

Sitting on the results of exit elections

For a while, the International Republican Institute in Kenya has been playing a funny game with the public. The organisation, which pioneered opinion polling in the country, conducted periodic opinion polls last year in which it asked respondents who they were likely to vote for if elections were called at the time. Almost all the time, IRI adopted a rather patronising but puzzling attitude when it came to the results. It insisted on releasing all the other findings except the race-horse results.

Once, a Kenyan journalist snookered the organisation by asking politicians it had shared the findings of the race-horse with and published them anyway.

Late last year, I mentioned in these columns that James Long, a doctoral student from the University of California in San Diego, would be con-

ducting an exit poll on Election Day. Well, he did but I failed to tell you who was paying for it.

It is Uncle Sam, and he is holding the results in a vice-grip, even James Long's Kenyan supervisor cannot see them.

Professionally run exit polls usually produce results faster than election officials because they deal with a sample that is usually a few thousand.

Incomplete data

Last week, a full month and 10 days after the exit poll, IRI put out the following statement on its website:

"Release of the poll was initially delayed due to incomplete data.

Once all the data was received and a review of the poll was conducted, serious issues were raised.

Is it a coincidence that senior US officials reportedly called people who

might have seen the results and expressly threatened them if the poll leaked, even before the election result was released?

"As a result," continues the statement, "IRI does not have confidence in the integrity of the data and therefore believes the poll is invalid. The institute will not release a poll it believes is invalid and in which we do not have full confidence."

Is it a coincidence that this loss of confidence came after two Kenyan civil society organisations wrote demanding the release of the results, and that a committee of Congress in the US was about to subpoena IRI for the results?

There are poll results IRI in Kenya does not like the holloi polloi to know about, and the exit poll is obviously one of them.

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