

Kenyan president declared winner in election re-run amid low turnout

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The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) on Monday declared incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta the winner over rival Raila Odinga in the re-run of a hotly disputed presidential election overshadowed by egregious instances of fraud, violence, and intimidation.

In announcing President Kenyatta's victory, IEBC chair Wafula Chebukati stated that Kenyatta took over 98 percent of the vote in Thursday's poll, with an extremely low turnout of 38 percent. Chebukati claimed Kenyatta garnered 7.5 million of the votes cast, a smaller number than the 8.2 million he captured in the August 8 poll.

Odinga won a mere 73,000 votes, the low number being the result of his call to boycott the election. As a result of large numbers of voters not participating, balloting did not take place in 25 precincts.

The strikingly low turnout stands in stark contrast to the 80 percent turnout registered in the August 8 poll, and reflects the mass disillusionment of the Kenyan masses toward the political establishment, as well as widespread contempt for the corrupt electoral process.

Citing violent protests, the IEBC canceled balloting in Nyanza region and other parts of Western Kenya. Violent clashes occurred between police and protesters who attempted to disrupt polling in many cities and towns, including Kisumu, Migori, Siaya, and Homabay. The Nyanza region is a stronghold of support for Odinga and his National Super Alliance party (NASA).

Stating that he would contest the poll, Odinga said, "Kenyans are tired of this illegitimate regime. We do not want to institutionalize election-rigging. The moment people lose faith in the electoral process then anarchy becomes the order of the day." Odinga said that he would address his supporters at a rally planned for today, for which he would outline his plan for the

creation of a "resistance movement."

Kenyatta declared that the poll validated his August win, and he sharply criticized Odinga for his boycott, "You cannot choose the opportunity to exercise a right and thereafter abscond from the consequences of that choice."

The poll took place amid an atmosphere of police violence and acts of intimidation, which almost certainly originated with forces loyal to Kenyatta. Since the election on Thursday, nine people were killed and scores more injured by police responding to demonstrations held in several locations of Nairobi and Western Kenya. More than 70 people have been killed since the August 8 poll.

Several reports in Kisumu and Nairobi recounted police conducting door-to-door searches and rounding up NASA supporters, in the process ransacking homes and beating scores of residents. Police have repeatedly responded violently to ongoing demonstrations conducted almost daily since the original August 8 poll.

Highlighting the overall corrupt character of the election occurring in the days preceding the October 26 re-run poll, was the lawsuit filed by several civil organizations to the Supreme Court which sought to postpone the election. This followed the news that senior IEBC board member Roselyne Akombe fled to the United States after receiving death threats, prompting IEBC chair Chebukati to admit the IEBC's inability to carry out a "free and fair" election.

The day before the court was to convene a hearing of the case, the bodyguard of Supreme Court Deputy Chief Justice Philomena Mwili was shot. Indicating that a concerted attempt to intimidate the judiciary was successful, only two of the seven judges on the court were in attendance, with the judges declining to adjudicate the case for lack of a quorum.

Maina Kai, a Kenyan lawyer and the former UN special rapporteur on the rights to freedom and peaceful assembly and association, responded to the court's refusal to convene: "When judges have taken office and vowed to keep the constitution, and then they don't show up, that is a big statement. It worries us because the judiciary was the last bastion of independence. If they are going to be buckling under pressure and be intimidated, then we are going to be in for a very rough ride."

Odinga and NASA have accused the IEBC of rigging the election in Kenyatta's favor. The allegations are not without foundation: Christopher Musando, an official in charge of IEBC's digital voting system, was found murdered and tortured just days before the August 8 poll. Additionally, two foreign election consultants employed by the Odinga campaign were kidnapped by police and forced to depart the country. In another suspicious instance, an IEBC poll worker committed suicide after the August 8 poll, leaving a note expressing his distress over illegalities perpetrated during the vote tally.

Despite this, Chebukati stated on Monday that the re-run poll was "free and fair," a complete reversal of his statements last week eliciting his doubts of the commission's ability to carry out a credible election. Chebukati made no attempt to reconcile these two contradictory claims.

The fact that Kenyatta has been declared the winner of the re-run poll in the wake of blatant electoral malfeasance, testifies to the criminal role not only of the Kenyatta government, but of the governments of US and Europe, which said not a single word of protest.

Instead, US and European observers unanimously certified the August 8 poll "free and fair," essentially emboldening the Kenyatta government in its assault on the democratic rights of the Kenyan population.

Adding fuel to the political crisis is the downturn of Kenya's economy, of which growth projections have been adjusted downwards in the wake of the election chaos. This in turn has spooked investors away from East Africa's top economy.

Washington has been particularly unnerved by the widespread contempt for the political establishment expressed in the mass demonstrations, fearing the unrest could precipitate a full-scale insurrection against the government. Kenyatta plays a key role in

Washington's geopolitical strategy in the region, having committed Kenyan troops to the US-backed war in neighboring Somalia.

Last week, US Ambassador to Kenya Robert Godec, leading a pack of several Western diplomats, sharply rebuked Kenyatta and Odinga, blaming them for the "deteriorating political environment," saying, "Inflammatory rhetoric, attacks on institutions, and growing insecurity all make holding a credible and fair poll more difficult ... it is dangerous, and it must stop."

In the final analysis, it was clear from the outset that regardless of which of the two wealthy contestants assumed power, they would preside over a government that will come into explosive conflict with an increasingly restive population experiencing conditions of social misery for which the Kenyan ruling class has no solution but violent repression.



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