

INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE ENDORSES ACCURACY OF EXIT POLLS

Congratulations Presidents Kerry and Gore, the State Department's-backed [see Redshift's comment here; title changed accordingly] International Republican Institute has just belatedly declared you both President.

Or perhaps not. Perhaps the IRI has not released its exit poll from the Kenyan election precisely because doing so would suggest exit polls are an accurate measure of election fraud—and all that might imply for recent US electoral politics.

An exit poll carried out on behalf of a U.S. government-backed foundation indicated that Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki suffered a resounding defeat in last month's disputed election, according to officials with knowledge of the document.

The poll by the Washington-based International Republican Institute – not yet publicly released – further undermines Kibaki's claims of a narrow re-election victory. The outcome has sparked protests and ethnically driven clashes nationwide, killing hundreds.

Opposition leader Raila Odinga led Kibaki by roughly 8 percentage points in the poll, which surveyed voters as they left polling places during the election Dec. 27, according to one senior Western official who's seen the data, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. That's a sharp departure from the results that Kenyan election officials certified, which gave Kibaki a winning margin of 231,728 votes over Odinga, about 3 percentage points.

[snip]

It wasn't clear why the International Republican Institute – which has conducted opinion polls and observed elections in Kenya since 1992 – isn't releasing its data. A spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Kenya confirmed that a poll was conducted but referred questions to the institute, where officials couldn't be reached for comment.

[snip]

The senior Western official, who reviewed partial results of the poll, described them as credible. The survey included a sufficient sample of voters from around the country, and Odinga's lead was comfortably outside the margin of error, the official said.

"What it tells me is there was an exit poll that had one candidate with a significant lead who, at the end of the day, was not declared the victor. That seems to me to be a little surprising," the official said.

It kind of makes you wonder how many more "credible" exit polls US government agencies are sitting on.