



## KENYA: Violence clouds post-poll outlook

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**EVENT:** The death toll in post-election violence has today surpassed 300.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** President Mwai Kibaki's narrow and heavily disputed re-election in the December 27 poll has provoked serious unrest in Nairobi and especially in western Kenya. The longer it lasts, the more serious the political, social and economic consequences could be.

**ANALYSIS:** The results of the presidential election on December 27 were not finally reported until December 30, a significant delay that sharply raised tensions and drew the criticism of international and domestic election monitors (see [KENYA: Presidential poll goes down to the wire - December 24, 2007](#)). President Mwai Kibaki was sworn in within an hour of the announcement of his narrow victory over Raila Odinga, who has rejected the results. Some violence had accompanied the tense tabulation period, but it was only after Kibaki's win was announced that serious clashes broke out. More than 300 are now reported dead, mainly civilians.

**Outlook.** The implications of the violence break down along four lines:

1. **Duration and scale.** A key question is how long the unrest will continue. Violence has accompanied previous Kenyan elections: although the 2002 polls were relatively peaceful, those in 1992 and 1997 saw serious clashes. Over 3,000 were killed in the run-up to and following the 1992 polls, and over 250,000 people displaced. To date, the death toll in the current unrest is much lower, though in two respects it is more dangerous:

- Groups have targeted ethnic Kikuyus, mostly in multiethnic areas where they are a minority.
- The violence is taking place beyond areas associated with unrest in previous elections.

The violence has diminished over the past two days. However, Odinga has said he still plans to hold a rally tomorrow, at which he will be declared "people's president". This could lead to a serious confrontation between his supporters and police in Nairobi. It could also reignite tensions outside of the capital.

2. **Social impact.** The ethnic dimension of the clashes has drawn comparisons with the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Members of Kibaki's Kikuyu ethnic base have been targeted in attacks, with retaliatory violence directed against Odinga's Luo base and other groups allied to the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), including the Kalenjin. However, parallels with Rwanda are shallow at best:

- There is no state-sponsored campaign of violence against a single ethnic group. Although they are the largest group, the Kikuyu make up only 17% of the population; the Luo comprise 11% and the Kalenjin 10%.
- The country is too ethnically diverse for a genocidal campaign to take hold, although Kibaki has accused Odinga of orchestrating "ethnic cleansing". While politics is certainly influenced by ethnic considerations, a key element of Odinga's electoral performance was his ability to secure support beyond his Luo base.
- Rwanda's genocide took place in the context of a civil war between a minority Tutsi insurgency and a majority Hutu regime. Civil war appears highly unlikely in Kenya, although resentment at perceived Kikuyu political and economic dominance since independence is reflected in, and will be entrenched by, the post-election violence.

These distinctions aside, the violence is a blow to the prospects of multi-ethnic political cooperation in the future.

3. **Economic effects.** The unrest has disrupted activities in Mombassa, which serves as the main port not only for Kenya, but also for much of the Great Lakes region. Investor confidence and the tourism sector took years to recover from the 1998 US embassy bombing and 2000 Mombassa terrorist attacks. Tourism in particular can be expected to suffer as a result of the violence. Portfolio investment could recover more swiftly, if the political situation calms soon. Protracted violence will damage investor confidence for the longer term.

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4. **Mediation?** Neither Odinga nor Kibaki appear ready to compromise. Kibaki has accepted international calls for talks, but will not accept Odinga's precondition that he acknowledge the elections were fraudulent. For now, Washington and the EU appear to favour some kind of power-sharing, and they have been most critical of Kibaki.

The president may have believed that he would be able to weather any unrest following the controversial result. He survived a stinging defeat in the November 2005 constitutional referendum; survived the February 2006 corruption scandals; and believes that his administration has a role as a key ally in US counter-terrorism activities in the region. However, international and domestic perceptions of flaws in the election will undermine Kibaki's position.

Although shops are closing down in the capital ahead of the expected ODM rally tomorrow, the capital is secure. Security personnel have closed off the one road from the poor Kabeira slum, where many of Odinga's supporters are located; so turnout at the rally will be limited. Kibaki has not declared a state of emergency.

However, the scale of the violence elsewhere may force him to reconsider. Moreover, doubts being voiced from within the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) over the validity of the results -- along with international pressure -- may create irresistible momentum towards a retabulation. This position will be further strengthened by the ODM's parliamentary majority.

Nevertheless, a retabulation (rather than a full recount) will only uncover fraud where the tally from the polling station does not match that from the ECK; more subtle rigging done at the stations themselves will not be exposed. As such, it may not be enough to change the results -- which could lead to more unrest.

The violence is also undermining the legitimacy of the ODM and its leaders. This is because, though Odinga and the party leadership are almost certainly not orchestrating the violence, they have not pressured their supporters to stop the organised attacks on Kikuyus. This is eroding Odinga's support outside of his ethnic base.

**CONCLUSION:** The violence that has greeted the heavily disputed presidential election result is not new in Kenya. However, the targeting of ethnic Kikuyu and the more widespread nature of the violence mean that it will have a lasting negative impact on ethnic political relations. Assuming political stability is soon restored, the economy can be expected to recover swiftly.

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