

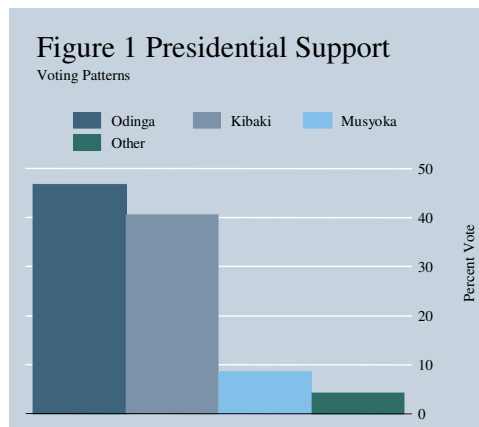
Ethnicity, Violence and the 2007 Elections in Kenya

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The recent Kenyan elections have given rise to violence and tensions between ethnic communities. During the first half of December, just before the elections, the University of Oxford, in collaboration with researchers from the Michigan State University and the University of Connecticut, conducted a detailed survey of voter intentions, attitudes towards violence, ethnicity and socio-economic characteristics. The data are based on a nationally and regionally representative sample of 1207 eligible voters, who were interviewed in 76 constituencies out of 210 between December 3 and December 10, 2007.

As the survey was conducted right before the elections, using a careful, independent instrument by a highly trained survey team, it can give a good indication of voter intentions shortly before the elections. We found that 93 percent of our sample were registered voters, and virtually all intended to vote. When we restrict the data to those that are registered voters and who said that they would vote, we find that if the elections had been held on the day of our interviews, Raila Odinga (ODM) would have received 46.7 percent of the votes for president, with Mwai Kibaki (PNU) receiving 40.6. A third



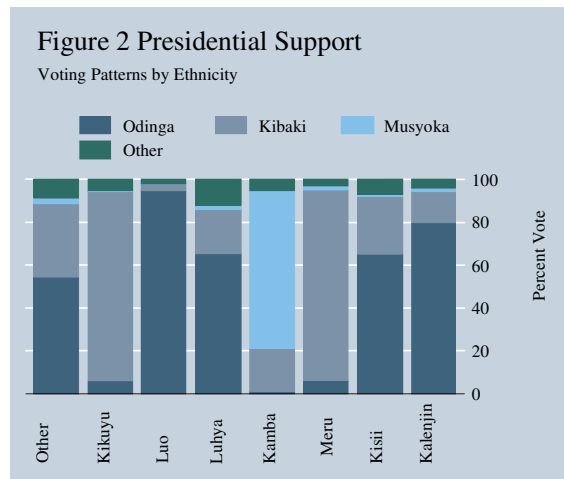
presidential candidate, Kalonzo Musyoka (ODM-K), would have received 8.5 percent. About 2.5 percent of respondents refused to answer, and 1 percent were undecided. Most of those still making up their minds on whether to vote at all expressed support for Odinga. These results are quite consistent with those found in other polls conducted during the run-up to the elections; but they should be treated as a poll, not actual voting outcomes. The parliamentary election voting intentions were even more clear-cut in favour of the ODM, with support among those intending to vote at 46.3 percent for the

ODM, as against 36.7 percent for the PNU and 6.7 percent for the ODM-K. Proving that the discrepancy with actual results is due to voter manipulation and counting irregularities is harder. As in all elections, actual voting behaviour or outcomes on the day could have been rather different: polls could have swung further to Kibaki or turnout could have been a decisive factor in changing the outcome, without requiring manipulation.

Nevertheless, it does not dispel the sense of possible irregularities, and they were definitely expected: when asked how free and fair they thought the elections were going to be, 70 percent expected some problems, and about half expected major problems or worse. Breaking these responses down further, it is clear that suspicions were higher among the Odinga supporters, with more than 65 percent expecting major problems or worse compared to about 35 percent among likely voters for Kibaki. A similar gap

between Odinga and Kibaki supporters was evident with respect to the specific fear that the counting and reporting of results would not be free and fair.

The voting intentions reflected a strong ethnic bias. Kenya is characterised by considerable ethnic diversity with more than 40 distinct ethnic groups, and the largest group, the Kikuyu, accounting for less than a quarter of the population. Other main groups include the Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, Kamba, Kisii and Meru. Figure 2 shows the voting patterns by major ethnic group. It is clear that among the Kikuyu, support for Kibaki was overwhelming, while support for Odinga is similarly high amongst the Luo; they each had close



to complete support from voters of their own ethnic groups. But these two groups constitute less than a third of the total population. Some other ethnic groups supported specific candidates as well: the Meru virtually all supported Kibaki; the Kamba overwhelmingly support Musyoka; and similar levels of about 80 percent of the Kalenjin planned to vote Odinga. This implies that at least another third of the population intended to vote mainly along ethnic lines. The Kisii and the Luyha largely supported Odinga, but less exclusively.

But it is too easy to dismiss these voting intentions as a reflection of a serious indictment of President Kibaki's rule in recent years. Economic growth has been relatively high since he took office in 2002, above 6 percent in the last three years. Broad macroeconomic stability has been maintained as well. President Kibaki's approval ratings were still very high in late 2007: 69 percent approved or strongly approved of the way he performed in the previous 12 months, while less than 10 percent disapproved or strongly disapproved (the rest neither approving nor disapproving). Unsurprisingly, among likely Kibaki voters his approval ratings are higher at 93 percent. But also among likely Odinga voters, his ratings were very positive with 47 percent approving or strongly approving, and only 15 percent disapproving or strongly disapproving. Even among Luo, approval of Kibaki's performance stood at 44 percent, well above his disapproval rate of only 14 percent.

People's perceptions of economic conditions in the country reflect their appreciation of the incumbent's record, with 51 percent reporting that the country was doing better or much better during Kibaki's rule, compared to his predecessor President Moi's period in office. Only 28 percent thought that the country was doing worse or much worse. And more people reported improving living conditions than worsening living conditions (45 to 33 percent). Even among likely Odinga voters, equal numbers thought the country was doing better than doing worse, even though more thought that their own living standards had worsened during Kibaki's rule (but a quarter still reporting improved living standards).

As these subjective perceptions are often far more negative than material living standards, due to 'nostalgia' bias, it would be wrong to conclude that misrule or rising

poverty are really behind the current tensions. Indeed, using a simple standard of living index based on the survey data (a wealth index, based on a score of 13 possible durable assets, such as radio, bicycle, fridge, telephone etc.), there is no difference in this basic standard of living index between likely Odinga voters and likely Kibaki voters. Nor is there a significant difference in average wealth between Luo and Kikuyu. Approximate material equality exists across these main ethnic groups even though Nyanza, the traditional homeland of the Luo, has on average lower wealth, and more people with low levels of assets than the Central province, the predominantly Kikuyu area. The differences between the regional and ethnic patterns can be explained by substantial numbers of Luo and Kikuyu living elsewhere in the country, including in Nairobi. According to our survey, the perceived grievances of the Luo in Kenya do not arise from a generalised socio-economic disadvantage, or from recent misrule.

Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?	Percentage of respondents
I feel only Kenyan	26.7
I feel more Kenyan than [ethnicity]	27.7
I feel equally Kenyan and [ethnicity]	35.3
I feel more [ethnicity]	8.4
I feel only [ethnicity]	1.9

Ethnic divisions should not be overstated. We asked respondents what identity they preferred if they had to choose between being a Kenyan and being ‘from their ethnic group’. Table 1 shows the findings: only 10 percent of

Kenyans put their ethnic identity above being Kenyan. These results were similar among the Kikuyu and Luo, with less than 9 percent of each putting their ethnic group above being Kenyan. Moreover, more than three out of four of the Kenyans we interviewed (76 percent) claim that ethnicity plays no part in their choice of friends. Thus, while in practice ethnic considerations clearly shape the behaviour of Kenyans in the voting booth, they seem to yearn for a society in which such considerations play a much reduced role. Still, even though (45 percent) assert that the ethnic or regional origin of the party’s leader does not enter into their calculation of how to vote, it does leave a lot of people for whom it matters a little (30 percent) or a lot (25 percent).

Even before the election, Kenyans were clearly concerned about political violence. Only 16% of respondents stated that they did not fear becoming a victim of violence or intimidation during the election period. More than half were often or always afraid of political violence. Kikuyus were significantly more concerned about becoming victims of political violence with 66% stating that they always or often feared violence compared with 54% of the Luo respondents. Similarly, supporters of Kibaki were more worried about violence than supporters of Raila Odinga.

However, if anything, the instigation of violence may have been more of a top-down process with 30% of people stating that politicians in their area have been openly advocating violence in the last year at least to some degree. In contrast, 67% of respondents reported that their neighbourhood or community has been taking a clear stand against violence originated by politicians. Only 16% stated that their community’s position toward violence was unclear. These responses did not differ significantly between supporters of Kibaki and Odinga or between the Kikuyu and Luo in the sample. Equally, 78% reported that communities were willing to vote out violent politicians, with supporters of Odinga showing significantly more willingness to take this step.

In terms of actual experience of violence and intimidation, 9% of the sample stated that they had been threatened with negative consequences in order to vote a certain way.

Threats mainly related to their personal safety, the safety of their family and their property. Supporters of Kibaki and of Raila Odinga had had similar experiences in this respect. There was also no significant difference between Kikuyu and Luo interviewees.

According to our sample, the ODM and the PNU were clearly more active in carrying out threats and intimidation than any of the other parties. Of those who had been threatened with negative consequences, 26% reported that the PNU had carried out the threat and 33% reported that the threat had come from the ODM (interviewees could name up to three parties in response to this question). Both these figures were significantly higher than for any of the other parties – KANU had come in third place with 10% reporting that they had received threats from this party.

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