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Are Electoral Coalitions Harmful for Democratic Consolidation in Africa?

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Abstract

Electoral coalitions are becoming increasingly popular among opposition parties in Africa because they offer many advantages with respect to reducing party fragmentation and increasing incumbent turnovers. At the same time, however, they are often comprised of parties that are defined predominantly by their leaders' personalities and exhibit little differentiation in terms of their policy orientation. Based on a dataset spanning all opposition coalitions since 2000 in Africa's electoral democracies, this paper demonstrates not only that coalitions rarely defeat incumbents but also that they are only competitive when major opposition parties are involved. More significantly, the paper highlights that in many countries, a sizeable share of total electoral volatility is due to fluctuations in voting for opposition parties that have belonged to coalitions. The paper argues that such volatility reflects the inability of coalition members to build loyal constituency bases over time, which is critical for party development and broader consolidation.

Keywords: Africa, campaign strategies, electoral volatility, opposition parties, party development

JEL classification: D72, N30, N37, O10

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1 Introduction

In July 2008, five Ugandan opposition parties announced the formation of the Inter-Party Cooperation coalition in order to compete against President Yoweri Museveni in the country's 2011 elections. Similarly, in March 2009, opposition parties in Nigeria decided to form a coalition in an attempt to defeat the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 2011. South Africa's opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Independent Democrats (ID) likewise agreed in mid-2010 to an electoral alliance for forthcoming local and national elections in a bid to undermine the dominance of the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

These cases represent only a few recent attempts by African opposition parties to form electoral coalitions as a means of challenging the entrenchment of ruling parties. Indeed, in a region where democratization has led to a proliferation in parties, electoral coalitions represent one means of reducing party fragmentation. As such, coalitions could enhance both the participation and contestation of opposition parties that Dahl (1971) deems critical for democracy. Moreover, opposition coalitions could facilitate the turnover of incumbent parties, which is Huntington's (1991) minimum standard for achieving democratic consolidation.

However, this paper not only illustrates that opposition coalitions rarely defeat incumbents but also argues that such coalitions further hinder democratic consolidation by preventing the development of competitive party systems. As Stepan (1990: 44) notes, opposition parties must represent 'credible democratic alternatives' which, among other things, involves retaining an independent ideological and institutional existence. Yet, opposition parties in Africa often lack any ideological differentiation on issues relevant to citizens. Coalitions only exacerbate this tendency by precluding parties from developing distinct platforms and thereby from garnering a loyal constituency base. Often, coalition members are only motivated by an office-seeking agenda and simply coalesce around a shared goal of ousting the ruling party. At best, this reinforces the existing tendency of voters to select parties according to the personalities of their leaders rather than their policies. At worst, it increases voter disillusionment over the lack of genuine party alternatives and may ultimately foment apathy.

This paper focuses exclusively on pre-electoral coalitions rather than on governing coalitions.¹ Moreover, I use the term pre-electoral coalitions to refer to two types of arrangements: (1) the coalescence of two or more political parties under one party banner for the purposes of elections or (2) negotiated pacts whereby they compete under their own individual party banners but agree to split amongst themselves the share of seats they collectively win in legislative elections.² Explicit attention is devoted to pre-electoral coalitions by opposition parties rather than incumbents in light of the importance of opposition parties for democratic consolidation.

¹ See Oyugi (2006) for an overview of post-electoral coalitions in Africa.

² The terms coalition, electoral pacts, and alliances are used interchangeably in this paper but collectively refer to the same concept elaborated here.

As Powell (2000: 644) notes, theoretical and empirical work on pre-electoral coalitions remains relatively limited. Indeed, research on coalitions largely has focused on bargaining by parties within governing coalitions after elections have occurred (e.g. Baron and Ferejohn 1989; Laver and Shepsle 1990; Müller and Strøm 2000). Moreover, the scarce literature that does exist on pre-electoral coalitions tends to be concentrated on politics in industrialized countries (e.g. Carroll and Cox 2007; Debus 2009; Golder 2006). Notable exceptions in the African context include Kadima's (2006) work on coalition survival and collapse and Arriola's (2008) analysis of why some multi-ethnic opposition coalitions succeed while others fail.

This paper aims to contribute to this nascent literature on African coalitions by examining their impact on election outcomes, voter attachment, and party development. The paper first reviews the two main challenges facing opposition parties in Africa, which are the electoral advantages enjoyed by incumbents and the absence of distinct policy orientations. Survey data from Afrobarometer is used to highlight that citizens do not readily trust or identify with the region's opposition parties. Then, the theoretical advantages of pre-electoral coalitions in addressing the first challenge are elaborated. Data on opposition coalitions formed across Africa's electoral democracies since 2000 reveals, however, that they demonstrate little empirical success at defeating incumbents. Subsequently, the paper discusses why such coalitions can undermine the maturation of political parties and reviews key cases within the region. Election data then highlights that opposition coalitions are usually their most competitive only when the main opposition party participates, which raises doubts about the added value of coalitions. Most significantly, the data also reveals that shifts in support for opposition coalitions and for their member parties account for a large share of a country's total electoral volatility. The final section concludes with broader implications for party development in Africa.

2 The challenges for opposition parties in Africa

High expectations existed when democratic transitions swept across Africa during the 1990s. However, scholars subsequently lamented about how these transitions were evolving (e.g. Bratton 1998; Carothers 1997; Fomunyoh 2001). Foremost among these critiques was that the political party which won in its country's first multi-party elections had, in most cases, retained power (Nohlen et al. 1999; van de Walle 2003). In fact, Doorenspleet (2003) argued that most African democracies could be characterized as 'one-party dominant' since the ruling party consistently wins presidential elections and garners a majority in legislative ones.

Although the problem is particularly pronounced in countries such as Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa, where the ruling party emerged from a liberation movement and therefore has a unique legacy, other factors have also fostered the entrenchment of incumbents. First, with greater access to state media and financial resources than their counterparts, ruling parties can host more elaborate electoral campaigns and more easily extend their reach into remote rural areas. This is particularly true in those countries where political parties do not receive any public financing for campaigns (see Bryan and Baer 2005). Second, opposition parties proliferated after multi-party transitions, thereby enhancing the advantages enjoyed by ruling parties. For example, there are approximately 103 parties in Burkina Faso while the equivalent figure is 94 in Mali and

77 in Senegal (Adejumobi 2007). Not surprisingly, the sheer number of opposition parties means that many receive negligible support from voters.

Public opinion data provides a useful means of assessing citizens' perceptions of their expanding party options. The Afrobarometer project, which relies on a standardized survey instrument to assess public opinion across more than a dozen African countries, provides such data. Based on survey responses from the fourth round of surveys, which was conducted in 2008, African voters appear to support greater involvement of the opposition in politics, but they are not especially impressed by the opposition parties that exist.³ On average, 66 per cent of respondents believe that many parties are needed to ensure that citizens have real choices in who governs them, and 61 per cent believe that a democracy contains either minor or major flaws if elections never lead to a change in the ruling party.⁴ However, as seen in Table 1, respondents claim to be, on average, more trustful of the ruling party than of opposition parties. Moreover, while a majority of voters claim that they are attached to a particular party, closer inspection reveals that more respondents are close to the incumbent rather than opposition parties. A comparison with the third round of surveys collected in 2005 reveals that these attitudes have changed very little over time. This preference for incumbents becomes even more notable given that the opposition party category collectively encompasses many parties while the incumbent just refers to one party.

Thus, while voters believe that multiple parties are important for democracy, there is not a very high level of trust of, or identification with, the opposition. This reinforces the fact that the opposition has not been able to successfully gain the loyalty of voters in many countries. Indeed, most opposition parties are small in membership and prone to internal struggles. Yet, even those with a substantial membership base often lack a defined policy stance on important issues that distinguishes them from both the ruling party and other opposition parties. Many of these opposition parties were not launched to fill a policy void but rather as vehicles for the personal ambitions of political elites, many of whom were previously members of their country's ruling party (Olukoshi 1998).

This in turn highlights a second common observation of political parties in African democracies, which is their lack of ideological and programmatic foundations. Instead, a party's ethno-regional background or its leader's personality tends to characterize them (e.g. Manning 2005; van de Walle 2003). Moreover, as van de Walle and Butler (1999) note, even those few parties that have campaigned on specific policy issues have encountered little success in gaining votes. Avowedly socialist and Marxist parties within the region, such as Ghana's Convention People's Party (CPP) or Senegal's *Parti de l'Indépendance et du Travail* (PIT), fail to articulate a message that exhibits much relevance to the lives of many African voters, who predominantly labour in a very heterogeneous informal sector rather than represent a unified, formal working class.

Thus, while democratization has created the space for many new opposition parties to emerge, their electoral success remains hindered by two major challenges: the many

³ See <http://www.afrobarometer.org/>. Afrobarometer focuses on Africa's more liberal regimes and includes all which regularly hold multi-party elections. Since Burkina Faso and Liberia were not included in Round 3, they were also excluded in Round 4 in order to ensure comparability.

⁴ These numbers are the average of the weighted responses for questions 32 and 42C.

advantages enjoyed by incumbents and the absence of well-articulated and relevant policy platforms that would help distinguish them from their competitors.

3 The promise of electoral coalitions

Electoral coalitions represent a plausible means of addressing the first challenge through economies-of-scale. Disparate parties can pool their meagre financial resources into a more substantial collection and thereby launch a larger campaign. In addition, through a coalition, a party can appeal to a broader constituency beyond its original base and thereby mitigate the possibility of splitting the opposition vote to the incumbent's benefit. In ethnically-divided societies, coalitions may have the added benefit of encouraging dialogue among parties that transcends their individual ethnic, linguistic, or religious orientations (Salih and Nordlund 2007). In fact, Horowitz (2002) notes that pre-electoral coalitions are more amenable to attracting votes across group lines than post-electoral compromises.⁵

Moreover, parties may assume that voters choose candidates strategically rather than sincerely. In other words, they believe voters are influenced by the prospects of a party and are thereby loath to 'waste' their vote on candidates who may not win, even if they personally favour that candidate over all others (see Cox 1997). In such cases, a coalition of either a large number of parties or a few of the better-known ones provides the electorate with the sense that change is possible, encouraging opposition sympathizers to vote accordingly. Likewise, the expectation of an opposition coalition becoming a serious contender can attract funding from the private sector, providing the opposition with additional resources and creating momentum that could last well up until the election day. Howard and Roessler (2006) further note that opposition coalitions are more likely to prevent ruling parties from employing 'divide and rule' tactics.

Although some argue that the likelihood of pre-electoral coalitions depends on prevailing political and electoral institutions, no clear consensus exists on what institutions are most conducive to coalitions. For instance, Manning (2005) argues that the power accorded to executives in African countries often discourages the formation of coalitions in presidential elections because party leaders do not want to forfeit their chance at the presidency. Where coalitions do occur in presidential elections, Rakner and van de Walle (2009) believe this is more likely in two-round systems since candidates that failed in the first-round of voting are more willing to support the opposition front-runner in the second round. Kadima (2006) instead argues that first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems place greater pressure on voters to avoid wasting their votes, and this realization encourages parties to form coalitions.

In legislative elections, proportional representation (PR) systems are considered less likely to encourage pre-electoral coalitions because votes are not necessarily 'wasted' in the traditional sense.⁶ Exceptions, however, can occur if threshold levels for gaining

⁵ However, forming coalitions across ethno-linguistic or regional lines often ensures that these coalitions break down along those lines as well (Kadima 2006: 228).

⁶ Strøm et al. (1994) also make this claim with respect to Western Europe, arguing that disproportionality advantages larger parties and therefore creates incentives for pre-electoral alliances.

representation are relatively high, such as Mozambique's former five per cent threshold level (Kadima 2006). Indeed, reflecting on the European experience, Oyugi (2006) suggests that coalitions are actually more likely in PR systems.

Table 2 reveals that the prevalence of pre-electoral coalitions by opposition parties in Africa actually has occurred under a variety of electoral institutions. This table only focuses on those coalitions formed since 2000 due to both data availability, given that most countries transitioned only in the 1990s, and because opposition coalitions tended to proliferate after the party which defeated the one-party state began to appear dominant. Moreover, this table only includes countries considered electoral democracies. Specifically, those included have had at least two consecutive rounds of competitive elections since 2000 in years during which they were classified as 'electoral democracies' by Freedom House and have not subsequently experienced any type of electoral breakdown such as a military coup or civilian takeover.⁷ The analysis is limited to electoral democracies because the challenges of obtaining party differentiation and defining a policy agenda is often impossible when elections are not free and fair and opposition parties lack the freedom to campaign.⁸

Seventeen countries fit these criteria, 14 of which have had pre-electoral coalitions by opposition parties in presidential and/or legislative elections.⁹ Given the focus of this paper on opposition parties, Table 2 excludes coalitions that include incumbent parties.¹⁰ In countries where a two-round system is used to elect the president, the opposition coalition refers to one that had already formed prior to the first round. Where presidential and legislative elections are not concurrent, a legislative coalition was coded as 'opposition' if none of the parties that belong to it won presidential office in the previous elections.¹¹ The rationale was that a party whose candidate wins executive office often has greater access to resources and popular momentum in subsequent legislative elections, thereby reflecting the role of presidential incumbency rather than the impact of coalition behaviour. This is particularly true in Africa's presidential systems where executives demonstrate a high level of control (see van de Walle 2003). For instance, the SOPI coalition in Senegal's 2001 legislative elections was excluded since it was led by the *Parti Démocratique Sénégalais* (PDS), whose leader Abdoulaye Wade had won the presidency in the previous year's elections.

⁷ According to Freedom House, it offers its 'electoral democracy' designation to countries that meet four criteria: (1) a competitive, multiparty system; (2) universal adult suffrage for all citizens; (3) regularly contested elections in conditions of ballot secrecy and in the absence of massive voter fraud; and (4) significant access to the electorate through the media and through open political campaigning (see <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>).

⁸ This is not to deny the importance of opposition coalitions in non-electoral democracies, such as the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) in Ethiopia's 2005 parliamentary elections. However, given the constraints faced by these opposition parties, they cannot be fairly compared with those in more liberalized political environments.

⁹ The remaining three countries are Namibia, Sierra Leone, and South Africa.

¹⁰ The table also excludes opposition coalitions that disintegrated before competing in elections, such as the alignment of the Democratic Party with the New National Party and the Federal Alliance in South Africa during 2000.

¹¹ The exception is Mali in 2002 when Amadou Toumani Touré was elected president but did not belong to any political party. As such, the party that had previously held both the presidency and the parliamentary majority, which was the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA), was considered the incumbent party.

Where presidential winners left their party soon after their electoral victories and formed new parties, their erstwhile party was thereafter considered part of the opposition. This is relevant for Malawi, where President Mutharika left the United Democratic Front (UDF) after winning the 2004 elections to form the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and for São Tomé e Príncipe where President Fradique de Menezes left the *Acção Democrática Independente* (ADI) following his 2001 victory to form the *Movimento Democrático das Forças da Mudança* (MDFM).

Importantly, Table 2 also highlights that the perceived theoretical benefits for defeating incumbents rarely materializes, reinforcing Randall and Svåsand's (2002) observation that even if leaders do agree to enter a coalition, it is very difficult to construct a winning coalition that will defeat the principal political party. In fact, the best known instances of coalitional success, which are the Alternative 2000 coalition in Senegal and the NARC coalition in Kenya, are notable precisely because they are so rare in the multi-party era.

4 Fickle foes and unconventional allies

Pre-electoral coalitions not only have proved relatively unsuccessful in addressing incumbent turnover, but they also reduce the ability of political parties in Africa to address their second major challenge: the lack of well-defined policy platforms and ideological orientations. Indeed, most coalitions in Africa are based on office-seeking, rather than policy-seeking, motives. In the office-seeking perspective, parties enter coalitions with the goal of obtaining control over the benefits that accompany holding a particular political office (Riker 1962; Laver and Schofield 1990). These benefits may be either intrinsic, such as the influence and power that accompanies the office, or material if such offices come with certain perquisites (see Budge and Laver 1986; Strøm and Müller 1999). By contrast, policy-seeking coalitions consist of parties that possess broadly similar policy preferences, and therefore parties with the smallest ideological distance between them are more likely to join together (De Swaan 1973).

The frequency by which coalition members consist of old foes who suddenly become new friends illustrates that ideology is rarely central to coalition-building in Africa. For example, Oyugi (2006: 64) highlights this with respect to the case of NARC in Kenya: 'Thus the need to remove [President Daniel Arap] Moi from power became a major factor influencing alliance formation in 2002. It had very little, if anything, to do with the 14 parties coming together to trade off policies that they wanted to implement'. Although Mwai Kibaki led NARC against the then-ruling Kenyan African National Union (KANU), he subsequently formed a coalition with KANU in the 2007 elections in an attempt to stave off one of his former NARC allies, Raila Odinga.

A similar dynamic has occurred in Southern Africa. In Malawi, where the opposition formed the Mgwirizano Coalition in the 2004 elections, Rakner et al. (2007: 1131) observe that there was a 'marked absence of ideological or political priorities as the driving factor behind coalition formation'.¹² In the country's 2009 elections, the

¹² A similar trend also characterizes incumbent coalitions. For instance, Kapa (2008) notes that in Lesotho's 2007 elections, the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) formed a pact with the National Independent Party (NIP) solely because the two parties both used birds as their campaign

opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) formed a pact with the exact same party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), whose dictatorial leader it ousted in the country's first multi-party elections in 1994. In Zambia's 2006 presidential elections, the United National Independence Party (UNIP) joined with the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD) and the United Party for National Development (UPND) to form the United Democratic Alliance (UDA). Two years later, in the 2008 by-elections, both UNIP and FDD then decided to campaign against the UPND's presidential candidate and in favour of the ruling Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), a party which roundly defeated UNIP during the country's transition to democracy in 1991.

The example of Senegal deserves special attention given that its 2000 presidential elections represented an important example of coalitional success (see Galvan 2001). In that election, the then-ruling *Parti Socialiste* (PS) was challenged by the Alternative 2000 coalition, which was led by Abdoulaye Wade and the PDS. In the run-up to the first round of elections, he formed a coalition with six other parties, including three self-proclaimed leftist parties: *And-Jëf/Parti Africaine pour la Democratie et la Socialisme* (AJ-PADS), *Ligue Démocratique/Mouvement pour le Parti du Travail* (LD-MPT), and PIT. Since the PDS was an avowedly neo-liberal party, the support of these three parties for Wade's candidacy revealed that they prioritized defeating the incumbent over pursuing common policy goals. When it became clear that Wade would be competing against the PS candidate, Abdou Diouf, in a second-round of elections, other major opposition parties, including the *Alliance des Forces de Progrès* (AFP), coalesced around the Alternative 2000 coalition and formed the broader *Front pour l'Alternance* (FAL).

Yet, soon after winning this election, a series of fallouts among Wade's coalition partners occurred. He dismissed cabinet members from the PIT and LD-MPT and fired his Prime Minister, Moustapha Niasse, who leads the AFP. By May 2001, Niasse led 16 opposition parties to form another coalition, known as the *Cadre Permanent de Concertation de l'Opposition* (CPC), to contest local and municipal elections. Ironically, the party that the AFP had challenged just one year earlier, the PS, was also a member of this opposition coalition. Not long after, the CPC joined with the PIT and the LD-MPT to form a broader opposition coalition known as the *Coalition populaire pour l'alternance* (CPA). However, in the run-up to the February 2007 presidential elections, the CPA collapsed and led to a host of new coalitions each formed around the key opposition parties. Only a few months later, in preparation for the legislative elections, yet another new opposition coalition, *Bennoo Siggil Senegaal*, was formed that included Niasse, Ousmane Dieng of the PS, and a former protégé of President Wade, Idrissa Seck. Collectively, this behaviour only lends support to Mbow's (2008: 167) claims that in Senegal, 'political parties proliferate and disappear at will in dizzying bouts of fusion and floor-crossing that on the whole makes it hard to take the country's party scene seriously'.

Indeed, unless a voter is very well-informed, which can be difficult in a region where independent radio stations remain sparse and relatively low literacy rates hinder large-scale newspaper readership, such labyrinthine shifts in alliances and the profusion of new acronyms can be extremely difficult to follow. Consequently, voters may simply

symbols, and neither party wanted to risk losing votes to the other party if voters mixed up the symbols.

resort to supporting parties because of the personality of their party leaders, thereby reinforcing the lack of programmatic content already plaguing the region's parties.

5 Failing to create loyal party constituents

As Dalton and Anderson (2011: 16) observe, 'Volatility in party offerings makes it difficult for voters to make meaningful choices, and to reward or punish political parties on programmatic grounds'. Since many of the pre-electoral coalitions witnessed in Africa are based on the sole goal of defeating the incumbent rather than shaping policy in a specific direction, and because they often are transient to reflect shifting alliances among party leaders, these coalitions prevent the development of a loyal constituency base. Crafting a loyal constituency base often requires creating roots in society, which Mainwaring (1998: 72) argues is reflected by whether parties are regularly supported over time and in different types of elections. This section therefore examines how much support voters offer opposition parties involved in coalitions vis-à-vis opposition parties that abstain from them and whether this support wavers between elections.

Specifically, Table 3 considers whether the opposition party that performed best among all opposition alternatives belonged to a coalition. The table reveals that in many cases, the opposition party that obtained the largest share of votes in presidential elections, or seats in legislative ones, was actually part of a coalition. However, in most of those cases, the coalition was led by a major opposition party within the country.

For instance, while the *Alliance Etoile* in Benin performed relatively poorly in the 2003 elections, the *Alliance pour une dynamique démocratique* (ADD) performed better four years later when it was led by one of the country's main opposition parties at the time, the *Rénaissance du Bénin* (RB). For the *Resistência Nacional Moçambique* (RENAMO) and the MCP, joining a coalition made little difference to their positions as the main opposition parties in Mozambique and Malawi, respectively. By contrast, without the Botswana National Front (BNF), the *Movimento para a Democracia* (MpD), the National Democratic Congress (NDC) or the Patriotic Front (PF) in Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, and Zambia, respectively, opposition coalitions were less successful. This suggests that coalitions may be more beneficial for smaller parties that lack broad appeal than for larger ones. Yet, in joining coalitions that feature major opposition parties, smaller parties are overshadowed and unable to both differentiate themselves from their coalition partners and build their own distinct constituency base.¹³

Electoral volatility between each country's most recent presidential and legislative elections offers a more dynamic assessment of these coalitions. Volatility, as measured by the Pedersen Index (1983), has long been used as a metric for examining the degree to which a party system is institutionalized. The index is calculated as:

$$\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |p_{it} - p_{i(t+1)}|}{2}$$

¹³ Of course, this may not be the intention of smaller parties who join coalitions. Instead, they may leverage their participation to bargain with the incumbent for seats in government or spoils of office.

where p represents the share of votes or seat shares for party i in one election period, t , or the subsequent election, $t+1$. Yet, while high levels of volatility should signal the inability of parties to establish a loyal constituency base, low levels of volatility may indicate a lack of competitiveness rather than system stability (Kuenzi and Lambright 2005: 444). This is precisely the case where ruling parties have transformed into dominant parties and where opposition parties offer little appeal to voters. In the same vein, using the Pedersen index alone hinders understanding whether volatility is due to the behaviour of incumbents or the opposition.

As such, Tables 4 and 5 present not only total electoral volatility during the two most recent consecutive elections in each country but also the share attributable to opposition coalition formation and splits. This latter variable was calculated by isolating changes in either presidential vote shares or legislative seat shares between elections for those opposition parties that were involved in any coalition during period t , period $t+1$, or both.¹⁴ For the purpose of calculating changes in vote and seat shares, some coding rules are necessary for party splits and mergers. Following Powell and Tucker (2008), if a coalition in period t subsequently splits but one party is the clear successor, then this party and the coalition are considered one entity while the other splinter parties are considered new ones. For instance, the NARC in Kenya subsequently split into a host of new parties between the 2002 and 2007 presidential elections. Since Mwai Kibaki had led NARC, his Party of National Unity (PNU) was considered the successor to NARC while the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and Orange Democratic Movement-Kenya (ODM-K) are considered new parties. The change in the PNU's vote shares was calculated as the difference between what the NARC obtained in 2002 and what the PNU received in 2007 while that for the splinter parties was equivalent to what they obtained in subsequent elections, or $|(0-p_{i(t+1)})|$, because their parties technically did not compete in the previous presidential election.

By contrast, if a coalition was formed in time $t+1$ and at least two of its constituent members received at least five per cent of the vote in time t , then the coalition was considered a new party. If only one received five per cent of the vote in time t , then the coalition was considered a successor to that party. In Benin, both the RB and the *Mouvement Africain pour la démocratie* (MADEP) received more than five per cent of seat shares in the 2003 elections. When they joined to form the ADD coalition in 2007, the ADD was therefore considered a new party with seat changes calculated as $|(0-p_{i(t+1)})|$ while the RB and MADEP's seat changes were equivalent to $|(p_{it} - 0)|$.

In addition to volatility, the age of political parties is often used as an indicator for determining how established parties are within their respective country (e.g. Mainwaring 1998; Kuenzi and Lambright 2005). Both tables therefore include the mean age of the parties included in the coalition at the time of the elections in which they competed.¹⁵ The results reveal that volatility can be just as high in countries with more established opposition parties as in countries with relatively young parties. The reason for this is because volatility is linked to two factors: shifts in voting preferences for

¹⁴ In presidential elections with two-round systems, volatility is calculated based on vote shares obtained from the first round. Legislative seat shares were calculated based on the number of total seats elected rather than total seats to exclude those that are appointed.

¹⁵ This was calculated as the average age of each party participating in the coalition at the time of the elections in which they competed as a coalition.

established parties, such as in Mauritius, and the entry and exit of relatively young parties, such as in Kenya or Mali.

More significantly, the two tables illustrate that in a number of countries, opposition coalition volatility can constitute quite a high level of total volatility within a country. In most cases, this is because there have been multiple coalitions in consecutive elections and/or the country's main opposition party was involved in a coalition. This latter point is particularly important in light of Table 3 where it was revealed that a coalition usually was more successful vis-à-vis other opposition competitors if the country's main opposition party was involved. In other words, the participation of the main opposition party may be critical for shoring up a coalition's competitiveness on the one hand but may also contribute to higher levels of party system volatility on the other hand.

The example of São Tomé e Príncipe is instructive in this regard. There, the larger and more established ADI was part of the Uê Kédadji (UK) for the 2002 elections, helping that party gain 8 seats, but then defected in the 2006 elections and gained 11 seats while its former UK partners earned no seats. As a result, opposition coalition volatility was quite high. By 2010, the ADI was the party of the incumbent president and earned 26 seats in parliament. The UK did not even compete while the previous incumbent party, the MDFM, lost many of its previous seats. This explains why overall volatility is quite high between the 2006 and 2010 elections but the share of opposition coalition volatility is low compared to that between the 2002 and 2006 elections.

The other few cases of low shares of volatility attributable to opposition coalitions are related to two trends. First, the opposition parties comprising a coalition in some countries have minimal appeal, thereby resulting in consistently low votes during elections. This is not only true with respect to the ABN in Benin but also in Ghana where the Grand Coalition's main constituent party, the People's National Convention (PNC), articulates an 'Nkrumahist' message that has garnered negligible votes across elections. Second, low volatility in Seychelles is a result of the high appeal of the Seychelles National Party, which has retained an equally high share of votes across elections, regardless of whether it was part of a coalition with the Democratic Party.

In the majority of cases where opposition coalitions contribute a high level of volatility, this must be attributed to the failure of party members to generate a loyal following over time. Other explanations for this volatility are not convincing. For instance, the emergence of a new opposition party in the system can impact the degree of volatility created by a coalition. This was the case in Zambia where the emergence of the PF upset the prospects of the UDA. However, if voters are distracted so easily by new opposition parties, then this serves to only heighten a coalition's lack of widespread appeal. Changes in electoral rules and institutions between elections represents another explanation for volatility because this may create, or reduce, opportunities for coalitions to increase their seat shares. Yet, within the countries and time period examined here, Mozambique was the only country to switch its electoral rules, removing the 5 per cent electoral threshold for the legislative elections that took place in 2009.¹⁶ This should have increased the coalitions' prospects. Nevertheless, none gained any seats in the

¹⁶ Senegal also changed the number of seats in the National Assembly from 120 to 150 but this had little impact on the main opposition coalition, Siggil Front, because it boycotted the legislative elections in 2007.

2009 elections while a former coalition leader in 2004, RENAMO, actually witnessed its seat shares decline. A final possibility is that voters turn away from an opposition coalition because its leader leaves. Indeed, Malawi's Gwanda Chakuamba, who led the Republican Party (RP) and the Mgiwirizano Coalition in 2004 soon defected to the ruling DPP. When the RP then competed in the 2009 parliamentary elections with a new leader, it received no seats. Such trends, however, only reinforce that personality of candidates, rather than policy of the coalition, are motivating voters and that voter loyalty is therefore tied to party leaders rather than to the parties themselves.

6 Conclusion

Pre-electoral coalitions among opposition parties have been popular in Africa during the last decade, and opposition parties in countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa have recently announced the formation of such arrangements to increase their competitiveness. By offering economies-of-scale, such arrangements offer the promise of overcoming incumbent dominance and reducing party fragmentation.

However, this paper has illustrated that coalitions do not necessarily promote consolidation within the region in either the narrow sense of incumbent turnovers or the broader notion of creating competitive and credible party systems. By focusing on those pre-electoral coalitions forged by opposition parties since 2000 in a set of African countries classified as electoral democracies, three findings emerged. First, aside from a few notable cases, opposition coalitions rarely have defeated incumbent parties in either presidential or parliamentary elections. Second, the performance of such coalitions is best when they include the country's main opposition party, meaning that the potential advantages for smaller parties in terms of gaining greater recognition and a constituency following are not forthcoming.

Third, except in a few cases, opposition coalitions have contributed from one-third to two-thirds of total electoral volatility. This indicates that they, and their participating parties, often fail to generate a loyal constituency base over time. One of the main reasons that these opposition coalitions fail to craft linkages with voters is that participating parties are focused more on creating office-seeking, rather than policy-seeking coalitions. In turn, this is because their coalition member parties often lack policy substance and predominantly rely on the personality of their party leaders for differentiation.

The implications of this are troubling in these nascent democracies, especially given that Afrobarometer surveys indicate already low levels of trust and identification with opposition parties. Scholars focusing on industrialized democracies have argued that the clarity and differentiation of party choices offered to voters influences their decision to vote in the first place (see Aarts and Wessels 2005; Dalton 2008). Indeed, the 'supply' of meaningful party alternatives in an election increases voters' motivation to invest time and energy in making electoral decisions (Klingemann and Wessels 2009). Otherwise, as Hagopian (2005) argues, the lack of credible party alternatives can lead to a diminished interest in politics and a decline in citizen participation. In Africa's electoral democracies, the important challenge of increasing incumbent turnover in dominant party systems should be complemented by the development of distinct party choices in order for democracy to provide a meaningful conduit for conveying citizen preferences. Such parties do not necessarily have to offer distinct platforms along the

traditional left-right ideological spectrum and, as noted earlier, those few African parties which have done so rarely demonstrate widespread appeal. However, they do have to demonstrate relevance with the everyday concerns of African citizens, including job creation and improved service delivery, and offer realistic solutions for achieving such goals. This, more than coalitions that may potentially defeat incumbents, would go a long way to ensuring that democracy provides African voters real choices when they go to the polls.

Appendix

The sources for the election data presented here include the following:

African Elections Database (<http://africanelections.tripod.com/>); *Africa South of the Sahara* (2000, 2009), Electoral Commission of Ghana (<http://www.ec.gov.gh/>), Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa (<http://www.eisa.org.za/>); International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (<http://www.idea.int/>); International Foundation for Electoral Systems (<http://www.ifes.org/>); Inter-parliamentary Union (www.ipu.org)

Benin – Alliance pour une dynamique démocratique (ADD), Bâtisseurs et Gestionnaires de la Liberté et de la Démocratie (BGLD), Mouvement Africain pour la démocratie (MADEP), Renaissance du Bénin (RB), Parti social-démocrate (PSD), Union pour la Démocratie et la Solidarité Nationale (UDSN), Union Nationale pour la Solidarité et le Progrès (UNSP)

Botswana – Botswana Alliance Movement (BAM), Botswana Congress Party (BCP), Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), Botswana National Front (BNF)

Cape Verde – Partido da Convergência Democrática (PCD), Partido de Trabalho e Solidariedade (PTS), União Cristã, Independente e Democrática (UCID)

Ghana – National Democratic Congress (NDC), People’s National Convention (PNC)

Kenya – Democratic Party (DP), Party of National Unity (PNU), Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Orange Democratic Movement-Kenya (ODM-K), Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya (FORD-K), National Party of Kenya (NPK)

Lesotho – All Basotho Convention (ABC), Basotho National Party (BNP), Basutoland African Congress (BAC), Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), Lesotho People’s Congress (LPC), Lesotho Worker’s Party (LWP), National Progressive Party (NPP)

Malawi – Democratic People’s Party (DPP), Malawi Congress Party (MCP), Malawi Forum for Unity and Development (MAFUNDE), Movement for Genuine Democratic Change (MGODE), National Unity Party (NUP), People’s Progressive Movement (PPM), People’s Transformation Party (PETRA), Republican Party (RP), United Democratic Front (UDF)

Mali – Congrès national d’initiative démocratique (CNID), Mouvement patriotique pour le renouveau (MPR), Parti pour la renaissance nationale (PARENA), Rassemblement pour la démocratie du travail (RDT), Rassemblement pour le Mali (RPM), Union soudanaise-Rassemblement démocratique africain (US-RDA)

Mauritius – Mouvement labour party (MLP), Mouvement militant mauricien (MMM), Mouvement Mauricien Social Démocrate (MMSD), Mouvement militant socialiste mauricien (MMSM), Mouvement rodriguais (MR), Parti mauricien social démocrate (PMSD), Union Nationale (UN)

Mozambique – Aliança Independente de Moçambique (ALIMO), Frente de Ação Patriótica (FAP), Frente Democrática Unido (FDU), Frente Liberal (FL), Frente Unida de Moçambique-Partido de Convergência Democrática (Fumo-PCD), Movimento Nacionalista Moçambicana-Partido Moçambicano da Social Democracia (MONAMO-PMSD), Partido Africano Conservador (PAC), Partido Socialista de Moçambique (PSM), Partido do Congresso Democrático (PACODE), Partido da Aliança Democrática e Renovação Social (PADRES), Partido Nacional Democrático (PANADE), Partido para Todos Nacionalistas de Moçambicanos (PARTONAMO), Partido de Convenção Nacional (PCN), Partido Livre Democrático de Moçambique (PLDM), Partido Ecologista de Moçambique, Partido do Progresso do Povo de Moçambique (PPPM), Partido Renovador Democrático (PRD), Partido Social Democrático de Moçambique (PSDM), Socialista de Moçambique (PSM), Partido de Unidade Nacional (PUN), Partido Partido da União para a Reconciliação (PUR), Resistência Nacional Moçambique (RENAMO), União Electoral (UE), União para a Mudança (UM), União Nacional de Moçambicana (UNAMO)

São Tomé e Príncipe – Accção Democrática Independente (ADI), Partido de Convergência Democrática (Códó) Partido Popular do Progresso (PPP), Partido Social Renovado (PSR), Partido de Renovação Democrática (PRD), Uê Kédadji (UK), União Nacional para Democracia e Progresso (UNDP)

Senegal – Alliance des forces de progress (AFP), And Jëf-Parti africain pour la démocratie et le socialisme (AJ-PADS), Ligue démocratique-movement pour le parti du travail (LD-MPT), Parti démocratique sénégalais (PDS), Parti de l'indépendance et du travail (PIT), Parti socialiste du Sénégal (PS)

Seychelles – New Democratic Party (DP), Seychelles National Party (SNP)

Zambia – Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), Patriotic Front (PF), Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD), United National Independence Party (UNIP), United Party for National Development (UPND)

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Table 1: Trust and identification with African political parties

Survey question	Round 3 (2005)		Round 4 (2008)	
	Not at all/ Just a little	Somewhat/ A lot	Not at all/ Just a little	Somewhat/ A lot
How much do you trust the ruling party?	36.9	57.5	42.1	52.9
How much do you trust opposition parties?	57.3	34.7	57.8	34.2
Are you close to a political party in your country?	Yes 61.1	No 35.2	Yes 59.8	No 34.6
If so, which party? ^a	Incumbent 38.7	Opposition 20.7	Incumbent 35.4	Opposition 21.6

Notes: The 'incumbent party' refers to that party in power at the time the survey was conducted. These percentages are the average of the weighted responses across the 17 countries included in both rounds of the survey.

^a Percentages do not sum to 100 because of the exclusion of those who refused to answer or who claimed that they were not close to any party.

Source: Afrobarometer Rounds 3 (questions 55E, 55F, 85 and 86) and 4 (questions 49e, 49f, 85 and 86). N = 25,397 in Round 3 and 24,106 in Round 4.

Table 2: Opposition coalitions in presidential and legislative elections since 2000

Country	Electoral institutions ^a		Year of coalition (presidential or legislative)	Opposition coalition/pact	Did coalition defeat incumbent candidate/party?
	Presidential	Legislative			
Benin	TRS	List PR	2003 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Alliance Etoile	No
			2006 (<i>Presidential</i>)	Alliance pour un Benin nouveau (ABN)	No
			2007 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Alliance pour une dynamique démocratie (ADD)	No
Botswana	----	FPTP	2009 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Botswana Congress Party/Botswana Alliance Movement	No
Cape Verde	TRS	List PR	2001 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Aliança Democrática para a Mudança (ADM)	No
Ghana	TRS	FPTP	2004 (<i>Presidential</i>)	Grand Coalition	No
Kenya	TRS	FPTP	2002 (<i>Presidential and Legislative</i>)	National Rainbow Coalition (NARC)	Yes
Lesotho	----	MMP	2007 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Alliance of Congress Parties	No
			2007 (<i>Legislative</i>)	All Basotho Convention and Lesotho Workers Party	No
			2007 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Basotho National Party/National Progressive Party	No
Malawi	FPTP	FPTP	2004 (<i>Presidential and Legislative</i>)	Mgwirizano Coalition	No
			2009 (<i>Presidential</i>)	Coalition of Malawi Congress Party and United Democratic Front	No
Mali	TRS	TRS	2002 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Convergence pour l'alternance et le changement (ACC)	No
			2007 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Espoir 2002	Yes
Mauritius	---	BV	2005 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Front pour la démocratie et le République (FDR)	No
			2010 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Alliance Sociale (AS)	Yes
				Alliance du Coeur	No

Table 2 continued

Country	Electoral institutions ^a		Year of coalition (presidential or legislative)	Opposition coalition/pact	Did coalition defeat incumbent candidate/ party?
Mozambique	TRS	List PR	2004 (<i>Presidential and Legislative</i>)	RENAMO- União Electoral (UE)	No
				Frente Unida para Mudança e Boa Governação (MBG)	No
			2004 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Frente Alargada da Oposição (FAO)	No
				União para a Salvação de Moçambique (USAMO)	No
				União Democrática (UD)	No
				Aliança Democrática de Antigos Combatentes para o Desenvolvimento (ADACD)	No
São Tomé e Príncipe	TRS	Parallel	2002 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Uê Kédadji (UK)	No
			2006 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Uê Kédadji (UK)	No
Senegal	TRS	Parallel	2000 (<i>Presidential</i>)	Alternative 2000	Yes
			2007 (<i>Presidential and Legislative</i>)	Takku Defaraat Senegal	No
				And Defar Senegal	No
			2007 (<i>Presidential</i>)	Alternance 2007	No
				And Liggey Senegal	No
				Jubbanti Senegal	No
				Tekki Taaru Senegal	No
			2007 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Sellal	No
Coalition Waar Wi	No				
Seychelles	TRS	Parallel	2007 (<i>Legislative</i>)	Seychelles National Party and Democratic Party	No
Zambia	FPTP	FPTP	2006 (<i>Presidential and Legislative</i>)	United Democratic Alliance (UDA)	No
			2006 (<i>Legislative</i>)	National Democratic Front (NDF)	No

Notes: ^a FPTP = first-past the post, TRS= two-round system, BV=block vote, PR = proportional representation, MMP = mixed member proportional system.

Sources: Please see appendix.

Table 3: Performance of opposition parties and coalitions in recent elections

Presidential elections				
Country	Year	Opposition party that obtained most votes (% of votes)		Was party part of a coalition?
Benin	2006	PRD	(24.1)	No
Ghana	2004	NDC	(44.6)	No
Kenya	2002	DP	(62.2)	Yes
Malawi	2004	MCP	(27.1)	No
	2009	MCP	(30.5)	Yes
Mali	2007	RPM	(19.2)	Yes
Mozambique	2004	RENAMO	(31.7)	Yes
Senegal	2000	PDS	(31.0)	Yes
	2007	Rewmi	(14.9)	Yes
Zambia	2006	PF	(29.4)	No
Legislative elections				
Country	Year	Opposition party that obtained the most seats (% of seats)		Was this party part of a coalition?
Benin	2003	RB	(18.1)	No
	2007	RB	(24.1)	Yes
Botswana	2009	BNF	(10.5)	No
Cape Verde	2001	MpD	(41.7)	No
Kenya	2002	LDP	(28.1)	Yes
Lesotho	2007	ABC	(14.2)	Yes
Malawi	2004	MCP	(30.4)	No
	2009	MCP	(14.1)	Yes
Mali	2002	RPM	(28.8)	Yes
	2007	RPM	(6.9)	Yes
Mauritius	2005	Alliance Sociale	(61.3)	Yes
	2010	Alliance du Coeu	(27.4)	Yes
Mozambique	2004	RENAMO	(36.0)	Yes
	2009	RENAMO	(20.4)	No
Sao Tome	2002	MLSTP-PSD	(43.6)	No
	2006	MLSTP-PSD	(36.4)	No
Senegal ^a	2007	DS	(2.0)	Yes
		AJ-PADS	(2.0)	
		Moudou Diagne	(2.0)	
Seychelles	2007	SNP	(32.4)	Yes
Zambia	2006	PF	(28.7)	No

Notes: Where there are two-round systems for presidential elections, vote shares are based on the outcome of the first round.

^a In Senegal, the legislative seat shares are so low because the main opposition coalition boycotted.

Sources: Please see appendix.

Table 4: Volatility for opposition coalition candidates in presidential elections

Country (electoral period)	Total presidential volatility	Opposition coalition volatility as share of total volatility (%)	Opposition coalition (year)	Mean age of coalition parties	Coalition's presidential candidate
Benin (2001-2006)	67.8	6.1	ABN (2006)	15	Bruno Amoussou
Ghana (2004-2008)	4.4	11.7	Grand Coalition (2004)	11	Edward Mahama
Kenya (2002-2007)	53.6	69.7	NARC (2002)	6	Mwai Kibaki
Malawi (2004-2009)	72	45.1	Mgwirizano (2004)	4	Gwanda Chakuamba*
			MCP-UDF pact (2009)	34	J.Z. Tembo
Mozambique (2004-2009)	19	40.4	RENAMO-UE (2004)	12	Alfonso Dhlakama
			MBG (2004)	13	Carlos Reis*
Senegal (2000-2007)	49	58.7	Alternative (2000)	18	Abdoulaye Wade
			Alternance (2007)	8	Moustapha Niasse
			And Liggey (2007)	1	Idrissa Seck
			Jubbanti Senegal (2007)	26	Abdoulaye Bathily
			Tekki Tarru Senegal (2007)	1	Mamadou Lamine Diallo**
			Takku Defaraat Senegal (2007)	1	Robert Sagna
			And Defaar (2007)	15	Landing Savane
Zambia (2006-2008)	9.4	30	Sellal (2007)	1	Mame Adama Guèye**
			UDA (2006)	20	Hakainde Hichilema

Notes: * Candidates did not compete in subsequent election; ** Candidates did not compete in prior election.

Sources: Please see Appendix.

Table 5: Volatility for opposition coalitions in legislative elections

Country (electoral period)	Total legislative volatility	Share of volatility due to opposition coalition(s) (%)	Opposition coalition (year)	Mean age of coalition parties	Member parties
Benin (2003-2007)	60.8	46.5	Alliance Etoile (2003)*	11	Les Verts, BGLD, UDSN
			ADD (2007)	14	RB, PSD, MADEP
Botswana (2004-2009)	9.7	36.4	Pact (2009)	11	BCP/BAM
Cape Verde (2001-2006)	2.7	0	ADM (2001)	7	UCID, PCD*, PTS*
Kenya (2002-2007)	41.4	54.5	NARC (2002)	6	DP/PNU, LDP, FORD-K, NPK*
Lesotho (2002-2007)	38.7	60.4	Alliance of Congress Parties (2007)	4	BAC, LPC
			Pact (2007)	4	ABC**, LWP
			Pact (2007)	22	BNP, NPP**
Malawi (2004-2009)	60	40	Mgwirizano Coalition (2004)	4	RP, MAFUNDE, PETRA*, NUP*, MDP*, PPM*, MGODE*
			Pact (2009)	34	MCP, UDF
Mali (2002-2007)	26	65	Espoir 2002 (2002)	7	RPM, RDT*, MPR, CNID
			ACC (2002)	6	PARENA, US-RDA
			FDR (2007)	7	RPM, PARENA
Mauritius (2005-2010)	98.4	47.5	AS (2005)	20	MLP, PMSD, MMSM, MR, VERTS-OF
			Alliance du Coeur (2010)	15	MMM, UN,* MMSD
Mozambique (2004-2009)	15.6	50	RENAMO-UE (2004)	12	RENAMO, UE (PCN, MONAMO-PMSD, FAP, FUMO-PCD, PEMO, PPPM, PRD, PUN, FDU, ALIMO)
			MBG (2004)*	13	UNAMO, PARTONAMO
			USAMO (2004)*	6	PADRES, PSM, UM, PSDM
			FAO (2004)*	1	FL, PAC
			UD (2004)*	11	PANADE, PLDM
			UE (2009)	16	PCN, MONAMO-PSD, FAP, FUMO-PCD, PEMO, PPPM, PRD, PUN, UDF, ALIMO
			ADACD (2009)	11	PPPM**, PSM**, PACODE**, PUR**
São Tomé e Príncipe (2002-2006)	21.75	79.3	UK (2002)*	5	ADI, UNDP, PRD, PPP
São Tomé e Príncipe (2006-2010)	34.6	0	UK (2006)*	7	PPP, PSR, UNDP, Codó
Senegal (2000-2007)	23.5	48.2	Takku Defaraat Senegal ^a	7	Led by DS
			And Defar Senegal ^a	15	Led by AJ-PADS
			Waar Wi ^a	1	Led by Moudou Diagne Fada
			Siggil Front	22	PS, AFP, Rewmi, PIT, LD-MPT
Seychelles (2002-2007)	0	0	Pact (2007)	28	SNP, DP

Notes: * Parties did not compete in subsequent election; ** Parties did not compete in prior election.

^a Existing data only indicates which party led these coalitions and that party is the basis for calculating mean age of coalition.

Sources: Please see Appendix.