and political loyalty continue to influence everyday governance. For example, in the health domain, elites may build new health centers to signal action to the electorate while construction contracts are used to channel benefits to politically loyal businesses. This allows the system to appear functional to the public, while maintaining the rent‑sharing arrangements that underpin elite survival

The Street Parliament discussion highlighted perceived inequalities between constituency size and equal NGCDF allocation, illustrating how formal equality in resource distribution may generate differential per capita outcomes. This concern echoes broader debates within fiscal federalism regarding the distinction between equity and equality in devolved systems (Cheeseman, Flynch and Willis, 2016). These patterns illustrate how distributive outcomes are not merely administrative failures but reflect the incentive structures of the political settlement, through which elite coalitions secure loyalty and manage contestation across regions.

Such distributive narratives can also be understood as part of broader bargaining dynamics within Kenya's dominant coalition. Article 89(6) of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) provides parameters for population variance in constituency delimitation, while population data from the

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2020) indicate continued demographic variation across constituencies. However, available evidence does not conclusively demonstrate systematic demographic disadvantage for constituencies in the Nyanza/Lake region relative to Central Kenya.

Nonetheless, perceptions of structural inequity remain politically salient. Within the dynamics of Kenya's political settlement, such narratives can consolidate elite-society alliances by framing resource allocation as unjust or insufficient, thereby strengthening leaders' positions as regional brokers within national bargaining processes. Even where formal allocation mechanisms appear neutral, their political interpretation becomes embedded within settlement dynamics, shaping how elites mobilise support and negotiate inclusion within the dominant coalition in ways that reinforce the underlying distributional bargains.

In this sense, marginalisation narratives do not need to correspond directly to measurable structural exclusion to carry political weight. Rather, they can operate as discursive resources that sustain political relevance and mobilise support during moments of coalition formation, cabinet negotiations, and broader power-sharing arrangements. Perceived distributive injustice thus becomes intertwined with the dynamics of settlement maintenance, linking local interpretations of inequality to national struggles over inclusion and access to state resources.

The data also suggest that the salience of ethnicity and class varies across institutional levels. At the macro level and within elite-proximate spheres such as cabinet formation and public sector employment representation and recruitment were frequently perceived as structured along ethnic lines, reinforcing narratives of regional inclusion and exclusion within the dominant coalition. However, when participants described everyday encounters with security actors, courts, health services, or local administration, socio-economic differentiation emerged as more decisive. Access to protection, procedural fairness, and service reliability was overwhelmingly framed in terms of financial capacity, connections, or social status rather than ethnic identity.

This layered pattern indicates that while ethnicity remains central to elite bargaining and patronage allocation, class stratification shapes the lived experience of governance at the grassroots. The political settlement may be negotiated through ethnic mobilisation, but it is operationalised in everyday life through socio-economic hierarchies.

Findings from the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) 2024-2025 report further contextualise participants' experiences within broader governance domain dynamics. The report documents significant gaps in school capitation grants, material financial misstatements in public hospitals, and financial management irregularities across multiple county departments. Notably, approximately 79% of Parliamentary oversight recommendations remain unimplemented, indicating persistent gaps between formal accountability mechanisms and enforcement outcomes. Such patterns suggest systemic weaknesses in fiscal governance rather than isolated administrative lapses. Within the ACRC framework, these findings illustrate how governance domains particularly education, health, and local administration can become sites where weak enforcement structures and political incentives shape distributive outcomes.

6.4 Democratic Trade-Offs and Adaptive Citizenship

A recurring concern across datasets was the perceived weakening of opposition politics. Participants feared that when rival leaders join government, oversight diminishes and accountability becomes blurred. A human rights lawyer said:

> *"When you listened to them before this broad-based government, they were talking like ordinary people. They were speaking for us. But once they joined the government, the language changed, the body language changed, everything changed."*

This perception mirrors critiques that grand coalitions can dilute multiparty competition and reduce institutional checks on executive authority. As Hou and Kelsall (2020) note, the transition from an 'anti-system' stance to participation in government often transforms the opposition's disruptive potential into latent power acknowledged by leadership but no longer feared as an active constraint. This dynamic reflects a core feature of political settlements: elite incorporation reduces the disruptive capacity of opposition actors, stabilising the ruling bargain even as it weakens democratic oversight.

Yet the erosion of formal opposition does not translate into total political withdrawal at the grassroots level. Rather, participants described shifting their strategies of engagement. Youth participants emphasised that one of the few ways to counter elite bargains was to *"know what the Constitution says."* According to contemporaneous notes, they viewed constitutional literacy

and awareness of rights as essential tools for navigating both political exclusion and meso-level service delivery constraints.

Women increasingly turned to digital spaces perceived as safer for political expression. Street Parliament members pushed for public participation provisions and constitutional safeguards as alternative leverage mechanisms.

Within the constraints of the prevailing political settlement, weakened institutional oversight appears to generate corrective forms of civic adaptation. Citizens do not necessarily disengage; instead, they recalibrate how and where they exercise their voice. This pattern suggests that individuals navigate constrained democratic environments by modifying strategies rather than abandoning participation altogether.

Gendered dimensions were also particularly notable. Women participants described reputational attacks and moral policing as barriers to political voice.A female community worker said,"Men are allowed to sit and have discussions whenever and wherever, but when women gather or even join the men they say we are engaging in prostitution." Persons with disabilities highlighted representational exclusion despite constitutional recognition. These findings suggest that power-sharing may reinforce existing hierarchies unless accompanied by structural inclusion mechanisms.

Therefore, while participants perceive democratic narrowing, they simultaneously express ongoing belief in constitutional frameworks as corrective instruments. This tension between erosion and resilience is central to understanding Kenya's negotiated political order.

6.5 Overall Analytical Synthesis.

Taken together, the analysis suggests that power-sharing in Kenya functions as a stabilising elite mechanism embedded within a broader political settlement that produces uneven social outcomes. Although coalitions may reduce overt conflict and facilitate elite accommodation, their legitimacy at the grassroots depends on distributive equity, institutional accountability, functional service delivery, and meaningful participation.

Where these conditions are lacking, power-sharing is experienced as largely symbolic rather than transformative. At the same time, continued practices of constitutional literacy, civic

critique, and selective institutional effectiveness demonstrate that Kenya's political settlement remains dynamic and contested. Power-sharing, therefore, does not eliminate democratic aspiration; it reconfigures the political space through which citizens and elites negotiate the meaning and practice of democracy.

6.6 Pockets of Effectiveness a Critical lens.

While much of the data point toward elite capture and uneven governance, the findings also reveal institutional variation. The High Court emerged as comparatively more credible in politically sensitive cases, particularly where executive appointments or administrative decisions were challenged. This reflects the concept of "pockets of effectiveness" islands of relative institutional performance within broader systems characterised by patronage (Hickey, 2023).

Participants frequently referenced the Constitution as the correct framework for governance. Where the High Court enforced constitutional provisions such as nullifying appointments or halting irregular processes, respondents interpreted this as evidence that institutional safeguards can function (Miyandazi and Okubasu, 2025; Noyes, 2025).

However, this perceived effectiveness was largely confined to high level constitutional cases. It did not necessarily translate into improved everyday governance outcomes at the local level. Thus, while the High Court illustrates the potential of constitutional insulation, it does not negate broader concerns about institutional capture elsewhere.

This institutional variation complicates a uniformly pessimistic account. Political settlements may coexist with limited institutional resilience, particularly where formal protections are respected. Yet the distributive reach of such resilience remains limited.

7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how Kenyan citizens perceive elite-driven power-sharing arrangements as peacebuilding mechanisms and whether such settlements translate into meaningful security, development, and democratic inclusion at the grassroots level. By integrating political settlements theory, the African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) governance domains framework, and the peace-development nexus, the study traced how elite bargains negotiated at the macro level are mediated through institutional domains at the meso level and ultimately experienced in everyday life at the micro level.

The findings indicate that power-sharing arrangements are widely recognised as mechanisms of elite stabilisation. Participants did not dismiss their utility entirely; many acknowledged that coalitions may reduce large-scale political confrontation and electoral violence. However, legitimacy was rarely assessed in terms of elite inclusion or cabinet composition. Instead, it was judged through tangible outcomes: reliable services, accountable institutions, equitable access to opportunity, and everyday security. In this sense, citizens evaluated elite bargains not by their symbolic political significance but by their ability to translate negotiated peace into improvements in daily life.

At the macro level, coalitions were largely understood as instruments for accessing and redistributing state power among elite actors. Ethnopolitical bargaining remained central to perceptions of who benefits from inclusion within dominant coalitions. Yet at the meso and micro levels, marginalisation was more frequently experienced as a function of socio-economic status and institutional mediation. Access to justice, employment, and service delivery was widely described as contingent upon money, connections, or patronage networks. This suggests that while political settlements in Kenya are structured through ethnic power configurations, their everyday consequences are often stratified along class lines.

The study further demonstrates that peace, as understood by participants, extends beyond the absence of political violence. Peace was defined as the ability to trade, move freely, access healthcare, educate children, and participate in public life without fear or harassment. Where development was perceived as performative, visible in infrastructure but weak in functionality, peace was considered incomplete. The persistence of insecurity, informal payments, and uneven

service delivery reinforced the perception that negotiated political stability does not automatically produce substantive transformation in citizens' lived experiences.

At the same time, the findings reveal that citizens are not politically apathetic. Even in contexts where opposition politics were perceived to weaken under coalition arrangements, participants described recalibrating their modes of engagement. Constitutional literacy, digital participation, and local civic forums emerged as alternative avenues through which citizens seek to maintain political voice. This adaptive engagement illustrates how democratic agency persists even where institutional accountability appears constrained.

Importantly, the findings also demonstrate that elite incorporation does not necessarily equate to societal incorporation. Regional and community perceptions of marginalisation persisted even where elites from those regions were represented within national coalitions. Legitimacy therefore rests less on symbolic inclusion at the top than on whether political settlements reshape governance in ways that expand material opportunity, institutional fairness, and everyday security.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Kenya's power-sharing arrangements contribute to political stabilisation but do not automatically guarantee distributive equity or institutional accountability. Their peacebuilding capacity remains contingent upon how effectively elite bargains are translated into inclusive governance outcomes across institutional domains. Where macro-level agreements are not matched by meso-level institutional integrity and micro-level developmental gains, peace is experienced as negotiated but uneven.

From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrates the value of combining political settlements analysis with domain-level governance frameworks and citizen-centred approaches to peace and development. Political settlements theory helps explain the incentives shaping elite bargaining and the durability of coalition politics in Kenya's competitive clientelist system. The ACRC framework provides a useful bridge by illustrating how these elite agreements are mediated through specific governance domains such as security, services, and local administration. Finally, the peace-development nexus captures how citizens ultimately evaluate the legitimacy of these arrangements through their everyday experiences of safety, opportunity,

and wellbeing. Together, these frameworks proved complementary in explaining the gap between elite-level stability and micro-level perceptions of justice and development.

Empirically, the study contributes to political settlements scholarship by foregrounding citizen perceptions as indicators of settlement durability. While much of the literature focuses on elite negotiations and institutional design, this research demonstrates that the long-term legitimacy of political settlements also depends on how ordinary citizens experience their outcomes. In the Kenyan case, the findings suggest that the social foundations of elite bargains are not sustained solely through ethnic incorporation but through ongoing public evaluation of security, development, and fairness in everyday governance.

Ultimately, the study highlights the limits of elite-driven peacebuilding when negotiated political stability is not accompanied by meaningful institutional reform and developmental inclusion. Power-sharing arrangements may reduce immediate political tensions, but their long-term legitimacy depends on whether they produce improvements that citizens can see and experience in their daily lives. The durability of Kenya's political settlement will therefore depend not only on the ability of leaders to negotiate elite inclusion at the national level, but on the capacity of state institutions to translate political agreements into tangible gains for the communities they govern.

More broadly, the findings contribute to debates on power-sharing as a peacebuilding mechanism by demonstrating that while elite power-sharing arrangements may stabilise political competition, their legitimacy and durability ultimately depend on whether they generate meaningful improvements in security, development, and governance at the citizen level. In the Kenyan case, the evidence suggests that although power-sharing has helped manage elite conflict, its peacebuilding potential remains constrained where institutional performance and distributive outcomes fail to reflect the expectations of ordinary citizens.

7.1 Reflection on the theoretical framework.

The empirical findings both converged with and complicated the expectations of the theoretical framework. Political settlements theory proved particularly useful in explaining the stabilising

logic of elite-driven power-sharing arrangements. Participants widely interpreted coalitions as mechanisms through which political actors secure access to state resources and positions, aligning closely with the theory's emphasis on elite bargains that distribute minimally acceptable benefits among actors capable of destabilising the political order. In this respect, the framework demonstrated strong explanatory power in accounting for why power-sharing arrangements are perceived as serving elite interests while maintaining political stability.

However, the findings also reveal limitations in the framework's predominantly elite-centred focus. While political competition at the macro level was frequently interpreted through ethnopolitical narratives, everyday experiences of insecurity, service delivery failures, and access to opportunity were more consistently articulated in socio-economic rather than ethnic terms.

Here, the ACRC governance domains framework strengthened the analysis by illuminating how elite bargains are mediated through institutional arenas where patronage networks, administrative discretion, and resource constraints shape citizen outcomes.

At the same time, evidence of institutional variation, including the relative credibility attributed to the High Court in politically sensitive cases, suggests that political settlements do not produce uniform institutional capture. These findings therefore indicate that while the theoretical framework aligns well with the stabilising logic of elite bargaining, its explanatory reach is strengthened when combined with citizen-centred perspectives that capture how settlements are interpreted, negotiated, and contested at the grassroots level.

7.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As with any qualitative study, this research has several limitations that also open avenues for further investigation. The study draws on interviews and focus group discussions conducted across a limited number of counties, and participation levels varied depending on local political context. In particular, recruitment proved more difficult in counties historically associated with ruling coalitions, which may reflect broader dynamics of political caution or perceived risk in

discussing elite power arrangements. While this variation itself offers an important field-level insight into the expressive dimensions of political settlements, future research could expand the geographic scope and systematically compare citizen perceptions across different political strongholds. Further studies could also examine how ethnopolitical bargaining at the macro level interacts with socio-economic inequalities that shape citizens' everyday experiences of governance. Finally, future research could explore how institutional safeguards that enable relatively autonomous bodies such as the High Court to resist elite capture might be adapted to other governance domains. Understanding how such arrangements could contribute to scaling pockets of effectiveness within competitive clientelist political settlements may provide valuable insights into how accountability and service delivery can be strengthened even within the constraints of existing settlement dynamics.

Appendix

Appendix A: Consent script.

Verbal Informed Consent Script

Bachelor's Thesis: Peace and Development Studies
Research Title:
Negotiated 'Peace', Neglected People: Citizen's Perceptions of Political Settlements, Elite Pacts and Power-Sharing as Peacebuilders in Kenya

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to speak with me.

My name is Beryl Joan Caesar, and I am a Bachelor's student in Peace and Development Studies. I am conducting research on how Kenyan citizens experience and perceive political power-sharing agreements, particularly their effects on peace, security, development, and democratic participation.

Before we begin, I would like to explain a few important points:

1. Your participation is completely voluntary.
2. You may refuse to answer any question.
3. You may stop the interview at any time without giving a reason.
4. Your name will not be used in my thesis. I will use a pseudonym or code instead.
5. The information you share will be used only for academic purposes.
6. With your permission, I would like to audio record this interview for accuracy. If you do not agree, I will take written notes instead.

There are no direct risks expected, but some topics may involve political matters. Please feel free to skip any question you are uncomfortable answering.

Do you understand the information I have shared?

Do you agree to participate in this study?

Do you agree to the interview being audio recorded?

Appendix B: Poster displayed in a local business premises depicting the Kenyan president shaking hands with the opposition leader following the power-sharing agreement. Such imagery symbolised national political reconciliation and stability at the elite level, yet participants simultaneously expressed scepticism about whether these agreements translated into tangible improvements in everyday governance and service delivery.



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Appendix D: Sticker displayed inside a public transport vehicle encouraging passengers to report reckless driving and unsafe practices. The message" Don't let the driver drive recklessly and leave your children orphans. Demand to be driven safely" promotes citizen oversight and accountability, yet participants frequently described traffic policing as characterised by routine informal payments and bribery overlooking overloading and reckless driving. The coexistence of such messaging with widely acknowledged corruption illustrates the tension between performative accountability narratives and everyday governance practices within a clientlist settlement.



Appendix E: List of participants and distribution.

Participant	Gender	Location
One	Male	Urban informal settlement
Two	Female	Urban
Three	Female	Rural
Four	Male	Rural
Five	Male	Urban town
Six	Male	Urban town
Seven	Male	Urban big town
Eight	Female	Urban City
Nine	Female	Urban informal settlement
Ten	Male	Urban city
Eleven	Female	Rural
Twelve	Male	Rural
Thirteen	Male	Urban Town
Fourteen	Male	Urban City
Fifteen	Female	Urban City

Appendix F: Focus group participant distribution

Focus group	Participants
Women SMEs (6)	From different business backgrounds. Salonist, second hand clothes seller,
Youth from informal slums (8)	Varying ages between 20-26 years old mostly unemployed.
Street parliament (5)	Woman, Person with disability, retired civil servant, older SME worker, middle aged SME.

Appendix G: Sample of code matrix

"There are groups that are left out… small small tribes… even politically they have no representation."	Q1_Political_Settlement; Q7_Cross_Cutting_Probes	Groups left out; Ethnic differences	Highlights ethnic exclusion from power-sharing arrangements
"People like Turkana… Garissa Wajir… MPs shift to Nairobi… they don't even have schools… security is bad."	Q1_Political_Settlement; Q2_ACRC_Security; Q3_ACRC_Basic_Services	Groups left out; Personal safety; Access to services	Connects political neglect to insecurity and poor service provision
"The collaborations… jobs can be available… if you know somebody… otherwise you cannot get a job."	Q1_Political_Settlement; Q3_ACRC_Basic_Services	Fairness of jobs and contracts; Fairness across groups	Describes patronage and exclusion in employment
"They are fragile because they are time bound… once the purpose is done, that's the end of it."	Q1_Political_Settlement	Credibility and stability of agreements	Assesses coalitions as temporary and unstable
"The government, of course." (on who gets blamed or credited)	Q1_Political_Settlement; Q3_ACRC_Basic_Services	Attribution of credit or blame	Clear attribution of responsibility to the coalition/government

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