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Keeping the peace – just about

Kenya's presidential rivals are urging calm following a hotly contested election

This Tuesday saw Kenyans queue for hours to cast their ballots in what was predicted to be an extremely tight presidential election. With most of the votes now counted, the incumbent president Uhuru Kenyatta appears to have a strong lead, polling at around 55 percent, compared to 44 percent for his rival, Raila Odinga. Odinga, leader of the National Super Alliance (NASA), claims hackers broke into the election commission's systems and rigged the count in Kenyatta's favour – an allegation that sparked isolated protests in Odinga's strongholds. Ellie Mears spoke to Titus Kaloki from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Nairobi about what implications the vote will have for Kenya and the wider world.

What were the main campaign issues this election?

The main campaign issues were the high cost of living, youth unemployment and corruption. However, during campaigning there was little serious discussion of issues affecting Kenyans. Far more important was the issue of ethnicity. Kenyans tend to vote along ethnic lines, and the 2017 election was no exception. Whereas Kenyatta, the 55-year-old son of the first president, Jomo Kenyatta, is a Kikuyu, his rival Raila Odinga belongs to the Luo ethnic group. Much of their campaign strategy involved forging alliances with other ethnic groups, so as to win votes from their members. During campaign rallies, the presidential candidates addressed the crowds directly by their ethnicity. The system is widely accepted in Kenyan society, where it is not uncommon to hand privileges to certain ethnic groups in, say, business dealings.

Though perhaps broadly acceptable to voters, some, like yourself, argue that as long as the patronage system exists, Kenyans will not really be able to take hold of their own destiny. Are there any groups attempting to combat this practice?

Most civil society organizations have attempted through TV and Radio commercials to preach against tribalism. The Uwiano Platform for Peace and the Uraia Trust have led the way. In terms of what the

government is doing, the National Commission on Integration and Cohesion has send out patriotic messages to Kenyans warning them against tribalism.

How have Kenyans reacted to Kenyatta's win?

Most Kenyans believe the elections were free and fair and that Uhuru Kenyatta won. They are urging Raila Odinga to accept the result, and that peace prevail. Alongside the presidential elections there were five other ballots – for governors, senators, members of parliament, women representatives to the National Assembly and members of county assemblies. Most people seem to agree with the outcomes of these ballots too.

Raila Odinga has called the result of the presidential elections fraudulent, claiming his party's own assessment of the vote puts him ahead of Kenyatta. On what basis is he making this claim?

His initial claims were based on the alleged hacking of Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) servers. He argued that the servers automatically inflated Kenyatta's voter share when transmitting the results. He also released the computer logs and data to support his claims which were quickly refuted by IT experts as impossible and fake. Wafula Chebukati, chairman of the electoral commission, also rejected claims of a hack initially, although he has since admitted an "unsuccessful attempt" may have been made to hack the system. The IEBC has now called all presidential agents to examine over 40,000 forms signed by the presiding officers at each polling station, which detail the votes given to each candidate. They are tallying these together to reach a final result.

Is Odinga likely to launch a legal challenge? What is the procedure?

That is the only recourse. He has to go to the high court or supreme court. A special division of the judiciary was formed before the elections to handle election disputes. However, Odinga had promised in the past not to go to court, so there is a possibility of him calling for mass protests to force a political deal with Kenyatta.

We've seen some small-scale demonstrations against the result. What's being done to make sure they don't erupt into widespread violence, as happened after the 2007 elections?

The protests were quickly dispersed. The police presence here is heavy to deter such protests, especially in areas marked as hotspots. However, many Kenyans are using their social media accounts to call for peace, and the mainstream media is giving protests a blackout to

avoid inciting others to violence. The international observers are also calling for calm and restraint as we await the final results.

Just two weeks before this year's elections, the Electoral Commission's IT manager, Chris Msando, was found tortured to death. How is his death being perceived Kenyatta's Jubilee Party and the opposition?

Kenyans are used to unsolved murders and Chris Msando's murder is not a special case. Many Kenyans will quickly move on. Odinga tried to politicise Msando's death by alleging his user access was used to hack the IEBC servers, but those claims have been refuted by IEBC and other IT experts. The Jubilee Party have called on the police to investigate his death but Kenyans do not expect much to come out of it. Within a week it will be old news.

What role did social media play in election campaigning?

Social media was used extensively by both the Jubilee Party and NASA to broadcast their campaign promises and propaganda, share campaign updates and mobilise supporters. Thanks to social media, neither team ended up spending huge amounts on producing posters as in previous campaigns. Kenyatta even used Facebook Live to answer public questions instead of attending a TV debate. However, there were also many cases of ethnic incitement through social media. It was a very effective tool for most candidates in reaching supporters. The Jubilee Party even hired Cambridge Analytica to devise a social media campaign strategy. Unfortunately, both sides also used social media to spread fake news about each other.

Despite political and ethnic tensions, Kenya is one of Africa's strongest economies and still seen by many as a pillar of stability in a fragile region. What is the secret to Kenya's apparent success?

Kenya's strength is its human capital. Many Kenyans are well educated and are entrepreneurial. That is why our technological, financial and other service sector industries are flourishing. Because our founding fathers accepted a capitalist ideology early on, all Kenyans believe in working for their own interests, which heightens competition and thus innovation. It also deters war, as most people do not want to lose their possessions. Also, the one party rule under the KANU party for almost 40 years did ensure patriotism, rather than tribalism, received more of an emphasis. That is why we did not have civil wars. The dictatorships ensured troublemakers disappeared and the population feared dissent. Tribalism has actually been fostered by multi-party democracy. However, even now the intelligence and security services are swift in extra judicial killings of dissidents who

they believe will cause major trouble. Finally, Kenya is also in a geopolitically strategic location with a good harbour and port, and better road infrastructure and internet connectivity than most of its neighbours, making it the Eastern African commercial hub.



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