

AUG 14, 2022

# Kenya's Presidential Election

This is The Weekly Letter for August 14, 2022. [About this newsletter](#)

## Big Story

Kenyans went to the polls on Tuesday to elect new leaders, including a new President, replacing incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta, who is term-limited. The two main candidates in the influential East African country are former Prime Minister Raila Odinga and Deputy President William Ruto.

Odinga is a veteran politician who has spent most of his career in opposition. He is vying for the presidency for the fifth time. Violence costing the lives of over 1,000 people followed the disputed 2007 election which pitted Odinga against then-incumbent Mwai Kibaki, and a national unity government was ultimately formed with Kibaki remaining President and Odinga becoming Prime Minister. The 2017 election was also disputed—the initial vote was annulled and Odinga boycotted the second vote, leading to the re-election of Kenyatta. Despite their history of rivalry, Odinga and Kenyatta mended fences in 2018 and Odinga has the backing of the outgoing President in this year's election. Odinga has campaigned against corruption, and an aspect of his economic platform is direct monthly economic support for some households. On his ticket is Martha Karua, who would be the first woman to serve as Deputy President.

Whereas Odinga was an adversary of Kenyatta until 2018, Ruto was a former ally. However, Kenyatta and his Deputy President had a falling out, and in this election Ruto is portraying himself as a self-made man who represents a break with Kenya's political dynasties (Kenyatta is the son of Kenya's first post-independence President, Jomo Kenyatta; Odinga is the son of Kenya's first Vice President, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga). Coming from a humble background and succeeding in business and politics, Ruto describes himself as a hustler and, if elected, he promises to establish a fund for granting loans to entrepreneurs.

The economy is the key issue in the election, with the cost of living, unemployment, and national debt as problems. Addressing corruption is also on many voters' minds.

The violence following the 2007 election still casts a shadow, and, as Nanjala Nyabola [writes](#) in an opinion piece, "all of the people on the major tickets have blood on their hands from that cycle." However, there is optimism that the situation today is different from 2007 and the election will not be accompanied by violence.

In an [opinion piece](#), Samira Sawlani writes that early indications from the election suggest that there was a high level of abstention among young people. Young Kenyans have little belief that either of the two main candidates will address the issues facing the country, as both Odinga and Ruto "sit at the apex of a system that has failed to counter endemic [youth unemployment](#), skyrocketing [debt](#) and a rising [cost of living](#). In the eyes of many young people, expecting change from such stalwarts of the status quo is a fool's errand."

Although some votes have been [officially tallied](#), as of Saturday, the election has not yet been called.



### Sources/Further Reading:

- Short videos on the election from [AL Jazeera](#) and [Sky News](#).
- [Election special issue](#) of *The Continent* newspaper.
- Brief *New York Times* profiles of [Odinga](#) and [Ruto](#).
- Articles on Martha Karua, candidate for Deputy President, from [Mail & Guardian](#) and [Reuters](#).

## Opinion

- Ezra Klein:** From text to TV to Twitter, different media technologies [shape us](#) differently. (NY Times, 8/7)
- Bill McKibben:** The climate component of the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) is a major win. Still, the bill "reflects not just the growing strength of the climate movement but also the lingering power of the fossil-fuel industry..." (New Yorker, 7/31)
- Vladimir Kara-Murza:** From prison, I can tell that many Russians [oppose the Ukraine war](#). (Washington Post, 8/5)

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