

Kenya 2017 General Elections: Forecast

EDITOR'S NOTE: This document is part of our series "Elections in Africa 2017", which for each country comprises of:

1. **A Short note** (2 pages, 3 months before the elections)
2. **Possible scenarios** (2 pages, 1 month before)
3. **Forecast** (1 page, 7 days before)



On the 8th of August, Kenyan voters will take part in the sixth general elections since the end of the one-party state in 1991. Unsurprisingly, all signs show that the upcoming presidential election will be a two-horse race between the incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta and his main rival Raila Odinga, both having dominated the campaign period, owing in large part to political experience and unequalled access to financial resources.

Less than a week to the elections, uncertainty persists, as the race for the presidency promises to be a tight contest between the two men, each being confident of a win as they wind-up their campaigns.

Potential for violence, mutual accusations of rigging

More worrying is the prospect of violence during and after the election, considering the unrest which marred party primaries last April. While international focus is put on the presidential race, the election of local leaders could also potentially lead to violence. The upcoming elections may thus turn out to be a test of the security forces' ability and readiness to contain unrest.

The judiciary has shown no tolerance against hate speech, with some prominent politicians facing prosecution for such utterances. Whether that stance will extend to ordinary citizens remains to be seen.

In Eldoret county — one of the areas which were badly affected by the 2007 post-election violence — for example, unidentified individuals have distributed leaflets in neighborhoods where many Kikuyu ethnics live, giving them instructions on which candidates to vote for¹.

Mutual accusations of rigging between the ruling JUBILEE party and its National Super Alliance (NASA) rival have led both parties to recruit 'agents' to be posted at polling stations, in a bid to curtail each other's 'attempt' to rig the election. Such paranoia increases the likelihood that the loser will not accept the electoral commission's results. Even more worrying is the death of the commission's ICT manager, Chris Musando, whose mutilated body was discovered by the police on 31st July, three days after he had gone missing.

Conclusion

Less than a week before the elections, none of the two main presidential candidates has shown any clear sign of advantage over the other. Fears of vote rigging — real or perceived — and reports of intimidation in multi-ethnic communities have increased the likelihood of violence. The upcoming elections hold high stakes for stability in a country already battling the threat of Al-Shabaab and unending inter-ethnic rivalry fuelled by land disputes.

¹ The Star, "Don't worry, Eldoret police tell voters after more hate leaflets circulated" Available online at http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/07/25/dont-worry-eldoret-police-tell-voters-after-more-hate-leaflets_c1603633 (Accessed on 28 July 2017)