

ABSTRACT

This study set out to investigate the political history of the Abagusii. The Abagusii are a Bantu community who inhabit the fertile highlands to the South-Western part of Kenya. The period of study is between the years 1907 when the British colonial government established an administration station in their territory, and 2002 when single-party rule came to an end in Kenya. The study sought to analyze their pre-colonial socio-economic and political situation as the basis of their political history; assess the interaction of the community with the colonial establishment and their general reaction to colonial rule; establish the political trends and leadership patterns of the community during the period of Kenyan nationalism and decolonization; and to assess the position of their society in the wider Kenyan national political landscape since independence. The study adopted the theory of Articulation of Modes of Production to explain how their pre-capitalist modes of production shaped their socio-political formation and how the capitalist mode of production penetrated and interacted with the Abagusii pre-capitalist modes of production, thus influencing socio-political change in their society through the study period. The study area comprised of the ten constituencies that made up Gusiiland by the year 2002. Both primary and secondary sources were used to obtain data. Primary data entailed archival sources and field interviews. Purposive sampling was used to select the accessible or study population which entailed identification of knowledgeable individuals on Abagusii political history like the community elders, election officials, voters and politicians to serve as resource persons. Snowball sampling technique was also applied whereby the first set or group of individuals identified was used to identify more others of similar characteristics until the full study population sample was obtained. A total of 112 informants were selected to facilitate in data collection out of which 52 were earmarked to respond to oral interview, while 60 were constituted to form focus groups of 6 each per constituency. An interview schedule was prepared and used, which managed to facilitate oral data from the earmarked accessible population. Secondary data was obtained from relevant documentary sources from library books and media reports in newspapers. The data was analysed descriptively through content analysis, while raw data from field research was organized into themes and both presented the Abagusii political history arranged in chronological order on the basis of major historical periods. The study confirmed Abagusii politics evolved on clan basis during pre-colonial period, lacking one central tribal political authority. During the colonial era, it became evident that the British transformed Abagusii politics by introducing a completely new centralized administrative system with chiefs being installed to be in charge of locations (former clan areas), and the colonial policy brought new changes and developments in Gusiiland. The study ascertained that the Abagusii formed part of the wider Kenyan nationalist struggle and that since independence, the community and its leadership failed to pursue a united political front which could guarantee them a good bargain for the national cake. The findings from the study will definitely prove invaluable by adding to the richness of the existing literature of individual African societies. Students and scholars on the subject of political history will benefit with more knowledge. Politicians and the electorate will benefit in terms of political theory and practice. From the study, various recommendations and areas for further study were highlighted, such as, the need to address political disunity and studying the community's political history to more current period among others respectively.