

# Opposition Coalitions and the Democratic Ouster of Dominant African Parties

## Lessons from the Kenya Elections of 2002

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**T**wo decades after the onset of the third wave of democratization, the African political landscape is still replete with dominant parties operating within the framework of competitive multiparty systems. Some of these parties seem so entrenched that even relatively free competitive elections have not been able to shake their political bases. Botswana, for example, is widely regarded as “the longest-enduring and most stable liberal democracy in (Southern) Africa.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite this impressive record of democracy, the Botswana Democratic Party has won all successive elections and has ruled the country since independence in 1965.<sup>2</sup> Relatedly, Chama cha Mapinduzi has proved hard to remove from power in Tanzania due to its deep roots among the masses.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement raised its parliamentary strength from 44 percent in the first Cameroonian multiparty elections in 1992 to 58 percent in 1997 and, ultimately, to 76.5 percent in 2007.<sup>4</sup>

Even in countries where grand old parties lost the founding multiparty elections, the opposition parties that took power became dominant. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) has prevailed since the first all-inclusive elections of 1994.<sup>5</sup> In Zambia, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy—which defeated the country’s independence party,

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the United National Independence Party in 1991—also assumed preeminence in the country's political scene. In Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade—supported by a section of the opposition parties as a coalition candidate—polled only 30 percent of votes in the first round of the 2000 presidential elections against 41.3 percent garnered by the incumbent president Abdou Diouf. In the second round, Wade enlisted the support of the other key opposition leader, Moustapha Niassé, and won by 58.5 percent. Once in power, however, Wade strengthened his Senegalese Democratic Party, making it an invincible monolith.<sup>6</sup>

The emergence, survival, and dangers of dominant parties are well documented in the literature.<sup>7</sup> For instance, party dominance has the negative effect of promoting authoritarian tendencies. In Uganda and Namibia, for example, Yoweri Museveni and Sam Nujoma capitalized on the power of the National Resistance Movement and the South West Africa People's Organization, respectively, to engineer constitutional amendments that allowed them to extend their presidential tenures to three years.<sup>8</sup> However, similar attempts by Bakili Muluzi and Frederick Chiluba to lengthen their presidential terms failed in Malawi and Zambia, respectively.

In addition, one-party control tends to stifle intraparty democracy, as reflected in the incessant power struggles in South Africa's ANC that resulted in the party's recalling former president Thabo Mbeki. Such posturing would have proved suicidal if the ANC had encountered strong opposition. Similar struggles have occurred in the increasingly preeminent Movement for Multiparty Democracy in Zambia, leading to several new splinter parties, which, as expected, have not had a significant effect on subsequent elections.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, South Africa's experience under the ANC shows that one-party dominion can also undercut democracy by discouraging political participation because of the absence of institutionalized uncertainty about election outcomes. In this regard, the hegemony of the ANC has received blame for the plummeting voter turnout in South Africa over the years.<sup>10</sup>

A concomitant trend in African party systems involves the increasingly fragmented nature of opposition parties. Most African party systems are characterized by one large party, with small and highly volatile parties that wither away after losing elections.<sup>11</sup> In dominant African party systems, fragmentation of opposition parties usually attracts blame for successive

electoral victories of incumbent hegemonic parties. For instance, William Tordoff has noted that “the failure of opposition parties to unite behind a single candidate ensured the return of the incumbent presidents and ruling parties in elections in Kenya in 1992 and 1997, Gabon in 1993 and 1998, and Tanzania in 1995 and 2000.”<sup>12</sup> Opposition disunity has also been faulted for its perennial loss in Botswana since independence.<sup>13</sup> In short, “in most African states, the opposition is destined to be simply that: eternally the opposition, never in power. It is here that abuse of incumbency can emerge.”<sup>14</sup>

As a corollary to these developments, people often suggest the opposition coalition as a model for defeating the controlling African parties. One usually draws empirical support for this model from the Kenyan elections of 2002, in which a coalition of opposition parties, formed two months prior to the elections, defeated the incumbent Kenya African National Union (KANU), which had ruled for four decades since independence.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, “the National Rainbow Coalition of Kenya that defeated the well-entrenched ruling Kenya National Union in the 2002 elections is seen by many opposition supporters as a model to be emulated if the National Resistance Movement and its likely presidential candidate Museveni are to be ousted from power.”<sup>16</sup>

Broadly stated, scholars who subscribe to this view contend that “the lessons learned from the 2002 Kenyan elections are many and could strengthen democracy movements elsewhere in Africa.”<sup>17</sup> In particular, “opposition parties can win elections—provided they are not rigged—if they form a coalition and unite behind a single presidential candidate as happened in Kenya.”<sup>18</sup> Other scholars have put it even more succinctly: “Generally, only when the opposition is able to unite in electoral or post electoral coalitions can they manage to assume power. Kenya is perhaps the archetypical example of this.”<sup>19</sup>

Although the claim that an opposition coalition would likely result in the defeat of dominant African parties is logically compelling, it has not undergone thorough examination. Neither has any systematic study demonstrated that the formation of an opposition coalition caused KANU's defeat. Therefore, the role that opposition unity played in KANU's loss remains unclear. Consequently, the main research question becomes, can an opposition coalition guarantee the defeat of a premier African party? More

specifically, did KANU lose elections primarily because of opposition unity, or did local contextual factors such as economic conditions contribute to its defeat? Can Kenya's election experience in 2002 be replicated in other sub-Saharan African countries? To answer those questions, this article (1) provides a brief background and the context of the 2002 elections, (2) examines whether the voting patterns in those elections are consistent with the assumptions of the opposition-coalition thesis, (3) tests whether the prevailing economic living conditions at the time of the elections also had a significant influence on voting patterns, and (4) discusses the implications of the election results for opposition coalitions in Africa.

### The Kenya Elections of 2002: Background and Context

At independence in 1963, Kenya had a parliamentary system of government headed by the executive prime minister and characterized by federalism, bicameralism, and multipartism. Within the first six years of independence, these institutions were systematically dismantled and supplanted with centralized one-party authoritarianism. The first president, Jomo Kenyatta, used political rather than legal means to create and sustain a *de facto* one-party autocracy. By 1970 he had turned Kenya into a unitary state with a unicameral legislature and a powerful executive president. Although the law still allowed multipartism, political maneuvering ensured that only the ruling party—KANU—existed. However, his successor, Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, took the legal route and created a *de jure* one-party state through a constitutional amendment in 1982. This scenario persisted until the restoration of multipartism in 1991.<sup>20</sup>

These changes notwithstanding, Kenya remained in a unique league of a few African countries that held elections every five years since independence, even at the peak of authoritarianism in the 1970s and 1980s. Contrary to the perception that few turnovers occurred in Africa before the 1990s, evidence shows a very high number of them, especially for parliamentarians even under authoritarian regimes—notably Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone.<sup>21</sup> For instance, the legislative turnover in Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s sometimes approached 62 percent.<sup>22</sup> Elections in the one-party system in Zambia, though, were more competitive and resulted in the defeat of more incumbents than under the multiparty system.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg note that “Kenya

[was] probably the most unrestricted of Africa's one-party democracies, where [parliamentary] elections regularly result in a high level of participation and a large turnover of elected politicians."<sup>24</sup> However, the presidential elections were largely of the "no contest" variety.

The rebirth of multipartism in 1991 presented KANU with the first real prospect of losing elections. Kenya adopted the first-past-the-post electoral system with the additional requirement that the winner of a presidential contest receive at least 25 percent of the votes cast in at least five of Kenya's eight provinces. Nonetheless, KANU won both the first and second multiparty elections in 1992 and 1997. Two arguments account for KANU's victories. The first maintains that it succeeded through electoral fraud.<sup>25</sup> Yet, no one has either subjected this argument to rigorous scholarly analysis or backed it with credible evidence beyond speculation. With respect to the 1997 elections, for instance, the *New York Times* draws evidence from both domestic and international observers:

The truth is that Mr. Moi did not need to resort to crude methods to win. . . . The wily 74-year-old veteran of Kenyan politics triumphed with tactics familiar to any machine politician from urban America—gerrymandering, dividing his opponents along ethnic lines, and making sure voter registration favored his party. . . .

But while the playing field favored the governing party, the irregularities and logistical problems reported at the polls were not widespread enough to skew the results.<sup>26</sup>

The second argument holds that disunity among opposition parties led them to split the votes, thus enabling KANU to win.<sup>27</sup> Advocates of this view argue that in 1992 and 1997, KANU won because of the lack of a united opposition front. Indeed, "One of the main reasons KANU has never lost an election is because the opposition has never managed to unite under one presidential candidate."<sup>28</sup>

Taking the cue, James McKinley observes that

the biggest reason for Mr. Moi's victory is the tribal nature of Kenyan politics. . . . The anti-Moi vote was split among four main challengers, all of whom had strong support in their home regions but had made few inroads elsewhere.

In essence, the President faced four regional parties based on tribal loyalties. The major ethnic groups voted overwhelmingly for their kinsmen: the Kikuyu for Mr. Kibaki, the Luo for Raila Odinga, the Luhya for Michael Kijana Wamalwa, and the Akamba for Charity Ngilu.<sup>29</sup>

The elections of 2002 provided yet another opportunity for the opposition to dislodge KANU from power. To begin, Moi had exhausted the

maximum two-term limit imposed by the constitutional reforms of 1991 and was therefore ineligible for reelection. The fact that Moi had prevented the emergence of a potential successor from within the party's rank and file during his 24 years as president further reinforced KANU's perceived vulnerability in 2002. Thus, even senior KANU leaders had little or no influence beyond their own constituencies. Moi believed that he could choose anybody from within KANU and use his influence to successfully market the choice to Kenyans. However, he did not foresee the possibility of revolt against his choice, let alone the prospect that Kenyans would reject his choice. In any case, no one within KANU ever questioned his decisions and actions during his 24 years in power.

As part of his succession strategy, Moi orchestrated KANU's merger with the National Development Party (NDP), led by Raila Odinga. Although Odinga saw this move as a chance to ascend to the presidency, Moi used the merger as a twin strategy to contain Odinga while ensuring that KANU remained in power. He believed that Odinga, who had finished third behind him and Mwai Kibaki in 1997, would bring his support base to the KANU fold and boost its chances of retaining power. As it turned out, the merger was a miscalculation on the part of both Moi and Odinga. Neither of them succeeded in using the merger to carry out his real intentions. When Moi anointed Uhuru Kenyatta (son of the first president) as the preferred successor and KANU's presidential candidate, Odinga led former NDP legislators, together with some KANU loyalists, in rebelling against Moi. They then bolted from KANU and formed the Liberal Democratic Party.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, NDP's merger with KANU sent the other opposition parties back to the drawing board. As a counterstrategy, Kibaki, Wamalwa, and Ngilu formed an opposition alliance—the National Alliance of Kenya (NAK). That alliance and the Liberal Democratic Party formed the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), through which they fielded parliamentary candidates and fronted Kibaki as the presidential candidate. In doing so, they were united and guided purely by the quest to remove KANU from power rather than an ideological congruity. Kibaki won with 62 percent of the votes against 31 percent for Uhuru Kenyatta. NARC also won 125 of the 210 elective national assembly seats against KANU's 64.<sup>31</sup>

One should note that the empirical foundation of the opposition-coalition thesis rests on the fact that although Moi won both the 1992 and 1997 elections, he received only 36.6 percent and 40.4 percent of the vote, respectively, while the pooled share for the top-three opposition presidential candidates was 62.5 percent in 1992 and 49.9 percent in 1997.<sup>32</sup> In essence, Moi won both elections not because of his popularity but because of opposition disunity. Hence, one assumed that if opposition leaders formed a coalition, they would merge their core support bases and consolidate their votes in favor of NARC. The support bases are the provinces from which each of the coalition leaders (Kibaki, Wamalwa, and Ngilu) derived the bulk of their 1997 support, which coincides with the province predominantly occupied by each leader's ethnic group. In this regard, Kibaki's Kikuyu ethnic group comprises 94 percent of Central, Wamalwa's Luhya forms 86 percent of Western, and Ngilu's Kamba makes up 54 percent of the Eastern provinces.<sup>33</sup>

### Opposition Coalition and the Presidential Election Results

The process of testing whether an opposition coalition can significantly influence the democratic ouster of dominant African parties and, by extension, whether it significantly influenced KANU's defeat in 2002 involves projecting the likely outcome of the 2002 elections and comparing it with the actual outcome. One must base the projections themselves on the strength or level of support for all opposition parties or candidates, as measured by their most recent electoral performance before forming the coalition. Table 1 shows the percentage of votes obtained from each province by the incumbent party's presidential candidate and his four main opposition challengers in the elections of 1997.

**Table 1. Percentage of presidential votes by province in 1997**

<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Nairobi</i>	<i>Coast</i>	<i>North Eastern</i>	<i>Eastern</i>	<i>Central</i>	<i>Rift Valley</i>	<i>Western</i>	<i>Nyanza</i>
Moi	20.6	63.1	72.9	35.3	5.6	69.4	46.0	23.5
Kibaki	43.7	12.7	21.1	28.2	88.6	20.9	1.4	15.1
Odinga	16.2	6.1	0.3	0.7	0.7	2.2	2.0	56.6
Wamalwa	6.8	2.8	4.6	0.7	0.3	6.2	49.4	1.6
Ngilu	10.9	9.4	0.5	33.3	3.0	0.7	0.5	1.7

Source: Wachira Maina, "What Tyranny of Numbers: Inside Mutahi Ngunyi's Numerology" (Nairobi: Africa Centre for Open Governance, n.d.), 6, accessed 10 May 2013, [http://www.africog.org/sites/default/files/Tyranny%20of%20Numbers\\_final.pdf](http://www.africog.org/sites/default/files/Tyranny%20of%20Numbers_final.pdf).

Table 1 shows Moi as the preferred presidential candidate in four provinces (Rift Valley, Eastern, North Eastern and Coast) and the second-most preferred in the other four provinces (Central, Nairobi, Nyanza, and Western). Kibaki, on the other hand, was the most preferred candidate in Central and Nairobi; the second-most in Rift Valley, Coast and North Eastern; and the third-most in Nyanza, Eastern, and Western. If we take the provincial voting patterns as the ordering of provincial preference and assume that the 2002 elections involved transitive voting without Moi, then Kibaki still could have won in five provinces (Rift Valley, Nairobi, Central, Coast, and North Eastern) without opposition unity. Since transitive voting requires consistency, the preference ordering in table 1 suggests Kibaki as the most preferred candidate in Nairobi, Central, North Eastern, Coast, and Rift Valley provinces in the absence of Moi.

However, the situation becomes complicated with the entry of Uhuru Kenyatta into the scene as a new political player. For many observers, he was “a political non-entity sneaked into parliament and then into the cabinet after failing to win the Gatundu South parliamentary seat in 1997.”<sup>34</sup> He had no political capital other than his biological links with the first president and Moi’s unexplainable fixation with him as his successor. Therefore, Kenyatta could only hope to inherit Moi’s political base.

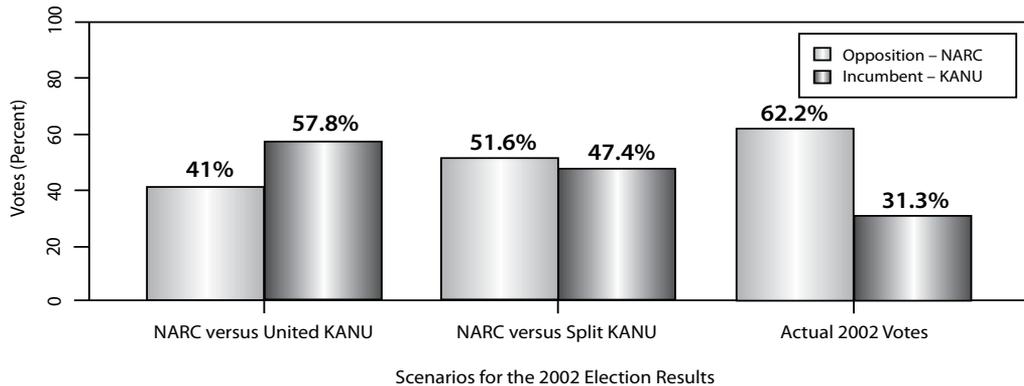
On the basis of the 1997 election results aggregated at the provincial and national levels, I forecasted two possible presidential-election outcome scenarios in a contest between the incumbent party—KANU—and a joint opposition candidate. I assumed that the level of support for each of the 1997 opposition candidates would be the same or better in 2002 and that each of them had the capacity to marshal his supporters behind the joint coalition candidate. To project the likely performance of a joint opposition candidate, the 1997 provincial vote shares of each of the three opposition leaders (Kibaki, Wamalwa, and Ngilu) were combined and applied to the actual number of valid votes in the 2002 elections. I assumed that opposition unity or, at best, opposition unity and a split in KANU were the major factors that drove KANU out of power. Odinga, third in the 1997 elections, had already merged his party—NDP—with KANU and thus became a member of the incumbent party. However, he later led a revolt that caused a split in KANU, the splinter group aligning with the Kibaki-Wamalwa-Ngilu axis.

Accordingly, the outcome scenarios for the two presidential elections of 2002 involve (1) a contest between a KANU candidate and a joint-opposition-coalition candidate without factoring in the split in KANU and (2) a presidential contest between a KANU candidate and a joint-opposition-coalition candidate, taking into account the split in KANU. Table 2 presents the aggregated actual and projected provincial votes (see also fig. 1).<sup>35</sup> Since both the incumbent-party candidate (Uhuru Kenyatta) and the joint-opposition candidate (Mwai Kibaki) in the 2002 elections came from Central province, where each was expected to draw the bulk of his support, I further assumed for the purposes of projecting the results that each candidate would receive 50 percent of the votes in that province.

**Table 2. Projected and actual results of the 2002 presidential election**

Province	Unity without Split		Unity with Split		Actual 2002 Votes	
	Kenyatta	Kibaki	Kenyatta	Kibaki	Kenyatta	Kibaki
Nairobi	134,568 (36.8%)	224,523 (61.4%)	79,449 (20.6%)	299,282 (77.6%)	76,001 (20.8%)	279,705 (76.5%)
Coast	252,330 (69.2%)	90,795 (24.9%)	230,087 (63.1%)	113,038 (31.0%)	121,645 (33.4%)	228,915 (62.8%)
North Eastern	90,991 (73.2%)	32,568 (26.2%)	90,618 (72.9%)	32,941 (26.5%)	83,358 (67.1%)	34,916 (28.1%)
Eastern	372,048 (36.0%)	650,051 (62.9%)	364,814 (35.3%)	650,051 (62.9%)	270,225 (26.1%)	749,654 (72.5%)
Central	508,943 (50.0%)	508,942 (50.0%)	508,943 (50.0%)	508,943 (50.0%)	306,012 (30.3%)	701,916 (69.0%)
Western	318,932 (48.0%)	340,858 (51.3%)	305,643 (46.0%)	354,147 (53.3%)	143,101 (21.5%)	506,999 (76.3%)
Nyanza	679,846 (80.1%)	156,169 (18.4%)	199,455 (23.5%)	636,600 (75.0%)	64,471 (7.6%)	521,052 (61.4%)
Rift Valley	1,034,136 (71.6%)	401,526 (27.8%)	1,002,371 (69.4%)	433,301 (30.0%)	769,242 (53.3%)	624,501 (43.2%)
Total	3,391,794 (57.8%)	2,405,432 (41.0%)	2,781,380 (47.4%)	3,028,303 (51.6%)	1,836,055 (31.3%)	3,647,658 (62.2%)

Data from European Union Electoral Observation Mission, *Final Report: Kenya General Elections, 27 December 2002* (Belgium: European Union Electoral Observation Mission, 2003), 72, <http://aceproject.org/regions-en/countries-and-territories/KE/reports/Kenya%20-%20EU%20rep02.pdf>.



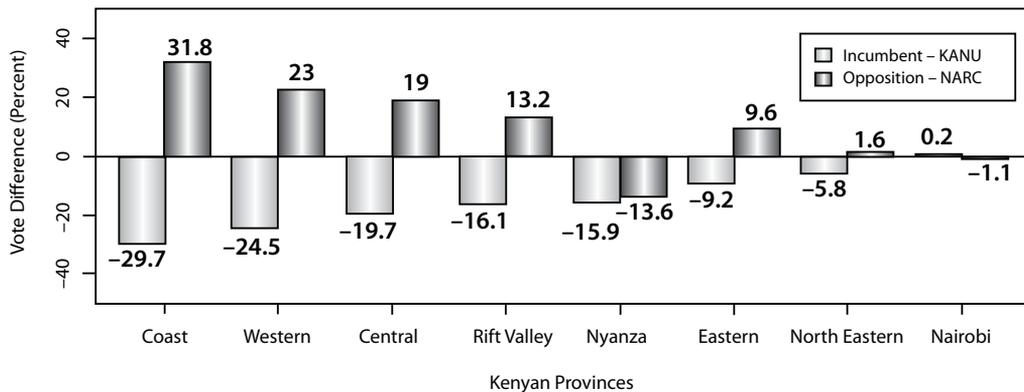
**Figure 1. Projected and actual presidential votes in the Kenyan Elections of 2002.** (Data from European Union Electoral Observation Mission, *Final Report: Kenya General Elections, 27 December 2002* [Belgium: European Union Electoral Observation Mission, 2003], 72, <http://aceproject.org/regions-en/countries-and-territories/KE/reports/Kenya%20-%20EU%20rep02.pdf>.)

The results show that if the incumbent party KANU had stayed united with Kenyatta as its candidate, he would have defeated the joint opposition candidate, Kibaki, by a margin of nearly 17 percent. In fact, even if Kibaki had gotten all of the Central province votes, he would still have lost to Kenyatta in the polls. These calculations likely informed KANU's strategic decision to merge with one of the key opposition parties—NDP—in the run-up to the 2002 elections. The presidential results of 1992 and 1997 show that KANU's performance steadily improved as the combined vote share of serious opposition candidates diminished. Indeed, although the opposition votes exceeded KANU's by more than 27 percent in 1992, the gap reduced to 18 percent in 1997. Either KANU's popularity increased, perhaps due to disillusionment with the opposition, or it became better and smarter at election fraud. Whatever the case, the results suggest that the mere coming together of the opposition as it existed then could not have enabled it to defeat KANU.

Notably, the split in KANU boosted the opposition vote tally by about 10 percent of all the votes cast while diminishing KANU's share by nearly the same margin. Thus, a united opposition still would have defeated a divided KANU but by a very narrow and statistically insignificant margin of 4.2 percent ( $\chi^2 = 0.20$ ;  $a = 0.56$ ). Such a small margin is risky in the new and emerging democracies since the incumbent can easily stuff the ballot box and "catch up." Since the narrow opposition victory margin is far less than that in the actual 2002 elections, factors other than opposition unity and

the split in KANU must have exerted an even greater influence on those results.

To explore these results further, I disaggregated the data depicted in figure 1 at the provincial level and calculated the differences between actual and projected votes for the KANU and NARC presidential candidates. The projected votes represent those for a united opposition against a split in KANU (fig. 2).



**Figure 2. Differences between projected and actual presidential votes in 2002.** (Data from European Union Electoral Observation Mission, *Final Report: Kenya General Elections, 27 December 2002* [Belgium: European Union Electoral Observation Mission, 2003], 72, <http://aceproject.org/regions-en/countries-and-territories/KE/reports/Kenya%20-%20EU%20rep02.pdf>.)

Figure 2 shows that the 2002 voting pattern in Nairobi is largely consistent with my projections and, by extension, with the expectations of the opposition-coalition thesis. Nairobi voters seem to have viewed Uhuru Kenyatta as another Moi and literally transferred the latter's 1997 support to the former in 2002. Moi received 20.6 percent, but Kenyatta's share came to 20.8 percent. Moreover, Kibaki got 76.5 percent—nearly the same as the 77.6 percent total vote share for the four opposition candidates in 1997, including Odinga. Notably, though, Kibaki would have won in Nairobi even without opposition unity, as he did in 1997. That is, opposition unity did not make him win; it simply increased his margin of victory.

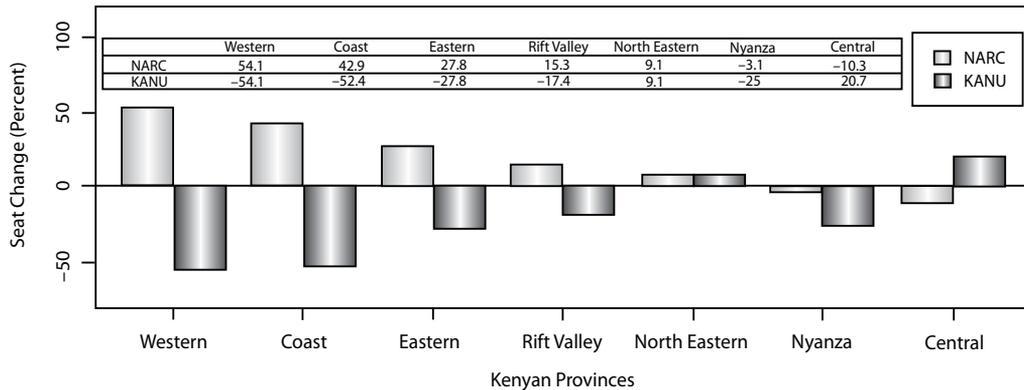
At the other end of the spectrum, Coast province voters shattered the coalition thesis by substituting the projected KANU results with those of the opposition. It seems that some sort of transitive voting occurred so that a significant proportion of the 63 percent majority who voted for Moi in 1997 evidently shifted support to the second-preferred candidate, Kibaki, rather than the unknown Uhuru Kenyatta. Voters are typically risk averse

and “prefer to minimize costs than to maximize benefits.”<sup>36</sup> Tellingly, KANU suffered the greatest loss in Coast province, yet no major coalition player came from there. Hence, the results suggest that the opposition-coalition thesis is inadequate as an explanation for the 2002 voting patterns in Coast.

In Nyanza, both KANU and NARC scored considerably below the projected values and, by extension, failed to live up to the assumptions of the coalition thesis, largely because of NARC’s failure to incorporate a small opposition party—Forum for Restoration of Democracy–People (FORD-P)—which had significant support in the province. The thesis appears to have been further despoiled in Western province, where Kibaki substantially increased his vote tally from a paltry 1.4 percent in 1997 to 76.3 percent in 2002. Yet, even Wamalwa—the coalition’s point man in the province—managed only 49.4 percent during his candidacy in 1997! Thus, even if Wamalwa’s vote share had transferred to Kibaki, he would have received only 50.5 percent. It is hard to believe that Wamalwa could market Kibaki’s candidacy to his supporters more easily than his own in 1997. These results show that something else, beyond the mere coming together of the opposition, influenced voting patterns.

### *The Opposition Coalition and the Parliamentary Election Results of 2002*

Are the patterns observed in the presidential elections replicated in parliamentary elections? Figure 3 shows the distribution of the net trade-off of parliamentary seats in each province by KANU and NARC. It displays the difference between the seats gained and/or lost by KANU or NARC in each province in 2002 relative to their strengths in 1997. If a party lost more seats than it gained in a province, then it would have a negative score and vice versa—a difference expressed as a function of the total number of seats in that province. Since NARC did not exist in 1997, its seat change is the difference between its share of seats won in 2002 and the combined share of seats won by its major affiliates (the Democratic Party, NDP, FORD-Kenya, and Social Democratic Party) in the 1997 elections.



**Figure 3. Changes in KANU and NARC seats in the elections of 2002.** (Seat changes calculated by the author from data in European Union Electoral Observation Mission, *Final Report: Kenya General Elections, 27 December 2002* [Belgium: European Union Electoral Observation Mission, 2003], 73–102, <http://aceproject.org/regions-en/countries-and-territories/KE/reports/Kenya%20-%20EU%20rep02.pdf>.)

NARC was expected to derive support from the four provinces from which each of its coalition leaders had greatest support, as already explained. However, figure 3 shows that of these provinces, only Western acted in accordance with expectations and voted out KANU from 13 of the 15 parliamentary seats it held in the province. On paper, it may appear that Wamalwa managed to swing his Western province base behind NARC. Yet, the magnitude of the Kibaki victory in Western seems to stretch beyond Wamalwa's influence there. In fact, table 1 shows that he did not have a great deal of support from the province when he was a candidate in 1997. Besides, the split in KANU does not seem to have played a significant role in securing NARC's victory since only three legislators shifted from KANU to NARC and managed to retain their seats. Clearly, factors other than opposition unity were at play.

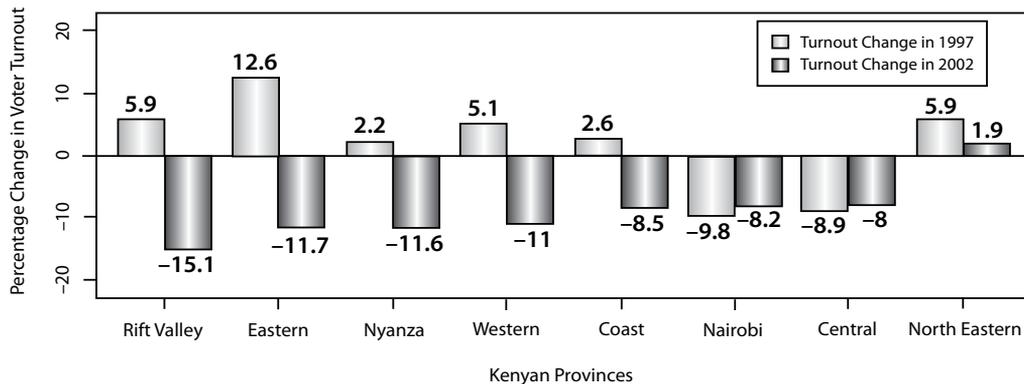
Although Eastern province gave NARC additional seats, voters in the lower region of the province, dominated by the Kamba ethnic group, demonstrated impulsive voting patterns and an eccentric appetite for fringe parties. Yet, this region was Ngilu's political bastion in 1997. It transferred seven seats from KANU to NARC and further redistributed four seats among the smaller parties. In essence the resolve for change was great but not equally matched with an enthusiasm to support NARC. In the non-Kamba regions, KANU lost several seats, gaining only one seat, ironically, from the Democratic Party headed by Kibaki, the NARC presidential candidate.

In Nyanza and Central provinces, though, the combined vote tally of the coalition partners in 2002 did not match the sum of their individual efforts in 1997. In Nyanza, NARC retained all 21 seats in the Luo region while KANU lost 10—mainly in the non-Luo areas—to FORD-P, a small party with a base in the province. Thus, KANU's heavy loss there was a result neither of its split nor opposition unity but of the rise of FORD-P as a strong party with a base in Nyanza. Similarly, since Central province is Kibaki's political turf, few people expected NARC to lose seats to KANU. Nonetheless, the elections presented Central province voters with a dilemma since the KANU candidate was also from their province. Because KANU had not won any seats there in 1997, those it gained in 2002 came largely at the expense of NARC. The fact that the core support bases of one of NARC's coalitions did not deliver any additional seats, instead losing those previously held by affiliate parties in the province, further undermines the utility of the opposition-coalition thesis in explaining the huge increase in NARC's parliamentary seats in the 2002 elections.

Perhaps more interesting is the behavior of voters in what I call the "outsider provinces" like Coast, which did not have a notable linchpin in the coalition. Yet, its voters heavily punished KANU by shifting nine of its 21 seats to NARC and another three to fringe parties. In the end, NARC displaced KANU as the majority party in the province. Thus, neither the split within the party nor opposition to the unity of the coalition can explain KANU's loss of seats in Coast.

### *The Opposition Coalition and Voter Turnout*

Figure 4 reveals the change in provincial voter turnout in the 1997–2002 general elections. Turnout reflects "the total number of people who cast their votes as a proportion of all those who, according to the electoral laws as of the time of voting, are eligible to vote."<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 4. Changes in voter turnout in the Kenyan elections of 1997 and 2002.** (Changes in voter turnout calculated by the author from data in European Union Electoral Observation Mission, *Final Report: Kenya General Elections, 27 December 2002* [Belgium: European Union Electoral Observation Mission, 2003], 72, <http://aceproject.org/regions-en/countries-and-territories/KE/reports/Kenya%20-%20EU%20rep02.pdf>.)

Interestingly, in 1997 voter turnout increased considerably in nearly all the provinces except Central and Nairobi. In these two provinces, Kenneth Matiba—who ran second to Moi in 1992 and had huge support there—decided to call for a boycott of the 1997 elections. Some of his supporters may have heeded his call and abstained. The greatest increase in voter turnout occurred in Eastern, where for the first time a female candidate, Charity Ngilu, mounted a credible presidential campaign. This showing may have energized her support base, consisting mainly of her native Kamba ethnic group.

But in 2002, voter turnout declined in all provinces except in sparsely populated, semiarid North Eastern. The fact that voter turnout increased everywhere in 1997 but decreased everywhere in 2002 lends credence to the view that the election results of 1997 may have been inflated through ballot-box stuffing to secure a win for Moi.<sup>38</sup> Yet, if that in fact occurred, how does one explain why Moi did not inflate the 2002 results as well, given his frantic efforts to impose a preferred heir—even at the risk of splitting KANU? Moi's succession strategy betrayed an attempt to install a puppet president and continue to rule from behind the scenes.<sup>39</sup>

Of particular interest to this study is the fact that, as shown in figure 4, the greatest decline in voter turnout took place in Rift Valley, Eastern, Nyanza, and Western provinces. Rift Valley is the home province of the incumbent Moi—no longer eligible to contest the 2002 elections. Because he had held power for 24 years, most of his supporters in the vast province

may have become so used to him that they could not imagine voting for another candidate. The low voter turnout there seems to have affected KANU more than NARC. Boasting the highest number of registered voters, Rift Valley has always been the core of KANU's support, so everyone expected that the KANU candidate would receive more votes from the province. Not only did Rift Valley record the greatest decline in turnout in the entire country (15.4 percent) but KANU's vote share also declined by 16.1 percent while NARC's rose by 13.2 percent. In fact, the vote margin between KANU and NARC in Rift Valley actually declined by nearly 30 percent—from 39.4 in 1997 to a mere 10.1 in 2002 (see table 2).

These observations imply that even the incumbent president could not mobilize his support base to vote overwhelmingly for his preferred successor in 2002. This fact further buttresses my argument that leaders not contesting an election have difficulty mobilizing their supporters to vote for another candidate. When one bows out of a race, a completely new set of electoral choices and dynamics emerges that may be convoluted by transitive voting. This occurs in places where the leader not contesting the election is the most preferred candidate and where the one expected to benefit from his or her nonparticipation is not the second-preferred. Consequently, strategic choice of a joint candidate demands one who has a large support base so that even if turnout in the core bases of coalition partners declines, that person can still mount a credible challenge to the incumbent. Otherwise, the opposition coalition can favor the incumbent by depressing voter turnout.

### Economic Voting as an Alternative Explanation of the KANU Defeat in 2002

If the opposition-unity thesis does not provide a complete account of why KANU lost, how well does economic voting theory fare? This study treats the latter as “any change in a voter's support for parties that is caused by a change in economic perceptions.”<sup>40</sup> I adopt the broad economic-voting assumption that people's living conditions determine their voting behavior and expect, for example, that the higher the incidence of poverty in a constituency, the lower its support for KANU.

The number of constituencies in each province is mostly smaller than the threshold of 30 cases needed for parametric statistical analysis.<sup>41</sup> Con-

sequently, I follow the exemplary nonparametric bootstrap approach of John Fox, which blends bootstrapping with Peter J. Huber's estimation of robust regression.<sup>42</sup> This process yields the same intercepts and slopes that would result from robust regression, with standard errors adjusted to correct for bootstrap samples. In short, "bootstrap provides reliable statistical inferences for small samples, irrespective of the distribution type."<sup>43</sup>

I used the data on relevant economic variables from the Central Bureau of Statistics.<sup>44</sup> Specifically, *poverty incidence* is the percentage of the population of a constituency whose consumption lies below the poverty line. *Poverty gap* measures how much further, on average, the poor people in a constituency fall below the poverty line. It is the difference between the poverty line and the mean incomes of those living below that line, expressed as a percentage of the latter. The value of the variable ranges from zero (the poverty line) to 100 (the highest poverty level). *Income inequality* refers to the extent to which incomes are dispersed in the population or concentrated among only a small number of people. *Voter turnout* represents the percentage of registered voters in a province or constituency who voted in the 2002 elections (the Electoral Commission of Kenya reports these figures). *Candidates* refers to the number of contestants for a parliamentary seat.<sup>45</sup>

Table 3 shows results of a nonparametric bootstrap regression of various economic variables on the percentage of votes that KANU parliamentary candidates of 2002 obtained in various constituencies across six provinces, with the exception of Nairobi and North Eastern, which I omitted since they have just eight and 11 constituencies, respectively.

**Table 3. Determinants of KANU's parliamentary votes in the elections of 2002**

	<i>Western</i>	<i>Central</i>	<i>Eastern</i>	<i>Coast</i>	<i>Nyanza</i>	<i>Rift Valley</i>
Number of Candidates	-2.40	4.94***	-4.75***	0.12	0.31	-2.20
	(1.03)	(4.49)	(3.30)	(0.11)	(0.29)	(1.03)
Voter Turnout	2.43***	0.32	0.76	1.35***	0.73	0.19
	(3.12)	(0.68)	(1.41)	(5.63)	(1.47)	(0.63)
Poverty Incidence	-0.51	-1.33***	-0.81*	-0.04	-0.06	-0.80*
	(1.00)	(5.54)	(2.31)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(2.05)
Poverty Gap	-1.28*	-0.27**	0.52#	0.16	-0.28	-0.14
	(2.29)	(2.70)	(1.68)	(0.29)	(1.40)	(.40)
Income Inequality	-4.06*	-0.88**	-0.77	-0.01	-0.32	-0.44
	(2.31)	(2.59)	(0.54)	(0.02)	(0.57)	(0.80)

**Table 3. Determinants of KANU's parliamentary votes in the elections of 2002 (continued)**

Original Observations	24	29	36	21	32	49
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Entries are nonparametric bootstrap statistics for robust regression based on 2,000 bootstrap samples. The t-values, in parentheses, are based on Huber's robust standard error estimates. Significance: 0 \*\*\*\* 0.001 \*\*\* 0.01 \*\* 0.05 \* 0.1.

As indicated in table 3, poverty incidence, voter turnout, income inequality, number of candidates, and poverty gap are significant predictors of the votes received by KANU parliamentary candidates in the 2002 elections. However, their influence varies by province. For instance, in Central, Eastern, and Rift Valley, constituencies with low poverty incidence tended to give more votes to KANU parliamentary candidates and vice versa, regardless of whether the party won the seat or not. In the Kabete constituency, which has the lowest national poverty incidence, the KANU candidate received an impressive 34.9 percent of votes although he did not win the seat. KANU, however, won the Limuru and Kiambaa seats, which had the second- and the third-lowest poverty incidence in the province.

One can argue that these seats are concentrated in parts of Central province, where the KANU presidential candidate enjoyed support. However, even in Rift Valley, KANU lost three seats in districts with the highest poverty incidence in the heartland of incumbent president Moi's Kalenjin ethnic group—Marakwet East, Engwen, and Baringo East. In fact, the latter borders Moi's Baringo Central constituency but had the worst poverty in the province. In contrast, Keiyo South, which had the least destitution among the Kalenjin-populated constituencies, gave the KANU candidate 83 percent of the votes.

Two other measures of living conditions—income inequality and poverty gap—further influenced KANU's performance in Western and Central. As one would expect, constituencies with high inequality levels in these provinces were more supportive of KANU. Moreover, people living significantly below the poverty line seem to attribute their predicament to KANU and therefore rejected that party.

The number of candidates for a parliamentary seat had sharply contrasting effects on the vote shares of KANU candidates in Central and Eastern. Although the large number reduced those vote shares in Eastern province, it increased the shares in Central. Evidently, candidates in Eastern province emphasized KANU's failures, thereby chopping off that party's support. Indeed, KANU candidates tallied more than 70 percent of the

votes in each of the three constituencies in Eastern province that had fewer than five candidates. But their votes hardly rose above 50 percent in the rest of the province where there were more than five. Thus, an opposition coalition could have worked in favor of KANU in Eastern since it reduces the number of contestants who would cut off KANU's support.

I also examined the effects of various measures of economic living conditions as well as voter turnout on KANU's share of the presidential vote in 2002. Results of the nonparametric bootstrap regression (table 4) show a slight difference in the factors that motivated people's choice of presidential and parliamentary candidates. Although income inequalities and poverty gap exerted varying degrees of influence on the decision to support or reject KANU's parliamentary candidates in different provinces, they had no statistically significant effect on the party's performance in the presidential race in all six provinces. In Western, Central, and Eastern, the incidence of poverty greatly undercut support for KANU's presidential candidate to the extent that constituencies with extreme indigence tended to limit support for that candidate and vice versa. In Central and Eastern provinces, the prevalence of poverty led to reduced support not only for KANU's presidential candidate but also for its parliamentary contenders.

**Table 4. Determinants of KANU's presidential votes in the elections of 2002**

	<i>Western</i>	<i>Central</i>	<i>Eastern</i>	<i>Coast</i>	<i>Nyanza</i>	<i>Rift Valley</i>
Voter Turnout	-0.16 (0.23)	-3.24*** (6.11)	-0.89 (1.39)	0.60 (0.85)	-0.08 (0.89)	0.72* (2.06)
Poverty Incidence	-0.11** (2.75)	-0.87* (2.07)	-0.95** (2.79)	0.19 (0.41)	0.01 (0.20)	-1.15 (1.92)
Poverty Gap	0.23 (0.52)	0.29 (1.53)	0.62 (1.82)	1.13 (0.76)	0.01 (0.20)	0.06 (0.17)
Income Inequality	0.07 (0.19)	0.16 (0.33)	-0.26 (0.23)	-6.75 (1.56)	0.16 (1.45)	-1.24 (1.06)

Entries are nonparametric bootstrap statistics for robust regression, based on 2,000 bootstrap samples. The t-values, in parentheses, are based on Huber's robust standard-error estimates. Significance codes: 0 \*\*\*\* 0.001 \*\*\* 0.01 \*\* 0.05.

Finally, although high voter turnout had no significant effect on the share of votes received by KANU's parliamentary candidate in Central and Rift Valley provinces, it has statistically significant but contrasting effects on support received by the party's presidential candidate there. More specifically, high turnout tended to diminish KANU's presidential votes in Central province but increased them in Rift Valley.

## Conclusions: The Opposition Coalition Thesis and Implications for Democracy in Africa

The study's findings indicate that the opposition coalition had only partial influence on the defeat of KANU. Voters showed substantial shift in support from KANU to NARC both in terms of the redistribution of legislative seats and votes for the presidential and parliamentary candidates in key coalition regions like Western province. Similarly massive shifts, however, also occurred in Coast province, notwithstanding the fact that all of its key politicians were in KANU. This situation significantly weakens the unity-split hypothesis.

Moreover, the study found that economic factors such as the incidence of poverty, the poverty gap, and income inequality also affected the performance of KANU in the presidential and parliamentary elections. Yet, their influence is not consistent across the provinces, suggesting the need for deeper inquiry into exactly what led to KANU's massive loss in 2002. These results, though, need further investigation since data-availability problems hindered the study.

The opposition-coalition thesis assumes that defeating incumbent parties is a necessary condition for democracy—an argument consistent with Adam Przeworski's definition of the latter as “a system in which parties lose elections” as well as Samuel Huntington's turnover rule, whereby a country is considered democratic if it has had three successful electoral turnovers.<sup>46</sup> For Przeworski, democracies are distinguished by the presence of a competing party that loses the elections rather than the presence of a winning party. Yet, in some countries with open political competition, citizens are content with one dominant political party that wins elections fairly. In Tanzania, for example, the ruling party—Chama cha Mapinduzi—has not encountered a credible challenge despite political liberalization. Similarly, the Botswana Democratic Party has held power since independence in 1965, courtesy of credible electoral victories. Consequently, democracy can exist even when parties do not lose elections. One should not necessarily view democratic electoral contests as those between one unpopular incumbent party and popular opposition parties that share ideology, vision, and interests—and whose only fault (disunity) causes split votes during elections.

In most cases, when African opposition parties coalesce to defeat the incumbent, the rationale is that the latter is less democratic. Yet, there is

nothing democratic about the coalition itself. Not only does it have the potential for letting the elite impose unpopular leaders on society, but also it undermines political parties as institutions and degrades the electoral discourse to personality-based instead of issue-based contests. Moreover, the coalition depresses voter turnout among supporters of other would-be candidates who opt to support a joint candidate, thus undercutting political participation and democracy. Kenya's experience shows that fixation with the defeat of the incumbent can result in a coalition built on quicksand, which gives rise (if it ever wins) to an unstable government.

The notion that opposition unity is necessary to defeat dominant incumbent parties presupposes that the burden of deciding who should govern—or the sort of leadership desirable for society—lies with political elites rather than the masses. In the context of Kenya's elections of 2002, the overarching assumption has maintained that voter mobilization against incumbent KANU occurred top-down. That is, after elite-level negotiations created the NARC coalition, the voters neatly fitted into the elite political designs and promptly ratified the deal at the ballot box. Nonetheless, studies demonstrate that voters are more than passive clients of elite institutional designs—that they interminably resist such designs that they do not approve. In other words, “voters are not lumps of clay waiting to be molded.”<sup>47</sup> They do not simply approve elite decisions at face value but often question, scrutinize, and even make contrary decisions.

If an opposition coalition wishes to succeed in dislodging the incumbent, the choice of the joint presidential candidate must be strategic. Otherwise, voters might not neatly fit into the elite political designs and could fail to seal the deal at the ballot box. In Kenya, for instance, the choice of Kibaki as the joint opposition presidential candidate was based on the fact that KANU had already selected a candidate from the populous Kikuyu ethnic group. Thus, the coalition needed a joint candidate who would share Kikuyu votes with KANU's choice and then top them with votes from strongholds of the other opposition leaders. However, since the opposition coalition seeks to remove the incumbent by presenting a joint candidate and since the choice of that candidate must be a strategic rather than an electoral process, the coalition risks subverting democracy. In the first place, if parties and their leaders pursue identical agendas, then why not merge those parties into one? Rather than persuade opposition blocs to form pre-

election coalitions, one should encourage the development of broad-based, institutionalized political parties built on ideologies, programs, and policies that offer a clear alternative to those of the incumbent.

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