THE BALLOT

The Chronicle KENYA

Beyond the Campaign. Into the Choices.

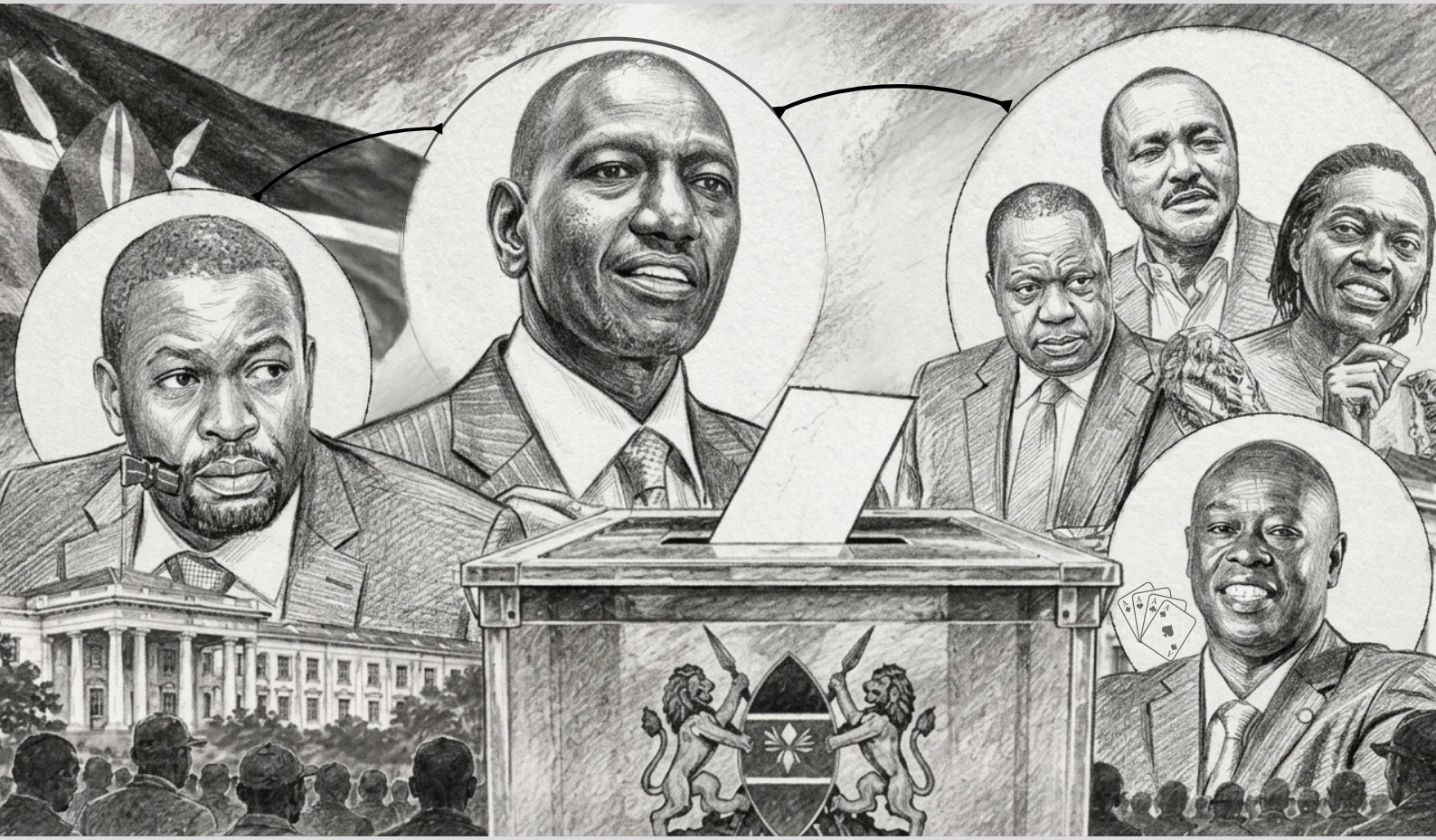
KENYA 2027 | ELECTIONS | POLITICS | ACCOUNTABILITY

ISSUE II

NOVEMBER 27, 2026

A THREE-WAY CONTEST AND A WILD CARD

Kenya's next presidential election is beginning to take shape around four competing centres of political influence, with one emerging as a wild card



DATA SHAPING 2027: WHAT OPINION POLLS CAN'T TELL YOU AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR

RUTO'S MACHINE: WHAT IS BEING BUILT AROUND HIS RE-ELECTION

ELECTORAL REFORMS: EVERY DEMAND RUNS THROUGH A CONTRACT OR A STATUTE



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EDITORIAL NOTE

Beyond The Campaigns Into The Choices

Two weeks ago, we launched The Ballot with a simple promise: to look past the rallies and the headlines at the choices that will decide Kenya's 2027 election.

This second issue tests that promise in a political season that is moving faster than the calendar. Since Issue I, the race has become harder to read, not easier.

Our cover story maps four centres of influence: the UDA–ODM partnership behind President William Ruto's re-election, Edwin Sifuna's Linda Mwananchi, the Ukombozi Alliance, and Rigathi Gachagua, the wild card whose choices could reshape the arithmetic. None is settled. All are still being tested.

Inside, we look at what is being built around Ruto's re-election, and what it must still prove to voters.

We also ask the question the opposition has so far avoided. Every principal now says there will be a single flagbearer, but none has said who decides, by what test, or by when.

We then turn to the machinery of the vote itself.

The opposition's four electoral reform demands sound like one package, yet each runs through a contract or a statute, and the calendar to August 10, 2027 will not wait for the slowest of them.

Our data brief returns to 2022 to show where the last election was actually decided.

Our explainer on opinion polls sets out what a percentage can and cannot tell you.

A thread runs through these pages. A poll is not a vote. A pledge of unity is not a method. A demand for reform is not yet a reform. Between the declaration and the outcome lie rules, deadlines and decisions, and that is where The Ballot intends to keep looking.

Thank you for reading. Whatever the headlines say next, we will keep asking who decides, how, and by when.

Welcome to the Ballot.

The Ballot is an election publication of The Chronicle Kenya, an affiliate of StrategiCrest Ltd.

For any feedback or questions, contact the editorial team at **editor@thechronicle.co.ke.**

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A THREE-WAY CONTEST AND A WILD CARD

The four emerging centres shaping the 2027 electoral contest have different advantages, but none can take its traditional political base for granted.

Kenya's 2027 presidential contest is taking shape around four political forces. President William Ruto has incumbency and the UDA–ODM partnership. Senator Edwin Sifuna is seeking to turn Linda Mwananchi into a political force.

Kalonzo Musyoka, Martha Karua and Fred Matiang'i are building an opposition platform, while former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua's ambitions and Mount Kenya influence could reshape coalition calculations.

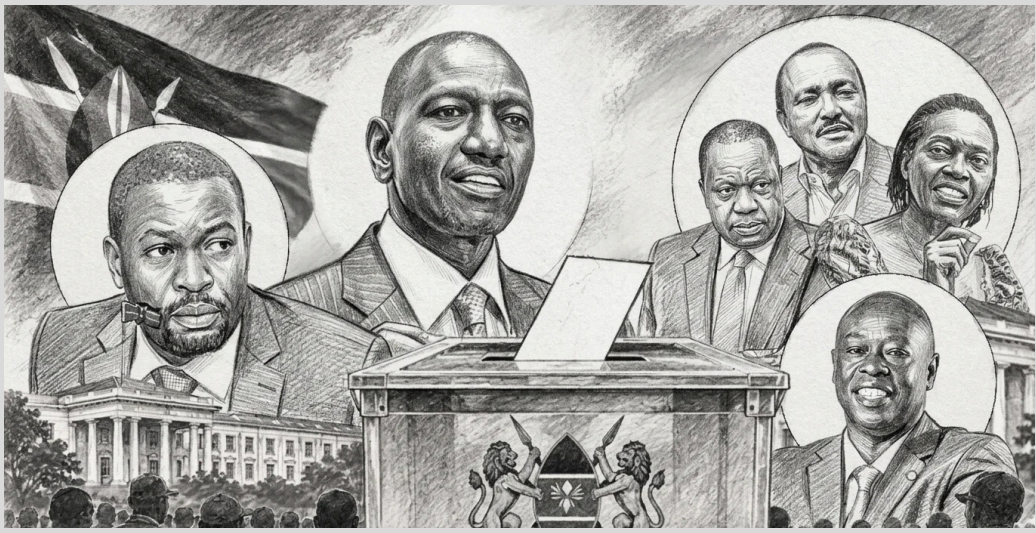
Though the election is months away, leaders are already reorganising parties, negotiating alliances and testing regional loyalties. The race will hinge as much on coalition-building as on individual popularity.

The four formations offer different routes to power. Ruto aims to strengthen his re-election prospects through a formal UDA–ODM partnership. Sifuna and Linda Mwananchi are testing whether opposition to government policies can become a credible national alternative.

Kalonzo, Karua and Matiang'i are organising a broader opposition through the Ukombozi Alliance. Gachagua remains a wildcard who could strengthen or complicate their plans.

These are not yet settled presidential tickets, nor are the groups entirely separate. Some leaders share platforms; others pursue parallel alliances. Their relationships and ambitions remain fluid, and the eventual line-up may differ considerably.

RUTO'S RE-ELECTION BID HAS A KEY ADVANTAGE HIS CHALLENGERS MAY STRUGGLE TO MATCH: CONTROL OF THE NATIONAL POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT AND A GOVERNING PARTY WITH NATIONWIDE NETWORKS.



Ruto's Advantage: Incumbency Machinery

Ruto's re-election bid has a key advantage his challengers may struggle to match: control of the national political establishment and a governing party with nationwide networks.

His most consequential move is turning the broad-based government arrangement into a formal electoral partnership with ODM.

Announced in August 2026, the agreement commits ODM to support his re-election instead of fielding its own presidential candidate, significantly reshaping the political landscape.

The partnership unites parties with distinct histories, regional constituencies and networks. UDA provides the incumbent's political machinery and support structures; ODM brings a longstanding organisation influential in Nyanza and beyond.

The deal could expand Ruto's coalition beyond the constituencies that secured his 2022 victory and reduce the chance that a strong opposition candidate benefits from fragmented support in ODM's traditional strongholds.

However, a presidential agreement does not automatically ensure harmony at every other electoral level.

The two parties still have to manage competing interests in parliamentary, gubernatorial and county assembly contests, where their members may be seeking the same positions.

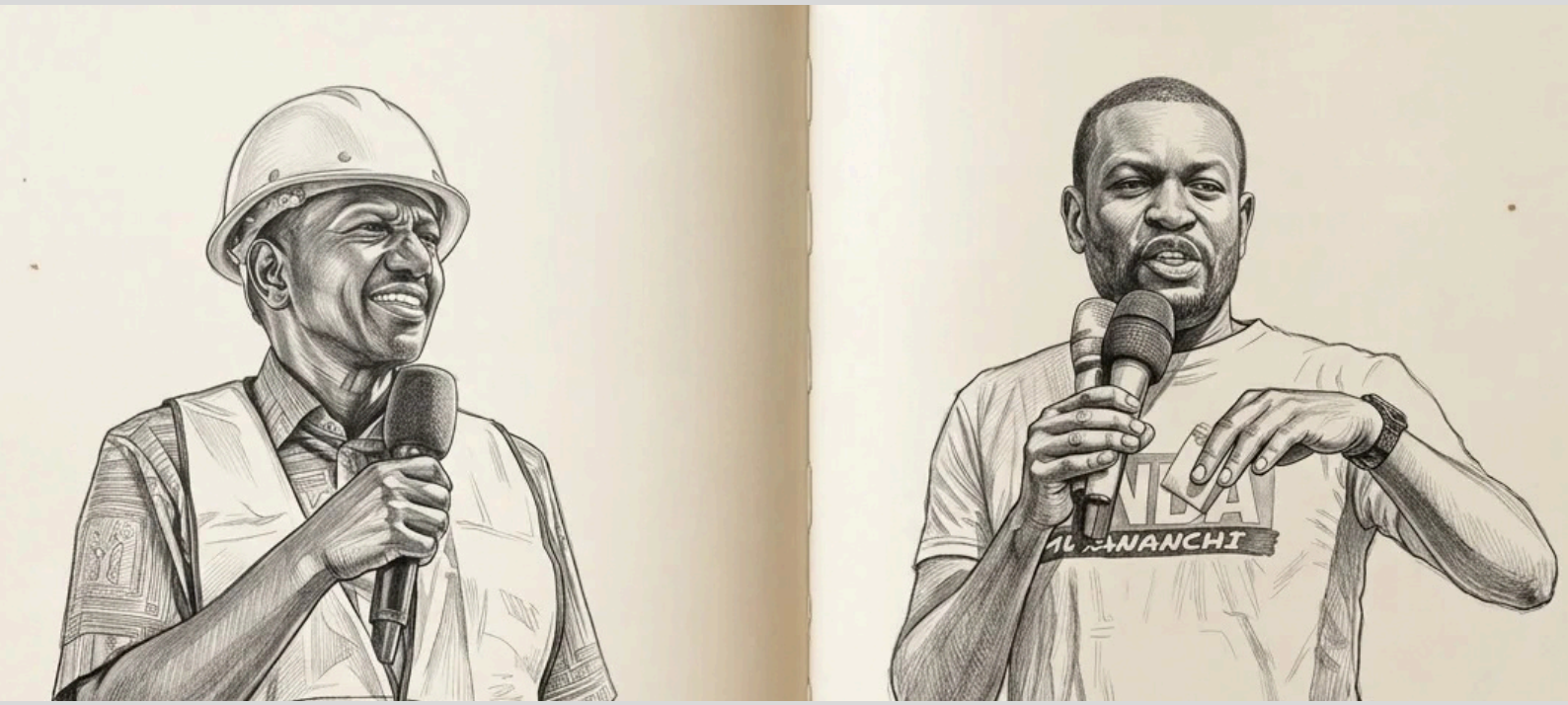
The question of how power will be distributed within a future administration will also test the durability of the partnership.

The political bargain is therefore larger than the endorsement of one presidential candidate. It involves party structures, campaign financing, political appointments, policy priorities and the management of competing ambitions.

Ruto's challenge will be to demonstrate that the partnership is more than an agreement among political leaders. He must translate it into grassroots mobilisation while convincing voters that the coalition offers a credible response to the country's economic and governance challenges.

His incumbency remains an important political asset, but it also places his administration's record at the centre of the election.

The cost of living, taxation, public debt, employment and the government's delivery record will shape how voters assess his claim to another term.



The same machinery that can help him organise a national campaign also makes it difficult to separate his re-election pitch from public judgement of his presidency.

Sifuna's Challenge: Turning A Movement Into A Political Machine

Linda Mwananchi is reshaping the opposition landscape. Unlike established parties built around long-standing leadership, it draws support from calls for accountability, generational change and dissatisfaction with the government's direction.

Sifuna, Nairobi senator and former ODM secretary-general, is among its most prominent figures. His stance increasingly conflicted with parts of ODM's leadership, particularly over cooperation with Ruto's administration and the electoral partnership with UDA.

The movement seeks to mobilise voters who feel poorly represented by existing political arrangements. Its appeal extends beyond opposition to Ruto, reflecting frustration with transactional politics, where alliances shift without clear explanations of what changes mean for voters.

Its challenge is turning that sentiment into an election-ready organisation. Rallies, social media and messaging can raise its profile, but a national campaign also needs party structures, registered members, candidates, funding, polling agents and sustained organisation across all 47 counties.

Linda Mwananchi must also define its purpose: an independent political vehicle, a platform for a wider opposition coalition, or the start of a Sifuna-led presidential campaign?

Prominent figures such as Embakasi East MP Babu Owino give it visibility but ongoing wrangles between the various teams could puncture the momentum.

The movement must preserve its grassroots energy while building ties with established politicians who offer resources, networks and electoral experience.

Such alliances, however, could bring the compromises supporters question in the existing establishment.

Ultimately, it must move beyond protest politics to build an electoral coalition and present a credible programme for government.

Ukombozi And The Search For An Alternative Coalition

While Linda Mwananchi tests a new political vehicle, the Ukombozi Alliance offers a more conventional effort to unite established opposition figures and organisations.

Kalonzo Musyoka, Martha Karua and Fred Matiang'i bring distinct strengths. Kalonzo has a strong political network and extensive experience in presidential and coalition politics.

Karua brings government, parliamentary and constitutional reform experience, and a reputation for institutional accountability. Matiang'i offers senior administrative experience and may appeal to voters seeking executive leadership.

James Orengo and other figures broaden the alliance, while appointing Matiang'i and Orengo co-chairs of its council suggests a structure more substantial than periodic meetings among opposition leaders.

But forming a coalition is easier than choosing its leader. Kalonzo has long pursued the presidency, arguing his experience and loyalty to past opposition alliances merit consideration.

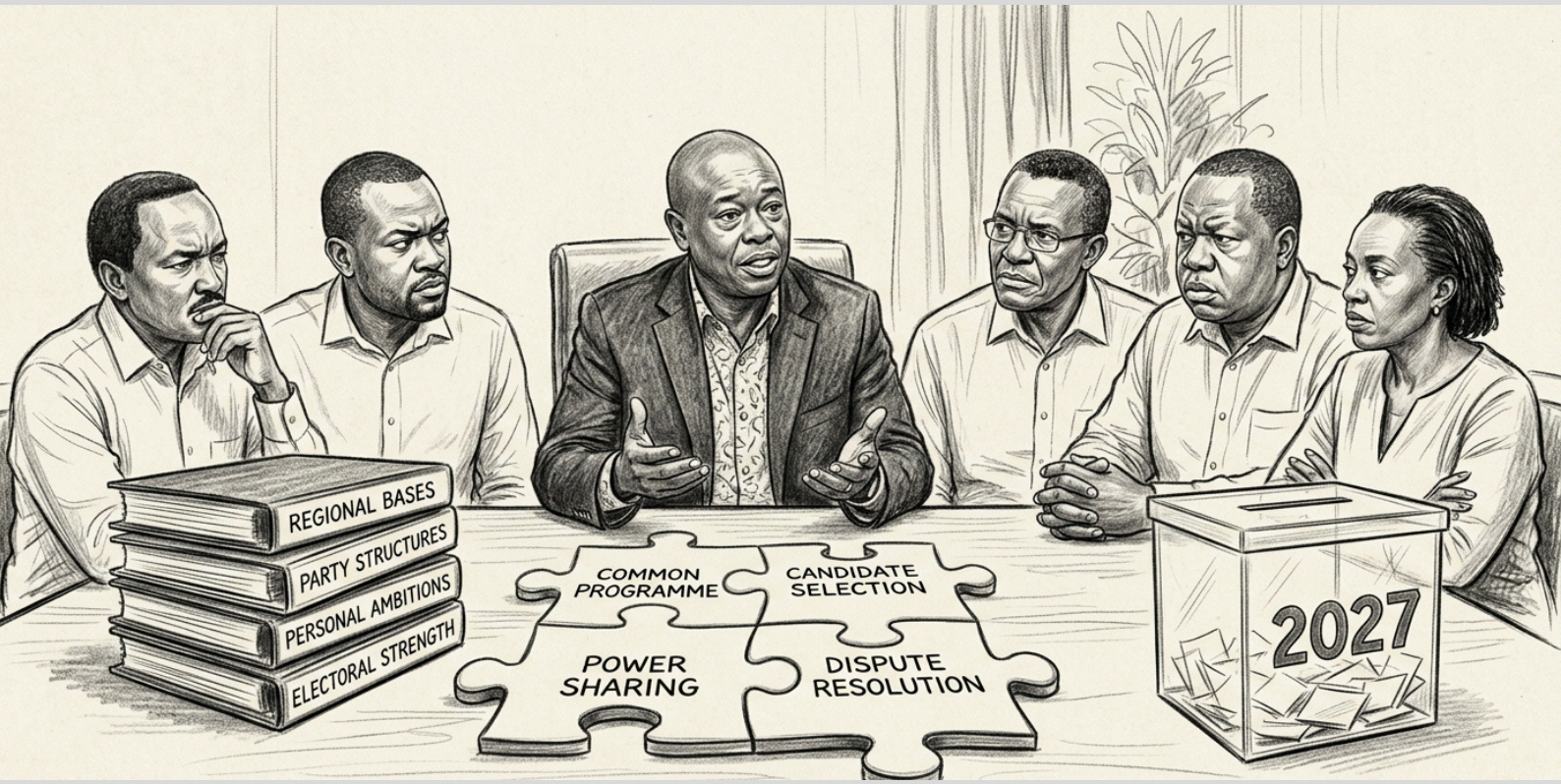
The alliance must agree on a candidate without alienating the partners who give it value.

It must also distinguish itself from other opposition initiatives. Defeating Ruto may unite leaders around an immediate goal, but cannot sustain a government after poll.

Voters will expect plans for the economy, debt, corruption, devolution, healthcare, education and jobs, as well as clarity on power-sharing and resolving disputes.

A well-organised coalition with established networks, experienced leaders and a shared programme could offer a serious national alternative. But wrangling over the presidential ticket and political posts could drain the energy needed to build it.

SIFUNA CAN MOBILISE VOTERS SEEKING A DIFFERENT POLITICS, BUT MUST TURN LINDA MWANANCHI INTO A FUNCTIONING NATIONAL ORGANISATION.



Gachagua: Wild Card In The Coalition arithmetic

Gachagua's political position makes him one of the most consequential figures in the emerging contest, even without a settled decision on whether he intends to pursue the presidency himself.

His departure from government and subsequent break with Ruto have fundamentally changed his political calculations.

Through the Democracy for the Citizens Party (DCP), he is attempting to establish an alternative political base, particularly in Mount Kenya, while presenting himself as a voice for voters who feel politically marginalised by the current administration.

His greatest potential asset is his understanding of the political networks and interests within the region that delivered substantial support to Ruto in 2022.

His ability to mobilise sections of that electorate could make him an important player in determining whether the incumbent retains the support that helped secure his victory.

But Mount Kenya is not a single political constituency whose votes can be transferred from one leader to another. The region has competing interests, multiple political personalities and an electorate whose preferences cannot be assumed to follow the positions of its most prominent politicians.

Deputy President Kithure Kindiki, Ndindi Nyoro, Justin Muturi and other leaders retain their own networks and ambitions. The extent to which Gachagua can consolidate the region behind DCP will depend on his ability to build party structures, attract influential leaders and demonstrate that his political project can deliver tangible benefits.

His engagement with other opposition figures adds another layer to the calculations. His appearance alongside Sifuna and Kalonzo at a Linda Mwananchi event demonstrated that political boundaries between emerging opposition formations are not impermeable. However, shared platforms do not necessarily mean agreement on leadership, strategy or the eventual presidential ticket.

Gachagua could emerge as a presidential candidate, a coalition partner or a kingmaker whose support determines the viability of another candidate. Each option carries different implications for the opposition.

The Coalition Arithmetic Will Determine The Race

Kenya's emerging political contest is about more than popularity: it hinges on political networks, regional support, organisation, resources and a credible national message.

Ruto benefits from incumbency and a budding ODM partnership, but must defend his record and manage a broad coalition.

GACHAGUA'S GREATEST POTENTIAL ASSET IS HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE POLITICAL NETWORKS AND INTERESTS WITHIN MT KENYA THAT DELIVERED SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT TO RUTO IN 2022.

Sifuna can mobilise voters seeking a different politics, but must turn Linda Mwananchi into a functioning national organisation.

Ukombozi could unite experienced leaders as a credible alternative, but needs to settle its leadership.

Gachagua can shape the opposition's regional arithmetic, but must choose whether to lead a coalition or help select its leader.

The alignments formed in coming months will matter as much as the candidates. Kenya's history shows coalitions can win majorities, but their durability depends on shared interests and leaders' willingness to compromise.

The 2027 race is not yet a settled contest among four presidential candidates. It is a struggle to build the machinery, alliances and national support needed to win.

Though one person will hold the presidency after August 2027, the battle for it is already unfolding across multiple centres of power.

WHAT OPINION POLLS CAN'T TELL YOU

A poll is a snapshot of names, not an election. Kenyans will see more polls before August, and this piece explores what each number can and can't do.

As Kenya moves toward the 2027 General Election, opinion polls will increasingly shape political narratives, influence coalition talks and dominate headlines.

But a national percentage is not an election result, and a candidate's popularity today does not necessarily mean victory tomorrow. Here, we explore seven things voters should understand before taking the numbers at face value.

The numbers arrived with the political weight opinion polls now carry in Kenya. In its November 2026 survey, TIFA Research placed President William Ruto and Nairobi Senator Edwin Sifuna in a joint lead, with each attracting 31 per cent of respondents asked whom they would prefer to win the 2027 presidential election.

Kalonzo Musyoka followed at nine per cent, Fred Matiang'i at five per cent and Rigathi Gachagua at four per cent.
The findings offered a striking picture of a presidential race in which the incumbent faced an emerging challenger from a political formation still defining its identity and structure.

Issue I of The Ballot's examination of the poll explored what these numbers revealed about the changing political landscape, the decline of established political formations and the challenge of converting individual popularity into a nationally competitive political movement.

But there is another question worth asking: what do these numbers tell us about the election itself? The answer is less straightforward than the headlines suggest.

TIFA interviewed 2,036 Kenyan adults between October 26 and November 5, using face-to-face household interviews across all 47 counties, organised into nine geographical survey zones.

The poll reported a margin of error of plus or minus 2.16 percentage points for the national sample, with larger margins for smaller subgroups. It asked respondents whom they would prefer to win the presidency. That is a useful measure of political preference, but it is not the same as asking how they intend to vote, whether they are registered, or whether they will actually turn out on election day.

There are at least seven limitations voters should keep in mind when interpreting the growing number of opinion polls.

1. A national sample is not a county-level election map

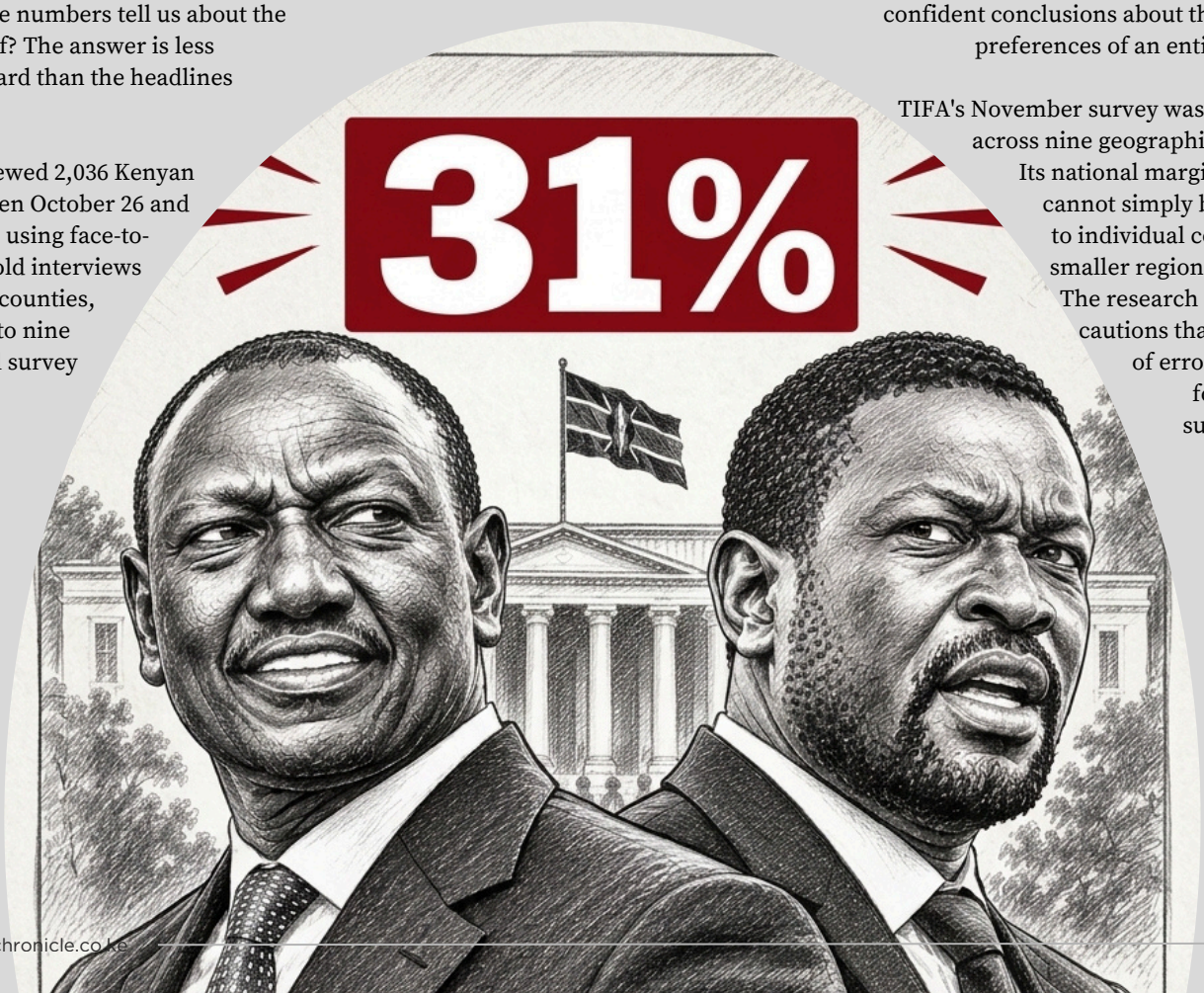
One of the most common mistakes in interpreting opinion polls is assuming that a nationally representative sample gives an equally reliable picture of political preferences in every county.

A survey of about 2,000 respondents can provide a useful national estimate when its sampling design is sound, its geographic coverage is appropriate, and its weighting is done properly. But that same sample becomes much less reliable when divided into smaller geographical units.

Consider a survey covering all 47 counties. Even if respondents were evenly distributed, which is not necessarily how a nationally representative sample is constructed, each county would average only about 43 respondents.

That is a very small group from which to draw confident conclusions about the political preferences of an entire county.

TIFA's November survey was organised across nine geographical zones. Its national margin of error cannot simply be applied to individual counties or smaller regional groups. The research firm itself cautions that margins of error increase for smaller subsamples.





This distinction matters because Kenya's presidential election is not decided by a national popularity contest alone.

A candidate may enjoy overwhelming support in several counties but struggle to build the geographical spread required to win the presidency. Another may have a more modest national profile but possess a strong coalition of support across different parts of the country.

A national poll can tell us who is attracting the most support overall. Without sufficiently robust geographical data, it cannot show how that support translates into a viable electoral map.

KENYA'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HAS TWO CONSTITUTIONAL TESTS, AND A NATIONAL OPINION POLL GENERALLY MEASURES ONLY ONE DIMENSION OF THE CONTEST.

2. Being popular is not the same as being registered to vote

Opinion polls measure the views of those interviewed, but not everyone will be eligible to vote, registered, or willing to turn out on election day.

This matters in a country where voter registration remains a major part of the electoral equation. The 2022 General Election used a register of 22,120,458 voters. IEBC has since worked to expand that register ahead of the 2027 election, targeting about 28.5 million voters.

By August 20, 2026, the commission had reported 2,936,516 new registrations since September 2025. The final register will also reflect verification, transfers, deaths and other adjustments.

The distinction between the adult population, registered voters and likely voters is therefore important. A survey of adults 18 and above may capture the political mood of a much broader population than those who will ultimately vote.

Even a survey limited to registered voters cannot automatically show who will turn out.

Young people who have not registered, citizens who have just turned 18, and people who registered but may not vote all complicate the link between stated preference and actual electoral strength.

Readers should therefore pay attention to the population a poll measures. Is it interviewing all adults, eligible voters or registered voters? Does it try to identify likely voters? And if so, how does it define them?

These questions matter because a candidate's support among the general adult population may look very different from their support among registered, likely voters.

3. The presidency requires more than 50 per cent

Kenya's presidential election has two constitutional tests, and a national opinion poll generally measures only one dimension of the contest.

Article 138(4) of the Constitution requires a presidential candidate to win more than half of all votes cast and at least 25 per cent of the votes cast in each of more than half of the counties.

In practical terms, a candidate must secure more than 50 per cent nationally and at least 25 per cent in at least 24 of Kenya's 47 counties. These are two separate requirements.

A candidate could lead a national opinion poll but lack enough support across the required number of counties. Equally, a candidate could have a competitive geographical spread but still fall short of the national majority threshold.



This is why the 31 per cent recorded by Ruto and Sifuna in the November TIFA survey should not be read as evidence that either is on course to meet the constitutional requirements.

The poll measured stated preference. It did not show whether either candidate could cross the 50 per cent threshold or secure the required county spread.

As the campaign develops, the key question may be not just who leads nationally, but where each candidate's support is concentrated, where it is growing, and whether political alliances can expand that support into the counties that matter.

4. A popular candidate is not necessarily a winning ticket

Opinion polls are useful for measuring individual politicians' popularity. Elections, however, are contested by parties, formations and coalitions.
This distinction matters in the emerging 2027 contest.

The November TIFA poll measured individual presidential preferences while opposition leaders were still negotiating their ties, the Linda Mwananchi movement was taking shape and different formations were positioning themselves for the election.

A coalition agreement can bring together politicians whose support bases complement each other. It can also create tensions, alienate supporters or shift loyalties.

A POLL CONDUCTED BEFORE COALITION AGREEMENTS MEASURES A DIFFERENT CONTEST FROM ONE CONDUCTED AFTER THE TICKETS ARE SETTLED.

Choosing a presidential candidate, running mate and coalition leadership can significantly alter electoral calculations. A politician who polls strongly individually may not command the same support on a particular ticket.

That is why the November 30 coalition summit deserves attention beyond the personalities expected to attend.
The negotiations could change the political choices presented to voters and, in turn, the question future polls need to ask.

A poll conducted before coalition agreements are concluded measures a different contest from one conducted after the tickets are settled.

5. Undecided voters are not necessarily available votes

Another detail worth closer attention is how opinion polls treat people who have not settled on a preferred candidate.
In the November TIFA survey, 15 per cent of respondents were undecided. Others said they did not favour any candidate or declined to answer.

These categories are not interchangeable. An undecided respondent may be weighing several candidates. Someone who says none may be dissatisfied with the options.

A person who declines to answer may have a preference but may not wish to disclose it.

How a pollster handles these responses can materially change the result.

For instance, a poll showing two candidates tied at 31 per cent each, with 15 per cent undecided, tells a different story from a headline suggesting the two candidates command 31 per cent of the eventual vote.

Removing undecided respondents and recalculating shares can also produce a different picture.

But that assumes those respondents will eventually choose among the named candidates, rather than abstain, reject all options or support someone not included in the question.

Readers should therefore look beyond the leading candidates' percentages.

The proportion undecided, those choosing none, those refusing to answer and the way these groups are treated in the final calculations are all part of the story.

6. Every poll has an expiry date

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about opinion polls is that they describe a particular moment.

The TIFA survey was conducted between October 26 and November 5 and released on November 12, but the political environment continued to evolve after the interviews ended.



The State of the Nation Address, subsequent developments surrounding Gachagua's eligibility to contest the presidency, and ongoing coalition negotiations all came after the fieldwork period. Indeed, on November 25, IEBC clarified that it had neither cleared nor determined Gachagua's eligibility to contest the 2027 presidential election.

These developments matter because political preferences are not fixed. A major political announcement, an alliance agreement, a court decision, a policy controversy or a change in a candidate's campaign strategy can influence public opinion.

The November poll cannot be faulted for failing to anticipate events after its fieldwork. But neither should its findings be presented as though they describe the political environment indefinitely. There is a difference between the date a poll is published and the period during which the interviews were conducted. Readers should always look for the latter.

7. Even the best poll is not a crystal ball

Kenya's 2022 General Election is a useful reminder of both the value and limits of opinion polling. The final presidential result was close: William Ruto received 50.49 per cent of valid votes, against Raila Odinga's 48.85 per cent.

Yet the final polls did not all tell the same story. A Radio Africa Group poll published by The Star shortly before the election put Ruto at 45.5 per cent and Odinga at 44.2 per cent. Excluding undecided respondents shifted the figures to 50.4 per cent for Ruto and 49 per cent for Odinga.

The adjusted figures were very close to the eventual outcome. Other major pollsters, including TIFA, Infotrak and Ipsos, produced adjusted estimates pointing to an Odinga victory, with reported leads of varying sizes.

The lesson is not that one pollster is always right, and others are always wrong, or that one successful poll proves permanent accuracy. Rather, the comparison shows why voters should examine methodology, the treatment of undecided respondents, fieldwork timing and the questions asked.

It also underlines the importance of comparing a poll with actual results, rather than judging credibility by how confidently findings are presented.

A good poll can provide a valuable estimate. It cannot remove the uncertainty inherent in an election.

Read the numbers, but interrogate the politics

As the 2027 election approaches, opinion polls will become increasingly important in Kenya's political conversation.

Political parties will use them to assess their standing. Coalition negotiators will cite them to strengthen their bargaining positions. Candidates will celebrate favourable findings and question unfavourable ones. Media organisations will continue publishing numbers that can quickly become political headlines.

But voters should resist the temptation to treat every new percentage as a verdict on the election. An opinion poll is a snapshot of the electorate's mood. An election tests its choices. Confusing the two is one of the easiest ways to misunderstand the race.

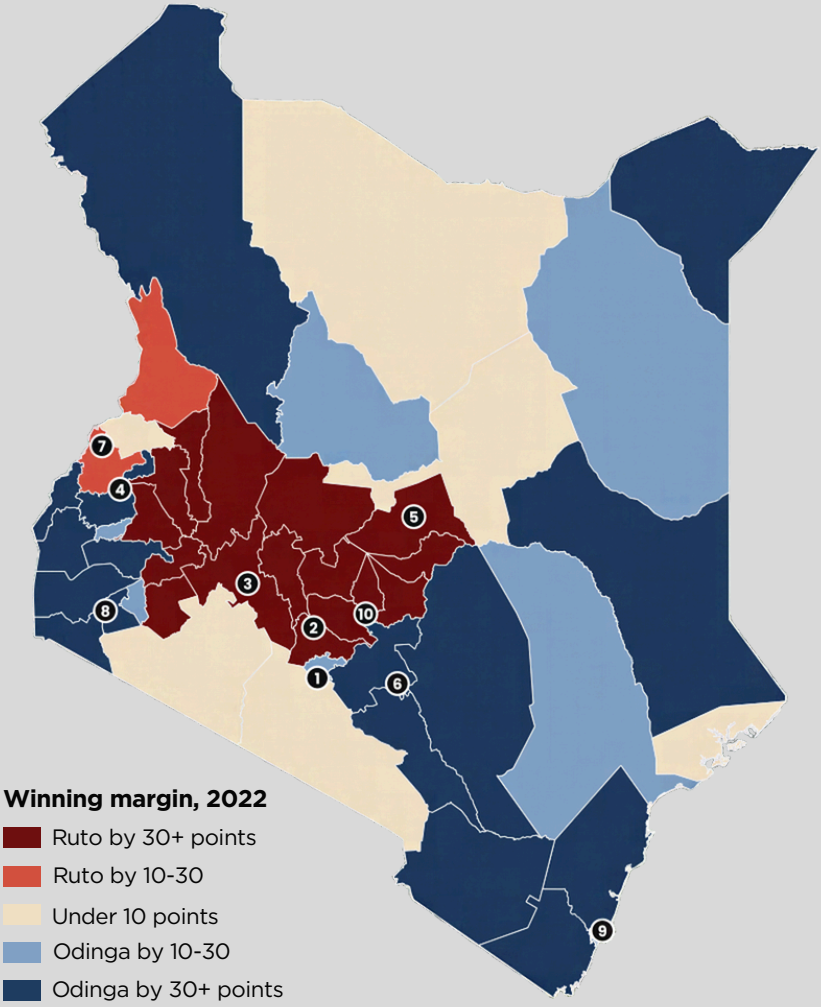
VOTERS SHOULD RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO TREAT EVERY NEW PERCENTAGE AS A VERDICT ON THE ELECTION. AN OPINION POLL IS A SNAPSHOT OF THE ELECTORATE'S MOOD. AN ELECTION TESTS ITS CHOICES.

The Chronicle KENYA

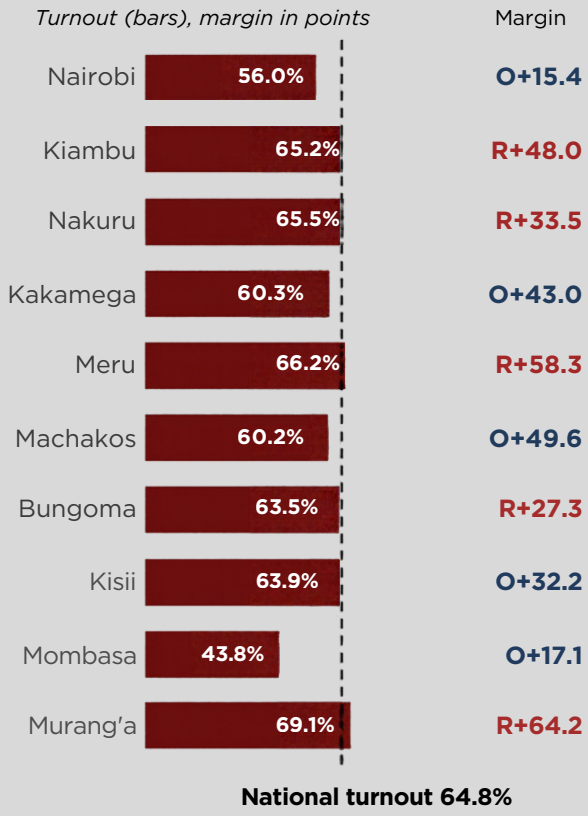
DATA BRIEF

WHERE 2022 WAS DECIDED

- 2022 presidential result by county: the winner's margin in points. Ruto 50.5%, Odinga 48.8%.
- Only 6 of 47 counties were close. The gap was made in turnout: 79.9% in Bomet, 43.8% in Mombasa.



THE BIG TEN, 2022



R = Ruto lead, O = Odinga lead.
Numbers on the map mark these ten counties, ranked by the 2026 register

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

233,211	votes (1.6 points) separated Ruto from Odinga nationally. Odinga still won 27 of 47 counties; Ruto won 20.
6 of 47	counties were decided by under 10 points. Together they held just 7.2% of the 2022 register.
79.9% vs 43.8%	turnout in Bomet against Mombasa. National turnout was 64.8%.
~213,000	ballots: the gap between Nairobi's 56.0% turnout and the national average, about 91% of the national margin.

Sources: IEBC declaration of presidential results, August 15, 2022



RUTO'S RE-ELECTION MACHINE: WHAT IS BEING BUILT

Through UDA–ODM partnership, regional political networks, grassroots mobilisation and a development-led message, Ruto is assembling a national electoral machine.

The clearest sign of President William Ruto's re-election preparations may not be his rallies, project launches or speeches, but the organisation taking shape behind them.

The 2027 campaign is gaining structure. Parties are negotiating a common platform, regional power brokers joining mobilisation networks, elected leaders coordinating and grassroots organisers combining operations.

At its centre is a partnership that could reshape the electoral map: the United Democratic Alliance (UDA) and the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

Beyond endorsing Ruto, the partnership could combine UDA's national networks with ODM's established support, particularly in regions where Ruto has had less influence. The goal is to turn a broad-based government into a coordinated campaign reaching voters in all 47 counties.

But building a political machine does not guarantee victory. Ruto must show voters his administration deserves another five years while balancing the interests of parties and politicians whose support he needs.

Broadbase Partnership Is The Foundation

The UDA–ODM arrangement is central to Ruto's re-election strategy. In August 2026, Ruto told a parliamentary group retreat that government cooperation would evolve into a common platform for seeking a fresh mandate in August 2027.

He announced a five-member team from each party to develop a joint manifesto, agree on shared priorities and present a common programme to voters.

By November, ODM's position on the presidential contest appeared settled: Ruto would be its candidate.

The parties have also discussed a joint campaign committee and treasury account to fund candidates at every level.

ODM Director of Elections Junet Mohamed said the proposed structure would support candidates from Members of County Assemblies to governors, MPs and the presidential candidate.

This would give the partnership shared campaign infrastructure instead of leaving each party to mobilise separately and coordinate only at the presidential level.

It could also help manage competition between the parties, which have interests in many of the same counties. Their proposal to avoid zoning and pursue complementarity aims to enable cooperation without erasing either party's identity.

Still, tensions remain. ODM wants its support to bring meaningful influence. Its leaders have raised power-sharing, the Deputy President's position, allocation of elective seats and resources for maintaining party structures.

These issues will determine whether ODM is an equal partner or merely supplies votes to a campaign controlled by UDA. Ruto must secure ODM's support without letting negotiations over positions derail the campaign.

The joint manifesto and proposed structures are important first steps. The harder task is creating a functioning organisation with clear roles, agreed funding and a credible way to resolve disputes.

From national leaders to polling stations

The second pillar is a nationwide network of political organisers. A November 13 meeting at State House, Nairobi, showed how the effort is developing. Ruto gathered about 1,500 UDA and ODM leaders, grassroots mobilisers and aspirants from Nairobi County to align party structures and plan a joint strategy for the capital.

The meeting took the partnership beyond national leaders to the more difficult work of organising voters and candidates county by county.

The emerging network includes national figures, regional coordinators, elected representatives and grassroots mobilisers.

The aim is not simply to gather prominent politicians for endorsements, but to connect the national campaign to county, constituency, ward and polling-station operations.



That is where elections are won or lost. Beyond national attention, campaigns must identify supporters, register and mobilise voters, communicate consistently, coordinate agents and maintain a presence at polling stations.

The State House meeting suggests Ruto's team recognises the need for this ground-level work.

The next test is expanding the partnership nationwide. Nairobi is difficult because both parties have competing ambitions; other counties will face disputes over nominations, incumbency and seat allocation.

The campaign will work only if the parties agree on how to manage these conflicts. Otherwise, the machinery assembled for Ruto could fuel competition among the politicians expected to mobilise for him.

Central Kenya And The Battle To Recover

One of the most important regional calculations concerns Mount Kenya. The region overwhelmingly backed Ruto in 2022, but their relationship has shifted since former Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua's impeachment in October 2024.

Gachagua has become a major opponent and is building influence through the Democracy for the Citizens Party (DCP). Ruto can no longer assume the region will support him simply because it did so previously.

GOVERNMENT-ALIGNED POLITICIANS MAY HELP ORGANISE A CAMPAIGN, BUT THEIR PRESENCE ALONE WILL NOT RESTORE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE.

The administration is responding with political mobilisation and development messaging.

Networks associated with Public Health Principal Secretary Mary Muriuki and National Assembly Majority Leader Kimani Ichung'wah are working to rebuild support through different approaches.

They aim to promote the administration's record and mobilise local leaders behind Ruto's re-election bid.

This reflects the need for a deliberate effort in Mount Kenya. Ruto's reduced presence there has left allies and local organisers with greater responsibility for defending his record and countering Gachagua. But the challenge goes beyond the absence of a prominent regional deputy.

Mount Kenya voters are not a unified bloc, nor can their interests be reduced to the Ruto-Gachagua contest. The region has elected leaders with varied ambitions, from government allies to critics of its policies.

Ruto must rebuild ties with voters who backed him in 2022 but now judge his administration on the economy, taxes, jobs, public services and its treatment of regional leaders.

Government-aligned politicians may help organise a campaign, but their presence alone will not restore public confidence.

Development As A Campaign Message

Ruto's other major asset is the visibility of government activity. Roads, markets, housing, water projects, hospitals, railways and other investments have featured in county tours, including visits to regions traditionally associated with the opposition.

Project launches, inspections and ceremonies are used to demonstrate the administration's reach.

His September tour of Nyanza illustrated this approach. Rather than focus only on a few major national projects, the administration highlighted investments in everyday economic activity, including markets, roads, water, health and education facilities.

The logic is simple: an incumbent seeking re-election must show that campaign promises have produced visible results.

Projects offer tangible evidence of government activity and opportunities to engage local leaders, answer community requests and build support where it is weaker.

But this strategy carries risks. Announcing a project is not the same as completing it: a road under construction, an unhanded-over market or a hospital that is not fully operational cannot be judged as a functioning public service.



Financial sustainability also matters. Kenyans want to know how projects are funded, whether contractors are paid and whether public resources reflect national priorities. Nor can visible investment erase household pressures such as living costs, taxes, jobs, credit access and service quality.

Ruto is betting that government investment will shape the election debate. The opposition will argue that projects should be judged by their cost, completion and impact. The contest will concern not just who launched the most projects, but whose account of the country's economic and social direction voters trust.

The Machine Must Do More Than Mobilise

The re-election effort will also test the boundary between presidential duties and campaigning. Incumbents have advantages challengers lack: national visibility, access to government instruments, and a public platform to explain policy and priorities. These are legitimate features of office, but they require clear separation between government work and partisan activity.

Public funds, official events and state institutions must serve public purposes, not replace party campaign infrastructure even when Using government resources or platforms for partisan advantage raises questions of accountability, fairness and electoral-law compliance.

The 2027 election's credibility will partly depend on respecting these boundaries.

Campaign financing also warrants scrutiny. A proposed joint UDA–ODM treasury account could coordinate spending, but voters and regulators will want to know its funding sources, allocations and compliance with disclosure and spending rules.

Large campaigns require transport, communications, staff, field operations and coordination; extensive machinery makes financing transparency especially important.

Ruto's team must also manage the ambitions of its regional allies. ODM will seek to protect its identity and representation; UDA will want control of its structures; governors and MPs will defend their positions; and aspirants will expect a fair path to electoral success. The presidential race may have one candidate, but the coalition contains many individual contests.

The Real Test Is The Public Verdict

Ruto is building a formidable political structure. The UDA–ODM partnership offers a wider national platform, a joint manifesto a shared message, and grassroots mobilisation shows the campaign is moving beyond elite negotiations.

RUTO'S CAMPAIGN MUST ADDRESS THESE CONCERNS WITH MORE THAN PROJECT LISTS AND ENDORSEMENTS.

His administration is making its development record central to the re-election case, while allies seek support in resistant regions.

But reaching voters is different from persuading them. Organisation, resources and networks can build a campaign; persuasion requires credibility.

Opponents will make the election a referendum on the government's record, citing the cost of living, taxes, public debt, public services and the gap between promises and delivery.

Ruto's campaign must address these concerns with more than project lists and endorsements.

The UDA–ODM partnership must also prove durable, manage competing interests and make its promised joint machinery work beyond national leadership meetings.

A political machine can create momentum, organise supporters and amplify a candidate's message, but it cannot ensure voters accept it.

That is the key uncertainty in Ruto's re-election strategy. He is building alliances and a network that could reach beyond his traditional base. Whether it becomes a winning coalition depends on Kenyans' experience of his government since 2022.

The election will show whether the Ruto electoral machine being assembled has earned enough trust to bring the country with it.

UNITED AGAINST RUTO DIVIDED OVER EVERYTHING ELSE

Kenya's opposition has made a compelling public case for a united challenge to President William Ruto. But behind the declarations of solidarity lie difficult questions about leadership, political structures, regional interests and the distribution of power.

Leaders from across the expansive opposition bloc now say, almost in unison, that they must avoid splitting the vote and field one candidate.

Kalonzo Musyoka said it again on November 14, standing beside Rigathi Gachagua and Edwin Sifuna at a burial in Nyeri, declaring himself ready to step aside for a common candidate. Martha Karua and David Maraga made the same pledge in Kitale days later. But a pledge to unite is not a method for choosing.

The article's central argument is simple: until the opposition agrees on three rules—who selects the flagbearer, when that choice is made, and how power is shared afterwards—every declaration of unity is merely a deferral of the real negotiation.

Rule One: Who Chooses

The field is crowded, and each contender is a different proposition. Kalonzo offers experience and a party structure.



Gachagua offers the Mount Kenya vote he retains, through DCP. Sifuna carries a newer energy through Linda Mwananchi. Matiang'i offers executive experience and the Jubilee platform. Karua, Maraga and Eugene Wamalwa each bring constituencies that will expect a seat at the table.

The October 20 meeting between Gachagua's team and Linda Mwananchi reportedly produced an understanding to work towards a common ticket. Agreeing to find one candidate is not agreeing on who it is.

Here the pledges meet their limit. Kalonzo's willingness to step aside has been stated repeatedly since March, but his own formulation on October 30 was conditional: he would stand with a chosen candidate because "it must be a team".

Some of his allies have said publicly that he should not accept a deputy's role or that he will go it alone if denied the ticket. A sacrifice offered in public and qualified in private is not yet a selection process.

What is missing is a rule that applies to everyone: a poll, a delegates' vote, a negotiated formula, or some combination, each with its own strengths and drawbacks, agreed before the contest rather than after it.

Rule Two: When

The opposition cannot agree on timing either. Kalonzo's camp wants an early decision to give the candidate time to raise money and build networks, a view echoed by Kitui Senator Enoch Wambua, who has called the naming "long overdue". Others prefer to keep talks open.

Gachagua has insisted that the naming of the united opposition candidate should wait until after the first quarter of next year. This is even as the former deputy president keeps insisting that he will be on the ballot.

Opposition supporters have a view.

In TIFA's November poll, 45 per cent of opposition supporters preferred the ticket to be announced between January and March 2027. Naming a flagbearer before the rules are set risks alienating leaders whose support is essential. Delaying keeps the talks alive, but turns every rally and endorsement into a contest for relevance.

Rule Three: What The Coalition Is

Unity at the top does not make an organisation. Ukombozi, Linda Mwananchi and DCP are separate formations, and DCP has at times expressed reservations about joining the Ukombozi framework. A coalition can exist as a campaign arrangement without being a governing body.

So the opposition must decide: do parties keep their identities under one candidate, or merge structures? Is there a joint secretariat controlling messaging and money? Is there a council and a dispute mechanism?





EVERY OPPOSITION PRINCIPAL NOW SAYS THERE WILL BE A SINGLE FLAGBEARER. NONE HAS SAID WHO DECIDES, BY WHAT TEST, OR BY WHEN. THAT GAP, NOT THE NAME, IS THE STORY.

Narc in 2002 shows both sides of the lesson: a broad coalition can win, but it can then struggle to manage its constituent parties' expectations.

Matiang'i has acknowledged that power-sharing talks remain unresolved and that a joint administration may prove difficult.

Agreeing to campaign together and agreeing to govern together are different negotiations, covering Cabinet seats, parliamentary leadership, and a programme on debt, taxation, devolution and the cost of living. A shared critique of the government is not yet a governing agenda.

Voters Are Ahead Of The Leaders

The TIFA poll, released November 12, shows the pressure. Among 758 opposition supporters, 57 per cent said it was very likely that Linda Mwananchi and Ukombozi leaders would form an alliance, and another 22 per cent said somewhat likely, 79 per cent in all.

The same poll carries a warning. Forty-three per cent of opposition supporters named Gachagua as the figure most responsible for opposition disagreements. Supporters want unity and already have a view on who stands in its way.

If leaders keep promising unity without resolving selection and power-sharing, the gap between expectation and delivery becomes a liability.

There is also a geography problem. Kenya has a long record of regional bargains that produce electoral strength without a shared programme.

The alliance must show it can organise beyond its leaders' strongholds and field credible candidates at parliamentary, gubernatorial, and county levels, where the coalition's durability will be tested.

The Incumbent Is Not Waiting

ODM has deliberately decided formally not to field a presidential candidate and to back Ruto's re-election, even though this does not guarantee him victory.

But it gives him a defined arrangement around the presidential contest, which is exactly what the opposition lacks.

The opposition does not need to resolve every disagreement before it campaigns. It does need a rulebook for the three that matter: selection, timing and structure.

The question is no longer whether its leaders understand the need for unity. Most have said they do.

The opposition's hardest test may not be finding a candidate who can beat Ruto. It may be agreeing, before the choice is made, to accept rules that will not favour everyone, including the person offering to step aside.



REFORM DEMAND: EACH RUNS THROUGH A CONTRACT OR A STATUTE

The opposition's four electoral reform demands sound like one package. They are four different problems with four different decision-makers, and the calendar to August 10, 2027 will not wait for the slowest of them.

On November 19, opposition leaders led by former Chief Justice David Maraga gathered under the People's Coalition on Election Reforms, and handed IEBC four demands.

They want a cleaned voter register, constituency-level declarations of presidential results made final so that Bomas only receives, aggregates and announces them, a pilot of electronic voting for Kenyans abroad, and live-streaming of voting, counting and results.

The same day, opposition leaders walked out of the commission's consultative meeting. Five days later, IEBC's contract with Smartmatic, the supplier behind biometric registration, voter identification and results transmission, expired. The commission had not explained how voter registration would carry on.

That sequence matters more than any single demand. It shows the four are not one negotiation

Each needs something IEBC does not hold on its own: a statute, a procured system, or both. That is the argument of this piece.

Four asks, four gatekeepers

Read as a list, the demands look like a reform agenda. Read as a to-do list with owners, they split.

Demand	What it takes	Who decides	Where it can stall
Clean the register	Audit and removal of duplicate, deceased and ineligible entries, plus registration of eligible Kenyans not yet on the roll	IEBC	Registration runs on technology whose contract expired on Nov 24; no stated bridge
End Bomas as the point of finality	Amend the Elections Act so constituency declarations are final	Parliament, then presidential assent	Needs a House majority and floor time before the campaign calendar
Diaspora e-voting pilot	A secure remote-voting channel, a legal basis for it, and a register of eligible voters abroad	IEBC, very likely Parliament too	Replacement election technology is not yet procured
Live-stream voting, counting, results	Cameras and connectivity at stations and tally centres, plus rules on ballot secrecy and handling of footage	IEBC by regulation, or Parliament by statute	Legal framing is contested; ODM has denied backing moves to restrict live broadcast of results

The Technology Under All Four

Three of the four lean on systems the commission has yet to secure. IEBC says it needs about Sh10 billion to replace 45,353 KIEMS kits judged obsolete, plus 5,000 contingency kits.

A procurement review found parts of the tender document vague, and a bidder alleged that the specifications were tailored to a rival. Earlier this year the High Court temporarily halted tendering for ballot papers after a bidder's challenge.

The Smartmatic contract is the part nobody can route around. Opposition leaders, including Rigathi Gachagua and Kalonzo Musyoka, asked IEBC before November 24 to say how registration would continue once it lapsed.

The register stood above 23.4 million in August, and IEBC projects 28.5 million by polling day, so the roll cannot be both cleaned and grown without working registration technology. Kenya has been here before.

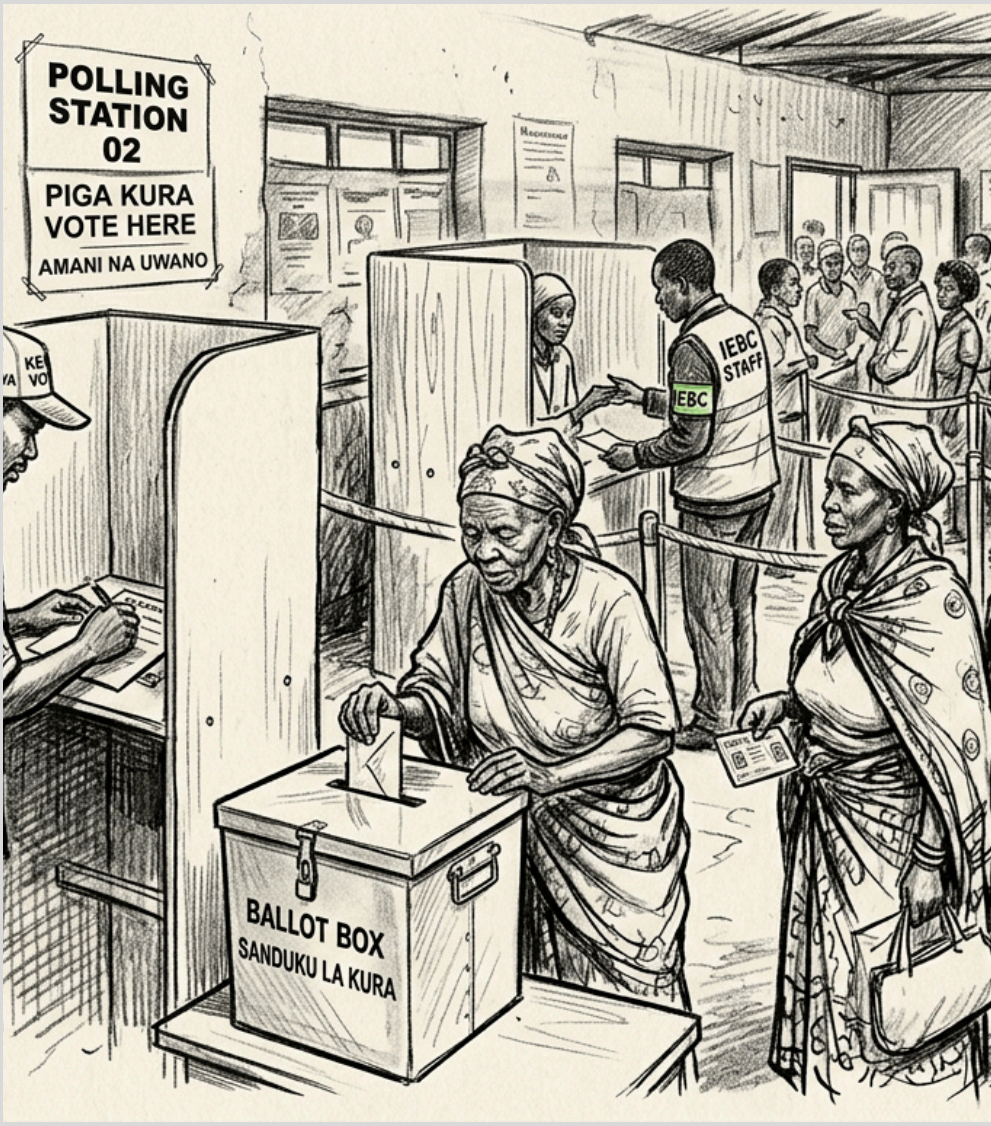
In 2017 the Supreme Court nullified the presidential election, finding that irregularities in the transmission and declaration of results undermined the process, and that technology reforms should therefore strengthen the integrity and finality of result transmission. Technology and finality are not side issues.

The Clock

Polling day is August 10, 2027.

Counting back from that date, the commission's published calendar sets out when each reform must be completed: voter registration rules by the first cutoff, since they must be in place before ballots are prepared; campaign finance changes by the next deadline, since parties need notice before the campaign formally opens; and final ballot or counting adjustments by the last date, since after that point they no longer affect polling day.

The squeeze is built in: a statute has to clear Parliament, including any long recess, and come into force before the machinery it governs can be trained and deployed, which matters because there is no room to complete those preparations until the legal basis is in place.



THE REGISTER IS THE ONE DEMAND IEBC CAN MEET ALONE, BUT ONLY IF THE REGISTRATION SYSTEM KEEPS RUNNING.

Technology has to be procured, tested, and deployed in the field before nominations. Procurement is the starting point; testing should follow while there is still time to build confidence, and deployment in the field must be completed before nominations.

What IEBC and The Government Say

The commission's side is not silent. Chairperson Erastus Ethekon responded on November 20 that leaving the meeting would not resolve the concerns parties had raised. Deputy President Kithure Kindiki has said the 2027 polls will be free and fair.

IEBC has also published a timetable and presents its preparations as on course, citing its public electoral roadmap and implementation updates. There is also the sceptic's reading.

Four demands made publicly days before the opposition's own summit can be seen as substantive concerns, but they also serve as positioning, and demands that cannot all be met make a convenient reason to withhold endorsement.

Both things can be true: the concerns may be real, and the timing may be tactical. The test is whether each demand comes back with an owner and a date.

What To Watch

First, the opposition summit on 30 November, which will show whether the four demands become formal conditions for taking part or a bargaining position, matters because it will clarify the level of consensus needed before the polls and signal how much confidence remains in the process.

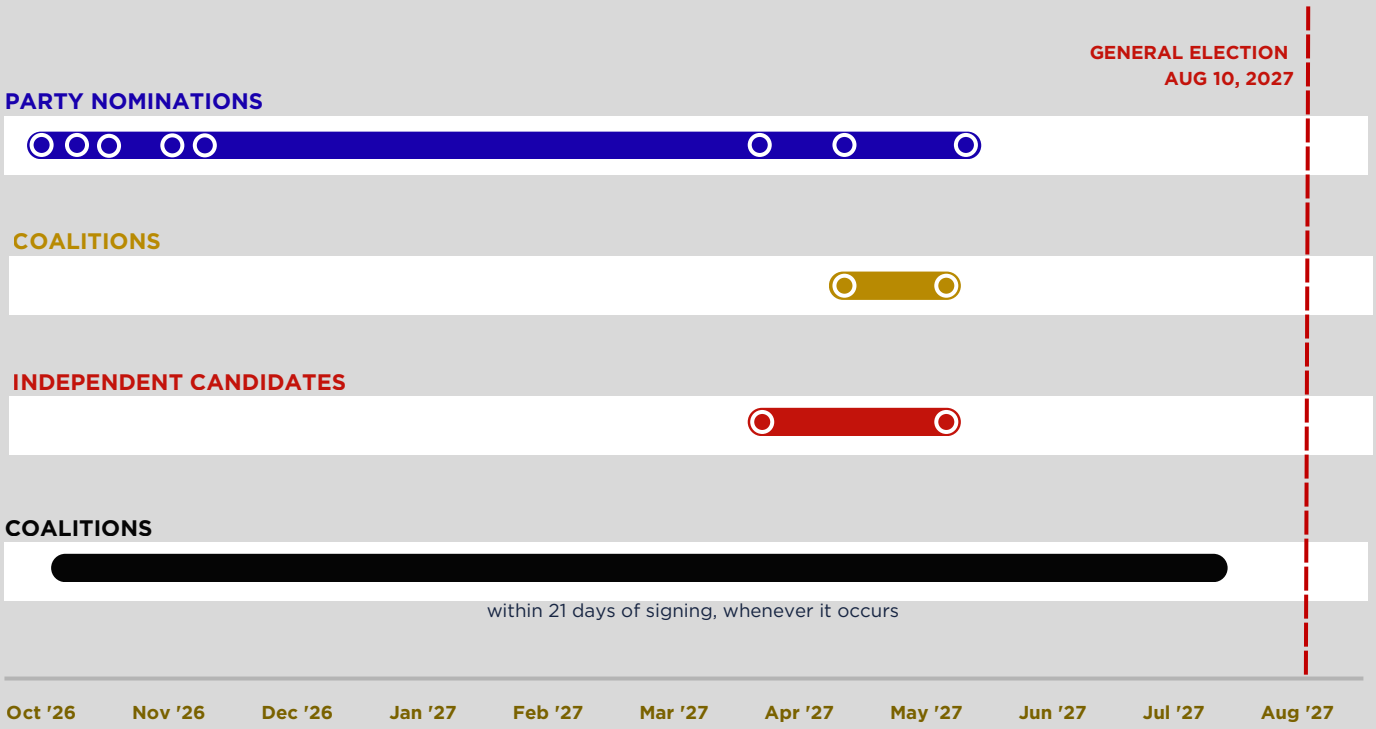
Second, IEBC's written reply, which had not been published when the coalition presented its demands, matters because a clear response would show how the commission is addressing concerns and whether it can reassure the public.

Third, what replaces or extends the Smartmatic arrangement matters because it affects the credibility of the technology to be used in the election and whether preparations are on track.

Fourth, whether any Elections Act amendment is tabled before the House breaks matters because legal changes would shape the rules of the contest and affect confidence that the framework is settled in time.

Kenya's electoral calendar has fixed dates. The reforms do not yet have any.

THE ELECTIONS CALENDAR



KEY DEADLINES AT A GLANCE

- **Oct 7–15 2026**
  Party signatories submitted to ORPP
- **Oct 30 2026**
  Nomination rules certified by ORPP
- **Nov 6 2026**
  Certified nomination rules filed with IEBC
- **Mar 16–23 2027**
  Party membership lists submitted to ORPP
- **Mar 23 – May 82027**
  Independent candidate symbol & status window
- **Apr 12 2027**
  Certified membership registers filed with IEBC
- **Apr 12 2027**
  Coalition political party registration due
- **May 8 2027**
  Resignation deadline for independent candidates
- **9 May 2027**
  Pre-election coalition confirmation due
- **12 May 2027**
  Party member register + assets/liabilities statement due
- **Rolling**
  Merger agreements due within 21 days of signing

THE BALLOT

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