Abstract

The integration of data-driven microtargeting techniques in political campaigning has transformed modern domestic and global politics. Contemporary elections cycles are witnessing a surge in attack advertisements, fake news, and data manipulation, fuelled by the emergence of political consulting firms like Cambridge Analytica. These firms, as non-state information operations actors (IOAs), have emerged as influential players with considerable sway over democratic stability worldwide. This dissertation aims to explore the role of such actors in Kenya's Presidential Elections of 2013 and 2017, combining existing research with the concept of 'Data Colonialism'. The study seeks to understand how non-state IOAs engage in digital election interference and potentially contribute to data colonial practices, paving the way for more effective regulation and protection of democratic processes in the Global South. This dissertation used qualitative data from investigations and news reports to thematically analyse the actions of non-state IOAs in the 2013 and 2017 Kenyan Presidential Elections. The findings were then interpreted in accordance with a data colonialism framework to understand the potential implications of digital election interference in the Global South. Through this approach, the study reveals how data-driven campaigns by non-state IOAs can be considered predatory and extractive, causing division and destabilising the democratic process. The findings raise questions about the nature of data-driven political campaigning and its impact, emphasising the need for robust data protection regulations and technical infrastructure to safeguard democratic politics in the Global South.

Keywords: Non-state information operations actors, data colonialism, digital election interference, disinformation, Global South, online political campaigns, thematic analysis.