

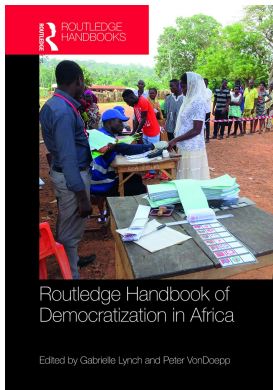
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OPPOSITION COALITIONS

Nicole Beardsworth

African opposition parties are at a significant disadvantage to incumbents, with the result that between 1989 and 2010, just twelve countries had experienced an electoral turnover from an incumbent president (Cheeseman 2010, 1). This number has increased quite dramatically since then. One factor that has been crucial to many—if not most—of these electoral victories is that opposition forces within the country united behind a single leader within an electoral coalition, enabling the opposition to gain the votes needed to overcome the incumbent’s advantages (Rakner and van de Walle 2009). In this way, the candidate of a coalition known colloquially as the “Sopi” or “Change” coalition won the 2000 Senegalese presidential elections, overthrowing Abdou Diouf and forty years of one-party dominance. That candidate, Abdoulaye Wade, was subsequently beaten by another coalition led by Macky Sall in a second-round election in 2012. However, the coalition that really drove scholarly interest in alliances was that formed in Kenya in 2002 when, after two multiparty elections in 1992 and 1997 in which the incumbent had won with 37 and 40 percent of the vote respectively, the previously divided opposition formed a mega-coalition, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), which went on to win a landslide victory. Since then, coalitions have changed governments in Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Senegal, and most recently in Nigeria, Liberia, The Gambia, and Sierra Leone.

Given this success, it is perhaps unsurprising that pre-electoral coalitions¹ are an increasingly popular tactic used by opposition parties across both democratic and hybrid regimes. In 2015, an opposition coalition caused the first democratic turnover in Nigerian history, while a coalition in Tanzania the same year came closer than ever to overturning the hegemony of *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM), in power since independence in 1962. Between 2012 and 2018, of forty-six legislative elections² that were held in Africa, twenty-three (50 percent) were contested by an opposition coalition. Of those, six countries experienced an electoral turnover, or a change in the majority party represented in parliament.³ Of the forty-seven presidential elections held,⁴ seventeen countries (or 36 percent) saw the opposition coalesce, of which four countries then experienced an electoral turnover where the incumbent party lost to the unified opposition. These countries were Liberia (2017), The Gambia (2016), Comoros (2015), and Nigeria (2015). The coalitions in The Gambia and Nigeria both successfully (and surprisingly) ousted the entrenched incumbent president. There were also several more instances where a second-round runoff between the opposition and the incumbent prompted a coalition of opposition forces

to support the most successful opposition candidate—who ultimately won. Between 2012 and 2018, this occurred in Senegal (2012), Benin (2016), and Sierra Leone (2018).

The growing prevalence of opposition coalitions has prompted the rapid growth of academic interest in party coalitions in Africa. As far back as 1997, Bratton and van de Walle identified the importance of opposition coordination as a precursor to democratization by elections (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997). But, as already noted, it was NARC's defeat of the nearly forty-year incumbency of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) in Kenya in 2002 that captured the imagination of political elites and scholars concerned with coalitions, regime transitions, and democratization. A few years later, findings by Howard and Roessler (2006) suggested that opposition coordination ahead of an election is one of the most important predictors for electoral turnover in competitive authoritarian regimes—with successful turnover long linked to democratization (Huntington 1993; Przeworski et al. 2000).

As a result, research on opposition coalitions has proliferated, with several key studies dominating the field. This literature has focused on three key questions. (1) Why do parties go into coalitions? (2) What leads to the success of opposition coalitions? And (3) What is the impact of these coalitions—or of electoral turnover by coalition—for democratization? This chapter will outline the key arguments that have been put forward in response to each question and highlight the points of disjuncture, as well as points of agreement, before suggesting future avenues for research.

Why coalesce?

Opposition parties in Africa face significant challenges when competing against entrenched ruling parties. Benefits that can and often do accrue to incumbents, such as the use of state resources, patronage, and coercion, place ruling parties at an enormous advantage that is particularly difficult for opposition parties to overcome (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Rakner and van de Walle 2009; Schedler 2002; van de Walle 2006). When the opposition then expends their energy, resources, and political capital bickering between themselves and competing against each other for elected positions, their capacity to win parliamentary and national elections is further eroded. To overcome these challenges, it is argued, opposition parties must coalesce, usually in the form of pre-electoral coalitions (Howard and Roessler 2006). These are agreements reached between opposition parties ahead of an election, where they publicly declare to coordinate their campaigns and electoral strategies. The intention is either to front a joint presidential candidate and/or to run joint parliamentary candidates so that they do not split the vote at presidential or parliamentary level, which would otherwise enable the ruling party to win the election with a plurality of the vote (Gandhi and Reuter 2013, 138). This is done with the expectation of sharing out the benefits that would accrue to the coalition in the event of victory at the polls (Golder 2006a, 40). Pre-electoral coalitions enable parties to pool scarce resources and prevent unnecessary competition; cooperation facilitates the sharing of information and allows greater coordination with regards to mobilization efforts, party agent deployment, and vote protection mechanisms. Coalition formation often also allows opposition parties to access funding that may not otherwise be available—for example, in Zambia in 2009, frustrated opposition funders demanded the formation of a coalition between the two largest opposition parties to maximize the returns on their investment (former Zambian Vice-President Guy Leslie Scott, interview with the author, February 25, 2015).

Although it is rarely mentioned in the literature, opposition coalitions can also have an important demonstrative effect. Coalitions are frequently studied through an analysis of electoral mathematics—the proportion of the vote received by each coalition partner in the previous

election is added together to calculate the likely vote-share of the coalition. But beyond basic electoral math, it is important to remember that coalitions also serve as a signaling device to voters. Multiple rounds of Afrobarometer surveys have found that for various reasons, opposition parties are the least trusted actors across a variety of political institutions in Africa including presidents, ruling parties, and militaries, among others. Indeed, across eighteen African countries, 57 percent of survey respondents in 2005–06 reported that they did not trust opposition parties (Logan 2008, 11). Logan suggests that this is a result of a cultural preference for consensus rather than contentious politics, but another explanation is that distrust results from the opposition's antagonistic style of engagement and the popular belief that politicians place their own interests and careers ahead of the public good. Bratton and Logan's (2015, 5) research supports this idea—71 percent of Afrobarometer respondents reported that they believe that opposition “leaders are more interested in advancing their own political ambitions than in serving the interests of people.” In such contexts, multiparty coalitions can act as an important signaling mechanism, regenerating faith in the opposition at election time, increasing the perceived competitiveness of the election, and potentially increasing turnout. As noted by a Zimbabwean opposition leader, when you create a coalition “you re-energize the people, you get them to believe once again that [the incumbent] can be defeated and when they believe that [they] will lose, you are able to mobilize many more people to vote and it will take much more arithmetic manipulation for [the ruling party] to win” (Welshman Ncube, interview with the author, April 15, 2015). What coalitions signal to voters is that opposition leaders are displaying political maturity by foregoing their own personal ambitions and overcoming internecine squabbles to coalesce for the “good of the country” (Beardsworth 2016, 750).

Coalitions literature in established democracies

Since the 1950s, comparative and European political science considered the study of coalition-building as a key component of the broader political party literature. Riker (1962) produced one of the first studies on coalitions and hypothesized that parties, as office-seekers, try to maximize the value from being in government by maximizing their size within a given governing coalition. His “minimal winning coalition” theory suggests that parties always try to build a coalition with the smallest possible majority in parliament, to minimize the number of “extra” players between whom benefits should be shared (Riker 1962). Subsequently, two schools of thought emerged: the first revolved around Riker's “size” principle, and the second around a “policy-seeking” theoretical approach. This second school was most clearly articulated by de Swaan (1973), who argued that coalitions were most likely to form between parties with the most similar ideological inclinations. Similarly, Leiserson (1966) theorized the minimal range theory, which predicts that (parliamentary) coalitions are most likely to be formed between parties with the smallest ideological range. The assumption behind these analyses is that parties who enter into opportunistic coalitions with parties on opposite sides of the political spectrum would be punished by voters for betraying their core values.

However, this theory proved inadequate to explain the majority of coalition formations in sub-Saharan Africa. As noted by Wahman (2011), the problem with these early theories of coalition-building is that they were overly simplistic, their predictive power was weak, and they were unable to explain oversized coalitions—such as those most often formed in Africa. Moreover, while previous research had largely focused on government coalition-building (the creation of governing coalitions within legislatures), coalitions in Africa tend to be formed ahead of elections, rather than after them. These coalitions have often also been “oversized”—involving a proliferation of parties and political groups—rather than the “minimal winning

coalition” as predicted by Riker (1962). Equally, few coalitions in Africa are formed based on ideological distance. As noted by Manning (2005), the role of ideology in party formation and electoral competition tends to be weak, not least because of structural adjustment policies and the nature of the global economy, which leaves limited options available to African policymakers (Manning 2005, 715–16). Bleck and van de Walle (2013) argue that rather than professing a strict ideological commitment, which is likely to garner less traction, African parties are most likely to couch their electioneering in terms of valence issues—broad issues with which it is hard to disagree, such as “development” and “change” (Bleck and van de Walle 2013). Together, these issues make it difficult to apply the existing theories of coalition-building in established democracies to the countries of democratizing Africa.

An exception is the study by Golder (2006b) on pre-electoral coalitions in Europe. This study begins with the simple but crucial observation that “pre-electoral coalitions arise from a bargaining process in which party leaders compare the expected utility from running independently to the expected utility from forming a coalition” (Golder 2006b, 198). This suggests that coalitions are the result of a dynamic decision-making process in which political actors—in contexts of incomplete information and information asymmetries—attempt to weigh up the costs and benefits of cooperation. This emphasis on the decision-making process among political elites who consider various strategies to determine the utility of coalition-building relative to the expected utility of running independently is a useful shift in focus from static and structural explanations.

Coalitions literature in Africa

The growing literature on coalitions in Africa is relatively new, emerging as it did in the mid-1990s on the back of the third wave of democratization and spurred by instances of transition-by-coalition in Senegal in 2000 and Kenya in 2002. Only one book edited by Denis Kadima (2006) on qualitative comparative coalition studies currently exists, and it compares a range of diverse electoral alliances including cases in South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique, Kenya, and Mauritius. The wide range of case studies provided a wealth of contextual information, and the book was an important early contribution to defining the emerging borders of African coalition studies. It explored the factors that drive coalition formation, their ethnic underpinnings, their contribution to national cohesion and the stability of party systems. While this book was an important first contribution to the field, it covered a broad range of coordination-type behaviors among both ruling and opposition parties. Because of its breadth, this edited volume is unable to reach any firm theoretical conclusions regarding the specificities of opposition pre-electoral coalitions; thus, it is useful more for the data it presents for country-specialists rather than theorists. Since the publication of this book of case studies, a burgeoning literature has emerged that studies coalitions using quantitative dataset-driven analyses of coalitional behavior.

The most ambitious of these studies is Leonardo Arriola’s (2013) book on multiethnic opposition coalitions in Africa. Arriola begins from the premise of a collective action problem: opposition parties in Africa face many barriers to effective electoral competition and would thus benefit greatly from cooperation. However, they rarely coordinate successfully. He seeks to understand why successful opposition cooperation remains so elusive, and his answer is that ethnic cleavages and credibility gaps present formidable barriers to trust between opposition parties. Credibility gaps arise from the uncertainty over whether the coalition will be able to win the election, and whether—if they are successful—the winning opposition candidate will keep their promises to their coalition partners to distribute positions and resources. Arriola argues that parties can overcome these trust deficits through offering financial incentives to other party leaders—“pecuniary coalition-building”—when private business is sufficiently

free from political interference and fear of political reprisals to be able to fund opposition coalitions. More specifically, Arriola argues that in countries that have undergone a process of economic liberalization, which has sufficiently delinked the state from control over access to credit, incumbents lose the capacity to command the political allegiance of business (Arriola 2013, 19). This business class is thus able to access credit, free of political constraints, and use it to fund the opposition's pecuniary coalition-building strategy without the fear of financial reprisals from the ruling party. This provision of financial incentives ahead of the election, Arriola argues, mitigates the distrust between parties that the coalition candidate may not keep his promises regarding the distribution of spoils following a successful campaign. For Arriola, it is this factor that explains why coalitions cohere in some cases but collapse in others. In turn, a key contribution of Arriola's work is that it highlights the importance of party finance to the study of coalitions, which had previously not been theorized in any significant depth.

Arriola's book is an important contribution to advancing the field, but it also leaves several questions unanswered. Despite the central role accorded to ethnicity in the book, Arriola fails to explain how ethnic groups are conceptualized, and assumes that the political salience of ethnicity—and its role as a hindrance to cooperation—is uniform across the continent. He also appears to suggest that opposition leaders are equally able to deliver the votes of their co-ethnics in stackable voting blocs that can be used to manufacture popular majorities (Wahman 2016, 5), a proposition that often does not hold as clearly outside Arriola's two cases of Cameroon and Kenya as assumed—and sometimes not even within them (Brass and Cheeseman 2013). As noted by Bogaards, Arriola's analysis, while ambitious in its complexity, offers a mono-causal explanation for coalition formation (Bogaards 2014, 28). It is also unable to explain within-case variation in outcomes, or why coalitions fail to form in later elections following the liberalization of the banking sector and the incumbent's loss of control over the allegiance of business. Perhaps most importantly, Arriola's book does not take parties seriously as multi-actor institutions constituted as an alliance of interests—frequently organized into factions—who jostle to achieve the supremacy of their interests over others.

Several other studies have also been published on opposition coalitions, but despite the proliferation of quantitative research on the topic, there is relatively little consensus on the drivers of coalition formation and barriers to their successful consolidation. In part, this is a result of differences in the population of cases being measured. Some authors confine their cases only to opposition coalitions in democratic, or semi-authoritarian regimes, while others include ruling party coalitions and power-sharing governments within a broader group of coalition-type phenomena. Given the substantial differences between regime types and coalition types, these studies reach very different conclusions regarding what drives coalition formation. Even when authors are studying the same phenomenon among the same population of cases—as with Resnick and Arriola—their coding of various coalitions differs so substantially as to significantly alter the conclusions that they come to. This means that many of the conclusions in the literature are contradictory. Where Resnick (2014) finds that coalition formation has significantly increased post-2000, Arriola finds that “there is no significant increase or decrease in the incidence of opposition electoral coordination over time” (2013, 212). Arriola thus suggests that opposition parties fail to learn from unsuccessful coalitional efforts, a conclusion that contradicts the findings of Gandhi and Reuter (2013). Several other questions animate the field of coalition studies, such as the role that electoral system design and ethnicity play in encouraging or hindering coalition formation. This will be dealt with in the following two short sections.

Electoral systems

There are several key unresolved questions that exist in the coalitions literature. The first concerns the influence of electoral system design in promoting cooperative behavior. Manning (2005) argues that the predominance of presidential systems in Africa discourages the formation of coalitions, due to the indivisibility of the position. However, as noted above, opposition coalitions are frequently formed in presidential systems. When one looks within this general category, electoral rules can have a significant bearing on the likelihood of coalitions, but there is little consensus around which electoral systems are most effective at encouraging cooperative behavior. Thus, while Kadima (2006) and Cox (1997) argue that a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system promotes the coordination of opposition efforts,⁵ Resnick (2014) and Rakner and van de Walle (2009) find that a two-round runoff system that requires winners to receive more than 50 percent of the vote is more conducive to coalition formation. The latter conclusion is likely due to the increased incidence of post-electoral coordination following a first-round election, where the losers from the first round coalesce to support the largest opposition party, as in Senegal in 2000 and 2012. The logic advanced for Rakner and van de Walle's position is that opposition candidates prefer not to create pre-electoral coalitions in the first round, but to use it instead to gauge their political support, and then use the results to bargain for a better deal with their candidate of choice in the second round (van de Walle 2006, 89). By contrast, Gandhi and Reuter (2013) and Arriola (2013) find that electoral systems have no statistically significant effect on the incidence of coalitions.

A possible reason for this lack of consensus is that the effect of electoral institutions varies depending on political context. More specifically, opposition leaders' choices are frequently mediated by their trust in the fairness of the first-round election, and the perceived likelihood of pushing the incumbent below the electoral threshold. For example, in Zambia in 2016 a constitutional amendment changed the presidential election's plurality system to a two-round electoral system, but the opposition still sought to build a pre-electoral coalition due to the need to win decisively in the first round. A lack of trust in the electoral system led party leaders to believe that if they won with a slim margin and/or with less than 50 percent of the vote, a second-round election would be manipulated or a narrow opposition victory would be massaged into an incumbent win (Zambian Movement for Multi-Party Democracy MP Felix Mutati, interview with the author, February 9, 2015). The perceived risk of a manipulated second-round election is high when parties do not believe that the electoral commission is independent or that state institutions will allow fair contestation. In Zimbabwe in 2008, the opposition failed to coordinate their efforts and argued that they were collectively strong enough to bring the ruling ZANU-PF under the 50 percent threshold. After a hard-fought campaign, the electoral commission eventually announced that a second-round runoff was necessary to decide a winner and a campaign of state-sponsored violence was unleashed on the opposition in which more than 200 people were killed (Alexander and Tendi, 2008). Ultimately, the opposition withdrew from the runoff and the ruling party won a pyrrhic victory. Zimbabwe's experience of the 2008 two-round election serves as a stark reminder of what can happen if opposition parties are unable to win decisively in the first round. This raises the stakes for the first round as parties who do not trust in the independence of the electoral commission would prefer to win decisively in a first-round election with an "oversized coalition" rather than risking it all on a second round. Opposition parties are aware that ruling parties also prefer to win decisively in the first round, as it helps to shore up their legitimacy, and a second round raises the risk of incumbent defeat as it raises hopes and turnout among anti-incumbent voters.

Although Resnick (2014) and Rakner and van de Walle (2009) suggest that two-round runoff systems are most conducive to coalition formation in the second round, this does not preclude the formation of coalitions in the first round. Despite the existence of a two-round presidential system in Senegal—through which a second-round opposition coalition had defeated the incumbent in 2000—opposition parties in 2012 still sought to create a pre-electoral coalition to defeat incumbent President Abdoulaye Wade (Resnick 2013a). When this pre-election coalition collapsed, opposition parties formed a coalition in the second round around the top opposition contender, Macky Sall, who went on to defeat Wade. This illustrates that two-round systems do not necessarily preclude the formation of pre-electoral coalitions, as the second round provides a second opportunity to coalesce if the opposition is collectively strong enough to pull the incumbent under the 50 percent threshold. Second-round coalitions come at a lower cost and carry less risk than pre-electoral coalitions. First-round coalitions require higher levels of trust, coordination, cooperation, and sacrifice, and they carry higher costs in terms of party profile, branding, and internal unity. The opportunity cost of a second-round coalition is much lower, as the “ranking” of opposition contenders has been firmly established by the results of the first round, and therefore there is less uncertainty in bargaining. The negotiations are also less complicated, as parliamentary and local government races are normally concluded in the first round, making the convoluted process of choosing joint parliamentary candidates redundant. Parties are thus much more willing to “bandwagon” after the first-round has been concluded, as the payoffs are substantial but come at a vastly reduced cost.

Ethnicity

Another key question concerns the role of ethnicity in driving or hindering coalition formation. A common assumption in the literature—typified by Arriola (2013)—is that ethnic fragmentation makes coalition formation unlikely, as inter-ethnic rivalry and competition for limited resources promotes ethnic outbidding. Such analyses operate from the assumption that ethnic fragmentation (and thus a lack of trust between different ethnic groups and the parties that represent them) is the most significant barrier to coalition formation. However, Gandhi and Reuter (2013) find that ethnic fragmentation has no significant effect on coalition formation in their study of coalitions in semi-authoritarian regimes globally. Wahman (2016) builds on this conclusion, offering the insight that ethnicity has been overdetermined as a driver of voting (and thus coalitional) behavior in Africa, and that a more contextualized turn away from ethnic overdetermination is needed in order to understand the complexities inherent in the relationship between parties and their constituencies, and how that feeds into coalition formation.

In fact, recent research suggests that “ethnic” parties are less common than is generally accepted (see Stroh, this volume). Parties rarely seek to mobilize only a single ethnic community, and few ethno-regional groups vote solely and reliably for co-ethnic leaders (Elischer 2013). Thus, the importance of “ethnic” parties appears to have been overstated. The predominance of multiethnic parties also complicates coalition bargaining because as parties seek to mobilize adherents among several groups, it brings them into direct competition with each other for voters. In such contexts, coalitions carry costs for parties in terms of their potential to undermine the profile, structures, membership, and vote base of smaller political parties. When ethnic groups cannot be counted on to bloc vote for co-ethnics, it introduces greater uncertainty in coalition negotiations. This complicates the negotiations process, as it portends greater uncertainty over electoral outcomes than in places such as Kenya, where parties tend to draw the majority of their support from particular ethnic groups, and where ethnic bloc-voting (and

thus ethnically determined coalition-building) has been a relatively stable component of recent elections (Elischer 2008).

New research suggests that in cases where parties' support bases are more geographically concentrated—as in Malaysia and Zambia—parties may find it easier to negotiate and sustain pre-electoral coalitions as they face less resistance from lower echelons of the party (Dettmann 2017; Beardsworth 2018). In contrast, in contexts where potential coalition partners compete at the local level, conflict frequently emerges over the demands for one party's parliamentary candidate to concede ahead of the race in favor of the candidate from the other party to the coalition in order to ensure joint candidates in all electoral races. This was the case in Zimbabwe in 2008 and 2013, when promising coalitions were scuppered over competition for the same parliamentary seats in the key opposition stronghold of Bulawayo Province (home to the country's second biggest city). With the parties fighting for the same seats and the same anti-incumbent voters, they ultimately chose to forego a coalition because they could not agree on how to distribute parliamentary constituencies. In addition, prominent party leaders—who are also representatives of ethno-regional groups—may scupper coalitions with parties from the same region out of fear that they will lose their place as the most prominent political representative of their region (Zamchiya, 2013, 959). In this way, geographically limited or “ethnic” parties may find it easier to negotiate and sustain coalitions as they are not in direct competition for seats at all levels of the party (Beardsworth 2018).

Methodological considerations

Most studies of coalitions are now conducted using quantitative methods to draw out causal inferences among a large set of cases. However, existing dataset-driven studies of coalitions are often unable to separate the drivers and outcomes of coalitions. As these analyses are undertaken retrospectively and based upon an exploration of electoral results, they find it difficult to deal with sequencing and endogeneity problems. For example, Gandhi and Reuter (2013) find that the greater the incidence of electoral repression, the more likely it is that a coalition will form. This suggests that coalitions are more likely in authoritarian states—a conclusion that other scholars question (van de Walle 2006, 82). Gandhi and Reuter recognize that there may be an endogeneity problem in their conclusion; that rather than repression leading to the increased incidence of coalition formation, the creation of a coalition (and thus the prospect of more competitive elections) may in fact lead to ruling parties increasing their use of repression in order to dampen down the electoral threat (Gandhi and Reuter 2013). While Howard and Roessler (2006) find that opposition coalitions are the most significant determinant of electoral transitions, van de Walle (2006) contests this by arguing that the perceived imminence of an electoral transition forces a “tipping point” that makes coalitional behavior more likely as regime insiders jump ship, both weakening the ruling party and strengthening the opposition coalition. A dataset-driven analysis of the drivers of coalition formation is unable to distinguish between these two outcomes.

In dataset-driven analyses, conclusions are also derived from a set of cases that are often weighted in favor of countries in which the turnover-by-coalition model is relatively common. For example, in Arriola's book he counts fifteen cases of turnover by coalition,⁶ but nine of the fifteen were in just four countries.⁷ Where case material has been used, there appears to be a “success bias” where cases such as Kenya and Senegal are overrepresented due to their status as countries where coalition formation helped to remove long-reigning ruling parties. Unsuccessful coalitions are rarely studied due to their lack of success, although they provide important insights into why so many coalitions fail—and even why some succeed. Resnick

(2011) noted that opposition coalitions—although frequently formed—rarely defeat ruling parties. Coalitions must be studied in context to understand the reasons for their formation, coherence, and potential success. In this regard, more robust case study analysis is necessary to test the assumptions of the quantitative literature and resolve some of the unresolved questions over the drivers of, and barriers to, successful opposition coalition-building.

Coalitions and democratization in Africa

The final question that the coalitions literature seeks to answer concerns the impact of coalitions on democratization. Arriola (2013, 250) ends his book by stating that “the consolidation of democracy over the long term is unlikely to occur” without cooperation between opposition parties. He echoes a commonly held belief that opposition coalitions facilitate democratic turnover, which in turn drives democratization in Africa’s post-third wave countries (Howard and Roessler 2006; van de Walle 2006). However, Resnick (2013b, 751) takes a more pessimistic view, arguing that coalitions have rarely led to the defeat of incumbents and that the electoral volatility induced by members of these coalitions has negative consequences for both electoral outcomes and party system institutionalization. More specifically, she (2013b) argues that the frequent creation of opportunistic, office-seeking coalitions hinders the establishment of a more programmatic approach and loyal party constituencies, while voters may simply support parties and coalitions due to the personality of the leader. Wahman (2013) similarly attempts to investigate the consequences of electoral coalitions, although he does so by focusing on elections in eighty-six electoral authoritarian regimes across various regions from 1973 to 2004. Although he finds that the probability of an opposition victory is 29 percent higher with a coalition (2013, 15), Wahman takes a skeptical view of the likelihood of democratization. He notes that even if coalitions lead to turnover, alternation does not necessarily lead to democratization as it is possible to change the regime without changing the regime type (cf. Levitsky and Way 2010). Based upon his study, Wahman finds that successful opposition coordination has no significance for longer-term democratization. Although what is clear is that opposition electoral success—whether through a coalition or not—provides a window of opportunity for political and civil society to push for further liberalization, tests the rules of the game, increases confidence in the electoral system, and shows citizens that it is possible to remove an unpopular government via the ballot box. Democratization is not a linear process—as the apparent democratic roll-back across both the developed and developing world shows—but when opposition parties are weak and unable to place sufficient pressure on ruling parties to reform, or respond to citizens’ concerns, the quality of democracy is also unlikely to improve.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some of the most important questions in the coalition literature: why are coalitions formed? How useful is European party literature for understanding African coalitions? What role do electoral institutions play in coalition formation? Is ethnicity a hindrance or a help to coalitions? And what are the consequences of coalitions for democratization in Africa? However, several issues remain largely unexplained or unexplored. For example, while the basic building blocks of coalitions are political parties, there has been little systematic research on coalitions that looks in any depth at the parties that comprise these formations, particularly across several electoral cycles. This research has also focused almost exclusively at the national level and on party coalitions negotiated between party elites. More research is needed to explore the impact of national-level coalitions on local party contests, to more

clearly articulate how they impact on parliamentary and local races. There is some evidence to suggest that coalitions are most difficult to sustain at the local level, where local party elites are brought into direct competition with each other for voters and employment opportunities. This may also be where coalitions are most damaging for party unity, an issue that remains under-researched. Indeed, the costs that coalitions impose on parties have hardly been explored in the growing volumes of academic text.

Another largely unexplored area of research concerns how voters receive opposition coalitions. While surveys such as the Afrobarometer have found some evidence that opposition voters in some countries have preferences for coalitions, no empirical research has been done to identify when and why voters might support coalitions. This is a substantial gap, given that political parties believe that in forming coalitions, they are maximizing their vote base. What drives voter preferences—including identity issues such as ethnicity, education, public policy preferences, and urban–rural linkages—is also likely to shape how voters feel about coalitional politics. Developing a deeper understanding of the relationships between opposition parties and their constituents, particularly beyond “ethnic” explanations, would also help to illuminate the issues that drive and undermine coalitions. Given that many of these dynamics have shifted quite dramatically since the third wave of democratization in the 1990s—when voters not only gained more experience with elections, but the Internet and information technologies shifted how information is dispersed—scholars would do well to consider if and how these preferences have shifted over time. A preference for coalitional politics likely also changes over time, in response to changes in media access, urbanization, and education. As voter coordination increases in the face of growing availability of information, a preference for coalitions may be decreasing as voters flock to the most viable national opposition challenger, decreasing the likelihood of multiparty coalitions. More research into voter preferences would help to bring voters back into studies of coalitions.

The clear majority of the literature on coalitions is based upon large quantitative datasets, using electoral data and a rational actor framework, which treats each coalition as a single event to theorize regarding the factors that promote or impede coalition formation. This chapter draws upon recent research that examined evolutions in coalition-building across successive elections in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Uganda with the aim of better explaining why certain strategies are chosen at particular times (Beardsworth 2018). More contextualized longitudinal research of this kind should be conducted so as to link coalition-building in with a more grounded understanding of party expansion and mobilization strategies—what gap does coalition formation fill that traditional mobilization strategies cannot address? Is it reasonable to expect that parties’ expectations of coalitions are conditioned both by previous experiences of coalition bargaining, and by expectations that there will likely be future rounds of bargaining? As a result, coalitions need to be understood in situ, as part of an iterative game played between opposition parties. It is also important to understand the parties that go into coalitions, and why they would choose to collaborate rather than competing individually. As coalitions are just one part of a political party’s arsenal, the study of them needs to be reconnected to that of African parties and their mobilization strategies.

Notes

- 1 This chapter will look predominantly at opposition coalitions, as ruling party coalitions are fairly common and often-opportunistic alliances of an exchange of political support in return for (almost) guaranteed future access to positions or resources, whereas with opposition alliances, access to resources is rarely guaranteed and the higher risk involved generally requires higher levels of commitment.

- 2 Nine elections were excluded from the sample because they were holding founding elections (Somalia), parties were banned from competing (Swaziland), the country was experiencing a civil war, revolution, or substantial political unrest (Libya, Central African Republic), or some parties were restricted from competing as the country had experienced a coup since the previous election (Burkina Faso, Mali, Madagascar, Guinea).
- 3 Seychelles (2016), Nigeria (2015), Comoros (2015), Tunisia (2014), Mauritius (2014), Senegal (2012).
- 4 Nine elections were excluded from the sample as a turnover could not be coded due to a recent coup that led the ruling party to be disqualified from running a candidate (Burkina Faso, Egypt, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Madagascar), or because the president wasn't directly elected (Somalia). Kenya (2013) was coded as not being a turnover, as former President Mwai Kibaki (Party of National Unity, PNU) supported the candidacy of Uhuru Kenyatta (The National Alliance, TNA) and the PNU agreed not to run its own candidates in the election, but to support the TNA campaign.
- 5 This, they argue, is a result of the system placing greater pressure on voters to avoid wasting their votes and providing greater incentives for parties to coalesce.
- 6 In the Nigerian case, although Arriola infers that it was a case of turnover-by-coalition, the coalition did not in fact win the 1999 election.
- 7 These countries are Benin (twice), Mauritius (three times), Madagascar (twice), and Mali (twice).

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