
Opposition Coalitions and Democratic Ouster of Dominant African Parties: Lessons from the 2002 Kenya Elections

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Abstract

Can opposition coalition guarantee the democratic ouster of dominant African parties? Two decades since the onset of the third wave of democratization, some African ruling parties are still so dominant, that even repetitive competitive elections have not shaken their foundations. Consequently, opposition coalition is often suggested as a model for defeating dominant African parties. Empirical support for this model is often drawn from among others, the 2002 Kenya elections, where the opposition coalition defeated the incumbent KANU, which had ruled for 39 years. However, neither the claim that opposition unity was the primary cause of KANU's defeat, nor that the Kenyan experience is a model for removing dominant African parties, have been empirically tested. The paper examines the 2002 Kenya elections, and show that opposition coalition only had partial influence on KANU's defeat, and that, the simultaneous erosion of the incumbent party's support base epitomized by the split within KANU, as well as favorable contextual factors particularly the public disaffections with prevailing economic living conditions, appear to have played an equally significant role.
