

The GLOCEPS

Theme: Institutionalizing the Raila Odinga Legacy: Constitutionalism, Democratic Reform, and the Realization of African Union Agenda 2063

Webinar Series Report

Overview

The Global Centre for Policy and Strategy (GLOCEPS) launched its ten-week webinar series on Institutionalizing the Raila Odinga Legacy: Constitutionalism, Democratic Reform, and the Realization of African Union Agenda 2063, with an inaugural session examining political reconciliation in Kenya. The session formed part of a scholarly initiative reviewing 21 working papers prepared for a Special Issue of the GLOCEPS Eastern Africa Journal for Policy and Strategy.

The discussion focused on the working paper "Building a One United Kenya? Inside Raila Odinga's Politics of Political Reconciliation," coauthored by Prof Fred Jonyo and Mr. Philip Kaudo. The paper explores how elite political reconciliation, popularly known as handshakes, has shaped Kenya's democratic trajectory and influenced governance during political crises.

Strategic Context

Dr. Kenedy Asembo, GLOCEPS Executive Director, situated the webinar within the Governance and Ethics Pillar, which promotes ethical leadership, constitutionalism, and accountability across Africa. He highlighted the continuity from the November 2024 Diplomacy Experts Workshop examining Odinga's strategic positioning for the African Union Commission Chairpersonship and alignment with Agenda 2063. Following Odinga's passing, GLOCEPS issued a call for papers in November 2025, encouraging scholarly reflection



on institutionalizing reformist political traditions beyond individual leaders. Twenty-one papers were selected for review.

Brigadier (Rtd) Wilson Boinett, Chair of the GLOCEPS Council of Advisers, reflected on his historical engagement with Kenya's political transitions, emphasizing the relevance of the Accommodation, Compromise, and Bargains framework that characterized Odinga's political strategy.

Key Highlights: The Paradox of Political Reconciliation

Prof Fred Jonyo noted that Odinga, despite limited formal executive power, exercised significant influence through strategic reconciliations, navigating when to escalate pressure and when to accommodate opposing forces. Mr. Philip Kaudo provided a historical overview, drawing on Rational Choice Theory and institutionalism to explain how reconciliation becomes a rational response to electoral volatility and institutional fragility. Both authors emphasized that handshakes serve as





mechanisms for stabilizing governance but also generate elite bargains, raising concerns about accountability, patronage, and delayed reforms.

Reflections from Discussants

Ambassador Dr. Josephine Ojiambo and Dr. Ochieng Kamudhayi commended the paper while recommending deeper comparative analysis, stronger citizen perspectives, and clearer policy lessons balancing stability and democratic accountability. Dr. Kamudhayi noted that societal structures often resist reforms, producing short-term stability rather than long-term institutional solutions. Dr. Ojiambo emphasized evaluating reconciliation across societal segments and integrating these insights into continental governance frameworks, such as the African Union Peer Review Mechanism.

Plenary Reflections

Participants highlighted Kenya's challenges in multiethnic democracy and emphasized Odinga's influence on constitutional jurisprudence, grass-roots issues, and Pan-African initiatives. Key concerns included the long-term implications of elite-driven handshakes on democratic institutionalism, the management of future political crises, and operationalizing lessons within AU frameworks. Reflections also noted generational differences, with Gen Z activists interpreting political arrangements as a potential departure from reformist ideals.

Key Areas for Strengthening the Paper

Conceptual Clarity

- Clarify the distinctions between political reconciliation, handshakes, and power-sharing.
- Define criteria for evaluating the success or failure of reconciliation processes.
- Differentiate between formal and informal reconciliation mechanisms and their effects.

Evidence and Causality

- Strengthen empirical support linking reconciliation to national unity and stability.
- Demonstrate causal connections rather than mere correlations.
- Include case comparisons or data substantiating claims about elite bargains.



Normative vs Analytical Balance

- Distinguish between prescriptive goals and actual outcomes.
- Address potential bias in evaluating Odinga's approach.

Incomplete Exploration of Key

- Reconcile contradictory assessments of the 2008 Grand Coalition.
- Analyze the BBI and Ruto–Raila 2024/2025 arrangement more deeply.
- Assess long-term impacts on democratic accountability.





Stakeholder Perspectives

- Incorporate views of ordinary citizens and victims of political violence.
- Treat youth movements as independent actors, not mere triggers for elite deals.
- Examine the roles of civil society, the judiciary, and electoral institutions.

Comparative and Theoretical Depth

- Integrate theoretical frameworks such as consociationalism and peacebuilding theory.
- Deepen analysis of Odinga's role in presidential election petitions, highlighting influence on constitutional jurisprudence, electoral law, and democratic accountability.
- Expand coverage of Pan-African engagements in Ghana, Malawi, Côte d'Ivoire, and beyond, examining how these initiatives reflect leadership philosophy, influence continental governance norms, and provide comparative lessons for reconciliation and institutional reform.

Policy and Forward-Looking Recommendations

- Explore ways to establish a formal, institutionalized mechanism for managing national political crises that does not rely solely on individual leaders.

- Suggest specific mechanisms for transitioning from elite-driven to citizen-centered reconciliation.
- Identify safeguards to prevent reconciliation from undermining democratic checks and balances.
- Explore alternatives to handshakes, including electoral reforms and decentralization strategies.

Closing Reflections and Way Forward

DG Alexander M Imbenzi, GLOCEPS Council of Advisers, emphasized that the webinar series offers a platform for rigorous public review, strengthening analytical depth and policy relevance. While political dialogue has historically stabilized Kenya, sustainable democratic progress requires robust institutions anchored in constitutionalism, accountability, and inclusive governance. These principles are essential for advancing the long-term vision of the African Union Agenda 2063.



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