

Kenya: Violence spreads following presidential elections

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At least 300 people have died in clashes since the Kenyan presidential elections held on December 27 last year, with tens of thousands fleeing their homes fearing further attacks. Mwai Kibaki claimed he had been re-elected and was hastily sworn in on December 30 after the Electoral Commission announced the results. He said he had won 46.7 percent of the vote as against 44.3 percent for opposition candidate Raila Odinga. But Kibaki's narrow lead of some 230,000 votes out of nearly 9 million cast was immediately challenged by the opposition, which claimed the election was fraudulent.

Fighting broke out between gangs of the rival candidates' supporters in the Kibera slum area of Nairobi, which Odinga represents in parliament, in the coastal region around Mombasa and in the western city of Kisumu, where Odinga has most support. It appears to have spread to other areas. On January 1, a church was burned down in the town of Eldoret in the Rift Valley Province. At least 35 bodies were found in the remains.

Much of the fighting has been between tribal groupings. Kibaki belongs to the Kikuyu tribe—the largest ethnic grouping that has dominated in politics and business. Odinga belongs to the smaller Luo tribe. The victims in the burnt-out church were all Kikuyus.

But most of the violence has come from state forces. Reuters reports eye witnesses saying the majority of the killings were due to police firing at demonstrators, and Associated Press Monday cited anonymous reports from police officers—denied by the government—that they had been given shoot-to-kill orders.

A priest in the Nairobi slums, Father Daniel Moschetti, told Reuters that the violence was hitting the poor rather than the wealthy politicians who had stoked up the conflict. "It is the politicians living in their secure compounds who are inciting ethnic hatred," he said.

The whipping up of tribalism is being used by the leaders of both political camps. A government spokesman told the BBC that Odinga's supporters are "engaging in ethnic cleansing" in an "organised, calculated manner." Odinga told Associated Press that Kibaki's government was "guilty, directly, of genocide."

There is little doubt that Washington and London wanted Kibaki to stay in power. Kenya is a strategic centre for US

security operations in Africa. It borders on Somalia and Ethiopia. It is also the business hub of the East Africa region.

Odinga, the opposition candidate, is a businessman and supporter of free market economics, but is something of an unknown quantity for the Western powers. His Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) has called for devolution of power from the Kikuyu elite and has used populist rhetoric, while Odinga paints himself as a champion of the poor.

On December 30, both the United States and Britain called on the presidential candidates to accept the election results, and the US Embassy issued a statement praising the work of the Electoral Commission. An embassy official called for patience, urging that any concerns over the voting be addressed to the commission. This was backed by a statement issued in the US by State Department official Tom Casey calling on Kenyans to accept the final result, also praising the commission for the "largely peaceful and orderly voting."

This stance has been made increasingly untenable by the criticisms that have since emerged over the vote-counting procedures. The European Union (EU) observer in one constituency had witnessed election officials saying Kibaki had won by 50,145 votes, but by December 30, the Electoral Commission had increased the same result to 75,261 votes. The chief EU observer stated that the "Electoral Commission has not succeeded in establishing the credibility of the tallying process."

Western diplomats attempted to persuade the Electoral Commission to do a re-tally, but whilst they acknowledged there had been "irregularities"—admitting that the turnout in one constituency was 115 percent and that a candidate had run away with ballot papers in another—they were clearly under pressure to accept the result. Four of the 22 Electoral Commissioners have since expressed doubts about the veracity of the results.

On December 31, therefore, the US State Department was forced to express "serious concerns" about the voting. Tom Casey said, "I'm not offering congratulations to anybody." Any sense that the US was happy with the election results was an "error," said Casey, and called for the "problems" to be resolved by the Kenyan legal system in accordance with its constitution. British Foreign Secretary David Milliband said in

an interview January 1 that there were allegations of voting irregularities on both sides and “we don’t know who won.”

Whilst there were 10 presidential candidates and 300 political parties with more than 2,000 candidates competing in the parliamentary election that take place at the same time as the presidential elections, the main contest was between Odinga’s ODM and Kibaki’s Party of National Unity (PNU). Both organisations are loose ad-hoc coalitions led by government ministers or former ministers put together for the purpose of raising finance and campaigning in the election. Kibaki’s slogan was “let the work continue,” standing for economic conservatism and prudence, whereas Odinga’s call for “devolution” was coupled with a vague commitment to spending more public money on the poorest sections of the population. Kenya has one of the most unequal societies in Africa, with about 14 million, 60 percent of the population, living below the poverty line.

In 2002, Kibaki came to power as leader of the multi-ethnic National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC), winning a large majority against Uhuru Kenyatta of the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Kenyatta is the son of independence leader Jomo Kenyatta and was the chosen candidate of Daniel Arap Moi, who had been president since 1978. The big vote for Kibaki resulted from the widespread hatred of Moi because of his repressive police measures and alleged corruption—it is claimed that Moi and his cohorts stole 2 billion dollars from state coffers. Raila Odinga was a leading figure in NARC, although he had merged his own National Democratic Party with KANU earlier in the year. Odinga, imprisoned by Moi in the 1990s for his opposition to the regime, had dropped his differences in the hope of being made Moi’s successor. When Moi chose Uhuru Kenyatta instead, Odinga threw his support to Kibaki.

Although Kibaki had promised to root out corruption, his regime soon became involved in scandals, including the Anglo Leasing case in 2004, which involved giving huge government contracts to bogus companies linked to presidential advisors. Last year, the government dismissed the investigation carried out by the Anti-Corruption Commission into a number of state contracts. Neither Moi himself or any of his relatives and cronies have been prosecuted by the Kibaki regime.

While NARC fell apart with differences among its factions, Kibaki made overtures to Moi and succeeded in winning his support and considerable financial backing for the current election. KANU is a major constituent of the PNU and includes Uhuru Kenyatta as a parliamentary candidate. The Kenyatta, Moi and Kibaki families are among the three richest in Kenya and have dominated Kenyan politics since independence. According to *Africa Confidential*, there is talk of a secret succession pact in which Uhuru would take over from Kibaki in 2012. Odinga has been able to appeal for support among sections of the ruling class excluded from this narrow circle around Moi.

Though there has been little change in the amount of corruption and there are complaints about the continuing lack of investment in Kenya’s infrastructure, Western investors and local businessmen have generally supported Kibaki for imposing fewer government restrictions. The head of Kenya’s Association of Manufacturers told the *Financial Times* that under Moi, “executives were regularly strong-armed into dishing out jobs and contracts to enrich the political elite,” whilst under Kibaki, “you still get requests but it’s not so overt.” The economy is now growing at about 7 percent a year compared to 0.2 percent in 2002.

The Kibaki government has also been a major supporter of the US “war on terror” and has collaborated in seizing dozens of people accused of being Al-Qaeda operatives. The US has recently given Kenya US\$14 million to pay for “training and equipment.” Earlier this year, a Kenyan man, Abdulmalik Mohammed, was moved to Guantanamo Bay after being handed over to the US following his arrest in Mombasa. US officials claimed he had confessed to taking part in the 2002 hotel bombing in Mombasa.

Muslim groups have opposed a draft law—pushed for by the US—that would give the Kenyan security minister powers to declare an individual or an organisation “terrorist.” No doubt, one of the US concerns about Odinga is that he has won Muslim votes by pledging that he would guarantee defence of their constitutional rights.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and British Foreign Secretary David Milliband have now issued a joint statement urging both sides to “engage in a spirit of compromise,” insisting that they call on their supporters to stop fighting. The African Union chairman, Ghanaian President John Kufuor, has been dispatched to Kenya to try to calm down the situation. Recognising that the degree of opposition to Kibaki would make a government led solely by him unworkable, the US and Britain are calling for a government of national unity. Despite intense diplomacy, so far there has been a complete deadlock, with Odinga refusing to enter talks with Kibaki unless he agrees to give up his claims on the presidency.



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