

MAMBO !

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Political developments in Kenya towards the 2007 elections

While rumours of an imminent dissolution of Parliament, and of General Elections to be held before Christmas, political activity in Kenya seemed to intensify. In less than a month, the three main presidential contenders Mwai Kibaki (Party of National Unity–PNU), Raila Odinga (Orange Democratic Movement–ODM) and Kalonzo Musyoka (Orange Democratic Movement of Kenya–ODM-K) successively launched their electoral campaigns. Additionally, to attract support, the two favourites, Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga mobilised their allies in the country's key regions.¹

On the other hand, while Mwai Kibaki appeared to dominate opinion polls since mid-2006, his popularity progressively diminished such that, for the first time, at the end of September 2007, Raila Odinga took the lead as the voters' preferred choice.² There are certainly several explanations for this reversal in trend but it is possibly as a result of two factors: one, the delayed launching by Kibaki of his campaign, and two, the division within the Orange camp, which led to the split of the movement. However, this latter had the unexpected and paradoxical result of clarifying the position of Raila Odinga and his supporters.

Mwai Kibaki's delayed campaign launch

The great hopes elicited in 2002 by the election of Mwai Kibaki as President were very quickly overtaken by disillusionment and 2005 proved to be particularly difficult for the President.³ His disastrous defeat during the referendum on the new Constitution was accompanied by a drought in the north east of the country at the end of the year, threatening the lives of 3.5 million Kenyans. The failure during the referendum also sounded the death knell for the Government of National Unity after the sacking of seven ministers who called for the 'NO' vote.⁴ The year 2006 was not a comfortable year for the President due to the multitude of scandals and political derailments as well as accusations of corruption which cost several ministers their posts.⁵ Among these were the Artur brothers, presumed mercenaries,⁶ the police raid on the Standard Media Group,⁷ and the financial difficulties of the Uchumi Supermarkets group.⁸ The Kibaki government also faced numerous acts of violence; particularly inter-community fighting in the Mount Kenya region and confrontation linked to the Mungiki sect in the Central Province and the Mathare slums in Nairobi. Whereas all

these events could have logically weakened the presidential camp, Kibaki nevertheless held on to his popularity. From May 2006, during elections held in Marsabit, Moyale and Nakuru, three candidates supported by Kibaki won the polls⁹ and several opinion polls given in 2006 and 2007 had Mwai Kibaki as the preferred candidate for the presidential election. This relative popularity of the President was for largely linked to the successes of his administration in the economic domain, since the country witnessed high growth rates and the revival of several industrial companies (Kenya Meat Commission, Kenya Co-operation Creameries, Mumias Sugar Company, Kenya Seed Company). Counting amongst Kibaki's successes was the free primary education programme, which would have benefited more than seven million children, and the establishment of the 'Youth Fund' and the 'Constituency Development Fund – CDF'. He took every opportunity to remind Kenyans about these successes, asking re-election so as "to continue the work".¹⁰ However it is only on the 16th of September 2007 that he officially announced the name of the party under whose banner he would carry out his campaign. On whose ticket the

President would contest the election. Whereas Mwai Kibaki had been elected in December 2002 as the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) candidate¹¹, the group split during the campaign on the referendum for a new Constitution. Members of Parliament from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) united with some members of the opposition to form the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), calling for a rejection of the document. After its failure on the referendum¹² and because NARC seemed weakened by the departure of LDP members, some MPs allied to Kibaki formed a new party, which they called NARC-Kenya.¹³ Nevertheless, Mwai Kibaki never publicly announced that he was supporting NARC-K, because leaving NARC would have meant that he had abandoned the party through which he had been elected as a President. However, it would also have been difficult for him to announce that he would contest the 2007 election on a NARC ticket because of the departure of several members of the coalition. This probably explains why Kibaki waited until September 2007 to state that he would be the candidate with the support of a new coalition, the Party of National Unity (PNU), regrouping several political parties that were backing him.¹⁴ The creation of this new alliance however did not shed light on Kibaki's campaign, considering that the political parties which formed it had various interests. The resultant division mainly concerned the way parliamentary and civic aspirants should be elected; several parties had expressed the will to present their own candidates, rather than under the PNU ticket. After intensive talks between the interested parties, it was decided that all the groups would present their candidates under the PNU banner, apart from the Kenya African National Union

(KANU), which was allowed to present independent candidates.¹⁵ However, this was regarded as special treatment by some political parties within the association and they announced their intention to do the same, fearing that they would be absorbed by the PNU.¹⁶

These divisions monopolised the debates within the PNU while they should have been mobilising the members of the new coalition on common campaign topics. This may have contributed to the shifting trend at the end of September and to Kibaki's drop in the opinion polls. At the same time, the split of the Orange movement put an end to the fight for leadership between Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka. This gave Raila the opportunity to concentrate on his campaign, contributing to the growing interest of the public in his favour.

The divisions in the Orange camp and the consecration of Raila Odinga as the ODM candidate

Created as a lobby group to pressurise against the draft Constitution (Wako Draft) in the referendum organised for November 2005, the Orange Movement, which officially became a political party in August 2006—Orange Democratic Movement Kenya (ODM-K), was in reality only an alliance formed under specific circumstances, rendering it particularly fragile.¹⁷ The creation of this new party was certainly motivated by a desire to face NARC-K. The good results of this latter during the July by-elections had convinced the members of the Orange Movement that they had to remain united if they did not want to fail in 2007. However, from its origins, the alliance, regrouping mainly MPs from the LDP, KANU and the Liberal Party of Kenya (LPK), provoked debates within the ranks of KANU. Some of its members actually feared that the

party, the oldest in Kenya, would be dissolved in ODM-K, as had been the case of the parties which had formed NARC. KANU then divided into two camps; one allied to Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, favourable to an alliance with the Orange party, and the other led by Nicholas Biwott, opposed to any association with the new group. The divide aggravated when the former President Daniel arap Moi gave his support to Mwai Kibaki in the race for presidency. This alliance was hardly surprising, considering the mutual hostility of the two men towards Raila Odinga.¹⁸ However, such a link could have represented the most serious threat for ODM-K, especially in the Rift Valley where Moi still wields great influence on the Kalenjin community.¹⁹ Moreover, the decision of Daniel arap Moi to support Mwai Kibaki placed Uhuru Kenyatta in an awkward position—it became difficult for him to maintain his candidature to the presidency against the wish of his mentor as this risked an irreversible division of KANU. Therefore, Uhuru Kenyatta finally retired from the Orange camp to support Mwai Kibaki.²⁰ Paradoxically, this surprising alliance between Kibaki, Moi and Kenyatta may have increased the popularity of Raila Odinga. It cannot be certain that the position of the former President really played in favour of Mwai Kibaki, despite the influence of Moi on the Rift Valley electorate being far much greater than in the past.²¹ On the other hand, according to some, the Kibaki administration had victimised the Kalenjin and they would therefore prefer to vote for other candidates.²² Lastly, the position of Uhuru Kenyatta towards the Orange movement had always been ambiguous and his support less than total. Thus, his defection might have helped the movement appear more

united, even if it later divided again.

Apart from the departure of Uhuru Kenyatta, the Orange camp indeed had to face the fight for leadership between Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka, the two party favourites, who differed on the method of choosing the future ODM-K candidate to the presidency.²³ The tension between the two men, exacerbated by the fight for the LDP leadership led to a final split in July 2007. Kalonzo Musyoka left the LDP to join LPK, the party headed by Julia Ojiambo. This caused a scission in the Orange movement: Raila Odinga took over the group that had been created by Mugambi Imanyara after the 2005 referendum and which was called 'Orange Democratic Movement Party' (ODM), while Kalonzo Musyoka remained with ODM-K. After the split Kalonzo Musyoka officially became the ODM-K candidate to the presidency, while Raila Odinga was chosen to represent ODM. Thus, the race to the presidency was to be a fight between three contenders, despite Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga being seen as the main opponents as a result of their greater mobilisation potential.²⁴ The main advantage of ODM compared to the party of Mwai Kibaki is that from the beginning, Raila Odinga announced that his group would not be a coalition but a party of individuals, thus dodging the issues that PNU faced concerning candidates to the parliamentary and civic posts. The departure of Kalonzo Musyoka undoubtedly contributed to Raila Odinga's victory when the presidential ODM candidate was chosen and also confirmed his popularity.²⁵

While no date has yet been announced for the general elections, it seems that Raila Odinga's camp enjoys great goodwill, heightened when two Ministers from the Kibaki

Government—Charity Ngilu (Health) and John Koech (East African Cooperation)—announced that they would support him. Nevertheless, prediction in politics is an uneasy exercise but it is not impossible that the difficulties Mwai Kibaki is experiencing in uniting his troops might cost him some precious votes.



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Endnotes

- ¹ Mwai Kibaki counts on the support of the former President, Daniel arap Moi and of (Kipruto Kirwa (Minister for Agriculture) in the Rift Valley, on Chirau Ali Makwere (Minister for Transport) in the Coast Province, on Musikari Kombo (Minister for Local Government) in Western Province, on Simeon Nyachae (Minster for Energy) for some parts of Nyanza, as well as several MPs from Central Province. Raila Odinga benefits from the popularity of Musalia Mudavadi in the western region; on Najib Balala in the coastal region, on Joseph Nyaga in the central eastern province, on William Ruto in the Rift Valley and on Fred Gumo and Reuben Ndolo in Nairobi.
- ² An initial opinion poll, published on 29 September 2007 gave Raila Odinga the lead in voter choice at 47% against 38% for Kibaki and 8% for Musyoka. *Saturday Nation*, 29/09/07, 'Raila tops table', p. 1. These figures were confirmed by following polls, for example, on 13 October 2007, Raila Odinga garnered 53% of voter choice as opposed to 38% for Mwai Kibaki and 8% for Kalonzo Musyoka. *Saturday Nation*, 13/10/07, p. 4, 'Raila stretches lead over his rivals'.
- ³ *Sunday Nation*, 01/01/06, '2005 was horrible year for President and his close allies', p. 12
- ⁴ After the rejection of the Constitution proposal during the 21 November 2005 referendum, Mwai Kibaki sacked

the entire Cabinet, with the exception of his Vice-President, Moody Awori and of the Attorney General, Amos Wako. Two weeks later, a new cabinet comprising the same people was formed, save for the seven ODM ministers, among whom were Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka. They were replaced by pro-government parliamentarians.

- ⁵ Several 'heavy weights' of the Kibaki administration were cited in corruption issues and Chris Murungaru, George Saitoti and David Mwiraria were removed from the political scene. However, the latter two were re-integrated into the government.
- ⁶ The two Armenian brothers, Margaryan and Sargasyan, were deported at the beginning of June 2006, after having caused a major security scare at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. In a report given in September 2007, the Artur brothers were presented as drug traffickers who had protection from the highest State organs. *Daily Nation*, 28/09/07, pp. 4-5.
- ⁷ On the night of 2 and 3 March 2006, police officers and secret service agents invaded the offices of the Standard Media Group, setting newspapers on fire, halting the television programmes on KTN and causing damages and losses amounting to several million shillings.
- ⁸ All branches of the supermarket chain were closed on 1 June 2006 due to the group's inability to honour its debts totalling Ksh 3 billion. Some branches were re-opened in July after the government lent the ailing group Ksh 675 million.
- ⁹ On the 12th of April 2006, a plane crash killed five MPs who were travelling to North-Eastern Province to end clashes between rival clans. The accident left vacant the three parliamentary seats of Marsabit, Moyale and Nakuru. By-elections were organised to fill the seats, which involved 26 candidates—11 in Nakuru, 6 in Saku, 3 in North Horr, 3 in Laisamis and 3 in Moyale. In these by-elections, NARC-K won three seats in

- Nakuru, North Horr and Saku, whereas KANU won the other two in Moyale and Laisamis.
- ¹⁰ The slogan of the Party of National Unity is '*Kazi iendelee*', meaning "may the work continue."
- ¹¹ The National Alliance of Kenya (NAK), a coalition of fourteen political parties, comprising the Democratic Party of Mwai Kibaki, allied to the Rainbow Alliance (which later became the Liberal Democratic Party, LDP) of Raila Odinga, to form the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). The latter won the general elections in December 2002.
- ¹² The 'No' camp won the referendum where 57% of the voters rejected the proposed Constitution.
- ¹³ Several allies of Mwai Kibaki joined the new party, such as John Michuki (Minister for Internal Security), Njenga Karume (Defense Minister), Raphael Tuju (Minister for Foreign Affairs), Amos Kimunya (Finance Minister), Martha Karua (Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs), Kivutha Kibwana (Minister for Land) and Moody Awori (Vice-President). One of the characteristics of the Ninth Parliament is that a large number of its MPs, especially those who had been elected on a NARC ticket, have since then shifted to other political parties.
- ¹⁴ The parties in the PNU comprise, among others, NARC-K, FORD-Kenya, FORD-People, Safina, Sisi Kwa Sisi and Shirikisho.
- ¹⁵ *Daily Nation*, 11/10/07, pp. 1 & 4, "PNU strikes deal on nomination method".
- ¹⁶ *Daily Nation*, 12/12/07, p. 4, "Parties reject deal on PNU nomination". This was the case for the New-FORD-K, Shirikisho and Agina.
- ¹⁷ The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Raila Odinga joined Uhuru Kenyatta's KANU to form the Orange camp, despite the two parties having being opposed during the general elections held in 2002.
- ¹⁸ Recall that in 2002, Mwai Kibaki was elected against Uhuru Kenyatta, who was the KANU candidate supported by Daniel arap Moi.
- ¹⁹ The Rift Valley is the region with the highest number of voters, totalling almost 3.5 million. It supported Moi throughout his presidency. However, the proportion of voters today that Moi could convince to vote for Kibaki is uncertain. Moreover, the control of the region by KANU is problematic because of the split of the party between Kenyatta's camp and Ruto/Kosgey's group, the latter allied to Raila Odinga.
- ²⁰ This elicited numerous comments because in the original alliance, the opposition leader gave his support to the incumbent President.
- ²¹ Moi's influence is highest among the Tugen community (in the districts of Baringo and Koibatek), while the Kipsigis and the Nandi mostly support William Ruto.
- ²² Several members of the Kalenjin community have been sacked from important positions since Mwai Kibaki took over.
- ²³ Whereas the supporters of Raila Odinga wanted the candidate to be selected through consensus, those on Kalonzo Musyoka's side would have preferred a vote by the party's delegates.
- ²⁴ Kalonzo Musyoka's electorate is said to be concentrated in Ukambani, his region of origin, whereas the two other candidates also benefit from allies in different parts of the country.
- ²⁵ In the voting to choose the ODM candidate for the presidency, Raila Odinga obtained almost 77% of the total votes.

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IFRA News

In September 2007, the directorship at IFRA changed. The new director is now Bernard Calas, Professor of Geography at Université Michel de Montaigne, in Bordeaux. The assistant director is Jérôme Lafargue, Maître de conférences in Political Sciences at Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour.

Editor's note

Mambo is a Kiswahili word, which strictly speaking, means "news" or "information". However, current usage, and specifically colloquial speakers will recognise the word as a form of greeting, loosely translated as "what's up?"

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