A Political History of Busia

As told through their elected representatives, 1957-2024



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Limitations:

• Excludes local government throughout.

Charles Hornsby February 2024



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 10 Southern Kikuyu 11 Northern Kikuyu 12 Mombasa 13 Kilifi and Kwale 14 Kakamega and Vihiga 15 Taita and Taveta 16 Busia 17 Busia

Busia Political History A Short History of Busia District

Busia district and (since 2013) county is a small warm, wet area in the far west of Kenya, south of Mount Elgon, north of the Luo-populated Central and Busia and west of the rest of the expansive Luhya family. Two thirds of the district was ethnically Luhya at independence, most from the Khayo, Marachi, Samia and Banyala communities. As well as the majority Luhya, there was a community of 60,000 or so Iteso speakers in the north, Plains Nilotic pastoralists, and a few thousand Luo in the south where the border with Nyanza Province didn't precisely match ethnicity.

Both the Samia in the south and Iteso in the north lived on both sides of the (open) Uganda border and trade and migration was common. Many from the area schooled in Uganda schools or worked part of their live in Uganda jobs under colonial rule, an opportunity which continued until the late 1960s and early 1970s.

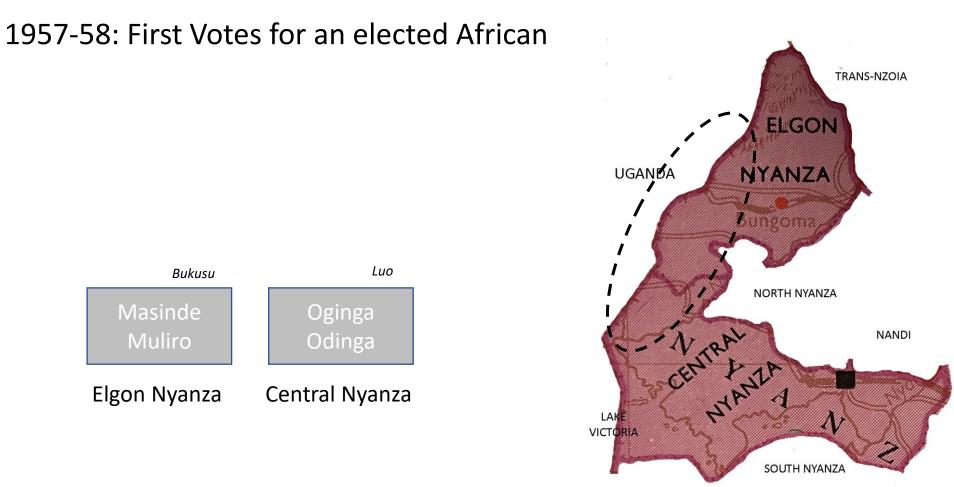
The region historically had little to no industrial development. The railway ended further south in Kisumu. Subsistence agriculture was the main economic activity, with fishing a key resource in the huge Lake Victoria for the Banyala and some robusta coffee production. Southern Bunyala had recently started a rice irrigation scheme (in 1959). Cross-border trade (mainly via Busia and Malaba on the Uganda border) was one of the region's economic mainstays. There was little foreign tourism, and it was not an area of white settlement in colonial times.



Governor Renison

Busia

Colonial Kenya



In 1957, the African constituency of "Elgon Nyanza", covering northern Luhya-speaking areas (including the Bukusu, Tachoni, Khayo and Marachi), plus the Iteso and the Sabaot Kalenjin is created. It is won by Bukusu Masinde Muliro (see No.3), defeating runner-up Wycliffe Awori, a Samia. Meanwhile, the southern Samia and Banyala Luhya are in Central Nyanza with the Luo. In 1958, six more constituencies are carved out for African Legislative Council members and elections held, but there is no change here.



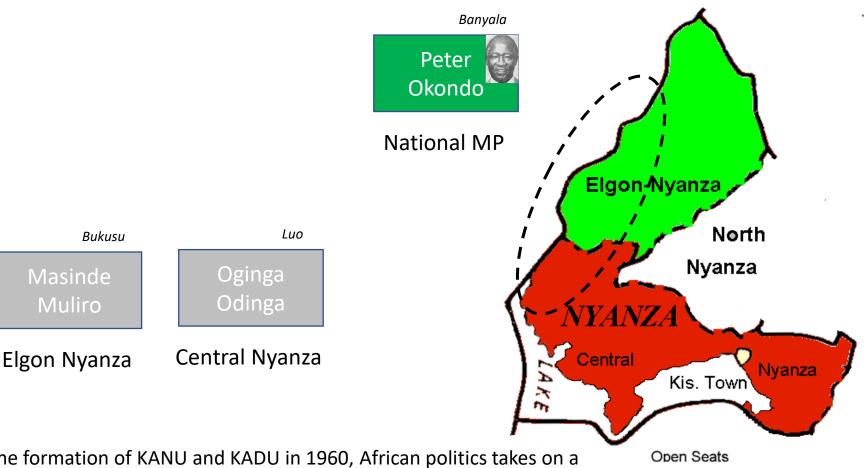
Governor Ronald Ngala Renison (KADU)

Busia Feb 1961: The Kenyatta Election

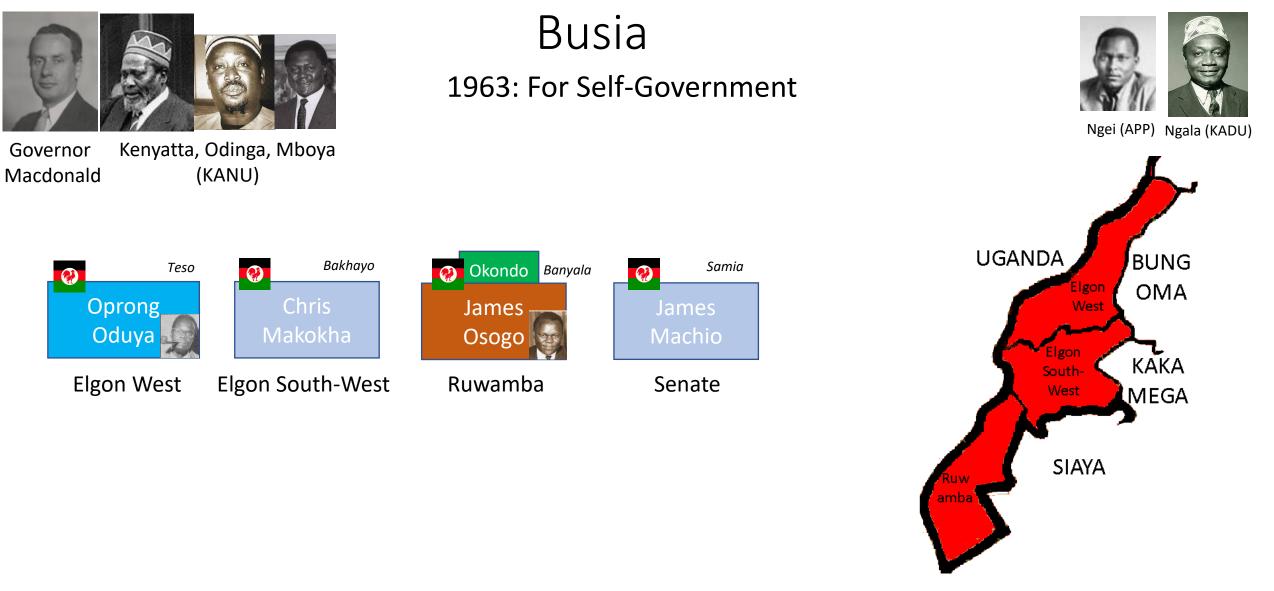


KADU

KANU



With national political parties permitted and the formation of KANU and KADU in 1960, African politics takes on a more structured form. The people who will later form the inhabitants of Busia district are still split between Elgon Nyanza – which votes KADU with Muliro - and Luo Central Nyanza, who vote KANU with Odinga. Central Nyanza Samia and Banyala candidates (including young James Osogo, a KANU-independent) are overwhelmed by the Luo KANU wave. When the Legislative Council reassembles, Peter Okondo (KADU) is elected as a National MP by the house. He plays an important role in the development of KADU's regional constitutional model.



In the new common roll, bicameral system, the long, narrow Busia district comes into existence, with three seats in the house plus one senate seat. KANU wins all four, though some are close. 31-year old railwayman and teacher Osogo (KANU) narrowly beats KADU's Okondo, the start of a rivalry to last four decades. Oprong Oduya become member for the Iteso. There are no ministers from the region in Kenyatta's first pre-independence government



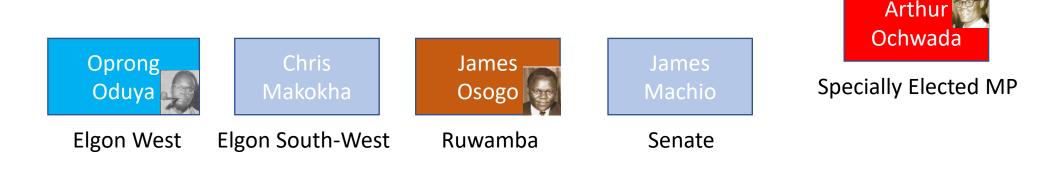
Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya (KANU)

Busia

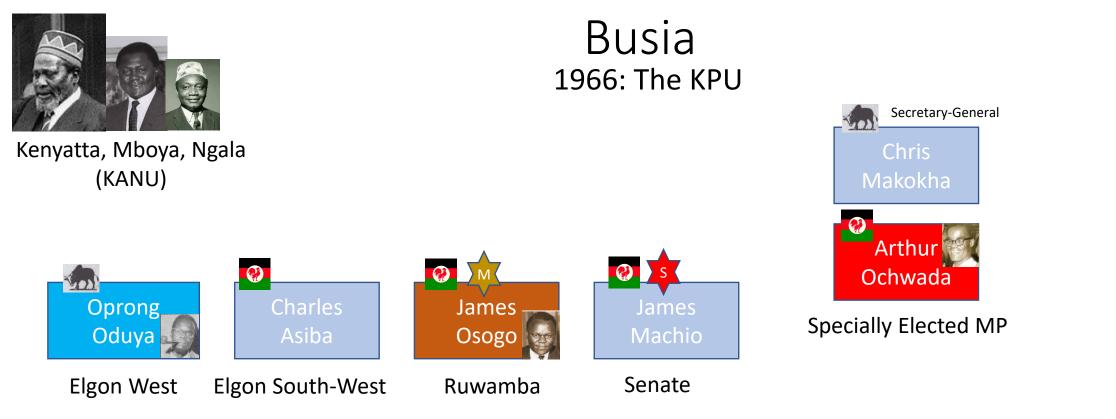
Dec 1964: Republican Constitution



One Party State (Part 1): 1964-66



In November 1964, an increasingly irrelevant KADU folds to join KANU. In December, the Republic is established with Kenyatta as President and regionalism ends. No change in Busia. In July 1964, Arthur Ochwada, a Samia trade unionist and early KANU official (and Kenyatta's grandson-in-law), is elected as a specially elected MP.



The 1966 KPU rebellion follows years of growing conflict between left and right. In the 1966 'little general election', KANU forces their KPU opponents to go back to the people after defecting to the new party. In Busia, bordering Siaya, the KPU is strong. Oprong joins Odinga as does Makokha. Senator Machio is sacked as an Assistant Minister but does not actually defect. Makokha (now KPU's Secretary-General) loses the by-election to KANU's Charles Asiba, but Oduya is re-elected for the KPU. As Kenyatta seeks to broaden his power base, Osogo enters the cabinet as Information and Broadcasting Minister.

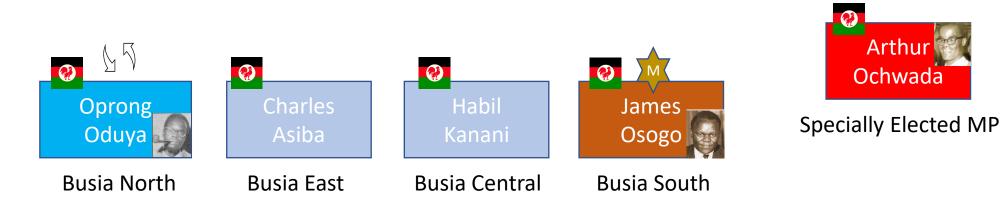
Busia



Kenyatta, Mboya, Ngala (KANU)

1967-68: Unicameralism, Deaths and Defections





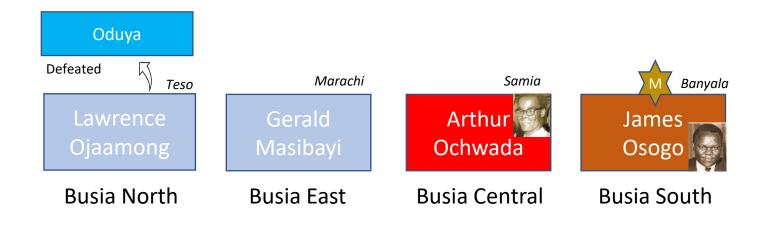
In 1967, with the seat redistribution which follows the abolition of the Senate, Ruwamba is split in half to create Busia Central (for the Abasamia) and Busia South (for the Abanyala). Elgon West is renamed Busia North and Elgon South-West becomes Busia East. In March 1967, Machio dies and is replaced in a by-election and in 1968, Oduya defects back to KANU, is given the party nomination and is re-elected. Makokha also defects back to KANU in 1968. The Busia KPU rebellion is over.



Busia 1969 General Election



One Party State (Part 2): 1969-82



Busia Census 1969:		
Luhya	130,571	65%
Iteso	61,844	31%
Luo	5,337	3%

In 1969, Tom Mboya is murdered and four months later, the KPU is banned; return of the one-party state. In Busia, only Osogo survives the resulting popular protest. Oduya loses to young teacher Lawrence Ojaamong, while Ochwada wins Busia Central. Osogo remains a minister, now for Commerce & Industry. Busia district is two-third Luhya, one-third Teso and Luo.



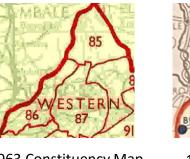
Busia Early 1970s



One Party State (Part 2): 1969-82



At some point between 1963 and 1970, a strip of Busia North has been transferred to Bungoma.





1963 Constituency Map

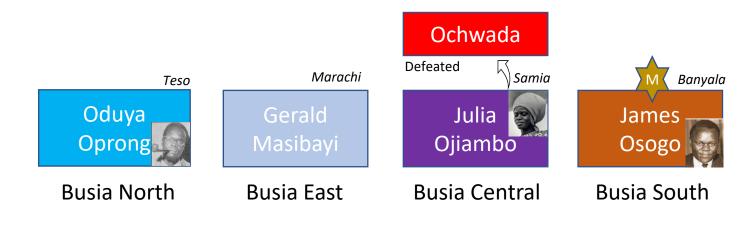
1970 District Map

In 1970, Ojaamong dies suddenly and is replaced by Gabriel Ebu. Meanwhile, relations become more difficult between East African Community presidents and 1969 sees "Ugandanization" followed in 1970 by the nationalisation of many foreign-owned businesses. This in turn is followed by the Ugandan coup of 1971 which deposes Obote and replaces him by Army Chief Idi Amin.



Busia 1974 General Election





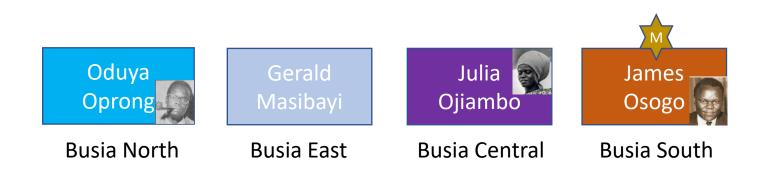
In the 1974 election, Oduya returns in Busia North. Ochwada is defeated in a violent and controversial poll by Dr. Julia Ojiambo, the first woman admitted to the Royal Technical College Nairobi, now Busia's first elected female MP. Okondo does not contest but supports a proxy, who narrowly loses to Osogo. Osogo is now Minister of Health.



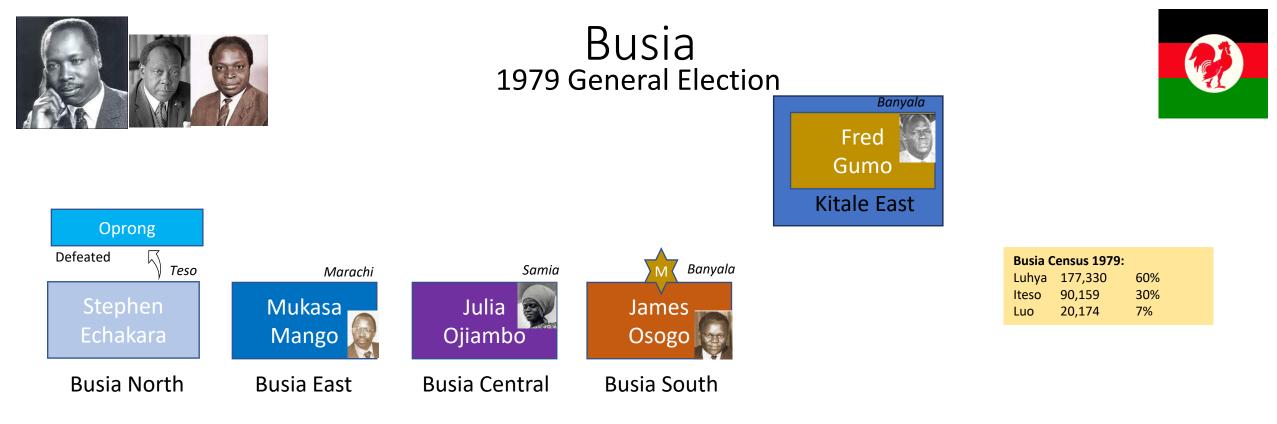
1975-77: Kariuki's murder, KANU is dead and Changing the Constitution

Busia

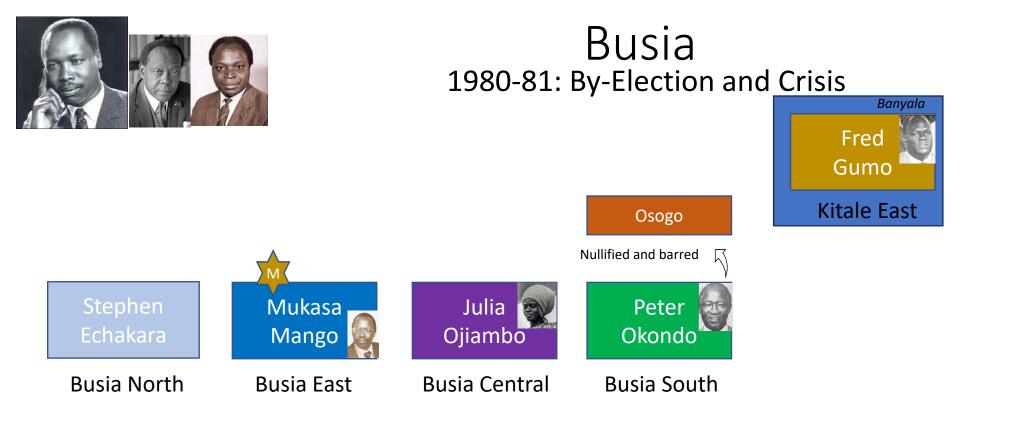




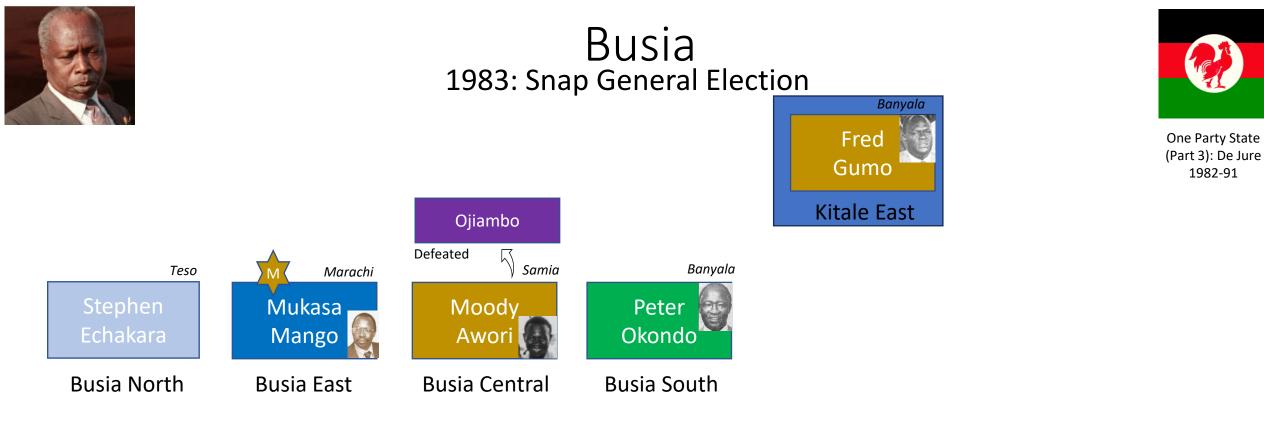
1975 Kikuyu presidential contender J.M. Kariuki is murdered by state security officers. The government teeters. In 1975-6, the state cracks down on dissent and the political system tightens as Kenyatta ages and elites fight for the presidential succession, but the political ferment mostly passes the region by. Meanwhile, Amin's rule proves disastrous and Uganda gradually collapses in violence and fear. Many Ugandans who can, seek refuge in Kenya. Coffees smuggling through the Uganda border proves a lucrative business during 1976-77.



Moi's first election sees divergent trends. Oduya loses again. A new entrant, veterinarian and lecturer Dr Mukasa Mango is elected in Busia East. Ojiambo again beats Ochwada and Osogo beats Okondo. Osogo is reappointed but Moi clearly preferred his old KADU-ally Okondo. The 1979 census meanwhile sees rapid population growth (nearly 100,00 more people in ten years), with Luo numbers quadrupling for unclear reasons (to me).



Osogo's election is nullified in 1980 and he is barred from standing for five years by the courts. Moi does not pardon him. In the resulting June 1981 by-election, KANU only clears Peter Okondo, who is therefore unopposed. Mango takes up the role of 'minister for Busia'. Political space is closing rapidly.



Njonjo's fall in 1983 after the 1982 coup is followed by a snap general election. Ojiambo falls to a newcomer, 55-year-old Moody Awori, younger brother of pre-independence politician Wycliffe Awori. Mango and Okondo are re-elected, and Mango remains minister (for a while). Awori becomes an assistant minister, a position he holds for the next 19 years.



Busia 1984-5: Okondo resurgent



One Party State (Part 3): De Jure 1982-91



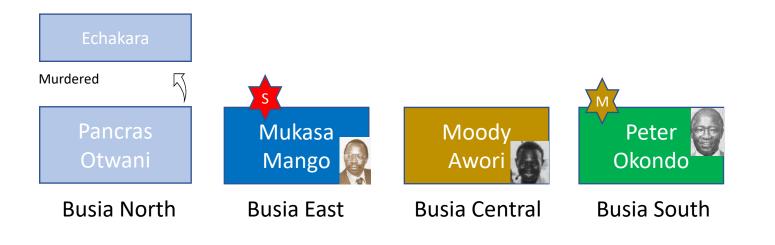
In 1984, as the political system becomes more coercive and violent, Mango is sacked (for unclear reasons) and Moi finally bring Okondo into ministerial office. In 1984, Gumo's rigged election in Kitale is nullified and he doesn't even stand in the by election.



Busia 1987: Death and By-election



One Party State (Part 3): De Jure 1982-91



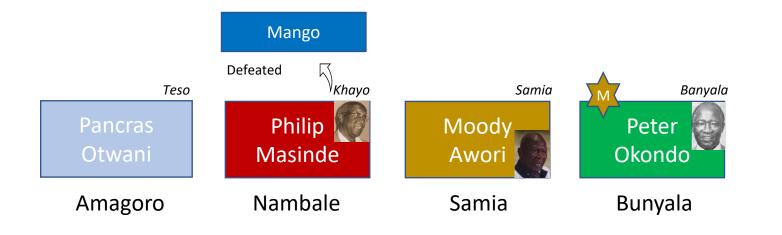
In 1987, Assistant Minister Stephen Echakara is murdered during a robbery in Nairobi. He is replaced by Pancras Otwani. With the rise of Museveni in Uganda and political tensions with Moi, the border is formally closed until 1990 and there are several armed clashes.



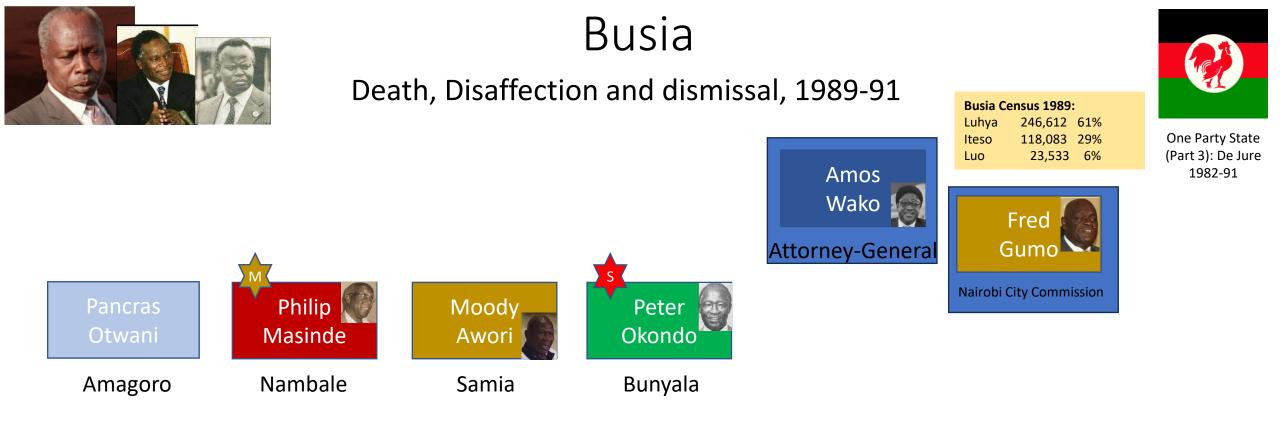
Busia

1988 (Public Queue Voting)





The first boundary redistribution since 1967 sees the four seats renamed but otherwise little changed. In the primaries and general elections that follow, many seats nationwide are substantially rigged. In Busia, all incumbents are re-elected except Mango, who is controversially and narrowly defeated by 55-year-old HR manager Philip Masinde. Awori beats Ojiambo and Okondo again narrowly beats Osogo. Okondo remains a minister.

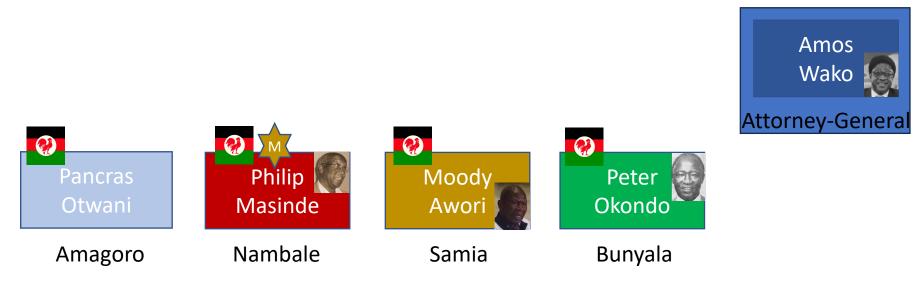


Kenya politics becomes more dangerous, culminating with the murder of foreign minister Robert Ouko in 1990. Election rigging, Ouko's death, repression and the formation of FORD (encouraged by the fall of the Soviet Union) galvanise many Kenyans into open opposition to KANU. In August 1990, Okondo is forced to resign as a minister after publicly threatening dissenting Anglican Bishop Muge with death if he stepped into Busia District. Muge's death in a road crash during the trip leaves Okondo's position untenable. Masinde replaces him as Busia minister. Gumo pops up as Moi's choice to run the Nairobi City Commission. In May 1991, Moi selects Amos Wako, from Busia, as Attorney-General and he remains in role for the next 20 years. The 1989 census shows little has changed ethnically, though population grows has slowed (a little).

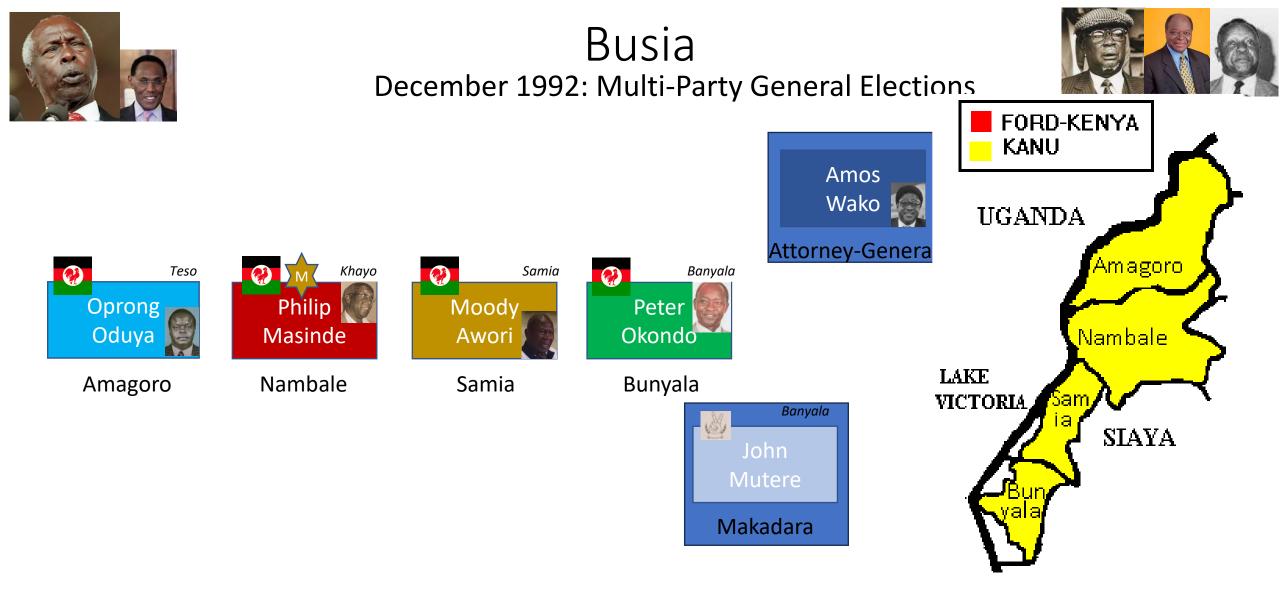


Busia Late 1992: Multi-Partyism

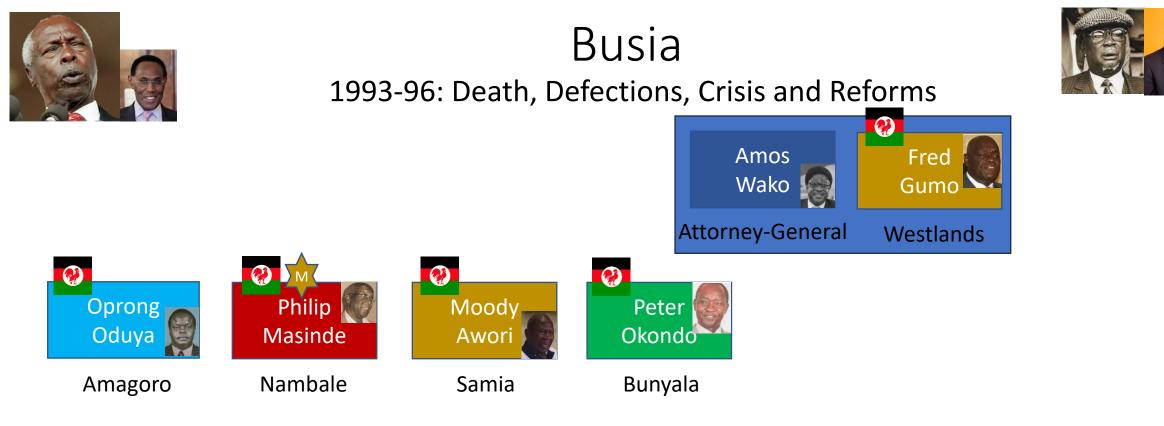




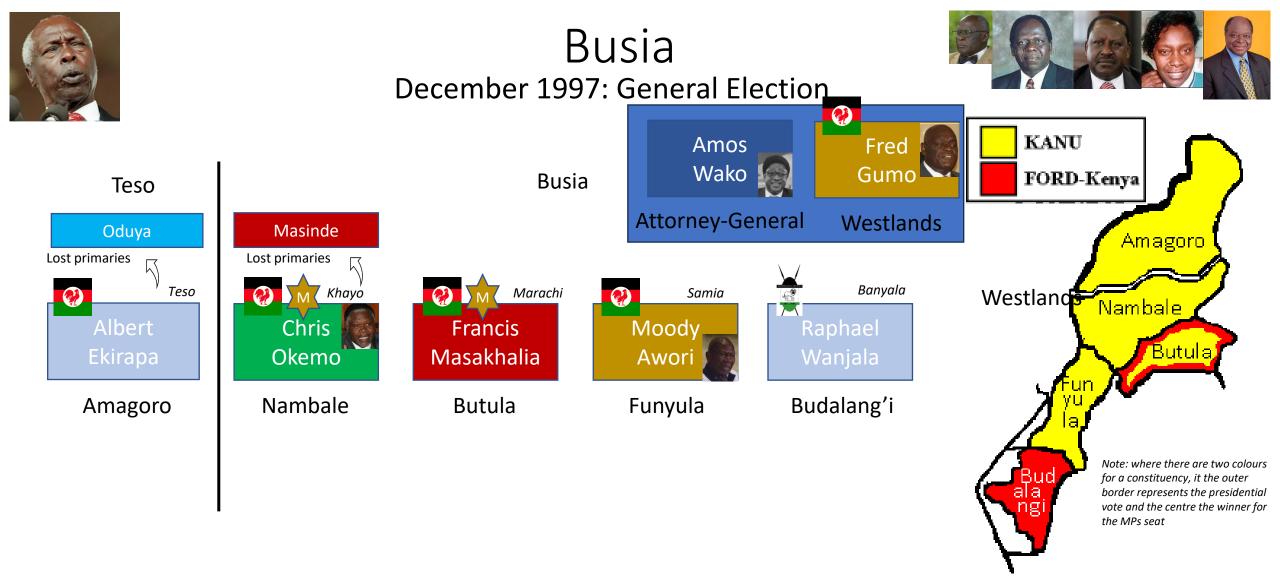
Multi-party democracy returns in December 1991. As FORD and the DP strengthen, Busia is a swing zone, without a strong leader aligned with any party, but with loyalties to both FORD and KANU. In early 1992, Osogo joins FORD but is then lured back to KANU in October, and all four incumbent MPs stay loyal. Ethnic clashes ravage the highlands, but here, far from the Kalenjin, all is calm.



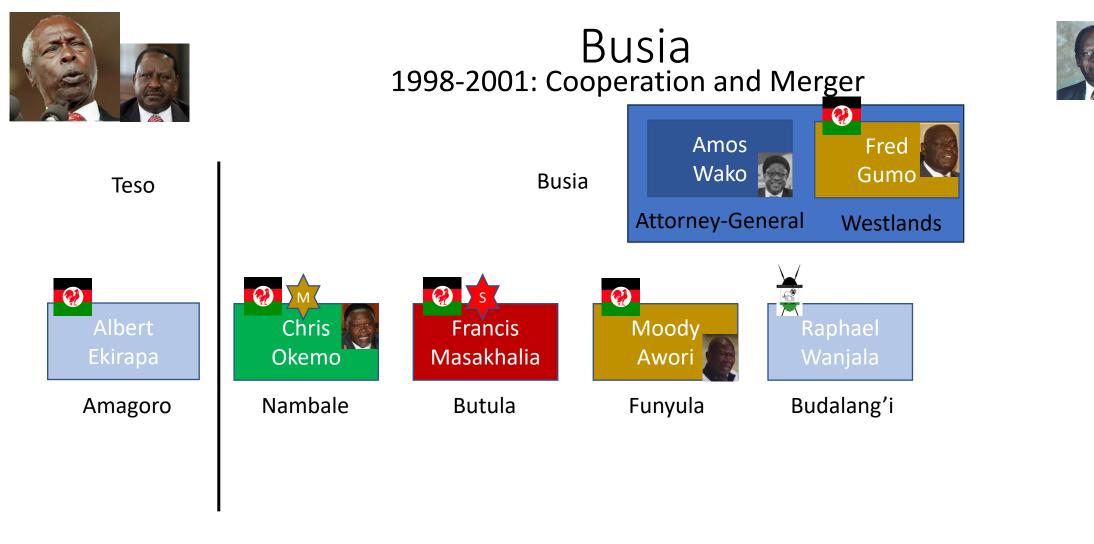
In the 1992 multi-party elections, KANU wins narrowly nationwide against a split opposition. In Busia, Moi wins every seat in both the presidency and parliament. Oduya returns. Awori wins, two of his opponents having been kidnapped or preventing from reaching the nominations. Masinde narrowly wins Nambale against FORD-Asili opponent Chis Okemo and remains a minister.



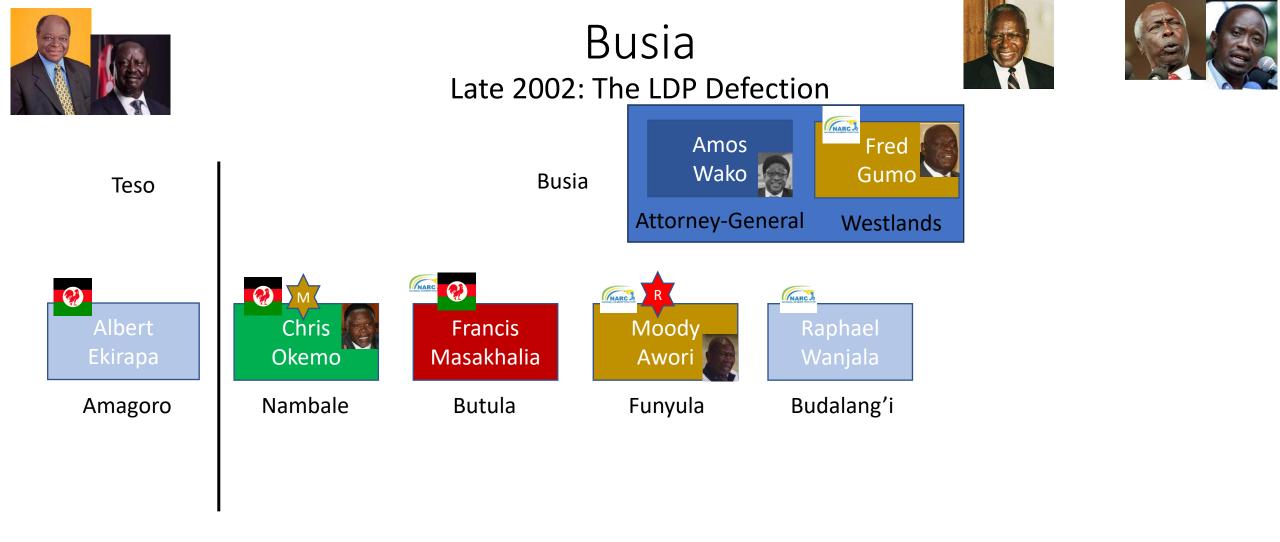
In May 1993, Odinga begins a path of cooperation with KANU, but in January 1994 he dies and FORD-Kenya returns to opposition. FORD-Asili implodes. Nationwide protests for constitutional reform leads to violence and in mid-1997, the IPPG deal. In Busia, KANU remains strong. In 1994, Oprong Oduya is shot and seriously injured. In 1995, Teso becomes its own nominal (one seat) district and in the 1996 constituency boundary redistribution, Nambale is split to create a new seat, Butula, and Samia and Bunyala are renamed from ethnic to location-based names. Gumo pops ujp again, now as KANU MP for Wstlands in a 1996 by-eelctiuon



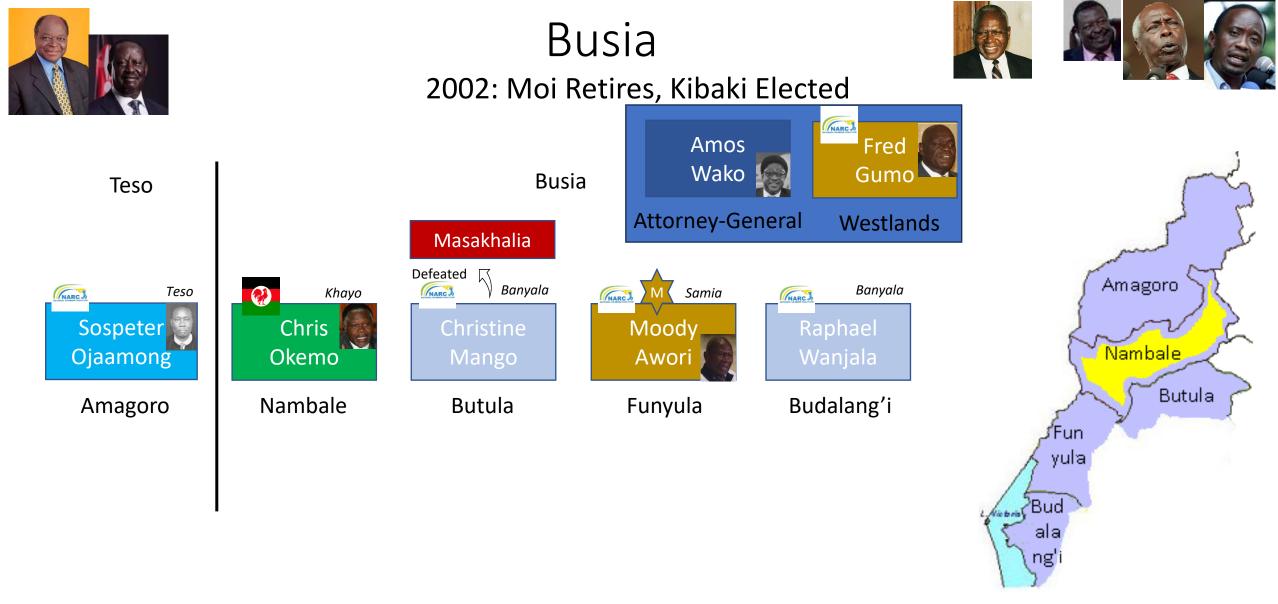
In the 1997 elections, facing four regional opponents (Raila, Wamalwa, Kibaki and Ngilu) KANU again wins nationwide. In Busia and Teso, KANU leads, but FORD-Kenya, now led by Luhya Michael Wamalwa, performs well (though not well enough). In the presidency Wamalwa wins two of five seats. In parliament, KANU's Masinde and Oduya are removed in party primaries, to field a stronger team. Okemo wins on his second attempt, now for KANU, 59-year-old Ugandan-born newcomer Francis Masakhalia narrowly wins, and Awori is re-elected, but in Budalang'i, FORD-Kenya (Raphael Wanjala) wins its first seat. In Moi's 1998 cabinet, unusually, both Okemo and Masakhalia become ministers.



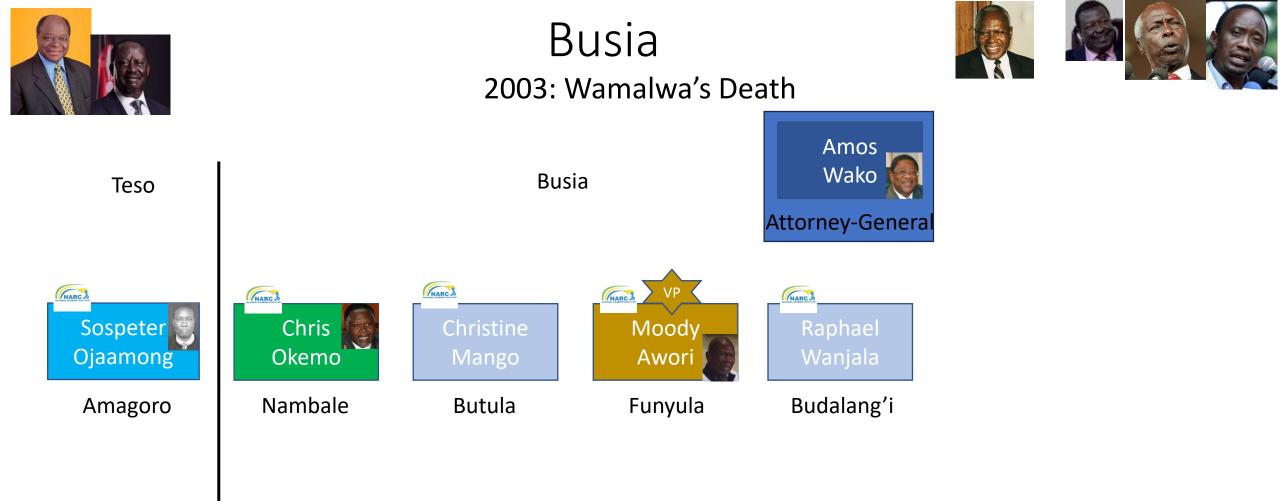
As Moi seeks allies in the opposition, KANU is riven by internal strife. Raila leads the NDP into cooperation with KANU and seeks power from within. Okemo as energy and then finance minister is commercially involved in the new independent power producer contracts. In November 2001, Masakhalia is sacked to make space for "Young Turk" and YK '92 moneybags Cyrus Jirongo (from Kakamega).



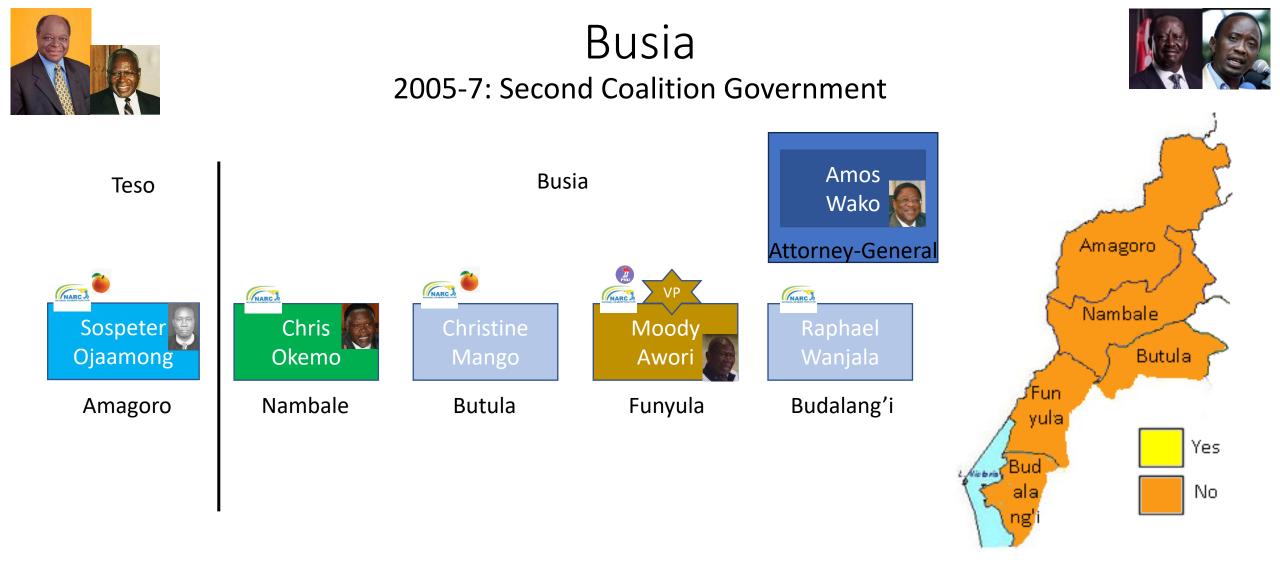
At the last minute, Raila realises that Moi has had no intention of passing the succession baton to him and leads an rebellion within KANU against Moi's choice of Uhuru Kenyatta as his successor. "Uncle" Awori joins many non-Kikuyu KANU leaders in the rebellion and takes a leading role in the new Liberal Democratic party (LDP) after Mudavadi "blinks". Awori resigns from the government in October 2022. Masakhalia defects to the LDP, then back to KANU. With the "rainbow rebellion" joining the National Alliance (NAK) of Kibaki, Wamalwa and Ngilu, the political tide nationwide shifts sharply against KANU.



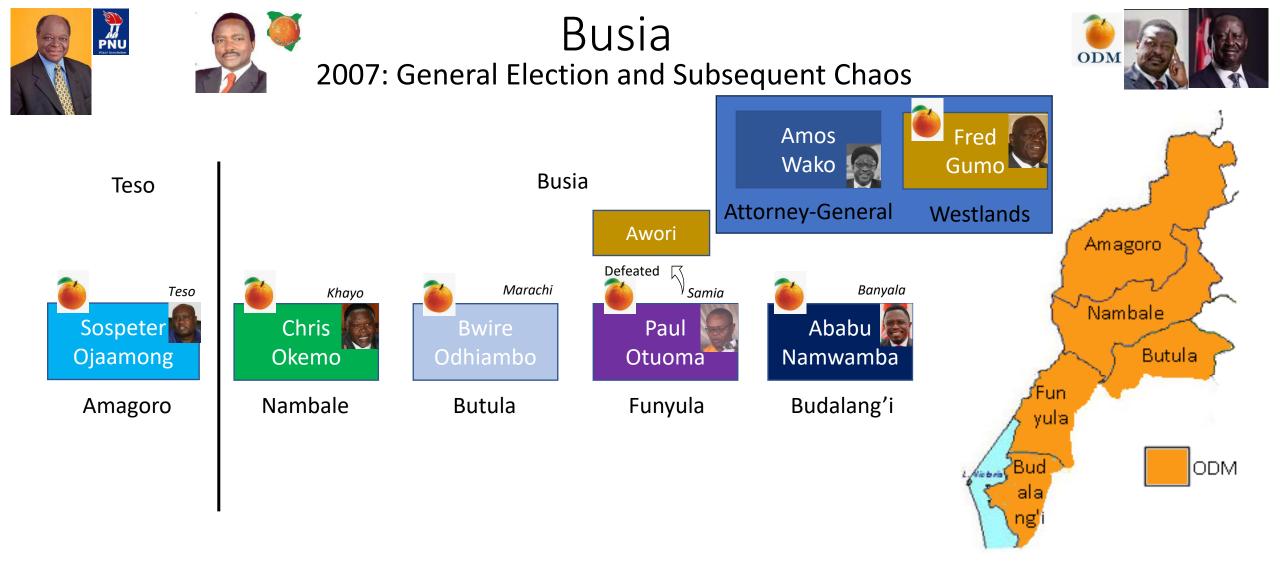
Moi retires and his chosen successor Uhuru is defeated for the Presidency by Kibaki. In Busia, Kibaki wins every seat in the presidential polls, most easily. In parliament, Awori is easily victorious, as is Wanjala. Ekirapa loses to Sospeter Ojaamong, son of old MP Lawrence. Masakhalia loses to Narc's Christine Mango, widow of old MP Mukasa. Only Okemo narrowly returns for KANU. Awori (part of the ex-KANU 'LDP' wing of NARC and Chair of the amorphous NARC summit) become Minister for Home Affairs in Kibaki's slimmed down government.



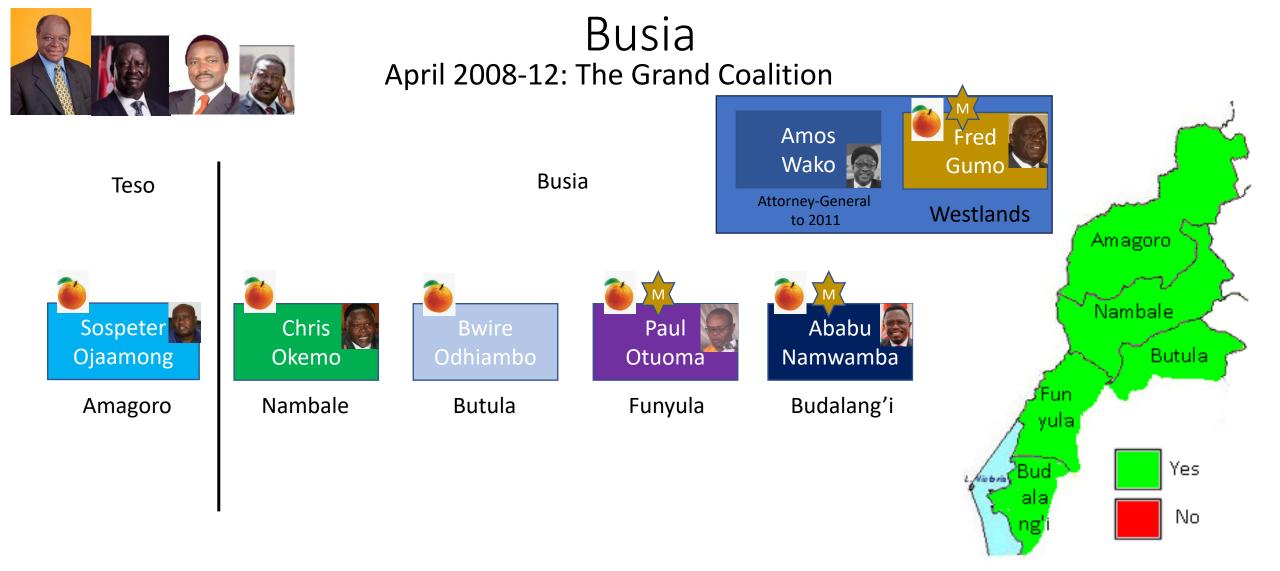
In 2003, Wamalwa dies and in September, Kibaki chooses Awori as his new Vice-President. Meanwhile, Okemo has (informally) defected to NARC. In Busia, between the NAK and LDP wings of NARC, growing rapidly apart during 2003, it is not clear where power stands



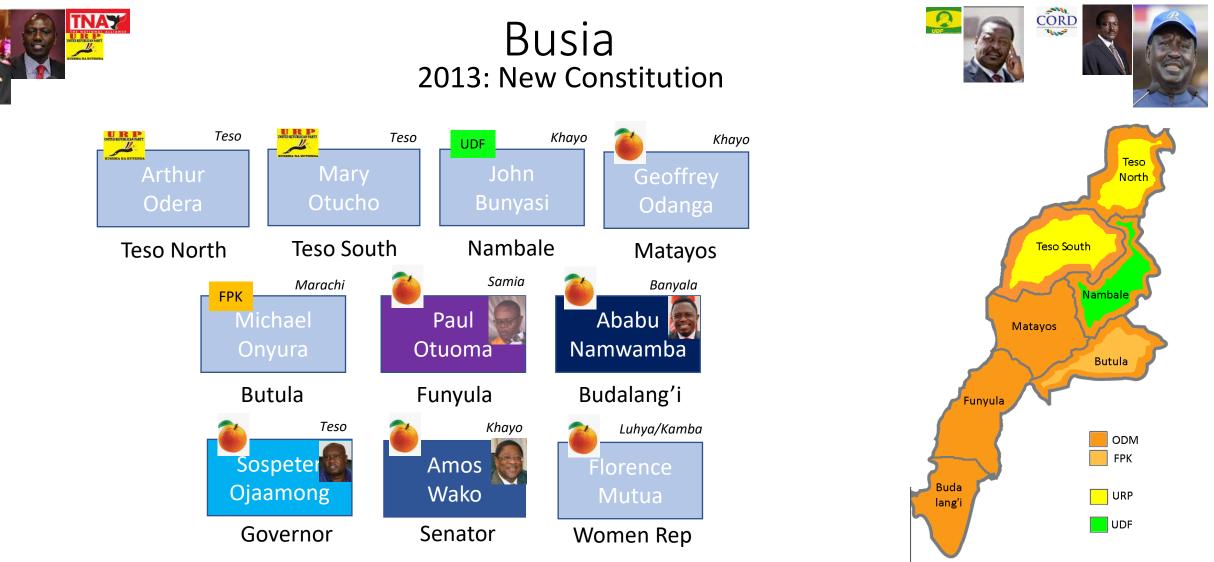
After two years of internal strife, NARC cracks in half after the failed referendum of 2005. All five Busia seats vote "No". Kibaki drops all the "Orange" ministers (who voted against the Wako constitution) and reaches out to allies anywhere he can find them. Awori, however, who has switched sides, remains Vice President and Home Affairs Minister and aligns himself with Kibaki's new Party of National Unity (PNU). The ODM strengthens and gains support nationwide. Mango, who began on the NAK side, is now with the Orange team



Another decade but no boundary redistribution in 2006. 2007 is an ODM-PNU battle nationwide (with Musyoka only influential in Kamba areas) but in Busia, with Mudavadi and Odinga together, ODM is in control. Odinga wins every seat in the presidency and ODM in parliament. Awori is easily defeated by newcomer Paul Otuoma, and Ababu Namwamba arrives in Budalang'i. Okemo and Ojaamong return. In the short-lived Kibaki-Musyoka government of January-April 2008, as Kenya burns, the region has no ministers.



In the grand coalition (PNU-ODM-ODM-K), the ODM team returns to coalition government, now taking half the enlarged cabinet's posts. Otuoma Becomes Fisheries Minister while Ababu is secretary to the ODM parliamentary group. Somehow, against all the odds, in 2010, the coalition crafts and the population votes for a new constitution. All Busia Votes yes. The new constitution is promulgated in 2010 and comes into effect over the next 2-3 years. Wako is finally replaced as A-G, required to retire a year after the new constitution came into effect. In 2012, Namwamba briefly becomes Sports Minister while Nairobi MP but ethnically Banyala Gumo is one of Odinga's picks as Minister throughout.



2013 brings a new constitution, new bicameral parliament, Governors. Ministers (Cabinet Secretaries) no longer MPs. Busia County is reborn including the Iteso. 80 more seats nationwide means two more here, one for the Teso, one for the Luhya. TNA and URP in alliance defeat Odinga's ODM (part of CORD) and Mudavadi's UDF, but here ODM dominates. Odinga wins ever seat in the presidency by huge (20-1) margins. ODM wins the governor (Ojaamong), senator (ex-Attorney General Wako), women representative and three of seven parliamentary seats. Mudavadi's UDF wins one, both Teso seats split-vote Ruto's URP and Butula is won by ODM-ally the FPK. In Kenyatta and Ruto's first slimmed-down government, there are no Cabinet Secretaries from the area.

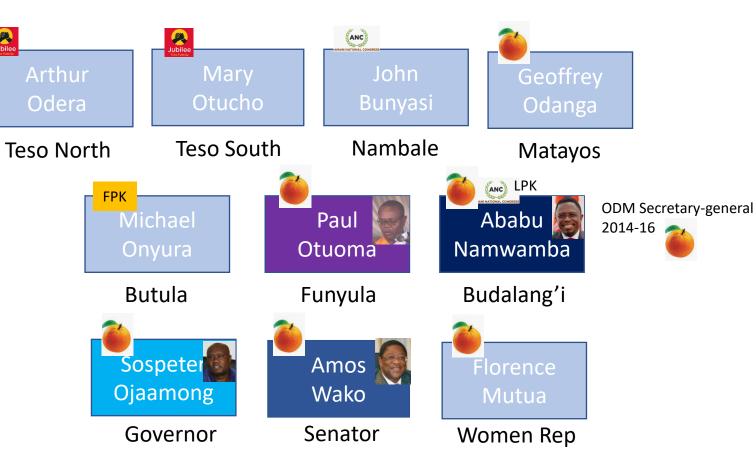


Busia 2015-17: Tug of War

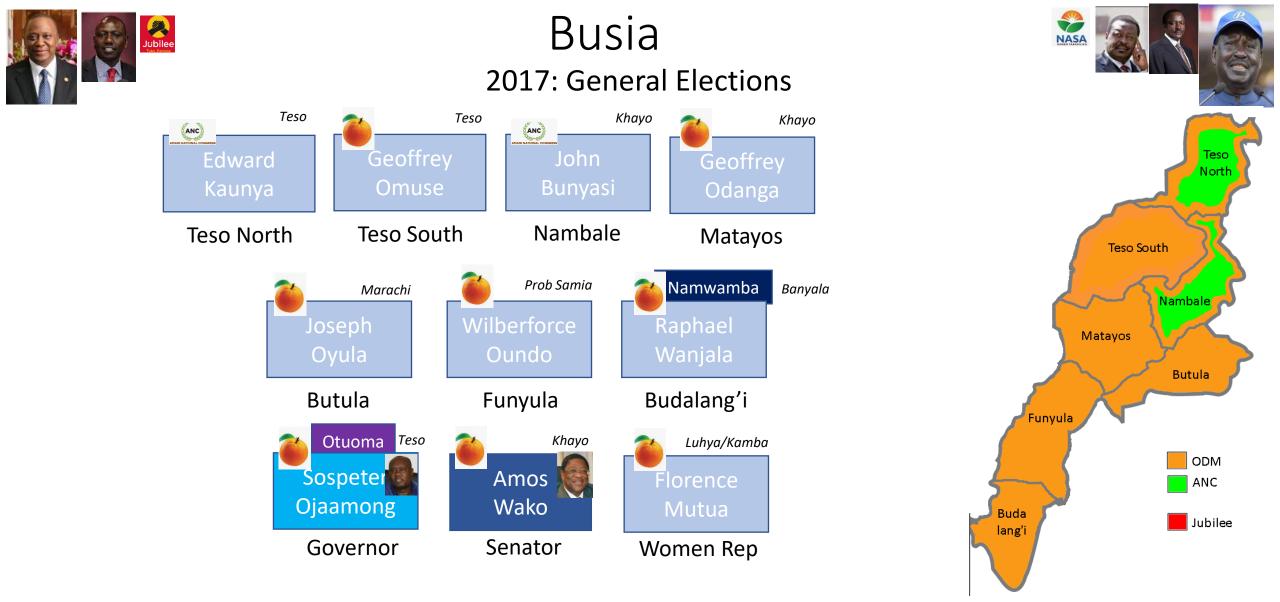




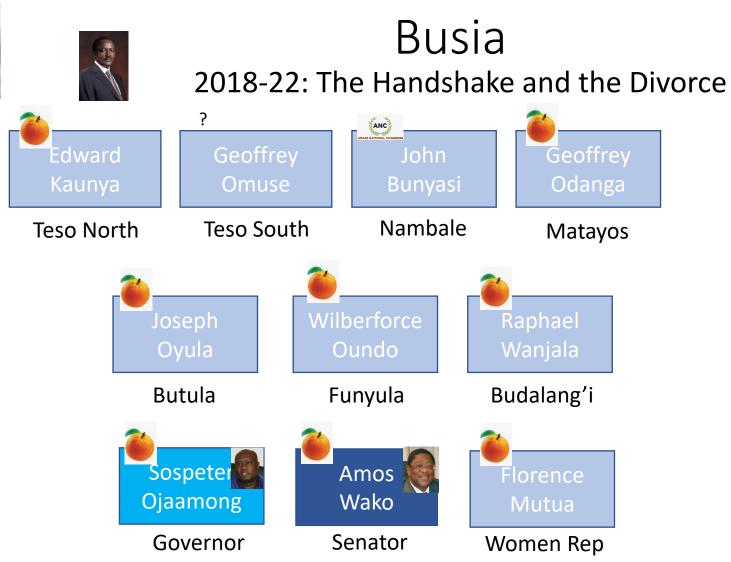




In 2016-17, TNA and URP merge to form the Jubilee party, and politicians nationwide defect to join them, including some ODM leaders elsewhere. In Busia, Bunyasi follows Mudavadi from UDF to ANC in 2015, but ODM leaders stand firm with Raila apart from Secretary-General Namwamba, who joins the ANC, then briefly becomes Labour Party leader, and is expelled from ODM.

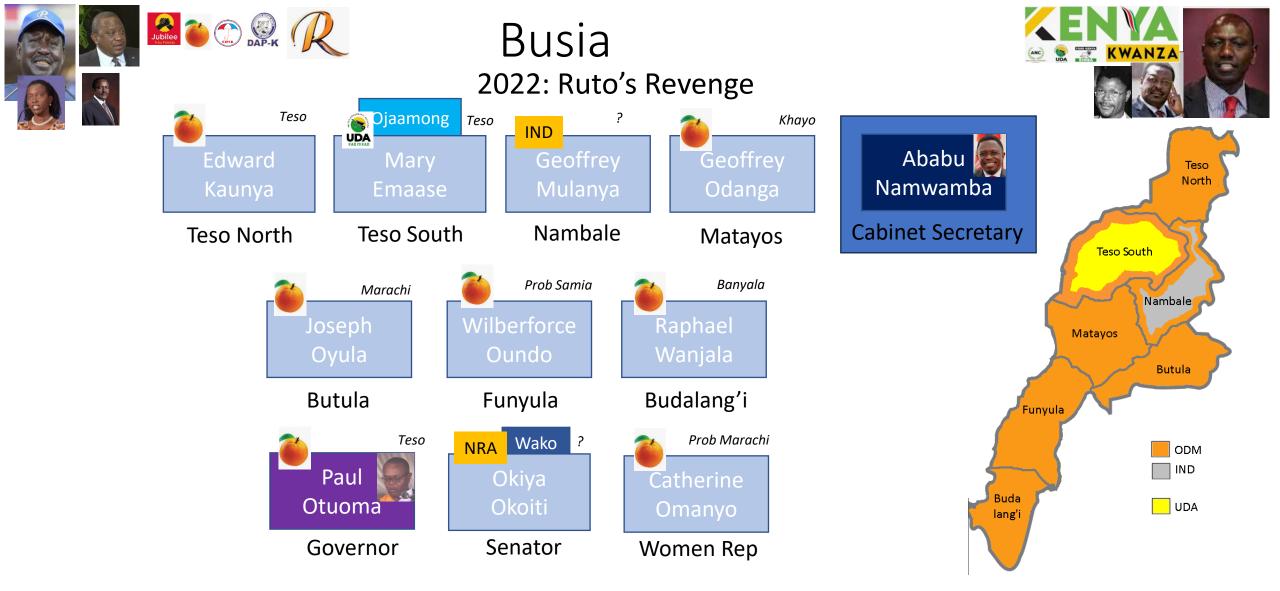


Wiper rejoins ODM, Mudavadi's ANC and FORD-Kenya in NASA, but NASA loses to Jubilee nationwide. In Busia, NASA is dominant, winning every seat, most through ODM but two through ANC. Even the Teso narrowly switch from Jubilee to NASA. Raila wins every seat easily for the Presidency. Ojaamong, Wako and Mutua return, Ojaamong defeating a strong attempt from Otuoma to step up to the governorship. In January 2018, Namwamba is made Chief Administrative Secretary, a newly invented role intend to emulate an Assistant Minister, but there are no Cabinet Secretaries from the region. Appointments only take place in 2018 after the first presidential poll is nullified and the repeat poll held, which Odinga boycotts.



After the repeat presidential election, growing tensions and the 2018 handshake between Odinga and Kenyatta, Kenya takes a different course. With Ruto out of favour and the handshake the main driver of politics during 2019-21, the situation becomes tougher for the Ruto team, who have little representation in the region. Jubilee and ODM cooperate to form a new supra-alliance Azimio, with Odinga their candidate. Kaunya defects from ANC to ODM while Omuse leaves, but in general the ODM team stay solid. In early 2022, in a stunning move, Ruto's UDA signs a public deal with Mudavadi's ANC and Wetangula's FORD-Kenya, significantly strengthening them in western. Wako announces his retirement from politics. Namwamba declares for Ruto and the UDA.





Azimio dominates the polls again in Busia. Odinga beats Ruto in every seat, 80%-20%, neither Luhya Kenya Kwanza principal being strong in the county. ODM wins five MPs and a sixth is won by a pro-ODM independent. UDA wins only one Teso seat on a 3-way split. ODM wins the governor and women representative, but the senate place goes to independent activist Andre Okiya Okoiti, with Wako gone. Ojaamong is ineligible to stand as governor and tries to stand as MP, only to lose. Otuoma replaces him a Governor. Nationwide, however, Ruto wins a narrow presidential victory. Ababu, now a Ruto loyalist, becomes a cabinet secretary.