

## **Policy Blind Coalitions- the Case of Kenya**

Michael Wahman<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lund University, Sweden

michael.wahman@svet.lu.se

Traditional theories of coalition formation, such as the minimal-range and minimal connected distance theories, suggest that political parties form coalitions based on ideological proximity. The predictive power of such theories is, however, severely restricted in many African party systems, where parties uphold unclear policy positions and are difficult to place on a policy continuum. This paper tries to explain the process of coalition formation in such unprogrammatic party systems, and assess how the mode of coalition formation, both pre- and post-electoral, affects the democratization process. This is done from studying the notable case of Kenya.

Based on interviews with Kenyan politicians, party officials, and political commentators, the paper argues that policy considerations are not a main determinant of coalition behavior in Kenyan politics. Similarly, other potential determinants, such as inter-personal trust and path-dependence have a limited explanatory power. Instead, coalition building is a fluid enterprise with few long-term commitments between political players.

These findings have important consequences for the process of democratization. Since players lack constraints in terms of potential coalition partners, parties may act opportunistically and engage in floor-crossing when found beneficial. As a consequence, governments face high uncertainty of their re-election prospects and might be hesitant to abolish incumbent advantages and level the electoral playing field.