

NDI ELECTION WATCH

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KENYA 2002 ELECTIONS

Summary

On November 18 and 19, 2002, the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) cleared five presidential contenders to run for the general elections scheduled for December 27, 2002: Uhuru Kenyatta of KANU, Mwai Kibaki of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), Simeon Nyachae of Ford-People and the Kenya People's Coalition (KPC), James Orenge of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Waweru Ng'ethe of little-known Chama Cha Umma. Political party nominations of parliamentary and civic candidates are set to take place from November 20 to 24, in anticipation of the November 26 deadline imposed by the ECK. Political defections have also marked the political scene in recent weeks as potential candidates migrate to parties they think most likely to offer them a nomination – and possible electoral success.

Presidential Nominations

Following the nomination of five presidential candidates by the ECK, the stage is set for one of the fiercest election campaigns in the political history of Kenya. Of nine candidates who expressed interest in running for the presidency, the five mentioned above were duly cleared by the ECK, while two failed to meet the legal requirements and were technically disqualified, one bowed out of the race and declared support for NARC, and the last simply did not show up for nomination.

KANU's Uhuru Kenyatta, escorted by President Daniel arap Moi and Vice President Musalia Mudavadi (his proposer and seconder, respectively), was the first candidate to present himself for nomination. In a strong show of support following weeks of high-level defections, Uhuru was also accompanied by a host of cabinet

ministers and KANU Members of Parliament (MPs). NARC presidential candidate Mwai Kibaki, joined by a number of NARC leaders including Raila Odinga and former VP George Saitoti, was second to present his papers.

Later in the day, the two leading contenders addressed thousands of supporters in separate celebration rallies organized to kick off the final phase leading up to the general elections. KANU went to great lengths to ensure its rally would be an overwhelming demonstration of its support among Kenyan citizens, with supporters from all over the country being dropped off by the busload well before the celebration began at Uhuru Park. The NARC rally at Nyayo Stadium was largely attended only by Nairobi residents; nevertheless, large crowds were present at both rallies, underlining the fact that these elections are likely to be fiercely contested.

Parliamentary and Civic Nominations

KANU and NARC, the two major political groupings in Kenya, have set their nominations for parliamentary and civic candidates to take place from November 20 to 24, 2002. In case of possible fallout after the process, NARC has elected to spread its nomination for the first three days of that period, while KANU has maintained its earlier date of November 21. Both parties have indicated that they will use multiple methods for nomination, most likely the secret ballot and the queue voting system. NARC is also encouraging candidates to come to their own consensus on who is best placed to win the elections.

Political Defections

Political defections continue to occur as candidates strategically position themselves in parties that hold election promise. Over the last several weeks, there has been a virtual deluge of both high- and mid-level politicians from KANU to NARC, surprising many observers who thought such traffic would likely be in both directions. The latest high-profile defections from KANU include former cabinet minister Joseph Nyaga, former nominated MP and long-term Moi confidante Mark Too and former MP and chairman of the Industrial Development Bank Reuben Chesire. Nevertheless, KANU benefited from the defection of former cabinet minister Francis Mashakalia from the NARC.

The spate of defections from KANU to the opposition is reportedly causing ripples of concern within the KANU ranks, with insiders quoted as saying that the crisis is forcing the party to review its position on many issues. The defections could impact both parties in

Regardless of which method is used by either party, there will undoubtedly be disputes over the candidates selected, as the nomination process has historically been a period of significant intra-party conflict in Kenya. Nevertheless, both parties have taken steps to ensure that such disagreements will be settled judiciously and expeditiously and seem committed to minimizing their disruptive nature. Parties are also eager to finalize the nominations so they can turn their attention to campaigning and to identifying party agents for pollwatching and other confidence-building measures in the electoral process.

some unforeseen ways related to electoral preparations. For example, both have also expressed worries that previous trainings for party agents may now be rendered ineffective, as those participants could have been tied to candidates that may no longer be in the party or the party's nominee.

As outlined in a November 17 article in *The Nation*, the defections raise a number of questions, including how significant their effects are on both the losing and gaining parties.¹ Analysts largely agree that the defections will have widespread ramifications for KANU in particular because the party is losing people who were previously point men in various geographic areas. The Rift Valley Province is likely of particular concern to Moi and other KANU leaders, as many of the

¹ See http://www.nationaudio.com/News/DailyNation/17112002/Comment/Election_200234.html for a more detailed discussion of how the defections are affecting the political environment.

defections have been key Moi allies and relatives from that traditional KANU stronghold.

In the numbers game that will decide the election's outcome, KANU's possible inability to win its traditional strongholds could spell electoral disaster for the ruling party. As things presently stand, the three key provinces that have traditionally voted KANU – Western, Eastern and Coast – are increasingly becoming swing constituencies that could be up for grabs by any party that mounts an

aggressive campaign in those areas. Capitalizing on that opening, the NARC has launched what appears to be an effective onslaught in certain key provinces, some of which are generally KANU strongholds. According to a recent opinion poll, the NARC would easily garner 25 percent in the following six provinces, out of a total of eight in Kenya: Western, Nyanza, Nairobi, Central, Eastern and Coast. Of course, it remains to be seen if the NARC can consolidate these gains in the period between now and election day.

Access to Media Coverage

Although the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) had previously promised to broadcast live all the presidential nominations – and the KANU nomination was indeed covered live – the NARC candidate was blacked out midway through his presentation. Suspicions were further raised when the KBC first offered a technical hitch as the explanation, then later said that they had not set up for the event because of fears that NARC supporters might destroy their expensive equipment – despite the fact that the two nominations were held in the same venue and the equipment had clearly already been used there. Later in the day, the KBC resumed live coverage of the KANU rally attended by Moi while giving a total blackout to the NARC celebration. These events have confirmed the concerns of many Kenya analysts who have pointed to unequal access to and coverage by the media as a major indicator of an uneven playing field in the pre-election and campaign period.