

Democratization by Elections or Democratic Regression? Nigeria, Zambia, and Kenya after the Last Elections (2021-2023)

Democratizzazione per via elettorale o regressione democratica? Nigeria, Zambia, e Kenya dopo le ultime elezioni (2021-2023)

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Abstract

This paper analyzes and compares three key elections in Zambia (2021), Kenya (2022) and Nigeria (2023). The aim was twofold: assessing the impact of elections on the democratic process and on the party system. The Zambian elections confirmed a trend towards democracy and party system consolidation, which since 2016 has become a two-party system. 2021's general elections marked also an important defeat for the incumbent and the consequent government change, with a significant increasing of voter numbers. This double result – the government change and the good level of voter participation – were considered as two indicators of the vitality and the full legitimacy of the democratic process. Contrary, in the other two cases under scrutiny problems of democratic consolidation seems to arise. In both cases the incumbent coalition won but what seriously affected the electoral legitimacy is the decline in voter participation recorded (i.e. dropping to 27% in Nigeria). The role of ethnicity was tested for all three cases by disaggregating the vote at the constituency level.

Questo articolo analizza e compara tre elezioni in Zambia nel 2021, in Kenya nel 2022 e in Nigeria nel 2023. Obiettivo del paper è quello di determinare l'impatto delle elezioni sul processo democratico e sui sistemi di partito. Le elezioni in Zambia confermano il consolidamento democratico del paese in un sistema bi-partitico. Le elezioni del 2021 hanno rappresentato, peraltro, una decisiva sconfitta per il candidato presidente in carica e del suo partito, con percentuali di partecipazione elettorale crescenti rispetto alle precedenti elezioni. Questo doppio risultato – il cambiamento della coalizione al potere e il crescente livello di partecipazione elettorale – era stato scelto quali indicatore della vitalità e piena legittimità del processo democratico. Negli altri due casi sembrano dunque manifestarsi dei problemi di consolidamento democratico. In entrambi i casi la coalizione al potere ha vinto ma ciò che più preoccupa la legittimità dei processi elettorali in questione è il calo del livello di partecipazione elettorale che ha raggiunto livelli preoccupanti nel caso nigeriano (27%). Il ruolo dell'etnicità è stato testato disaggregando il voto a livello circoscrizionale.

Keywords

Africa, Elections, Cleavages, Party-System, Democratization
Africa, elezioni, fratture, Sistema partitico, democratizzazione

Introduction

Starting at the beginning of the 90s, democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa has recently undergone important outbreaks of democratic backsliding. Since 2017, at least eight military successful coups have been recorded. While most of these occurred in countries that were either still under authoritarian rule (Zimbabwe, Sudan, Gabon, Chad) or were weak democracies (Guinea, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso), a most serious general trend of decline of democratic standards has also been recorded in the continent (Cassani and Tomini 2019; Gyimah-Boadi 2021). Still, democracy continued to be sustained by African public opinion (Afrobarometer 2023). This happens in both countries that democratized during the 90s and the 2000s as well as in countries that suffer from lasting authoritarianism.

This paper concentrates on a selection of countries that held democratic elections in the triennium between 2021 and 2023 and where these elections were the last of a long sequel of uninterrupted ones. For this reason, the countries selected could be considered regimes where electoral procedures consolidated overtime. The aim of this paper is therefore twofold: given the rising theme of ‘democratic backsliding’, it firstly intends to assess the impact of elections on the quality of democratic process in countries characterized by achieved democratic standards; secondly, by analysing the party systems and the cleavages, it endeavours to make considerations on continuities and changes in the party system. Electoral politics in Africa has attracted an enormous amount of interest since the beginning of the 90s and this paper further contributes to the general reflection on the relation between vote behaviour, the changing structure of cleavages and the legitimacy of the democratic processes.

Given the many elections held from 2021 to 2023 a selection of three cases has been made: Zambia, which held general elections in 2021, Kenya, in 2022 and Nigeria, in 2023. The cases have been selected based on their record of continuity in regular elections since the return to multiparty elections and on their magnitude in terms of population and geography and/or the importance of the potential political impact in the area. These countries returned to multiparty elections in 1991 (Zambia), 1992 (Kenya) and in 1999 (Nigeria). Other cases in equally crucial countries have been therefore ignored, either because elections were held under authoritarian control – Ethiopia 2021, Uganda 2021, Angola 2022, Zimbabwe 2023 – or because of their minor regional impact as those in Benin, which held the Presidential election in 2021. Finally, the selected cases were easier to compare. They were all general elections, meaning that electors were called to vote for a President who is the head of the government, a Parliament and, in at least two cases, for the election of local governments. They were furtherly held under electoral rules which are roughly the same (single-member plurality; SMP) and the total number

of elections held so far were also equal. Another election that deserved to be analysed, that of the parliament in Senegal, held in 2022, at the end was excluded. The main reason was that presidential and parliamentary elections are not concurrent so the impact of the presidential candidates on parliamentary alliances and results is different.

The Theory of Democratization by Elections and Its Critics

The capacity of the democratic process to reflect the changing preferences of electors is the consequence of the capacity of the party system and elections to reflect social change. This will be tested by comparing elections in these countries with the previous ones looking to the entire series of elections since the re-introduction of multi-party politics.

Such capacity of African democracies is not merely intended as Bingham Powell's "chain of responsiveness" (2004). African democracies are generally still poorly responsive, unable to fully provide citizens with what they demand (Gyimah-Boadi *et al.* 2021; Asunka *et al.* 2022). In the paper, the capacity of the democratic process and its legitimacy (Norris 1999) is intended as the capacity to respect that government changes occur and maintaining sufficient levels of participation. This will be assessed through two indicators: electoral participation (measured with the voter turnout; VTO) and the frequency of government change (FGC). As long as the VTO and FGC remain high, the democratic system could be intended as fully legitimate and still able to fulfil its Schumpeterian promises, notwithstanding the feeble chances of generating responsive government. If these "democracies" fulfil the aforementioned minimal requirements will be considered "consolidated", even if at a poor level when compared to mature democracies, but the likelihood of a serious reversal is at this point improbable. We should remember where these countries came from: two were single-party regimes before the return to multi-party politics and one was ruled by a series of military regimes.

This approach is partially consistent with the theory of the 'power of elections' as introduced by Lindberg (2006), if we go to the essence of Lindberg's contribution. According to Lindberg (2006: 34), the regularity of free and fair elections strengthens democratization.¹ The theory was initially welcomed because broke with the scepticism which surrounded African transition to multi-party politics. Results from the dataset employed by Teorrel and Hadenius (2009) seemed to be consistent with Lindberg ar-

¹ On the regularity of the elections in Africa as a proxy of political institutionalization and as a factor which curtails the likelihood of the democratic breakdown through military coups, see Ieraci and Battera (2023).

guments. However, criticisms also arose. Positive results for Africa were not confirmed elsewhere (McCoy and Hartlyn 2009; Bunce and Wolchik 2012) until Bogaards (2013: 152) heavily criticised the theory also in the case of Africa founding it “inconsistent” and the causal mechanisms in support of the theory poorly developed. Bogaards found that the repetition of elections per se does not necessarily strengthens democracy in countries that have already transited to democracy, not to say about countries with heavily manipulated democratic standards – i.e. “electoral authoritarian regimes”. His analysis rather suggested that African electoral democracies are still vulnerable to reversal if not breakdown.

The reliability of Lindberg’s theory will be therefore also tested. The countries under scrutiny have now a long tradition of electoral politics. Their democratic standards have not always improved. In particular, doubts about the fairness of some elections are strong, but after five electoral cycles, it could be said that multi-party politics has consolidated. The point remains which level of democracy they have reached. For example, according to Bogaards (2013: 157), Zambia and Kenya fluctuated between “electoral authoritarianism” and “electoral democracy”. This implies that democratic standards remain seriously poor. In this paper, it is not agreed on the qualification of the three cases assessed as “electoral authoritarian” regimes. Authoritarianism is incompatible with government changes. Holding elections under an authoritarian regime is today the norm, but authoritarian regimes do not change because elections unless they are pressed to do so by more serious events. That was not the case of the three countries under scrutiny which remain democracies notwithstanding the poor standards.

As far as the last elections in the cases selected are concerned, the impact of two factors on the electoral results should be ascertained. These two factors attracted considerable attention in the local press and if confirmed, they could imply a break from the dominant ethnic preferences of voters (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2004; Posner 2005), with strong potential of improvement of the democratic standards. First, the economic issue. In particular the debt burden reached rampant figures in the last decade with profoundly serious effects in Nigeria and Zambia with impacts in terms of inflation and jobs. Second, the growing activism of young people. The African voter is young and the continuous rejuvenation of voters, who have an ambiguous relation with ethnicity, has an adverse impact on the ethnic vote. This growing disconnection between voters and their ethnic profile is again more apparent in the case of Zambia, the less ethnicized case among the three, but shows encouraging signs of change also in the other two cases. If the importance of the ethnic/regional dimension is diminishing, this development will have a positive impact also on the responsiveness and signify a departure from elections as ethnic headcounts (Hoffman and Long 2013), making government changes more likely.

Zambia 2021: Towards a Two-Party System?

The Zambian 2021 general elections mark the most outstanding government change recorded throughout Africa during that year, with the exception of Cape Verdean presidential election. The 2021 elections are the second major government change after that occurred in 2011 when the PF (Patriotic Front) of Michael Sata put an end to the twenty-year dominance of the MMD (Movement for Multi-Party Democracy). This time was up to the PF to cede to the emerging UPND (United Party for National Development) of Hakainde Hichilema but now the difference between the two main candidates was the largest since the return to multiparty politics in 1991. About one million votes on a total of less than five million votes casted. The difference is captured by the percentage of votes obtained by the two main runners. Table 1 resumes the last five general elections held in Zambia covering twenty years of electoral history, with the exclusion of the Presidential elections of 2008 and 2015 which were not held as general elections owing to the premature death of the incumbent.

Table 1 – Zambian Electoral Results in the last five General Elections (2001-2021)

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
Winner (Party)	Mwanawasa (MMD)	Mwanawasa (MMD)	Sata (PF)	Lungu (PF)	Hichilema (UPND)
Percentage	29.2%	43.0%	42.8%	50,4%	59.0%
Runner-up (Party)	Mazoka (UPND)	Sata (PF)	Banda (MMD)	Hichilema (UPND)	Lungu (PF)
Percentage	27.2%	29.4%	36,2%	47,6%	38,7%
MPs first party	69 MMD	72 MMD	60 PF	80 PF	82 UPND
MPs s.nd party	49 UPND	43 PF	55 MMD	58 UPND	60 PF
Total MPs	150	150	150	156	156

The first remark to make is that since 2016 the process of transition towards a two-party system seems to be confirmed. If we sum up the percentages obtained by the first two candidates since 2016, the main two candidates cumulated more than 95% and a second round was not held.² The process of transition towards a two-party system started with the col-

² Between 2001 and 2011, the winner was elected with less than 50% of the votes. The electoral rules were changed after the 2015 presidential election into a two-round system.

lapse of the MMD after 2011 and was strengthened by the introduction of the two-round system for the presidential election in 2015.³ It is premature to exclude a future collapse of the PF, but no serious signs of this has emerged so far, unlike it happened during by-elections held between 2011 and 2012 for the MMD when members of this party abandoned it for the PF and the UPND.⁴ The transition towards a two-party system is further stressed by the fact that since 2016 the winner party has been able to reach an absolute majority in the National Assembly (NA) without recurring to the support of independents (thirteen were elected in 2021), to small parties' MPs (only one was elected in 2021; they were four in 2016), to the appointed MPs (the President has the power to appoint eight MPs) or benefiting from floor crossing. The consolidation of the party system around to two main parties would furtherly strengthen the sustainability of democracy and the FGC approaching the case of Ghana (three FGC in thirty years) (Abdulai and Crawford 2010). It must be stressed indeed that after 2016 the Zambian democracy came under observation after some illiberal measures were adopted by the Lungu government against the opposition, the freedom of press, and of campaigning (Allison 2017). All these measures did not impede the UPND to win the confidence of most of the electors. The electoral result was so unambiguous that Lungu was forced, after some hesitations, to congratulate his opponents and concede defeat.⁵ This is enough to say about the consolidation of the democratic process in Zambia notwithstanding the opposite view of many observers (Fraser 2017). A consolidation which is far from reaching the upper echelons of democratization, but still within the group of democracies. In 2021, it was up to the mobilization of citizens to ensure that elections were still the legitimate and unique rule accepted for selecting the government despite the illiberal measures adopted by the incumbent government⁶ and the usual flaws of the electoral commission (ECZ).

The consolidation of the two-party system is due to other reasons. First, the growing importance of the economic factor for the electors. If it is true that ethnicity still drives an important number of voters, especially in rural areas, it is also true that the Zambian voter appears growingly emancipated from such a factor. He/she is moving out from Posner's ethnic voter model (Posner 2005) and moving towards Resnick's populist model voter centred around

³ The MPs elected on an MMD ticket dropped from 55 in 2011 to three in 2016. None was elected in 2021.

⁴ The MMD actually still exists and heavyweights of this party decided either to support the PF or the UPND locally in 2021 (Siachiwena 2021).

⁵ *Africa Confidential*, "President Lungu dithers then concedes after challenger Hakainde Hichilema's landslide victory", 16th August 2021.

⁶ Illiberal measures by the government were important but limited to some restrictions to public meetings based on COVID-19 regulations and the usual public broadcaster coverage in favour of the ruling party.

economic benefits or a combination of the two (Resnick 2010).⁷ Still, ethnicity matters, albeit in a lesser measure, and, as we will see, less than in the Kenyan elections. In particular, what is clear is the consolidation of an urban/rural cleavage, which is not ethnic in nature, and the division of rural areas into those that benefit more from those in government (the PF in this case) and those that benefit less. That rural constituencies are mainly divided along ethnic lines explains why the rural voter is also an ethnic voter. In this sense, ethnicity is strengthened by patronage and vice versa (Chandra 2004) and the PF invested heavily in crucial infrastructures to the benefit of some rural areas but not all (Hallink and Siachiwena 2023).⁸ This may strengthen and reinforce politicised ethnicities as the perception of ethnic preferences by the government grows (Kapesa, Sichone and Bwalya 2020). However, at the same time, PF lost the support of urban areas which had counted so much for its victory in 2011. Its defeat in 2021 is similar to that of the MMD in 2011: it lost the urban constituencies and maintained its core support in co-ethnic rural areas to its most important leaders (most of the Eastern, Northern and Muchinga provinces). The opposite happened to the UPND. A party largely and for long confined to the mostly rural Southern province, which embraced a strategy similar to that of PF during 2011, winning the confidence of the urbanized Copperbelt and Lusaka in 2021. Table 2 shows local trends (constituencies are regrouped into provinces) since 2011 by counting the number of constituencies won by parties.

Table 2 - Zambian Electoral Results for the NA since 2011
(first party in the province: no. of constituencies won on total constituencies in the province)

Provinces	2011	2016	2021
Central	9/14 MMD	8/16 UPND	10/16 UPND
Copperbelt	18/22 PF	18/22 PF	9/22 UPND; 9/22 PF
Eastern	15/19 MMD	13/18 PF	11/18 PF
Luapula	13/14 PF	13/15 PF	13/15 PF
Lusaka	8/12 PF	8/13 PF	9/13 UPND
Muchinga*		11/11 PF	11/11 PF
Northern	15/21 PF	11/12 PF	8/12 PF
North-Western	9/12 MMD	12/12 UPND	12/12 UPND
Southern	17/19 UPND	18/18 UPND	18/18 UPND
Western	8/17 MMD	18/19 UPND	18/19 UPND

*Muchinga was created as a province after 2011 elections by aggregating four districts of the Northern province and one from the Eastern.

⁷ Jöst et al. (2023) working on the Zambian case demonstrates as well the relevance of partisanship as a driver of political participation.

⁸ See also *Africa Confidential*, “Betting the farm on winning”, 10th June 2021.

These trends demonstrate the ability of the UPND to inherit much of the MMD vote after the collapse of the latter between 2011 and 2016 and to penetrate urban areas in 2021, winning five on seven constituencies in the Lusaka urban area and gaining important inroads in the Copperbelt. The vote in this province was indeed highly disputed: the UPND equalized the number of elected MPs with those of the PF, but of the 19 urban constituencies, the PF managed to maintain nine against the six won over by the UPND and the four by independent candidates, some of whom had lost the primaries in the PF and decided to run as independent. The overall picture of MPs distribution by province depicts a polarization east-west (Muchinga, Northern and Luapula lie in the eastern part of the country) which is however nuanced by the inroads the UPND was able to make especially in the Northern province. This trend is matched even more in the presidential election since the SMP electoral system multiplies the chances to elect MPs with simple majorities. In the Northern province, Lungu actually won, albeit narrowly, with a difference of less than 20,000 votes, while in the Copperbelt Hichilema won with a difference of 120,000 votes. At the end, it was the electoral mobilization (VTO) which impacted on the presidential result, while having a minor effect on the election of MPs in the constituencies. Nationally, the VTO reached 71%, but the provinces which supported Hichilema performed better (the maximum was reached in the Southern province with about 84% of VTO compared to the lowest 63% in the Eastern). This despite the obstacles posed by the PF government to the electoral campaign. Crucially, the highly contested elections in the Copperbelt impacted on the VTO, which reached there around 73%. As in the other two cases, disaffection, therefore, impacted first on the likelihood of voting and only secondarily as a swing in terms of support. If we look back at the table, indeed, only Lusaka swung in terms of party dominance and partially the Copperbelt, but the difference of one million votes came out from the mounting disaffection in the PF strongholds and the better mobilization in the UPND strongholds. Ethnic mobilization also counted but less than many observers expected. So, if it is true that the Southern province, whose ethnic profile is Tonga like Hichilema, voted overwhelmingly for him (602,000 votes against 36,000) in both Copperbelt and Lusaka, so important for the political career of Lungu, he recorded a defeat, and in the Eastern province, the Nyanja-speaking province where his family come from, he obtained only a marginal victory (290,000 votes against 198,000) over his challenger. It was at last the need for a political change amid dark economic prospects for the young that worried new voters, compelling them to make the difference (Resnick 2022).⁹

⁹ See also *Africa Confidential*, "Betting the farm on winning", 10th June 2021.

Government debt to GDP reached the peak of 91.9% in 2019 (source: Bank of Zambia). In 2021, Zambia's economy bounced back, with real GDP growing at 4.6% from a contraction of 2.8% in

Kenya 2022: Shifting Alliances amid Change and the Crystallization of Ethnic Constituencies

While the Zambian party system is moving toward a two-party system, the same cannot be said about Kenya. If it is true that at least since 2002 Kenyan electors are confronted with two main challengers for the presidency – one of them, Raila Odinga, has been since 2007 the eternal loser – the party system has failed to become a two-party system, rather elections oppose two main coalitions. Confusion between parties and coalition is furtherly strengthened by coalitions which are named as “parties” before being real as such, and vice versa. This indeed masks an important fragmentation and incoherence since both coalitions and parties are marred by continuous entering and exiting of sub-groups (parties) and important politicians. If coalition politics helps in maintaining national cohesion (Kadima and Owuor 2014), contrary to these authors’ argument, coalitions politics weakens also biggest parties as these are highly dependent on the popularity of some party bosses. Party name recurrent changes do not help, indeed, to portray the real picture. It is better to concentrate on party bosses which are rather still the same since the return to multiparty politics in the 1990s. At that time, they were young rampant, mostly ex-KANU (Kenya African National Union) cadres, at around their forties, now they have become older politicians around their sixties if not seventies (Raila is 77). Table 3 is similar to table 1 and tries to capture these changes and the performances of parties during elections. Parties are treated separately and regrouped into the alliances (in brackets; second and third rows). Rows includes party leaders just to understand better the schemes electors were finding on the ballots.

2020. Post-election market confidence played an important role in this recovery (source: World Bank’s Overview on Zambia)

Table 3 – Kenya: Electoral alliances and General elections' result (since 2007).

	2007	2013	2017*	2022
Winner (Party/Alliance)	Kibaki (PNU)	Kenyatta (<i>Jubilee</i>)	Kenyatta (<i>Jubilee/Jubilee</i>)	Ruto (<i>Kenya Kwanza</i>)
Percentage	46.4%	50.5%	54.2%	50.5%
Runner-up (Party/Alliance)	Odinga (ODM)	Odinga (<i>CORD</i>)	Odinga (<i>NASA</i>)	Odinga (<i>Azimio</i>)
Percentage	44.1%	43.7%	44.9%	48.9%
MPs first party (alliance)	43 PNU (78)	88 TNA (164)	171 Jubilee (190)	143 UDA (161)
MPs s.nd party (alliance)	99 ODM (102)	96 ODM (135)	76 ODM (127)	89 ODM (173)
Total MPs	210	349	349	349

*In 2017 Kenyatta was reelected in a second election boycotted by Odinga since the first has been annulled by the Supreme court. Results in the column are referred to the Presidential election annulled (Parliamentary election was considered valid).

As the table shows, regrouping parties into alliances reduced party fragmentation. Combined together, the two main parties obtained the best score in 2017 when Jubilee and ODM (Orange Democratic Movement), coupled together, obtained 71% of the MPs. At that time, Jubilee as a party failed to obtain the absolute majority, which however obtained as a coalition (of 11 parties) with the same name. The third party in the NA was the WDM-K (Wiper Democratic Movement – Kenya) led by Kalonzo Musyoka, a weighty political boss since the late 1990s, but *NaSA* (National Super Alliance), the coalition gathered by Odinga as vehicle for his 2017 campaign, which included WDM-K (Musyoka was at that time running mate of Odinga), failed to obtain the majority. This was not the case in 2022. While it is correct that Ruto (*Kenya Kwanza* alliance) won the presidential elections with a narrow margin of about 250,000 votes, his coalition failed to obtain the absolute majority in the NA after election. This time it was the opposition – *Azimio* – to obtain the relative majority. *Azimio* was, however, a coalition of 13 parties. In *Azimio*, Kenyatta's Jubilee obtained 28 MPs (Kenyatta this time sponsored the election of Odinga and entered his coalition) and WDM-K 26. In 2022, therefore the UDA (United Democratic Alliance), the party led by Ruto, was the first party in the NA, obtaining a large majority within the *Kenya Kwanza* coalition (143 MPs on 161). By November 2022, some parties abandoned *Azimio* to

join the government side which hence obtained the majority in the NA and was able to elect the Speaker.¹⁰

Kenya Kwanza and *Azimio* are the last two coalitions that were created around strong candidates. If we concentrate on candidates before approaching coalitions and parties, we find finally what are the pillars of electoral stability in Kenya. Politics revolves around candidates and less around parties. By concentrating on Odinga, one thing is noticeable which distinguishes this candidate from his rivals: while it is true that the coalitions created around Odinga have changed name in the last four elections, the backbone of these coalitions has remained always the same: the ODM party. This one in 2007 gave his name also to the coalition and thereafter has become a stable party, actually the most important and stable party in the NA, despite having not yet developed the ability to move beyond a core vote of about a quarter of total voters. In other words, contrary to what happened in Zambia, where the growing reduction of significant parties produced a certain swing of constituencies from one party to another with very few exceptions, in Kenya constituencies have demonstrated a voting continuity with very few changes. The electoral volatility that seems so apparent by looking at table 3 is therefore misleading. Table 4 tries to match the real condition of the party system in Kenya. It disaggregates votes according to former provinces (provinces were suppressed and divided into counties in 2010 and these were created out from the existing districts) and takes into consideration NA elections since 2013, when constituencies were elevated from 210 to the current 290.¹¹

¹⁰ Together with those who jumped on the bandwagon after the elections was Alfred Mutua the founder Maendeleo Chap Chap Party who was awarded the prestigious Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs.

¹¹ MPs in the NA are actually 349. To those elected directly in the constituencies (290) must be added 47 elected women (one for each county) plus 12 appointed by parties.

Table 4 – Kenyan Electoral Results for the NA since 2013 (first party in the province: no. of constituencies won on total constituencies in the province)

Provinces	2013	2017	2022	
Central	31/34 TNA	32/34 Jubilee	32/34 UDA	
	Kenyatta	Kenyatta	Gachagua?	Provincial (ethnic) bosses
Nairobi	10/17 TNA	10/17 Jubilee	9/17 ODM	
Eastern	15/44 WDM-K	18/44 Jubilee	16/44 WDM-K	
	Musyoka	Musyoka	Musyoka	Provincial (ethnic) bosses
North-Eastern	9/18 URP	6/18 Jubilee	5/18 ODM; 5/18 Jubilee	
Coast	13/26 ODM	15/26 ODM	13/26 ODM	
Rift Valley	44/76 URP	57/76 Jubilee	58/76 UDA	
	Ruto	Ruto	Ruto	Provincial (ethnic) bosses
Nyanza	30/42 ODM	24/42 ODM	29/42 ODM	
	Odinga	Odinga	Odinga	Provincial (ethnic) bosses
Western	12/33 ODM	11/33 ANC	16/33 ODM	
	Mudavadi; Wetangula	Mudavadi; Wetangula	Mudavadi; Wetangula	Provincial (ethnic) bosses

Of the eight existing provinces in 2010, four were dominated by a single ethnic group: the Gikuyu in the Central, the Somali in the North-Eastern, the Luo in the Nyanza and the Luhya in the Western province. However, with the exception of the Central and Nyanza provinces, the other two never experienced a dominant party in the province. The URP (United Republican Party) approached this condition during the 2013 election in the North-Eastern and in the Rift Valley provinces. Its victory in the latter was not by chance. William Ruto – the current president – was among its founders, after having broken up with the ODM and becoming the running mate of Uhuru Kenyatta, joining the Jubilee coalition. The URP was indeed strictly identified by Kaleenjin voters, who make up the majority of voters in the province, as ‘their’ party, as it happened again with the Jubilee party in 2017 and in 2022 with UDA. In these two cases the strengthening of the Jubilee party and UDA respectively compared to the URP have to do with the ability of these two parties to sum up the

Kaleenjin vote with the Gikuyu one in the same province (Gikuyu make the second ethnic group in the province). The big change in the 2022 elections was indeed the ability of Ruto to sum up his core constituents – the Kaleenjin voters – with the Gikuyu’s vote abandoned by Kenyatta, who was prevented from running for the presidency by the second term limit. Kenyatta’s support towards Odinga was not followed by his former electors, who preferred to reward Gikuyu candidates in the UDA. Jubilee won in only two constituencies out of a total of 34 of the former Central province – the core area of Gikuyu vote – while Odinga obtained a meagre 20% of votes in the same province.¹² The decline of Kenyatta’s power in the province is noticeable and it coincides with the two-term limit. It could be understood as a political retirement. So, if it is true that patronage does count so much in African politics, it is also true that clients are eager to abandon their patrons once they perceive they no longer possess the key to the safe. Jubilee party collapse followed that of its master. It still maintains 28 seats in the NA, which makes it the third party in the NA and the second in *Azimio*, but it lost all but a single stronghold as it lost any credible future perspective unless it will be used as a vehicle for a powerful politician in the future elections. This is the usual destiny of Kenyan parties with the exception of the ODM.

ODM has still Odinga as its leader. However, also Odinga’s trajectory is going to be eclipsed after four consecutive presidential defeats. The party still managed well in Nyanza, its stronghold, where it won in 25 Luo (Odinga is a Luo) constituencies on 27. ODM is a multiethnic party with important bastions in Luhya areas (Kakamega and Busia) and on the coast and with a certain appeal in the Greater Nairobi, given the leftist and populist program, where it got eight seats out of a total of 17.¹³ The possibility for the ODM of sinking after the gradual eclipse of its leader is not to be excluded since the Luo vote accounts for only a quarter of the total vote gained. It remains to be seen who will be able to inherit a charismatic leadership, whether a Luo politician or someone else.¹⁴

UDA on the contrary, is going certainly to endure, at least this legislature. It obtained 143 seats out of a total of 161 of the *Kenya Kwanza* coalition, of which it was a part. Of these, 34 from the Gikuyu vote of the former Central province, thanks to the organizational ability of Gachagua,¹⁵ the run mate of Ruto, and the new Gikuyu provincial boss and national deputy leader of the party and of the Republic after Ruto. He followed Ruto in the UDA after serving Kenyatta’s Jubilee in the NA between 2017 and 2022. The other UDA

¹² Gatundu South, the constituency of Kenyatta was also won over by UDA.

¹³ Compared to the rest of the country Nairobi is less but still fragmented. Jubilee obtained there four seats and UDA three.

¹⁴ The most active against Ruto’s government is now Kalonzo Musyoka, the vibrant leader of the WDM-K, the second party in the *Azimio* coalition (see, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C16RvdYMIML/>).

¹⁵ *Africa Confidential*, “Martha Karua and Rigathi Gachagua make the cut as running mates”, 16th May 2022.

stronghold is the Kaleenjin vote in what was once the Rift Valley province. There, UDA obtained 32 seats out of 37 in Kaleenjin-dominated constituencies.

UDA is therefore multiethnic as the ODM. That does not mean that the vote is no longer driven by ethnicity. The cohesion of vote for one candidate/party within ethnically dominated constituencies is not only confirmed in Luo, Kaleenjin or Gikuyu areas but also in Ukambani – the area inhabited by Kambas – where WDM-K led by Musyoka won 16 on 22 constituencies dominated by Kambas. This was not the case of Luhya-dominated areas, although this is one of the four major ethnic groups in the country, where the vote is quite more fragmented. The reason for this fragmentation of the Luhya vote is not well established (Battera 2012), but the most solid evidence points to an inner competition for the leadership.¹⁶ Therefore, in what was once the Western province, ODM managed well obtaining 16 out of 33 constituencies but was far from becoming the dominant party, given the ability of elderly local leaders such as Moses Wetangula (FORD-Kenya; Forum for the Restoration of Democracy) or Musalia Mudavadi (ANC; Amani National Congress) to drive votes in favour of the *Kenya Kwanza* Coalition.¹⁷ Ethnicity, therefore, still does count as much as patronage does, and they mutually strengthen. Income, measured as GDP per capita, did also count – the UDA manifesto was considered pro-business and ODM pro-poor – and out of the 19 richest counties,¹⁸ only six voted for ODM/*Azimio*. Six of those 19 counties that voted for UDA are dominated by the Gikuyus. In this case, ethnicity and economic interest go together. The same fragmentation of votes in the Nairobi county has partially to do with the ethnic profile of the constituencies.

The relevance of the ethnic vote in the Kenyan case has therefore an impact on the resilience of coalitions. Coalitions are built around those who benefit from controlling power as opposed to those who do not benefit from it. In this sense, the incumbent coalition tends to be stronger than the coalitions that oppose it. The 2022 election results demonstrated the ability of the incumbent coalition built around the Kaleenjin-Gikuyu vote to

¹⁶ Differences in terms of income may count – Busia county is far richer than Vihiga (Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics) – if similar differences were not as important as in the Kaleenjin areas.

¹⁷ The two were granted respectively the post of Speaker of the NA and as Prime Cabinet Secretary (the third executive position), the latter created to reward Mudavadi. Wetangula was part of the *CORD* coalition centred around Odinga in 2013.

¹⁸ In 2022, the vote in the Luhya country rewarded Odinga with the exception of the Bungoma county. Bungoma is the home of Wetangula. Vihiga, the county of Mudavadi voted for Odinga, but the ODM candidates badly performed in the county. On the Odinga campaign in Luhya country see, *People Daily*, “ODM leader says Luhya nation to play critical role in his government”, 22th March 2022). On political rivalries in the same region, see *The Star*, “Elections to shutter or build political careers of top Luhya leaders”, 8th August 2022).

¹⁸ Kenya is divided into 47 counties. The 19 counties are those that overcame 3,000 USD GDP per capita (PPP) in 2017 (source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics).

survive Kenyatta's departure and the volatility of the power of the latter once out of the game because of the second-term limit. The following crisis of *Azimio*, given the age limit of Odinga, confirms how fragile is staying at the opposition.¹⁹ However, also the incumbent coalition could be made fragile in case of economy decline since the control of economic resources strengthens the will to stay together. Public debt almost doubled during the Kenyatta-Ruto tenure (from 36 to 69% of GDP) and because of the debt crisis that followed the new Ruto government is forced to cut public spending now,²⁰ as required by the IFIs (International Financial Institutions), before the end of this electoral cycle.

Nigeria 2023: The Weak Impact of Youth Vote and the Importance of Gubernatorial Bosses

Nigeria holds general elections every four years. In February 2023, electors were called to vote for the President of the Republic, the Senate, the House of Representatives (HoR), and for gubernatorial elections – Nigeria is a federal state made of 36 states – together with elections for the Houses of Assembly for all the 36 states. Here are discussed the results of the presidential election, the HoR, and the gubernatorial ones in order to understand trends (with respect to the previous elections) and whether differences between the three elections were of certain importance. Data are disaggregated according to the states. These are further regrouped into macro-regions. The 2023 results are compared with those of 2019 which have already been discussed in a previous paper (Battera 2020).²¹

¹⁹ The coalition was furtherly weakened as Ruto started to court ODM's Governors of the former Coast province (*Africa confidential*, "Six months after its defeat in national elections, the *Azimio* coalition hasn't agreed on strategy or a new leader", 10th January 2023). Jubilee MPs too have started a rapprochement to Ruto's coalition (*Africa Press*, "Sifuna lands deputy whip role in Senate as *Azimio* lash rebels", 15th February 2023).

²⁰ *Africa Confidential*, "Cutting public spending and reforming state companies, Ruto keeps \$2.34bn IMF deal on track", 14th November 2022.

²¹ Macro-regions have been created by the author by aggregating states according to their historical and cultural affinity and consistent with dominant electoral partisanship. Southeast states are those states which were part of the Eastern region in 1963 plus Delta (which at that time was part of the Mid-Western region). Southwest states are those that were part of the Western region plus Edo, Kwara and Kogi (the last two were part of the Northern region). Both Sharia states and Middle Belt in 1963 were part of the Northern region. The Southeast therefore roughly coincides with the Biafra area with a majority of the population of Igbo ethnicity. Most of the oil production concentrates here. The Southwest is dominated by the Yoruba ethnic group. Sharia states are dominated by the Hausa/Fulani and by Islam, while the Middle Belt regroups several smaller ethnic groups mostly non-muslims.

The APC (All Progressives Congress) was again able to win all the elections. Bola Tinubu was elected President with 36.6% of votes cast – a simple majority is needed when the candidate is able to win at least 25% of the vote in at least 24 states – and the party obtained 176 seats in the HoR (-26 compared to the 2019 elections), less than the majority needed (the HoR is composed of 360 MPs), but a government swore in in May 2023. State elections followed in March. This year electors were called to vote in 31 states. Of these 19 went to the APC, while 12 were secured by the PDP (People’s Democratic Party). At first look, these elections seem to confirm the trend towards a two-party system, at least if not were for the exploit at the presidential election of Peter Obi, which risked blowing up the equilibrium reached so far.

Peter Obi, a Biafran politician, who served as Governor of Anambra state (from 2006 to 2014), had a past both in the PDP, which dominated Nigeria politics up to 2015, and the opposition APGA (All Progressives Grand Alliance). He was in the APGA when he served as Governor. However, in the 2019 Presidential election, he ran as the running mate of Abubakar for the PDP, just to lose. In 2022, defected from the party to jump into the Labour (LP) by alleging to corruption and mismanagement of primaries in the PDP. The LP was in 2022 an uninfluential party with only one seat in the HoR, although it had strong connections with the unions.²² During the campaign for the 2022 elections, Obi, a sixty-year-old man, was able to present himself as the youngest challenger and the man of change gaining a wide support from young new urbanized voters via social media (the so-called “Obidient movement”). As the result of the election came out Obi (25.4%) and Abubakar (29.1%) did not recognise the results on accounts of alleged rigging, and filed formal petitions to the Nigerian Supreme Court (NSC).²³

Obi’s third position in the presidential election is not reflected in the numbers of LP in the HoR (only 35 MPs elected on the Labour ticket) in part thanks to the FPTP electoral system which magnifies those parties better anchored in the constituencies.

Table 5 resumes the regional anchorage of Nigerian parties.²⁴ Note that in the column related to the HoR, it was considered only the party with a majority of MPs in the state, with the exception of the performances of the LP, which was interesting to underline.

²² Affiliated with the NLC (Nigeria Labour Congress) were estimated to be around 4 million beginning of the 2000s (Erap, 2005).

²³ In May 2023, the NSC dismissed both lawsuits.

²⁴ MPs as resulted from data delivered by the INEC (Independent National Electoral Commission) on March 7.

Table 5 – Regional parties' anchorage in Nigeria according to 2019 and 2023 electoral results

STATE	PRESIDENTIAL		HoR		GUBERN.
	2019	2023	2019	2023	2023
(SHARIA STATES)					
SOKOTO	Buhari (APC)	Abubakar (PDP)	APC 9/11	APC 8/11	APC
KEBBI	Buhari (APC)	Abubakar (PDP)	APC 8/8	APC 3/8 PDP 3/8	APC
ZAMFARA	Buhari (APC)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 7/7	APC 4/7	PDP
NIGER	Buhari (APC)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 0/10	APC 7/10	APC
KATSINA	Buhari (APC)	Abubakar (PDP)	APC 5/15	APC 10/15	APC
KANO	Buhari (APC)	Kwankwaso (NNPP)	APC 4/24	NNPP 17/24	NNPP
KADUNA	Buhari (APC)	Abubakar (PDP)	APC 13/16	PDP 10/16 LP 2/16	APC
JIGAWA	Buhari (APC)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 11/11	APC 7/11	APC
YOBE	Buhari (APC)	Abubakar (PDP)	APC 6/6	APC 4/6	APC
BAUCHI	Buhari (APC)	Abubakar (PDP)	APC 9/12	PDP 7/12	PDP
GOMBE	Buhari (APC)	Abubakar (PDP)	APC 6/6	PDP 5/12	APC
BORNO	Buhari (APC)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 10/10	APC 9/10	APC
(MIDDLE BELT)					
FCT	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	PDP 2/2	LP 1/2 APC 1/2	
PLATEAU	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	PDP 4/8 APC 4/8	PDP 5/8	PDP
NASSARAWA	Buhari (APC)	Obi (LP)	APC 3/5	APC 3/5	APC

BENUUE	Abubakar (PDP)	Tinubu (APC)	PDP 6/11	APC 10/11	APC
TARABA	Abubakar (PDP)	Abubakar (PDP)	PDP 3/6	PDP 3/6	APC
ADAMAWA	Abubakar (PDP)	Abubakar (PDP)	PDP 4/8 APC 4/8	PDP 7/8	PDP
(SOUTHWEST)					
KWARA	Buhari (APC)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 6/6	APC 6/6	APC
KOGI	Buhari (APC)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 8/9	APC 5/9	
OYO	Abubakar (PDP)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 9/14	APC 8/14	PDP
OSUN	Buhari (APC)	Abubakar (PDP)	APC 6/9	PDP 9/9	
EKITI	Buhari (APC)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 6/6	APC 6/6	
OGUN	Buhari (APC)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 6/9	APC 9/9	APC
LAGOS	Buhari (APC)	Obi (LP)	APC 21/24	APC 18/24 LP 5/24	APC
ONDO	Abubakar (PDP)	Tinubu (APC)	APC 4/9	APC 8/9	
EDO	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	APC 5/9	APC 6/9 LP 2/9	
(SOUTHEAST)					
DELTA	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	PDP 9/10	PDP 7/10 LP 2/10	PDP
ANAMBRA	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	PDP 6/11	LP 5/10 APGA 5/10	
ENUGU	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	PDP 8/8	LP 7/8	PDP
EBONYI	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	PDP 6/6	APC 3/6 LP 1/6	APC

IMO	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	PDP 6/10	APC 5/10 LP 2/10	
ABIA	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	PDP 5/8	LP 6/8	LP
CROSS RIVER	Abubakar (PDP)	Obi (LP)	PDP 7/8	APC 5/8 LP 1/8	APC
BAYELSA	Abubakar (PDP)	Abubakar (PDP)	PDP 3/5	PDP 4/5	
RIVERS	Abubakar (PDP)	Tinubu (APC)	PDP 13/13	PDP 9/13 LP 1/13	PDP
AKWA IBOM	Abubakar (PDP)	Abubakar (PDP)	PDP 10/10	PDP 7/10	PDP

Looking at the table, at a first glance the regional profile of the three main candidates confirms their regional (and ethnic) anchorage. Tinubu, a man of the Southwest won in six over nine states; Abubakar a man of the Middle Belt with however an ethnic and religious profile in line with most of the Sharia states won seven states of this group out of 12; Obi a Southeasterner won seven out of 10 Southeast states plus three out of six Middle Belt states (Middle Belt vote is generally in accordance with that of the Southeast). However, is not that simple. First, there is not always congruence between the vote for the Presidency and that for the MPs in the states. In two cases – Yobe and Rivers – the PDP presidential candidate won albeit most of the elected MPs in the state went to the APC and vice versa. Second, the LP underperformed in the elections for the HoR. Obi came first in 12 states, but his party came first only in Enugu and Abia (in other two, the FCT and Anambra shared the victory with other parties).

The APC or the PDP generally won the majority of the MPs in the states won by Obi, even in Igbo-dominated states such as Ebonyi and Imo. Reasons for this dyscrasias must be found in the weaker local anchorage of the LP. It must not be excluded that gubernatorial elections, when held, drove votes for the HoR much more than presidential elections, given the important powers transferred to the states (see the last column of the table).²⁵

²⁵ Gubernatorial elections were held the 18 March in 28 states, three weeks after the presidential elections. The PDP won in nine, the APC in 17 and both the NNPP and the LP won 1. In three “Igbo states” – Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo – incumbent governors supported presidential candidates other than Obi. In all these states the LP was unable to win the majority of elected MPs even if Obi was able to win over the majority of electors’ confidence. In these three states only in Ebonyi gubernatorial election was held. The APC retained the state and the former governor, Dave Umahi was awarded with the Ministry of Works.

However, differences can be observed also between the vote for the presidential, the HoR and the gubernatorial elections as far as the two major parties, the PDP and the APC, are concerned. For example, Bola Tinubu, who is from the Southwest and is a Muslim, won only in four out of a total of 12 states in the Sharia states region in the presidential election. The presidential election in the Sharia states rather rewarded Abubakar, who is also Muslim from Adamawa, which is a state that has been included in the Middle Belt with an important Muslim vote but not a state that adopted sharia. Bola Tinubu better performed in the Southwest where he won in six out of nine states. As far as the vote for the HoR is concerned, in the Sharia states, the APC, the party of Tinubu outperformed the PDP and the same happened in the gubernatorial elections (the APC won nine against two of the PDP). Curiously, in Zamfara, the PDP won the gubernatorial elections, while in this state Tinubu won the presidential election as his party – the APC – won the majority of MPs.²⁶ But this could be an exception to a general rule, according to which HoR elections are generally more consistent with the presidential ones, unless the party has poor grassroots, or, in the alternative, elections both for the president and the HoR are driven by Governors when their seats are not under elections. If we look indeed to results in those states that did not held elections for the gubernatorial seats, we find the importance of controlling the gubernatorial seat for the electoral result, especially for electing the MPs (see the table below).

Table 6 – 2023 electoral results (presidential and HoR elections) in states where the gubernatorial seat was already controlled*

	Presidential	HoR	Governor
KOGI	APC	APC 5/9	APC
OSUN	PDP	PDP 9/9	PDP
EKITI	APC	APC 6/6	APC
ONDO	APC	APC 8/9	APC
EDO	LP	APC 6/9; LP 2/9	PDP
ANAMBRA	LP	LP 5/10; APGA 5/10	APGA
IMO	LP	APC 5/10; LP 2/10	APC
BAYELSA	PDP	PDP 4/5	PDP

*FCT excluded (ruled by a Minister of the National govt.).

²⁶ Zamfara returned to PDP, which had been lost by this party in 1999. The elected governor, Dauda Lawal, had lost the APC primary in 2018.

This last rule may explain the poor performances of the LP in the HoR and difficulties in winning over gubernatorial seats, both, in particular the latter, associated with patronage potentials. The attention of some electors – urban, young and southeasterners – was driven by the Obi profile but less by his mates who ran for the HoR or as governors, given the poor record of the LP as a party in government. Feelings of exclusion may have also had an important effect on the southeastern vote. The last southeaster president, Goodluck Jonathan ended his term in office in 2015, in team with a northerner – Namadi Sambo. During that time, Jonathan was able to rally the southeaster vote together with that of Southwest and the Middle Belt. However, since Buhari's first term in office (2015-2019), Southeast has been profoundly neglected in terms of crucial positions within the government.²⁷

In a previous paper (Battera 2020), it was argued that the Nigerian party system could be likely to evolve into a two-party system as in Ghana and Zambia. This figure must be nuanced, but not completely. If it is true that other parties appear as locally important – the NNPP performance in Kano, the APGA in Anambra and the LP in Enugu and Abia must be noted – nationally, the party system remains solidly divided into two. The NNPP, APGA and LP could in perspective exploit the eventual crisis of the two main parties, as it happened in Zambia with the UPND but not yet. In the Nigerian case, the programs of the two main parties indeed resemble each other (Omilusi 2020), being both mild forms of conservatism, and the key to success is a skilful combination of the regional profile of candidates and patronage generously lavished locally. Floor-crossing is frequent and both parties are marred by inner factionalism (Omodia 2010; Kura 2011; Ekundayo 2016). This excludes chances of change for outsiders with a weaker patronage profile. The result has been rather a decline of the VTO nationally. This ranged from a minimum in Bayelsa (16.4%) in the South to 40.8% in Jigawa in the North. Lagos, the most urbanized state and one which brought more votes to Obi, scored a poor 18.9% of votes cast.²⁸

These data demonstrate the difficulty of moving out from an ethnic block voting pattern in the Nigerian case (Isiaq *et al.*, 2018), notwithstanding the novelty which surrounded the vote for Obi, who however drove also ethnic resentment. This happened despite the major expectations that surrounded the 2023 Nigerian elections.

²⁷ However, development data (HDI) of 2021 are still more favourable for the entire south compared to the Sharia states. With the exception of Lagos, which is the richest state in Nigeria (0.681 HDI), Ogun (Southwest) ranks second (0.671), Anambra (Southeast) third (0.662), Kebbi (Sharia states) the last (0.335) (source: Subnational HDI; https://globaldatalab.org/shdi/shdi/?interpolation=0&extrapolation=0&nearest_real=0).

²⁸ Together with Anambra, it was the state where Obi obtained more than half million votes.

In particular, the poor state of the economy,²⁹ which worried the electors, the novelty of Obi's candidature with a minor party but supported by the unions, and the impact of his profile on a movement led by young and urbanized people had seemed to make possible some major innovation in the Nigerian vote which did not realize, despite the favourable polling by some institutes.³⁰ Politics as usual prevailed. A lower turnout in urban realms demonstrates that electors of urban areas less mobilized by patronage stayed out from the polling station while a major turnout was recorded in rural areas like Jigawa, Plateau and Adamawa.³¹

Beyond the Ethnic Vote? The Promising Case of Consolidation in Zambia

Moving away from ethnic/regional allegiances is not easy for voters even when disillusionment grows, and policies fail to deliver what politicians pledged to their electors. As Chandra (2007: 90) argues, as far as these democracies are founded on patronage – “patronage democracies are those where elected officials enjoy significant discretion in allocating the jobs and services controlled by the state” –, the vote remains instrumental and founded on the expectations to get access to resources provided by kin.

However, differences among the cases analysed must also be underlined. While the Nigerian and Kenyan cases seem to match the ethnic vote pattern, the Zambian case does not fit very well. This does not mean that electors, especially those in rural areas, are not mobilized along ethnic lines, but that vote is less predictable, shifting with an uncommon frequency for African standards. This trend makes the institutionalization of the democratic process more likely in Zambia than in the other two cases, which, on the contrary, are more likely to suffer from electoral violence. What has been called by Sishuwa (2023) the “failure of incumbent advantage” makes alternation in Zambia more likely and democratization more robust. There is a sort of historical continuity which makes this output more challenging in the other two cases and gives an advantage to Zambian democracy with respect to the other two cases. Both Nigeria

²⁹ *Africa confidential*, “Grim outlook for the new president”, 15th December 2022

³⁰ Last but not least that of Redfield & Wilton Strategies of February 16 (<https://redfieldandwiltonstrategies.com/peter-obi-leads-decisively-in-nigeria-polling/>). The SBM Intelligence report was more equilibrated but still predicted a better result for Obi (https://www.sbmintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/202302_EiE-SBM-Election-2023-Survey-Abridged-Report_v2.pdf). SBM Intelligence polled together with Enough is Enough which is a civil organization which advocates for the youth vote and registration.

³¹ Osun state made an exception (38.7% of turnout) as it is largely urbanized. Osun rewarded Abubakar and the PDP. The Governor, Ademola Adeleke is from the PDP.

and Kenya have records of electoral and ethnic violence which has no equivalent in Zambian history and date back to independence in one case and accompanied recent electoral history in the other. The same transition to democracy was less dramatic in the Zambian case than in the other two and Kaunda's legacies are less controversial than that of Arap Moi.³²

What was therefore the impact of the last elections in Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia on the processes of democratic consolidation?

According to Lindberg (2006: 34), regular free and fair elections strengthen democratization. Political participation (VTO) is one required quality (Lindberg 2006: 37), the others being "competition" and "legitimacy". According to the same author, "turnover of power" (i.e. FGC) could be considered as an indicator of the degree of competition. We can assume that sufficient levels of VTO may be also considered as an indicator of legitimacy and that in these cases elections have been generally held regularly (with some delays in the case of Kenya) and have ensured an adequate level of freedom and fairness (generally less about the fairness).³³

Table 7 gives an idea of electoral participation since the return to multiparty politics. One preliminary consideration must be done when dealing with VTO in Africa. Decline of VTO between one election to the following is sometimes due to the poor records of voter registration. For example, voter registration in Zambia recorded an unrealistic decline of about 650,000 voters between 1991 and 1996 – 1996 elections were internationally judged as particularly unfair – in a country characterized by high rates of demographic growth. Between 2006 and 2016, more efficient registration recorded increments of more than a million voters every five years. Problems arose again before the 2021 elections (which registered an increment of only 320,000 voters), but this did not impede the opposition to win.³⁴ However, the table records data for about two and three decades. Enough to make important observations.

³² *Voa News*, "Kenyans Remember Mixed Legacy of Moi", 4th February 2020 and *New African Magazine*, "Kenneth Kaunda: A legacy divided in two", 2nd July 2021.

³³ Two presidential elections in Kenya recorded serious flaws: that of December 2007 and August 2017. However, results of concurrent parliamentary elections were judged regular by international observers.

³⁴ Less serious flaws occurred in Kenya, while Nigeria experienced flaws similar to that of Zambia (a decline of about five million voters between 2011 and 2015 in the face of more than 10 million new voters entering the record every four years since 2015).

Table 7 – Trends (%) in Voter Turnout (VTO in General elections) in the selected countries (since the return to multiparty politics)

	I election	II election	III election	IV election	V election	VI election	VII election	mean
Nigeria	52 (1999)	69 (2003)	57 (2007)	54 (2011)	44 (2015)	36 (2019)	27 (2023)	48
Kenya	69 (1992)	68 (1997)	57 (2002)	69 (2007)	86 (2013)	80 (2017) ¹	65 (2022)	71
Zambia	45 (1991)	58 (1996)	68 (2001)	71 (2006)	54 (2011)	56 (2016)	71 (2021)	60

¹ August 2017 Presidential election was annulled and postponed to October, but the results of the Parliamentary elections were judged regular. The data refers to the latter.

If we consider the sequence, Nigeria records a serious decline which date back to 2015. The democratic process appears exhausted although the important government change that occurred in the 2015 elections (see tab. 8 below). This decline questions seriously the sustainability and the legitimacy of democracy in Nigeria (Fasakin 2023). Such “disillusionment” has nothing to do with that expected for mature democracies (Huntington 1991: 265), since higher VTO levels are important for keeping on the democratic track poor responsive democratic regimes as those of Africa. Differently from Nigeria, Kenya still maintains a good level of VTO, despite the important decline registered during the last elections. This means that ethnicity remains an important tool of mobilization. Elections are a highly competitive field where expectations from electors remain high.³⁵

Table 8 finally resumes the impact of elections on government changes (FGC).

Table 8 – FGC (Frequency of Government Change) (since the return to multiparty politics)

	I election	II election	III election	IV election	V election	VI election	VII election	FGC
Nigeria	YES (1999)	NO (2003)	NO (2007)	NO (2011)	YES (2015)	NO (2019)	NO (2023)	2
Kenya	NO (1992)	NO (1997)	YES (2002)	NO (2007)	YES (2013)	NO (2017)	NO (2022)	2
Zambia	YES (1991)	NO (1996)	NO (2001)	NO (2006)	YES (2011)	NO (2016)	YES (2021)	3

³⁵ The highest VTO nationally were recorded in counties dominated by Luos (Odinga) and Kaleenjins (Ruto), well above 70% in the former counties and above 75% in the latter. In Luo-dominated counties Odinga obtained an average score above 90% (the top score was recorded in Homa Bay [98.4%]); in Kaleenjins-dominated counties, Ruto scored between 62.8% in West Pokot up to 96.1% in Elgeyo-Marakwet. In an ethnically mixed county such as Mombasa, VTO was the lowest (43.9%).

Evaluating the FGC is complicated by the incidence of change of the names of the parties and the shorter sequence of Nigeria in terms of years. Changing the name of the parties occurred rather frequently in the case of Kenya. For this reason, the 2022 elections have not been considered a real change. William Ruto had been the incumbent vice-President in 2022 and the coalition which supported him was more or less the same as that which had supported Uhuru Kenyatta since 2013, with the notable exception of Kenyatta himself who this time had decided to support his arch-rival Raila Odinga.

FGC is clearer in the Zambia case. Both the three major changes, in 1991, 2011 and 2021, led to governments which clearly broke with the previous. The constituencies which supported the government change were not the same. Less perhaps in Nigeria. The 2015 elections indeed brought Buhari into power, a longstanding rival of the PDP (Peoples Democratic Party), which had dominated Nigeria since 1999, but his party, the APC (All Progressives Congress) was full of ex-PDP bosses who had jumped onto his bandwagon. Differences between the three cases are therefore again important. Not only Zambia has a better FGC compared to the other two, but the FGC of Nigeria could be further reviewed if we consider that the 1999 change was also a regime change between a military government and a civilian elected government.

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