

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

**“Consolidating Democracy: A Candid Discussion with
Kenyan Deputy President William Ruto”**

DATE

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FEATURING

H.E. Deputy President William Ruto

Deputy President of the Republic of Kenya

CSIS EXPERTS

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Transcript By

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Mvemba Phezo Dizolele: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome. I'm Mvemba Phezo Dizolele, a senior fellow and the director of the Africa Program here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We are delighted and honored that you could join us today for this candid conversation on the state of democracy in Kenya. I would like to remember our audience that you can submit your questions through the questions-and-answer link on the event page.

Our guest today, His Excellency William Ruto, needs no introduction. He is the deputy president of Kenya and a contender for the presidency in the upcoming elections. Karibu, Washington, DP Ruto.

Deputy President William Ruto: Thank you very much, Mvemba.

Mr. Dizolele: You are welcome to make your remarks and tell the audience what's on your mind today.

Deputy President Ruto: Thank you very much. And I much appreciate the fact that you have made this platform on CSIS available to us. And, more particularly, available to the people of Kenya. I'm in Washington for a couple of appointments because the relationship between Kenya and the United States is a wonderful relationship. We have recently, in 2018, elevated that relationship to a strategic relationship, which gives us the latitude to do more as nations. Aside from my engagements with government, there are also engagements on matters to do with the programs we have in Kenya involving farmers, including matters to do with how we can better grow economy, how we can do things better.

And speaking about the subject you have mentioned, the state of democracy in our country, Kenya is sitting in a very hostile territory. Many of the nation-states around us are states that are struggling to be nations. And we stand out. And it puts a lot of pressure on Kenya to remain stable. We believe that it is the democratic culture that will underpin and guarantee the stability and the progress of not just Kenya, but of the region as well. And that's why 9th of August is a very important date for not just Kenya, but for the region; important because amongst the things that will be on the ballot is our democracy and whether we are moving forward with it or we succumb to the forces that want us to go backwards.

I will tell you there are three things, in my estimation, on the ballot on 9th of August. On the ballot will be a referendum on our constitution, the 2010 constitution that was built to be the most progressive in our region, complete with a comprehensive bill of rights. Today is on the ballot because there are those who belong to our school of thought that think that we have a

wonderful constitution, and whatever is remaining, the challenges that are there, is on completing the implementation of that constitution.

Our competitors on the other side believe that the constitution we have is not serving us well. And they have proposed a raft of amendments, close to 72 amendments, completely to reverse the progressive constitution that we have. And I call these people counterreformers.

The second item that is on the ballot this year is our political culture. The decision that Kenyans will be making on 9th of August will be is this about leaders and positions and power, or is it about the people, their empowerment, and their progress? That's what is on the ballot. We believe very strongly that this election should be about the people. It should be about the empowerment of the people. It should be about what is in it for the people. We've had elections about leaders and positions and power, and they are never satisfactory. That's what makes our politics very high-octane.

And the final item that, in my estimation, will be on the ballot is our economy. And the question people in Kenya will be asking, who does it work for? When I listened to President Biden the day before yesterday, and he made a fundamental statement: Trickle-down doesn't work. That is a position we took before the U.S. did. In fact, I – we already discovered that trickle-down never worked.

So what is on the ballot is the people who believe we should continue with a trickle-down economic model that benefits a few people and leaves huge sections of our population behind, or those of us who believe that it is time to reimagine our economy and make it work for the majority of the citizens of our republic, and our bottom-up economic model that seeks to create inclusivity, that seeks to create and expand opportunity, to create jobs, to build enterprise, to improve productivity in our agricultural sector, and to create an inclusive society.

These are the issues that will be, in my estimation, on the ballot on the 9th of August. And it will determine – the way that election goes will determine whether we are consolidating our democracy and moving forward or we are denigrating from the gains we have made and so, by so doing, engaging the reverse gear. So that's where we start.

Mr. Dizolele:

Thank you very much, DP Ruto, for your remarks. This will set up our conversation pretty well. I think this will be helpful in laying the basis of our conversation.

So you've laid out a number of issues that we'll tackle in the course of this conversation. Talk about strategic relationship with the United States, engagement with your programs, the stability or lack thereof in the region,

and the role that Kenya will be playing in that space. You also talked about what is on the ballot this time. So our question will actually revolve around some of the issues that you've raised.

So, first, let's discuss democracy in Kenya. Many people around the world remember the hotly contested violent, really, general elections of 2017. The elections revealed the schisms in Kenya's electorate as well as the identity politics of that country.

Fast forward to present day, and Kenya's general elections are less than six months away. You are one of the main contenders for the presidency. I'd like to hear about your thoughts on democracy in Kenya. How has the Building Bridges Initiative attempted to restructure the state and has it succeeded?

What are pros and cons around the recent election law that permits the grouping of party coalitions? Can you describe successes and failures of recent effort toward voter registration? How are misinformation and human insecurity treating democracy? I think some of those issues are all about the pillars you just laid out. So, please, sir.

Deputy President
Ruto:

Well, granted, we've had challenges with elections and that goes to the heart of what I just spoke about. If we focus on leaders and positions and power, we will never have a peaceful election because not every leader will get the power they want. Not every leader can get the position they want. And that is why we are saying this time around we have to focus on the people – what is in it for the people.

And when we discuss what is in it for the people, jobs for 4 million Kenyans who do not have jobs, access to credit for 15 million Kenyans who are today blacklisted on credit reference bureaus, people who access credit today at anywhere between a thousand and 2,000 percent a year, productivity of farmers – how do we get our farmers to improve their productivity? Milk, for example, from three, four kilos to 15, 20 kilos. Coffee, from two or three kilos per bush to 10, 12 kilos per bush.

That's the conversation we want to have and that's why my brother, Musalia Mudavadi, and Moses Wetangula, we came together because we were brought together by the focus of what is in it for the people of Kenya.

We need to focus on the things that matter to the people of Kenya. It will never be possible to create enough positions for all the leaders. It will never be possible to share the power to the extent that everybody wants shared. But it is possible for us to share prosperity if we focus on ensuring that we have a much more prosperous country.

And, therefore, talking about the Building Bridges Initiative, I do not think that there was a single bridge built. In fact, every bridge on site was destroyed. Because of the BBI process, a fraudulent political experiment that left the country worse than before it was started – because of this BBI conundrum, we do not have a government or the opposition. When you mesh the opposition into government, and government into the opposition, you end up with a system of government not known anywhere in the world. It's not a monarchy. It is not a democracy.

And as a result, the BBI process and sister handshake destroyed the opposition by coopting the opposition into government, compromising the oversight responsibility – constitutional oversight responsibility – of the opposition. It destroyed the governing party. You may want to know that the governing party that had close to 180 members of parliament has degenerated to almost a quarter what it was and has put the party leader of the ruling party in a very awkward position. Today the party leader of the ruling party, that had a majority in parliament, is today as quarter in the opposition.

Destroyed the big plan we had for the transformation of our nation. A plan that had youth empowerment, a plan that agricultural transformation, a plan that had universal health coverage, a plan that had manufacturing, value addition agro-processing was shelved. And in its place this monster, whose only attempt was to do the wrong things. Number one, to try and recreate an imperial presidency – something the people of Kenya fought against for 30 years. Because once you have an executive or a president that controls the executive, controls the judiciary using the ombudsman, and controls the legislature using appointment of executive members into the legislature, you have an imperial president, complete like it was.

There would have been no need to have wasted 30 years fighting for a new constitution if we wanted to end up at the same place. And by so doing, we ended up with four years wasted, down the drain, not implementing the plan – the great plan we had, upon which we were elected. And fortunately, the whole charade was stopped by the courts because of the imminent danger of threats to the independence of the court itself. So we completely – that whole experiment on BBI failed, and failed the country, and costed the country enormously.

Speaking to the issues you have mentioned about 2017, up and until we accept that there is only one way in a democracy that we all go to elections and a democrat must be ready to accept the outcome of an election. The moment you reward bad manners, if I may, then you are building grounds for impunity. And that's the message – part of the message that I discussed with officials here in Washington, that every presidential candidate must be made to commit that they will respect the will of the people, and they will

respect the outcome of the election. I have done it publicly. I am waiting for my competitors to do the same so that we can have a free, fair, peaceful election.

Mr. Dizolele: Very good. Thank you very much, DP Ruto.

I want to follow up on a bunch of points that you raised. One, you know, for those of us observing Kenya, it's not always about 9th of August; it's about the day after. And Kenya politics are built around alliances; these alliances, sometimes they're ethnic, sometimes they're regional, sometimes – they come in all kinds of forms. It appears that the elites failed to deliver for the people of Kenya. The alliances – maybe it's what you said earlier; it's about being a leader and not necessarily living for the people. But there's also some issues that have been – you mentioned the constitution and what should be done.

You mentioned graft – fraudulent, to use your word. It was fraudulent, the initiative of the BBI. My question is twofold for now: one, you have been in politics for a long time; you have an impressive resume; you've been minister of Home Affairs, minister of Agriculture; you've been assistant minister in the office of the presidency; now, of course, deputy president of Kenya. How do you see your role in everything that you've described, because you've been part of that elite that was part of it? Another element – so when you used the word fraudulent, what I hear is a word that I don't like to use very often because it's so broad, which is corruption, is mismanagement of resources.

And then the other word you had mentioned early on about the constitution and the courts. There's an elephant in the room: so, as an outsider speaking with fellow Kenyans and also speaking with people in Washington, 2023, you know – 2003, pardon me, and the elections and the ICC. So you were indicted but the charges were dropped. That has left a lot of discomfort in many quarters, as you well know, of course; I'm not telling you anything new. Your fellow countrymen or women will wonder how things be different with DP Ruto. Those of us outside, your friends, the friends of Kenya in Washington and elsewhere in the world who would like to see change are wondering the same question.

Would you address those issues of weak alliances or driven by different thing your own experience with the ICC and how people may conceive it and see it, how people are worried about the future of justice in part because you come from the same system that you're denouncing today, and which is the way forward?

Deputy President Ruto: Thank you very much.

First, as you have said, I have been part of the system to a good extent, yes, and I can account and that's what gives me the track record upon which the people of Kenya will assess my candidature. I was minister for Agriculture and my record and my performance at the Ministry of Agriculture is something I'm very proud of, and the people of Kenya know it, and it's part of the reason why my candidature is very viable. Same thing to do with my record at the Ministry of Higher Education and same thing in my position as deputy president. My contribution to the progress and development of Kenya is built on a solid track record and the people of Kenya in their entirety are a very intelligent people; they know what to choose and I am no stranger. They know what I can do and they have a good account of my track record as a public servant. I think let's leave that there.

My experience with ICC. I am a very strong believer in the belief of innocence until you're found otherwise. And to the record, President Uhuru Kenyatta and I submitted ourselves to the process in ICC. We didn't run away. We didn't escape. We submitted ourselves to the process. And the process itself cleared us. So there are many innocent people who are taken to court. Being taken to court doesn't demonstrate any guilt of whatever nature.

So I thought you should be looking at it positively, that this is a man that is willing to submit himself to the rule of law. And that's my position. And that is why I can comfortably tell you, seated here, that I will respect the outcome of the election, whichever way it goes, because I am a believer in the rule of law. I'm a believer in constitutionality. And if anybody brought whatever challenge my way, I would deal with it within the parameters of the law and the rule of law and international justice.

And maybe, finally, post-2022, I am very confident that August 10th, going into after the election, Kenya is going to be peaceful. I am very confident. And the people of Kenya, I believe, will do their thing. They will elect the leaders of their choice. And Kenya will walk into the future confidently.

Mr. Dizolele: Very good. Thank you very much, DP Ruto.

We're going to move shortly to our next segment, which is the economy, but I just want to come back to this. Why are you running?

Deputy President Ruto: I am running because I have a plan and I have a contribution to make to my nation. I have been in public life and I know what clarity in leadership, being able to make decisions, the correct decisions in politics, can change lives.

When we came – let me give you an example. When we came to office in 2013, we had 2.3 million people connected to electricity. By making deliberate, very simple, deliberate decisions, we have moved the number of

people connected to electricity from 2.3 million to 8 ½ million; very simple decisions.

We have – when we came into office in 2013, we had 11,000 kilometers of paved road in Kenya, tarmac road in Kenya. By making clear, well-thought-out decisions on how to continue that journey of making sure that we have a robust infrastructure around road and rail, we have doubled in 10 years the number of paved roads that were done in 50 years.

So I am a great believer that Kenya can change in our lifetime, depending on the decisionmakers, the policymakers, the people at the helm, who can make the right decisions. And I am very confident that I have what it takes not only to make the right decisions, but my team and I have a solid plan and a solid track record of performance that the people of Kenya can vote for and that we can use to transform our nation.

Mr. Dizolele: Very good. We'll be hearing about that plans in the next segment now. I would like to hear about your economic vision of Kenya, right, so for Kenya. Before COVID-19, Kenya was one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa, with an annual average growth rate of 6 percent. The pandemic hit the economy hard, like everywhere else in the world, and led to increased unemployment. But Kenya is one of the fast-recovering countries on the continent, with an expected growth rate of 5 percent in 2022-2023. There is job growth, particularly in industry and services, but agricultural output is waning, and partly due to climate change. Rainfall – reduced rainfall. But it's also some of the issue that you mentioned earlier, corruption and others.

So my question is – a few of them, really. What are your views on threats and opportunities for the Kenyan economy? How should the Kenyan government support employment in tech, including effort to strength the ICT-enabling environment? What are opportunities for increased trade and investment? And what is your vision for Kenya's engagement in the African Continental Free Trade Area? Does the bilateral U.S.-Kenya Free Trade Agreement discussed under President Trump come into conflict with the AFCFTA? And finally, what are your thoughts on the African Growth and Opportunity Act? We'll start with those, and then we'll come back for another –

Deputy President Ruto: Quite a bunch, eh?

Mr. Dizolele: Yes. You are running for office. Kenyans want to know. (Laughter.) And we want to know in Washington.

Deputy President Ruto: OK. Let me begin where you started, all right? And that was what do I see? What are the opportunities? What are the challenges? We have tremendous opportunity in the whole space that we currently sit. We built a base, a solid

base, in our first term. We have a robust infrastructure development at the moment, 700 kilometers of new Standard Gauge Railway, 10,000 kilometers of tarmac. We have a robust electricity connection around the country. We have built a solid education and training facilities, including what we recently concluded, about 150 technical training colleges around the country, to equip our young people with skills and competences. So we have laid a firm foundation which, in my opinion, is an opportunity.

We also – because of that foundation, there is huge opportunity in our young people, in the demographic divided around our young people. We have amongst the youngest populations. We have amongst the best trained and very educated population. Depending on what you do with it, it can either be a challenge or it can be an opportunity. I want to consider it an opportunity. And that is why in the plan that I see Kenya going, we will be deploying resources to ensure that the infrastructure we are building is labor intensive. And in my estimation, the 4 million young people out of college, school and university, that is an opportunity we need to tap into, by making sure that we engage them.

So job creation – when I talk about job creation, I talk about deliberate job creation. We will invest in sectors that deliberately create jobs, so that we can turn the challenge of young people into an opportunity for us to grow our economy. We have a comparative and a competitive advantage in agriculture. Just for your information, for every one flower sold in Amsterdam – one flower for every four one comes from Kenya. So we have a serious competitive advantage on matters to do with milk, coffee, tea, horticulture. Much as we've been hit by the pandemic, there is great opportunity for us to increase the productivity of that sector.

I see a great opportunity if we put sufficient resources to make sure that we have access to fertilizer, access to credit for farmers, access to new technology for our farmers. We will double if not triple earnings from that sector. In fact, in my estimation, and working with my team, we believe that milk can actually overtake coffee and tea and horticulture if we dealt with matters to do with the cost of feed for our livestock. Kenya is the largest producer of milk, about 5 billion liters every year.

So I see opportunity in some of the challenges that we have. I see great opportunity in universal health coverage as part of our plan. We know many families go straight to being destitute just with one sickness. In fact, it is normally said many families are one sickness away from poverty. That challenge, if we turned it round and – with the interventions that we have made, and hopefully now that we have changed the law and we will make contributions to our universal health coverage kitty to be graduated depending on incomes, we should be able to increase by between 200 and 300 percent the contributions and we should be able to turn around our

health insurance facility. And it is – and with it, we can be able to not only save lives; we can save incomes and we can have a better health-care population that then becomes much more productive.

Mr. Dizolele: OK. Thank you very much.

Deputy President Ruto: So I see both opportunities and challenges.

And just to mention one thing, the trade negotiations that are ongoing between Kenya and the U.S. will be a very big opportunity that I see, and it's one of the issues that was on the table of discussion between my team and the State Department. And also, Kenya being part of the East Africa Community and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, those are added opportunities that can help us grow and expand our economy.

Mr. Dizolele: Thank you, DP Ruto.

One question I would like to beg your indulgence. We can make it short in response so we cover foreign policy.

Deputy President Ruto: Maybe you can also make your – ask your question in a short time.

Mr. Dizolele: Yeah, yeah, it's – no, it's going to be one – yes, yes, absolutely. Fair. (Laughter.) That's a fair trade, right? (Laughter.)

So the economy – Kenya's economy is heavily agriculturally based. It's a powerful economy. It's a big one of \$100-plus billion in GDP. But it is not working for the youth. You referred to the youth in passing. It's heavily also saddled with debt.

So two things. How you mean to address this? Because kind of shortly. And then, two, the next president of Kenya will need to bring tremendous discipline because there is a fiscal crisis looming.

Deputy President Ruto: I did not mention youth in passing. I have – I think I have mentioned youth here more than 10 times. Youth is at the heart of our plan. Whether you're talking about the job creation initiatives we are – we are looking at, whether we are talking about access to credit – majority of the young people don't have – cannot access credit. Startups have no access to credit. Many young people as a last resort get into famine. So back and forth and in the middle is the young people of Kenya, because we have a very young population.

Discipline and debt, that is at the heart of this conversation. Maybe you may wish to know that for the first time in Kenya we have forced a conversation on the economy. All along, it was who gets what – who gets what position,

who gets access to what power. Today, the conversation in Kenya is about the economy.

When you hear mama mboga and boda boda, these are economic units. These are people – players in the economy. And we are replacing discussions about the economy away from discussions about this tribe and that tribe and this community and the other. And I am very confident that another two elections' discussions on economy, we will have dealt a big blow to ethnic politics in Kenya.

Mr. Dizolele: And thank you very much, DP Ruto.

So we enter our foreign policy segment of this conversation. We'll take about five minutes to this, and then we'll go to Q&A because there's a lot of people waiting to engage with you from the audience.

So turning to our final topic, let's talk about your vision – the diplomatic vision, the outward vision – particularly, Kenya's role in the region, particularly, also in the international community. Early on, you mentioned the tough neighborhood that Kenya finds itself in. It's always struck me a little bit that Kenya is – it's a regional power that is somewhat timid and reluctant to play its vocation on the international stage.

That has changed a little bit with the crisis in Somalia, the crisis in Ethiopia, and the Great Lakes region where Kenya is also engaging. We have five minutes. Let's talk about how do you see Kenya's involvement. You talked earlier about strategic engagement, your trip here in Washington.

Deputy President Ruto: It stems from what I told you earlier. For Kenya to play its rightful place as a member of the international community and deploy the status we have around the region, at the heart of it is the stability of Kenya first, and the stability of Kenya is built on how democratic Kenya is, political democracy and economic democracy – that we have a nation that is at peace with itself by building a broad-based coalition, like the way we have done, and building a broad-based economy that leaves nobody behind. That's the beginning.

And going into what we can do in Somalia, I think we have made huge sacrifices as a nation to keep that region the way it is. We have a huge burden of refugees. We have the accompanying terrorist challenges that come with refugees and a region that has very weak governments, and Kenya has played its role in that space by making sure that we have provided leadership in AMISOM. We've contributed troops in AMISOM. We have played our role in IGAD. We have played our role in South Sudan. In fact, we are the single country that has – that actually midwived the birth of South Sudan as a nation.

And I agree with you, the posture we have as a nation is slightly of a lower caliber than it should be. I believe that Kenya can deploy its diplomacy much more effectively in a much more creative and innovative manner, and working with our other partner states in the region and in the continent, we believe that we can play a significant role in making sure that we have a peaceful region and a much more stable Africa.

You may want to take cue, for example, from the statement that was issued by Ambassador Kimani on Ukraine. That tells you Kenya's robust position on matters to do with the security of our globe, and we can confidently speak out for Ukraine because we are used to a difficult neighborhood and we are used to bullies who sometimes want to overrun other countries, and challenges that countries have faced.

It is my position that we should be able to see an amicable solution to the Tigray challenge in Ethiopia. We should be able to complete the peace negotiations in South Sudan, and it is our considered view that the elections in Somalia must be brought to an end. We cannot have an endless election timetable that has no results. Whether it is 4 ½ or 4 ¼ or 4-and-something, I think it must come to an end so that we can consolidate a government in Somalia that can then work with the international community to stabilize Somalia and to begin the journey of creating the nationhood of Somalia.

So from South Sudan and in north Sudan or the main Sudan, our position has been – and I think that should be expedited – the transition from a military regime to a civilian authority that has the people's mandate, as opposed to what is going on at the moment, and maybe to look at how we can stop the shifting goalposts, you know; that there is a tangent and there is a corner. It never quite gets to an end.

Again, as I said, that depends, to a good extent, on a very stable and democratic Kenya. And working with partners like the United States and other partners, that should be a reality.

Mr. Dizolele: Thank you very much, DP Ruto. This concludes this part of our discussion. We're now opening it to questions from the audience. I'll read one question for you that has just come.

You have stressed the importance of the rule of law and judicial independence in your public remarks. In 2017, when Kenya's supreme court nullified the election result, threats against the judiciary raised concerns about your government and about Kenya's democratic trajectory. Can you comment on that situation?

Deputy President Ruto: For your information, I think the nullification of our election was in itself a turning point in judicial independence in our continent. We criticized the

judiciary because we felt that we had won the election. But our criticism ended at criticism. We still obeyed the law, we obeyed the ruling, and we went back to elections.

So again, I was told by one good politician when I first became a member of parliament, they looked at me – and I was then a member of the ruling party – he told me, young man, I see you are very robust about your support for your party. But the best way to support your party is to criticize it when it goes wrong. So criticism is not necessarily not believing in the other side. It is just an expression. But the test of the pudding is in the eating. Did we obey the law? Did we obey the ruling? And it set the benchmark for many other jurisdictions.

And so it goes to the heart of my belief in the rule of law, that we may disagree, but bottom line, we must respect the law. It doesn't matter whether I like it. It doesn't matter I don't like it. But bottom line is that we must respect the law.

And let me – while talking about the judiciary, maybe it is at this point that I want to say, for those of us who believe that the way to the future is not to engage the reverse gear and denigrate from our constitution by compromising the independence of the judiciary, instead our position is that we should complete the implementation of the 2010 constitution by enacting and bringing into force the Judiciary Fund, which has been the biggest impediment in the independence of the judiciary and the ability of the judiciary to discharge its mandate of making sure that it holds the other arms of government to account and it helps in the fight against corruption.

And it is my very considered position that, within the first 100 days of the new administration, the Judiciary Fund should be operationalized to give the judiciary financial independence so that they can appropriate their mandate and be able to discharge their responsibility in accordance with the constitution. And the same goes to the inspector general of police and all the other criminal justice arms, that today, though the constitution says they should have financial independence and have an accounting officer, today they still depend on the office of the president for financial resources, while the constitution itself says they should be – they should have their own independent budgets and independent accounting of such, so that we can truly make the whole prosecution, investigation independent of manipulation by the executive, or indeed any other arm of government.

Mr. Dizolele:

Thank you very much, DP Ruto. Two questions. One says, what is your – what is your plan to keep peace during and post elections? And then that is related to this says, elections are largely won through intense mobilization of mama mbogas and wazee wa boda boda and mikokoteni. How do you actually plan to integrate them into your vision, and uplift them if you win?

Deputy President Ruto: Those categories of economic actors in Kenya are actually at the heart of our economic model. So we are not – we are not recruiting them after the election. They are, in fact, an integral part of the discussion we are having. They are the reason why this discussion about the next government moved away from positions and power sharing to the economy, where the people you have listed are actors. I agree with the gentleman that it's about mobilization. And even as we are in the U.S. today, we have our teams all over the country making sure that Kenyans are sensitized. We engage them to understand our economic model.

And we are doing it differently. For the first time in the history of Kenya, we are not going to have a manifesto that is discussed in air-conditioned offices. Our manifesto today is being discussed in markets, in all manner of places. And before – as soon as our nominations are over, we're going to have assigned chapter with every county on their priorities, on the things they want most, on the things they want to put in their priority list, on what they want us to do. And we want them to hold us to account. That is bottom-up politics. We want every citizen in their corner. They want the prices of their commodities, they want the price of milk, they want the price of coffee, they want the price of tea, they want the price of sugarcane.

And they want a commitment on how we're going to improve those. They want a commitment on matters of universal health coverage. They want a commitment on the education of their children. And that is the model we have built, a bottom-up political model that will inform the next government. And that's why those groups are significantly very important in our plan.

Mr. Dizolele: Thank you, DP Ruto. Two more questions on this side. One is, LGBTQ Kenyans have faced physical violence and death threats. You have made public remarks suggesting there is “no room,” quote/unquote, for homosexuals in Kenya. If elected president, how would you approach the issue of homosexuality in the country? That's the first question. And then the other one, can you speak to Kenya's relationship with China? If you are elected president, how will you navigate great power competition and competing desires from the United States and from China?

Deputy President Ruto: I will give you my position as a Christian. My position as a Christian is that the Bible teaches us against homosexuality and related matters. That's me, William Ruto, as a Christian. As a public leader and as a servant, the constitution and the law in Kenya becomes the guiding principle. Whatever is within the constitution and the law I will respect. So long as everybody is operating within the law and within what is permissible in the constitution, they have nothing to fear because we are a nation governed by the rule of law.

Mr. Dizolele: So, on that point, do I hear you correctly that LGBTQ Kenyans don't have anything to fear in terms of physical violence and the protection of the law?

Deputy President Ruto: I do not think anybody should pick up arms against any Kenyan, irrespective of whether you like what they're doing or you don't like. Every Kenyan must be subjected to the rule of law. If you do not think that any Kenyan is acting in the right way, it's not for you to decide to harm them; it is for the law to take its course. So that's why I am saying no Kenyan should be subjected to any form of harassment or any form of harm. The only authority that can take action over anybody is the authorities that are permissible within the law. And if a Kenyan has not broken any law, nobody should harass them.

So, as a public servant, we will operate within the parameters of the constitution and the law. And every Kenyan must be safe within those parameters. There is no – there is no exception on anybody harming other Kenyans.

On the matter you have said about China and the U.S., we have a solid relationship with the U.S. We have interests that are – that converge between us as the U.S. That's why, for example, two days ago I was in Nebraska to discuss how the university there and the companies there can work with us on agricultural – agribusiness, value addition. They are supplying us with pivots and equipment that are used for our value addition and agro-processing interventions. And the interests that are with the U.S. as a nation are very primary to the relationship between us and the United States.

We have relationships with other nations because of politics being and nations pursuing their own development and economic interests. And we will pursue those interests without necessarily jeopardizing our relationship with a great friend and partner like the United States.

Mr. Dizolele: Very good. Thank you, DP Ruto.

So there is still one question that I would like to address. We have a couple minutes to go and we'll see if there is any other questions coming through. You say that a democrat must be ready to accept the outcome of an election.

Deputy President Ruto: Correct.

Mr. Dizolele: Even if you lose.

Deputy President Ruto: Correct.

Mr. Dizolele: Are you willing to accept the outcome of the 2022 election even if your opponent wins?

Deputy President Ruto: Yes. A straight yes with no qualifications.

Mr. Dizolele: Finally –

Deputy President Ruto: Because that's what a democrat is, you know? And that's the question I want all the other competitors to answer, you know? And it should be a straight answer, yes or no.

Mr. Dizolele: Very good.

We have one minute to go, so I will go back, reserve my chair prerogative. You early on mentioned the constitution, and you talk about certain people want to go another way and a different school of thought. As the constitution exists today, you have had a tough relationship with your president.

Deputy President Ruto: (Laughs.)

Mr. Dizolele: You started as partners – that's an understatement, obviously. (Laughter.) But in 30 seconds, is – what is the state of that and how does it relate to position of the constitution? This is part of the alliance that has been troubling in Kenya.

Deputy President Ruto: (Laughs.) I think you have said yourself that it's not – it's not something that I can answer in a minute. I mean, it's a relationship built over a long time, over maybe 20-30 years. So it's not something I can describe in a minute. But just to put it, that we shared the same thoughts up until the handshake came about. And when the handshake came about, I did not believe that the way to build and consolidate our democracy is by creating two, three positions for a few leaders. And that's the point of departure. I believe that building an inclusive economy would actually sort out the challenge of ethnicity in Kenya. And building national political parties and national political coalitions would actually sort out the challenge of ethnicity in our politics.

I did not believe that what's currently going on in Kenya, that every ethnic community and every region is being sponsored to have a political party of some sort, is the way to go. I do not believe that changing the constitution to create a few positions would sort out the challenge of ethnicity in our country. And I have no problem creating positions, but I do not think it is the answer. And I think that's partly what informed, to an extent, because I have views. And democracy means that even though I don't agree with you, I should defend your right to hold a contrary view without necessarily taking

any drastic action against one another. So Uhuru Kenyatta is my boss and my good friend, although we have different points of view on matters to do with how we want to take Kenya forward.

Mr. Dizolele: I think what I was driving at, we hope that kind of friction, those differences moving forward, that structure of president and DP will continue, but in a way that is positive. It's been unsettling to see the DP and his president, one asking one to resign, the other one saying no. This is part of that entire ecosystem I was talking about.

Deputy President Ruto: Well, I would really – maybe if you get an opportunity to have a chat with President Kenyatta, maybe you could ask him to be less aggressive against me. (Laughter.) Maybe that way we could make this a lot better.

Mr. Dizolele: Very well.

Deputy President Ruto: But I have taken it in stride, and we are moving on.

Mr. Dizolele: OK. Thank you very much, DP Ruto. I would like to thank you for joining us today. I'm sure I speak on behalf of our audience as well here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We're happy that you joined us. To our audience, I would like to thank you for joining us also today, for your questions, for your engagement. We appreciate you. Thank you. Have a good day.

Deputy President Ruto: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mvemba. Thank you.