

Kenya's opposition parties auditions for imperialist powers ahead of elections

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With Kenya's 2027 general election approaching, leading opposition figures are intensifying their contacts with the US and the European imperialist powers to present themselves as alternatives to the widely discredited President William Ruto.

Political parties must submit the names of their presidential candidates to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) by October 15. A prominent figure is Edwin Sifuna, Nairobi senator and former secretary-general of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), now spearheading the Linda Mwananchi movement. Following the mass Gen Z uprising against International Monetary Fund (IMF)-backed austerity in 2024, ODM leader Raila Odinga came to Ruto's rescue, entering a power-sharing arrangement. Sifuna drafted that arrangement and remained ODM secretary-general, periodically denouncing Ruto with Odinga's blessing. This division of labour allowed ODM to preserve its opposition credentials, even as its leadership sustained Ruto's government.

Odinga's death in October 2025 sharpened divisions within ODM. When a faction moved to support Ruto's re-election in 2027, Sifuna opposed the move and he was removed as secretary-general. He then joined other ODM dissidents to building Linda Mwananchi, whose rallies have attracted tens of thousands.

A survey released in July put Sifuna at 15 percent nationally, up from 10 percent two months earlier, making him the fastest-rising opposition figure in the poll. Among ODM supporters, 44 percent said they preferred Sifuna. Among voters aged 18 to 26, he has polled 20 percent.

On September 18, US Chargé d'Affaires Susan Burns hosted Sifuna. Two days earlier, he met Dutch Ambassador Henk Jan Bakker. These encounters followed discussions with British High Commissioner Matt Baugh, French Ambassador Arnaud Suquet, German Ambassador Sebastian Groth, European Union representatives and Australian High Commissioner Andrew Barnes.

Virtually nothing has been disclosed about the content of these meetings, but what is clear is that the imperialist powers are aware that Sifuna could be relied upon as president. Sifuna opposed Kenya's US-orchestrated police deployment to Haiti in 2023, but the March 2025 ODM-Ruto agreement he drafted made no demand for withdrawal. Nor has he called for an end to US military operations at Manda Bay, the withdrawal of British troops or the cancellation of Kenya's defence agreement with France.

Despite his combative rhetoric, Sifuna has yet to publish an

electoral programme. Linda Mwananchi centres its activities on demanding implementation of the ten-point agreement between ODM and Ruto. No commitment has emerged to repudiate Kenya's external debt, whose servicing consumes around 70 percent of government revenue, draining resources from healthcare and education, or to break with the IMF and World Bank and dismantle the country's military arrangements with the Western powers.

For four decades Kalonzo Musyoka, leader of the Wiper party, has occupied the upper ranks of Kenya's political establishment, rising to national organising secretary of KANU, the sole legal party until 1991, and later foreign minister. When he was in power, the Western-backed regime of Daniel arap Moi imprisoned and tortured political opponents, including students, trade unionists and left-wing intellectuals, while imposing IMF- and World Bank-backed austerity programmes.

Kalonzo has been a key figure in Kenya's system of ethnic-bloc politics, in which rival factions of the ruling elite mobilise support along communal lines and use regional voting blocs to bargain for positions in government. Presenting himself as the political spokesman of the Kamba community, Kenya's fifth-largest ethnic group, a recent poll records his support to around 13 percent.

On September 2, Kalonzo met British High Commissioner Matt Baugh, where he defended the continued hosting of Britain's military base in Nanyuki. The month before, he hosted French Ambassador Arnaud Suquet and German Ambassador Sebastian Groth at his residence, stating of the involvement of both countries in Kenya's political affairs that "democracy is not sustained by one country alone."

In February, Kalonzo travelled to Washington, where he held talks with Democratic Senator and anti-China hawk Chris Coons, who has repeatedly been deployed in Kenya over the decades at the behest of US imperialism. The discussions with Coons centred on "regional stability" and the longstanding Kenya-US partnership. Kalonzo also met David Beasley, the former Republican governor of South Carolina and Trump ally.

David Maraga, presidential candidate of the United Green Movement (UGM), has also travelled to Washington. He served as chief justice from 2016 to 2021 and rose to national prominence in 2017 when he presided over the historic annulment of Uhuru Kenyatta's presidential election victory over electoral irregularities, the first such ruling by a court in Africa. He is running a programme focused on constitutional reform, "good

governance” and anti-corruption, oriented towards layers of the professional middle class. The latest poll recorded just 2 percent national support for his candidacy, falling to 1 percent among voters aged 18 to 26.

Last month, Maraga arrived in Washington at the beginning of a nearly three-week American tour. Although presented as an opportunity to mobilise Kenyan diaspora support, Maraga met with CIA-front National Endowment for Democracy (NED), intended to secure what he described as a “free, fair, credible 2027 election”.

Established under the Reagan administration in 1983, the congressionally funded NED emerged following revelations about the CIA’s covert financing of foreign political parties, trade unions, student organisations, journalists and other groups. Allen Weinstein, one of the NED architects told *The Washington Post* in 1991: “A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA.”

Maraga signed an agreement with Vanguard Africa, a Washington-based political advisory firm. Under the pro bono arrangement, Vanguard Africa will advise Maraga on campaign strategy and political messaging, while facilitating contacts with US policymakers. Established in 2016, it was founded by Jeffrey Smith, a former NED official, with veteran Democratic Party strategist Joe Trippi. It has an extensive record of involvement in African politics, having advised Raila Odinga during Kenya’s 2017 presidential campaign, as well as Bobi Wine in Uganda and Tundu Lissu in Tanzania, both leading capitalist opponents of their countries’ longstanding ruling regimes.

Another figure courting Washington is Fred Matiang’i, the Jubilee Party presidential candidate. Matiang’i served in Kenyatta’s cabinet from 2013 to 2022. As Interior Minister, he led the police repression following the disputed 2017 elections that killed over a hundred protestors.

On July 9, Matiang’i hosted Jendayi Frazer, the former US assistant secretary of state for African affairs under George W. Bush, followed by Israeli Ambassador Gideon Behar. Matiang’i called for strengthening partnership with the genocidal Israeli regime. On July 27, he met US Chargé d’Affaires Susan Burns. Three days later, he met French Ambassador Arnaud Suquet.

Matiang’i draws political support from the Gusii region, while his association with Kenyatta provides him with established political networks in Mount Kenya among the Kikuyu tribe, the largest in Kenya. A recent survey positions his support at around 12 percent.

Rigathi Gachagua, who leads the Democracy for the Citizens Party (DCP), has launched extensive tours of Britain and the US. Gachagua was a central figure in Ruto’s government, serving as deputy president as it imposed IMF-backed tax increases and unleashed police repression against the Gen Z protests of June and July 2024, during which security forces killed dozens of demonstrators. Gachagua broke with Ruto as the president moved to bring Raila Odinga’s ODM into government to contain the protests, undermining his influence within the ruling coalition.

In May, Gachagua travelled to London and other British cities to mobilise diaspora networks and campaign funding. On August 26, he embarked on a 50-day American tour, holding meetings with

Kenyan expatriates, business executives and potential investors. Gachagua called on Washington, London, Berlin and Paris to intervene in Kenya, invoking the role played by US Ambassador Smith Hempstone in the 1990s to stabilise capitalist rule amid mounting opposition to the Moi regime. Gachagua declared: “We are asking the American, British, German and France governments to intervene”.

Behind their claims to defend democracy, Kenya’s capitalist opposition parties are all courting the imperialist powers that played a brutal role during colonialism, then backed post-independence Kenyan regimes that attacked workers and peasants and are now involved in a series of bloody wars—NATO’s against Russia in the Ukraine, Israel’s genocide in Gaza, the US–Israeli war against Iran. For Kenyan workers, these wars have driven up fuel, transport and food prices, compounding the devastating impact of Ruto’s austerity.

For the millions of workers and youth who rose up against Ruto in 2024 and 2025, none of these forces advances a programme to end IMF austerity, halt Kenya’s participation in US-backed military and police operations across Africa and the Caribbean, expel US and British forces from Kenyan soil, or challenge the stranglehold of international finance capital over the economy.

The Gen Z uprising demonstrated the enormous potential for a mass movement cutting across the ethnic divisions cultivated by the Kenyan bourgeoisie. But it also exposed the political bankruptcy of the established opposition, above all ODM, which intervened to prop up Ruto. The danger now is that the immense social anger produced by austerity, unemployment, inequality and police repression will once again be diverted behind one or another supposedly lesser evil in the 2027 elections.

The central lesson is the necessity of building a new, independent revolutionary party of the working class, opposed to all factions of the Kenyan bourgeoisie and their imperialist backers. Such a party must unite workers and youth across tribal lines, linking the struggle against austerity and state repression to the fight against capitalism. This means turning to the working class throughout East Africa and internationally, in the struggle for workers’ power and socialism.



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