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Kenyans Decide 2017: Countdown to August 8, 2017

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Kenyans lining up to vote

With less than fifty days to go before Kenyans go to the polls on August 8, 2017, the country (and horn of Africa) is holding its collective breath and hoping for a peaceful election and equally peaceful aftermath in one of the region's erstwhile pivotal economies.

In this 2017 election cycle, the main candidates** incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta (Jubilee Coalition) and his closest AND main competitor Opposition leader Raila Odinga (National



they saw in 2013 as it is markedly different.



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** - There are 18 presidential candidates of which 7 are each affiliated with a party and 11 are running as independents

The 2017 race is different because Mr. Kenyatta and Mr. Ruto are no longer facing crimes-against-humanity charges at The Hague.

The two beat back the charges NOT because they were innocent, but because Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta “harassed and intimidated potential witnesses” compelling Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda to “*withdraw the charges against (him).....without prejudice to the possibility of bringing a new case should additional evidence become available.*” Likewise, Mr. William Ruto escaped conviction due to “*insufficient evidence*” and what one judge described as a “*troubling incidence of witness interference and intolerable political meddling*”.

Simply put, the current president and his deputy avoided conviction at The Hague because they obstructed justice by scaring the witnesses to death – literally and metaphorically.

The landscape is also similar to that of 2013 but even more disturbing, to that of 2007/8.

As was the case in 2007, Kenya's premier electoral body, this time the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commissions (IEBC), is once again the epitome of incompetent planning and conflict of interest machinations; the latter illustrated by allegations of the single-source issuance of the ballot printing tender to a company – Al Ghurair Printing & Publishing Ltd. – with ties to Mr. Kenyatta's family.



congealed around ethnic royalties, itself not necessarily a bad thing, but portends a worrisome darkness given the lackadaisical almost non-existent attempts by the current government to address some of the issues that drove and continue to drive post-election violence in Kenya.

The incumbent Mr. Kenyatta and his running-mate Mr. Ruto are hoping to replicate the “[tyranny of numbers](#)” calculus that saw the [GEMA](#) (Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association) and Kalenjin communities respectively of Mt. Kenya/Central AND Rift Valley throw their weight behind the two in 2013.

Mr. Odinga and his running mate Kalonzo Musyoka have added Musalia Mudavadi, Moses Wetangula and Isaac Ruto to their larger ethnic tent that now includes voters from the Luo, Kamba, Luhya and some Kalenjin communities. Also throwing his lot behind the NASA Alliance is Mombasa Governor Hassan Joho and communities around the coastal region.

My take is that the 2017 Elections will be won by the party (and candidate) that can appeal to a critical mass of Kenyans across the tribal divide - who also believe that their fortunes are markedly better than it was four years ago. The hope is that those with access to the levers of power do not resort to the [Tharaka Nithi-like machination of 2007](#) that saw Mr. Mwai Kibaki sworn (back) into power under cover of darkness while simultaneously plunging the country into violence.

Having offered the cautious optimism, let me also point out that it is the aforementioned stratified demographics combined with unresolved historical injustices - mostly around land ownership - that have been exploited by politicians throughout Kenya’s history; a phenomenon that continues to this day.

Mr. Kenyatta’s Jubilee has [hired](#) the Robert Mercer-funded data mining firm Cambridge Analytica to help shape its campaign message. True to form, the firm that also worked on Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign has fashioned a similarly fear-based (xenophobic) message designed to scare Jubilee’s base to the polls.

Raila Odinga, for his part has increased the call for the public release AND implementation of the recommendations of the [Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission](#) (TJRC) Report. Jubilee wasted little time [characterizing](#) this valid issue as one advocating xenophobia against its supporters - some of who are spread out throughout the country.



have ratcheted up the tensions as unresolved historical issues (have) become campaign fodder. An encouraging sign, again as evidenced by social media postings, is the near-universal desire the country has to “listen to” each other but even more importantly, to respect one another’s views and ultimate choice.

I have previously argued against the re-election of Mr. Kenyatta and Mr. Ruto because of their record on grand corruption, impunity and incompetence.

My position has not changed.

The duo has failed to deliver on all save one of their 2013 campaign promises – Develop a cogent foreign relations and trade policy for Kenya. And on this promise, the (foreign) policy was fundamentally driven by the government’s relentless efforts to garner (Africa’s) support against the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its cases against Kenyatta and Ruto.

To be clear, the opposition NASA Coalition has struggled to piece together a coherent case on why it should be elected. However, there is little doubt that they offer a markedly different path for a larger portion of the country than the one Jubilee has offered over the past four years. Under Jubilee, lack of basic planning has combined with grand corruption and impunity to exacerbate the year-long famine and shortage of essential food items prompting food aid from China, Dubai and Israel. The foregoing have combined to see Kenya fall behind Ethiopia as the region’s premier economy and just ahead of Uganda as its most corrupt!

As written in the Standard newspaper:

“Most of these countries have zero-tolerance towards corruption and wastage that have become endemic in Kenya. Of the nine Eastern Africa countries, only Uganda ranks above Kenya in Transparency International’s corruption perceptions index.”

That President Kenyatta’s own family and his deputy William Ruto have all been implicated in multiple corruption scandals during their 1st term fully explains Kenya’s inability to address the scourge.

The argument has been made that the opposition does not offer a viable alternative and will, in fact, be worse because the “corruption will be spread out among five individuals”. As incredulous as this may sound, that may not be such a bad thing i.e. spreading the ill-gotten



fruits of independence may alleviate the pervading sense that Kenya ma wenyewe or “Kenya has its owners” who get to “eat” - while the rest of the country “salivates”.

Finally, the specter of the International Criminal Court (ICC) still looms large over the country and its leaders. It is inconceivable that Mr. Kenyatta and Mr. Ruto would want their crimes-against-humanity cases to be reopened – they were NOT acquitted. It is equally unimaginable that former Prime Minister Raila Odinga and former Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka would allow the country to degenerate into the violence the whole world witnessed in 2007.

Based on the public discourse in the run-up to August 8, Kenyans, having come face to face with post-election violence that saw thousands brutally murdered (including about 40 women and children who had taken refuge in a church) and another 600,000 displaced, do not want a repeat of the events of December 2007.

As offered by the [Washington Post](#):

“All sides know from painful experience that Kenya has much to lose if its leaders fail to act responsibly. The sheen of progress that the country showed off recently could be quickly wiped out.”



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