Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes

Marc Morjé Howard Georgetown University
Philip G. Roessler University of Maryland

In the wake of the third wave of democratization, competitive authoritarianism has emerged as a prominent regime type. These regimes feature regular, competitive elections between a government and an opposition, but the incumbent leader or party typically resorts to coercion, intimidation, and fraud to attempt to ensure electoral victory. Despite the incumbent's reliance on unfair practices to stay in power, such elections occasionally result in what we call a "liberalizing electoral outcome" (LEO), which often leads to a new government that is considerably less authoritarian than its predecessor. Using a "nested" research design that employs both cross-national statistical analysis and a case study of Kenya, we seek to explain how and why LEOs occur. Our findings highlight in particular the importance of the choices made by opposition elites to form a strategic coalition for the purpose of mounting a credible challenge to the ruling party or candidate in national elections.

By the late 1990s, the third wave of democratization—which began in the mid-1970s and gained considerable momentum with the end of the Cold War—had stalled, as the global spread of democracy collided with the harsh reality of domestic politics (Diamond 1999). Whether in Latin America, Africa, or Eurasia, recalcitrant authoritarian leaders discovered ways to acquiesce to internal and external demands for democratization while still maintaining their hold on power. They legalized opposition parties and permitted competitive elections, yet manipulated the process to ensure their political survival. As a result, "hybrid regimes" (Karl 1995), which combine democratic procedures with autocratic practices, emerged as the most widespread political system in the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

A flourishing body of literature has recognized the prevalence of hybrid regimes, with scholars coining new descriptive labels, such as "competitive authoritarianism" (Levitsky and Way 2002), "electoral authoritarianism" (Diamond 2002; Schedler 2002), and "semi-authoritarianism" (Ottaway 2003), to conceptualize and study them. Not only are these regimes viewed as neither completely authoritarian nor democratic, they are most likely not "in transition" from one to the other (Carothers 2002). Rather, they constitute a "gray zone" (Carothers 2002, 9) or a "foggy zone" (Schedler 2002, 37), consisting of relatively established institutional forms that are likely to remain for the foreseeable future.

Many scholars are now recognizing the need to shed light on this murky set of regimes by studying them *relative to one another*, rather than by highlighting the numerous ways in which they fall short of the standard set by advanced democracies. This article takes a step in that direction by focusing specifically on what Levitsky and Way (2002) have labeled "competitive authoritarian" regimes. The characteristics of these systems include regularly held elections, in which the dominant party and rulers use coercive and unfair means to disadvantage the opposition and to ensure their own electoral success. Unlike purely authoritarian regimes, however, the system

generally allows for a minimal level of genuine competition, meaning that, although the odds are long, the opposition does have a chance at an electoral upset that could result in the defeat of those in power. In other words, while certainly not "free and fair," the electoral process is not completely rigged and fraudulent either.

Indeed, every so often, elections become moments of significant liberalization in competitive authoritarian systems. For example, countries as diverse and dispersed as Ghana, Indonesia, Peru, and Romania have experienced more free and fair votes relative to the past, and these elections have ushered in governments that are not necessarily democratic, but that are certainly less authoritarian than their predecessors. Even though these elections should not be characterized as "transitions to democracy," they do represent what we call "liberalizing electoral outcomes," which provide at least a chance for a new beginning in each of these countries. In fact, many of them liberalize to the point that they can eventually be considered electoral democracies, rather than competitive authoritarian regimes.

This article offers an explanation as to why some elections in competitive authoritarian systems can lead to liberalizing outcomes, while others maintain the status quo. We develop our explanation by using a "nested" research design that employs both quantitative and qualitative methods, with the goal of providing a more valid, reliable, and powerful causal explanation than could be achieved with either method alone.[1]

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we summarize and operationalize Levitsky and Way's concept of competitive authoritarianism and explain how it is distinct from other political regimes. Then we develop our concept and measure of a liberalizing electoral outcome (LEO), which serves as our dependent variable. In the following section, we introduce our theoretical argument, which stresses the importance of strategic choices made by opposition elites—and in particular the development of coalitions among the opposition parties and candidates. We then turn to logistic regression analysis, which allows us to weigh the relative strength of our argument, while controlling for other factors. After demonstrating the significance of opposition coalitions at the cross-national level, we deepen the analysis by showing how the coalition-building strategy of opposition leaders contributed to a LEO in the 2002 elections in Kenya. Finally, we conclude with some reflections about the larger implications of our findings.

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[1] For an engaging discussion of the usefulness of mixed methods and the potential synergy between large-N and small-N analyses, see Lieberman (2005).

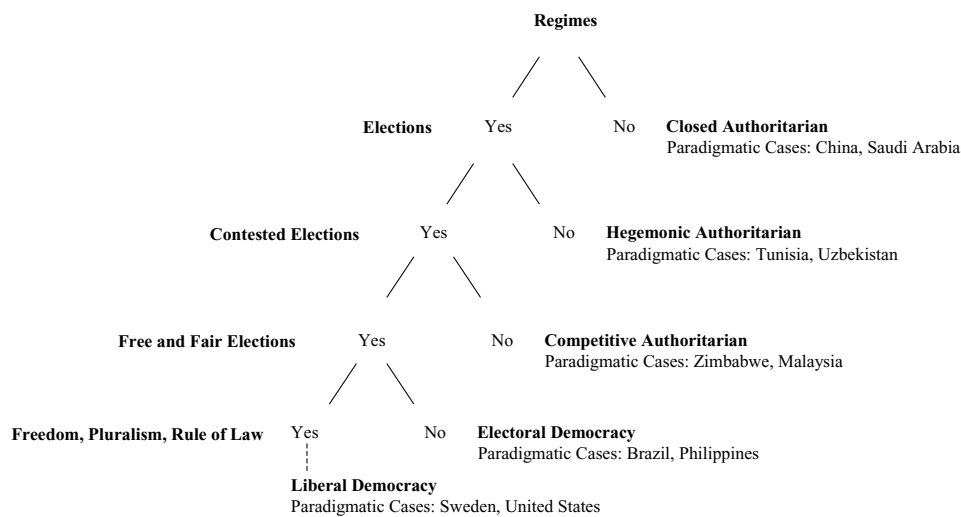# Competitive Authoritarianism as a Regime Type

In moving from conceptualization to operationalization we apply the methodological standard recommended by Adcock and Collier (2001) to competitive authoritarianism. We begin with the background concept of political regimes, which we then disaggregate into five different types based on theoretical and substantive differences, thus allowing us to define and specify our "systematized concept" of interest: competitive authoritarianism. To operationalize the systematized concept, we develop a series of indicators that distinguish competitive authoritarianism from other regime types. Finally, using our indicators, we score all cases of political regimes to generate our universe of competitive authoritarian elections.

Political regimes are the rules and procedures that determine how national, executive leaders are chosen. Thus, the concept of political regimes is an umbrella term that includes both democratic and authoritarian systems, in which the two types differ crucially on the degree to which the rules allow for contestation and participation in selection of a government (Dahl 1971). We disaggregate political regimes into five types based on the sets of rules adopted to select authoritative national leaders: first, whether selection is through national elections or through lineage, party decree, or military orders; second, if there are national elections for an executive, whether the elections are competitive or not; third, whether the elections are free and fair or fraudulent; and finally whether the regime is based on the rule of law and "political and civic pluralism," or whether the rights and liberties of some individual and groups are still violated (Diamond 1999, 8–13).

Figure 1 presents a tree diagram illustrating the key distinctions between the five different types of regimes in the world today. The four main factors that distinguish regimes are listed on the left of the figure, and the regime types are listed on the right.

Two important caveats are necessary when interpreting this figure. First, it is intended as a typology, not as a linear or teleological progression from one regime to the next. The last decade has shown that, contrary to the "democratizing bias" (Levitsky and Way 2002, 51) of much of the earlier democratization literature, these regime types can be stable and enduring, or can even revert to a more consolidated form of authoritarianism. Second, although we place the institution of elections at the center of our analysis, we do not want to contribute to the literature's "fallacy of electoralism" (Karl 1995), by focusing on the significance of elections at the expense

FIGURE 1   **Disaggregation of Political Regimes by Various Dimensions of Democracy**

Regimes

Elections Yes	No **Closed Authoritarian**
	Paradigmatic Cases: China, Saudi Arabia

Contested Elections Yes	No **Hegemonic Authoritarian**
	Paradigmatic Cases: Tunisia, Uzbekistan

Free and Fair Elections Yes	No **Competitive Authoritarian**
	Paradigmatic Cases: Zimbabwe, Malaysia

Freedom, Pluralism, Rule of Law Yes	No **Electoral Democracy**
	Paradigmatic Cases: Brazil, Philippines

Liberal Democracy
Paradigmatic Cases: Sweden, United States

Note: "Elections" refers to national elections for the direct selection of authoritative executive leaders or for a parliament that selects authoritative executive leaders.

of other important attributes of democracy. Indeed, democracy involves much more than just elections. Robust civil society, effective and independent legislatures and judiciaries, and a civilianized military are just three of the many factors that are necessary for a consolidated democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996). At the same time, however, democracy cannot be less than free and fair elections. Until a country's selection of national leaders occurs consistently through a public, competitive, and free and fair process, the deepening of democracy will remain elusive.

As Figure 1 shows, building on the work of Schumpeter, Dahl, Diamond, and others, we distinguish authoritarianism and democracy by the degree of contestation and participation in the selection of national leaders. Closed authoritarian regimes are those in which a country's leaders are not selected through national elections, opposition political parties remain banned, political control is maintained through the use of repression, and there is little space for a free media and civil society. Hegemonic authoritarian regimes do hold regular elections as part of their system of governance, but in addition to widespread violations of political, civil, and human rights, the elections are not actually competitive. Because no other party, except the ruling one, is allowed to effectively compete (i.e., the opposition is completely shut out from access to state-owned media coverage, banned from holding political rallies, or forced into exile or in jail), the dominant candidate or party wins overwhelm-

ingly, leading to a *de facto* one-party state.[2] In competitive authoritarian systems, on the other hand, regular, competitive elections are held between the ruling party and a legal and legitimate opposition, which usually chooses to participate, rather than to boycott. But the incumbent regime still uses fraud, repression, and other illiberal means "to create an uneven playing field between government and opposition" (Levitsky and Way 2002, 53) to try to ensure that it ultimately prevails in the electoral contest.

Since both hegemonic authoritarianism and competitive authoritarianism involve regular elections under conditions that are generally authoritarian, they can be grouped within a larger category that some have called "electoral authoritarianism."[3] Using the latter term, Diamond writes that "the distinction between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism turns crucially on the freedom, fairness, inclusiveness, and meaningfulness of elections" (2002, 28). In other words, the regime

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[2]Perceiving any chance of a fair contest beyond reach and not wishing to legitimize the electoral victory of the incumbent or ruling party, opposition candidates and parties in hegemonic regimes sometimes boycott the elections out of protest.

[3]We prefer to maintain the distinction between competitive authoritarian and hegemonic authoritarian regimes. It would be hard to argue that a case like Tunisia, where President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali won 99.91% of the vote in 1999, should be classified alongside Zimbabwe, where President Robert Mugabe won with great difficulty and by a close margin in 2002.

type of electoral democracy can be distinguished from competitive authoritarianism in that it involves elections that are not only competitive, but also held under genuinely free and fair conditions. Finally, liberal democracies go a step beyond, as they are strictly bound by the state's constitution and the rule of law, with horizontal accountability among officeholders, protection of pluralism and freedoms, and the lack of "reserved domains of power for the military or other actors not accountable to the electorate" (Diamond 1999, 10).

While these larger distinctions are useful for introducing the range of regimes in the world today, as well as the key distinctions between them, the regime type that concerns us here (the "systematized concept") is competitive authoritarianism. Competitive authoritarian regimes include rules of the game that are accepted and stable, whereby both sides agree that elections—however flawed in practice—are the primary means of obtaining or maintaining political power. Moreover, these elections are competitive, generating a real struggle between the incumbent and opposition, which can sometimes lead to unpredictable or uncertain outcomes. Although the process is certainly unfair, since the ruling party relies on fraud, coercion, and patronage to try to win the election, the opposition still has an opportunity to defeat the incumbent, and thereby potentially to open the door for significant political liberalization. In this sense, competitive authoritarianism can be viewed as a residual category—neither liberal or electoral democracy nor closed or hegemonic authoritarianism—which suggests that it is inherently unstable, and thus can "tip" in one direction or another (Levitsky and Way 2002, 59). The theoretical and empirical objective of the rest of our analysis is to explain how competitive authoritarian regimes can liberalize and thereby move in a democratic direction.

Having summarized and clarified the concept of competitive authoritarianism within the relatively abstract framework of our typology of regime types, we still need to operationalize the concept, addressing how it can best be measured empirically in the real world. There are two ways in which one can identify which countries should be classified as competitive authoritarian regimes: one is to select cases of based on the "I know it when I see it" formula, namely by analyzing countries independently, and determining which ones fit the overall definition; the other is to establish criteria derived from the coding of other data sources, and to "let the chips fall where they may." Both are plausible and defensible strategies. We have chosen the latter, thereby avoiding the temptation to select cases based on our subjective judgments, and instead applying a com-

mon, precise, and systematic set of criteria based on existing indices. Any classification system is, of course, arbitrary, but by applying these criteria consistently, we aim to contribute a more objective measurement of this regime type—while recognizing that no such measurement is perfect and that there may still be some disagreement about the inclusion or exclusion of individual cases.[4]

In order to determine which elections should be classified as competitive authoritarian—i.e., to identify our universe of cases for analysis—we use a combination of criteria from the two most commonly used indices of regimes, Freedom House (various years) and Polity (various years).[5] To distinguish competitive authoritarian regimes from electoral and liberal democracies, we excluded countries that received a score of 2 or better on the Freedom House ratings of political rights *or* a Polity score of 6 or higher in the year before an executive election was held.[6] To distinguish competitive authoritarian regimes from closed authoritarian systems, we excluded countries that received a Freedom House political rights rating of 7, the worst possible score, or the equivalent on the Polity scale, a score of –8 and below. And to distinguish competitive authoritarian regimes from hegemonic authoritarian systems, we excluded countries where the winning party or candidate received over 70% of the popular vote.[7] Finally, we exclude "founding elections" from our analysis, since they are usually the culmination of a transition from nonelectoral authoritarianism to a more competitive system, and the political dynamics

[4]In this sense, we are answering the important challenge laid out by Munck and Snyder (2004, 1), who write, "Methodologically, research on hybrid regimes has failed to adequately to address a number of central issues involved in measurement. Most critically, this research has not provided systematic, clear procedures for developing measures that successfully handle intermediate categories and cases."

[5]For a critical evaluation of both Polity and Freedom House, see Munck and Verkuilen (2002). Despite Munck and Verkuilen's criticisms of these and other indices of democracy—for having problems with conceptualization, measurement, and aggregation—there are as of yet no better alternatives that cover countries around the world annually. By drawing from *both* Freedom House and Polity, we can ensure that there is a much wider degree of consensus than might otherwise be the case if we used only one index exclusively.

[6]Note that these are the standard thresholds in interpreting whether a country should be classified as "free" or "democratic."

[7]This cut-off point, while admittedly arbitrary, has been used by other scholars to determine whether an election was competitive (see Levitsky and Way 2002 and Wantchekon 2003).

are often quite different from established competitive authoritarianism.[8]

In the cross-national analysis below, we therefore consider all 50 nonfounding, competitive authoritarian elections held between 1990 and 2002. It is important to note that our unit of analysis is elections, not countries, since these 50 elections took place in a total of 31 countries. While some countries have had multiple competitive authoritarian elections (e.g., Albania and Malaysia), others dropped out of our dataset because they—sometimes only temporarily—became either electoral democracies (e.g., Croatia after 2000 and Peru after 2001) or hegemonic authoritarian regimes (e.g., Zambia in 1996 and Singapore in 2001). In other words, when applying our coding criteria to evaluate cases for inclusion in our dataset, we looked only at the particular election of interest, exclusive of that country's previous or subsequent elections results.[9]

Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes

Competitive authoritarianism is inherently contradictory. Legitimate procedures (i.e., regular, competitive elections) are undermined by illegitimate practices such as vote rigging, violent disenfranchisement, and media bias. These inherent tensions simultaneously raise and frustrate the expectations of the opposition, civil society, and the population (and even moderates and reformers within the incumbent regimes) that a more liberal order is possible. Thus, the opposition identifies the incumbent as the key obstacle to a more democratic system of governance and—unlike in hegemonic and closed authoritarian regimes—since the institutions for change already exist, victory is more likely to be perceived as being within reach. Unless the incumbent drastically alters the rules of the game, reverting to hegemonic or closed authoritarianism, change is possible. And, in fact, electoral "upsets" do sometimes take place, where the dominant party (or candidate) sometimes loses despite the considerable advantages it had enjoyed. In other cases, such as Ghana in 1996 under President Jerry Rawlings, the dominant party may still win, but the elections are considerably more free and fair than in the past, and the country moves in a liberalizing direction following the elections. Either scenario fits into our conception of a liberalizing electoral outcome (LEO).

Having a LEO does not necessarily mean that a country will turn into a liberal democracy overnight, though in most cases the country does become classified as an electoral democracy following the liberalizing election. Nor does a LEO guarantee long-term improvement, since backsliding can occur later, especially if the new winner decides to engage in similar tactics as his or her predecessor. But LEOs do represent a chance for a new beginning, whereby the freedom and fairness of the electoral process will usually improve somewhat, the incoming government has a chance to pass new policies that are generally more open and liberal, the overall mood of the population shifts dramatically in the direction of optimism and in favor of democracy as a form of government, and better relations develop with international financial institutions and bilateral donors, on which many of these countries are dependent. Moreover, even if a country still stagnates within the competitive authoritarian category following a LEO, it represents an important precedent, one that may inspire future opposition candidates, and one that may set a model for other countries in the region.[10]

In the analysis that follows, we incorporate a very precise measure of a LEO, once again based on a combination of the Freedom House and Polity indices. Cases were coded as LEOs if the Polity score increased by three or more points *and* the Freedom House political rights score decreased by one point or more in the year of the election, compared to the year before.[11] Our dependent

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[8]Moreover, other scholars have addressed founding elections in much detail, showing the lasting impact of the initial "window of opportunity" that they presented. Yet subsequent "regular" elections, held well after the founding moment has passed, have received far less attention.

[9]We have also conducted extensive robustness checks to ensure that our case selection criteria did not in any way bias our results. For example, we raised the electoral cut-off point for classifying regimes as hegemonic authoritarian from 70% to 75% and 80%. We also included a series of countries listed by an anonymous reviewer, which according to our criteria have been classified as "electoral democracies"—including Macedonia, Madagascar, Malawi, Moldova, Mozambique, Paraguay, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Zambia—as well as some other hegemonic or closed authoritarian regimes—such as Cambodia, Cameroon, and Ethiopia. These additional data and analyses are available upon request. For all of these checks, the results were virtually identical to those that we present below. We can therefore conclude that our results do not hinge on our case selection criteria.

[10]As McFaul (2002) argues, based on his study of the early post-communist elections, liberalizing moments—particularly when a liberal opposition wins the election—can serve as a critical juncture in the history of a country, and they generally (though not always) have lasting implications for the type and shape of its future regime.

[11]Since the Polity scale runs from −10 to 10 (most democratic), and the Freedom House scale runs from 7 to 1 (most free), the required changes to count as a LEO—three points on Polity and one point on Freedom House—are equivalent mathematically as well as substantively. Note also that both Polity and Freedom House construct their ratings retrospectively, i.e., based on the events that took place in each country in a given year. It therefore makes sense to measure a LEO by comparing the score in the year before the

TABLE 1   **Universe of Cases of Non-Founding Competitive Authoritarian Elections**

Liberalizing Electoral Outcome (N = 15)	*No Liberalizing Electoral Outcome (N = 35)*
Armenia 1998	Albania 1996
Croatia 2000	Albania 1997
Dominican	Albania 2001
Republic 1996	Armenia 1996
Ghana 1996	Central African
Ghana 2000	Republic 1999
Guatemala 1995	Chad 2001
Indonesia 1999	Croatia 1997
Kenya 2002	Gabon 1998
Nicaragua 1990	Guatemala 1990
Peru 2000	Guinea 1998
Peru 2001	Guinea-Bissau 1999
Romania 1996	Indonesia 1992
Senegal 2000	Iran 1993
Thailand 1992	Iran 1997
Yugoslavia 2000	Ivory Coast 2000
	Malaysia 1990
	Malaysia 1995
	Malaysia 1999
	Mexico 1994
	Nepal 1994
	Nepal 1999
	Peru 1995
	Romania 1992
	Russia 1996
	Russia 2000
	Senegal 1993
	Singapore 1991
	Singapore 1997
	Sri Lanka 1994
	Sri Lanka 1999
	Togo 1998
	Uganda 2001
	Yugoslavia 1996
	Zambia 2001
	Zimbabwe 2002

Theories and Hypotheses

The inherent contradictions of competitive authoritarianism do not mean that change is random, spontaneous, or beyond systematic explanation. In fact, intrinsic tensions make those regime types susceptible to some pressures more than others. Our goal in this analysis is therefore systematically to identify the factors by which elections become moments of significant liberalization in competitive authoritarian regimes. In this section, we develop our theoretical argument and we operationalize hypotheses for statistical testing. We then do the same for four alternative hypotheses, which we include as controls.

Our theoretical argument focuses on the interaction between the opposition and the incumbent. The political opposition affects the electoral dynamic depending on whether it creates a multiparty *coalition*, or jointly supports a single presidential candidate from the opposition, as well as its *mobilization*, such as the initiation of antigovernment protests. Both of these factors involve the strategic choices made by the opposition—by elites in the first case, and by a combination of elites and the public in the second. But the circumstances surrounding the incumbent are also very important. If an incumbent—particularly a long-time autocrat—seeks reelection, key actors in the regime are often committed and united in ensuring electoral victory at whatever cost. On the other hand, when an incumbent does not run for reelection due to death, resignation, or retirement, the regime's coherence, direction, and resolve fades, increasing the possibilities for competition and liberalization. These regime developments can further encourage opposition leaders to act strategically and to mobilize their supporters. We now introduce these three factors in more detail, before turning to some alternative hypotheses from the democratization literature.

Opposition Coalition

When trying to compete against an entrenched competitive authoritarian establishment, opposition movements face an uphill battle. There is a large degree of asymmetry between the ruling party and the opposition in

variable is therefore a dichotomous measure of the occurrence or nonoccurrence of a LEO. As Table 1 shows, of the 50 nonfounding competitive authoritarian elections held between 1990 and 2002, 15 (or 30%) count as LEOs.[12]

election to the new score that takes into account the effect of that election.

[12]Once again, we should stress that our cases are elections, rather than countries, and that we apply our criteria strictly and system-

atically for each case. Therefore, a country could theoretically have multiple LEOs (as did Ghana and Peru, which both had two), as long as the criteria were fulfilled for each particular election. If, however, a LEO leads a country to become an electoral democracy (as is often the case), and if that country remains an electoral democracy by the time of the next election, then the country will drop out of our database—unless, of course, it backslides into the competitive authoritarian criteria at some point down the road.

competitive authoritarian electoral contests because in many developing countries wealth is concentrated in the hands of the government. Consequently, opposition political parties lack access to sufficient material resources to build a broad, nationwide political party that is capable of mounting an effective challenge to the incumbent's hold on power. The more divided the opposition parties, the more susceptible they are to governmental manipulation, cooptation, and repression. An active and diverse civil society, though important for the consolidation of democracy as it checks the accountability and power of the government (Diamond 1999), proves ineffectual when matched against an oppressive incumbent or ruling party seeking to guarantee reelection. Instead, opposition victory in a competitive authoritarian regime "requires a level of opposition mobilization, unity, skill, and heroism far beyond what would normally be required for victory in a democracy" (Diamond 2002, 24). In short, what is important in competitive authoritarian regimes is how opposition leaders and civil society groups choose to organize in the electoral arena and their ability to create strategic coalitions that are resilient in the face of government force and fraud (Levitsky and Way 2001).

The formation of an opposition coalition does not refer to the strength of the opposition per se, and it is not based merely on the degree of hostility to a leader or party in power. Many authoritarian incumbents are deeply unpopular, with the broader population, opposition movements, and civil society groups "united" in their agreement that the president must go. Yet, despite their lack of popular support, such incumbents can often maintain their hold on power because of the opposition elites' inability to form organizational structures that effectively challenge the government in the electoral arena. In our conception, what is important is the ability of these political elites to come together, not by giving up their own parties and interests or by submitting to a charismatic leader, but in order to form a strategic coalition (whether formal or informal) for the specific goal of winning an election.

An opposition coalition can increase the probability of political liberalization in four ways. First, it can take votes away from the ruling regime. When the opposition has joined together, an unpopular incumbent is less able to use repression and patronage to coerce and induce people to vote for him, and thereby to slide by with a plurality of votes. Second, it can prevent incumbents from playing opposition parties and leaders against each other, thus making "divide and rule" a less effective strategy. Third, it can increase the perceived risks and costs of repression and manipulation. The police, army, and bureaucrats may

be less inclined to employ illegal practices to benefit the incumbent if they calculate that the opposition is sufficiently organized that it can mount a credible challenge to the ruling party, since the authoritarian incumbent's henchmen could face recriminations for their actions if the opposition wins. Finally, it can mobilize people to vote against the incumbent, as the electorate has a sense that change is possible, and they begin to view the opposition as an alternative governing coalition.

To code for the existence of an opposition coalition, we follow the lead of Bratton and van de Walle, who include "opposition cohesion" as a dichotomous variable in their major study of democratization in sub-Saharan Africa (Bratton and van de Walle 1997).[13] We code for *coalition building*, rather than *cohesion*, within the opposition, however, because the term "cohesion" suggests a degree of ideological and organizational integration that is often missing from broad opposition movements that materialize to counter incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes. Often these elite coalitions and alliances are temporary and convenient "negative" partnerships that are based on their common antipathy to the ruling regime.

We derived our measure of opposition coalition from newspaper coverage of each election.[14] Although our coding determinations were made with three gradations— "high," "low," and "no" coalition building—for the statistical analysis that follows, we use a dichotomous variable, coded 0 for low levels or the absence of coalition building and 1 when multiple opposition groupings, parties, or candidates joined together to create a broad movement in opposition to the incumbent leader or party in power.[15] Our expectation is that cases with opposition coalitions will have a much greater likelihood of a LEO.

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[13] Since Bratton and van de Walle's book focuses on founding elections, which we have excluded for reasons explained above, there are very few overlapping cases, and thus we cannot compare our scoring of opposition coalition to theirs on opposition cohesion.

[14] In order to ensure a consistent and unbiased coding of opposition coalitions, we only looked at the newspaper coverage leading up to the actual election, and not the post-election coverage (which may have retrospectively imputed opposition unity in cases of surprising outcomes). We also coded the opposition coalition variable separately from our dependent variable, so as to minimize any potential bias. A thorough justification of our coding score, including excerpts from newspaper sources that we used to derive our coding, and the actual election results, is available upon request.

[15] We use the dichotomous measure because it corresponds more closely with our argument about the *presence* or *absence* of a broad opposition coalition. And as we discuss below, this coding transformation has no substantive effect on the results.

Opposition Mobilization

In addition to the strategic choice of opposition leaders, widespread public mobilization can also play a crucial role in the opposition's ability to challenge the incumbent. Protest may weaken the legitimacy of the incumbent and provide signals to the electorate that the incumbent is vulnerable to defeat. Moreover, the more motivated and mobilized the electorate, the more likely people are to vote in the elections, whereas a demoralized and apathetic citizenry will probably not bother participating in the electoral process. In cases of extremely high mobilization, sustained protest may force an autocratic incumbent to step down, as occurred in Indonesia in 1998 and Peru in 2000.

In order to measure opposition mobilization, we incorporated Banks' measure of antigovernment demonstrations, which entail "any peaceful public gathering of at least 100 people for the primary purpose of displaying or voicing their opposition to government policies or authority, excluding demonstrations of a distinctly antiforeign nature" (2002). We calculated the average number of antigovernment demonstrations in the year before the election and the year of the election.[16] The hypothesis is that a higher level of mobilization will be positively associated with the occurrence of a LEO.

Incumbent Turnover

Because of the inherent tensions associated with competitive authoritarianism, the stability of these regimes often rests on the personalistic rule of the incumbent and his or her ability to devise strategies to overcome domestic and international pressures for a more free and fair electoral system. In fact, many competitive authoritarian regimes in the 1990s were holdovers from the third wave of democratization in which long-time incumbent leaders resisted the global spread of democratization (e.g., Mahathir in Malaysia, Moi in Kenya, and Suharto in Indonesia). Consequently, when the ruler dies (e.g., Tudjman in Croatia) or is forced out of office—whether due to deep economic crisis and political protest (e.g., Suharto in Indonesia), electoral fraud and political protest (e.g.,

Fujimori in Peru), or constitutional-term limits (e.g., Moi in Kenya)—there is a considerable weakening of the incumbent regime and opening of the political playing field, as the former ruler's failure to build an institutional base disadvantages his successor. It should be pointed out that incumbent turnover does not always indicate a weakening of the regime, since the anointed successor may be closely associated with the former ruler (e.g., Zedillo in Mexico) and may be even stronger than the incumbent stepping down (e.g., Putin in Russia). But in most cases, it raises the opposition's expectations that victory is possible, increases uncertainty among the regime's rank-and-file that they have a secure future—which in the past gave them carte blanche to commit force and fraud—and eventually leads to a greater likelihood of the occurrence of a LEO.

Of course, an autocratic leader's weakness (whether political or physical) can itself launch a liberalization process that makes significant progress *before* the next election takes place—and in this sense, incumbent turnover is not always wholly exogenous to liberalization. But the subsequent elections are still the process by which any liberalizing change must be consolidated, and incumbent turnover can be an important part of that process.

To measure incumbent turnover, we created a dichotomous variable, with a code of 1 if the incumbent had died or stepped down, and 0 if the incumbent was running in the election. Our expectation is that a LEO will be more likely if the incumbent is not running. In short, we argue that liberalizing electoral outcomes in competitive authoritarian regimes are highly dependent on the strategies of, and circumstances surrounding, individual elite actors. This approach introduces an important element of individual agency and strategic choice that has often been lacking in cross-national studies of democratization. Yet, actors' strategies can also be constrained by external pressures (e.g., donor demands) or structural factors (e.g., economic crises). To control for these structural conditions, we introduce a set of plausible rival hypotheses.

Economic Factors

One of the central findings of the democratization literature is that economic crisis is often linked to regime transitions (Geddes 1999; Haggard and Kaufman 1995). According to this argument, an economic crisis undermines support for an authoritarian regime, divides the ruling elites, and creates opportunities for the opposition to mobilize. In short, a crisis helps to tilt the balance of power in favor of the opposition and weaken the bargaining power of the incumbent. The elections literature also finds support for the thesis that poor economic

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[16]The reason why we average these two particular years is to standardize somewhat the timing of the election within a calendar year. Since antigovernment demonstrations usually take place around the time of the election, if a country holds its elections in January, we would be missing the demonstrations that took place shortly before the elections if we only coded for the year of the election. Similarly, if a country's elections take place in December, we would be missing demonstrations held that year if we only coded for the previous year.

performance leads to the ousting of incumbent governments (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 1999). Economic decline undercuts the incumbent's legitimacy and shrinks his or her voting pool.

Economic crisis should have the same debilitating effect for leaders of competitive authoritarian regimes trying to win re-election. It at once reduces the incumbent's legitimacy and makes it more difficult for the incumbent regime to tilt systematically the playing field in its favor due to the lack of resources necessary to rig an election, buy votes, co-opt opposition leaders, and employ the military and police to harass opposition voters and supporters. On the other hand, economic growth should allow the authoritarian leader to maintain his hold on power, since he will likely be able to ensure electoral victory (whether legitimate or fraudulent) under these more propitious economic circumstances.

To measure economic factors, we calculated the average level of economic growth—measured as the percent change in gross domestic product (GDP)—in each country for the two years prior to an election.[17] The hypothesis is that low or negative levels of economic growth (i.e., economic crises) will increase the likelihood of LEOs.

International and Global Factors

External factors can also affect election outcomes, especially with the West's increased interest in spreading democracy throughout the globe since the end of the Cold War, along with the globalization of finance and production, which shies away from political instability. Indeed, "democratization" has often been linked to international pressure and conditionalities (Joseph 1997) and the need to secure property rights and attract foreign direct investment (FDI) (Li and Resnick 2003; Levitsky and Way 2005). In competitive authoritarian regimes, one would therefore expect that greater contact with the West—coming in the form of both pressure and linkage—would have the effect of raising the costs for the incumbent to use extralegal measures to stay in office, since the alternative might be isolation or reduced aid, FDI, and other external resources (Levitsky and Way 2002, 51). Conversely, countries that are scarcely influenced by the West should have few incentives to liberalize, thus resulting in the continued imposition of harsh political measures that ensure the regime's survival.

We operationalized international and global factors by calculating both a country's average level of FDI as a percent of its GDP in the two years before the election[18] and the average level of foreign aid per capita received by a country in the two years before the election.[19] The expectation of this hypothesis is that countries with greater connection to the West (i.e., higher levels of FDI and foreign aid) will be more likely to experience LEOs.

Political Institutions

Political institutions may also affect the electoral process by making certain electoral outcomes more likely. The debate about the relative effectiveness of parliamentary and presidential systems (Horowitz 1990; Lijphart 1991; Linz 1990a,b) has yet to be conclusively resolved, but the theoretical expectations can go in both directions. The general consensus in the democratization literature is that parliamentary systems are more conducive to democratic stability and consolidation (Przeworski et al. 2000). As Linz (1990a) argues, presidential systems are prone to "winner-take-all" politics, which can lead to political polarization and potentially violent electoral contests for the presidency. This can especially apply to countries that are politically divided along ethnic lines and compete for control of the state through the presidency. Because the stakes in presidential elections are all-or-nothing, one can hypothesize that presidential systems encourage the incumbent to use all means possible to hold on to political power and refuse to allow a free and fair vote. Parliamentary systems, on the other hand, can permit greater opportunities for leadership turnover and broader government representation of opposition parties, moderating the high stakes of the election.

The liberalization of competitive authoritarian regimes, however, is often achieved by a shake-up of the regime, rather than through regime stability. In this sense, one could argue that parliamentary systems, which allow greater opportunities for opposition parties to participate in government, can provide a disincentive for the

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[17] Our economic data come from the World Bank (2004). Note that we tested a related, alternative measure for economic *crisis* by creating a dummy variable based on whether or not a country had negative growth in either of the two years before an election. And we also controlled for GDP per capita. With both of these alternative variables, since the results are essentially the same, we do not report them in the tables below.

[18] Note that Iran is missing data on FDI for 1991 and 1992; therefore we use the average of 1989, 1990, 1993, and 1994 for the election of 1993. And Yugoslavia is missing data on FDI for all years before 1995; therefore we use the 1995 score for the 1996 election.

[19] Once again, these data come from the World Bank (2004). We also tested for alternative measures of international factors, including a country's average level of total trade (exports and imports) with the G7 countries and its total external debt as a percentage of GDP. Since the results were very similar to those with the other two measures, we do not include them in the analysis below.

opposition to form a pre-election coalition to challenge the government, thus giving the incumbent the upper-hand. In presidential systems, in contrast, because the only avenue for achieving any political power is by ousting the incumbent and ruling party, there may be more of an incentive to create a broader coalition, since disorganization often leads to continued exclusion from power.

In order to test the effect of political institutions, we followed convention by creating a dichotomous variable coded as 0 for presidential systems and 1 for parliamentary systems, based on the type of system the country had at the time of each executive election.[20] As discussed above, however, the theoretical expectation can point in either direction.

Prior Liberalization

Lastly, we introduce two control variables to test for prior political liberalization. The first measures the relative *level* of liberalization in a given country in the period before a given election. In a more open political system in which individual rights are protected, one would expect the opposition to find it easier to mobilize and organize for an electoral contest against the incumbent. Moreover, greater political openness and respect for civil liberties are indicators that the regime is showing a willingness to accept the rules of the game of democracy. This respect for civil liberties prior to the election may foreshadow its behavior during the election. If this is the case, then LEOs, which signify more free and fair elections than in the past, should consistently occur in more liberal regimes. To test this argument, we include a variable, "regime openness," that indicates the average of the regime's Freedom House civil liberties score for the two years prior to the election.[21]

The second measure of prior liberalization captures whether liberalizing *change* has been occurring over the half-decade leading up to an election. Indeed, it is quite possible that LEOs are the culmination of an endogenous political liberalization process that has been occurring over time and that has gradually led to a more open political system, an increasingly level playing field, and a relatively restrained incumbent. According to this argument, other factors, such as incumbent turnover and the

formation of an opposition coalition, would be an epiphenomenal part of this liberalization process, and thus have little exogenous causal significance. Instead, the main factor driving LEOs would be the underlying liberalization process occurring in a given country. To test this hypothesis, we include a dichotomous variable that measures prior liberalization by subtracting the regime's Freedom House political rights score the year before the election from the score five years before the election. Regimes that experienced *no* political liberalization (a difference of 0 when subtracting the two Freedom House political rights scores at (t-5) and (t-1)) or regressed (a negative score) were coded as 0 and any regime that experienced political liberalization (a positive score) was coded as 1.

Cross-National Statistical Analysis

Having introduced our theoretical argument and empirical expectations, along with several alternative hypotheses, we now turn to statistical analysis in order to better understand the factors associated with liberalizing electoral outcomes in competitive authoritarian regimes. Since our dependent variable is dichotomous, we ran a cross-sectional logistic regression model covering our population of 50 competitive authoritarian elections from 1990 to 2002, thus allowing us to estimate the marginal effects of our independent variables on the probability that an election resulted in a LEO.[22] Table 2 reports the coefficients (likelihood estimates), standard errors, and significance levels.

The results show that none of the structural and institutional variables is statistically significant.[23] Economic growth, foreign direct investment, foreign aid, and political institutions[24] may be important variables within a

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[20]Note that in Croatia, the system was presidential in 1997, but became parliamentary in 2000. Serbia and Montenegro (former Yugoslavia) had a parliamentary system in 1996, but became presidential in 2000.

[21]Since the Freedom House's 1–7 scale counts lower scores as more liberal, in order to make this concept more intuitive we have reversed the scale for this variable, so that the expectation is for a positive association between regime openness and LEOs.

[22]In addition to the variables discussed above and reported on Table 2, we also measured and tested a host of other variables that we consider to have somewhat less theoretical purchase, and that space limitations prevent us from presenting here. These include a variety of economic variables, several regional dummy variables, the level of oil production, and the prior political system (single party, militarist, personalist). None of these additional variables was close to being statistically significant.

[23]The substitution of several alternative measures for these variables—as described above—did not change the essence of these findings.

[24]Though the variable is insignificant, evidence from several cases (e.g., Senegal 2000, Ghana 2000, and Romania 1996) suggests that the institutional mechanism of a two-round voting system within presidential systems (if no majority is achieved by a single candidate in the first round) can effectively provide the opposition with a "second chance" to build a coalition, thus increasing the likelihood of a LEO.

TABLE 2 **Explaining Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes: Logistic Regression Analysis**

	Coefficients and Standard Errors
Opposition Coalition	7.72**
	(3.03)
Opposition Mobilization	.91*
	(.40)
Incumbent Turnover	3.15*
	(1.51)
Economic Growth	.33
	(.24)
Foreign Direct Investment	−.10
	(.31)
Foreign Aid	.008
	(.02)
Parliamentarism	−3.07
	(2.18)
Regime Openness	1.04
	(.99)
Prior Liberalizing Change	−1.38
	(1.73)
Constant	−1.33
	(5.24)
N	50

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is whether or not a country experienced a liberalizing electoral outcome (LEO).
*$p < .05$; **$p = .01$

global universe of all countries, but they seem to have little bearing on liberalizing elections in our more narrowly specified subset of competitive authoritarian regimes.[25]

In contrast, opposition coalition is statistically significant at the .01 level, and opposition mobilization and incumbent turnover are significant at the .05 level, all with the predicted sign. Interestingly, the variables representing prior political liberalization are not significant, suggesting that LEOs are not consistently occurring in more liberal competitive authoritarian regimes and are not predetermined by an ongoing process of political liberalization. Moreover, it discounts the thesis that opposition coalition building, opposition mobilization, and incumbent turnover are merely epiphenomenal—a consequence of short-term liberalization rather than its cause. There is no

correlation between either prior political liberalization or regime openness and any of our three main factors across competitive authoritarian regimes.[26] Instead, it seems that the strategic decisions made by the opposition elites and the incumbent, while not made in complete isolation of other factors, do contribute exogenously to a liberalizing electoral outcome.

In order to compare the relative strength of these independent variables, Figure 2 presents a different perspective on these data. It shows the change in predicted probability of a LEO when each continuous variable increases by one standard deviation from its mean and each dichotomous variable increases from 0 to 1, while all others are held constant at their mean, or in the case of the dichotomous variables, held at their minimum values, since means are not substantively plausible with such variables.[27] The figure allows for a more intuitive interpretation of the relative effect of each variable, with the average predicted values highlighted, along with the associated confidence intervals.[28]

Overall, these findings provide strong support to our theoretical argument. While structural factors seem to be less centrally related to the occurrence of LEOs, several important strategic features related to both the ruling party and the opposition play a crucial role in creating new possibilities in countries with competitive authoritarian regimes.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the strongest explanatory variable is the opposition's formation of a coalition.[29] Even

[25]Note that while space limitations prevent us from presenting descriptive statistics on these variables, they all have wide distributions, with extensive variation across cases.

[26]Of course, by definition competitive authoritarian regimes have already experienced a certain degree of political openness (i.e., there is an electoral process to select the executive of the country and it is competitive), compared to hegemonic or closed authoritarian regimes. Since this level of openness is common to all competitive authoritarian regimes, it does not prove a useful explanatory variable in pinpointing the direct causes of LEOs (as shown in the statistical analysis). An important question that will have to be left for future research is what explains transitions from more closed regimes to competitive authoritarian regimes, such that elections become competitive and the opposition has a greater opportunity to contribute to political liberalization through strategic electoral coalitions.

[27]The CLARIFY program was used in STATA to derive this figure and estimate predicted probabilities of various response outcomes based on changes in the explanatory variables (see Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001, and King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000)

[28]When the confidence intervals cross the 0 line, the result is not statistically significant (at the .05 level).

[29]To verify that the strength of these results was not an artifact of our creating a dichotomous variable by collapsing the categories "no" and "low" coalition-building, we also ran the analysis with all three levels of opposition coalition, and the results (not shown) demonstrate that countries with low coalition-building do have a slightly higher likelihood of resulting in a LEO than countries with none at all (significant at the .05 level). But the much larger

FIGURE 2   **Changes in Predicted Probabilities of a Liberalizing Electoral Outcome**
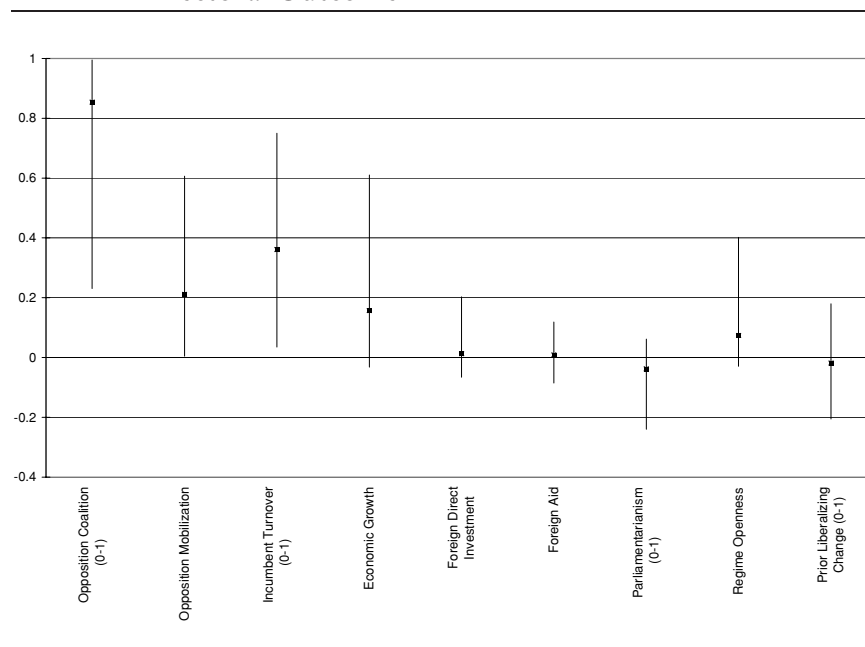
with a presidential incumbent running for reelection in a country that has not experienced substantial political liberalization over the past five years (and other variables kept at their mean), the probability of a liberalizing electoral outcome increases by more than 80% as the opposition is able to overcome its inherent divisions and build a broad-based coalition.[30] This variable is more robust than incumbent turnover, which is no guarantee for political liberalization. Even when the incumbent is out of the electoral equation, there is a greater likelihood (more than 60%) that the status quo persists and the regime resists liberalization. In short, this statistical analysis suggests that the responsibility for liberalizing electoral outcomes in competitive authoritarian regimes falls on the shoulders of the opposition and its ability to put aside differences and form a coalition, rather than waiting for the resignation of the incumbent or a sufficient opening of the political system.

While statistical analysis is useful for drawing out broad patterns across countries, it has limited utility for specifying causal processes in more detail. With this latter

difference is between countries with "high" levels and those with either "low" or "no" coalition-building. Given our theoretical focus on opposition coalition as a dichotomous category, we view this finding as a justification for having operationalized it accordingly in the statistical analysis.

[30] A similarly strong result occurs in parliamentary systems in which the incumbent party's leader runs for re-election.

goal in mind, we therefore turn to the qualitative part of our "nested" design. Since our large-N results are robust, our use of a nested design is for "model-testing," rather than "model-building," purposes (Lieberman 2005). Specifically, we focus on a case that is an "ideal type" example, in that it had both an opposition coalition and incumbent turnover contributed to its LEO. Through the case study, we can explain what accounts for an opposition coalition and examine in more detail the mechanism by which an opposition coalition interacts with incumbent dynamics to contribute to a liberalizing electoral outcome.

Case Study

Having demonstrated *that* an opposition coalition is an important factor in bringing about liberalizing electoral outcomes, in this section we try to illustrate *how* it matters. Many of the cases of liberalizing electoral outcomes in our study have few characteristics in common: the elections occur in countries that come from different geographic regions, have dissimilar levels of economic development and types of political institutions, and have seldom been studied together in the same analytic framework. Despite their differences, they show that an opposition coalition—which often developed somewhat surprisingly, as old

rivals suddenly became strategic allies—clearly became a decisive factor that led to the significant political liberalization of each country.

For example, during the run-up to the 2000 presidential elections in Serbia and Montenegro, opposition leaders such as Zoran Djindjic and Vojislav Koštunica—who had previously been bitterly divided—decided to create an 18-party alliance, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia, to oppose Slobodan Milosevic. The 2000 elections in Senegal saw the shocking upset of 20-year president Abdou Diouf, by Abdoulaye Wade, who had lost the four previous elections by wide margins. In 2000, however, although Diouf had the largest number of votes after the first round, he lacked the 50% needed to win outright, and Wade was able to ride a wave of support from the "Front pour l'Alternance," a coalition of 19 opposition parties, to win handily in the second round. Very similar stories could be told for Romania in 1996, and Croatia and Ghana in 2000, where opposition coalition building resulted in the ouster of long-standing dominant parties and leaders.[31] An important common feature in each of these cases was that such a coalition was neither logical nor predetermined—in fact, in many countries there were recent precedents of fractious conflict within the opposition. But it somehow crystallized and helped to lead to a dramatic political liberalization in a relatively short period of time.

Space limitations prevent us from developing all of these cases fully here, but a more detailed exploration of the case of Kenya in 2002 will help to elucidate many of the common processes connected to the emergence of LEOs in competitive authoritarian regimes around the world.

Kenya's Liberalizing Electoral Outcome

The case of Kenya's 2002 election illustrates the central role that opposition coalitions can play in liberalizing electoral outcomes, particularly when it is compared to the country's prior two elections. In the run up to Kenya's

first two multiparty elections in 1992 and 1997,[32] international donor pressure and an active opposition and civil society movement pressed Kenya's long-time president, Daniel Arap Moi, to allow a competitive and free and fair electoral process. Though the elections were competitive, as the opposition received a clear majority of the votes, they were neither free nor fair. The Moi regime and the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) party used patronage and large-scale ethnic violence to attempt to divide the opposition parties, disenfranchise voters who supported them, and ultimately tilt the electoral playing field in its favor. This strategy succeeded as the opposition fractured along ethnic lines and fielded multiple presidential candidates, which negated the opposition's overwhelming majority vote total, and allowed Moi to win reelection with a meager plurality.[33]

In the December 2002 election, though Moi was constitutionally barred from running for re-election, many observers expected a repeat of 1992 and 1997. Early evidence of ethnic violence was seen as a sign that the incumbent regime would again resort to its bag of dirty tricks to guarantee electoral victory (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks 2002). The opposition's attempts to join together were treated with skepticism across the board.[34] Moreover, early polls indicated that any of the possible successors to Moi from the KANU party were favored over opposition presidential aspirants. Despite these early signs of a repeat of 1992 and 1997, the 2002 election turned out to be a watershed moment in Kenyan politics as the opposition pulled off a triumphant victory.

A crucial determinant of this remarkable outcome was the opposition's ability to overcome personal and ethnic differences and form a broad-based coalition, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). The opposition took advantage of the incumbent party's latent divisions, and it united behind one candidate, the veteran politician Mwai Kibaki, to trounce Moi's appointed successor, Uhuru Kenyatta. The opposition coalition raised the costs of extralegal policies by the incumbent regime and increased doubts among the regime's cohorts that corruption and

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[31]On the other hand, the case of Zimbabwe 2002 reminds us that the relationship between an opposition coalition and a liberalizing electoral outcome is merely probabilistic. Though the political opposition and civil society rallied behind a single presidential candidate in the 2002 election in its challenge of the long-time incumbent Robert Mugabe, it did not guarantee a liberalizing outcome. The unified opposition raised the costs of repression, manipulation, and patronage—setting in motion a mechanism for political liberalization—but the Mugabe government was willing to incur these costs even if it meant compromising its monopoly of violence, bankrupting the economy, destroying vital commercial farms, inducing famine and food shortages, and facing stringent internationial sanctions.

[32]These cases are excluded from our statistical analysis because 1992 was a founding election and in the year before the 1997 election Kenya was coded a 7 on the Freedom House political rights scale.

[33]In 1992, Moi won with 36%, while the three main opposition candidates received a total of 63%. In 1997, Moi won with 40%, and the four main opposition candidates received 57%.

[34]Kenya's leading newspaper declared in an editorial almost a year before the election: "We believe that opposition unity is important for the political development of this country and we give our unreserved encouragement to those who seek it. But the onus remains squarely on the alliance to provide the evidence that this will not be another 1992 or 1997" (*Daily Nation* 2002).

fraud during the election could be carried out with impunity. In this case study, we briefly review the conditions for the emergence of an opposition coalition, which many expected to fail as it did in 1992 and 1997, and the mechanism by which the opposition's broad-based alliance ushered in a liberalizing electoral outcome.

The Origins of the NARC

Crucial to the formation of a broad-based coalition was the political opposition's growing coordination in parliament and its increasing number of linkages with civil society throughout the 1990s. Though none of their leaders was able to win the presidency in the 1992 and 1997 elections, the multiple political parties in the opposition were able to control nearly half of the elected seats in parliament, increasingly assert themselves as a cohesive political force, and ally with a younger generation of more technocratic KANU politicians, who were not afraid to challenge Moi (Barkan 2003). For example, in 1997, following a series of protests for constitutional reform by civil society groups, the political opposition—working with moderate KANU MPs in the Inter-Parliamentary Parties Group—extracted limited, but important, constitutional reforms from the Moi government.

Despite the opposition and civil society's moderate success, the antigovernment forces realized that wide-reaching reform would remain elusive as long as Moi was president. Yet, Moi's reelection in 1997 once again illustrated that the opposition's own divisions were an important factor in keeping Moi in power. As one civil society leader phrased it, "No leader can refuse to admit that a fragmented Opposition, in the absence of democratic constitutional change, will lose again to KANU in 2002. The 1992 and 1997 elections must have delivered the message and the lesson" (Kibwana 2001).

The opposition's need for a united front became even more imperative as the KANU party developed an alliance with one of the largest opposition parties, the National Development Party, led by Raila Odinga and broadly supported by the Luo ethnic group. Ties between KANU and NDP grew from a loose parliamentary partnership in 1998 to a full-scale merger in March 2002. Responding to the growing KANU-NDP alliance and building on linkages developed during their campaign for constitutional reform, the parliamentary opposition and civil society leaders sought to coalesce into a single opposition coalition to compete in the 2002 election.

Hoping to form an alliance before main opposition politicians "committed their resources and minds on individual campaigns" (Oluoch 2002), talks on forming an opposition coalition began as early as January 1999 among a group of moderate members of parliament, known as the "Progressive Elements Forum." These MPs, representing all of the major opposition parties, broached the idea of forming an alliance for the 2002 election to the three leading opposition presidential candidates from the 1997 election. Indeed, the "Big Three"—consisting of Kibaki, Michael Wamalwa, and Charity Ngilu—started to have regular breakfast meetings in March 2001, while other active MPs worked behind the scenes with civil society leaders to cement the alliance (Oduol 2002; Warigi 2002).

After a number of meetings and negotiations, in February 2002 the National Alliance for Change (NAC) was formed as an instrument to mount a credible challenge to the KANU party. At its inception, NAC grouped together the Democratic Party, Ford-Kenya, the National Party of Kenya, Ford-Asili, Saba Saba Asili, Progressive Peoples Forum (formerly the Progressive Elements Forum), and the National Convention Executive Council. The goals of the Alliance were "to win the next General Election and form a government of national unity, reconstruct the economy, uphold democracy and promote reconciliation" (Mugonyi and Namunane 2002). With this organizational apparatus established and supported by a broad swathe of opposition parties and civil society groups, the NAC (which eventually became the National Alliance Party for Kenya, or NAK) rallied around Kibaki and eventually selected him as its single presidential candidate on September 18.

As the opposition was coming together, KANU itself began to unravel, in particular over the decision of selecting Moi's successor as KANU's presidential candidate. Moi alienated Raila Odinga and other presidential aspirants within the KANU party by hand-picking Uhuru Kenyatta—the son of Kenya's pro-independence leader and first president, Jomo Kenyatta—as the party's presidential candidate, and thereby resisting any democratic presidential nomination process. Consequently, Odinga, long-time Vice President George Saitoti and other dissenters formed the Rainbow Coalition and eventually broke away from the KANU party. With the NAK already in place and solidly behind Kibaki, Odinga adeptly led those who defected from KANU to merge with the extant opposition alliance (Throup 2003b). Soon afterwards, Odinga endorsed Kibaki's bid for president, and the NAK and Rainbow Coalition merged on October 21, 2002 to form the "super-alliance" of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). The parties signed a "public Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the design of fielding a single compromise candidate for the presidency as well as for each parliamentary seat and local-government post" (Ndegwa 2003, 153). With this degree of coordination,

and with representatives hailing from all of the country's major ethnic groups, the NARC positioned itself to exploit the electorate's antipathy to the Moi regime and channel votes to one opposition presidential candidate.

Causal Mechanism

Yet, despite the formation of NARC and the creation of the "super-alliance," many in the opposition, civil society, and media worried that KANU would again use its old tricks—including playing the ethnic card, inciting violence, and spending billions of Kenya shillings to buy votes—and ensure Kenyatta's victory. Compared to the previous two elections, however, in 2002 the ruling regime used relatively little force and fraud. For example, by one estimate, in the 2002 election KANU spent less than one-quarter of the funds it spent in 1992 to try to buy votes (Throup 2003b). Why?

A number of factors came into play. Most important was the tightly knit coalition created by the opposition parties. With an allied opposition that was both nationally and cross-ethnically supported, the NARC was seen as a government-in-waiting. By October, opinion polls started to show Kenyatta trailing far behind Kibaki, despite earlier polls showing any number of Moi's possible successors poised for victory (National Democratic Institute 2002). Consequently, the Moi regime had to take into account the fact that KANU's defeat was likely. With NARC running on a campaign of ending corruption and cleaning up the government, any devious preelection acts by regime hardliners could be subject to possible criminal investigations by a new NARC government. Moreover, for repression or patronage really to alter the electoral outcome, through vote buying and disenfranchising opposition supporters, millions of dollars would be required in financing. KANU did not have the money for such an extensive electoral operation, especially with Moi stepping down, reducing the willingness of his family and cronies to spend exorbitant amounts to get Kenyatta elected (Throup 2003a), and donors tightening the strings on Kenya's government spending (Throup 2003b, 4). In short, the opposition alliance significantly raised the risks and costs of the incumbent's use of patronage and repression.

Other factors contributed to KANU's reluctance to use force and fraud. In the lead up to the 2002 election, the Kenyan press and international and domestic human rights groups highlighted government abuses in previous elections to remind hard-liners on both sides, but particularly within the KANU government, that they would be exposed and held accountable if they orchestrated violence (Human Rights Watch 2002). At a practical level, with two Kikuyus as the lead presidential contenders and both

NARC and KANU representing cross-ethnic coalitions, the ethnic tension that existed in the previous elections, and which gave rise to ethnic clashes between Kalenjin and the Kikuyu and Luo, was not as salient. There was no advantage to attacking and disenfranchising the other's supporters as it risked alienating one's own ethnic group. Finally, civil society organizations deployed tens of thousands of electoral observers to ensure that the vote was free of rigging and manipulation.

With these conditions in place, the 2002 election was one of the freest and fairest in Kenya's history, despite ominous signs of KANU's willingness to resort to its tried and true electoral practices throughout the year. Exploiting the even playing field that they helped to create, Kibaki and the NARC party won overwhelmingly, capturing more than 60% of the presidential vote total and 125 of the 210 elected seats in parliament.

In sum, the Kenya case provides substantive evidence to complement our quantitative results. While the resignation of Daniel Arap Moi and his mishandling of the succession process created divisions within the incumbent party, it did not determine the opposition coalition or the ensuing liberalizing electoral outcome. The existence of NAK at the time KANU became roiled by the succession crisis (which in part can be seen as a failed alliance or coalition between KANU and the NDP) acted as a focal point for KANU defectors and paved the way for the formation of a grand opposition coalition. It was the linkages between civil society and the political opposition and the subsequent breakfast meetings and negotiations between the "Big Three" that led to the origin of the NAK—the nucleus of the opposition coalition.

In the end, this coalition of opposition parties proved crucial to a liberalizing electoral outcome, not because the opposition was stronger or more popular in 2002—it received roughly the same proportion of the presidential vote as in 1992 and 1997, leading one scholar to declare the 2002 election "a victory ten years delayed" (Ndegwa 2003, 148)—but because of the way it was organized. The National Rainbow Coalition, comprising some fifteen political parties and supported by all four major opposition presidential candidates from the 1997 election, channeled the opposition vote into one candidate, while raising the risks and costs of the use of force and fraud by the Moi regime—effectively rendering these policies futile.

NARC's electoral victory ushered in a new era in Kenyan politics. It boosted widespread elite and popular support for the institution of democracy as the only way to attain political power. And Kibaki's new government, the most ethnically diverse in the country's history, immediately pledged to root out corruption, started to clean out the judiciary, and introduced free public education. Yet, NARC now struggles with the inherent tensions that

persist in many opposition alliances that manage to oust a dominant incumbent party. It has been unable to evolve into a unified political party, became bitterly divided over a referendum on a new constitution, and has fallen far short in its anti-graft campaign. Despite its shortcomings, however, the NARC's victory has set Kenya on a new path, and has contributed to a greater degree of liberalization in the country.

Conclusion

In the wake of the third wave of democratization, competitive authoritarianism has emerged as a prominent regime type in developing countries. The defining characteristic of these regimes is a competitive process for the selection of national leaders that is often manipulated by the ruling party or incumbent to ensure its hold on power. Consequently, competitive authoritarianism rests on a paradox: it is stable as long as the incumbent is capable of controlling the electoral process, yet inherently unstable since regularly held elections provide a significant opportunity for opposition movements to effectively challenge authoritarian incumbents (Levitsky and Way 2002). In other words, major political change is never certain, but it is often possible. And while incumbents have become deft at securing reelection, opposition movements can and do sometimes overcome the fundamentally flawed process.

This article has systematically analyzed when and why elections in competitive authoritarian regimes usher in significant political liberalization. Our main finding is that the strategic decisions made by the opposition—in particular, the decision to create a coalition or to jointly support a single candidate, despite significant regional, ethnic, or ideological differences and divisions—can have a tremendous effect on the electoral process and its results. Although future research is necessary to specify the determinants of opposition coalitions,[35] we have shown that the larger impact of such coalitions on political liberalization can be rapid and dramatic. As demonstrated by the case study above, this was certainly what transpired in Kenya's 2002 elections, where the opposition's ability to organize effectively into a broad-based coalition channeled votes to one candidate and raised the costs and risks

of repression, manipulation, and vote-buying on the part of the ruling party.

The empirical findings of our statistical and case study analysis lend support to our main theoretical argument about the importance of elite strategies and incumbent-opposition dynamics in competitive authoritarian regimes, versus structural factors and prior degrees of political liberalization. And the applicability of our argument to similar regimes from several different continents shows the advantage of studying these regimes in a genuinely cross-*regional* perspective (Bunce 2003).

Our finding also has significant policy implications, showing how important it can be for opposition leaders to realize—and, by extension, perhaps, for Western donors to encourage them to realize—the overall benefits that can be achieved if they can put aside their differences in order to seize upon the political opportunity offered by elections. The result, if successful, might be significant change and improvement in that country over the long run. In that sense, our findings provide a more hopeful message for countries that are constrained by poor economic and institutional conditions, as it shows the potentially important role of the agency of collective actors. Indeed, though they were not included in the 1990–2002 time frame of our analysis, the recent success stories in such countries as Ukraine and Georgia, as well as the disappointments in Malawi and Cameroon, in which the opposition's inability to form a coalition allowed the incumbent to prevail, highlight the enduring importance of strategic opposition coalitions. And while some countries that have had liberalizing electoral outcomes will probably slide backwards in the future, the achievement of an opposition coalition, even if it dissolves later, will likely remain as a pivotal historical moment, an inspiration to future opposition movements in that country and elsewhere.

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[35]The Kenya case study points to the important role of civil society in creating linkages between the disparate opposition parties, as well as facilitating meetings, brokering negotiations, and enhancing the trust between the deeply divided opposition leaders such that they were willing to put aside differences to collectively challenge the incumbent party.

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