

A Political History of the Taita and Taveta

As told through their elected representatives, 1957-2024



Charles Hornsby
January 2024

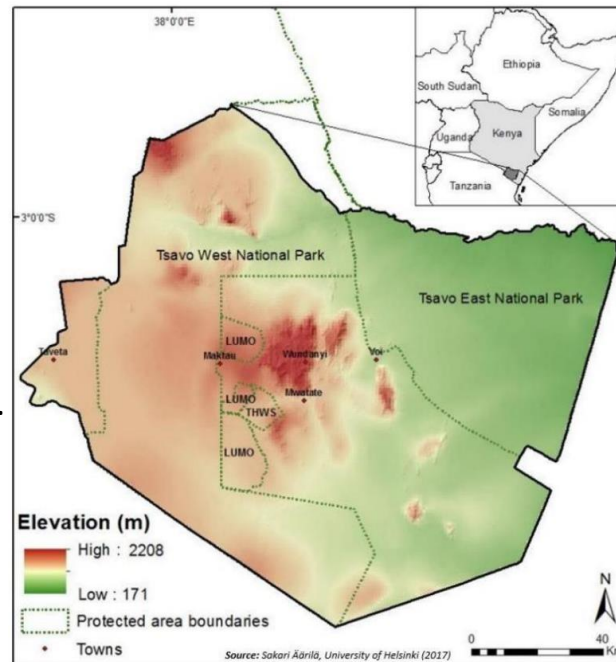


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Limitations

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

Taita-Taveta Political History

A Short History of the Taita and Taveta

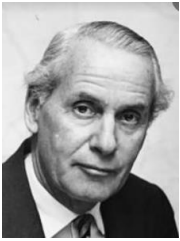
The Taita and Taveta peoples of what is now known as Taita-Taveta County have diverse origins. What was known (by the British) from 1895 as Taita District was primarily occupied by the Taita, a Bantu community, speaking two distinct languages Kidawida (or Kitaita) and Saghala/Pare, consisting of multiple sub-groups and (like most “tribes”) without any precolonial central political authority. The Taveta (or Wataveta) were a small mixed refugee Bantu group with origins partly in Tanzania, found in the south-west of the district around Taveta. At independence, there were also a few Kamba in the north-east on the boundaries of south Kitui and Machakos. Most inhabitants were Christian.

The Taita Hills around Wundanyi in the centre of the district are a highly fertile agricultural area, but much of the rest of the County is flat dry lowlands and almost unoccupied. The huge Tsavo East and West National Parks comprise 62% of the district's 17,000 km² and wildlife tourism has been a key revenue generator for the area. There was little industry at independence, but the Mombasa-Nairobi railway and road both ran through the district, bringing some small-scale services. Food and cash crops were the main economic activities. Most of the land that was not national parks consisted of large sisal estates, owned by Britons until the mid-1960s.

As later became clear, the Tsavo plains in the district contained significant mineral resources, undeveloped at independence, including Kenya's only precious gems (rubies, tsavorite and garnet) and some iron ore.

Taita-Taveta Political History

1957: First Vote for an elected African



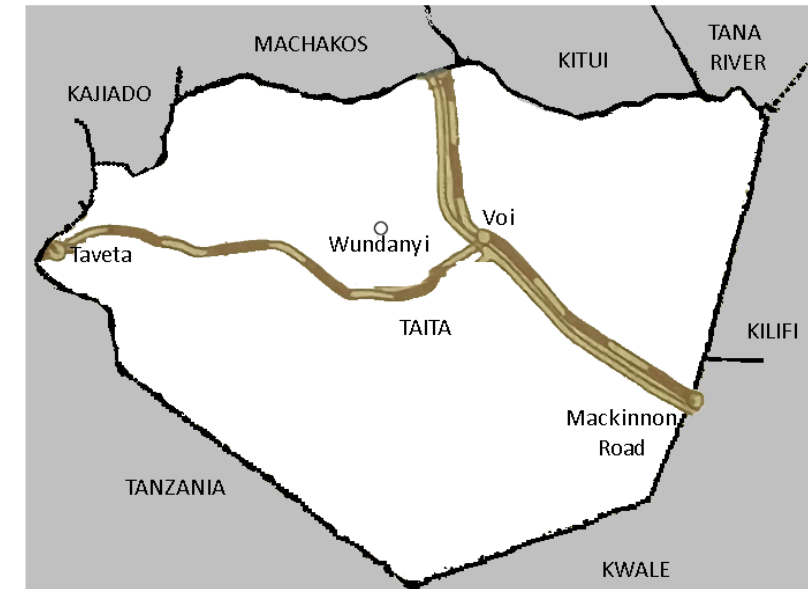
Governor
Renison

Jimmy
Jeremiah

Nominated Legco
(1948 to 1957)

Ronald
Ngala

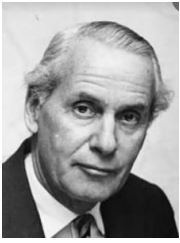
Coast



In 1957, the African constituency of “Coast” (including Taita-Taveta) is established and won by Mijikenda Ronald Ngala. Ambitious Alliance and Makerere-educated ex-teacher and now small-scale shopkeeper Dawson Mwanyumba (Taita) is second. The incumbent nominated Legislative Council member and ex-KAU leader, Jimmy Jeremiah, from Taveta, came last.

Taita-Taveta Political History

1958: 6 more African constituencies

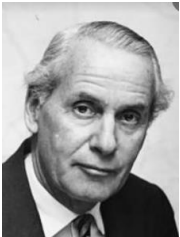


Governor
Renison

Ronald
Ngala

Coast

In 1958, six more African seats are created and elections held, but Taita-Taveta remains in Coast constituency and the community has no national scale elected politician



Taita-Taveta Political History

Feb 1961: The Kenyatta Election



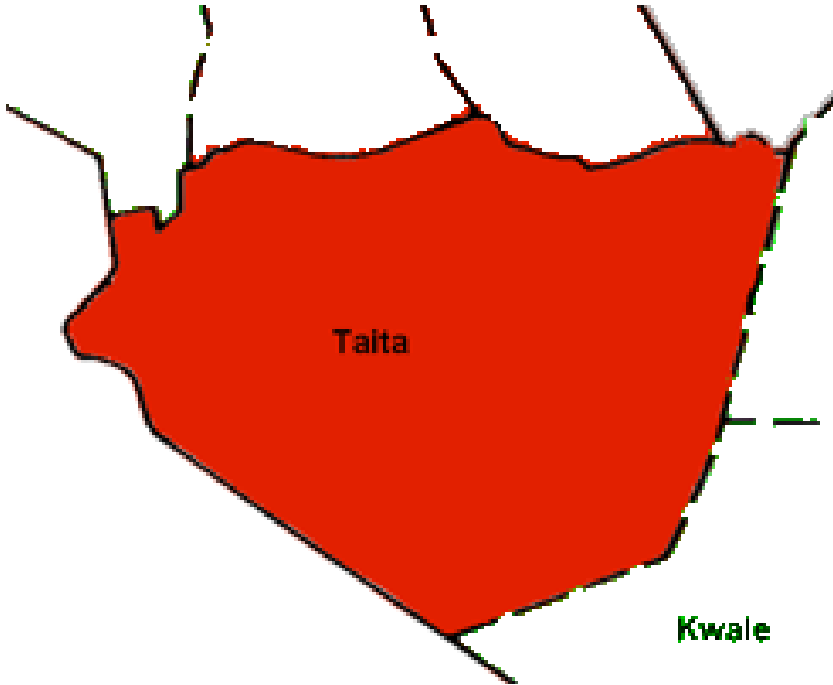
Governor Renison
Ronald Ngala
(KADU)

*Taita*

Dawson
Mwanyumba



Taita



With national political parties permitted and the formation of KANU and KADU in 1960, African politics takes on a more structured form. In the 1961 “Kenyatta election”, Taita constituency is established and is won by 34-year-old Mwanyumba on his second attempt, for KANU (in a predominantly KADU Coast Province). KADU takes office in the subsequent minority government and Mwanyumba remains a backbencher.



Renison Kenyatta Ngala

Taita-Taveta Political History

Apr 1962-63: Coalition Government

In the 1962 African census, there are 83,000 Taita and (the 14th largest community) and just 5000 Taveta recorded



Taita

In the coalition government of May 1962-3, Kenyatta joins Ngala as joint leaders, both taking the title of Minister of State. Mwanyumba becomes Parliamentary Secretary (junior minister) for Agriculture.



Governor Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya
Macdonald (KANU)

Taita-Taveta Political History

1963: For Self-Government



Ngugi Ngala



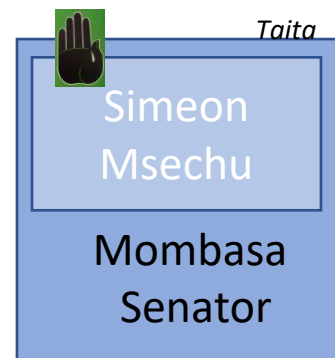
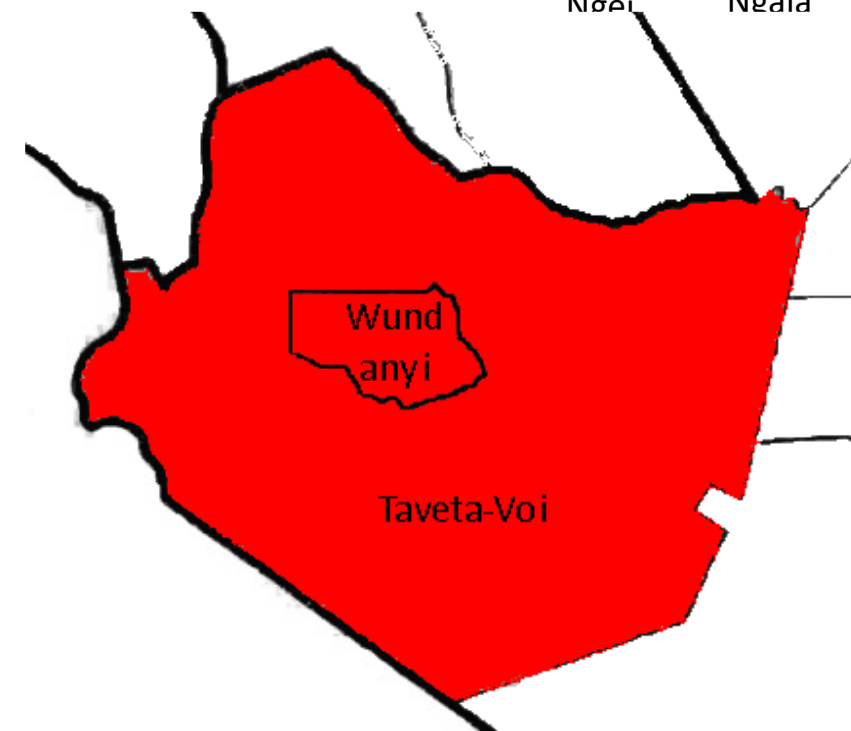
Wundanyi



Taveta-Voi



Senate



Mombasa
Senator

In the new common roll, bicameral system, the constituency is split into Wundanyi and Taveta-Voi, and acquires one senate seat. The district expands in the north to cover all Tsavo. KANU wins nationwide and here, with KANU candidates easily winning all seats. Mwanyumba, re-elected, is chosen as the district's Minister (for Works, Communications and Power) and sole coast Minister. A Taita, Simeon Msechu, wins Mombasa senate for KADU.



Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya
(KANU)

Taita-Taveta Political History

Dec 1964: Republican Constitution



One Party State
(Part 1):
1964-66



Dawson
Mwanyumba



Wundanyi



Alexander
Dingiria




Taveta-Voi



Woresha
Mengo

Senate

Juxon
Shako

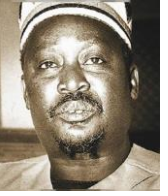


Ambassador

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 Taita-Taveta. Meanwhile in January 1964 Alliance-educated Regional Govt Agent (i.e. DC) Juxon Shako, a Taita, is made Ambassador to Paris and soon after to Bonn.

Taita-Taveta Political History

1966 KPU



Kenyatta, Odinga, Mboya
(KANU)



Wundanyi



Taveta-Voi



Senate

The 1966 KPU rebellion has little effect in Taita-Taveta. None defect, there are no by-elections, and no changes in roles except that Mwanyumba's ministry is split, leaving him only with Works.

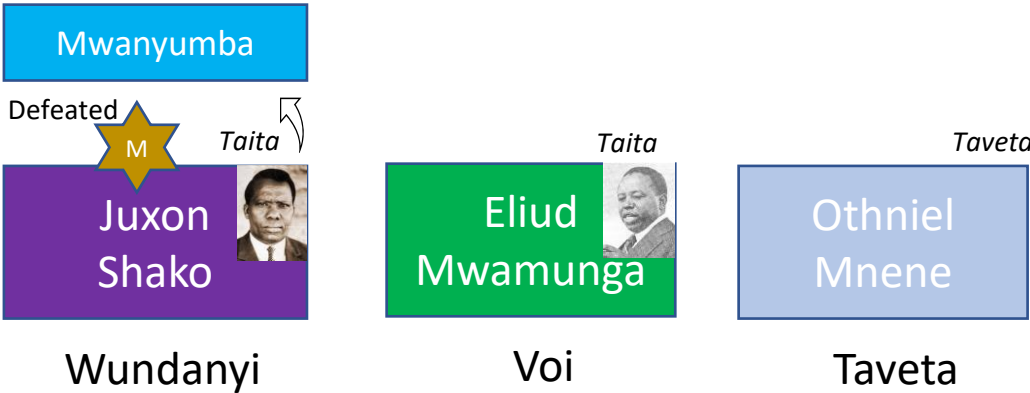


Taita-Taveta Political History

1969 General Election



One Party State
(Part 2):
1969-82



| Taita Taveta Census 1969: | | |
|---------------------------|--------|-----|
| Taita | 86,964 | 79% |
| Taveta | 5,285 | 5% |
| Kamba | 4,784 | 4% |
| Luo | 3,581 | 3% |
| Luhya | 2,392 | 2% |

1967 Senate abolished and boundary redistribution adds one seat to the district. In 1969, the KPU is banned; return of the one-party state. KPU has some support locally, but KANU is now unopposed. All three incumbents are defeated. Mwanumba is evicted by 51-year-old ex-ambassador, permanent secretary and recently EA Railways and Harbours Chairman Shako (also his father-in-law). Dingiria loses in Taveta and Mengo is time barred from standing in Voi. Lawyer Eliud Mwamunga (Alliance, Makerere and Dar-es-Salaam university) is a new backbencher. Shako unsurprisingly becomes the district's minister, responsible for tourism and wildlife.



Taita-Taveta Political History

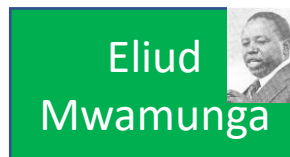
1970-73



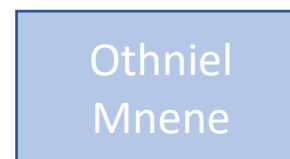
One Party State
(Part 2):
1969-82



Wundanyi



Voi



Taveta

1973-4 sees the “ruby mines scandal”, in which Kenya elites squabble over and eventually exclude the American prospectors who discovered rubies in Tsavo West and (backed by a consortium including Vice-President Moi and Shako) became to extract them. The Kenyatta family and their partner George Criticos’s theft of the mines from Saul and other elites creates a major diplomatic incident internationally. Meanwhile poachers and sharpshooters working for family and other political insiders are decimating Tsavo rhino and elephant herds. This continues throughout the 1970s, despite nominal restrictions on hunting and sales of ivory (by Shako). Shako is close to Kenyatta and seen as an ally of the Kikuyu elites in these actions. Meanwhile in 1972, Kenyatta and his Greek partner Criticos bought the main sisal farms in Taveta (Gicheha farm being the most well-known)



Taita-Taveta Political History

1974 General Election




Shako

Defeated

Taita

Dawson
Mwanyumba

Wundanyi

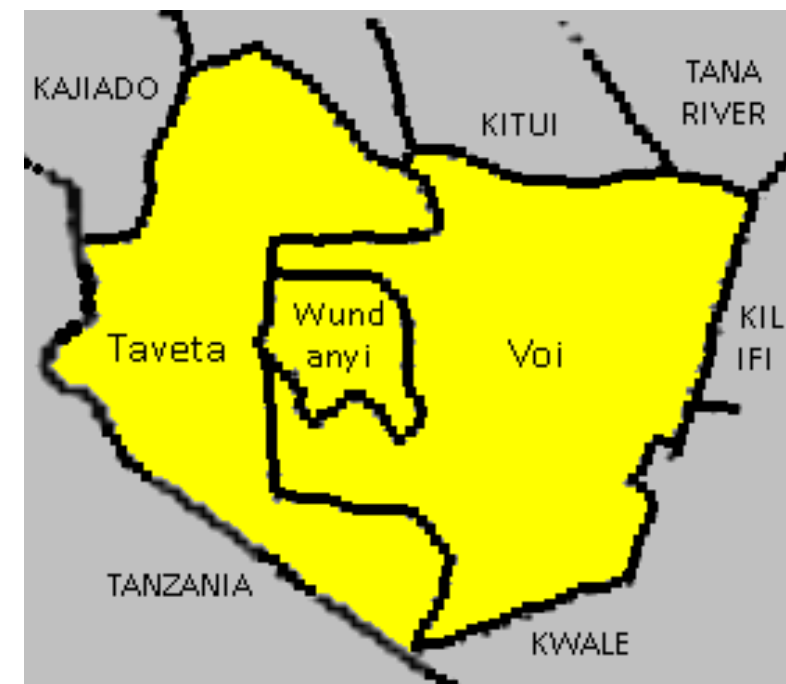
 Eliud
Mwamunga

Taita

Voi

Taita
Mwacharo
Kubo

Taveta

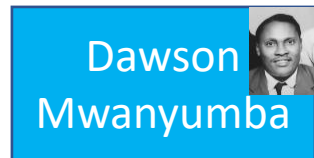


In the 1974 election, Shako is narrowly defeated by Mwanyumba, and Mwamunga is re-elected. Perhaps surprisingly, Mwanyumba is passed over for office, in favour of 39-year-old Mwamunga, who become Water Development Minister.



Taita-Taveta Political History

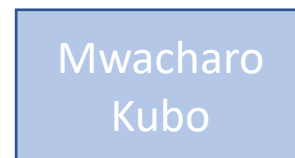
1975-77: Kariuki Murder, KANU is dead and Changing the Constitution



Wundanyi

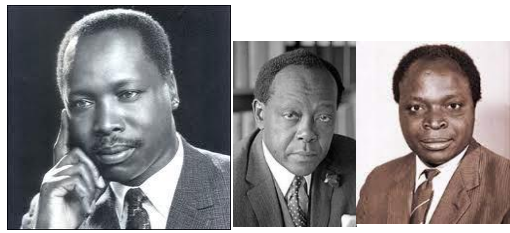


Voi



Taveta

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 succession in 1976-77, but the political ferment mostly passes the region by. In 1976, Mwamunga is shifted to Commerce and Industry minister but continues to have business and political links with Kikuyu insiders.



Taita-Taveta Political History

1979 General Election



Mwanyumba

Defeated

Taita

Mashengu
wa Mwachofi



Wundanyi



Taita

Eliud
Mwamunga



Voi

Taita

Mwacharo
Kubo

Taveta

Taita-Taveta Census 1979:

| | | |
|--------|---------|-----|
| Taita | 111,929 | 76% |
| Kamba | 11,103 | 8% |
| Taveta | 6,135 | 4% |
| Luo | 3,895 | 3% |
| Luhya | 2,870 | 2% |

Moi's first election sees divergent trends. Mwamunga is re-elected and reappointed as minister, but Mwanyumba (and Shako) are defeated by Nairobi University master's student radical Mashengu wa Mwachofi in a narrow three-way race. Kubo is re-elected in Taveta. Meanwhile the Kamba are now the second largest community in the district.

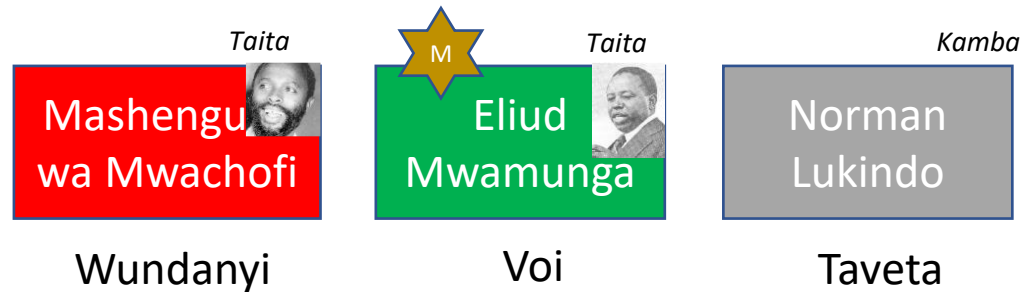


Taita-Taveta Political History

1983: Snap General Election



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



Njonjo's fall after the 1982 coup is followed by a snap general election, but little changes in Taita-Taveta. Mwamunga is re-elected and reappointed as a minister and Mwachofi survives the purge of radicals elsewhere. In Taveta, Norman Lukindo, a Kamba, is elected, reflecting the growing influence of the Kamba community



Taita-Taveta Political History

1988 (Public Queue Voting)

Taita-Taveta Census 1989:

| | | |
|-----------|---------|-----|
| Taita | 148,200 | 71% |
| Kamba | 20,557 | 10% |
| Taveta | 10,529 | 5% |
| Mijikenda | 6,986 | 3% |
| Luo | 5,069 | 2% |
| Luhya | 3,611 | 2% |



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

wa Mwachofi

Defeated



Wundanyi

Taita

Eliud
Mcharo

Mwatate

Taita

Mwamunga

Defeated



Voi

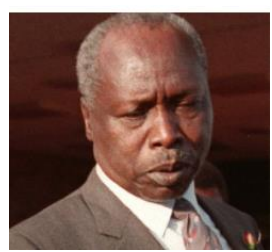
Taita

Mwacharo
Kubo

Taveta

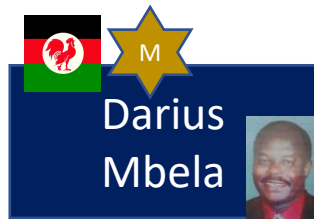
Taita

The decennial boundary redistribution adds one seat, Mwatate. In January 1988, just before the election, Mwamunga is sacked for unexplained reasons, possibly relating to his closeness to Kibaki. In the rigged primaries and general elections that followed, Mwamunga is “defeated” 12-1 by the little know Adiel Kachila and Mwachofi is ousted by 48-year-old retired permanent secretary Darius Mbela, who becomes the district minister. Kubo returns in Taveta, giving Taita candidates all four seats.



Taita-Taveta Political History

Late 1992: Multi-Partyism



Wundanyi



Mwatate



Voi



Taveta



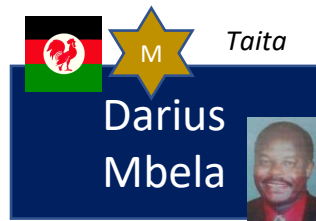
DP National Treasurer

Queue voting abolished. Multi-party democracy returns Dec 1991. As FORD and the DP emerge, Taita-Taveta is split between Supporters of FORD, the DP and KANU. Mwamunga joins the DP as do Mwachofi and Kubo (after losing the KANU primary)



Taita-Taveta Political History

December 1992: Multi-Party General Elections



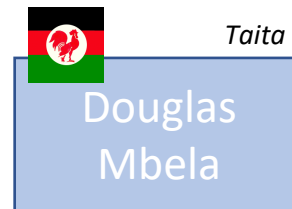
Wundanyi

Darius Mbela



Mwatate

Eliud Mcharo



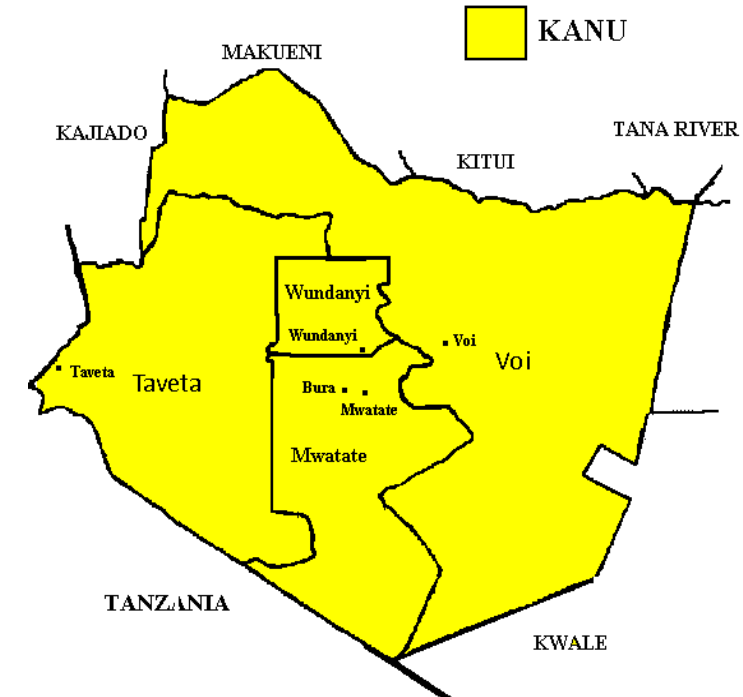
Voi

Douglas Mbela

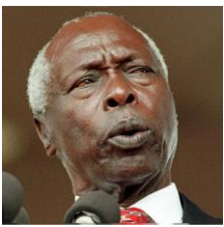


Taveta

Basil Criticos

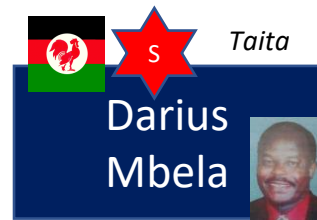


In the 1992 multi-party elections, KANU is triumphant nationwide against a split opposition, and in Taita-Taveta they win all four seats relatively easily. The expected DP wave fails to materialise, and Moi wins everywhere, with Kibaki second and Matiba third. Newcomers include Greek Basil Criticos, son of George (the local landowner in Taveta, who is offering squatters land for votes). In Moi's new multi-party government, Mbela remains a minister



Taita-Taveta Political History

December 1997 General Election



Wundanyi



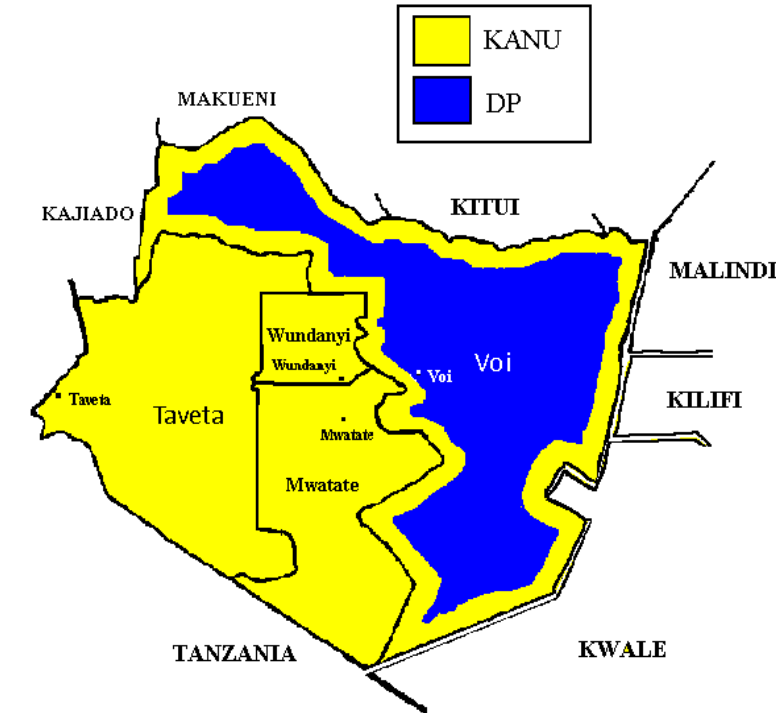
Mwatate



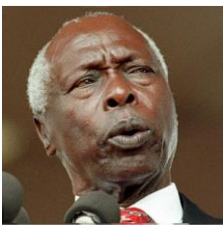
Voi



Taveta

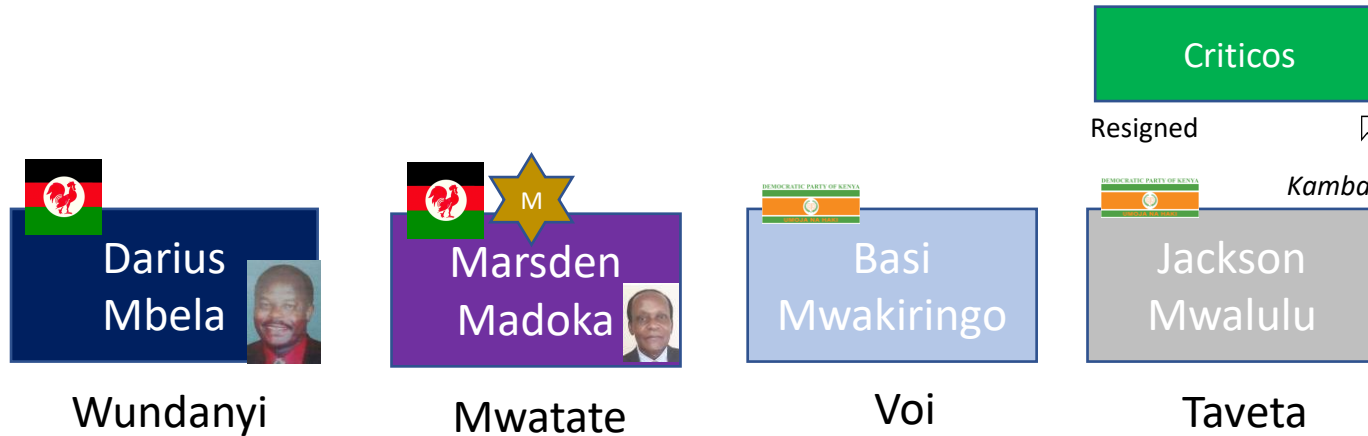


The 1996 boundary redistributions changes nothing in Taita-Taveta. In the 1997 elections, KANU again wins the presidency and most seats easily, but the DP narrowly wins Voi. A new power emerges in the local KANU team – retired Major Marsden Madoka, once *Aide de Camp* to Jomo Kenyatta, now MP for Mwatate. In Moi's last government, Mbela is dropped and Madoka replaces him as the district's minister.



Taita-Taveta Political History

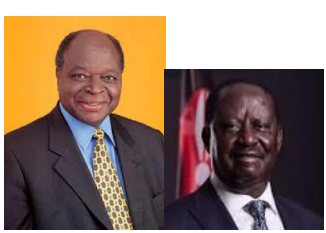
2001: Reshuffles and Realignments



As Moi seeks allies in the opposition, KANU is riven by internal strife. In Taveta, Criticos is hounded out of his seat in early 2001 and flees overseas and squatters occupy parts of his farms. In the resulting by-election, the KANU candidate loses to Kamba Jackson Mwalulu for the DP.

Taita-Taveta Political History

Late 2002: LDP Defection



Wundanyi



Mwatate



Voi



Taveta

With the rainbow rebellion joining the National Alliance, the political tide nationwide shifts sharply against KANU in 2002. The two DP MPs transition to NARC, as does a seriously-ill Darius Mbela, but Madoka holds firm.





Taita-Taveta Political History

2005-7: Second Coalition Government



FORD-P

Mwandawiro
Mghanga



Wundanyi



Marsden
Madoka



Mwatate



Boniface
Mghanga

Voi



Naomi
Shaban



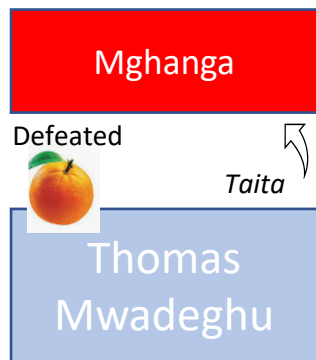
Taveta

In the cobbled-together coalition of 2005 after the failed referendum, little changes in the region, with no ministerial appointments. In 2007, Taveta District briefly comes into existence, to be abolish three years later.

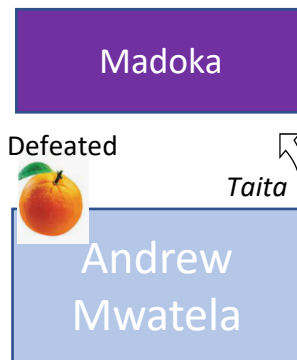


Taita-Taveta Political History

2007: General Election and Subsequent Chaos



Wundanyi



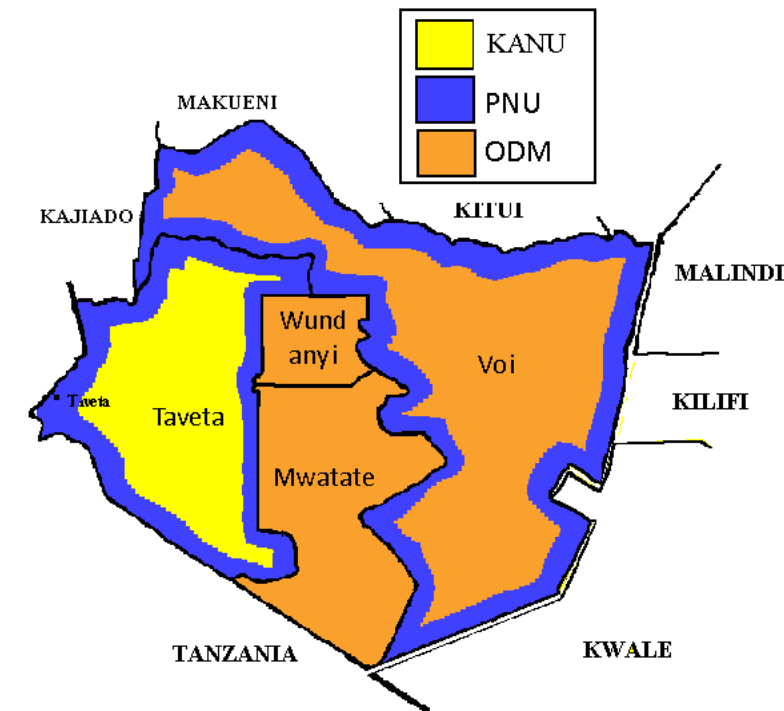
Mwatate



Voi



Taveta

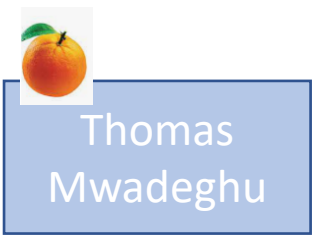


2007 is an ODM-PNU battle nationwide but in Taita-Taveta ODM wins a decisive victory with 3 MPs and two of four seats in the presidential vote. New MPs include Dan Mwazo and only Shaban remains from the (pro-Kibaki) KANU team. Nonetheless, Kibaki is sworn in as President, triggering nationwide violence. In the short-lived Kibaki-Musyoka government of January-April 2008, the region has no representatives.



Taita-Taveta Political History

2008-12: Grand Coalition



Wundanyi



Mwatata



Voi

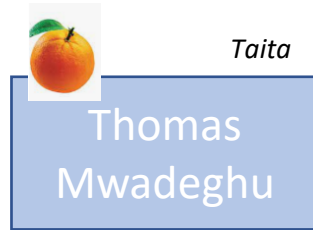
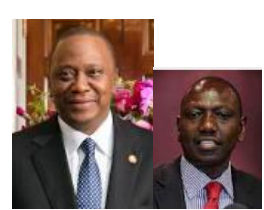


Taveta

In the grand coalition (PNU-ODM-ODM-K), Shaban becomes a Minister and remains in office throughout the transition to the new constitution during 2010-13. In 2009, she is questioned in association with the maize scandal, which fell under her Special Programmes ministry. As a supporter of Uhuru Kenyatta's, she shifts informally to his National Alliance (TNA) in 2012. Also in 2012 Dan Mwazo is (briefly) made Minister for Tourism.

Taita-Taveta Political History

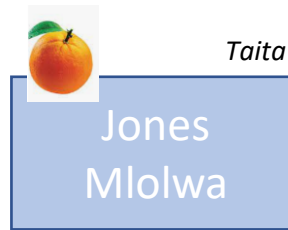
2013: New Constitution



Wundanyi



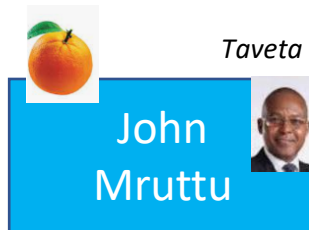
Mwatate



Voi



Taveta



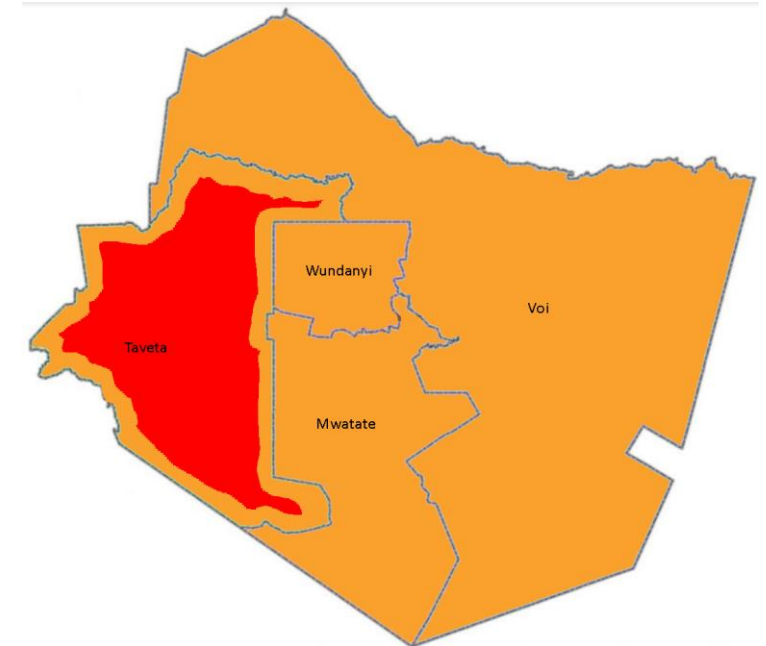
Governor



Senator



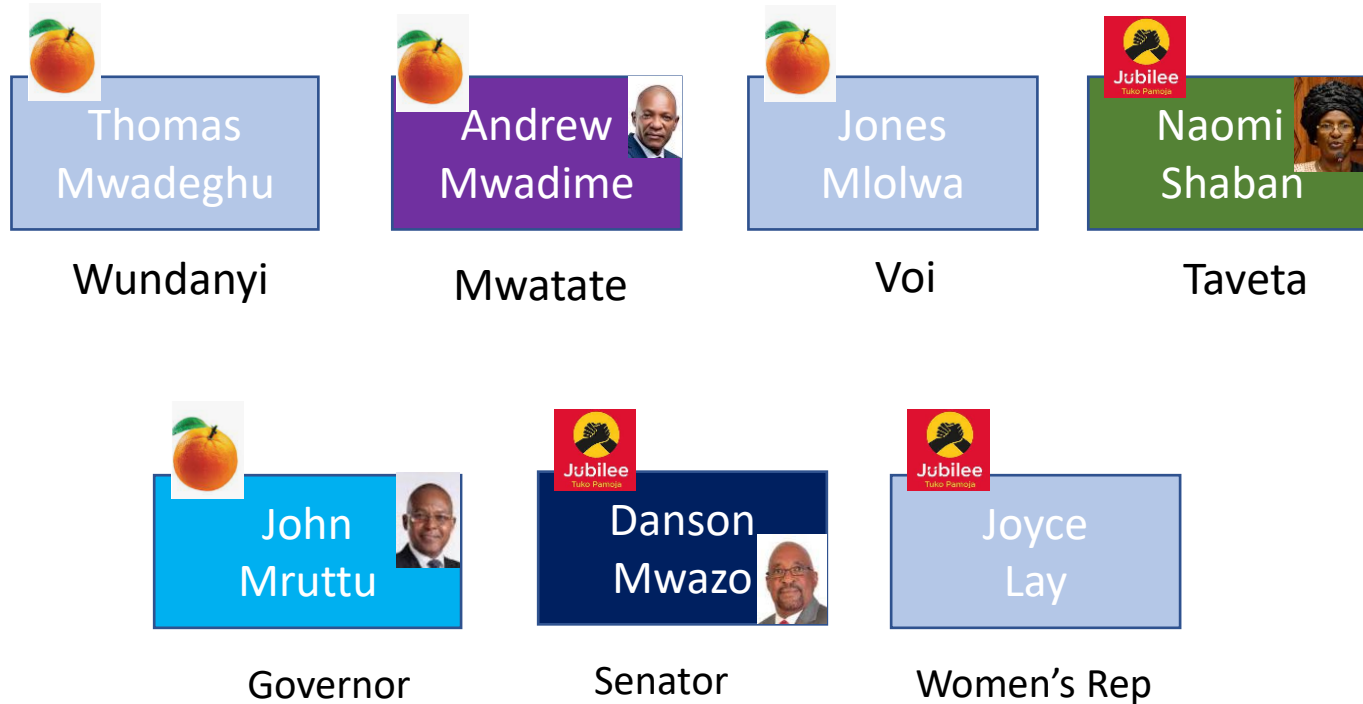
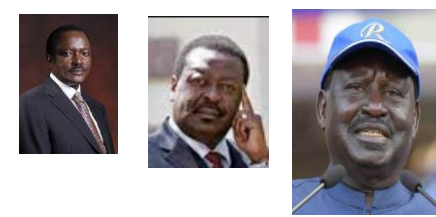
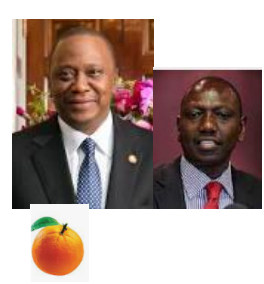
Women's Rep



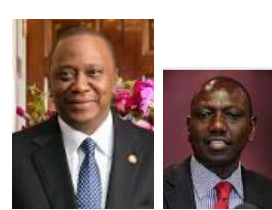
2013 brings a new constitution, new bicameral parliament, Governors, and ministers (Cabinet Secretaries) no longer MPs. No material change in the county's seats. TNA and URP in alliance defeat Odinga's ODM and Mudavadi's UDF nationwide, but here ODM dominates. Raila wins every seat by huge margins (10-1 in some areas) and ODM almost all other seats, with Shaban again the sole survivor, now for TNA. John Mruttu (a 58-year-old oil executive from Taveta) becomes the county's first governor and Mwazo moves to become its senator. In Kenyatta and Ruto's first government, there are no Cabinet Secretaries from the area, but Shaban becomes Deputy Leader of the majority side in the National Assembly.

Taita-Taveta Political History

2015-17: Party Swaps

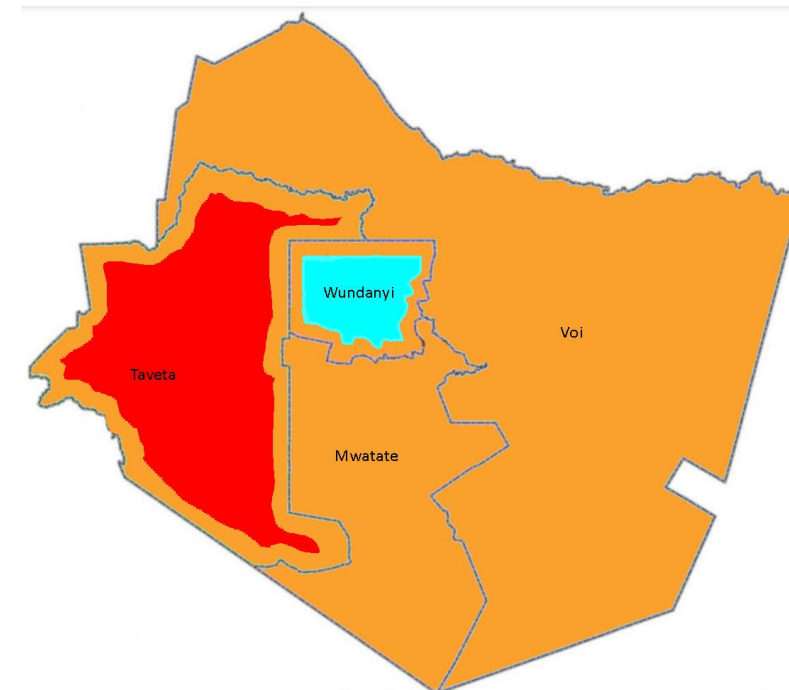
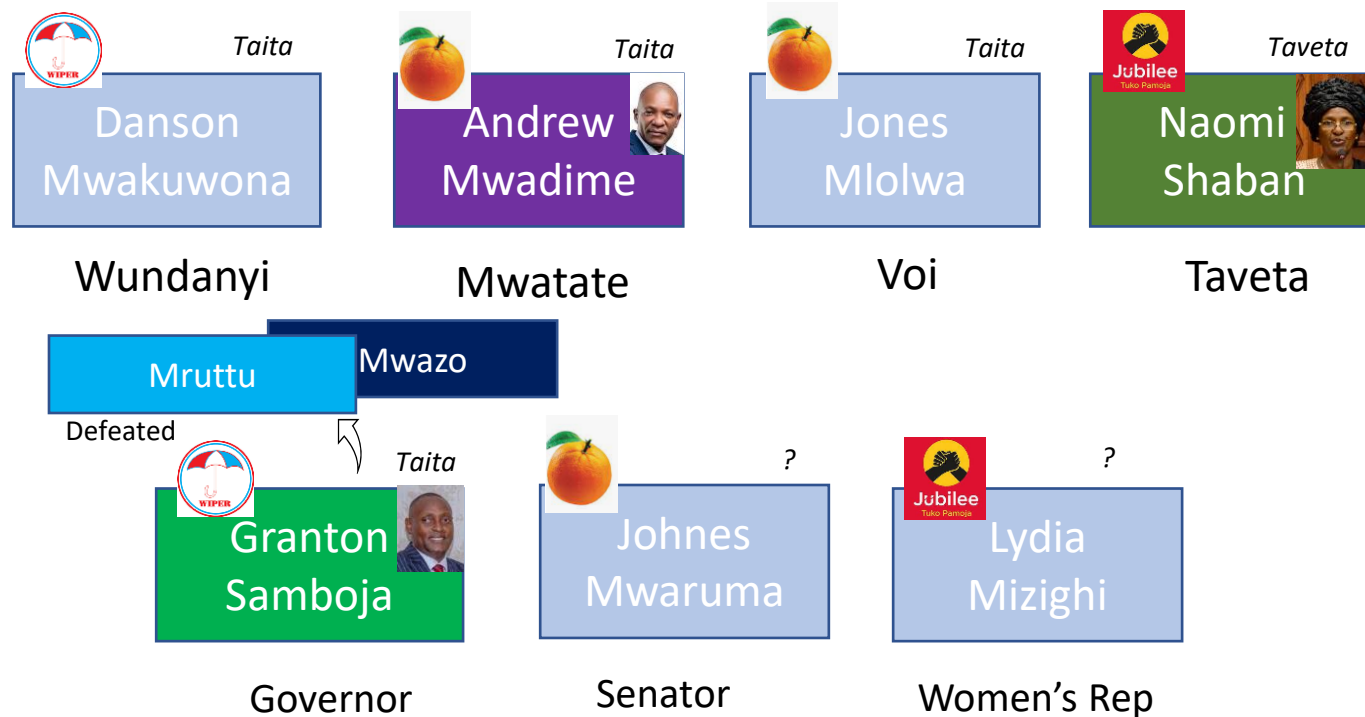


Mudavadi struggles for relevance as a third force, and eventually forms a new party, the ANC in 2016. New FORD-Kenya merges with Jubilee and several other MPs join the new merged TNA-URP Jubilee party. In early 2017 several ODM politicians defect to Jubilee, including Dan Mwazo and Joyce Lay. Meanwhile the new constitution reduces the ex-white settler land leases from 999 to 99 years, leading the main Taveta sisal farm leases to expire, creating a legal ownership vacuum.

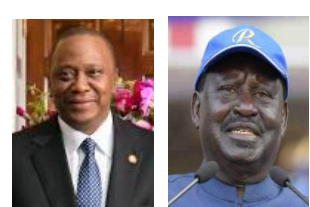


Taita-Taveta Political History

2017: General Elections

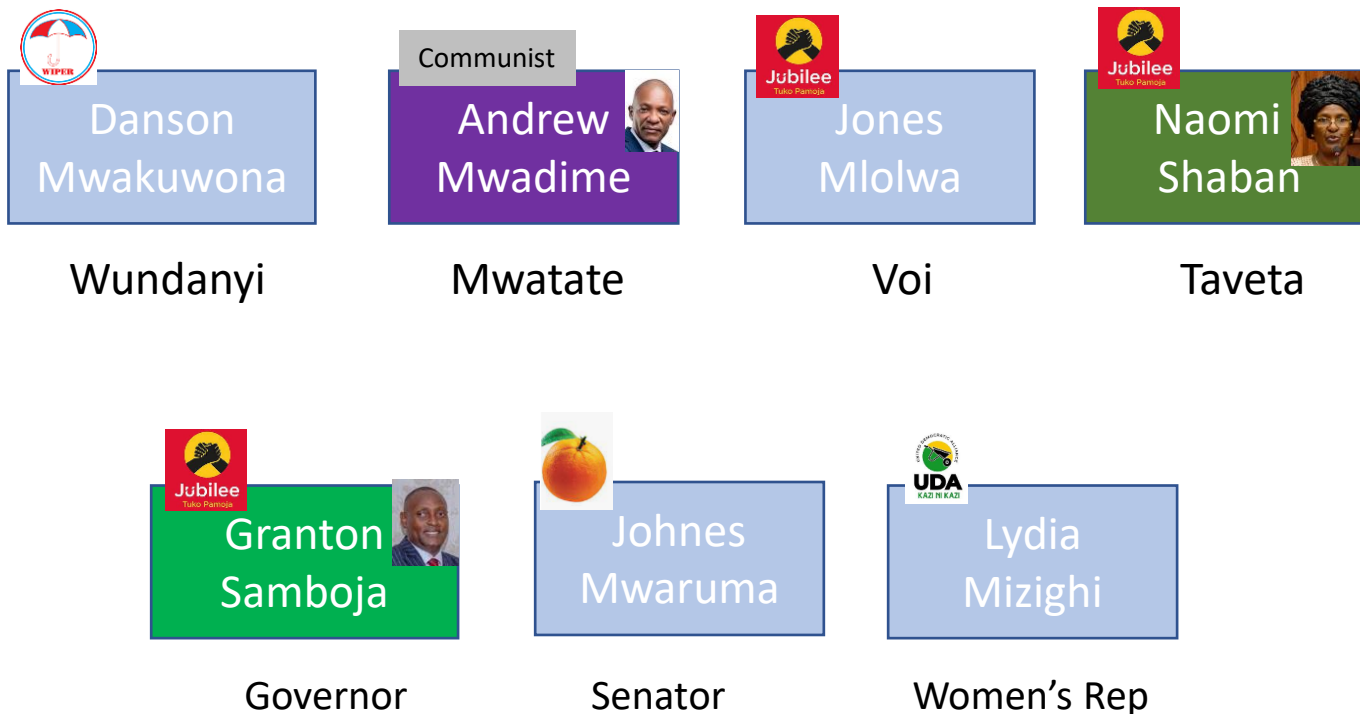


Kalonzo Musyoka's Wiper rejoins ODM and FORD-Kenya in NASA, but NASA loses to Jubilee. In the region, Wiper wins its first two seats, most notably Granton Samboja, a journalist and businessman of uncertain background (his B. Comm at Kenyatta University was repeatedly claimed to be fake) elected on a 3-way split vote after Mruttu lost the ODM Gubernatorial primary and stood as an independent. Most other incumbents are reelected. Odinga again easily wins every seat for the presidency in the region (2-1 to 4-1) but loses nationwide on the first ballot. There are no cabinet secretaries from the region.



Taita-Taveta Political History

2018-22: The Handshake and the Divorce

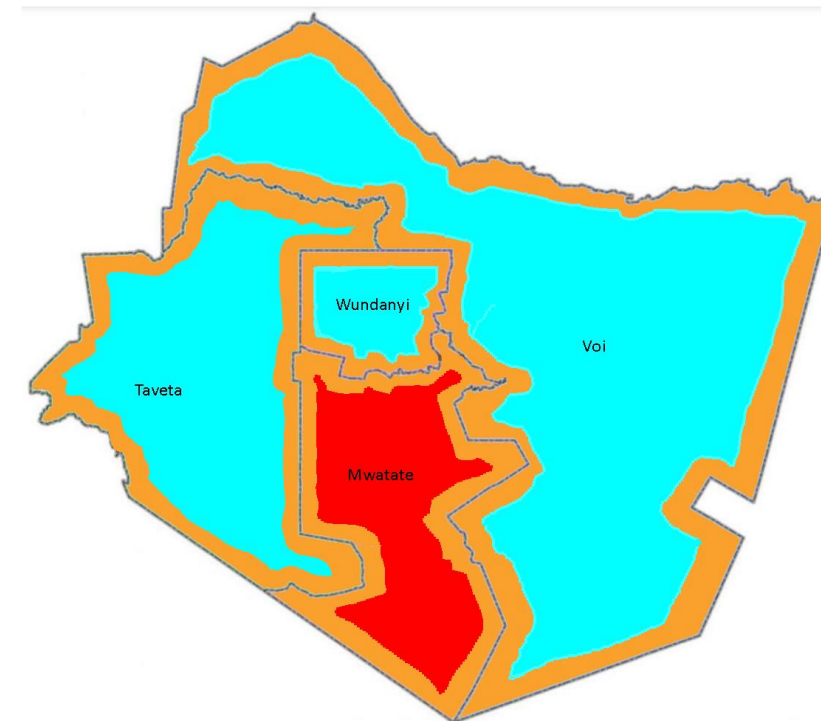
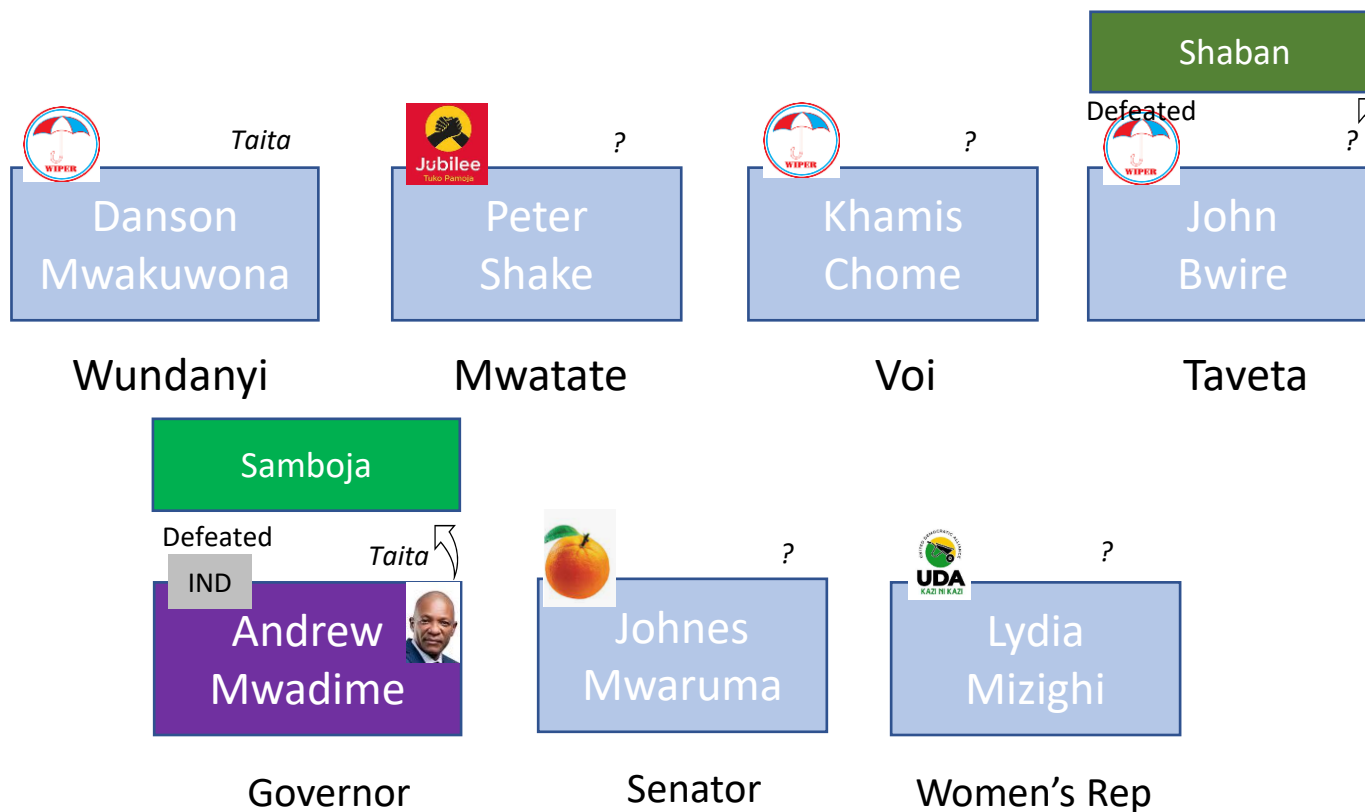


After the repeat presidential election, growing tensions and the unexpected 2018 handshake between Odinga and Kenyatta , the nation takes a different course. With Ruto increasingly out of favour and the “handshake” the main driver of political events during 2019-21, the situation becomes tougher for the Ruto team, who have limited representation in the region. Nonetheless, when in 2021 Ruto sets up the UDA as the vehicle of choice for his presidential bid, Mruttu and Mizighi support. In the run up to the 2022 elections, Samboja defects to Uhuru’s Jubilee as does Mlolwa, while Mwadime joins the Communist Party of Kenya (previously known as the SDP), leaving ODM weakened and the “Azimio team” divided between supporters of Jubilee, Wiper and ODM.



Taita-Taveta Political History

August 2022: Ruto's Revenge



In the region, Azimio dominates the polls, winning everything except the Women's Rep (where Mizighi is reelected for UDA on a personal vote) and the governorship, where Samboja is defeated by a pro-Azimio independent, Andrew Mwadime, who was passed over for the ODM nomination. Odinga beats Ruto between 2-1 and 4-1 in every seat for the presidency. Nationwide, however, Ruto wins a narrow presidential victory. There are no cabinet secretaries from the region.