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SPECIAL EDITION:

Kenya has a complicated relationship with democracy. Recent elections have featured an annulled vote, an opposition boycott, and serious post-election violence. Power seems to stay in the hands of a few families – the Kenyattas and the Odingas chief among them. This year **Raila Odinga** (p6) seeks the top office. He's up against **William Ruto** (p16), a self-styled outsider who started life selling chickens. Polls suggest the election is too close to call. But who are these guys, and how did they get to the very top of Kenyan politics?

ABOUT US

The Continent is a weekly newspaper with 18,000 subscribers in over 100 countries. This is a special edition – regular programming resumes next Saturday, 13 August, with high-quality journalism from across Africa. If you are not yet subscribed (it's free), save our number to your phone (+27 **73 805 6068**) and send us a message on WhatsApp or Signal. We'll do the rest.

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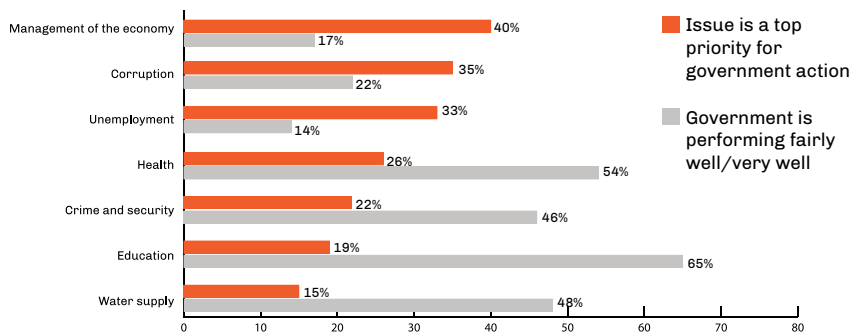
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Kenya election 2022: It's about the economy (and corruption and unemployment)

Kenyans entered the 2022 election season with the economy, corruption, and unemployment foremost on their minds – along with considerable mistrust of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). When Afrobarometer asked Kenyans in November 2021 what they considered the most important problems the government should address, management of the economy (40%) topped the list of citizens' concerns for the first time in a decade, followed by corruption (35%) and unemployment (33%). On all three issues, only small minorities (17%, 22%, and 14%, respectively) said the government was doing a good job.

We also asked how citizens would vote in an election held the next day. Excluding the 10% who said they would not vote, the parties allied for Raila Odinga (37%) held a slim lead over those backing William Ruto (33%). Considering the volatility of a campaign, and the fact that about three in 10 respondents refused to say (14%) or said they didn't know how they would vote (15%), our only projection based on the November 2021 data is for a closely contested race. In that case, a fair and competent performance by the IEBC might help increase – from just 45% – the share of Kenyans who say they trust the electoral commission “somewhat” or “a lot”.

Most important problems and government performance | Kenya | 2021



Source: Afrobarometer, a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.

Electoral commission gambles, again, on untested election technology

Biometric voting systems have failed in Kenya twice before. Third time lucky?

In recent years, Kenya has been at the forefront of a global experiment in using technology to safeguard elections. In both the 2013 and 2017 polls, the country implemented – at vast expense – an electronic, biometric voter system. This was designed to prevent fraud and deliver results quickly and accurately.

So far, the experiment has failed.

Catastrophically.

In the 2013 election, the system failed at 55% of polling stations at some point during the day, forcing officials to revert to a manual system. In 2017, the failure was even more spectacular, forcing the Supreme Court to annul the election entirely.

That election had to be rerun two months later, and was boycotted by the opposition amid ugly scenes of election violence. The French company responsible for the failure, Idemia, was eventually paid its \$40-million fee in full – but allegedly only after threatening to withhold Kenya's voters roll, which was held on its servers.

Africa's most expensive elections

Undeterred, Kenya's electoral

commission, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), is trying again – and again it is costing a small fortune. According to a copy of the contract, exclusively obtained by investigative journalism centre Lighthouse Reports, and shared with *The Continent*, the commission is paying a minimum of \$31-million to Dutch company Smartmatic for what is effectively a brand new biometric voting system.

Kenya's election is the most expensive in Africa, and among the most expensive in the world, working out at \$17.61 per voter. The money paid to Smartmatic will cover the cost of reprogramming most of the 45,000 tablets that failed last time around, as well as purchasing an additional 14,100 tablets, at a cost of more than \$800 per tablet. This is nearly 150% more per tablet than the IEBC paid in 2017.

There is nothing in the contract that indicates how exactly Smartmatic intends to fix the security and logistical issues which were such a problem in 2017; nor does the contract explain why the new



Polls apart: Biometric voting systems have been used in Kenya since elections in 2013, but have yet to deliver on their promise of a more credible vote.

Photo: AFP/Getty

tablets are so expensive.

Smartmatic declined to respond to questions from *The Continent*, saying that they should be referred to the IEBC. The electoral commission did not respond to a request for comment.

The tablets, which will be in every polling station, are the foundation of the biometric voting system. Voters will have to verify their identity on the tablets using their fingerprints, before being allowed to cast their vote. The tablets will also transmit the results from each polling station to a central server.

With just days to go before the vote, there are already grave concerns that this new system will fail, too. In a test run conducted last month, only 1,200 of 2,900 polling stations successfully transmitted data, according to the electoral commission, with many reporting that they did not have sufficient 3G signal to do so.

That's a failure rate of nearly 60%.

On election day, there will be 46,232 polling stations operating – the highest number in the country's history. A similar

failure rate will affect nearly 28,000 polling stations, and perhaps fatally undermine the credibility of the vote.

"It seems like the country, through the IEBC, is on a tech hamster wheel," said Nanjira Sambuli, a tech researcher who has previously written about this issue for *The Continent*. "The increasing price tag for delivering biometric-enabled elections certainly isn't delivering on the democratic dividend. This is a classic case of technology deployed in a complex political ecosystem and thus amplifying the 'politricks' therein ... Technology, per se, cannot make up for the deficiencies in effective institution building and governance."

Not that Kenya's old-fashioned paper ballots are free from controversy. Presidential candidate Raila Odinga has alleged that supporters of his main rival, Deputy President William Ruto, have conspired with the printing company based in Greece to print extra ballots to help rig the vote.

Both Ruto's team and the electoral commission have denied this claim. ■

The Grand Finale

Raila Odinga has spent his entire career getting close to the presidency – but never into the office itself. Now is his best, and perhaps last, opportunity to fulfill what he believes to be his destiny.

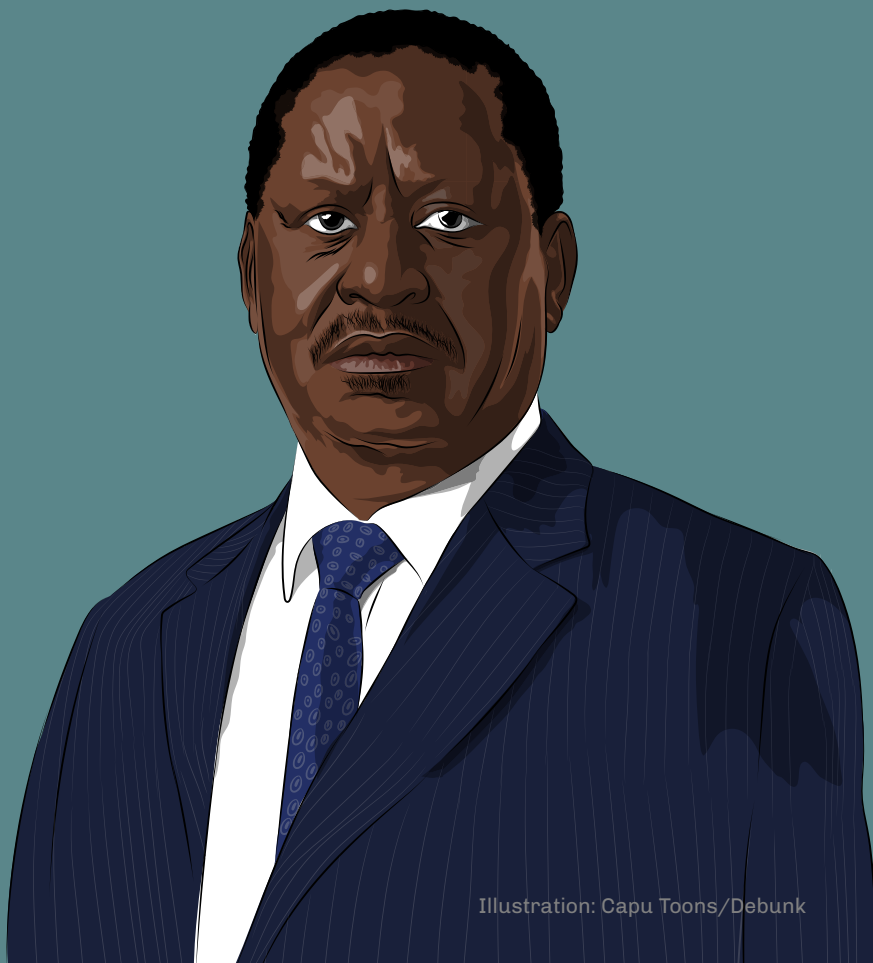


Illustration: Capu Toons/Debunk

Isaac Otidi Amuke

There is usually a moment in Raila Odinga's political rallies when he pretends to be a football commentator. One team in this fictional match is led by his rival – this year, it has been Deputy President William Ruto – and he is the captain of the other.

With Odinga narrating, the game always goes the same way. The opposition gets the ball first, but fails to score. Odinga's side then takes control.

They pass it around for a while before Odinga, who is always the striker, scores the winning goal.

The crowd goes wild.

As metaphors go, it is hard to find a better one for Odinga's long political career. The 77-year-old has made an art form of coming from behind. It is almost as if he prefers it that way; as if being the underdog gives him more space to plot and strategise, and a better thrill when he inevitably turns the tables on his opponents.

This, coupled with his endless capacity to surprise – like when he went to work for his former jailer Daniel arap Moi; or when he stunned the nation by shaking the hand of his one-time nemesis Uhuru Kenyatta, who is now an enthusiastic supporter – has made him one of the dominant forces in Kenyan politics for decades.

But there is one prize that has always eluded him. One match he has never been able to win.

And the presidential election on Tuesday might be Raila Amolo Odinga's last chance.

A dynasty in distress

The Odingas have had a seat at the top table of Kenyan politics for as long as there has been an independent Kenya. Raila's father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, was a prominent freedom fighter with strong socialist sympathies. In the messy transition from colonial rule to independence, British authorities asked Jaramogi to form a government. He refused out of loyalty to fellow freedom fighter Jomo Kenyatta, who was then in prison.

Jomo Kenyatta went on to become Kenya's first president, and Jaramogi became the country's first vice-president. But his loyalty was not repaid: Jaramogi resigned in protest at the Kenyatta administration's conduct, and spent much of the rest of his life under house arrest.

This may have slowed him down, but it did not stop him. For Jaramogi had a superpower, which his son has inherited: he was an extraordinary political organiser and his office later became the operations base for the pro-democracy movement which was formed to counter arap Moi, Kenyatta's authoritarian successor.

His son, Raila, would play a major role in this movement. He was born in 1945 and grew up in the midst of the liberation struggle. At age 17 he was despatched to study engineering in East Germany. By the time he came back eight years later, Kenya had won its independence, but his family had fallen from grace and his own prospects had changed dramatically. It was almost impossible for his family

to get a loan, and few would risk the government's wrath by hiring an Odinga.

Odinga managed to get a job teaching engineering at the University of Nairobi, but his salary was not enough to support the entire family. So he took out an under-the-table loan from an Indian banker and started Spectre Limited, which was and remains the only company in Kenya to manufacture gas cylinders.

He later got a job at the Kenya Bureau of Standards, but his mind was always on politics.

In 1982, a group of disaffected air force officers launched a coup attempt against President Moi. It was unsuccessful. In the aftermath, the president went after alleged supporters of the coup, including Jaramogi and Odinga.

Jaramogi was put under house arrest

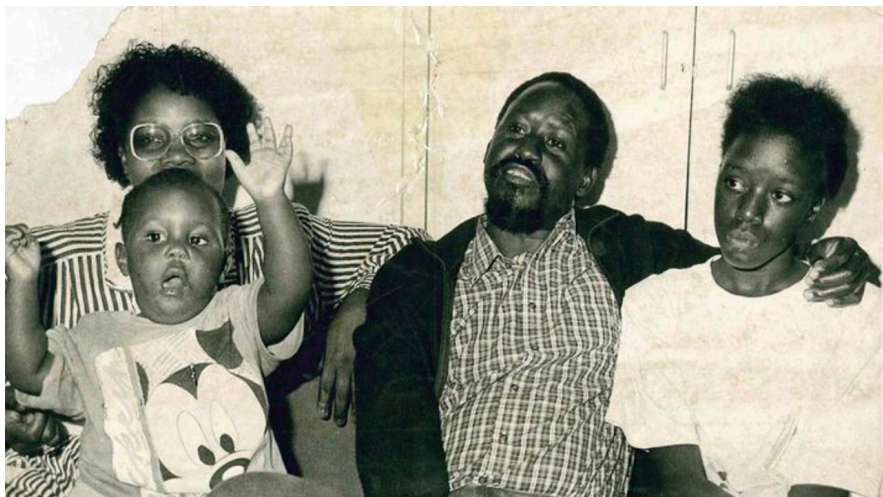
again, while Odinga was put in jail for treason.

He would spend the next six years there, although his involvement in the coup has never been proven (and Odinga himself has been reluctant to discuss it).

Not long after he was released, he was arrested again, this time for his involvement in the pro-democracy movement.

When he finally got out again, the next year, he got wind of an assassination attempt – many of President Moi's enemies seemed to have a short life expectancy – and fled into exile.

His escape was daring, crossing through Uganda dressed as a nun, and he ended up in Norway. For the next year, he waited for the right moment to make his return.



Path to power: A young Raila Odinga with his family. Over the decades, Kenyans have learnt never to count Odinga out, and he may be about to achieve his lifelong ambition of becoming president.

Will the real Raila please stand up

Under enormous political pressure, President Moi reluctantly agreed to return to multiparty politics in 1992. Odinga came back to Kenya to run for Parliament and to support his father's State House run. Odinga won his race, but Jaramogi only managed to come in fourth – no amount of organisation could compete with the cash that Moi's campaign was splashing around (with the help of none other than Deputy President William Ruto, then a young entrepreneur who had yet to make his name in politics. Now Ruto is the only person standing between Odinga and the presidency).

Jaramogi died two years later, but it was far from guaranteed that his son would be his political heir. First, Odinga had to take control of his Forum for the Restoration of Democracy, and outwit the 'Young Turks' affiliated with Michael Kijana Wamalwa.

The Young Turks viewed themselves as worldly intellectuals. They quoted Shakespeare and spoke Kiswahili, waxing lyrical about the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. They were also lawyers and social scientists.

Raila Odinga was the only engineer, and he lost the leadership contest.

Down but far from out, Odinga resigned his parliamentary seat and triggered a by-election. He competed again, under the banner of a different party, and won – a warning shot to the Young Turks.

Next, he went about consolidating support among the Luo ethnic group, which was his father's political base. In Kisumu – Kenya's third-largest city and

the seat of power for the Luo – mayor Akinyi Oile had built a serious ground force, which Odinga rented to control political rallies. This included groups such as the Baghdad Boys, an infamous youth gang, some of whose members were subsequently implicated in post-election violence.

This secured Odinga's position as the de facto political leader of the Luos, giving him his own base. He did not need his father's party, or the Young Turks, any more. The real Raila Odinga had stood up, and was no longer overshadowed by his father's towering shadow.

Love and hate

Odinga ran for president, unsuccessfully, in 1997. President Moi, who had put him behind bars for six years, won easily. Before the next election, Odinga did the unthinkable, and teamed up with the man who had gone to such great lengths to persecute him and his family.

It was an opportunistic alliance. President Moi was using Odinga to sanitise his regime's stinking past, while Odinga and his squad were there to raise political capital and to use the state for future political advancement.

But this marriage of convenience did not last. Shortly before the 2002 vote, President Moi made it clear that Uhuru Kenyatta was to be his political successor. Odinga walked out in a huff. By then, it was too late for him to register his own candidacy, so instead he uttered two words which would forever change politics in the country.

"Kibaki tosha," Odinga told the



Raising the roof: Raila Odinga unsuccessfully contested the 1997 presidential elections as leader of Kenya's National Development Party.
Photo: Alexander Joe/AFP

country — Kibaki is up to the task. This was his endorsement of opposition leader Mwai Kibaki, which effectively united the opposition and galvanised support for Kibaki. Odinga gave the campaign more than just words. When Kibaki was involved in a near-fatal road crash on his way from a rally, Odinga took over the reins of the campaign, criss-crossing Kenya as if he were running for president himself.

Largely thanks to Odinga's intervention, Kibaki won the election with 62.2% of the vote. Moi's hand-picked successor, Uhuru Kenyatta, received just 31.3%. This marked the end of the Moi era, and the beginning of a new chapter in Kenyan politics – a chapter in which Odinga was destined to play an even bigger role.

The 2002 election revealed something else about Odinga. His one-time rival Wamalwa, who rose to become Kibaki's vice-president, remarked that Odinga was the only Kenyan politician to attract

love and hate in equal measure, resulting in two equally powerful phenomena: Railamania and Railaphobia.

To Wamalwa, Odinga was the sort of character who was uniting and polarising in equal measure. His fanatical core support base stuck with him whether he won or lost. This near-religious following, said Wamalwa, attracted an equally passionate opposing force.

With such strong feelings on all sides, there was always a chance that sparks could fly.

Playing with fire

The quid pro quo for his support was that Kibaki would change the Constitution and make Odinga his prime minister. Kibaki reneged, making Odinga the minister for roads instead. Relations worsened in 2005 when the two leaders disagreed over the content of a new draft constitution, and Odinga suddenly found himself out of government entirely.

Ahead of the 2007 election, he was



Up in the air: As the Azimio La Umoja Coalition's candidate, Raila Odinga is vying against his main rival and frenemy William Ruto to take the reins of state power as Kenya's president in the 9 August general election. Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

the underdog once again. Exactly how he likes it.

When the results of the vote started to stream in, it became clear that Kibaki had made a massive miscalculation and had lost his parliamentary majority to Odinga. Then things got strange. The chair of the electoral commission was suddenly whisked away by armed police into a secret room, where only the national broadcaster was allowed in, and Kibaki was declared the winner. He was sworn in before dusk of that same day – unprecedented in Kenya.

The country exploded.

At least 1,300 people were killed in post-election violence, and it took a mediation effort by the former United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan to put a stop to the blood-letting. Uhuru

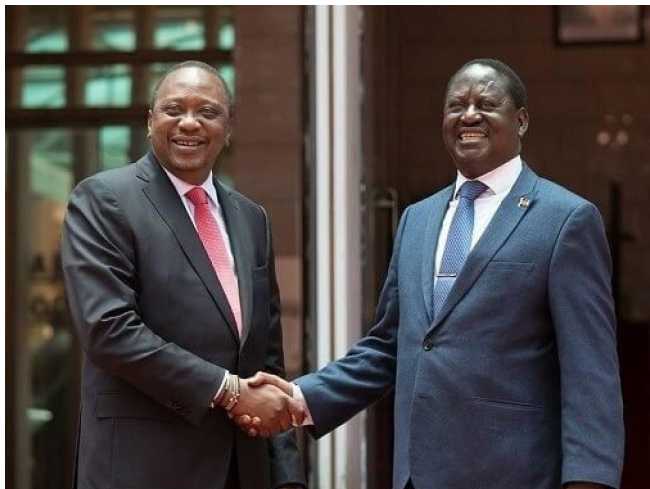
Kenyatta, who had by then transferred his allegiance to Kibaki, and William Ruto, who had thrown his growing influence behind Odinga, were both referred to the International Criminal Court for their role in inciting the violence (the charges were ultimately dropped).

The mediation effort ended with Kibaki and Odinga shaking hands on the steps of Harambee House, the president's office. They agreed to form a government of national unity with Kibaki as president and Odinga as prime minister.

Received wisdom at the time was that this arrangement would set up Odinga for a successful presidential run in 2013, with the full weight of the state behind him. It did not work out like that.

As if allergic to having a head start, Odinga watched as internal dissent

**Shaky ground:
In 2018, Uhuru
Kenyatta and Raila
Odinga united their
political dynasties.**



rocked his party. Ruto left the fold, while key advisors Miguna Miguna and Caroli Omondi spent more time squabbling with each other than running the prime minister's office. Corruption allegations circled around key staff members, forcing Odinga to suspend both his permanent secretary and his chief of staff.

By the time the next election came around, Odinga was facing a formidable threat from Uhuru Kenyatta and Ruto, who had teamed up to fight the ICC charges together. Their partnership worked: despite challenging the veracity of the results, Kenyatta was sworn in as president in April 2013. Odinga was out in the cold once again.

The handshake

The 2017 election was no better for Odinga. After Kenyatta and Ruto were declared the winners, Odinga's team got the vote annulled by the Supreme Court,

which found that there had been serious irregularities. But Odinga boycotted the rerun, saying that the vote would still not be fair, leaving the incumbents with a clear run.

With Kenyatta in State House for a second term, and with Ruto lined up to succeed him, Odinga looked to be at his lowest ebb ever. He staged a mock inauguration ceremony in January 2018, inaugurating himself as the "People's President", and threatened to make the country ungovernable if the election was not revisited.

But on the other side of the aisle, things were not as rosy as they seemed. Kenyatta and Ruto were falling out, and suddenly there was an opportunity for Odinga to make another miraculous comeback.

In March 2018, the son of Jomo Kenyatta and the son of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga united their political dynasties. It was an unstructured man-to-man and



Family business: Luo Chief Oginga Odinga, future president Jomo Kenyatta, Njoroge Mungai and Ramogi Achieng Onyango gather in a show of unity on 7 December 1963 at the eve of the Independence of Kenya ceremony, in Nairobi. Photo: AFP

family-to-family pact. The two leaders said that the root of Kenya's problems dated back to their fathers' falling out, and promised to do everything within their powers to right the wrongs of the 1960s and 70s. As part of the deal, Kenyatta and Odinga promised to align their parties. Suddenly, Odinga was in pole position for the presidency – while an irate William Ruto did everything in his power to oppose and splinter their united front.

Last chance saloon

Over the course of his long career, Odinga has gone by many names. His supporters call him jakom (chairman), or agwambo (mystery man). When he was fighting for their cause, grateful Kibaki supporters anointed him njamba (warrior). And in a 2006 biography, Nigerian professor Babafemi Badejo gave him perhaps the most accurate moniker of all: enigma.

The mystery, or is it the mastery, is real. Now, after decades of trying, Raila Odinga is closer to the presidency than he has ever been before. By his side this time is his running mate Martha Karua, one of the Young Turks who were the first to feel the force of his political acumen.

Neither are young any more, as Odinga's new nickname reflects: He is Baba, the father, and this may be his last chance to achieve what he has worked towards for his whole life; what he believes is his destiny. It is do or die.

That said, if we have learnt anything, it is that Raila Amolo Odinga can never be counted out. ■

Isaac Otidi Amuke is the editor-in-chief of Nairobi-based Debunk Media. A video version of this profile will be available on Debunk Media's website.

There are only two interesting things about this election

And neither Raila Odinga nor William Ruto are among them

Nanjala Nyabola

Imagine that from the moment you hit puberty you were told that your role in society was to be a provider. So you chase that role with every fibre of your being and at the expense of having interests, hobbies, or even a personality. You only read self-help books. You only socialise at the bar. You play golf as an excuse to go outside. And then one day your children move out of home, your wife is too busy running her businesses to cater to you, you retire and you realise that this is the sum total of your life.

Cue the mid-life crisis.

When this happens to middle-aged men of means in other countries, they buy a sports car. In Kenya, they go into politics. They then chase that fantasy of relevance through various tiers of government, absorbing rejection after rejection and refusing to accept the possibility that people may not be interested in what they have to offer.

This is perhaps the most important thing you need to know about Kenyan elections. It explains the proliferation of political parties, the absence of ideology, or silence on key issues. Most of these people aren't driven by a desire to serve.

They are driven by a very basic fear of being irrelevant.

This would remain an abstract issue if they were not sucking up resources, distracting people and making it impossible to have issue-driven conversations about the future of the country. And the inflationary pressure that these men put on the price of doing politics preserves politics as a pursuit for the relatively rich, and locks out candidates with an actual agenda.

Nationally, there are only two interesting things that are happening in this election cycle. One is the nomination of Martha Karua as the deputy presidential candidate for Azimio La Umoja, alongside Raila Odinga. Women in Kenya have run for president before but always as marginal candidates, sidelined by both resource disparities and misogyny within political parties.

Karua is a veteran of civil society and of politics. She doesn't come to the table with clean hands, particularly because of her role in the 2007 election and its violent aftermath. But all of the people on the major tickets have blood on their hands from that cycle. Held to the same standard as the men, Karua's is the clearest path to the most senior role for a



Path to power: Deputy presidential candidate Martha Karua's innate talent for not being a middle-aged man sets her apart – and above. Photo: Suleiman Mbatiah/AFP

woman in Kenyan politics to date.

The second thing is that unless Uhuru Kenyatta is possessed by the demon that seems to possess and trick African presidents into thinking people want them to remain in office indefinitely, this will be the first time that presidential power is handed over to a new party in Kenya without the context of a changed constitution.

Not that Kenyan presidents change the Constitution to remain in office. Rather, constitutional changes seem to work as a pressure valve to diffuse intense personality politics around an election. Moi came into power in 1978 after Kenyatta I died, and in 1964 the constitution had been changed to allow for one-party rule. Kenyatta II came into office after the Constitution was changed

following the post-election violence. Kibaki in 2002 is an arguable exception, although his was the presidency that was pushed by the desire to change the Moi constitution, and fed into the 2010 constitution.

This year we have an election without such a pressure valve, although it is also arguably the first election in multiparty Kenya with little pressure, given that Odinga appears to have a clearer path to the presidency than his main rival, William Ruto.

We can only hope that this lack of pressure leads middle-aged Kenyan men of means to resolve their mid-life crises elsewhere. ■

Nanjala Nyabola is a writer and political analyst based in Nairobi, Kenya

Hail to the hustler-in-chief

William Ruto began his career by selling chickens on the side of the road. Now he is just one election away from overthrowing Kenya's most powerful political dynasties. This is a story of one man's incredible rise to power – and the things he did to get there.



Isaac Otidi Amuke

Whether he wins Tuesday's presidential vote or not, William Samoei Ruto has already done the impossible: Kenya's 55-year-old deputy president has defied the country's traditional political elite – including the president, Uhuru Kenyatta – to sustain a five-year campaign to install himself as president, against all the odds.

This is partly courtesy of the country's 2010 Constitution, which prevented President Kenyatta from sacking his deputy or forcing him to resign. It is also partly thanks to Ruto's own grit, raw ambition and indefatigability. And it has all been made possible by his vast resources – even as questions surround the source of these funds.

Kenya's post-independence history has not been kind to deputy presidents. The only deputy to successfully transition to the top job was Daniel arap Moi, after Jomo Kenyatta died in office in 1978.

But Ruto has made the deputy presidency his own, with a gravitas and an influence that none of his predecessors managed. If the presidential election on 9 August goes his way, his dizzying rise from streetside vendor to State House will be complete.

It all began with chickens

Ruto was born in 1966 in the Rift Valley, where he had a typical rural upbringing. The family relied on their farm for sustenance. Their home was within walking distance of the infamous Kamagut Junction, where the Trans-

Africa Highway takes trucks to or from Uganda, South Sudan, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It's the perfect location for a roadside produce market.

As a boy, Ruto sold chickens there. He now speaks proudly of these days, and uses this experience to draw a distinction between his ordinary background and his rivals' elite upbringing.

Ruto managed to gain admission to the nearby Wareng Secondary School, and then to the prestigious Kapsabet Boys for his A-levels. In 1986, he was admitted to the University of Nairobi for a degree in Botany.

Although there was a lot of politics happening during Ruto's university days, he did not make his political name at the time. His running mate for the 2022 election, Rigathi Gachagua, was more politically significant in their university days – as a leader in the district associations, the primary organising units of student politics. Much later he became personal assistant to Uhuru Kenyatta, Moi's hand-picked successor.

After university, however, Ruto met someone who would change his life forever.

Splashing the cash

In the 1992 election, having bowed to pressure to reintroduce multiparty democracy, Moi for the first time faced a genuine threat to his authority, prompting him to seek alternative ways to short it up.

Enter Cyrus Jironga.

A sharp-witted university dropout, he had turned one of the telephone booths in



Poultry sums: Deputy President and presidential contender William Ruto in Kosachei in western Kenya in 2010. Ruto credits his chicken farm as the source of his financial fortitude on the path to power. Photo: Roberto Schmidt/AFP

downtown Nairobi into a makeshift office, making and receiving calls from the booth. He hustled his way into Nairobi's high society – and the lucrative world of government financing.

But Jirongo had even bigger ambitions, offering to build President Moi a campaign juggernaut that complemented his strategy of dividing the opposition. The offer was taken up.

Youth for Kanu '92, as the group was called, splashed cash all over the country, with 500 shillings – then the highest denomination note – being the signature amount. The note came to be known as the “Jirongo”, and the campaign was so lavish that it was blamed for contributing to the ensuing 100% rise in inflation.

There are major question marks over where all the money came from.

William Ruto, then a 26-year-old graduate trying to make it as an entrepreneur, threw himself enthusiastically into Jirongo's campaign, and has applied the lessons he learned there to the rest of his political career.

Moi won the 1992 vote, and five years later both Jirongo and Ruto were elected as members of Parliament. Jirongo has openly stated that he ran for parliament to seek protection from the ghosts of 1992, while Ruto has avoided the topic as much as possible.

Later, when their fortunes were reversed, Jirongo claimed that Ruto would have been a nobody had he not given him a hand up. “I was your handyman, but I made something out of myself,” Ruto responded.

This would not be the last time that

Ruto, the student, would become the master. Daniel arap Moi, Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta can all attest to this. Ruto learns quickly, and moves even faster.

Building a stronghold

In 2001, President Moi made Uhuru Kenyatta a parliamentarian and a Cabinet minister, grooming him as his successor. Uhuru and Ruto's political trajectories could not have been more different: Uhuru, as the son of Kenya's founding father and first president Jomo Kenyatta, was born into political royalty and was always destined for high office.

At first, Uhuru and Ruto appeared to get along well, even when the ruling party lost power and Mwai Kibaki became president. No one at the time knew how intertwined their futures would become. Their first major difference of opinion

came ahead of the 2007 election, when Uhuru opted to support Kibaki's re-election bid.

Ruto, sensing an opportunity, joined Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

Because Kenyan politics is organised regionally and thus ethnically, with regional kingpins given outsized influence on the national stage, Ruto knew he needed to win over the Rift Valley before he could be considered a real player.

In the wake of the bitterly-contested election, there was a wave of violence that left at least 1,300 people dead. Although the Rift Valley was hit hard, Ruto's standing in the region was enhanced thanks to his role as Odinga's emissary when he and Kibaki agreed to hold talks to contain the violence, with Martha Karua representing Kibaki.

In the government of national unity



On trial: Ruto in the dock in The Hague. The case was later dismissed for lack of evidence.

that emerged from these talks, both Ruto and Karua, Odinga's current running mate, were made cabinet ministers. Kibaki was president and Odinga was prime minister, while Uhuru Kenyatta was Odinga's deputy.

Ruto's star had risen, and he was being talked about as future presidential material.

Then came the scandals.

In October 2010, Ruto was kicked out of Cabinet after being accused of corruption. He had allegedly defrauded a government agency by selling it a piece of land that the government already owned. A court found that he had a case to answer.

Later that year, an even bigger bombshell landed.

On December 15, Luis Moreno Ocampo, the chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, opened an envelope and revealed six names, among them William Ruto and Uhuru Kenyatta. The names, given to Ocampo in a sealed envelope by Kofi Annan on 9 July 2009, had been identified by a Kenyan commission of inquiry as the main suspects responsible for the post-election violence. Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who played a mediator role, put these names in a sealed envelope and asked Ocampo to hold on to it.

The envelope was only to be opened in the event that Kenya failed to undertake its own judicial process to redress the post-election violence cases within a year.

Soon, Ruto was charged with crimes against humanity in The Hague, accused

of inciting and orchestrating some of the violence. He faced the prospect of a life behind bars.

With friends like these

Facing the biggest crisis of their lives, both Ruto and Uhuru Kenyatta calculated that their best defence was to go on the attack. They both launched presidential bids ahead of the 2013 election

As they built momentum for their respective bids, talks were ongoing within their inner circles about a potential joint ticket – rather stick together than hang separately. A deal was struck. Kenyatta went on to win the presidency, with Ruto as his deputy. The promise was that Ruto would support Kenyatta – and then Kenyatta would return the favour when he stepped down.

When they took power in April 2013, they made a habit of wearing matching pants, shirts and ties, and even agreed to fold their shirts sleeves Obama-style. The press called them the dynamic duo.

It was immediately apparent that Ruto intended to make the deputy presidency his own. For his first term, he was hands-on to the point that he looked more like a co-president. He was ever-present, attentive and active, and in the process became the de facto face of government – acquiring massive political clout in the process.

His official residence, a mansion in the upmarket Nairobi suburb of Karen, became one of the busiest government buildings in the country as it played host to a series of high-profile meetings. Things got even better when the International



Here we go again: A family walks past a billboard for presidential candidate Uhuru Kenyatta and his then running-mate William Ruto in Nairobi in 2013. Kenya is gearing up for presidential elections on 9 August. Photo: AFP

Criminal Court threw out Ruto's case, saying that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute (there had been a "troubling incidence of witness interference and intolerable political meddling", according to one judge).

Ruto had all the markers of a president-in-waiting. But not everyone was happy.

The handshake

As the 2017 elections drew close, murmurs started surfacing from Kenyatta's corner. First to speak was David Murathe, the president's friend and confidant, who complained about a group of highly placed individuals in government who were perpetuating grand corruption, and who seemed entitled to Kenyatta's presidency as if it were a co-presidency.

Speaking on TV talk shows, he went even further, saying that upon re-election, Kenyans would see a Kenyatta like they hadn't seen before: firm and in charge,

and ready to deal with any wayward officials in his government.

It was easy to decode Murathe's message. The president's support for Ruto was no longer a guarantee. Nonetheless, the pair contested and won a second term for Kenyatta, beating Odinga yet again. But the result was thrown out by the Supreme Court, which found serious irregularities in the voting process – largely thanks to an expensive and untested biometric voting system that failed catastrophically – and ordered a re-run.

This precipitated a political crisis, and Kenyatta thought about stepping down. Ruto was having none of it. "I would have slapped him if I could," Ruto is heard saying in a recently leaked audio recording. Ruto has confirmed that the recording is genuine. In it, he says that he persuaded Kenyatta not to surrender the presidency.

Odinga and his supporters boycotted the repeat election in October. Kenyatta was sworn in for another five years the next month, while Odinga swore himself in as “The People’s President” in January 2018.

As an ode to his young self, Ruto established a highly mechanised chicken farm, which he partly credits for his financial liquidity when he is questioned about the source of his wealth.

Ever the opportunist, Ruto thought of working with Odinga. Together, they may even have commanded enough support in parliament to impeach Kenyatta.

But the president had the same idea – and he got there first and showed up on the steps of his office with Odinga in tow. The pair shook hands, and announced a ceasefire.

In a terse communiqué, they invoked the spirit of their fathers: Jomo Kenyatta and his first vice-president, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. They said that the rain had started beating Kenya when their fathers fell out, and that now the two sons would atone for their sins – and fix Kenya in the process.

Everyone in the country, including Ruto, was stunned.

No longer worried about impeachment, Kenyatta went on a systematic onslaught against Ruto. He transferred responsibilities initially granted to the vice-president to the office

of Fred Matiang’i, the interior minister. Ruto’s in-tray became empty.

In the Senate and National Assembly, Ruto’s men were purged from leadership roles at all levels, and were replaced by Kenyatta and Odinga allies. At the same time, anti-corruption agencies began pursuing high-profile individuals – many of whom claimed they were only targeted for being Ruto’s friends.

Corruption allegations swirled around Ruto himself. From the time he became an MP in 1997, he slowly built a multi-million dollar business empire straddling insurance, real estate, hospitality and agriculture.

And as an ode to his young self, Ruto established a highly mechanised chicken farm, which he partly credits for his financial liquidity whenever he is questioned about the source of his wealth.

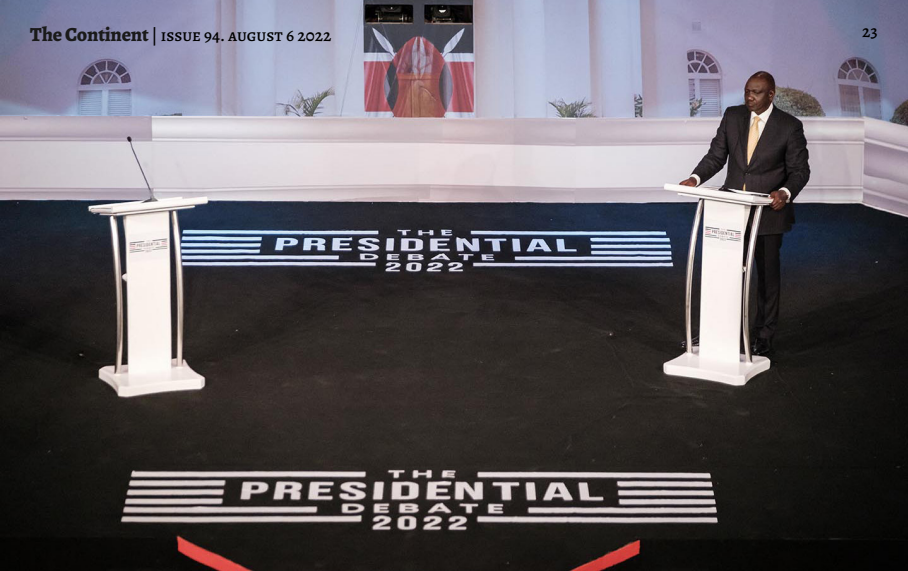
Ruto was never shy to do business with government, which added to suspicions.

In 2013, he was found guilty of occupying a 100-acre piece of land in the Rift Valley which belonged to a victim of post-election violence.

He was ordered to return the land and pay compensation. More recently, he has been accused of illegally obtaining a piece of land near Nairobi’s Wilson Airport, where he built the Weston Hotel. In both instances, Ruto claims that he believed he purchased the land lawfully.

The campaign trail

In the wake of the handshake, Ruto knew that his road to the presidency had become much more difficult. So he hit the campaign trail early. Traversing great



Un-Raila politik: Kenya's deputy president and presidential candidate William Ruto cuts a lone figure at an electoral debate, boycotted by his rival Raila Odinga, at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa on July 26. Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

swathes of the country, with a special focus on Kenyatta's base in Central Kenya, Ruto rebranded himself as a hustler – in stark contrast to political dynasties he was competing against.

Dynasties must fall, he said.

Two individuals became Ruto's motif: mama mboga, the vegetable vending market woman; and the boda boda (motorcycle taxi) rider. To Ruto, these two embodied the struggles of the common Kenyan, travails to which an Odinga or a Kenyatta could never relate. After all, Ruto himself hawked chicken on the side of the road.

It is a message that he hopes will cut through the ethnic considerations which drive so much of Kenyan politics – and prevent him from having to negotiate complex deals with a myriad of ethnic

chiefs.

And to reinforce it, he has revisited his Youth for Kanu '92 training, unleashing vast amounts of money on the campaign trail, much of it directed towards churches and his own campaign teams. Suffice to say that the 500-shilling note is no longer the highest denomination.

The campaign worked. Polls show that the election is too close to call, and which means the Kamagut Junction chicken seller is now on the steps of State House. Whatever happens next, William Samoei Ruto has already earned his status as hustler-in-chief. ■

Isaac Otidi Amuke is the editor-in-chief of Nairobi-based Debunk Media. A video version of this profile will be available on Debunk Media's website.

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Is change really coming to Kenya?

The words ‘change’ and ‘revolution’ continue to be thrown around ahead of elections – but lip service is not enough to convince the population. Nearly half don’t believe anything will change. But the focus on economics does represent something new.

Justin Willis, Ngala Chome, Nic Cheeseman & Gabrielle Lynch

Change is coming to Kenya, we are told. So is freedom. Politicians across Kenya’s current divide – from both the Azimio La Umoja and Kenya Kwanza alliances – are saying this. From Raila Odinga, presidential candidate for Azimio, and William Ruto, flagbearer for Kenya Kwanza, down to the grassroots, candidates are insistent that after the elections Kenya will be transformed by an “economic revolution”.

In Mombasa, for example, two rival candidates for the governorship each speak of “revolution”, as do other candidates and activists across Kenya. Yet many Kenyans are sceptical – change is hardly a new message, in Kenya or anywhere else. Why should they believe that things will be different this time?

One of the distinctive things about the 2022 elections is that the change narrative was initially turned on its head by Ruto. After many years of

alliances with dynasties – Daniel arap Moi, Odinga, Kenyatta – he suddenly decided that they were a bad thing after all. Subsequently, Ruto has campaigned on economic inequality and the need for change – messages that proved resonant.

Odinga, meanwhile, found that although his rapprochement with Kenyatta had given him a political opportunity, it had also turned him into the candidate of the establishment.

As a result, we were treated to the curious spectacle of Odinga, Kenya’s die-hard radical, pledging “administrative continuity” while Ruto, after 10 years at the top of the government, assumes the guise of the insurgent.

Sincere or not, Ruto’s campaign – propelled by a cost-of-living crisis that no one quite foresaw last year – succeeded in dragging the political focus of the campaign onto the economy. That is presumably why the Azimio campaign has also come to emphasise change, or even “economic liberation”, in recent weeks.

Now Kenyan voters face two rival coalitions and presidential candidates, each promising change – and each casting that change as primarily economic. But how plausible are these promises, and will any of them lead to real change for Kenya's people?

At the core of Ruto's campaign is the Hustler Fund: loans to enable entrepreneurial Kenyans to realise their ambitions. Opinion polls show it is a popular promise. The emphasis in the Odinga and Azimio campaign is on social welfare: better healthcare; better access to education (or maybe even free secondary and university education); and – the most novel aspect – social protection payments to two-million households.

This means the campaigns feature real differences that are about national policy.

The big question is therefore whether they are affordable and whether the candidates that propose them are really serious about their implementation.

The Hustler Fund is hardly the first scheme to provide credit. There have been many previous ones, and they tend to collapse because administering so many small loans is quite difficult (and can be open to abuse), and default rates tend to be high.

Odinga's promises would be expensive. And that's quite apart from the cost of the fuel and food subsidies that are presently being used to bolster support for Azimio.

Kenyans, used to successive elites ignoring their needs, have looked at these policies and the country's growing debt

burden with considerable scepticism. A recent South Consulting opinion poll found that 47% of people believed that whatever the result of elections there would be no change in Kenya.

The big question is therefore whether they are affordable and whether the candidates that propose them are really serious about their implementation.

Failed promises have more than just an economic impact of course. They also risk undermining popular engagement with elections more broadly.

But – questions of affordability aside – we should celebrate the shift to focus on economic issues. While ethnicity continues to be critical to efforts to mobilise support, one reason the election is very close is that a large number of Kenyans are voting across ethnic lines. This, in the end, may prove to be the most significant change to come from the 2022 polls. ■

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The Big Picture

Photo: Fredrik Lerneryd/AFP

Paper trail: Voting officials count ballots on 8 August 2017 at the Victoria Primary School polling station in Kisumu, Kenya. This election was later annulled due to serious irregularities, meaning that all these ballots were effectively meaningless. As Kenyans prepare for another presidential election on Tuesday, we're all hoping that, at the very least, every vote counts.



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