

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

THE 2022 KENYAN ELECTIONS

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, June 29, 2022

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Greetings everyone around the world, and welcome to this Brookings Africa Security Initiative event, whether you're listening to me in Washington, D.C. to Matt Carotenuto in New York State or to Michael Wairungu in Nairobi, Kenya.

We are transmitting around the world from all over the world, and we're very grateful to have you here today for the important discussion of the upcoming Kenyan presidential election slated for August 9th this summer in a very important ongoing process of the development and stabilization and strengthening of Kenyan democracy which has had an important history with several previous elections of differing kinds of outcome and in 2007 at least, some considerable violence. But nonetheless Kenya has continued its March forward towards building a stronger and more cohesive nation. And we hope and pray that that will be indeed the case again this year with the upcoming elections.

We have an outstanding panel to discuss this subject today. Again, you heard me mention their names already. Let me say a bit more about each, and then we're going to proceed with some presentations, including the two panelists using some slides and graphics to help us all understand where we stand with this election and with the campaign, the issues, the important subjects that are of concern to Kenyan voters and that will likely shape the outcomes in August 9th and beyond.

So Matt Carotenuto, a good friend of Brookings and of myself, a longstanding colleague on these kinds of events, and Professor as well as incoming dean at St. Lawrence University in the great state of New York. An ongoing partner in our Africa Security Initiative events more generally along with some distinguished members, other distinguished members of his facility. And just delighted to have Matt.

He's also a specialist on Kenya. He wrote an outstanding book that really you should try to read if you haven't already, about President Obama's roots in Kenya. And from not just a purely political but a personal, cultural, and just fascinating human prospective. So, I recommend that book and Matt's other work very highly.

And then a new friend of mine but a long-standing colleague I think at St. Lawrence and an important dean as well of their Kenya Study Program. Michael Wairungu is Kenyan, where he was born and raised before spending a considerable amount of time in the United States developing his skills

as a linguistic anthropologist. He's got a Ph.D. in that field from the University of Virginia, spent some time at other universities in the United States, including Stanford, and now is back in Nairobi at a program where I'd recommend if your kids' university is able or if you're able to get access to that Kenyan program, it is an outstanding way for people to learn about Africa and exchange ideas with Kenyans and Americans and others.

So today we're going to begin by my turning the floor over in just a second to Matt. And he and Michael will toggle back and forth on some of these background materials, the graphics they've developed for us, we'll be sharing those screens.

You're welcome to send in questions to Events@Brookings.edu by email. Again, one more time, Events@Brookings.edu. And the last half hour or so of our event this morning, morning in Washington at least, will be focused on your questions. So please share those with us at any point by about 45 minutes after the hour.

And so, without further ado, again, welcome gentlemen, thank you for joining, and Matt, over to you.

MR. CAROTENUTO: Great. Thanks, Mike, I really appreciate the warm introduction, it's great to be back here with you all today on this important topic.

So, I'm going to share my screen just to kind of give a sense of some of the background issues that many of them, you know, audience members who might know Kenya well, are familiar with, others who are thinking of from a broader context to kind of situate this locally. So, I'll play a bit of the role of the historian here and Michael will chime in and thinking about these issues as well as I'll be kind of helping him and commenting on some of the research that we've also done collaborative between the two of us and also our colleague, Jon Pagoji (phonetic) in Kenya. And we'd like to extend a warm thank you to him for some of this material.

So just to give a context, right, I mean this for the 59th year of Kenya's independence from Colonial Ruled Brittan. That may seem a long time ago but some of the issues in terms of legacies like land and governance still have a role to play even up until today.

So, after Kenya gained independence really the first 40 years of rule in the country was marked by a strand of authoritarianism, right? Kenya had up until 2002 just two presidents and was ruled

by one political party. And from 1969 to 1991 was a de facto one-party state. And so that legacy of authoritarianism is still sort of playing in the background of Kenya's electoral politics today.

Domestic pressure and international support forced the Kenyan government to sort of relinquish that one-party state status and return to multiparty politics in 1991. And so, the 2022 elections in August, as Mike has said, will be the seventh time that Kenyans have voted in a national election since the return to multiparty politics.

There has been significant election violence, right, 2007, 2008 is the most that we can think about. Up to 1,000 people are dead, 600,000 or more internally displaced. Some of those people are still internally displaced up until today. But there has been election violence and significant, in at least three of Kenya's elections. 1992, 1997, 2007, and 2008 being the most prominent.

A lot of these have to do with the role of the state. Many accusations during these periods of election violence or political violence have discussed the role of the state as a sponsor of violence, right, in putting down protests against claims of election interference as well as historical injustices. Most notably the issue of land, access to resources, and some of those date back to the colonial period.

So, in the wake of the 2007/2008 post-election violence, I think Kenya and the international community was very supportive of changes on the ground. The Kenyan public really were demanding changes, most likely to try to avoid a repeat of that 2007/2008 real crisis in the country. And that led to an introduction of a new constitution in 2010.

And the map you see here is really the legacy of the Colonial Era. So, this provincial administration that the Kenyan post-colonial state inherited really up until 2010 defined the ways that Kenyans sort of associated with the national government, right. Very centralized control, very limited opportunities to vote for local officials on the ground and these huge kind of legacy of a provincial administration that was directly connected to the office of the president.

All that changed in 2010 with the really the devolved government, right, going to a system that broke that down into 47 different counties, each headed by a governor, local elected officials, and so all of a sudden in 2013 it was the first time that Kenyans could really vote for a number of officials at the local level.

And I think the elections since, I think as a result analysts have sort of talked about these ongoing debates about devolution and the hope that the 2010 constitution would address some of these historic grievances that led to violence in the past had led to more peaceful elections. But there have been continued claims, right, of voter tampering and increasingly in the last 10 years kind of digital manipulation. And I'm sure we'll talk more about the role of social media in the future.

So, in 2022 this will be the third time that Kenyans are voting under this new constitution. And so, they're starting to hold I think local officials, new roles such as the governor, local senators, local members of parliament, local members of county assemblies, much more accountable given that history over the last 10 years.

I don't know if, Michael, you want to add to this.

MR. WAIRUNGU: Thank you so much, Michael, for the introduction. And also, so much for laying the stage very well.

I think I just want to echo that much of what we are experiencing in these elections, they have that colonial baggage. Like now we'll be using terms which are problematic, like tribe ethnicity. All those are creations by the Colonial and missionaries that came before independence. So, whenever we talk about ethnicity here we're referring to both categories as defined, or as you encounter in the book, like one language, one people. But they are contexts where that may not hold, like in the urban areas.

Each of these are years that Matt has highlighted has got political significance and therefore as we talk about 2022, we would like to ask, why should we care, what is unique about this general election? Yeah, that's pretty much.

All right. So why is 2022 a unique election for Kenya? As you can see, we have candidates on the screen. The main contenders are four who passed the minimum requirement by IEBC. But let me just mention them by names because we will focus on the first three. We have Raila Odinga, who is being deputized by Martha Karua. We have William Ruto, who is being deputized by Rigathi Gachagua, and there are two presidential candidates who we do not have on the screen but who just want to acknowledge them to avoid looking at politics of this year in the usual political dichotomy. So, we have Professor Wajackoyah of the Roots party, and we have Waihiga of the Agano party.

So unlike in other elections where ethnicity or they were economically driven, this election

is a bit unique. And it's unique in the sense that, 1, we have the incoming President Uhuru, supporting the opposition leader, Raila Odinga. That is something that we have not witnessed before.

Then we have the first female deputy president on the ballot for the first time this election. As I had alluded to, it will be more issue based than ethnically driven.

I would like first to analyze the candidates in Root. We have Raila Odinga being deputized by Martha Karua. Raila Odinga has been their key opposition leader until when he had the handshake with President Uhuru Kenyatta. And at first while he declared his presidential ambition, he had struggled getting entry in some regions because he was perceived as an ethnic outsiders. But interestingly, the choice of Martha Karua was, it was a game changer. Also because of gender, it is, well it is assumed as we speak that the entry of Martha Karua, will appeal to a lot of women, unlike before where we didn't have a woman deputy president.

Then because of her integrity, both Raila and Martha Karua are known as defenders of law and justice. So, it comes out as a very solid combination that is likely to appeal to those people who believe in the rule of law.

Well while we say that this election is issue driven, we still see some continuity in terms of the patterns of ethnicity and regionalizing. First, Martha Karua comes from Kirinyaga. She is in the public domain, she is defined as ethnic Kalaqu, so therefore we end up with her choice as a way of accessing all of the Mt. Kenya region and also to reach the votes to the Kalaqu community.

On the other side we have Vice President Ruto who is second presidential contender. Well, historically he came into politics in the early 1990s when he was involved in the Youth for Kanu '92. Then from then he has been very active, involved in the opposition and also in government. He has held various administer positions.

In 2007 it was alleged that he was involved in instigating violence and therefore he was indicted at the ICC. And that indictment involved him and President Kenyatta together with four other people and that's what makes the election of 2019 and 2015 politically significant because they came together because both were indicted at the ICC and therefore that election was seen as a protest against the ICC.

Well, he has been the deputy president from 2019 to 2022, actively being involved in

Uhuru's government until the handshake between Raila and Uhuru. Well, his choice of a deputy president, it was a very difficult according to the popular opinion, it was one of the most difficult choices he had to make because he needed to access the president's backing, who had earlier promised his support but along the way he didn't, and therefore he needed a kingpin from the Kalaqu community and also from about Kenya, who would carry his voice.

Matt, I don't know whether you have something else to add.

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, I'd just like to, I can sort of, I mean the question kind of historically thinking, I mean the rhetoric, when we look at the political rhetoric, they are trying to distinguish themselves from each other, but they are really connected in a political past, right. The Kenyan politically often switch sides so in 2007 William Ruto was actually supporting Raila Odinga for his bid for the presidency. And now is on the opposite side, which is a common thing when you think historically in Kenyan terms.

Even though William Ruto is sort of claiming that he is a self-made man and really appealing to an economic populism, he's taking a playbook from Raila Odinga's old political rhetoric. And so, I think these candidates have more in common sometimes than they do have apart even if their rallies and campaign literature, you know, pushes them in different directions.

MR. WAIRUNGU: Yeah. So those are the two main presidential contenders. And they are bringing in a number of issues. I know we were discussing in the other slides, but I would want to alert the audience that as we think about this 25th election, given that Raila is an incoming backed candidate, it is good to know that people have got mixed feelings about the very right of the agenda for the outgoing government. And now it is alleged that the choice of Ruto to back Raila is because Ruto is seeing some kind of continuity of his legacy. And therefore, if you look at Raila's manifesto there are some ideas that have been taken from Raila's agenda folder.

There are two other candidates, and one is of significant interest when we will be talking about the youth is Professor George Wajackoyah. His entry has brought a lot of excitement among the young people. But for now, I think I would like us to focus on these two.

MR. CAROTENUTO: Yeah. Thank you. If we're thinking about this, I mean I think a lot of us people around the world and Kenyans themselves are really focused on elections as potential

flashpoints, given the historic experience really since 1992 of elections being, having the potential for widespread violence.

So, what is the potential for thinking about this for 2022? I think people are relatively optimistic that there won't be violence on the widespread scale like we saw in '92, '97, and particularly in 2007, 2008. Really the 2013 and 2017 elections, the Kenyan public had widespread calls for peace, and that was I think successful, right, in avoiding any sort of wide scale violence, although there have been pockets of that in 2013 and 2017, as many of you know.

For those not familiar with Kenya, right, I mean the voting patterns have technically, have traditionally been in very large blocks. So, candidates are trying to build really coalitions, regional coalitions, and if they have a stronghold area they might get 90 percent or more of the vote in that stronghold area. And there are relatively few battleground counties in this sense, right. So, each candidate needs to not just win 50 percent of the vote. For presidency they also need to win a majority, or 25 percent or more in a majority of the counties. So, 24 counties. So really the focus is going to be not just on the voter turnout and turning out their strongholds, but to these battleground counties.

Now you see here an infographic from Infotrack, a polling agency in Kenya that just had a recent poll, really conducted at the end of May but released in early June, that shows potentially Raila Odinga being a few points ahead, although other polls put William Ruto ahead. So, the notion that it's very close. And you'll notice that they concluded that at least 20 percent of Kenyan voters are undecided, even a couple months before the election. And so, these battleground images and areas are likely to shift in the next couple of months, right, as campaigning just increases.

And if we think about this, outside of the presidential race, right, some of the analysis that there hasn't been widespread violence since 2007/2008 has been because there is much more significance in local elections. So, it's not a winner take all approach as it used to be in the presidency, and so these races over particularly governor races, are seen as very important for local development concerns. And so, they can be very hotly contested and there could be potential for insecurity questions at the county level in these battleground governors' races. So, I don't want to just focus on the presidential ones.

I think a lot of it, when we look at 2007 and the last two election cycles, has been about

the perception of election tampering, right? Is it free and fair, do Kenyans perceive the winner to be the outright winner and the fair winner, or are there increasing calls for election manipulation and evidence to be suggested of it. The more unquestioned or uncertainty there is around the election time, right, and I think this will be more of the case right after the election rather than before it, right, there's a potential for violence, right?

Also, elections have historically played on existing historic tensions and insecurities. So, the question as I mentioned before about land security related all the way back to the colonial period, has been mapped upon political violence in Kenya ever since independence. As well as more sort of recent historic tensions. Whether it's climate change and the continuing drought, particularly in the north and northeastern part of the country, or the threat from Al-Shabab, right, in regional insecurity. I know people are worried, you know, perhaps they might take advantage of the tense moment of the election to launch an attack across the border.

There's also the question I think of historical kind of political alliances, and Michael mentioned this earlier about the politics of betrayal, right. So, William Ruto being the Deputy President of the current President, Uhuru Kenyatta, there was a deal, right, that he was supposed to support his deputy. And that is seen as a betrayal by backing Raila Odinga.

But before that, right, there is a historic alliance between not Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta, was their fathers, right. Jomo Kenyatta and Raila Odinga's father Oginga Odinga, who were the first President and Vice President of the country, right. And many people believe, particularly in Western Kenya rural community that they gave the presidency to Kenyatta by supporting him, and he betrayed Odinga in the 60s, whether that's true or not is up to debate, but that is the perception. So, these historic sort of alliances are also playing in the background.

Another kind of key issue to look for really since 2007, has been the role of social media, whether it's WhatsApp groups or Facebook accounts or Twitter or Tik Tok, there has been increasing disinformation campaigns, right? Cambridge Analytics was involved in the 2013 election, again in 2017, as well as much more organized machinery within both sides of the campaign to use social media not just to rally voters but to also spread rumors about candidates. And that has a potential to sort of spark or fuel instances of violence as we saw in the past.

What I think, and what I think a lot of analysts and Kenyans are hoping for is that Kenyan institutions are very strong and can paint a clear picture and a transparent picture over the elections, whether it's the Election Committee itself, the independent Election Committee or the Kenyan Judiciary, in particular.

And those of us who know about the 2017 election, this was the first time in the history of Sub-Saharan African democracies that a Supreme Court nullified a presidential election in 2017. And the Supreme Court was widely celebrated by that, not just within Kenya but outside its boundaries as well.

So really the strength of Kenyan institutions is key in maintaining that. And while we might see people trying to utilize the judiciary to contest the election, that's going to be a key institution that I'm looking for to see if it remains strong.

What role could the international community play in this? Is I say supporting Kenyan institutions on the ground, making sure the judiciary has the support from the international community to conduct their work, right? The Election Committee also has that support. And if it comes to sort of monitoring, I think a key constituency is the African Union having a strong contingent in Kenya during that election to show support not just from the West but from the rest of the Continent in particular. I think that's more important in a lot of ways.

And all these kinds of things feed into the potential for violence or the potential for hopefully a sustained peace.

I don't know, Michael, if you wanted to add to that.

MR. WAIRUNGU: Thank you much. Regarding the potential for violence as we speak is very low because of the factors that Matt has highlighted, but it's also good to acknowledge that African democracy is very fluid, and they are also very young.

And if we fluidity of these democracies makes it hard to predict with precision about peoples' political behavior within a period of time. That means the behavior can change abruptly and therefore when we engage with the politics of these democracies it's good to factor that one in.

Then in terms of credibility of the election, it also depends on the supposed referee, that is the IEBC. The way we talk about the IEBC also will create a perception of how the citizens will look at it. Today I was very happy to see IEBC inviting all the presidential candidates for a dialogue session, for

a briefing session so that they get to communicate with the candidates about its preparedness and they were really, really transparent, including creating provisions that had not been witnessed before.

Then with the fluidity of Kenya's politics, I think it is also good to look at the scenarios. Scenarios that would make this year not witness organized violence. The first scenario is that the main presidential contenders are Raila and Ruto. Their candidacy has a lot at stake. First with Raila, because of his age and given that he has tried this presidency more than four, five times, there is a lot of stake in his candidacy. And therefore given that he chose somebody who is, Martha Karua, as the known defender of law and justice, he cannot allow himself to be dragged into violence. He would, in case of any dispute, prefer to go to the courts.

Then when it comes to Ruto, Ruto is coming in with past allegations of involvement with violence which led him to go to the IECC. Going by the humiliation that we went through with current president in ICC, I don't think he would want to go the same path again. Then if you compare his age and political experience with Raila, his political future is also at stake. So therefore, he may want to appeal to these voters for now and in the future so that in case he doesn't win this time, he would still be appealing in future elections.

Then another factor that may downplay the possibility of organized violence is if you compare this election and 2017, plus elections that were done before, that is 2007 back to 1992, there is political hybridity of the political parties that are in the battles. Because of that and also the new structure of government, people will not be investing so much on the presidential vote. They will be distribution of interest in other positions and therefore these parties which are members of the main coalitions which will be focusing more on winning many votes so that they can have a lot of currency in the main assemblies, like the National Assembly, the Senate, and the County Assessors. So therefore, this year would say there isn't so much at stake in the presidential election as it was before, and that in itself will downplay any possibility of violence.

In terms of contesting the election, I would say there is a high possibility, and the contestation would be done through the law, the legal system. Because going by the election that was nullified in 2017, there is a big lesson that Kenyans learned, all the citizens and interested presidential candidates. That this time we are focusing more on the process rather than the tally. And because of

that bitter lesson, Kenyans will also be looking into any slight malpractice, and they will use that to contest, go to the court with the aim of maximizing possibility of a re-run or getting an opportunity legally to win the election. Thank you.

MR. CAROTENUTO: So as Michael said before, I mean I think traditionally, right, the way the Kenya elections have been covered is a sort of ethnic arithmetic, right, so who can garner sort of ethnic coalitions, right, it is a diverse country. There isn't an ethnic or linguistic majority in the country. And that is certainly still at play in a lot of regions in terms of the traditional strongholds. But each coalition is not counting on one particular community but many different areas of the country. And there are many battleground areas that are very diverse as well.

So that brings in sort of larger questions about gender and social class and other kind of demographics that I think are often ignored when covering African politics, particularly Kenyan politics.

MR. WAIRUNGU: Yeah. I would like to add that unlike other elections, this election is very hybrid. Some of the ethnic patterns will hold but there also some cracks that will be upset. And these cracks have been caused by a number of factors. In all the previous elections the Kalaqu community in Northeastern Region, which is the main vote basket of Kenya, together with the Rift Valley, but now let's focus on Mt. Kenya. They had presidential candidate, but for the first time they don't. And therefore, this has become like the main hunting ground for the votes. And we have seen people who are perceived as lacking currency, like Raila have had in the political rhetoric, people saying that Raila wears the (speaks Swahili). Meaning that (speaks Swahili) Raila cannot be sold or cannot be bought for or cannot be accepted in Northern Kenya.

But we are witnessing a surprising difference, not totally because Raila has increased in popularity but also because he has played his cards well, choosing a female candidate from this region.

The same with Ruto, he went for (speaks Swahili) for the same reasons, Mt. Kenya and Kitri (phonetic) Wood. And Ruto's choice of Raila is also interesting because like I said, he had a very difficult evening trying to choose between Rigathi Gachagua and Professor Kindura Kindiki (phonetic). But because of pressure of authenticity of Kindura Kindiki about who is Kalaqu, he had to go for Rigathi Gachagua. One, because Rigathi, if you look at his time as an MP, he was an MP for a very rich basket for the Madia constituency and by extension, Kindiki. So even before he comes to the national level, he

is bringing a very popular constituency from Nari. Then he is known to be a very abrasive politician and Ruto needed somebody who is abrasive in order to be able to quell his critics in public.

Then for the first time we are seeing multi-Kenya region. And like in other times when they would be directed by some of their ethnic kingpins, they are going against, their main political campaign Uhuru Kenyatta. Uhuru Kenyatta had been publicizing Raila as the better option. They are saying no, we are autonomous this time, I think you would want to make a choice that will carve our desired political direction.

So, you can see, there are motives in this election that are challenging the theory that Kenya's politics are always ethnically driven.

MR. CAROTENUTO: I'm just saying I mean I think it's, we don't yet know the effect that Martha Karua completely is ethnic and gender, whether Kenyan women will sort of see a connection with her on the basis of gender. But certainly, right, the rhetoric is a lot about talking about economic issues, right? And economic issues for the sort of lower- and middle-class Kenyans who are facing high inflation, and Kenya is certainly trying to recovery from the shocks of COVID on its economy, just like most of the world. And these are big talking points and big hot button issues for the Kenyan voters.

So, what I'm looking for is to see how much class transcends these kinds of regional voting blocks. And I know, Michael, you just were with a kind of focus group of young people from a couple key regions of the country, and you talked to them about these issues as part of some of our collaborative research.

MR. WAIRUNGU: Yeah.

MR. CAROTENUTO: Do you think that they're having this kind of transcendence or is it being reinforced?

MR. WAIRUNGU: Thank you so much, Matt. Actually, (inaudible) has said, we were doing collaborative research with Jaoti Forte (phonetic), which is an extension of what we had (audio skip). And this research was focusing on the views and perceptions of youth on Kenya's politics. And we got a chance to talk to them in focus groups and also interview them. And while we finished that research like three days ago, we may not be able to mine a lot of data, but at least I can make a few highlights.

Let's start with what their independent link in the election, what the IEBC is saying.

Unlike in the previous election where the youth were, you know, the district number was very high, this time it has decreased by 5.9 or 8 percent. And this is a statistic that we may not afford to ignore. Previously politicians would go to the youth because of their numbers. This time while we were interviewing them, a good number told us that in this area they were not going to vote. And that is something that is very striking. Like if you are the main vote basket, then you say you are not going to vote, what does that mean?

And one of the things they told us is, you know, now, unlike the other years, we have used to be seen as passive participants of Kenya's politics, this time they are autonomous constituency, and they are not going to vote in protest. They are more aware than before that, you know, we cannot be giving all these promises very continued period then when these people get to power, they don't deliver. So, it's out of that economic frustration.

Furthermore, this youth have also been following developments, political developments keenly and they told us at some point, especially after the choice of the presidential running mates, some of them changed their positions. They started seeing some hope. And now they are saying for those who are going to vote do you have to take a look at the manifestos of the candidates. They want to see who not only is speaking our language but somebody who is very intentional in bringing us into power.

So initially they had got an appeal from Deputy President Ruto because of his bottom half approach. But a significant number now is turning away from the DP to that candidate I had mentioned called Wajackoyah.

If you look at Professor Wajackoyah's rhetoric, well it did not appeal to the older generations that he is using the language of simple man, simple government, and he is also using the language I would anthropologically call language of resistance. By saying that he is going to legalize weed, I think he is speaking the language that young people would want to hear, a language that the youth know will not appeal to the older generations who they see as people who vote on ethnic lines.

I don't mean to say that they are excited about the weed because they didn't want to smoke it, but I think their excitement with Wajackoyah, from my point of view, is an invitation by other candidates not to take the youth constituency for granted.

Then we learned that youth, while they are usually the main victims of corruption, they

don't like corruption, per se. They were very critical of these candidates who say would have multiple experience because of their corrupt history. And they are saying Wajackoyah brings a fresh air in the political space. So logically we can say that Wajackoyah is bringing a political value space that is inviting people to start seeing youth differently.

MR. CAROTENUTO: All right, great. I think we'll kick it back to you, Mike, I'm sure we could talk a lot more about this and look forward to your thoughts and questions.

MR. O'HANLON: That was outstanding. And by the way, apologies for these sunglasses, my eyes are a bit damaged from too many Zoom sessions, but this one it's worth it.

And I've learned a lot and that was beautifully done. I'm sure many others feel the same way, and we're already getting some questions from the audience. I'm going to come back to those in just a few minutes.

But before we do, what I'd like to do is to ask you each to describe Kenya in broader terms, so we have a little bit more of a sense of where the selection is situated in terms of history and strategy and Africa at large. So, I guess my first question, and you touched on this certainly, you mentioned challenges that Kenya faces like COVID and now higher food prices due to the Ukraine war, and of course ongoing struggles throughout its history with building a nation.

I guess I'm just going to ask you each for your gut check on how is Kenya doing overall. You know, in the year 2022, I guess one way to ask would be if either one of you could go back in a time machine 20 years and imagine in the year 2000 what you would have wanted for Kenya two decades hence. And compare your realistic aspirations to what we have today.

How has Kenya been doing in this broad sense, not just in terms of politics but in terms of economics, in terms of building a country, in terms of building a democracy in the post autocracy period? It's a very broad question. You both, again, already touched on it but I'd like to ask you explicitly. Matt, starting with you if I could, please.

MR. CAROTENUTO: Yeah, Mike, good question. I mean I think, you know, it's definitely good to reemphasize from a global perspective how, you know, kind of Kenya is a key player in the region, right. It's still the sort of economic and center of East Africa although it has its challengers regionally, I'm sure.

But, you know, in terms of U.S. relations, it is a strategic key partner both economically and strategically in the Horn and all of the region. So, it plays a major role within African governance more broadly.

Now if you take us back to 2002, 2002 was a watershed moment in Kenya. It was the first time that political opposition ever won an election. And it was the end really of an authoritarian rule for 22 years, or 24 years, right, of President Moi, who finally stepped down. So, it was a really optimistic moment.

And I think those early years, 2002 to about 2004 there was a lot of progress both in terms of reigning in corruption and strengthening Kenyan institutions and a hope for a really kind of throwing this authoritarian past into the past.

I do think in recent years, right, 2007 is particularly that moment that it may have started, was a bit of a backslide. And we've seen struggles with that of increasing authoritarianism, particularly with the context of regional security questions, right. So, when the Al-Shabab issue and Somalia came into play, by crackdown on dissidents or Muslim populations along the coast or in Northeastern Kenya, took a very traditional authoritarian bent that was a playbook from the past.

So certainly, I think Kenyans are still struggling with that economically speaking. I think Kenya's moving away from the strategic just relationship with the West. China's playing an increasingly important role. Investments in infrastructure have been enormous over the last decade or more, particularly right under the Uhuru Kenyatta Presidency and the previous one under Kibaki, right. They've made a lot of progress in terms of infrastructure but that means they've taken on a lot of debt.

And so, there's a lot of promise in the Kenyan economy but it is very much fueled a lot by this infrastructure spending. So, we're kind of seeing how that's paying off in the Kenyan economy.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. And, Michael, over to you with the same question, please.

MR. WAIRUNGU: Thank you so much Michael and Matt for that very insightful response.

I think I would want to say currently, and I will respond from the internal point of view, Kenya is not doing very well economically. And we have seen this and the dismal performance and the high price of the cost of living. While it has been attributed to this Russia/Ukraine war, I think we have our own internal issues that we need to address.

And it's sad to actually keep going back on corruption but I'm very happy to see that even the presidential candidates that we have today, like Martha Karua, they are using the fight for corruption as the entry point of promising a better Kenya.

So, yes, it's not doing very well economically because the cost of living has gone very high but there is hope when candidates acknowledge that corruption is the national disaster that needs to be fought.

Then in terms of Kenya shifting from the West to the East, since the opening of Dubai as a free market we have seen so many Kenyans going to China and Dubai to source inputs. Interestingly, they are also going to other Arab countries. And those going to the Arab countries, while they have not given very good feedback in terms of how they are treated, they cannot ignore that there's foreign leniencies because the most people go to the Arab country because many of them cannot secure a form of jobs in Kenya that they have seen that as an alternative market. It may not be of the best but I think we still need to acknowledge the transfers they make because as we speak the historic remedies have surpassed foreign tourism as the main foreign (inaudible).

Then in terms of infrastructure, Kenya has made significant developments. From a positive point of view, we have seen mega, mega projects done by Uhuru and Kibaki's government, like the Kenya, the Uhuru Expressway, the SGR, the Thika superhighway. Unfortunately, still corruption kicks in when we come to assessing the cost of those projects and the economic returns that they are regulated to give the common citizen for the next 10 years. So that has gone with, the public debt has really shot.

Finally, Kenya has made a significant milestone as far as gender empowerment is concerned. For the first time we have achieved justice, actually both Chief Justice and the Deputy Chief Justice who are women. And now we see the incoming, well, not really incoming, but the Deputy President of Asamel is a woman, who she is not only, she is not a typical woman. She's there as a defender of law and justice and she is also, you know, in loose terms she is known as an (speaks Swahili), this is an action-driven kind of politician.

MR. O'HANLON: If I could follow up, you both mentioned China and I'd love to get your take. This is sort of about, in a way, taking the perspective of what I do in 80 to 90 percent of my work on

broader U.S. defense and strategy questions. And as you know, China is increasingly viewed by the United States as maybe not an adversary, but certainly a potentially hostile competitor or rival.

And what China does around the world with its investments is often painted in quite critical terms, the Belt and Road Initiative and, as you both pointed out, the potential to sour countries with debt. And I know we've had concerns in Africa in particular since many African countries don't have the kind of revenue to easily repay those kinds of debts, but on the other hand some investments that China supports around the world are really appreciated by the countries in question and really do help with the economy. And I think the United States, rather than sort of be surprised or be innately opposed to that kind of Chinese investment, maybe needs to improve its own game and get more involved in investing itself. And we're seeing a little more of this kind of talk from the Biden Administration of late.

So I guess I wanted to ask you, how do you see China's role? Is it good or bad? If that's too simplistic of a framing then, you know, where should the West, including the United States, be challenging China by trying to offer Kenyans better options for investment for infrastructure ourselves? Just how would you frame this kind of competition in regard to how it effects Kenya?

Starting again with Matt, please.

MR. CAROTENUTO: I would say initially it was welcomed, right, as an influx of capital and a sense of getting some projects completed, which really rose, right.

But then increasingly over time and more increasingly now we see critiques of that, not just in the importation of Chinese labor instead of giving, you know, qualified Kenyans those same jobs and opportunities. But I also think that they're starting to play a role in managing that infrastructure a little bit more. I know the current President Uhuru Kenyatta tried to get a second loan to extend the railway that him and his administration built, a high-speed railway from Mumbai to Nairobi, to extend that western. That was denied, right. And so that really kind of curtailed a large development challenge.

And so, we do not yet know is sort of what role is China going to play moving forward in these kinds of decisions? Are they going to try to sort of put pressure to force kind of development projects to lean a particular way? And I think Kenyans are increasingly aware of that potential danger.

I have seen, you know, I think, right, U.S. direct investment has declined in the last several years. And while Chinese investments are increasing, I did see, right, I think over the weekend at

the G7 as a result of some of that, I see Biden, you know, expressing, you know, a commitment to infrastructure in some of the foreign policy debates. I think that would go a long way in terms of increasing the role that the U.S. might play in terms of a partner there. But the Kenyans are not just going to rely upon the West as a strategic partner as they did for much of the first 40 years of independence.

MR. O'HANLON: Michael, same question, please.

MR. WAIRUNGU: I think I would like to echo what Matthew said, that China provides an autonomy to domination by the western markets. Initially it was welcome, yes, but I think over time it has become, what would you say -- and I don't want loans given to African countries to be micromanaged, but I think going to China has also increased the space of corruption by African governments.

It is not a Chinese problem, it is a problem of African government. I think if we stood as a government and said yes, we want loans that do not have those conditions, but we manage them well, the role of China will continue being seen as positively. Because if you go to the ground, most people are worried about, sorry, I don't know. Can you hear me?

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, yeah, okay.

MR. WAIRUNGU: If you ask ordinary citizens in Kenyan streets about China, they will say it is good because they are able to go to China without a lot of restrictions, go buy stuff, come back sell in local markets. But as to the level of government loans, I think it is the responsibility of African governments to do what those loans are meant to do.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. One last sort of big picture question and then I'm going to go to audience questions.

The big picture question builds partly on a framing that John Timin of Freedom House used in an article when he talked about Africa's pivotal states a few years ago. And as I recall, maybe I'm adding, I might add one or two to his list, but certainly in East Africa and the Horn of Africa the big three would have to be Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania. Sudan arguably could have been in that group but splitting in two reduced its size. But maybe we would consider Sudan as another pivotal state as well. But certainly Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia.

And then throughout the rest of the Continent certainly Nigeria as far and away the largest in population. My old Peace Corp county of DRC, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa,

given its sizes and industrial capability, and some people might add Angola. Again, sort of in that border region in terms of population and overall size and scale.

That's the way I sort of make my picture of Africa when I'm trying to break it down and, you know, obviously there are 54 countries and I haven't really included the Maghreb or Egypt in my list, I'm focusing more on Sub-Saharan Africa. But those are sort of the pivotal states for me and together they include half the Continent's population, and they really are in many ways I think the trendsetters.

But the question I wanted to ask you is in addition to just, you know, wondering if you have a similar framework mentally as I just expressed, about where Africa's pivotal states really are and which ones they are. But in terms of African democracy and in terms of the peaceful resolution of the disputes internally, it seems to me that Kenya may belong on an even shorter list of pivotal states. And that really gets us back to today's central topic of the looming elections because of the countries that I just mentioned, a number of them, you know, are trying some form of democracy but in many cases struggling.

And I think of Kenya as really a bellwether and also a role model for many African countries to the extent that it can avoid the 2007 problems and get back on the kind of track that you both have been discussing. It's been, to my mind, from what I hear as a generalist, somewhat encouraging in the last three elections, well at least the last two plus the campaign so far.

So, do you agree with me that Kenya really is maybe at a short list of four or five key states in Africa that really are the bellwethers for the future of African democracy and in many ways, you know, the role models for much of the rest of the Continent?

And maybe, Michael, I'll start with you this time.

MR. WAIRUNGU: Okay. First of all, I would want to put a disclaimer about selection of high-water states. Each state is significant, but now it will depend on whose perspective you want to outline the key states, whether it is in the constituency of spots whereas in the constituency of democracy. So maybe just to acknowledge that, each state in Africa has got its own significance. But it depends on how you look at it.

Geopolitically yes, Kenya is situated at a very strategic point. At a very broad level look at the kind of relations we have with the United Nations. The United Nations Headquarters, other than

Geneva, the main one in Africa is in Kenya. Then the U.S. Embassy, the main U.S. Embassy is located in Kenya. The UN Headquarters, I'm not very sure whether it has been moved, but for many years they have been in Kenya. So, if you look at that connection in terms of Kenya and the UN, it means that it's a very good entry point for many African countries that would want to visit with the UN.

Then if you look at just its location with its neighbors in terms of importation and exportation of goods, there is a time, and I wouldn't want to really use this term strongly, but there is a time that we used to say, "When Kenya coughs, Uganda answers." It was a political metaphor showing the strong connection or the significance that Kenya has to its neighbors because Uganda is a landlocked country.

If you look in terms of the relationship between Kenya and Tanzania, these are twins which have got tensions because of the language that we use, the Swahili. It's very hard for Kenya to define itself as a nation without citing Tanzania because of sharing language of identity.

Then if you look at Somalia, when there is war in Kenya, what does that mean to the many refugees that are in Hagadera, Dadaab, and other refugee camps. That would mean disrupting all that.

I know there is a little more that I can add but I think I will let Matt come in.

MR. CAROTENUTO: I think, you know, we do talk about backsliding when it comes to democracy and we're seeing that in lots of places in the world, right. And Kenya is certain grappling with some of those challenges, right.

But this is the second consecutive time that a term limited president is leaving without question. There is no question of changing the constitution. I know some of our audience members might be thinking, yes, that Uhuru Kenyatta wants to play some role after leaving office. But he's not trying to be president, right? And we're seeing that in other areas of the Continent and regionally, right. In Uganda and Rwanda in particular, right, these sort of lifetime presidencies that we thought were Cold War relics and were really coming back after the advent of multi-party politics.

I would say up until last year or so Ethiopia was starting to make a lot of challenges to Kenya's sort of dominance in the region in terms of being a bellwether, but we've seen internal security questions really dominate the Ethiopia landscape of politics in the last year. And that's again been a

backslide there.

So, I think there is a lot of promise here and I think it's an interesting kind of case study of looking at African democracy more broadly and hopefully that the August 9th election will be another step forward for Kenya.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. So now I've got -- go ahead, Michael, please.

MR. WAIRUNGU: I want to add that whenever the, you know, countries are talking as being neighbors and learning from each other, I think the political history of Kenya has taught the neighbors very key lessons. 2007 election violence was a key lesson that was shared in this region. They were closely monitoring the developments of the IECC saying, if you guys behave like Kenyans, this is where we are going to head. It may not be a very good lesson to be told that you are teaching others, but at least we had neighbors pay a lot of attention because of the crisis that we had in our country.

Then in terms of gender empowerment, I overheard a conversation between Tanzanians where they really were comparing the rights of their Deputy President Madam Suluhu as the President with the way Kenya is installing women into influential positions, like the Chief Justice. The same with the nullification of the presidential election in 2017.

So, all of those developments, whether it be better to be consumed in Kenya, I think they send echoes in the neighboring countries.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. So now let me go to the several questions we have from the audience and look forward to your reactions. I'm going to group a couple of them together because there were several about disinformation. You alluded, one of you, to social media and to the potential, I think you both mentioned it. And there were some questions that asked for further development of that theme.

Just how big a problem do we see disinformation in this campaign so far, abuse of social media, or other kinds of electronic communication. And also does the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission have any significant impact on this process? Are they doing their jobs well or should they be doing things differently? Is there any other kind of regulatory mechanism that should be considered or that may or may not be up to the requirements of the current challenge?

So, Michael would you like to start on that one my friend?

MR. WAIRUNGU: Well, I would say if you looked at youth as a constituency, it is the

main constituency of interest by the politicians. And following, you know, in the last three or four years there has been a lot of importation of Smartphones, high Internet connectivity and therefore the youth population have a number of members connected.

Now it has also become like the main tool of communicating with the youth. Because they really seek to watch news in the mainstream media. So, while I do not have substantial evidence, I can say being the main tool of reaching the youth, yes, there is a possibility of disinformation in that. And I have seen several posts on Twitter and what is it, Facebook, of people trading propaganda in broad daylight that it hasn't gone unchallenged. We have a social media police from the youth constituency, youth aligned to the different political blocks. So, some of it is propaganda, some is harmful, the other one just plays the, you know, the populous, the populous politics. Yeah.

MR. CAROTENUTO: Yeah, I mean I would say I think in the last 20 years Kenyans have developed a network of social media groups. That if I compare, let's say, to the United States, it is even more sophisticated, right. I mean it's very common for I think my Kenyan friends, I'm sure Michael would agree, to be in many different WhatsApp groups, whether it's a church group, whether it's a family group, whether it's a community organizational group, Facebook as well, Tik Tok, Twitter, all these kinds of things, right, that make it easy to manipulate, right? Because information is shared throughout these mass groups in ways that I think politicians see as an opportunity, right.

The question is sort of who's going to monitor that. And just like we've seen in other elections around the world and we're depending on Facebook to monitor itself, right, without sort of interference from regulatory bodies who are independent of that, it can be highly problematic. Because they have to identify these things immediately, right, that they don't take long to take effect.

So, I think that's the danger that we see, particularly when there was violence. Even in 2007 when these networks were less developed, WhatsApp groups, mass tech chains, were fueling violence on the ground, right. So now in this space where we're even at a much, much more imbedded level when it comes to social media and technology throughout Kenya, the potential for that is quite worrisome if it's not regulated.

However, on the flip side of things Michael said, you know, there's organized groups to police that, right. So those of you who have studied Kenya for a long time, I mean Kenyans on Twitter

are a phenomena, right. If the Kenyans on Twitter go after you, it's a massive force, right, to think about this. They've pushed back on Western media articles about Kenya and the misinformation there in really effective ways. So, I think the Kenyan public also will mobilize itself to try to use peace, hopefully, as a weapon to think about that.

In terms of the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission, that is a critique, right. The 2010 Constitution and the post-2007 negotiations to sort of bring peace in Kenya were really about trying to address historical injustices, investigate acts of political violence in the past, look at illegal land deals and questions of inequality that speak to Michael's point about corruption. And the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Report, widely available online. Anyone can look it up, this many-volume set as a deep dive on all of these issues, was tabled in parliament in 2013 and has done literally nothing since. And so, the issue of, you know, a commission, a report talking about those questions versus action is I think what Kenyans are thinking about.

MR. O'HANLON: Michael, please.

MR. WAIRUNGU: Yes. Let me add something about the use of social media. And I've just thought more as Matt was highlighting there. It has become very common for Kenyans to join these WhatsApp groups. Sometimes you are even added without your consent. But that is not even the main issue. The main issue is that we Kenyans have been sharing means, means either to each other the candidate that they don't want or to socially construct candidates in ways that they imagine them. Like now it is the candidates like Raila or Ruto. There's a way they would want that candidate to be seen. And maybe they feel like they have a role to package him in a way that he can help. So, sharing of means is social political commentary has become very, very common.

Then the monitoring of social media while it has been done, you know, by neighboring countries, I think is something that I don't think should happen unless it is threatening the security of the country because of interfering with the freedom, freedom of expression. So, the institution that will be tasked with regulating, you know, flow of information, might also be challenged in the court. And I don't know whether I can win that because Constitutionally Kenyans are guaranteed those rights, like rights of expression.

Then at a bigger level, look what happened with the abolition, the use of social media in

Tunisia and Libya. When the state went to the streets the citizens went virtual. And we can see that happening of providing an alternative space in case the state suffocated the citizens. So, it has both sides that we need to look into.

MR. O'HANLON: That leads to a question about the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, the IEBC. And you both mentioned it in the course of your conversation. But let's hone right in on it directly and ask if it's doing its job well, if there's anything it should be doing more of or doing differently.

So, a question from the audience about the IEBC, please. Starting with you, Matt, this time.

MR. CAROTENUTO: Yeah, I would say in previous election disputes the IEBC has certainly gotten its fair share of criticism for, particularly in 2007, 2008, for not being sort of controlling the announcement of the vote, letting the state sort of come play a role. As well as in the last two elections cycles with the digital transformation, right, of election results. And I think that's something that Kenyans, you know, want to do in real-time but they're very wary of seeing, you know, things change on the screen and results coming in. And so, the transparency question versus the paper ballot and the digital results is what has caused problems in the last two elections.

And so, I think that takes a lot of infrastructure, a lot of resources. I know there's been some reports that the IEBC is claiming it's being underfunded by the Kenyan government. So, there is concerns a little bit. Do they have the resources to put in place all of these kinds of questions of transparency?

But I think Michael is right to suggest that Kenyans are going to be checking the IEBC themselves at polling stations, you know, throughout the country. The media hopefully will be playing a big role in this in keeping that free and fair. So, I think there is a, it's a question mark in a lot of Kenyans' minds or in what I've seen from conversations with Kenyans about what role they're going to play.

MR. O'HANLON: Michael.

MR. WAIRUNGU: Yes. Thank you, Matt and Michael. Let's start with what was happening today to the credit of IEBC. Unlike before when it was seen as this obscure, you know, an institution that was doing things in ways that are not transparent. This time I think it has learned hard

lessons. They invited the presidential candidates for a conversation, for a dialogue.

And I think to me IEBC is sending a message that Kenya is not for IEBC. Kenya is everybody's business. And while the candidates has come there thinking that, you know, they would be defensive, they were very deceptive in their questions, especially with use of technology like Raila. He had 10 questions that he had submitted to the IEBC and all of them were addressed point by point. I don't know whether he was convinced by some, but that opening of space between players and the referee is something that needs to be commended.

Then in one of the media houses I saw one of the candidates saying well IEBC has a role to play. Every Kenyan has a role to play. We need to own up the process. Because sometimes we'll be (inaudible) by practices at the polling stations and rather than speaking up we get compromised and now we add a lot of pressure to the IEBC.

I know they have a long way to go but I would say, and also, two days ago it provided the main candidates space for having parallel tallying stations. That is something that they posted before, and seeing that they accepted, I would say yes, they may have their own shortcomings, but I think they are better prepared this time. And they have realized the more they play this defensive game the more they are going to taint their image. Yeah.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. Thank you. So, one final question that I'll put to you both and then you can also add in any final concluding thought you may have as well. And again, many thanks for an excellent discussion today. And also, as I'll say in a couple minutes wrapping up, certainly best wishes to the Kenyan people as they prepare for this important campaign and election.

The final question is about the role of the military. And I think I'll maybe add the police as well. And just ask if you think that there is sort of proper preparation in those two organizations for whatever potentialities, whatever eventualities they may have to face. Are they well suited to calming things down with minimum use of violence or force themselves if need be? And have they been preparing for this situation, this election campaign appropriately.

And maybe, Michael, I'll start with you. And again, please feel free to add in any concluding thoughts as well.

MR. WAIRUNGU: I think, Michael, I have to admit that I have not followed closely.

Because as we speak, you know, the debates have been about candidates presenting their agendas. But I have not seen any debate focusing on the preparedness of the military. As a Kenyan I would hate as situation where we would go back to what we were in 2007.

I think the police that we need at the moment is the institutions, like IEBC and the Supreme Court and any other court involved. If police are to be involved, they need to be retrained that this is a political process so that we don't see people retaliating against the police who had come to defend them. I think that's the best I can say for now.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Matt.

MR. CAROTENUTO: I would say that historically, right, the police and the military have been too tied to the state and have not acted independently in the same ways and have been accused of perpetuating or even perpetrating acts of state sponsored violence in the previous election cycles. So certainly Kenyans, and I'm sure members of the military and the police in Kenya do not want that to happen again.

Although I think the concern is what role will they play. Hopefully, right, we're in a situation where both candidates are seen as kind of incumbents and opposition, right. You have a sitting deputy president and another person who has been sort of brought in by the sitting president, so hopefully they have equal access to state power and that may not sway it one way or the other, although I think people are concerned about that, right.

I know Kenyans are obviously very concerned about the time around elections as being a time of just general insecurity and anxiety, and I think hopefully the security forces can play a role in making sure people feel safe. But I do think there has been an historic challenge and critique about this, in thinking about it.

I would say this as a concluding thought, right, I mean we're talking about this a little more than a month away, right, from the election. A lot is probably going to change in the next month. If you're watching Kenya on the ground, the election campaign cycles are just going to heat up. The resources of the campaigns are going to be expended at a higher rate over the next several weeks. And that 20 percent undecided vote that the last big public poll in Kenya, is certainly going to whittle. And we might see things even get a little bit closer. But certainly, this is going to be a close race and something

that's important for us to watch, not just for Kenya but for the broader region.

MR. O'HANLON: Michael, did you have a final thought you wanted to add as well?

MR. WAIRUNGU: So, I'm saying there is this arm of the police called the NIS, National Intelligence Service, they need to do their job and realize that there is a lot at stake, not only to protect violence but also for Kenya to define itself as a nation whenever we are having elections. And therefore, once they gather that information, whoever is given needs to take the right action in time. So maybe we can have a consultation between now and the election so that they can all agree, security operations, how are we going to get, to make use of the intelligence of the crowd.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, Professor and Dean Wairungu, Professor and Dean Carotenuto, thank you very much. Hats off as well to our colleagues Tina Luchetta, Alejandro Roca and Dan Lawrence who have been part of this event. Many thanks to all of you who were part of the discussion, and our best wishes to Kenyans who are engaged in such an important season of, again, their own democracy and the future of their country.

So, with that, and to American friends and everyone else, Happy 4th of July weekend and best wishes for the summer.

Signing off now from Brookings.

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