A Political History of the Bukusu Luhya

As told through their elected representatives, 1957-2022

Charles Hornsby February 2022

Series #9

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Limitations

• Excludes Local Government throughout.

1 Gusii 2 Meru 3 Ukambani 4 Embu and Mbeere 5 Maasai and Samburu 6 Somali 7 Nakuru and Laikipia 8 Nairobi 9 Bukusu Luhya

Bukusu Political History

The Bukusu are the largest subgroup of the Bantu-speaking Luhya (sometimes pre independence also Luyia) community of western Kenya. Until the 1950s the community were known by the British as Kitosh. They mostly lived before independence in North Nyanza District (renamed at independence Elgon Nyanza and part of Western Province with the regional constitution). Bukusu farmers were also found in the white highlands to the north and east, where Luhya squatted on European farms. Politically they have tended to take a slightly different line to that of their southern Luhya neighbours.

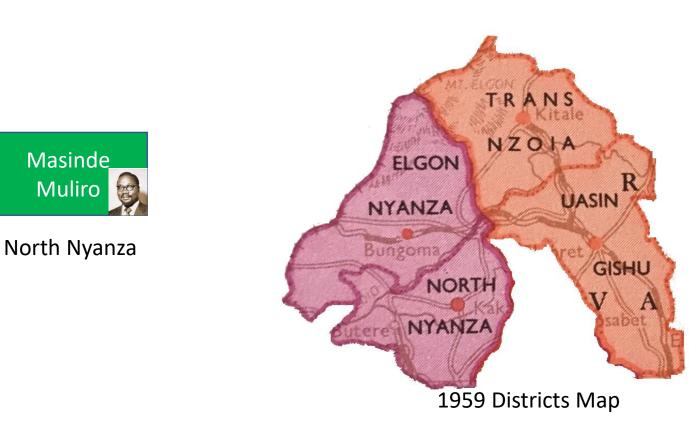
In the rest of this material, all politicians listed are Bukusu unless otherwise noted. If non-Bukusu, they are coloured grey and if non-Luhya, Grey with a suffix i.e. (Kal) for Kalenjin.



Governor Renison

Bukusu Political History

1957



Colonial

Kenya

The contest for the first elected African representatives in 1957 sees a 35-year old university educated teacher Bukusu, Masinde Muliro, win the large Nyanza North constituency, covering what was soon to become Western Province, defeating opponents including unelected incumbent Wycliffe Awori (Samia), Christopher Siganga and J.D. Otiende (Maragoli). The 1958 subdivision of constituencies does not affect North Nyanza but in North Nyanza District is split into Elgon Nyanza (Bukusu, Samia, Khayo, Marachi, Sabaot) and North Nyanza (the rest of the Luhya).

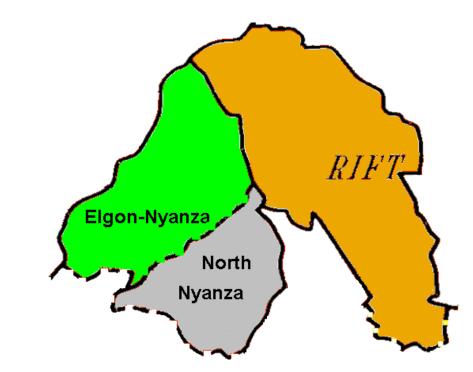


Governor Ronald Ngala Renison (KADU)

Bukusu

Feb 1961: The Kenyatta Election





In the 1961 "Kenyatta election", Muliro, now Vice-President of KADU (founded 1960), is unopposed in the new seat of Elgon Nyanza (Bungoma District to be). The neighbouring rift valley area is still "whites only". He is appointed Minister for Commerce, Industry and Communications in Ronald Ngala's short-lived KADU-led minority government of 1961-62.



Elgon Nyanza



Governor Jomo Ronald Renison Kenyatta Ngala Bukusu

Apr 1962-63: Coalition Government



Elgon Nyanza

In the KANU-KADU coalition government of April 1962 –May 1963, Muliro remains a minister but loses his communications portfolio. Pressure builds but is eventually unsuccessful to move Bukusu-dominated settler Kitale into Western Province to be as its capital.



Governor Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya Macdonald (KANU)

Mark

Barasa

Elgon East

Bukusu

IND

George

Kerre

Elgon Central

Nathan 🎐

Munoko

Bungoma Senate

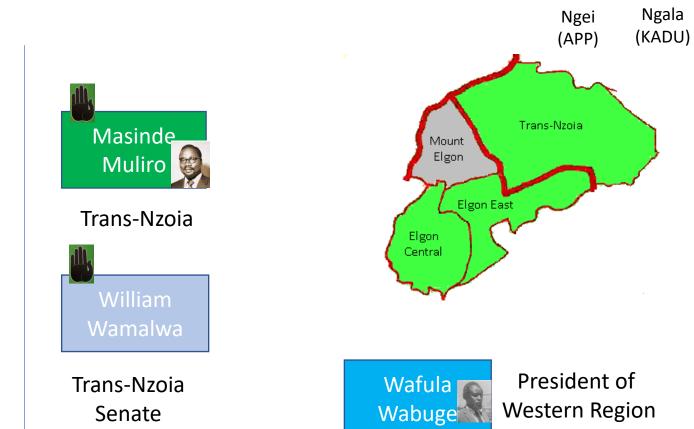
Daniel

Moss (Kal)

Mount Elgon

1963: For Self-Government





In the independence elections, Muliro makes a strategic move to contest (and win for KADU) in the new ex-white highlands constituency of Trans-Nzoia. Trans-Nzoia Senate is also won by a Bukusu for KADU, William Wamalwa (father of Kijana). In the newly created Bungoma District (enlarged with settlement schemes in the east) home to the Bukusu but also the Sabaot Kalenjin of Mount Elgon, KADU wins all seats except for Mount Elgon(independent). As KADU is defeated, Muliro joins the backbenches. A Bukusu Wafula Wabuge became the short lived President of Western Region (1963-64/5)



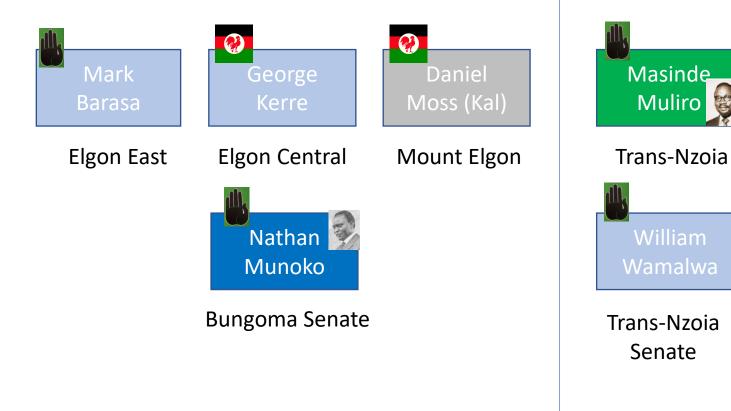
Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya, Ngei (KANU)



End 1963



Ngala (KADU)





Western Region

After KANU's victory, two MPs see that the grass is greener and defect to KANU

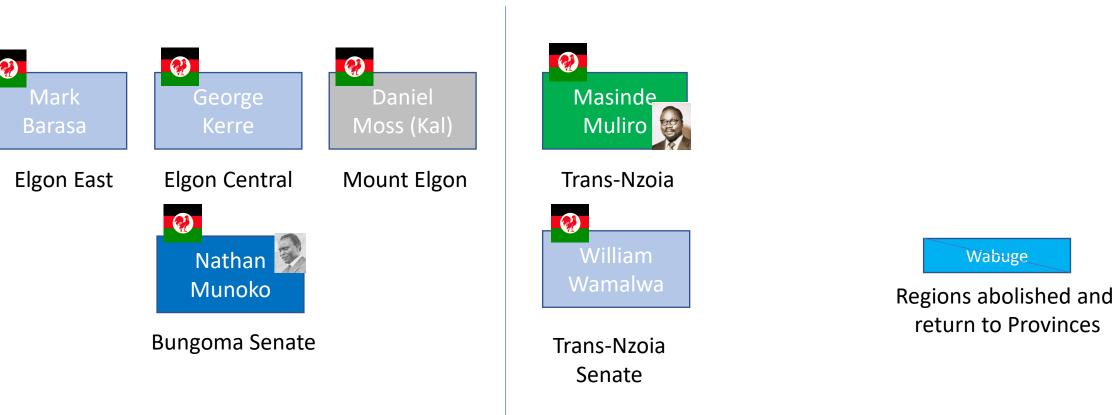


Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya, Ngala

Bukusu

1964: The First one Party State





In November 1964, beset by defections, Ngala and Muliro decide to fold KADU and accept the best terms they can get for incorporation into KANU. However while Moi is immediately offered a Ministerial post, Ngala and Muliro – Mboya's most determined foe – remain on the backbenches

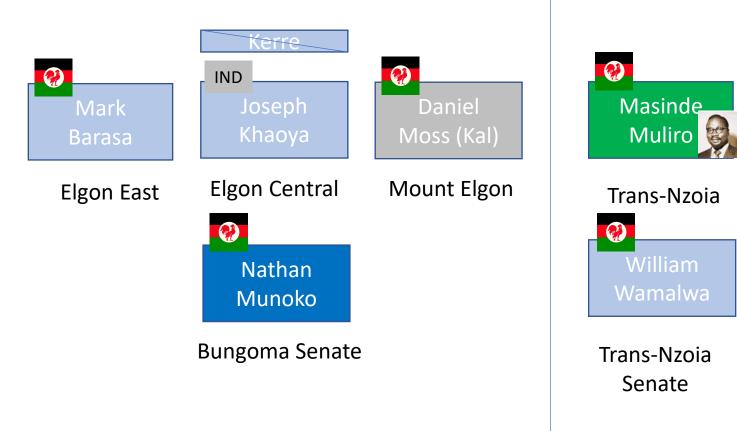


Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya, Ngala

Bukusu

1965-66: By-elections





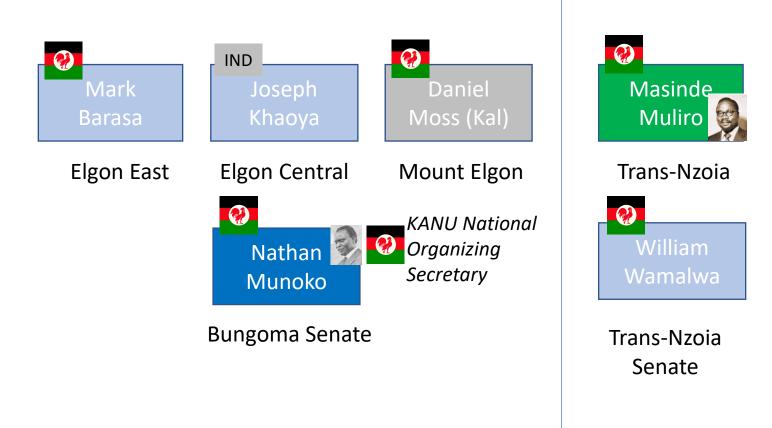
In the regular 1965 Senate by-election, Munoko retains his seat. In December 1965, George Kerre dies in a car crash and is succeeded by Joseph Khaoya (independent).



The Bukusu



1966: Little General Election - KPU vs KANU

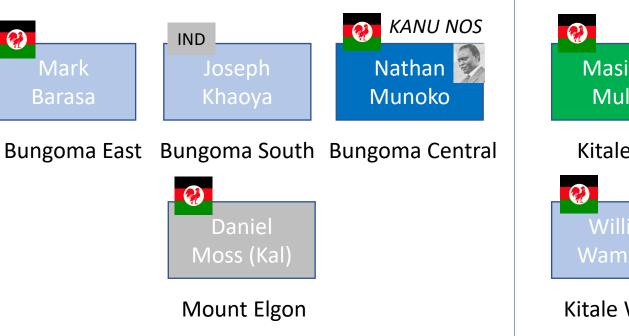


In the 1966 LGE, nothing changes in the Bukusu leadership; none defect with Odinga. Although KANU seeks out new allies elsewhere, and Munoko becomes KANU National Organizing Secretary, Muliro remains on the backbench



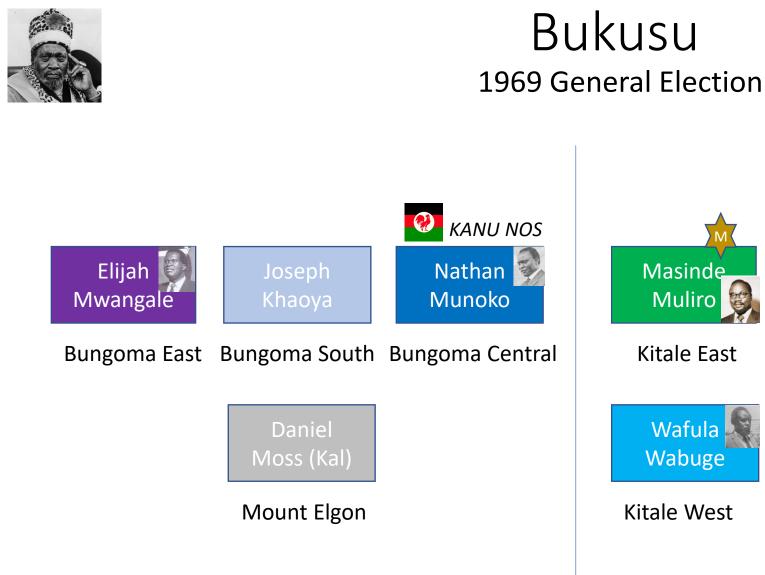






Wasindr
Masindr
DulicoKitale EastVilliam
VamalwaKitale West

The Senate is abolished and the both districts split to create one new national assembly constituency. At the same time, constituencies are renamed from their "Elgon" prefix to "Bungoma" and the Trans-Nzoia seats to "Kitale'. A small part of North Busia is transferred into Bungoma (I think at this time).



KPU is banned, Odinga detained. return of one-party state. Little changes. Muliro narrowly re-elected against a Kalenjin candidate. With Mboya dead, he is finally reappointed as a Minister. Wabuge elected MP. Moss re-elected beating a Bukusu candidate in Mount Elgon. Newcomer Elijah Mwangale wins Bungoma East and Munoko re-elected.

1969 Census:

Trans-Nzoia

47% Luhya, 19% Kalenjin,

14% Kikuyu,

5% Turkana

One Party State

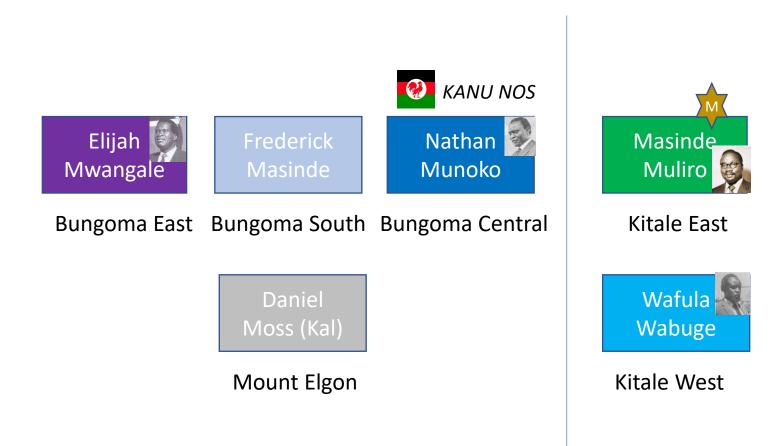
(Part 2):

1969-82



Bukusu 1974 General Election



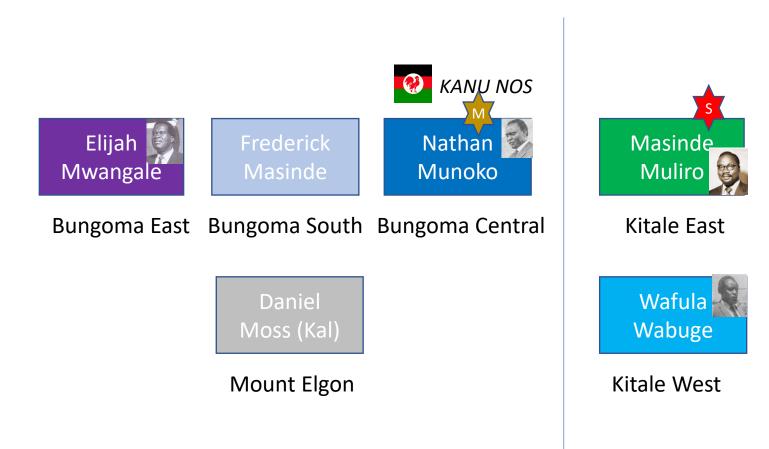


1974 general election. The height of Kikuyu dominance of Kenya. Both Kitale seats are won by Bukusu candidates, with Wabuge and Muliro again victorious. Only one seat – Bungoma South - changes hands

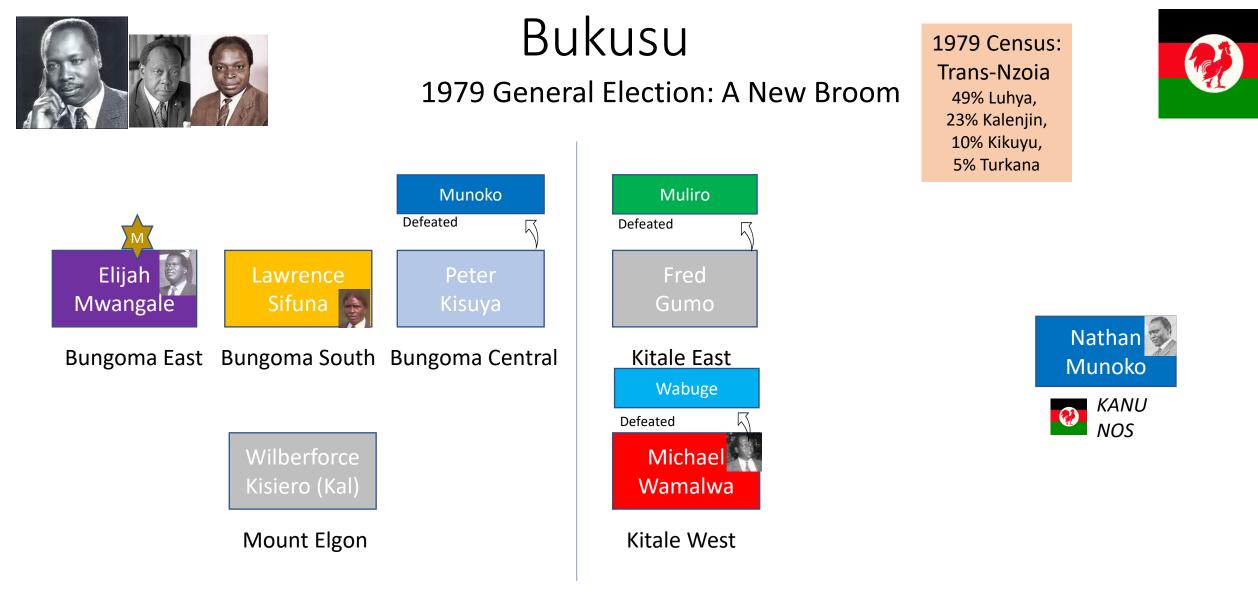


Bukusu 1975-76: JM Kariuki's murder





After Kariuki's murder, Muliro is the sole Minister to vote against the government on the report into his death. He is immediately sacked and replaced by Munoko.

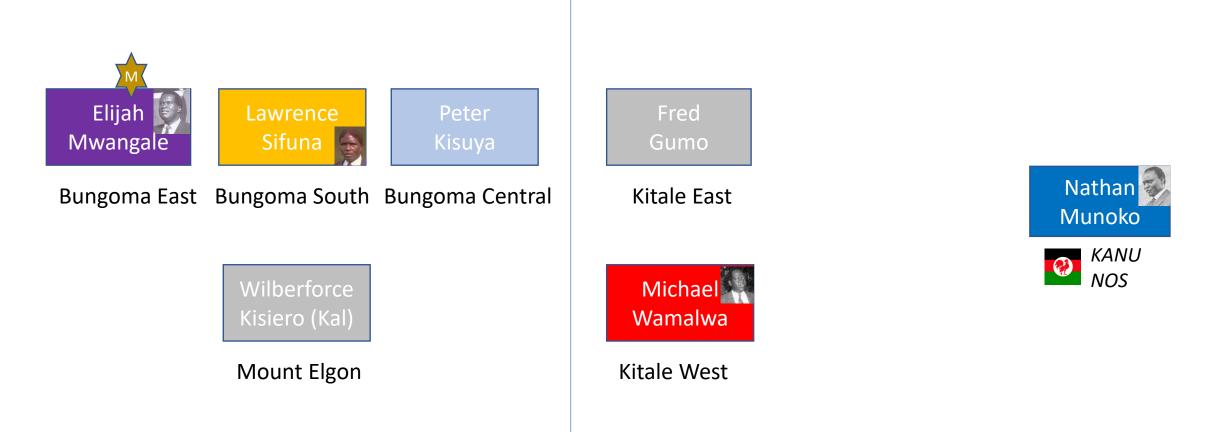


New president Moi - seeking to assert his authority – ensures his old ally Muliro is rigged out in Kitale East in favour of Banyala ex-Mayor Fred Gumo. In Kitale West, Muliro's protégé Michael "Kijana" Wamalwa (son of William) is elected. Recently reelected KANU Organising Secretary Munoko is evicted (he comes third) and the "flag" moves to Moi loyalist Mwangale. Lawrence Sifuna elected and becomes one of the radical "seven bearded sisters".

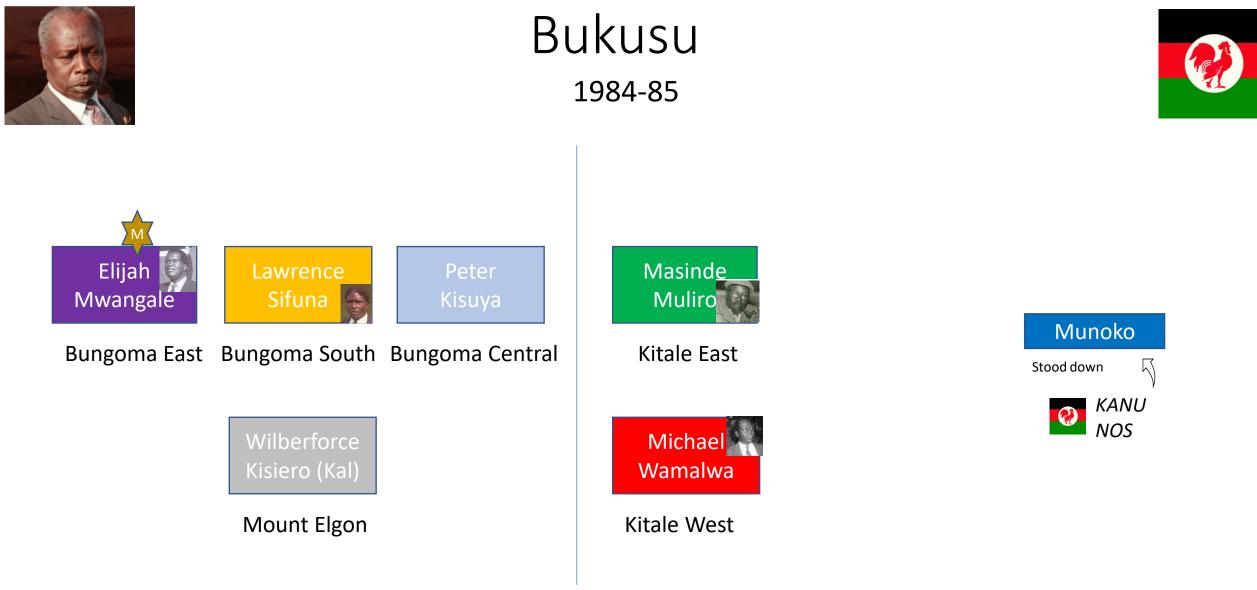


1983: Snap General Election





Every single MP re-elected. In Trans-Nzoia Gumo again "defeated" Muliro. Rising star Mwangale is made Foreign Minister.

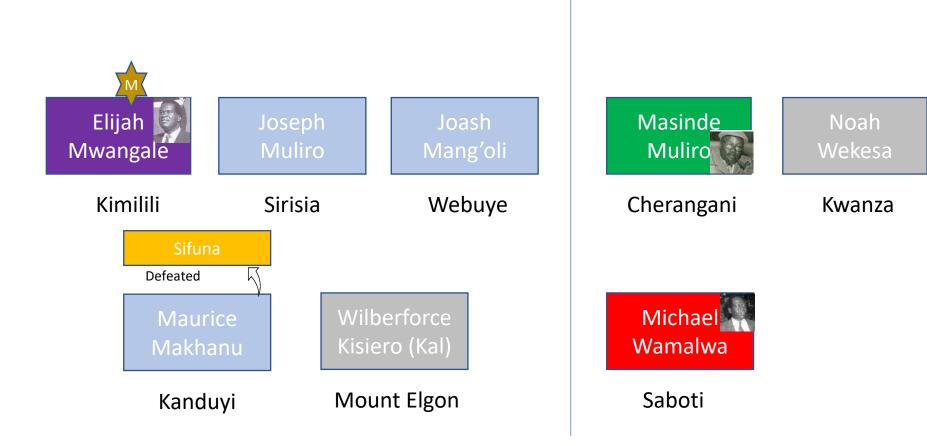


However in 1984 Gumo's election is invalidated due to ballot box stuffing. Muliro wins the resulting by-election against a Kalenjin candidate. However he remains a backbencher and under state pressure (as does Wamalwa). In 1985 in the KANU National elections Munoko stands down and the new Luhya representative is Burudi Nabwera (Tachoni),

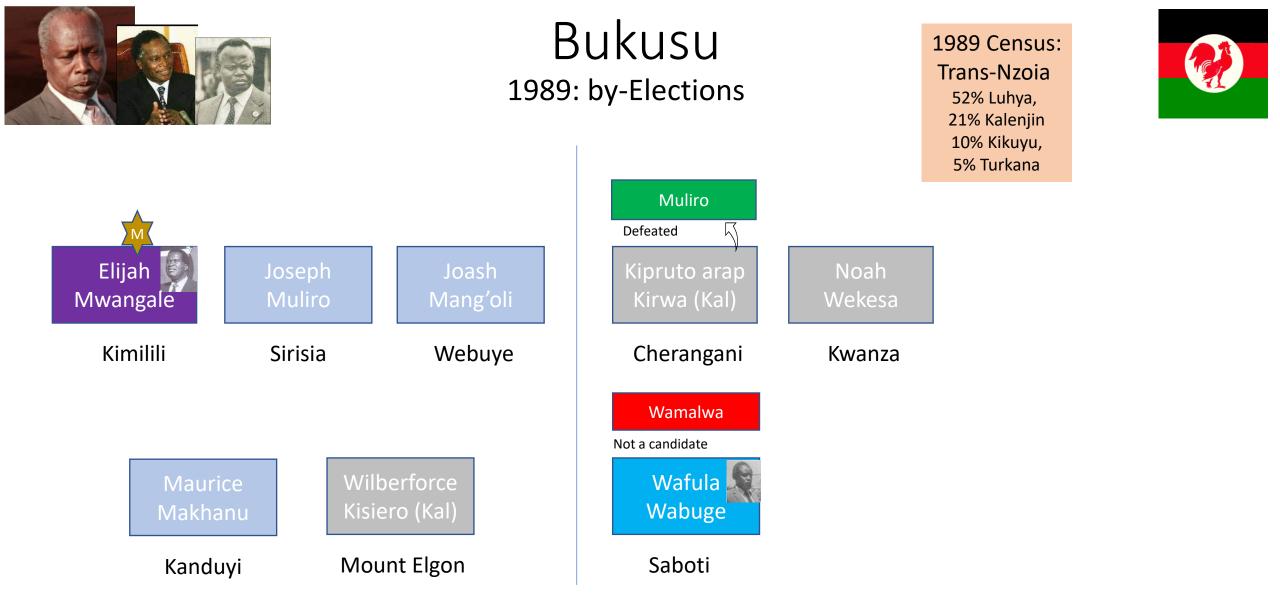


1988 (Public Queue Voting)





The 1987 boundary redistribution adds one seat to each district. Webuye is now majority Bukusu, minority Tachoni. Muliro narrowly reelected despite mass rigging elsewhere. Wekesa (Tachoni) wins Kwanza. Sifuna defeated. Mwangale remains the "Bukusu minister"

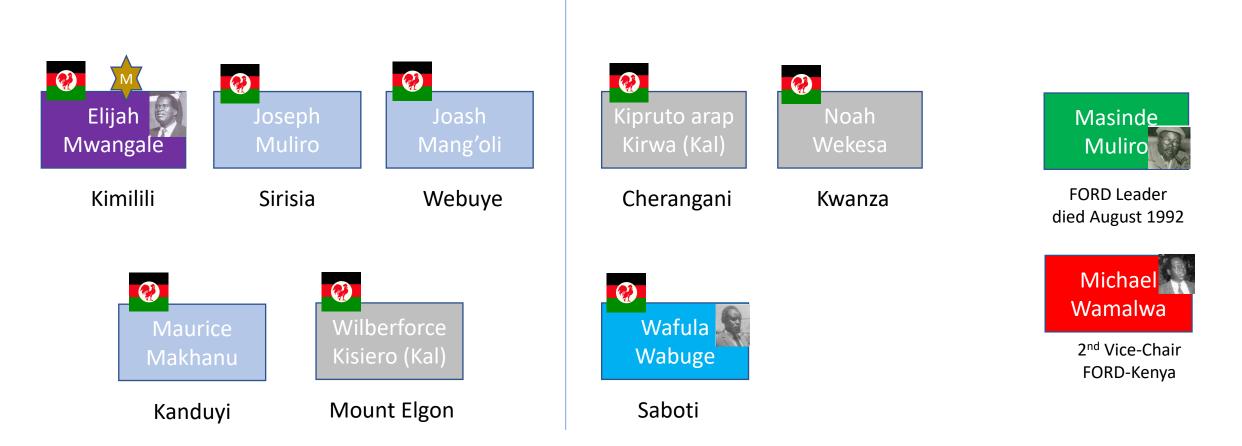


But Muliro almost immediately has his election nullified and loses the by-election to a Kalenjin, Kipruto arap Kirwa. Wamalwa follows soon after, and does not even try to stand for re-election.



Late 1992: Multi-Partyism

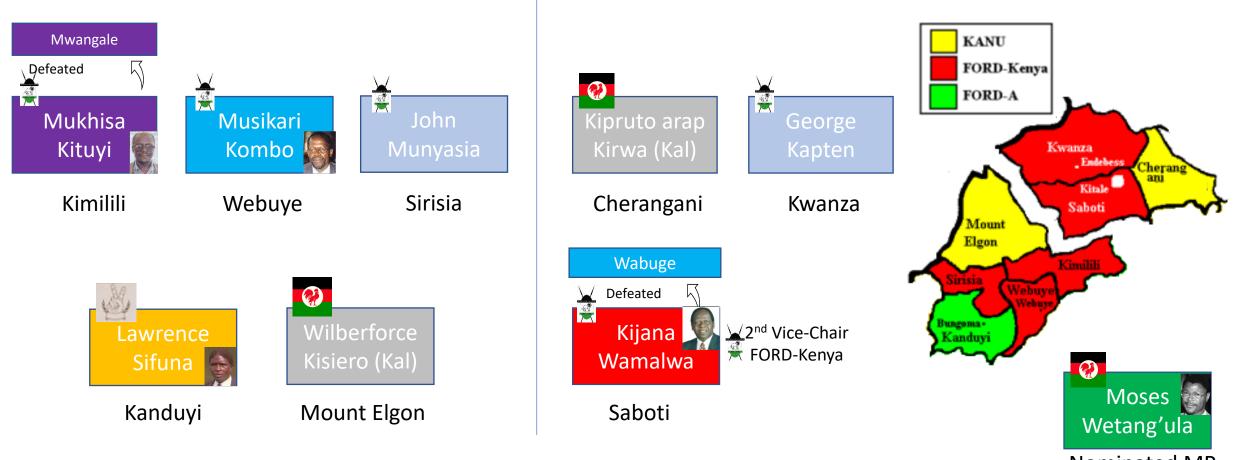




Queue voting abolished 1991. Ethnic clashes in Mount Elgon and Trans-Nzoia between Kalenjin and Luhya. Multi-party democracy returns Dec 1991. Despite the ferment of change and the clashes, all the incumbents stay in KANU, but Muliro becomes a key leader in FORD and a potential compromise president candidate. He dies suddenly in August, but Wamalwa and other Bukusu young Turks remain committed to FORD and then Odinga's FORD-Kenya as the two factions split into FORD-Kenya and FORD-Asili.

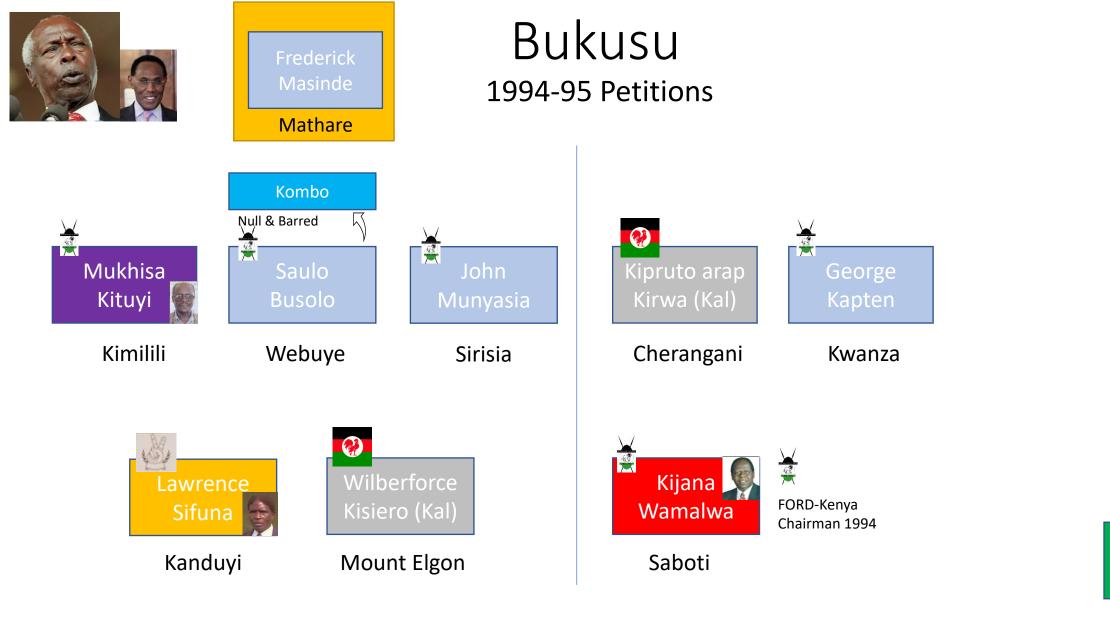
December 1992: Multi-party General Elections

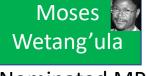




Nominated MP

In the December 1992 elections, Odinga's FORD-Kenya dominates the Bukusu vote. Amidst mass killings in Mount Elgon and north Bungoma, a new crop of radical leaders are elected. Mwangale is defeated by Mukhisa Kituyi. Odinga wins five of the six Bukusu dominated seats and FORD-Asili's Sifuna and Matiba one. Kanu wins only the two majority Kalenjin seats. Moi nominates lawyer Moses Wetang'ula to Parliament





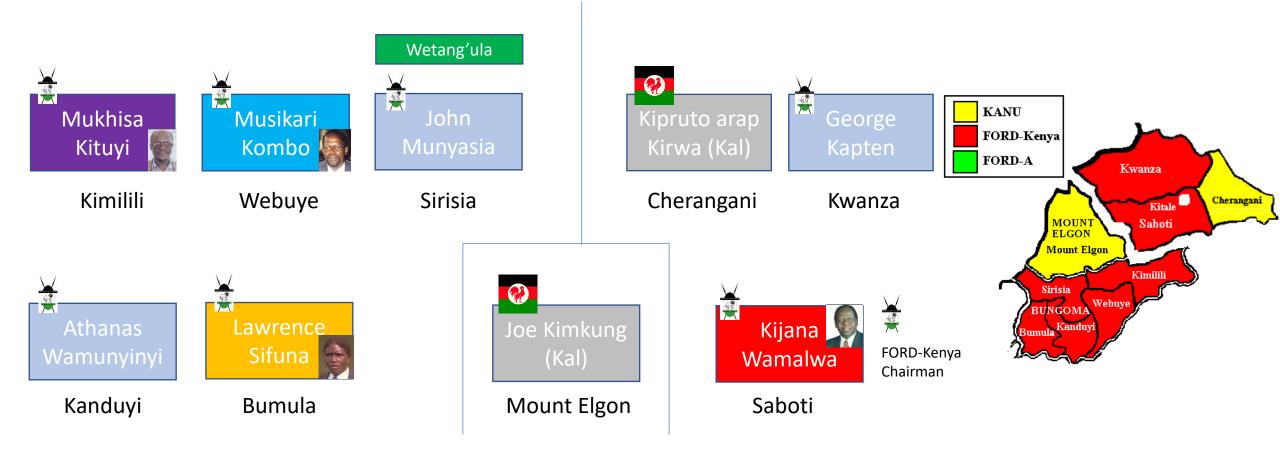
Nominated MP

1994 Kombo nullified, and barred, but FORD-K candidate Busolo wins the by-election. After Odinga's death vice-Chairman Wamalwa inherits the leadership and holds it against determined opposition from Odinga's son Raila. In Mathare, Bukusu Frederick Masinde, is elected MP (the first Bukusu MP outside the region) but dies on election day



Dec 1997 General Election



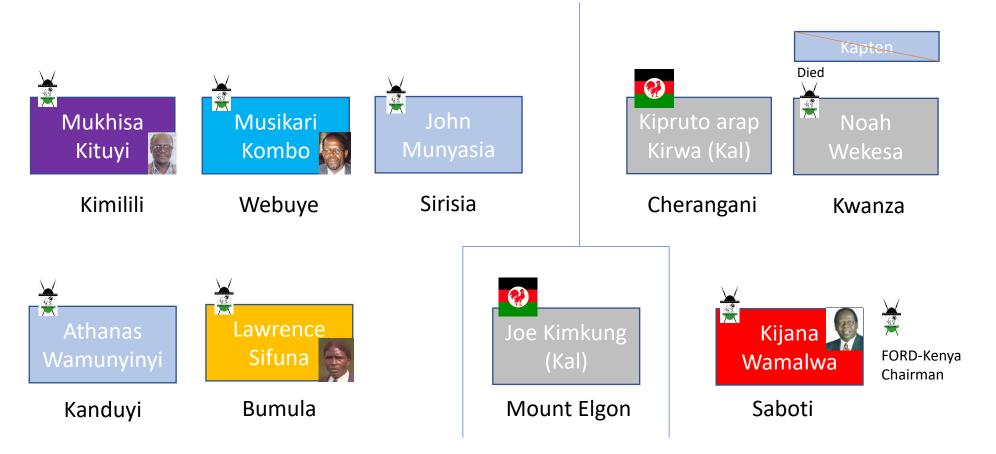


Boundary redistribution adds one seat for Bungoma. Mount Elgon now has its own district. Wamalwa (for President) and FORD-Kenya MPs wins every Bukusu seat (Sifuna having defected to join them), Moi and KANU again the two Kalenjin. Wetangula loses in Sirisia and is not renominated



1999-2000: Kapten's Death





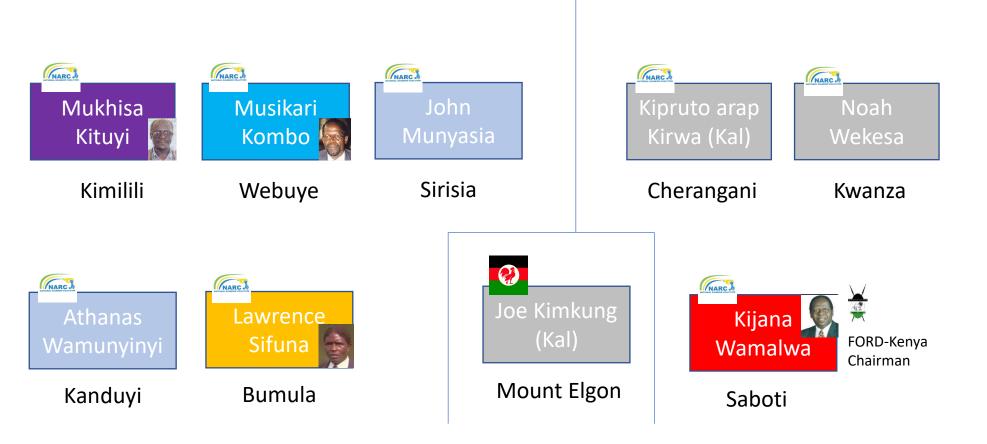
Kapten dies in December 1999. His successor is his predecessor Wekesa.



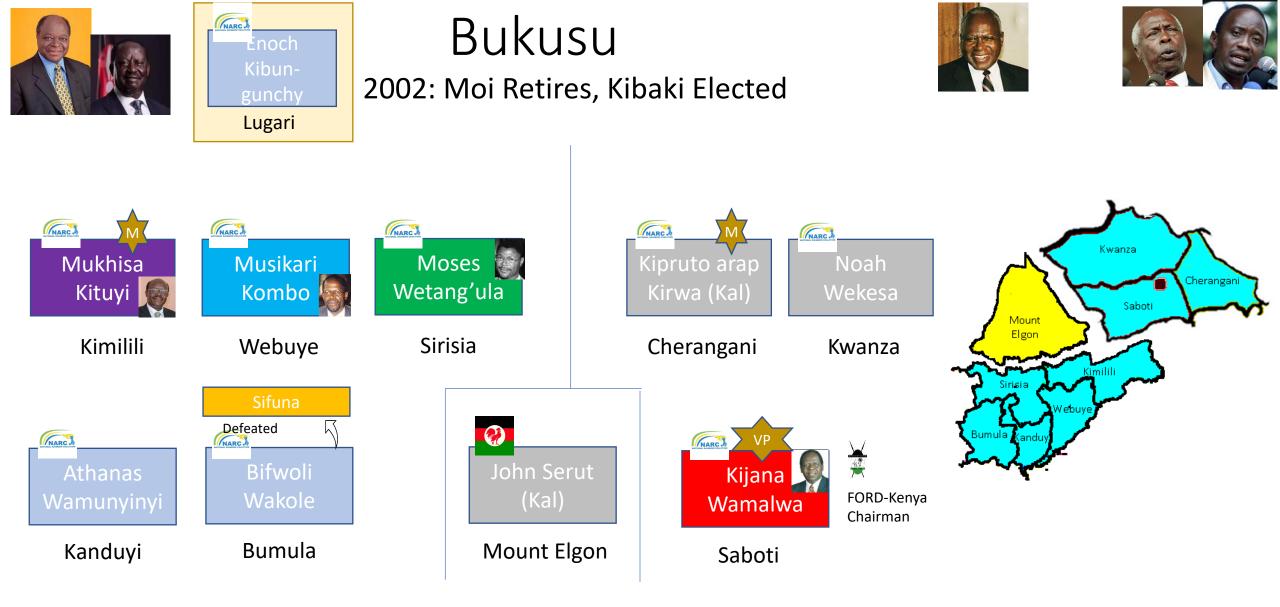
Late 2002: LDP/Rainbow Defection







FORD-Kenya MPs all remain aligned with Kibaki, Wamalwa and National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC). Kirwa, long a radical in KANU and associated with the unregistered UDM, is now part of NARC. Only Kimkung remains with KANU.



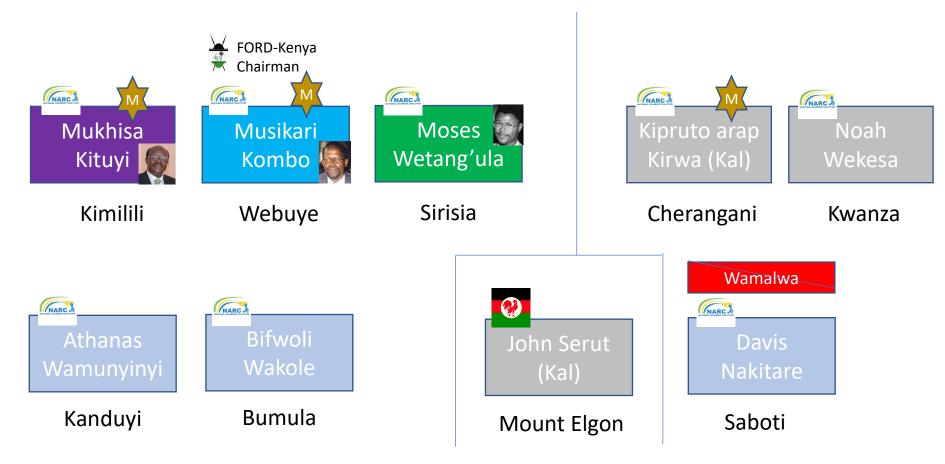
The NARC alliance has a clean sweep in presidency and parliament except for Kalenjin Mount Elgon. Little change amongst MPs. Wamalwa becomes Kibaki's Vice President. Kirwa, successful in Cherangany for NARC becomes the sole Kalenjin minister in the new government. Kituyi also becomes a minister. Wetang'ula elected MP. A Bukusu MP elected in the multi-ethnic settlement area of Lugari



2003: Wamalwa Dies

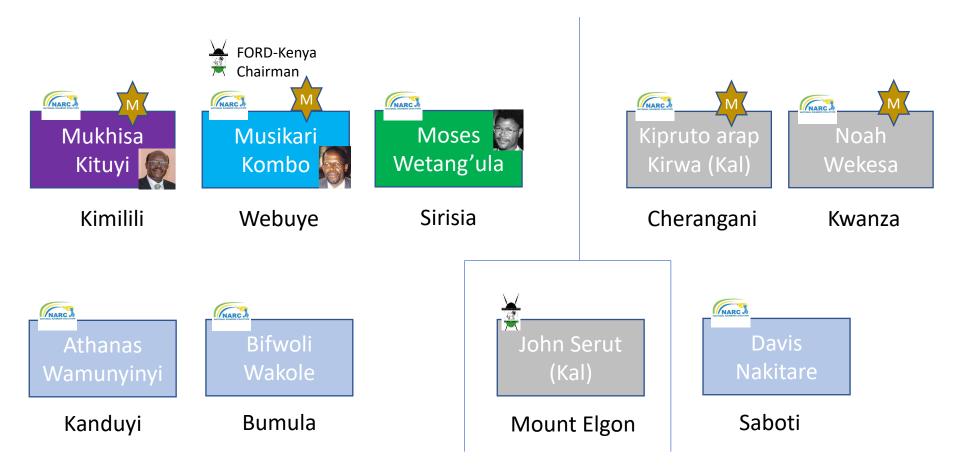






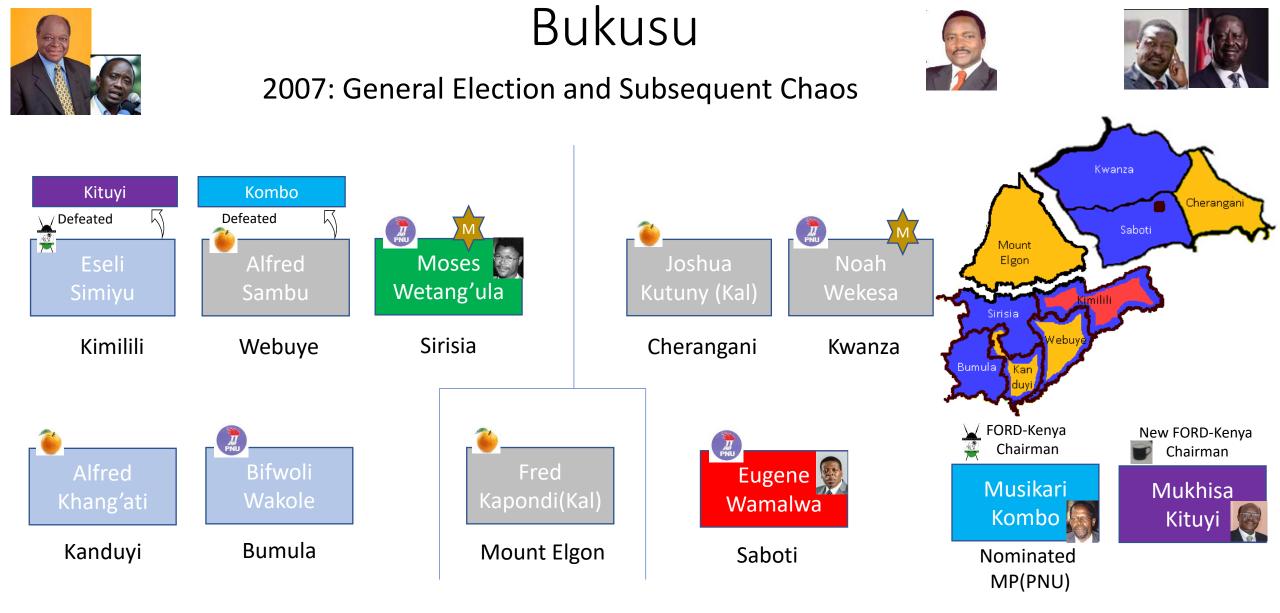
Vice-President Wamalwa dies in August 2003, and is succeeded in Saboti by another NARC MP. In the resulting reshuffle, the VP role goes to Moody Awori (Abasamia) and in consolation Kombo (now also head of FORD-Kenya) is also appointed Minister.

2005-6: Second Coalition Government



The 2005 Banana-Orange referendum split has little effect as most Bukusu (unlike most Luhya) remain loyal to Kibaki and oppose ODM. The Bukusu vote strongly for the Wako draft. In Kibaki's cobbled together government of December 2005, Wekesa also gets a ministerial post. Meanwhile Serut defects unofficially from KANU to FORD-Kenya and a large body of dissident FORD-Kenya MPs form offshoot New FORD Kenya.

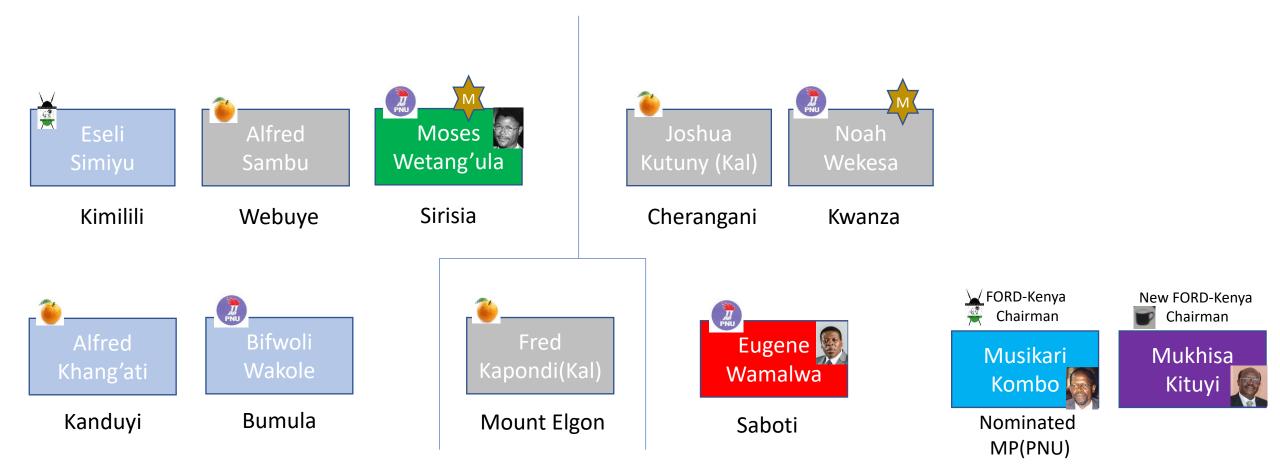




ODM-PNU battle nationwide, Luhya vote mostly ODM, but Bukusu split pro- and anti-Kibaki and between Kombo's FORD -Kenya and New FORD-Kenya (led by Kituyi). Kibaki wins two seats in the presidency which elected ODM MPs. Eugene, Michael's younger brother elected for PNU but Kitui and Kombo phyrrically ensure each other are defeated. Wetangula narrowly survives and becomes a Minister, as does Wekesa. Kombo nominated to Parliament.



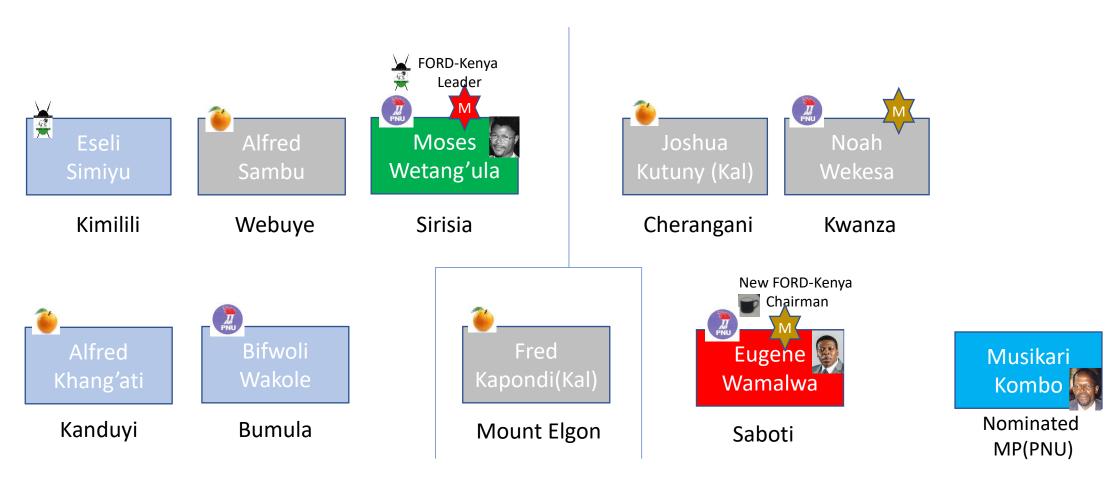
Bukusu 2008: Grand Coalition



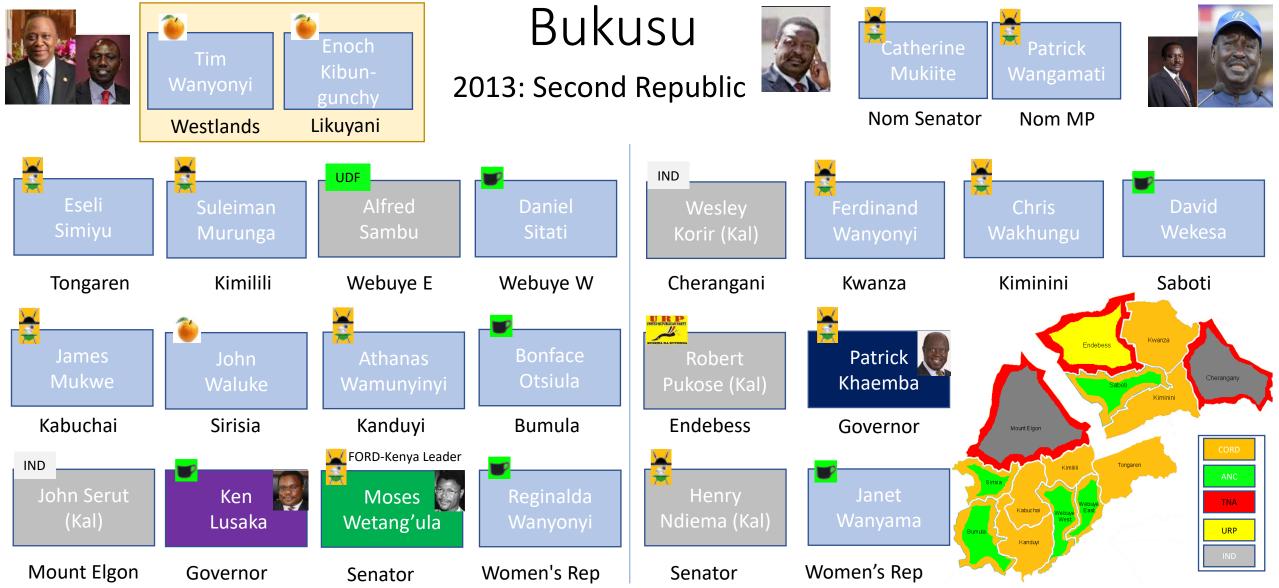
In the grand coalition (PNU-ODM-ODM-K), nothing changes. No Bukusu ODM MPs become ministers



Bukusu 2010-12



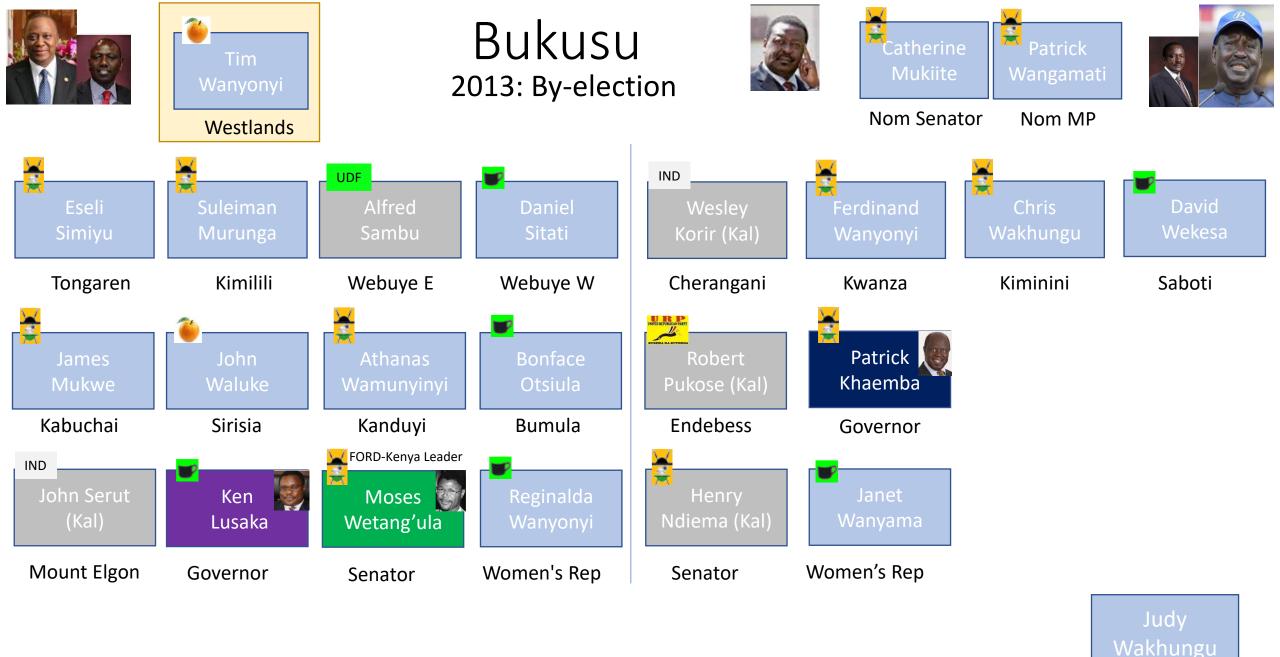
With the new constitution endorsed but not yet fully in effect, 2010-12 is a period of ferment and change. In the Bukusu, Eugene Wamalwa is appointed a Minister and (announcing he will stand for President) takes over the leadership of New Ford Kenya from Kituyi, while Wetang'ula resigns as a Minister in 2010 over corruption allegations, to be reappointed a year later. He then takes over FORD-Kenya's leadership from Kombo, leaving the two ministers each leading a party.



New constitution, new boundaries and Trans-Nzoia gains two seats to Bungoma's three. Bicameral parliament, Governors. Ministers no longer MPs. Odinga dominates presidentially and Mudavadi win nothing. CORD-member FORD-Kenya dominates, with Wetangula winning both Senate seats, the Trans-Nzoia governor and six MPs. New FORD Kenya, allied with Mudavadi, win three MPs, both women's seats and the Bungoma governorship. Kenyatta wins 3 seats presidentially and in parliament URP takes one. A Bukusu, Tim Wanyonyi is elected in Nairobi and Kibungunchy returns in Kakamega.

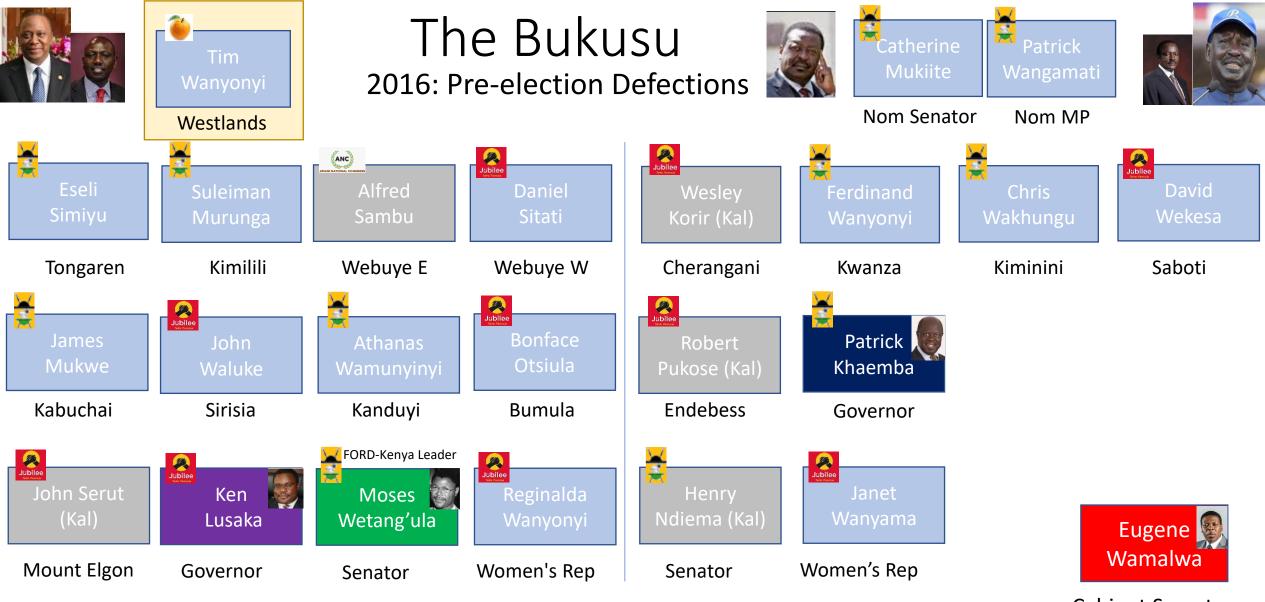
Judy Wakhungu

Cabinet Secretary



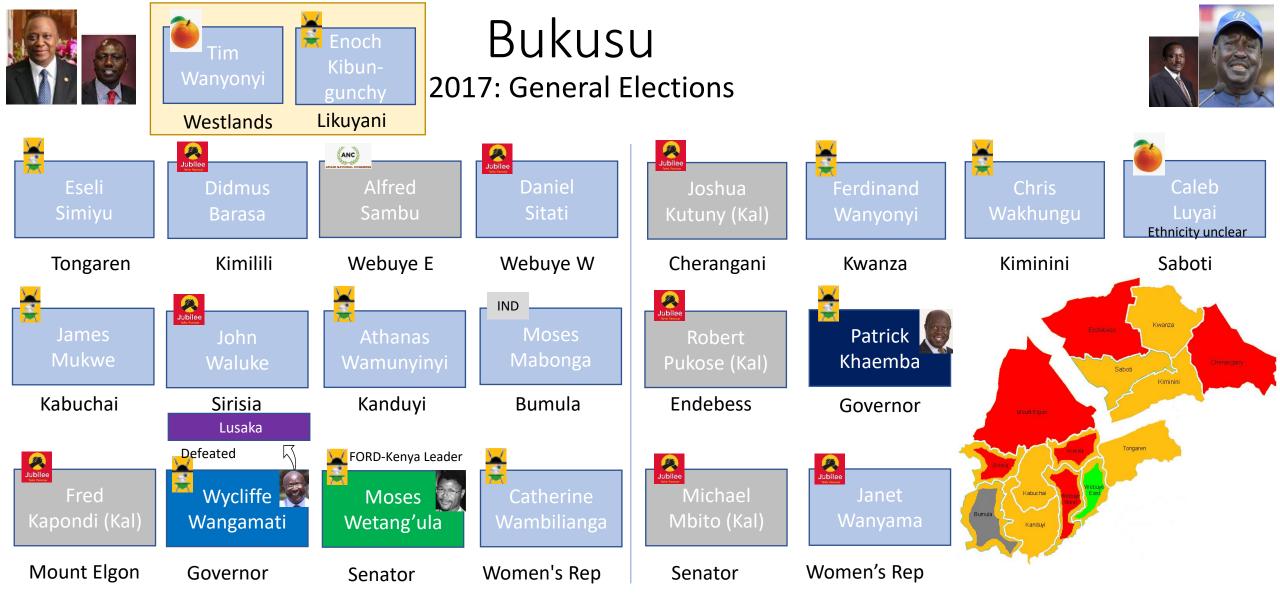
December 2013 Wetang'ula (now Senate minority leader) has his election nullified but is re-elected as Senator.

Cabinet Secretary

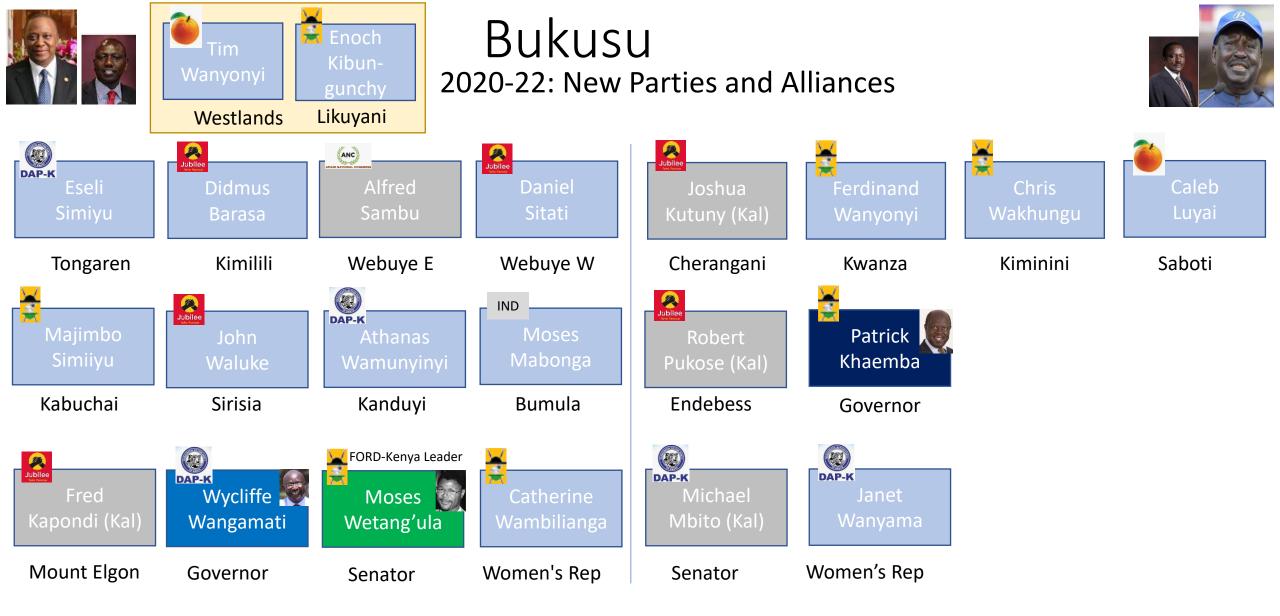


Cabinet Secretary

In late 2016, Lusaka, Waluke, Serut and Korir all defect to Jubilee as Kenyatta and Ruto build their new party, and the whole of New FORD-Kenya (no longer with Mudavadi) merges with Jubilee. However, most FORD-Kenya MPs remain hostile. Meanwhile Mudavadi moves from the UDF to ANC, taking Sambu (but no one else) with him. 2015 Eugene Wamalwa replaces Wakhungu as cabinet secretary



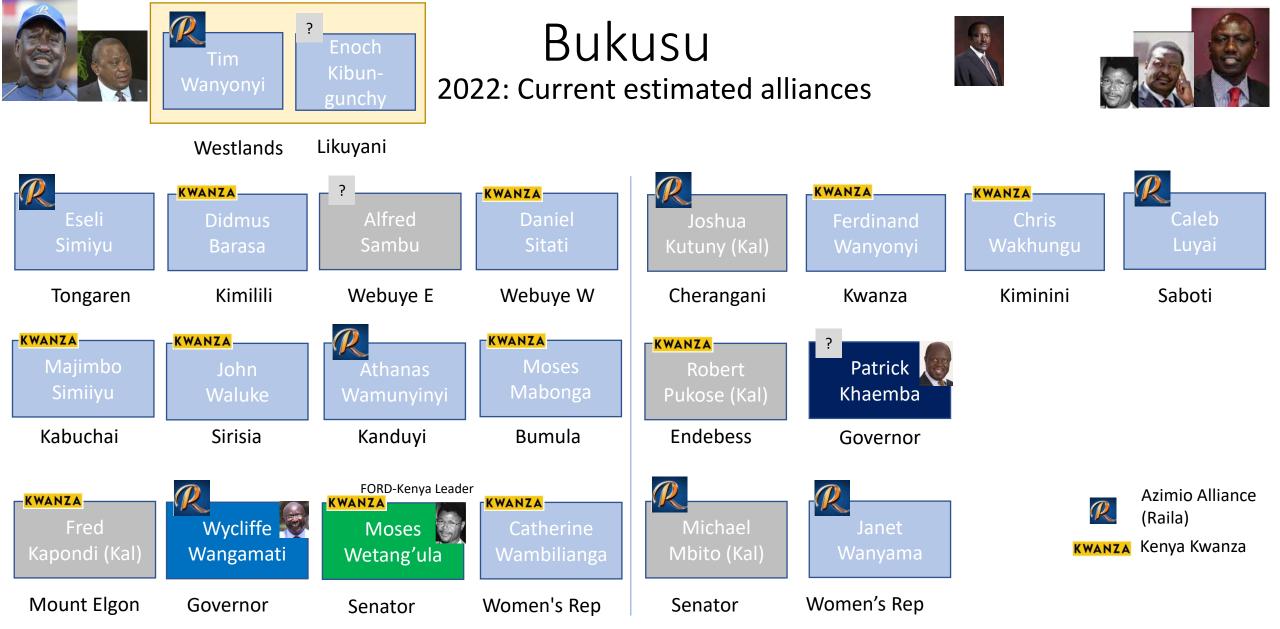
Wiper rejoins ODM in NASA but loses to the Kenyatta-Ruto Jubilee alliance. Mudavadi does not stand for any post, but backs NASA vis his ANC. FORD-Kenya does well, holding the majority of the Bukusu vote, and taking seats including Bungoma Governorship from Jubilee/new FORD-K, but most MPs on every party reelected. Odinga does very well presidentially, winning every Luhya seat, but in parliament (ex-New FORD-Kenya) Jubilee performs better, with honours equal overall.



In December 2020, Covid strikes down James Mukwe and he is replaced by Majimbo Simiyu, elected for FORD Kenya but who soon proves close to William Ruto. In late 2021, deep in battle with Ruto and the UDA, pro-handshake forces support the establishment of a new party, DAP-K, in Western province. In February 2022, bridges burnt with their ODM coalition partner from 2017, Mudavadi and Wetang'ula decide to go with Ruto over Raila. Several FORD-Kenya representatives refuse to go with them and defect (informally) to DAP-K.

From fact to opinion

• The next image captures my understanding of the current political alignment of this group of elected (and appointed) individuals as of early March 2022.



The Bukusu are split. With pro-Wetang'ula and pro-Ruto factions now aligned, nine Bukusu representatives back Ruto's presidency and six Raila and Azimio. Two have refused to declare their stand and will probably retire with Khaemba (who has hit his two-term limit). Neither alliance seems to have fixed on its branding and it seems both will go with the primary party first