

Kenya's Political Turmoil

What is the issue?

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- Incumbent president 'Uhuru Kenyatta' is holding on to power, despite allegations of widespread violence & poll rigging.

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- His election has been challenged for the second time in the courts, which is only bound to deepen the crisis.

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What was the turn of events?

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- The Kenyan presidential election was initially held in August and the incumbent President 'Kenyatta' emerged victorious.

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- But the results were declared void by the courts due to various discrepancies in electioneering.

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- This mandated a re-run in October which was boycotted by the opposition who argued that discrepancies persisted.

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- As the results of the re-run have also been challenged in Court, the political turmoil is only expected to intensify.

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What is the ground scenario?

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- The judicial ruling against the August vote was unprecedented and was widely hailed as an exemplar of judicial independence.

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- Subsequently, President Uhuru Kenyatta has amended the electoral laws to suit his interests, which was vehemently opposed.
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- The masses have also been intimidated and restless, thereby leaving no possibility for a fair poll.
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- Quitting of top election officials and mysterious deaths of high functionaries also highlights the extent of intimidation.
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- Also, when a plea was filed to postpone the presidential re-run, most judges didn't show-up for the fear of threats.
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How does the future look?

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- While the verdict of the latest legal challenge is uncertain, absence of a genuine contest might lead to declaring the results void.
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- As the GDP forecasts have shown big dips in growth, the social cost of this current uncertainty can be immense.
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- Politicians from both the ruling & opposition camps owe moral responsibility for the current situation and need to find a truce.
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- **Way Forward** - Negotiating a lasting settlement is necessary and the 2010 constitution should be followed in letter & spirit.
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- Monopoly of power enjoyed by the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin tribes must end and larger decentralisation should be taken up.
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- African Union must exert political pressure to prevent the escalation of the crisis beyond Kenya's borders.
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- Strengthening the election mechanism against political interference would be an important first step in this regard.
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Source: The Hindu

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