

1. Introduction

“The successful politician is the one who can build on the foundations of his or her ethnic affiliations whilst managing to build viable bridges across ethnic lines.” (Hillary Ng’Weno)¹

In September 2007 Kenya’s incumbent president, Mwai Kibaki, took his campaign for re-election to Western Province. At a series of campaign rallies, he made numerous promises to the area’s voters: an increase in the producer price for sugar cane grown in the region, the creation of a new district, title deeds for squatters, cheap fertilizer, and a new road from Kamukuywa to Chwele.² Not to be outdone, Raila Odinga, the main opposition leader, offered his own list of pledges during a tour of the region the following week. In Kakamega, Odinga promised to extend electricity to all market places, to increase support for small-scale farmers, and to provide free secondary education to the area’s students.³ Over the next three months leading up to the election, both candidates returned to the region multiple times.

What made Western Province an appealing area for campaigning? The answer, as any student of Kenyan politics knows, is that Western is home to the Luhya ethnic group, a community that was seen as up-for-grabs in the 2007 election.⁴ Both of the major presidential candidates rightly estimated that there were few potential swing voters to be won over in their own or their rival’s ethnic strongholds. Groups like the Luhya that were less tightly linked to either of the major parties offered a more inviting target. The desire to bolster their electoral prospects thus led both candidates to compete intensely for potential fence-sitters in the Luhya community.

The competition for swing voters in Western Province raises a number of questions about electoral politics in multiethnic societies. What makes some voters more up-for-grabs than others during elections? How much effort do parties invest in courting these potential swing voters relative to mobilizing core supporters? And how does this balance affect the policies leaders propose – and implement – if elected?

I examine these questions in the context of Kenya’s emerging multiparty democracy.⁵ The defining feature of electoral competition in Kenya is an electoral landscape in which a small number of candidates, each with a distinct ethnic base, typically vie for the presidency. Yet, because ethnic groups are too small to serve as the basis for national electoral bids, candidates

¹ Hilary Ng’Weno, *Weekly Review*, May 8, 1992, p. 1. Quoted in Throup and Hornsby 1998, p. 124.

² Nation Team. “Kibaki Woos Western Voters.” *Daily Nation*. September 18, 2007, p. 4.

³ Cyrus Kinyungu and Allan Kisia. “Raila Says He Would Ask Corrupt Leaders to Account for Their Deeds.” *The Standard*, September 23, 2007, pp. 1 and 4.

⁴ Ohito, David and Martin Mutua. “What Next? Battle for 14M Votes.” *The Standard*, September 3, 2007, page 1-2. Obonyo, Oscar. “Rush for Western Votes Intensifies.” *The Standard*, September 23, 2007 p. 9. See also MacArthur (2008, p. 227) and Throup and Hornsby (1998) chapter 9.

⁵ Throughout this book, I refer to Kenya as an emerging democracy, reflecting the country’s transition to a more open political system since the early 1990s. Of course, Kenya, like many other African countries, should be understood as a hybrid regime in which elements of democracy exist alongside elements of autocratic regimes (e.g., Diamond 2002; Schedler 2002). I therefore use the term democracy in a minimal sense to denote countries in which multiparty electoral competition is used to select the nation’s top political leaders (Schumpeter 1934; Przeworski et al. 2000).

must build diverse coalitions if they are to be viable. As noted in the above quote from Hillary Ng'Weno, a longtime media observer in Kenya, presidential aspirants must “build bridges” across ethnic lines. Indeed, because candidates can often rely on strong support from co-ethnic voters, it is the pursuit of out-group voters that frequently poses the greater challenge for presidential contenders.

What tools do candidates have at their disposal for attracting out-group support in Africa's diverse democracies? The conventional answer points to elite coalition building. Candidates gain support from out-groups by entering into alliances with prominent leaders from target communities. Allies are rewarded with positions in the future government in exchange for delivering their respective ethnic groups (e.g., Arriola 2013; Mozaffar and Scarritt 2005; Elischer 2013; Oyugi 2006). Thus, for example, Van de Walle (2007, p. 67) observes that political leaders in Africa “continue to focus their strategy on using state resources to put together a majority coalition of ethnic elites who are assumed to be able to bring along their communities' support.” The focus on elite coalition-building has particular relevance to Kenya, where shifting alliances largely account for the waxing and waning of candidates' electoral fortunes over time, both during the brief multiparty period after independence and since the return to multiparty politics in 1992 (Gertzel 1970; Throup and Hornsby 1998; Oyugi 1998; Lynch 2007; Cheeseman 2008; Barkan 2008; Berman, Cottrell, and Ghai 2009; Elischer 2013; Kagwanja and Southall 2009; Kagwanja 2009).

Yet, politics is about more than just elite coalition building. Once the alliances are set, candidates turn to campaigning, a subject that has so far received less attention in studies of African politics.⁶ The lack of attention may stem from the view that in settings where ethnicity is politically salient, as it is in many parts of Africa, campaigns do not have much effect on election outcomes (Horowitz 1985; Chandra 2003). Indeed, data in Chapter 4 confirms that in Kenya campaigns typically have little influence on the overall distribution of support during the months leading up to elections. This does not mean, however, that campaigns are inconsequential. What candidates do and say on the campaign trail matters because the candidates' actions and words may exacerbate ethnic tensions (e.g., Horowitz 1985; Reilly 2002). Campaigns also matter because of their implications for policy-making after the election – the focus of this book.

While elite coalition building and campaigning are complementary strategies, they operate according to different logics. Coalition building is about winning over out-groups as *ethnic blocs*; campaigning is about gaining support from *individual* out-group voters through the painstaking work of persuasion. This book shows that efforts at persuasion are more central to electoral politics than often assumed in the ethnic politics literature, even in settings where elite coalitions play an important role in structuring voter alignments, as in Kenya.

At the heart of this book is a theory of campaign strategy. The standard view in much of the ethnic politics literature is that in competitive elections parties seek above all to mobilize supporters in the one or more ethnic communities they represent.⁷ I refer to this approach as the *core mobilization model*. It proposes that in diverse societies rigid partisan bonds link ethnic communities to parties, meaning that voters – as ethnic blocs – will often be “sewn up” well in advance of election day. Presidential candidates, as a result, have little incentive to appeal for support outside their ethnic strongholds. On the campaign trail, presidential aspirants and their

⁶ Some important exceptions include Bleck and van de Walle 2011, 2013; Taylor 2017; Gadjanova 2017; Cussac 2008; Lynch 2008; MacArthur 2008; and Paget 2019.

⁷ Horowitz 1985; Rabushka and Shepsle 1973; Rothschild 1981; Reilly and Reynolds 1999; Reilly 2001, 2006, Fearon 1999; Wimmer 2002; Chua 2003.

allies instead concentrate on solidifying the base and turning out existing supporters on election day. Election winners have no electoral incentive to share resources across ethno-partisan lines after the election.

Political dynamics in Kenya are often described in precisely these terms. Ajulu (2002, p. 251), for example, notes that, “political parties have been organised along ethnic identities and state-power aggressively contested on the basis of mobilised ethnicity.” Writing about the 2013 elections, Barkan (2013, p. 1) observes that, “as in prior elections, the leading presidential candidates are mobilizing voters along ethnic lines.” And a 2011 report assessing the risk of election violence sums up the prevailing wisdom as follows: “Kenyan political factions have always been ethnically based and those in power tend to favour their own groups” (Sentinel Project 2011, p. 13). In line with this view, a spate of recent studies provide evidence of ethnic favoritism in multiple sectors, including education and health provision, road construction, foreign aid targeting, and local development spending (Franck and Rainer 2012; Posner and Kramon 2016; Barkan and Chege 1989; Burgess et al. 2015; Jablonski 2014; Harris and Posner 2019).

This book advances an alternative view – the *swing-targeting approach* – that contends that under some conditions parties have incentives to concentrate their campaign efforts on courting potential swing voters outside of their ethnic strongholds and to opt for universal policies in place of those that favor core ethnic clientele over others.⁸ While swing-targeting models are well established in the literature on electoral competition and distributive politics in the world’s long-standing democracies (e.g., Stromberg 2008; Lindbeck and Weibull 1987), there is less agreement about their applicability to settings where ethnicity – rather than ideology or policy preferences – structures the partisan landscape. A central goal of this book is to demonstrate the value of the swing-targeting approach to African contexts. In doing so, it draws attention to three factors that define the context in which party strategists determine how to allocate campaign resources: 1) uncertainty regarding the relative benefits of mobilizing existing supporters versus persuading potential swing voters; 2) the ability to delegate mobilization to lower-level actors in the parties’ ethnic strongholds; and 3) the strategic imperative of blunting rivals’ efforts in contested areas.

This is not the first work to note the importance of swing voters in Africa or in Kenya specifically.⁹ Nor is it the first to propose that when parties seek support from multiple ethnic communities they adopt inclusive electoral strategies and policies (e.g., Horowitz 1991; Reilly and Reynolds 1999; Reilly 2001, 2006).¹⁰ Prior work, however, has yet to answer basic questions about how parties balance the competing goals of securing their ethnic strongholds while also courting out-group voters, and the conditions under which party leaders prioritize the latter over the former. Likewise, the literature has yet to examine whether parties in highly-diverse countries like Kenya are better off courting out-groups widely or focusing their persuasive

⁸ Bates (2008) argues that if leaders can count on the support of their own communities but need to attract out-group support in order to be competitive in national elections, they have few incentives to reward ethnic clientele for their support. Kasara (2007) develops a related argument in which targeting resources toward out-groups stems from parties’ greater ability to retrain potential challengers in their ethnic strongholds than elsewhere.

⁹ Throup and Hornsby’s (1998) encyclopedic account of Kenya’s 1992 election, for example, reports that all of the major presidential candidates in that race “focused on the marginal areas” (p. 384) where groups like the Luhya are concentrated. MacArthur (2008) offers a similar characterization of the Luhya in Kenya’s 2007 election. Scarritt 2006 and Casey 2015 develop related arguments in Zambia and Sierre Leone respectively.

¹⁰ See also Van de Walle (2007, p. 66), which notes that as political competition in Africa increases leaders may adopt more expansive distributive strategies.

efforts more narrowly. And, few studies have traced through how the pursuit of the swing affects policy choices in Africa's emerging, multiethnic democracies.¹¹

In addressing these questions, this book extends prior scholarship in three specific ways. First, it develops a novel framework for conceptualizing core and swing in ethnically-diverse settings. The approach highlights the importance of ethnicity, departing from literature that emphasizes cognitive factors like political interest and engagement (e.g., Kaufmann, Petrocik and Shaw 2008) or work in Africa that draws attention to performance assessments (Lindberg and Morrison 2005; Weghorst and Lindberg 2013) and urban/rural divisions (Wahman and Boone 2018).

Second, it offers a novel explanation for why parties prioritize the pursuit of swing voters during campaigns in highly-diverse societies. In doing so, this work breaks with accounts that emphasize demographic factors alone, particularly the small size of ethnic communities in African countries (e.g., Tonah 2007; Hoffman and Long 2013); the institutional engineering literature which expects that ethnic mobilization will be the default in the absence of moderation-inducing constitutional provisions (Horowitz 1985, 1991; Lijphart 1977); or research that highlights cross-cutting cleavages such as *cousinage* or religious attachments that bridge inter-group differences (Dunning and Harrison 2010; Koter 2013). This book shows that broad-based electoral strategies may emerge in unexpected places because the factors identified here – uncertainty, delegation, and strategic imperatives – are fairly commonplace across Africa's emerging democracies, unlike moderation-inducing institutions and cross-cutting cleavages, which are not.

Third, the book develops the logic by which campaign strategies affect policy choices for incumbents, highlighting the value of universal policies that establish a concrete record of widely-shared benefits that aids in the pursuit of out-group voters arrayed across multiple ethnic communities. In doing so, it breaks with literature that finds that the transition to multiparty politics in Africa does little to attenuate patterns of ethnic favoritism (e.g., Kramon and Posner 2016; Franck and Rainer 2012) or may in some cases exacerbate them (e.g., Crook 1997; Van de Walle 2007).

Overview of the Argument

Kenya may seem like an unlikely place for the development of arguments about how electoral competition induces broad-based campaigning and universal policies. Accounts routinely describe Kenya as a country where the bare-knuckle tactics of ethnic mobilization prevail; where elites cynically play on ethnic antipathies for electoral gain; where electoral competition heightens tensions that periodically erupt into inter-group violence; and where incumbents favor their core ethno-partisan constituents in patronage allocations.¹² To be sure, these accounts capture one side of ethnic politics in Kenya, and they make Kenya a hard case for the arguments advanced in this book. But they cannot explain key facets of electoral competition or policy-making in Kenya's multiparty era.

In demonstrating the importance of the competition for swing voters to Kenyan elections, this book aims to overturn conventional approaches, above all the view that where parties are structured as ethnic coalitions, they have little incentive to court voters outside their core bases or

¹¹ Notable exceptions include Carbone 2011 and Carbone and Pellegata 2017.

¹² Prominent contributions to the literature on ethnic politics in Kenya include Berman and Lonsdale 1992; Berman 1998; Throup and Hornsby 1998; Haugerud 1993; Bratton and Kimenyi 2008; Oyugi 1997; Steeves 2006; Omolo 2002; and Ajulu 1998; among many others.

to share resources beyond them. This view, articulated most forcefully in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985) by Donald Horowitz, proposes that in settings like Kenya, where ethnic groups are too small to serve as the basis for national-level electoral bids, parties construct multi-group coalitions that nonetheless function like ethnic parties, representing the narrow interest of certain groups, concentrating their electoral efforts on shoring up support and maximizing turnout within these groups, and channeling resources to them if elected (see also Rabushka and Shepsle 1973 and Fearon 1999). In contrast, this book shows that given the inherent uncertainty about the responsiveness of voters arrayed across many swing communities – combined with the need to blunt rivals’ advances – parties have incentives to diversify their electoral strategies, “hunting for votes” widely rather than adopting a narrow focus on core coalitional groups. Indeed, because party leaders can delegate the mobilization of co-ethnic voters to lower-level actors, they may devote little effort their most ardent and steadfast supporters during the months leading up to the election. Moreover, for the election winner, the need to establish a record of inclusive policy-making that will aid in future appeals to out-group voters creates an incentive for universal programs. These arguments are developed in a set of related propositions that connect voters, campaign strategies, and policy making outlined briefly here.

Swing Voters

The book begins with voters. The central question is, if presidential hopefuls seek to attract new supporters through campaigning, whom should they target? Who, in other words, are the swing voters – those more likely to be moved by the parties’ persuasive efforts? Some will doubt whether there are *any* swing voters in countries like as Kenya, where elite alignments heavily influence voter preferences. The common perception is that voters line up as ethnic blocs behind the party or coalition that best incorporates senior leaders from their ethnic communities, leaving few voters available for persuasion and conversion during the campaigns. Yet, whether swing voters exist is ultimately an empirical question. Thus, a central goal of Chapter 3 is to show that a surprisingly large share of Kenyan voters – more than 20% in the 2013 and 2017 elections – change their stated voting intentions in the run-up to election day.

A key proposition developed in this book is that ethnicity plays a role in distinguishing core and swing. Presidential candidates in Kenya typically face an electoral landscape in which they and their rivals can count on strong support from a distinct set of ethnic communities while voters in other groups that are less strongly associated with any of the leading competitors are more up-for-grabs. Given this, the candidates and their party strategists rely on ethnicity as a way to simplify their understanding of which voters will be more or less responsive to their persuasive appeals on the campaign trail. While ethnicity is surely not the only factor that matters to voters, the association between ethnic identities and electoral alignments makes ethnicity a useful heuristic for party leaders seeking to determine how best to deploy their limited campaign resources across ethnic areas. By observing the ethnic composition of a locality, strategists can make inferences about whether it is worth allocating campaign resources toward the pursuit of voters in the region.

Chapter 3 explores the foundations of voters alignments in Kenya. It extends instrumental theories of ethnic voting, which stress the importance of ethnicity to voters because of the information it conveys about how candidates will behave in office, by arguing that the value of ethnic cues varies systematically across ethnic communities, with the result that some ethnic groups tend to be more tightly linked to the major parties than others at the start of presidential campaigns. The starting point is the simple observation – widely noted – that presidential candidates in Kenya are typically able to rely on strong support from co-ethnic voters. Thus, for

example, Cussac (2008, p. 2) observes that, “political parties are very often anchored in the region of their main leader.” However, given the small size of ethnic communities, presidential aspirants understand that coalition building is priority one. Accordingly, parties in Kenya are generally understood as representing distinct ethnic coalitions, owing to the elite alliances that make up their top ranks. Thus, for example, Maupeu (2008, p. 207) reports that the main opposition party in the 2007 election, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), was “commonly viewed in Kenya as an agreement to join majority forces between the Luos, the Luhyas, and the Kalenjins.” The Jubilee Alliance that brought together Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto in 2013 and 2017 is likewise understood above all as an alliance of the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin (e.g., Lynch 2015; Malik 2016).

Building on the rich literature on electoral alignments in Kenya, this book proposes that the distinction between core groups (those in which most voters are unlikely to change their voting intentions during the campaigns) and swing groups (those in which a larger share of voters may update their preferences) is based in part on whether ethnic communities have a co-ethnic candidate in the race. In Kenya some ethnic communities invariably have co-ethnic leaders in the race while many others do not. For members of ethnic groups *with* a co-ethnic in the race, there is typically little uncertainty about which party or candidate will best represent the group’s interests. Members of groups *without* a co-ethnic in the race will be on average less certain, making them potentially more receptive to persuasion and more likely to change their voting intentions during the campaign. These, of course, are general trends, not universal rules. Chapter 2 draws on a wealth of data to show that there is variation in the extent to which groups with a co-ethnic contender in the race rally around the candidate, just as there is variation in whether groups without a co-ethnic in the race unify around a single choice. This variation points to the importance of other factors – including historical alliances, sub-tribe and clan divisions, elite rivalries, and others – in structuring voter alignments. However, for both conceptual and practical reasons noted in Chapter 2, the analysis in this book generally abstracts from these factors.

An important question is whether coalitional groups – non-co-ethnic communities that may be part of candidates’ broader support bases at the outset of the campaign – should be treated as core or swing. A strong argument can be made for the view that coalitional groups should be seen as core because voters in such groups may be equally unified (or nearly so) in their support for the candidate associated with their community as voters in the candidate’s own ethnic group. Surely, this view proposes, the Kalenjin were as steadfast in their support for Odinga in 2007 as were voters from Odinga’s own Luo community, or in their support of Kenyatta in 2013 and 2017 as were voters from Kenyatta’s own Kikuyu group. Yet, this book shows that for the purposes of understanding the logic of election campaigns, coalitional groups are better viewed as swing. The reason, as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, is that there are often *marginally more* voters in coalitional groups who potentially may be induced to change their preferences through campaign persuasion than in groups that have a co-ethnic in the race. This margin may be small. Yet for campaign strategists, even small differences can be important when it comes to deciding whether to target particular areas during the campaigns or to write them off as a hopeless waste of time. Of course, in some instances, parties may view coalitional groups as core and treat them as such. However, my investigation of campaign strategies in Chapter 4 indicates that parties more often view coalition groups as part of the swing and compete for the support of voters in them during campaigns.

Conceptualizing the swing as voters from groups that do not have a co-ethnic in the race

has greatest relevance to personalized party systems as in Kenya, where elite alliances – not institutionalized parties – structure electoral competition. Party systems in many of Africa’s emerging democracies are highly personalized (Randall and Svåsand 2002). Thus, Van de Walle and Butler (1998, p. 15) remark that, “African parties are plagued by weak organizations, low levels of institutionalisation, and weak links to the society they are supposed to represent.” Ambitious politicians often create new parties as vehicles for their advancement, and in the public mind these parties are inextricably linked to the personality of the party head (Randall and Svåsand 2002; Kanyinga 1998; Fridy 2007; Posner 2005).

In countries with more institutionalized party systems like Ghana (the subject of Chapter 7), the electoral landscape is more complex, and core and swing are not structured as fully by whether ethnic communities have a co-ethnic leader in the race. The main parties in Ghana maintain durable ties to particular ethnic strongholds that persist even as the ethnic identity of the parties’ presidential candidates changes across election years. In such institutionalized systems, party labels will often be more valuable to voters than candidate ethnicity, conveying information about which groups each party will favor or neglect if it captures the presidency.¹³ Yet, like Kenya, the electoral landscape in Ghana is one in which each party can count on its strongest support from a distinct ethnic base while voters in other groups are more up-for-grabs. As a result, the core/swing conceptualization outlined in this book provides a useful framework for making sense of campaign strategies and policy choices, despite differences in how the party system is structured.

Campaigns

Presidential candidates and their campaign strategists must make two decisions. First, how should they allocate the limited time and money available for campaigning between *mobilization* (efforts to increase turnout among existing supporters) and *persuasion* (efforts to convert potential swing voters)? Second, if they choose to invest in persuasion, which types of voters should they target? In contexts where ascriptive identities structure core and swing, these questions require strategists to decide how to allocate resources across groups of voters. Thus, in highly-diverse settings like Kenya, they must choose whether to concentrate their campaign efforts on voters in their ethnic strongholds or to target voters elsewhere. And, if they choose to court voters outside their core bases, they must decide how widely to campaign. Where ethnic groups are spatially concentrated – as they are in Kenya and most other parts of Africa – these questions take on a geographic dimension. Campaign strategy therefore is about the spatial allocation of resources.

While the swing-targeting approach developed in this book proposes that reaching potential fence sitters outside their strongholds will be the priority for presidential aspirants, it does not suggest that parties should focus exclusively on persuasion. Party leaders in emerging democracies face considerable uncertainty about the relative returns to persuasion and mobilization. The conventional tools available to strategists in long-standing democracies – public opinion polls, past election results, and voter files – are often unavailable or less informative in emerging democracies. Faced with greater uncertainty, politicians – if they are

¹³ Key contributions to the literature on party labels shortcuts that convey information about group representation include Dawson (1995) and Popkin (1994) in the U.S. and Ferree (2006; 2011) in South Africa. The broader literature on voters’ reliance on cues comes mostly from the study of American politics, which explores partisan cues (e.g., Downs 1957; Campbell et al. 1960; Conover 1981), candidate race (e.g., Valentino, Hutchings and White 2002; Michelson 2005; Adida, Davenport, and McClendon 2015), and gender (e.g., McDermott 1997).

risk-averse – will diversify their investments by devoting resources to both persuasion and mobilization. Moreover, because party leaders are able to delegate mobilization to lower-level actors, they can devote their own time on the campaign trail to courting potential swing voters.

Parties in emerging democracies will also be uncertain about how best to target their persuasive efforts in highly-diverse societies. Should they pursue broad, inclusive approaches or concentrate their efforts on a narrow subset of ethnic communities? If party leaders are unsure about which voters will respond positively to their entreaties, risk-averse strategists will choose to diversify their efforts across swing communities. Thus, as parties seek to increase their vote share, they will embrace broad strategies, directly competing with each other for votes from swing groups across the country. Strategic imperatives reinforce this pattern: the desire to blunt rivals' efforts leads each candidate to invest in reaching groups even when the prospects of picking up additional supporters are limited.

The argument that electoral competition encourages parties to adopt broad-based campaign strategies does not discount the importance of ethnic mobilization or the divisive strategies that candidates may use to shore up support and drive up election-day turn-out among voters in their ethnic bases. Parties in Kenya simultaneously work to court a diverse set of potential swing voters with broad-based appeals while also mobilizing their most ardent backers to turnout on election day, exploiting communal fears and antagonisms for electoral purposes (KNCHR 2008; HRW 2008; CIPEV 2008; Barkan 2008; Chege 2008; Kagwanja 2009; Klopp and Kamunji 2008; Klaus 2015). This book shows, however, that electoral politics is about more than whipping up the base.

Policy Making

Finally, the argument links campaign strategies to policy making. Because voters in multiethnic settings like Kenya may view promises to share resources across group lines as cheap talk (Posner 2005), incumbents must work to overcome this credibility gap with out-group voters. Universal policies are useful in this regard. They establish clear, unambiguous methods for deciding how resources are targeted – typically by adopting formula-based rules or by creating new entitlements. For incumbents, tying one's hands in this way reduces the discretionary power to favor supporters, a power that political leaders in Africa have carefully guarded since independence, but signals inclusion to prized out-group voters.

To illustrate the connection between campaign strategies and the adoption of universal policies, I examine the education sector in Kenya. Education affects nearly every family in the country and accounts for a large share of the national budget. Moreover, recent empirical work has shown that ethnic favoritism is prevalent in the education sector in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa (Kramon and Posner 2016; Franck and Rainer 2012).

I use data on primary school enrollment and school construction to show that ethnic favoritism in Kenya is observed only during the single-party era and not after the transition to multiparty competition in 1992. The decline in favoritism is explained both by stroke-of-the-pen policies, especially the re-introduction of free primary education in 2003, and decisions related to the allocation of resources for school construction. Strikingly, reforms adopted during the multiparty era have concentrated benefits *outside* presidents' ethnic groups – a finding at odds with the view that electoral competition encourages leaders to channel benefits to core clientele.

Though electoral considerations are likely not the sole driver of policy shifts in Kenya's education sector, there is a clear connection between campaign strategies and education policies: incumbents and challengers routinely propose education reforms as a central plank of their

election platforms and tout accomplishments in this sector when they seek re-election, highlighting the inclusive nature of reforms on the campaign trail. Once in office, they seek to make good on their promises and establish a record that will aid their re-election bids.

The effects documented in the education sector are part of a more general movement away from particularistic policy making in Kenya's multiparty era. Policy makers have introduced a number of formula-based programs and constitutional reforms that have restricted their ability to engage in discretionary targeting. For example, the Local Areas Transfer Fund, launched in 1998, allocates 5% of national tax revenue to local governments using a formula based on population size and urban population density. Likewise, the Constituency Development Fund, introduced in 2003, allocates a minimum of 2.5% of ordinary revenue to parliamentary constituencies according to a pre-set formula in which three-quarters of the money is divided equally across constituencies and one-quarter is targeted toward poorer areas. Most important, Kenya's 2010 constitution stipulates that a minimum of 15% of national revenue be transferred to county governments. Finally, though data from other sectors is scarce, data on road construction and the allocation of title deeds confirms the findings of this book, documenting a clear pattern of ethnic favoritism during the single-party era but not under democracy (Burgess et al. 2015; Hassan and Klaus 2020). What is perhaps most striking about the changing patterns of distributive politics in Kenya is that incumbent leaders have come to embrace reforms that limit their discretionary powers – often initiating major changes – rather than fighting tooth and nail to retain the ability to target patronage resources for political purposes. This stands in stark contrast to the commonplace expectation that in Africa elites resist any reforms that undercut their ability to use patronage to build and maintain political support (e.g., Berman 1998). Elites in Kenya opt for such reforms because political incentives have changed with the advent of multiparty politics, increasing the value of universal policies and allowing leaders to legitimate their hold on power through the ballot box rather than through patronage.

These arguments are consistent with prior work showing that democracy incentivizes leaders to improve social services, both globally and in Africa's emerging democracies (Lake and Baum 2001; Baum and Lake 2003; Ansell 2008; Stasavage 2005; Stasavage 2005b; Harding and Stasavage 2014; Harding 2020, Carbone 2011, 2012; Carbone and Pellegata 2017; Kjaer and Therkildsen 2013; Travaglianti 2017). The difference is the emphasis on the *ethnic logic* of universal policies in settings where the need to cultivate support across ethnic lines structures electoral competition. In such contexts, the value of universal policies is not only that they provide benefits to a large number of voters, but also that they allow incumbents to demonstrate, in concrete and visible terms, the delivery of benefits across ethnic lines – making credible their appeals to swing voters outside their core ethnic bases.

Kenya in Context

This section describes several contextual factors that define electoral competition in Kenya, highlighting ways in which Kenya is similar to other African cases and also ways in which it differs. The data show that despite many unique features, key aspects of electoral politics in Kenya mirror broader trends in Africa's emerging democracies. Chapter 7 takes up the question of whether the arguments advanced in this book have broader relevance through a careful examination of electoral alignments, campaign strategies, and policy choices in Ghana, demonstrating the relevance of the swing-targeting approach even where important features of the electoral landscape differ.

Ethnic groups. Kenya's major ethnic groups (those that comprise 2% or more of the national population) are shown in Table 1.1.¹⁴ Like most African countries, Kenya is a country of ethnic minorities. The largest group, the Kikuyu, make up only about 17% of the population according to the 2009 census. While the Kikuyu are typically allied in politics with two closely related communities, the Meru (5%) and Embu (1%), these groups collectively comprise less than one-quarter of the population. Given the small size of ethnic communities, national politics has, since the first elections organized by the British in the early 1960s, revolved around coalition building. Demographically, Kenya is similar to most other African countries. Data from Fearon (2003) show that within Africa only 12 of 43 (28%) countries with a population larger than a million contain an ethnic group that on its own makes up a majority.¹⁵

Throughout this book, I primarily focus on how the higher-level ethnic divisions in Table 1.1 – the major ethnic fault lines in national elections – affect political dynamics, devoting less attention to sub-tribe or clan differences (Posner 2007). It is important to bear in mind, though, that ethnic groups in Kenya, as in other parts of Africa, do not constitute unified social or political entities.¹⁶ There is a rich literature on the historical construction of ethnicity in Kenya that highlights the evolving nature of ethnic boundaries and their salience to politics during the colonial era and since independence (see especially Lonsdale 1994, Berman 1998; Ogot 2000; Muigai 1995; and the overview by Lynch 2010). This work emphasizes the continued relevance of sub-group identities even among groups that are commonly treated as unified communities in accounts of national politics. My focus on higher-order ethnic identities is not intended to discount the importance of these sub-group attachments. Rather, it stems in large part from practical limitations outlined in Chapter 2, as well as the conceptual goal of tracing through how one factor – whether groups have a co-ethnic among the major presidential contenders – affects electoral alignments, and the implications of this factor for campaign strategies and policy choices, leaving aside other factors that certainly deserve more careful examination.

¹⁴ A rich literature on ethnicity in Kenya demonstrates that ethnic identities are multidimensional and fluid. The arguments and evidence in this book do not explore the political relevance of sub-tribe divisions, clan affiliations, or geographic differences within the major ethnic communities, nor do they address the shifting salience of identity dimensions over time. Those topics have been covered by others (e.g., Lynch 2011; Willis 1993; MacArthur 2008; Throup and Hornsby 1998).

¹⁵ Fearon's (2003) dataset excludes countries with a national population of less than one million people.

¹⁶ The fluid and multidimensional nature of ethnicity has been examined extensively in the broader literature on ethnic politics (see Chandra 2001 and Laitin and Posner 2001 for overviews).

Table 1.1. Major Ethnic Groups in Kenya (percentages)

	Population Share	Geographic concentration
Kikuyu	17	63
Luhya	14	61
Kalenjin	13	61
Luo	10	64
Kamba	10	78
Kisii	6	68
Somali	6	83
Mijikenda	5	63
Meru	4	78
Other (each < 2%)	13	--

Notes: Group size based on the 2009 census. Geographic concentration is defined as the percent of each group living in constituencies where it makes up 75% or more of the population, measured using survey data from multiple polls conducted between 2007 and 2009 (total sample 39,062).

Geographic concentration. Ethnic communities in Kenya remain geographically concentrated to a considerable extent despite decades of urbanization and internal migration. Table 1.1 displays the geographic concentration of Kenya’s nine largest ethnic communities, measured as the percentage of each group that lives in the group’s “ethnic homeland,” which I define as parliamentary constituencies in which the group makes up 75% or more of the population.¹⁷ It shows that at least 60% of each group lives in its home ethnic area and concentration is considerably higher for some communities. The spatial segregation of ethnic groups in Kenya is similar to other countries in Africa. Alesina and Zhuravskaya (2011) generate national-level estimates of ethnic segregation, using a measure that ranges from 0 for countries where regional-level ethnic composition matches the national-level distribution exactly to 1 for countries in which each ethnic group occupies a separate region. Their sample includes 23 African countries, in which segregation ranges from 0.002 for Lesotho to 0.49 for Uganda. The measure for Kenya (0.27) is above the median but is not an extreme value. The literature has long noted the importance of spatial segregation for patterns of distributive politics (e.g., Bates 1983; Ejdemyr, Kramon, and Robinson 2017). In the context of this study, it matters for a more mundane reason: it allows me to make inferences about campaign targeting by observing where the major parties hold campaign rallies, a strategy that forms the basis of Chapter 4.

Bloc voting. Ethnic bloc voting is a central feature of elections in Kenya. The next chapter details bloc voting patterns in Kenya since 1992 and finds that while common impressions are not without foundation, treating ethnic groups as electoral blocs conceals the partial and varying nature of bloc voting. In this regard, Kenya is similar to many other African countries. I use Afrobarometer (round 6) surveys conducted in 29 countries in 2014 and 2015 to estimate country-level bloc voting rates.¹⁸ Across Africa, bloc voting ranges from 0.33 for Lesotho to 0.76

¹⁷ Group concentration estimates were created by aggregating 12 nationally representative surveys (with a total sample size of 39,065) conducted between November 2006 and January 2009. Details are provided in the appendix.

¹⁸ This measure is defined as the mean bloc voting rate for groups that make up $\geq 2\%$ of each country sample, weighted by group size.

for Namibia. Kenya's value (0.66) is above the median, but in the same range as several other countries, including Ghana (0.61), Nigeria (0.66), and South Africa (0.67).¹⁹

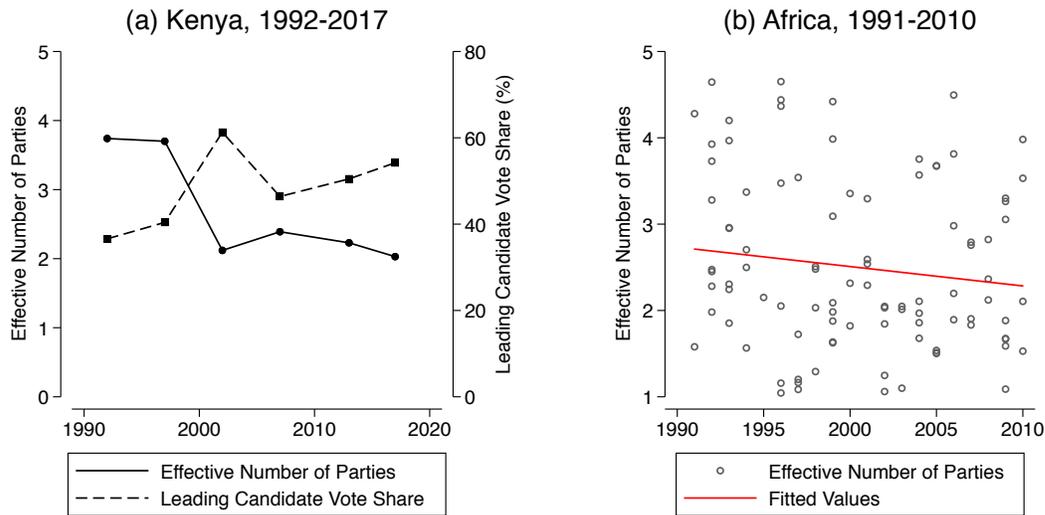
Party system consolidation. The trend since the reintroduction of multiparty presidential elections in 1992 has been toward a more consolidated party system in Kenya. In the first elections after the return to multiparty politics, Kenya's party system was highly fragmented with a large number of candidates competing to unseat the incumbent president, Daniel arap Moi. Starting with the 2002 election, however, the party system consolidated into what is essentially a two-party system in which two main parties – usually coalitions of several smaller parties – compete for the presidency. This can be seen in Figure 1.1, which plots the effective number of parties (ENP), the standard measure of party-system fragmentation used by political scientists, and the vote share of the leading candidate in presidential races from 1992 to 2017.²⁰ ENP declined from an average of 3.7 in 1992 and 1997 to an average of 2.2 in the four subsequent races. As a result, the share won by the leading candidate has trended upward. In 1992 and 1997 Moi won re-election with relatively small pluralities (37% and 40% of the official vote, respectively). In the four subsequent races, the winner gained an average of 53% of the vote, as reported by official sources. The arguments and evidence in this book mostly come from later election years – the “two coalition” period starting with the 2002 election. Subsequent chapters examine whether the book's arguments apply to earlier races. The trend toward a more consolidated party system in Kenya matches the broader pattern for Africa, as shown in the right panel of Figure 1.1, which shows a downward trend in the effective number of parties for African elections as a whole between 1991 and 2010.²¹

¹⁹ Other measures of party system “ethnicization” developed by Huber (2012) similarly show that Kenya is at the higher end of the spectrum with regard to the association between parties and ethnic groups, variously defined.

²⁰ These figures are based on official election results. The 2017 data is based on the first election, held on August 8, not the re-run on October 26, which was boycotted by the leading opposition candidate, Odinga.

²¹ The universe of cases is defined by the NELDA version 3 dataset (Hyde and Marinov 2012). Election results were obtained from a variety of online sources, mainly africanelections.tripod.com. The sample excludes extreme outliers with an ENP above 5: Liberia 2005 (6.4), Mali 2002 (5.4), and Zambia 2001 (5.1).

Figure 1.1. Party-System Fragmentation in Kenya and Africa



Notes: Data in (a) is based on official election results. Data in (b) is for all multiparty elections between 1991 and 2010 in Africa included in the NELDA data set (Hyde and Marinov 2012).

Candidate ethnicity. The leading presidential candidates in Kenya almost always come from different ethnic groups, as shown in Table 1.2, which displays the ethnicity of all candidates receiving at least 1% of the popular vote since 1992. Two exceptions are noteworthy: the 1992 election in which Kenneth Matiba and Mwai Kibaki (both Kikuyu) challenged the incumbent, Daniel arap Moi, and the 2002 race when Kibaki and Uhuru Kenyatta (both Kikuyu) competed for the presidency following Moi’s retirement. In every other instance, the major-party candidates are from different communities.²² As shown in later chapters, this means that the leading candidates often enter the race with support from distinct co-ethnic bases.

²² Presidential elections in Kenya, as in other parts of Africa, typically feature a handful of also-rans who have little chance of victory and fail to garner more than a tiny share of the vote. Given their limited influence on electoral politics, I do not focus on these competitors.

Table 1.2. Ethnicity of Major-party Candidates (>1%) and Official Vote Shares

1992	Danial arap Moi (Kalenjin) – 37%	Kenneth Matiba (Kikuyu) – 26%	Mwai Kibaki (Kikuyu) – 20%	Oginga Odinga (Luo) – 17%	
1997	Danial arap Moi (Kalenjin) – 40%	Mwai Kibaki (Kikuyu) – 31%	Raila Odinga (Luo) – 11%	Michael Wamalwa (Luhya) – 8%	Charity Ngilu (Kamba) – 8%
2002	Mwai Kibaki (Kikuyu) – 61%	Uhuru Kenyatta (Kikuyu) – 30%	Simeon Nyachae (Kisii) – 6%		
2007	Mwai Kibaki (Kikuyu) – 46%	Raila Odinga (Luo) – 44%	Kalonzo Musyoka (Kamba) – 9%		
2013	Uhuru Kenyatta (Kikuyu) – 51%	Raila Odinga (Luo) – 44%	Musalia Mudavadi (Luhya) – 4%		
2017	Uhuru Kenyatta (Kikuyu) – 54%	Raila Odinga (Luo) – 45%			

Notes: Data compiled by author.

This pattern tracks with elections across Africa’s emerging multiparty systems. Data collected from multiparty presidential elections in 38 countries between 1990 and 2010 shows that the top two contenders came from different ethnic communities in 83% of elections, and that these candidates only faced a significant co-ethnic competitor (defined as one or more candidates who received 5% or more of the vote) in 24% of all races.²³ Thus, the electoral landscape in presidential elections across Africa is typically defined by a small number of candidates from different ethnic groups, each of whom can often rely on their most dedicated support from voters in their respective ethnic communities, as in Kenya.

Elite coalitions. A central feature of presidential elections in Kenya is that elite coalitions, not parties, structure electoral politics. Thus, competitive efforts to construct diverse coalitions of seniors politicians from the country’s major ethnic communities take center stage in the run-up to presidential contests (e.g., Throup and Hornsby 1998; Cussac 2008; Cheeseman 2008). Despite some notable exceptions, elite alliances in Kenya have generally been short-lived. In Kenya there are no permanent allies or enemies, only coalitions of convenience, to use Horowitz’s (1985) apt phrase. These unstable alliances give Kenya’s weak party system its personalized character.

The shifting tides of Kenya’s elite alliances make voter alignments highly fluid, more so than in other parts of the continent. Weghorst and Bernhard (2014) provide a comparative measure of the change in vote share across parties from one election to the next (at the legislative level) that can be attributed to parties entering and exiting the system – so-called Type A volatility. Where elite coalitions are more fluid, Type A volatility will be higher. Between 1991 and 2007, Type A volatility in Kenya averaged nearly 20%, meaning that on average, 20% of voters in each election supported parties that did not exist in the previous race. In this regard, Kenya ranks among the most volatile party systems in Africa, putting it in league with countries like Malawi, Benin, and Mali, where party systems also revolve to a considerable extent around personalities rather than parties. As discussed in later chapters, the personalized nature of Kenya’s party system means that conceptions of core and swing differ from countries like

²³ This data is based on elections in the 38 African countries for which it was possible to determine the ethnic identity of the main candidates (those who received 5% or more of the vote), and for which it was possible to estimate the population share of the candidates’ ethnic groups using the ethnic classifications in Fearon (2003).

Ghana, where institutionalized parties structure electoral alignments. Yet, chapter 7 shows that despite these differences, the arguments developed in this book have relevance beyond the Kenyan case.

Plan of the Book

Chapter 2 provides an overview of presidential elections in Kenya's multiparty era and describes the connection between ethnicity and voter behavior at the individual and group levels. Chapter 3 then develops the claim that swing voters can be distinguished based on ethnic identities, and outlines the proposition that core and swing groups are defined in part according to whether ethnic communities have a co-ethnic candidate in the race. To support these propositions, the chapter draws on survey data from three national elections (2007, 2013, and 2017), including two panel studies of voter preferences conducted prior to the 2013 and 2017 elections.

The book then turns from voters to campaigns. Chapter 4 demonstrates that the pursuit of swing voters is at the heart of electoral competition in Kenya. It examines the ethnic logic of campaigns by studying where presidential candidates hold public rallies. It shows that candidates converge on the country's main swing groups and largely avoid their own co-ethnic strongholds and those of their rivals. Data on household canvassing prior to the 2007 election confirms that the important task of mobilizing core supporters in the parties' strongholds is delegated to lower-level actors.

Chapter 5 charts how the pursuit of swing voters affects campaign appeals. Drawing on a large sample of campaign speeches from rallies in the 2007 election, the chapter shows that both incumbents and challengers opt for broad-based, universal appeals over narrow, particularistic promises. And while the parties do make targeted promises to specific localities or ethnic communities, they do so in a universal fashion, offering promises of localized benefits to many groups – not just those in their core coalitions. The chapter also demonstrates that a focus on courting swing voters helps to explain the negative appeals employed on the campaign trail. It shows that while the content of negative messages in 2007 varied across incumbent and challenger, both parties sought to use negative messages to limit their opponent's appeal to out-group voters.

Chapter 6 explores the implications for policy making. Focusing on the education sector, it documents that since the transition to multiparty politics, Kenyan politicians have made universal reforms central to their electoral strategies. Using data on primary school enrollment and school construction, the chapter shows that the reforms implemented by incumbents since 1992 have upended patterns of ethnic favoritism observed in prior years. These reforms, particularly the removal of school fees, have dramatically increased enrollment and have gone a long way toward equalizing access across ethnic groups – mitigating inter-group inequalities that have existed since before independence.

Chapter 7 investigates whether the arguments in this book are applicable to other African cases, focusing on Ghana. It shows that despite differences in the nature of the party system and the salience of ethnicity to electoral politics, the swing-targeting model developed in this book helps to explain key aspects of electoral competition and policy-making in Ghana. Chapter 8 concludes by exploring the implications of the book's arguments for Africa's emerging, multiethnic democracies.