

# ELECTION WATCH

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KENYA 2002 ELECTIONS

## COMMENTARY

On Monday, October 7, 2002, the latest opinion poll commissioned by the Media Institute and conducted by Strategic Public Relations and Research was released. This is part of the series of opinion polls that the Media Institute is conducting to gauge Kenyan public opinion on the candidates and political parties in anticipation of the general elections later this year.

The results of this poll marked a radical departure from the first one, which was released in August 2002 and showed Uhuru Kenyatta and KANU with a commanding lead over any presidential candidate nominated by the National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK). However, after a strong push by the NAK to promote a unified front and single candidate, as well as continuing infighting in KANU, the most recent opinion poll suggests that Mwai Kibaki and the NAK have a strong likelihood of defeating Uhuru Kenyatta in the general elections – leading to the first alternance of power in Kenya's post-independence history.

### Main Results of the Poll

In the August poll, Uhuru Kenyatta was favored to win both the KANU nomination and the general elections, while Raila Odinga was polling second. In fact, the poll revealed that any of the KANU contenders for the presidency, namely Uhuru, Raila, Musalia Mudavadi or George Saitoti, would beat any candidate of the National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK).

However, in the poll released in early October, NAK presidential candidate Mwai Kibaki emerged as the favorite to win the presidency if elections were held immediately, polling at 25.6 percent of the votes, ahead of George Saitoti with 22.7 percent and Uhuru Kenyatta with 17.6 percent. Saitoti also edged Uhuru as the most popular candidate to win the KANU nominations, with Raila coming in third. Furthermore, according to the poll, a straight race between Uhuru and Kibaki would yield a landslide victory for the latter, with 67.5 percent of the

voters expressing their preference for the NAK candidate and Uhuru attracting only 26.7 percent of the vote. Ford-People presidential candidate Simeon Nyachae continued to perform dismally, polling at a meagre 7.5 percent of the total votes.

In fact, in the six head-to-head scenarios envisioned by the poll, Kibaki would win in four, against any candidate (Uhuru, Raila, Kalonzo Musyoka and Nyachae) except for former Vice President Saitoti.

With respect to political parties, the poll results indicate that the Rainbow Alliance is currently the most popular political grouping, with 38.8 percent of the votes, ahead of NAK with 31.4 percent and the KANU faction supporting the Uhuru Project scoring 20.1 percent. Thus, the results suggest that the NAK and the Rainbow Alliance represent the greatest threat to KANU's hold on power since the advent of multiparty politics in Kenya.

## **What explains the changes?**

Analysts cite a number of factors to explain the results of the October 2002 poll and the dramatic changes from earlier polls, including:

### **1) NAK Unity**

Despite the commonly-held belief in Kenya that the NAK would fracture over the naming of a single presidential candidate, the alliance has held together and named Mwai Kibaki as its candidate, along with promising other key governmental posts to top coalition leadership such as Charity Ngilu and Kijana Wamalwa. Some observers believe that the mere fact that the alliance survived through this nomination process has served to generate support from the public, who are now considering it to be a viable alternative to KANU in the post-Moi era.

### **2) Increased Political Party Activity**

Over the last several months, political parties – particularly the NAK and the Rainbow Alliance – have intensified outreach and campaigns across the country, whereas the major political activity in August was the KANU marketing of the “Uhuru Project”. The general public has now had greater exposure to the NAK, Rainbow Alliance and their respective policies and platforms, and is now better informed when making political choices.

### **3) Divisions within KANU**

The emergence – and growing popularity – of the Rainbow Alliance in KANU has posed serious problems to Moi’s plans for Uhuru as his successor. While marketing Uhuru across the country, Moi has been met on a number of occasions by crowds of demonstrators opposed to his preferred choice. Moreover, recent protests in Moi’s home province of the Rift Valley signalled eroding support even in traditional KANU strongholds.

## **Poll Methodology**

The second poll was based on a survey conducted between September 28 and October 1, 2002, involving a sample size of 2,654 respondents drawn from 46 constituencies across the eight provinces in Kenya. The sampling frame employed for this study was based on pre-determined geographic units using the 2002 voter registration figures to reflect the actual proportions of voters by province. Apart from questions on the parties and candidates, the survey also made inquiries related to public perceptions of the constitutional review process.

Moreover, two people were reportedly killed by police during a rally in Kakamega in Western province that was attended by Moi and other KANU members supportive of Uhuru’s candidacy.

### **4) Sacking of VP George Saitoti**

The manner in which former VP Saitoti was sacked, as well as his portrayal in the media as an independent-minded and experienced leader, has endeared him to the public. According to the poll results, Saitoti was the only candidate who would beat any opponent in any scenario, if the Rainbow Alliance were to join another party or contest the election as its own party with him as the presidential candidate.

### **5) Support for Constitutional Reforms**

Except for the mainstream KANU, each party or coalition has voiced its support for the recently released draft constitutional report. In fact, the opinion poll showed an emphatic vote of confidence from the public for the work of the Ghai Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC). A mere nine percent of the people interviewed shared Moi’s opposition to the CKRC report. The backing of each of the major coalitions for the CKRC may have translated to greater public support in the poll results.