



Elite Power-Sharing: How Presidential Candidates Buy-off Disgruntled Leaders and Maintain Their Coalitions

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As the August 9 general elections draw ever closer in Kenya, the month of April saw political party “nominations”, when the respective parties and coalitions select their candidates for a range of different positions including Member of Parliament and Governor. The political parties had a deadline of 2 April to conclude the process and submit the names of successful candidates to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) for approval. Although the 2022 nominations appears to have been a small improvement on the 2017 experience, with less violence and chaos, they did little to strengthen Kenyan democracy.

In most cases the parties behind former opposition leader turned establishment candidate Raila Odinga - the Jubilee Party and the Orange Democratic Movement - did not hold elected primaries at all, and instead used “direct nominations”, much to the chagrin of those who were overlooked. The parties behind Odinga’s main rival, Deputy President William Ruto, held more primaries, but here too there were many controversies and numerous disgruntled “losers”. As a result, both Ruto and Odinga faced a major challenge: how to prevent losing candidates from defecting and running as [independents](#).

This is a particularly dangerous prospect in the context of a close elections, because a popular independent can divide the vote, enabling a rival party to secure an unexpected victory. In response, coalition leaders spend the post-nominations period frantically calling those who feel they have been cheated to offer them a range of rewards to stay loyal, including the promise of future tenders; appointment to cabinet positions; appointment to various state commissions; nomination to legislative bodies; appointment to ambassadorial roles overseas; and, good old fashioned cash.

It is common knowledge that the nomination of candidates for some state jobs is heavily influenced by *coalition realities* rather than the ability and qualifications of the individuals concerned. It is disturbing that this trend is also extending to regional institutions, however. Party leaders are now using the promise of slots as representatives in the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) to buy-off disgruntled leaders. A case in point is Ruto's promise to give [Charles Kanyi \(Jaguar\)](#) a slot in the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) if he quit the Member of Parliament race for Starehe Constituency in favour of [Simon Mbugua](#). It is a powerful demonstration of how this particular political cycle works that Mbugua had himself been nominated to the EALA in 2017, after he was persuaded by the Jubilee Party leadership to step down in favour of Yusuf Hassan in the Kamukunji primaries.

Such bargains are the lifeblood of Kenyan electoral politics, but undermine accountability and embed deal making - and hence potentially corrupt practices - at the heart of the not only the Kenyan state, but also regional governance.

How EALA was turned into an “employment bureau”

The East African Legislative Assembly is an independent arm of the Community that is supposed to advance the interests of the East African Community bloc as well as provide oversight. The membership of EALA currently [stands at 62](#), with nine elected members from each of the six East Africa Community (EAC) partners states: Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan and Burundi and eight ex-officio members. However, political parties have been blamed for nominating politicians who lose in nominations, or [their own relatives](#), to the regional body. For Instance, Kennedy Musyoka, who was nominated to EALA in [2017 is the son of Wiper party leader](#) Kalonzo Musyoka.

This is not only happening in Kenya. A similar scenario is playing out in Uganda where political parties are also rewarding rejects to EALA. In 2017, the candidates presented for nomination to EALA were mostly those that had lost after vying to be a candidate for the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) in the parliamentary elections. Revelations about this practice triggered criticism in Uganda, which in turn prompted [President Yoweri Museveni to declare that EALA was not an “employment bureau”](#) for political job seekers. Despite being president - and hence the person with the greatest power to decide how his party operates and who is sent to the EALA - Museveni sought to displace blame, stating that. “This election is just an election; [elections are not employment bureaus](#) that you are here to give jobs to jobless people but people who will support the integration process”.

The problem facing Museveni is that even if he wants to end the practice of using such nominations as patronage, he may not be able to. Facing a growing challenge from Bobi Wine, and recognizing the threat that the NRM may start to fragment during the succession struggle to replace him - should he ever stand down - Museveni knows full well that buying off disappointed candidates is critical to his regime's survival.

More broadly, the practice of playing politics with nominations to legislative organs such as EALA is problematic because it sacrifices regional interests at the expense of the personal desires of politicians, many of whom were overlooked for good reason. As one of Africa's fastest growing

regions in desperate need of a more unified and effective approach to issues such as infrastructure and food security, this is a major shortcoming that needs to be urgently addressed.

The road back to effective leadership and administration

There is clearly a pressing need to improve the nomination procedures to EALA so that they become transparent, such those who are nominated understand the key issues facing the region and are accountable to its citizens. The process of nomination is supposed to include tough legislative vetting, with hearings to interview potential candidates, and a strong set of minimum requirements established. Some of this is already in place in Uganda, where nominees are required to appear before parliament to campaign for their bids, but could be further strengthened to enable a broader range of individuals to be considered. In countries such as Kenya, these procedures have been considerably watered down, undermining the process, and the credibility of the representatives it produces.

The changes required do not only relate to selection. Once they are in position, it will then be essential to ensure continuous performance assessment during their five-year term to assess their commitment and contribution and weed out incompetent representatives. But even these changes may not be enough if political leaders continue to see positions as an entitlement rather than something to be earned. It is the practice of paying off losing candidates that the ultimate driver of the nominations game - and the quality of domestic administration and regional leadership is unlikely to improve until this is brought under control.

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