

Kenyan police violently quell opposition to disputed election

Eddie Haywood
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Twenty-four people have been killed by police in post-election protests since Friday's announcement declaring President Uhuru Kenyatta the winner over his challenger, Raila Odinga. The majority killed are from the cities of Kisumu and Nairobi.

During the public announcement declaring Kenyatta the winner, supporters of Odinga in Nairobi and Kisumu numbering in the thousands immediately gathered in the streets, attempting to block main thoroughfares, and were met by police forces that fired tear gas and live rounds into the crowds. In addition to the 24 killed, an estimated 150 were injured and hospitalised.

Nine-year-old Stephanie Mokaya from Mathare, a slum in Nairobi that saw a large convergence of the protesters, was killed by a stray bullet after police indiscriminately fired into the crowd.

Two reporters from the Kenyan *Standard* were arrested while covering the protests and detained before being released a few hours later.

Illustrating starkly the state of siege gripping the country, particularly in Nairobi, the week of the poll saw a virtual shutdown of day-to-day activities, with many Kenyans not reporting to their places of work. Buses and other modes of transportation were curbed, and many businesses shuttered their doors in fear of a crackdown.

Displaying their contempt for the Kenyan population, the Kenyatta government denied that police fired live rounds into crowds and claimed that the protests were unlawful and consisted largely of criminals.

Acting Interior Minister Fred Matiang'i told the media, "There are no demonstrations. They are looters, and looters are criminals who ought to be arrested."

After the final poll result was released Friday, Odinga traveled to Kibera and Mathare, two of the largest slums in Nairobi and home to a significant base of his support, and told the assembled crowds to reject the result. He reiterated his claim that the election was fraudulent and declared that Kenyatta and his ruling government were criminals who stole the election.

Odinga told the crowd not to go to work Monday to register their dissatisfaction. "There is no work until Tuesday, when we will announce the next step."

He reiterated calls for an investigation into the vote tally, requesting that the United Nations provide an analysis of the poll.

By Sunday morning, tensions appeared to have eased, and Odinga's call for a strike was largely a failure as most residents returned to work Monday morning and businesses resumed operations.

Several suspicious developments seem to lend credibility to the claim of electoral fraud that have fueled the wave of popular outrage directed at the Kenyatta government. Considering the increasingly authoritarian actions against the Kenyan population, it is understandable that so many would believe that the election was rigged to Kenyatta's benefit.

First, there was an attempted hack into the elections system set up by the Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), the official body charged with counting the vote. The IEBC has said the hack was not successful, and after a preliminary investigation of the intrusion, the commission released its finding as "inconclusive" as to the identity of the person or persons involved and their motive.

Even more suspicious is last month's grisly discovery of the body of a senior official employed with the IEBC. Christopher Musando was murdered, and his body bore evidence that he was severely beaten and tortured before being killed. As of this writing, no one has been arrested for the murder.

Additionally, just days after the discovery of Musando's body, two foreigners working for the Odinga campaign as political consultants were seized and detained by Kenyan police dressed in plainclothes.

The two men, John Aristotle Phillips and Andreas Katsouris from the US and Canada, respectively, worked for Aristotle Inc., a political consulting firm owned by Phillips specialising in campaign software and voter data analysis.

They were employed by the Odinga campaign for two months when they were accosted and seized by the men who later identified themselves as police. The two men were held in a room at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport for several hours before being forced on a plane and ordered to leave the country.

Once back in Canada, Katsouris related to CBC Toronto the circumstances of their arrest, relating that they demanded to see lawyers and officials from their embassies, requests that were refused by their captors. “They were getting angry at this point. After a few minutes of this, they seemed to get tired of our little resistance and they handcuffed John and one of them grabbed me by my arm and pulled my glasses off my face, and pulled out a pair of handcuffs.”

On Saturday, Orenge Nyabicha, an official with the IEBC, was found dead in his home, of an apparent suicide. Police stated that the man had died from self-imposed carbon monoxide poisoning from a stove. Suspiciously, a suicide note left by Nyabicha stated that he was frustrated with “IEBC’s failure to deliver a credible, free and fair election.”

A building housing the offices of Odinga’s political party, National Super Alliance (NASA), was broken into and equipment was stolen. Computers, laptops, cameras, documents identifying the party’s membership, and various other documents related to party strategy were taken. NASA officials accused the police of the break-in. The Kenyan National Police Service denied involvement.

The Kenyatta government has moved to suppress any investigation into these highly suspicious circumstances. Two Kenyan human rights organisations, Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHCR) and African Centre for Open Governance (AfriCOG), were threatened by the government with closure and were informed they were being investigated for tax evasion and other dubious charges, after the two organisations stated their intention to file a case to the Kenyan Supreme Court over the irregularities of the poll.

These developments, taken together, point to the completely anti-democratic character of the Kenyan ruling class.

The chorus of congratulatory applause for Uhuru Kenyatta on his re-election from Washington and Europe is a clear indication of Western capitalism’s approval and support for the ruling clique in Nairobi. A number of Western election observers certified the August 8 poll to be “free and fair”, including the European Union’s election observer mission in Kenya. The African Union has also concurred with this assessment.

The Trump administration said in a statement, “The United States congratulates the people of Kenya on the successful conclusion of elections, and President Uhuru Kenyatta on his re-election.”

Former US Secretary of State John Kerry, who led the Carter Center’s observer team examining Kenya’s election, stated that while his team observed “aberrations here and there,” the election’s integrity was intact.

The *New York Times*, functioning in its role as the mouthpiece for the US foreign policy establishment, published an editorial Sunday chastising Odinga for his refusal to concede defeat, calling him a “perennial loser,” a reference to his previous electoral defeats in 2007 and 2013, going on to dismiss his claims of electoral fraud.

As if reading a statement straight from the US State Department, the *Times* praised the Kenyatta government for what the editorial says are “admirable changes” to the Kenyan constitution, claiming these reforms afford a more democratic process in Kenya.

Given the extremely suspicious developments hanging over the poll, which pose serious questions over the credibility of the election, it must be stated that there is no democratic content to be found in the campaign of Odinga calling for protests against the poll. Odinga, if elected to the presidency, would utilise the apparatus of state repression against the Kenyan masses just as ruthlessly as the ruling Kenyatta government.

Odinga, a millionaire scion and representative of the Kenyan ruling class, is no less a defender of capitalism and Kenya’s entrenched layer of pro-Western banking and corporate parasites vying for a share of profits than Kenyatta.

As for Kenyatta, the millionaire president presides over a society wracked by acute social antagonisms and social deterioration. The social misery experienced by the Kenyan masses coincides with the widespread disillusionment with the political establishment. The prospect of the restive masses entering into open class struggle against the establishment is what terrifies the ruling clique in Nairobi.

The blatant intimidation and anti-democratic actions directed against the population by the Kenyatta government reveal that the Kenyan ruling class is turning towards more dictatorial forms of rule to suppress opposition. The anti-democratic character of the Kenyatta government makes clear that it is unwilling and completely incapable of providing relief for the social misery experienced by the Kenyan masses.



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