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The Power of Perceptions: Elites, Opinion Polling, and the Quality of Elections in sub-Saharan Africa

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September 2013

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature.....

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE POWER OF PERCEPTIONS: ELITES, OPINION POLLING, AND THE QUALITY OF
ELECTIONS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

SUMMARY

This thesis examines the impact of the recent introduction of public opinion polling on the quality of elections in sub-Saharan Africa to understand why it has contributed to greater transparency and representativeness in some context and not in others. It makes a unique contribution to the literature in documenting the emergence of the public opinion polling industry on the continent and in developing a theoretical framework for understanding the influence of polling on elite perceptions and behaviour during electoral periods. The thesis situates the proliferation of polling in sub-Saharan Africa within the historical and contemporary debates on the relative merits and drawbacks of public opinion research in democratic politics and elections, while exploring the theoretical link between public opinion polling and the expansion of transparency and representation by elites. The framework developed here posits opinion polling as a new, modern form of political participation to which elites must adapt, creating opportunities for either expansion or contraction of political space around elections. In this model, elites' perceptions of shifts in political competition play a critical role in shaping both the degree of change within the electoral process and the direction, whether toward greater or reduced transparency and responsiveness, of that change. The thesis employs a mixed method approach, using content analysis of print media and key informant interviews to inform detailed case studies of electoral campaigns in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda. Consistent with the model, the case study chapters present historical narratives that capture significant examples drawn over multiple elections from each of the four countries in which public opinion polling and elite perceptions of political competition have instigated changes in political behaviour, ultimately contributing to improvement or deterioration in the quality of elections.

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Acronyms

AC	Action Congress (Nigeria)
ANPP	All Nigeria Peoples Party
CDD	Centre for Democratic Development
CPC	Congress for Progressive Change
CPP	Convention Peoples' Party
DP	Democratic Party
EU	European Union
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change
FORD	Forum for the Restoration of Democracy
ICG	International Crisis Group
Idasa	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
IRI	International Republican Institute
KADU	Kenyan African Democratic Union
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KBC	Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
KPU	Kenya People's Union
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
NARC	National Alliance Rainbow Coalition
NBC	National Broadcasting Commission
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NDP	National Development Party
NPP	New Patriotic Party

NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
PCP	People's Convention Party
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PNC	People's National Convention
PNU	Party of National Unity
SDP	Social Democratic Party
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPC	Uganda People's Congress

Chapter 1. Introducing Polls, Elites, and Elections

“Only fools, pure theorists, or apprentices fail to take public opinion into account”- Jacques Necker, Minister of Finance to Louis XVI

In June 2012, Kenya’s President Mwai Kibaki signed into law the ‘Publication of Electoral Opinion Polls Bill’, designed specifically to outlaw the publication of opinion polls within the last five days of an election. It marked the culmination of an extended effort within the country’s legislature alternately to ban or to regulate public opinion polling in the country.¹ Kenya is not alone in its attempts to curb the proliferation of opinion research around elections. Even in established democracies outside of Africa, the trend toward restricting or banning opinion polling has been strengthening.²

In each case, the rationale given was potential fallibility, real or perceived, in public opinion polling and the consequences the release of this information would have on electoral politics. This is far from the impact that polling’s proponents envisioned when introducing public opinion polling into sub-Saharan African politics. Polling in these contexts generally was designed to improve the quality of elections by channelling politicians’ competitive tendencies into more transparent and representative electoral strategies, all situated within a broader remit of ‘democratisation.’ The intrusion of reality upon each of these ideological conceptions has rendered sub-Saharan Africa as

¹ In September 2011, the Kenyan parliament rejected efforts by a small group of MPs to severely curtail the growing presence of opinion polls in the country. The MPs were seeking to amend the 2011 Election Bill to make it an offence for anyone who conducts an opinion poll or publishes the results of an opinion poll at any time within nine months of an election to pay a £15,000 fine or face a possible three year prison term(*The Star*, 19 September 2011).

² Prior to the April/May 2011 elections in India, its Chief Election Commissioner S Y Quraishi went on record numerous times advocating a complete ban on conducting and publishing opinion polls before elections to complement the existing ban on the release of exit poll data until all polling stations had closed on the final day of voting (*Times of India*, 13 February 2011). Political commentators in both Canada and Australia have also recently called for the revival or introduction of bans or restrictions on opinion polling. Countries in Europe such as Italy, France, and Belgium already impose a ban on the publication of polls in the days before an election.

the next locus of the on-going debate as to the merits and deficiencies of public opinion research in democratic politics.

Yet, for all the rhetoric surrounding it, the rapid emergence of an industry of political pollsters across a number of countries remains an understudied area of Africa's experience with democratic elections. As public opinion polls have become embedded within the political processes of these countries, they have become capable of shaping the perceptions and the behaviours of politicians and other principal electoral actors. This influence, however, has been neither as uniform nor as malignant as those campaigning for their restriction have claimed. Nor has the adoption of polling unleashed a pervasive push for political liberalization in those countries where it has been implemented. The story of public opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa is characterized both by ambivalence and by passion, by transparency and by deception, and by responsiveness and by manipulation. This variation in outcomes is intriguing and merits further investigation to understand *to what extent is public opinion polling influencing the political dynamics of elections in sub-Saharan Africa and what explains the variation in that influence across cases?*

The introduction of public opinion polling into sub-Saharan Africa over the past 15 years has forced its politicians, media, and pollsters onto a steep learning curve to accommodate this indispensable tool of the modern political campaign. Indeed, its emergence as a potential source of both information and influence for citizens and their leaders points to an increasingly sophisticated political system. Yet, opinion polling's increasing prominence in the electoral processes of several influential African democracies has gone largely unstudied in the political literature of the continent.

This thesis addresses that gap by examining the impact of the recent introduction of public opinion polling on the quality of elections in sub-Saharan Africa. It makes a unique contribution to the literature in documenting the emergence of the public opinion polling industry on the continent and in developing a theoretical framework for understanding the influence of polling on elite perceptions and behaviour during electoral periods. The thesis situates the proliferation of polling in sub-Saharan Africa within the historical and contemporary debates on the relative merits and drawbacks

of public opinion research in democratic politics and elections, while exploring the theoretical link between public opinion polling, political elites, and the quality of elections in sub-Saharan Africa.

I argue that public opinion polling should not be considered only in its abstract form or in isolation. Rather, it should be examined within the political context in which it is operating. This means engaging with the realities of political change and electoral politics in the African countries now adopting opinion polling. The framework developed here posits opinion polling as a new, modern form of political participation to which the political elite must adapt, creating opportunities for either expansion or contraction of political space around elections. In this model, elites' perceptions of shifts in competition play a critical role in shaping both the degree of change within the electoral process and the direction, whether toward greater or reduced transparency and responsiveness. Using detailed case studies from Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda, this thesis demonstrates that public opinion polling is influencing elite perceptions and that on the basis of this influence elites have instigated changes in political behaviour, ultimately contributing to improvement or deterioration in the quality of elections.

1.1 Why Study Opinion Polling in sub-Saharan Africa?

Public opinion research has been slower to catch on in Africa than in other continents, perhaps due to a lack of demand for the kinds of market research that enables research organisations to sustain themselves. One of the first comprehensive public opinion surveys to be sustained in Africa was launched under the auspices of Michigan State University, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in Ghana, and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) in 1999. Labelled Afrobarometer in deference to its predecessors, the Eurobarometer and Latinobarometro, it built upon previous small scale opinion surveys done at country level in an attempt to develop a cross-national database of public opinion in Africa, as well as catalyse the emergence of further national capacity for polling (Bratton et al., 2005).

Focusing initially on democracy and democratic perceptions, the Afrobarometer has since expanded its topics of interests to include political opinion polling in the run-up to elections and other topical surveys based on current events in the countries where the network has a presence. Afrobarometer's cross-national approach lends credence to its stance of non-partisanship in domestic political debates, but this does not mean that its polls have not attracted controversy. In spite of this, the survey network seems to be moving from strength to strength. Afrobarometer continues to expand its operations to cover more countries on the continent and to address more and more specific issues in its surveys based on funding from major donors like the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

At the country level, the progress toward scientific public opinion polling has been decidedly less smooth but no less relentless. Media outlets, particularly those in Anglophone Africa, have discovered the charms of opinion polling as a driver of circulation numbers around election periods. As a result, the past 10–15 years have seen a precipitous rise in the number of organisations engaged in opinion polling in Africa and in the coverage these studies receive in the press.

A review of opinion polling in the Kenya context, found that “opinion polls have become a familiar and also seemingly indispensable feature of political campaigns” (Wolf and Ireri, 2010: 2) and that “polls are now acknowledged to be one of the most scientific and systematic communication links between governments and the governed.” (*Ibid*: 7) Moreover, they conclude that “polls have stimulated the general public's interest in political and policy issues and have also played a role in informing more objective public debate on key issues. The general public appreciates and value their new found voice — they need not wait for five years to express their views on social, political and economic issues” (*Ibid*: 2,8).

Kwasi Ansu-Kyeremeh in reviewing the Ghanaian experience with opinion polling in the 1996 elections found an industry lacking in methodological rigour but nevertheless universally considered key to party campaign strategy. This rapid uptake should not be surprising, Ansu-Kyeremeh argues, as “should polling become part of the Ghanaian

democratic culture, this would not be another extension of Western democratic values or mere internationalization. It would be a continuity of an attribute of indigenous African democratic tradition whereby leaders pay attention to public opinion using various measuring strategies” (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1999: 72).

In the context of this thesis, public opinion polling encompasses any attempt made, whether for public or private consumption, to measure public opinion in a scientific fashion.³ Opinion polls commissioned by political parties are equally relevant to those commissioned by media houses and international donors. Indeed, the variation in how elites react to polls produced privately or publicly is a key finding of this research, revealing the importance of perceptions in the politics of sub-Saharan Africa.

The blossoming of the opinion polling industry both in scientific and commercial terms underscores that the impact of political polling on democratic process is not just of theoretical relevance but of practical relevance as well. It has become a big money occupation in Kenya and other African countries, underpinned by funds coming not just from political candidates but also from external donors. The International Republican Institute (IRI), with funding from USAID and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have also grown their reach in recent years to launch public opinion polls explicitly linked to important national elections around Africa and other transitional democracies. IRI contends that: “Public opinion research is a crucial instrument in IRI’s efforts to make political parties more responsive to voters, assist elected officials at all levels of government in improving their service to citizens, and foster greater participation by under-represented groups and by citizens generally in the political process” (IRI, 2012). UNDP views opinion research as an invaluable means of measuring the state of democracy within a country, gauging citizen’s views on institutions, governance, and other issues to determine how successful certain democracy promoting interventions have been.

³ This does not automatically presume that the polling methodology is rigorous, just that one exists and the numbers were not simply manufactured. As the case studies reveal, opinion polling can be influential whether it is rigorous or not, as long as it has the appearance of accuracy. The novelty of opinion polling means that this imprecision becomes part of the political game.

And the trend is not limited to international funders. Opinion polling organisations have mushroomed in certain parts of Africa, particularly East Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria, driven by a growing demand among the news media, politicians, and donors for ever more timely information around elections. Companies like Synovate in Kenya and NOI Polls in Nigeria have been able to develop their businesses rapidly over the past six years as African elections have become headline news. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, current Minister of Finance for Nigeria and founder of NOI Polls asserts: "Economic reform and democracy can only be consolidated and strengthened if citizens have a platform to express their preferences and desires on issues that affect their lives" (NOI Polls, 2012). Likewise, former managing director of Synovate, George Waititu, also praises the merits of opinion polling: "opinion polls should be allowed to flourish as it allows citizens to express their opinions on matters relating to governance and other fundamental issues" (*The Star*, 13 May 2011).

Public opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa is only likely to expand. Both politicians and the media, two prominent actors in all countries' electoral processes, have embraced it, in spite of its flaws and its detractors. For all its weaknesses, it has gained a foothold in the collective consciousness of many democratic societies, including an increasing number of transitional and emerging democracies in developing countries. Just as the industry of opinion polling has evolved over the decades it has been active in Western democracies, it is likely to change and adapt to meet the needs of new consumers of political information. There is a need to better understand how opinion polling is being produced, disseminated, and interpreted by these societies in order to grasp the extent to which opinion polling is influencing elections and attempts to consolidate democracies in these countries.

1.2 The Centrality of Political Elites in sub-Saharan Africa

The decision to focus the attention of this research on the role of elites reflects a recent move back to placing elites at the centre of political agency and analysis. Previously, a number of late nineteenth and early twentieth century political theorists, argued that power relationships among and between competing elites were central to

understanding the form and function of political regimes.⁴ The term ‘elites’ gained particular prominence in the sociology literature of the 1960s and 1970s, but, by consequence, it lost some of its definitional clarity and utility (Scott, 2008). Its presence in the development literature suffered a similar decline as theories and perceptions changed (Daloz, 2003). The last decade, however, has seen something of a resurgence in the use of ‘elites’ as scholars have refocused on the role of agency and politics in development (Moore and Hossain, 2005; Leftwich and Hogg, 2007).

Moore and Hossain define elites as: “the people who make or shape the main political and economic decisions: ministers and legislators; owners and controllers of TV and radio stations and major business enterprises and activities; large property owners; upper-level public servants; senior members of the armed forces, police and intelligence services; editors of major newspapers; publicly prominent intellectuals, lawyers and doctors; and — more variably — influential socialites and heads of large trades unions, religious establishments and movements, universities and development NGOs ... In most developing countries, governing elites tend to be especially powerful” (Moore and Hossain, 2002: 1). As the focus of this thesis is elections, it stands to reason that the actors most worthy of study are those with the greatest hand in the game. I begin with the assumption that for opinion polling to make an impact on the quality of elections, it must first influence the decision-making processes of the political elite. Upon establishing the presence of that influence, this thesis argues that the perceptions within this group of shifts in political competition is what ultimately shapes the impact of public opinion polling on the transparency and representativeness of elections in sub-Saharan Africa.

This has particular relevance in sub-Saharan Africa, where many countries have adopted the constitutional and legal framework of ‘democracy,’ with its corresponding institutions such as executives and legislatures, but politics remains largely the remit of the minority elite operating from urban centres, offering little opportunity for debate and expression of opposition viewpoints. Indeed, the growing ubiquity of elections in

⁴ See Gramsci (1929-1935), Mosca (1923), Michels (1911) and Pareto (1901).

Africa, since the early 1990s, has yielded contrasting interpretations of the continent's electoral prospects. One school of thought suggests that liberalisation is only a matter of time as elites and political institutions evolve to fit more accepted norms and existing clientelist relations become more formalised (Lindberg, 2006; van de Walle, 2006). At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who argue that African politics, its elites, and its institutions are fundamentally different from other political systems and should be analysed as they are rather than as what they might become (Carothers, 2002; Chabal and Daloz, 1999).

Much of this is contingent on elite strategies and behaviours. On one side, the pessimistic approach suggests that existing elites are simply adapting to changing contexts, adjusting only in an attempt to secure new sources of economic and political power. Those more hopeful for the prospects of political liberalisation suggest that there is growing pressure, both internationally and from within countries, on elites to transform themselves, to become more transparent and representative in their behaviour around elections. It is through these elite lenses that I propose to examine the impact of the introduction of public opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa.

Douglas Foyle makes the case for using elites as an intervening variable in his study of public opinion and American politics. He finds that even where opinion polling cannot be directly linked to policy or behavioural outcomes, where polling is prevalent it becomes intrinsically bound up with elite decision-making. Whether these decisions ultimately are better or worse for democracy and national interest is debatable, but the case of influence is clear (Foyle, 1997). Indeed, the context of elite politics provides an ideal environment to test the power of opinion polling's influence over electoral politics. Though centred around the formal processes of democracy — like elections — opinion polling also taps into the informality of democratic politics, supplying information that can just as easily form the basis of a backroom deal as it can a public proclamation of policy direction.

The decision to focus exclusively on the relationship between polling and elites also has a methodological justification in as much as it limits the thesis's exposure to some of the more contentious debates regarding the influence of public opinion polling,

namely its impact on voter behaviour. These issues are discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2 as they have a bearing on the way in which opinion polling is perceived, but evidence of any relationship between polling and voter behaviour features only through the mediating variable of elite perceptions. What is relevant to this research is whether elites *believe* that polling influences voter behaviour rather than whether such a relationship actually exists.

For the purposes of this thesis, public opinion polls are important in that they “provide political elites with the intelligence information to determine when and how to respond to the prevailing mood of the electorate; to consider the views and likely responses of voters when designing, marketing, implementing and modifying party policies; to gain feedback about the public’s reactions to these policies, to issues and to events” (Worcester, 1991: 125). Polls, therefore, play a central role in forging links between political elites and citizens, as well as providing a means by which the general public can contribute to the decision-making processes of government.

In this way, public opinion polling becomes an invaluable source of information, the pulse of the body politic. For political elites accustomed to managing mass politics through the control of information, opinion polls and the interest they engender among media and other observers can be problematic. Issues become immediately amplified; popularity becomes quantifiable. Information dynamics no longer function as before, forcing politicians to adapt and react to the new phenomenon of mass public opinion. This learning process is immensely important and ultimately indicative of the quality of elections within a country.

Public opinion, then, whether it is known or only perceived, permeates the lexicon and behaviour of political elites. I argue that the influence of public opinion polling must therefore be modelled through the lens of elite perceptions to capture accurately its impact on the quality of elections. Because elites are primarily concerned with either improving or preserving their own positions, perceived shifts in the competitive environment, as illustrated through public opinion polls, are what instigate changes in political behaviour. “The struggle over public opinion is, in other words, a key part of the struggle for power” (Manza and Brooks, 2012: 92).

1.3 Improving the Quality of Elections in sub-Saharan Africa

Over the last 15 years, somewhat remarkably, consistent, regular elections have become routine in a majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The quality of these elections may vary across countries and many are almost certainly not free and fair by any meaningful standard, but it is nevertheless important that they happen at all. As recently as 1989, multi-party elections were rare in sub-Saharan Africa, and few would have expected to see the wave of democratisation that swept the continent in the years that followed (Lindberg, 2006). Jeffrey Herbst notes that “the electoral revolution that swept Africa has been swift and dramatic. It is also historically unprecedented: never before have so many poor countries with such weak institutions attempted to democratise at once” (Herbst, 2008: 61).

The wave of democratisation that reached Africa in the early 1990s brought with it a renewed enthusiasm about the continent’s prospects for better public management and, most importantly, improved economic growth and welfare for its citizens. Yet, after almost twenty years, for all the expectations, few success stories have emerged from a region where violence, disease, and extreme poverty still maintain a stranglehold on much of the population. The assumption was that this infrastructure of democracy, via regularly elected representatives, would ensure adequate political competition and representation of public opinion. In practice, many African states have managed to stifle political competition in spite of the advent of multi-party politics.

Proponents of public opinion polling contend that it has the power to influence the quality of elections positively when it is introduced into electoral processes. Be it through the force of collective action or through the re-moulding of electoral institutions, public opinion polling, it is argued, can contribute to more transparent and representative elections. This study focuses on key elections and referenda conducted in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda over a period of 2002–2012.

The decision to focus the analysis solely on opinion polling during elections and referenda was deliberate. Elections are now considered an intrinsic mechanism of

governance, irrespective of a country's democratic credentials. Certainly, elections can be considered a cornerstone of democracy. They are first and foremost an opportunity for citizens to exercise popular will in selecting their leaders, giving the government much needed legitimacy. Moreover, elections, at least in theory, create opportunities for new ideas and new actors to enter the political arena, either in the form of alternation between governments or through policy debates triggered by election campaigns. These entry points are important as "alternation of power builds confidence in former opponents, encourages stability, and allows the public to learn visions different groups have for the country" (Brahm, 2005: 1).

Elections, however, are not the sole preserve of democratic states. Their popularity among authoritarian states has also grown in the aftermath of democratisation. Elections can provide the appearance of political liberalisation that forestalls more dangerous forms of popular dissent and international pressure, appealing to political elites in need of public displays of legitimacy and popularity. Sub-Saharan Africa has both types of regimes, and opinion polling has emerged in each. Selecting elections as the common point of analysis enables this thesis to compare its influence and impact across different political systems. This allows for a more robust representation of the intersection of opinion polling and elite politics in sub-Saharan Africa.

It is this context that drives this thesis's interest in the quality of elections, and more importantly, the potential for public opinion polling in improving that quality. More practically, it has been argued that "political actors are more likely to be responsive (or to 'pander') to public opinion in the build-up to an election than they would be between elections" (Rounce, 2004: 7). Perception is important here as politicians have a need to be seen to be responding to public opinion. If the voters are not aware of the link between their public opinion and elite decision-making, then elites derive no benefit from basing their decisions on public opinion. "Political actors must be able to receive credit for decisions made in order for their responsiveness to be worthwhile" (*Ibid*).

Numerous authors have developed methodologies for assessing the quality of elections⁵ and for explaining incremental changes in their quality.⁶ Underpinning many of these models are two core attributes or assumptions that are the focus of this research. The first is **transparency**, a level of openness and availability of information about the electoral process, which is crucial to avoiding basic electoral fraud and to informing citizen decision-makers about their electoral choices. The second is **representativeness**. The term is chosen deliberately to encompass two distinct though related concepts in electoral quality. One, elections are meant to be representative of citizen interests and preferences, meaning that politicians should be responsive to these and adjust their strategies accordingly.⁷ Two, elections should be representative of the true outcome of citizen voting, meaning that results should reflect actual vote tallies rather than those plucked from thin air or from the president's pocket.

1.4 Locating the Research: Methodology, Scope and Limitations

This thesis has three goals: first, to ask whether there is evidence that public opinion polling in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda is changing the way in which politics is conducted around elections; second, to develop a theoretical framework to understand the underlying characteristics that shape the interface between polling, the political elite, and electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa; and third, to determine whether polling has contributed to more transparent and representative electoral processes in these selected countries. Research in this area is sparse, and, as such, this thesis has adopted an exploratory approach. The nature of the research has dictated the selection of the methodology and guided the scope of the thesis. This approach has both strengths and limitations, both of which are acknowledged below. Each of these areas is covered in more detail later but they are introduced here.

⁵ See Lindberg 2006; Diamond 2002.

⁶ Howard and Roessler (2006) develop a framework for measuring "liberalising electoral outcomes."

⁷ Przeworski, A., S. Stokes, and B. Manin. eds. 1999. Democracy, accountability, and representation. New York: Cambridge University Press.

1.4.1 Methodology

Assessing change in political processes is a difficult task. Determining what and how to measure changes in attitudes, perceptions, and behaviour within complex political contexts is inherently challenging and requires a very specific and clear methodology from the outset. There is always the risk that important elements are unobserved or unaccounted for, compromising the explanatory power of the research.

The thesis responds to this challenge in two ways. First, chapter 2 lays out a clear theoretical framework that discretely defines the subjects of the study and the variables by which their relationship will be assessed. While this framework is undeniably narrow and will not capture every process through which public opinion polling influences elections in sub-Saharan Africa, it serves to operationalize the research question by defining measurable parameters. Second, the case study methodology has been designed specifically to capture different forms of evidence across a set time period and drawn from a variety of sources. Ultimately, the case studies are essentially historical narratives that capture changes in the relationship between public opinion polling and political processes through the observed electoral periods, analysing, in particular, the perceptions and behaviours of those most directly involved in electoral politics. The results of these studies make it possible to adjudge the extent to which opinion polling is having an impact on the way in which electoral politics is conducted, including whether or not it is contributing to greater transparency and representativeness in elections in sub-Saharan Africa.

The further challenge to implementing this particular study has been the absence of existing research dealing with public opinion polling around elections in sub-Saharan Africa. As stated above, the topic is still emergent, influencing greatly the choice of methods used to obtain relevant evidence. To compensate for the absence of evidence from secondary sources, the thesis has emphasised primary research, using a mixture of desk-based and field-based approaches. Using available resources, content analysis of major newspapers in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda was conducted remotely. This was supplemented by targeted field research across the four countries over the course of 2012–13. The research also relied heavily on interviews with key

stakeholders to validate the findings of the content analysis, drawing primarily from among political journalists, opinion pollsters, current and former politicians, and leading academics and political analysts. This included over 50 formal interviews, generally lasting between one and two hours, as well as a wide array of more informal conversations and meetings with stakeholders. The interviews were all semi-structured, with interviewees first asked to express their own impressions of public opinion polling's role in recent elections. Only after interviewees had shared their own interpretation were further questions asked in order to inform the consideration of particular research variables.

1.4.2 Scope

The decision to adopt a four-country comparative study reflects the dearth of existing research in this specific area and the value of comparative cases in illuminating complex processes. Limiting the scope sufficiently to make the research feasible, while ensuring relevance, requires that the study has specific case selection criteria. The initial decision related to identifying those countries in sub-Saharan Africa where public opinion polling is sufficiently established to allow for in-depth research. The growth of the Afrobarometer project in the past decade has brought some semblance of opinion research to over 30 countries on the continent, but its penetration remains low in the majority of its sample. It was therefore necessary to first create a sub-set of countries where public opinion polling had been carried out for an extended period, covering a number of electoral cycles.

Beyond this basic distinction, the selection of Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda has been motivated by four factors, which combine theoretical and practical considerations. The countries were further selected on the basis of geographic considerations and variation across the dependent variables. The thesis aims to be as representative as possible of sub-Saharan African democracies and, as such, selected two countries from East Africa and two from West Africa to ensure geographic spread. More importantly, however, was the need for institutional variation among the cases with respect to the dependent variables. For instance, one expects to see a different

landscape for political information in the more diffuse media environments of Kenya and Nigeria than the smaller, more ideologically aligned media in Uganda and Ghana. Likewise, campaign strategies and adaptation to polling will differ in the more politically competitive contexts of Kenya and Ghana from the one-party dominant systems in Uganda and Nigeria. Finally, the propensity toward electoral violence seen in Nigeria and Kenya places a far higher importance on elite expectations than in the less combustible settings of Ghana and Uganda.

1.4.3 Limitations

These decisions about methodology and scope inevitably result in particular limitations as to the conclusions and broader generalisations that can be made in the study. Two of these deserve special mention. As with any study that is heavily reliant on case study evidence, external validity is a challenge. By design, the case study countries all have an opinion polling industry of some description and have all witnessed important changes to the role and influence of this polling over time. While efforts have been made to select cases representative of the diversity in sub-Saharan Africa, the countries studied do have characteristics in common when compared to countries in other regions.

The study does not, for instance, explore the conditions necessary for an indigenous polling industry to emerge where one does not previously exist. It also does not address opinion polling in countries where there is not at least a nominal democratic system. These omissions, however, are somewhat unavoidable. It is impossible for a single study to cover all of these variations, further reinforcing the value of further research in other contexts.

Second, this thesis cannot and does not purport to study all of the many different ways in which public opinion polling influences political systems. This relationship is complex and there are several avenues by which opinion research can shape the perceptions and actions of political elites. Given the evidence available, this thesis has focused on the specific possibility that public opinion polling can contribute to improved transparency and representativeness of elections. To do this, this thesis has further

narrowed its scope to encompass relatively observable variables, leaving aside more abstract conceptions of democratic quality and levels of democratisation. Nevertheless, this author believes that the study is able to capture the most significant political processes and variables at work, providing a suitably robust picture of the relationship between public opinion polling and electoral processes.

1.5 The Way Forward

This research contributes to that body of evidence by proposing a theoretical framework for examining the interaction between political elites and opinion research in Africa and applying it to a number of key case studies on the continent. The thesis employs a mixed method approach, using content analysis of print media and key informant interviews to inform detailed case studies of electoral campaigns in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda. It demonstrates that public opinion polling is influencing elite perceptions and that on the basis of this influence elites have instigated changes in political behaviour, ultimately contributing to improvement or deterioration in the quality of elections. The four case study chapters present historical narratives that capture significant examples drawn over multiple elections from each of the four countries in which public opinion polling and elite perceptions of competition have instigated changes in political behaviour, ultimately contributing to improvement or deterioration in the quality of elections.

The thesis proceeds from theoretical framework to narrative analysis. Chapter 2 conceptualises public opinion research, contextualising it both in developed democracies and through research conducted in developing countries before expanding upon this discussion to establish the framework through which opinion polling and elite perceptions and behaviour interact in the electoral process. Chapter 3 presents the case of Kenya where opinion polling has enjoyed a prominent, if controversial, role in the country's recent political history. Chapter 4 reviews Ghana's experience with opinion polling over the last decade, revealing an increasingly partisan electoral climate that pervades attempts at public opinion research. Chapter 5 documents opinion polling's emergence in Nigeria where polling is helping shine a light

on persistently fraudulent elections. Finally, Chapter 6 presents the case of Uganda where opinion polling has faced a tumultuous introduction in the context of waxing and waning political competition. Findings from these empirical chapters are brought together in the concluding chapter that offers comparative analysis and points to further research that is needed.

Chapter 2. Elites, Opinion Polls, and Elections in sub-Saharan Africa

The recent, rapid expansion of public opinion research in sub-Saharan Africa is undeniable. Grounded in the belief that polls can contribute to more transparent and representative elections, external donors and local polling organisations have stepped up their efforts to meet a growing demand for public opinion polling. In Nigeria, opinion polling was credited with turning the balance against then-President Olesegun Obasanjo's attempt to amend the constitution to allow himself a third term in office. Yet, in Kenya, opinion polling received a significant amount of blame for the widespread violence that ensued following the contentious 2007 elections. To better understand these variations, this thesis investigates *to what extent public opinion polling influences the political dynamics of elections in sub-Saharan Africa and what explains the variation in that influence across cases?*

This chapter situates the proliferation of polling in sub-Saharan Africa within the historical and contemporary debates on the relative merits and drawbacks of public opinion research, while exploring the theoretical links between public opinion polling, political elites, and political change. Potential mediating influences in the form of political context, elite responses, and the role of the media are explored before presenting theories for explaining the influence of public opinion polling. Positing public opinion polling as a mechanism for change, this chapter introduces three theoretical models that are broadly representative of Tilly's classification of political mechanisms as either: relational, environmental, or cognitive. These classifications relate to change generated from interactions within networks, external influences, and internal influences, respectively, as discussed below.

A collective action model, which suggests that polling can harness public opinion and force government responses by overcoming the collective action problem, positions opinion polling as a relational mechanism capable of altering "connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks" (Tilly, 2001: 24). An institutional model,

which contends that polling's influence on elections is mediated through political institutions, suggests opinion polling is an environmental mechanism, an "externally generated influence on conditions affecting social life." (*ibid*) The lack of a model theorising opinion polling as cognitive mechanism for change, operating "through alterations of individual and collective perception," is identified as a gap in the literature. I argue that the ability of opinion polls to influence elite perceptions and decision-making is an essential first stage in the process by which polling impacts upon elections. Building on this premise, this chapter goes on to develop a framework to incorporate the concept of elite perceptions into existing theories to explain the varying influence of public opinion polling on elite behaviour and the consequent quality of elections, asking the question: *why does the presence of public opinion polling influence the political elite to restrict and distort campaigns and outcomes in some elections but not in others in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda?*

2.1 Conceptualising Public Opinion Polling

Before delving into the politics of polling, it is important to understand what is actually meant by the term "public opinion polling" and how it has been conceptualized in the literature. It is by no means an uncontroversial concept, generating significant debate in its country of origin, the United States, as well as elsewhere. Nevertheless, from this rich repository of literature it is possible to distil two principal strands; public opinion polling is generally construed as either an attitudinal or a behavioural phenomenon. This is an important distinction and one that has repercussions on how polling ultimately influences politics.

2.1.1 Opinion Polling as an Abstract Representation of Public Opinion

In one conception, public opinion polling can be defined as the quantitative representation of the aggregation of individual attitudes or beliefs in society. Althaus contends that a great strength of opinion research is its ability to identify issues within a society, as well as weaknesses within its own polling results. Surveying the electorate not only yields interesting results as to preferences and opinions; it also provides data

on the people themselves and their capability to make informed choices in the political process (Althaus, 2003). Berelson (1952: 19), in turn, argues that “opinion studies can help democracy not only to know itself in a topical and immediate way but also to evaluate its achievement and its progress in more general terms.”

That such an instrument would be in high demand is hardly surprising. It has great potential consequences for how strategies play out in the political arena. Sanders (1999: 273) contended that “surveying, because of its power to make inferences through sampling to underlying populations and communities — including unconventional or imaginary ones — provides unprecedented opportunities to make claims about the nature of public opinion in these populations and communities. This kind of analytical purchase on the empirical conditions of political life is something both pragmatists and democrats should embrace.”

However, the reliability and impartiality of opinion research has long been questioned by academics and researchers who point to the fickle nature of public opinion and the difficulties inherent in defining and measuring what the masses think (Crespi, 1989). A predominant and persistent concern is that opinion polling does not adequately capture ‘public opinion’ due to practical and methodological constraints. Most prominent among the critics here is Herbert Blumer who claimed that opinion polling as exercised does not adequately capture public opinion but rather treats society as if it were “only an aggregation of disparate individuals” (Blumer, 1948: 546). Not knowing “whether individuals in the sample represent that portion of structured society that is participating in the formation of public opinion on a given issue” means that there is no empirical way of ensuring that the evidence that emerges is really representative of the prevailing opinion among interested groups.

These critics of representative accuracy were soon joined by those attacking the methodological validity of modern opinion polling. Althaus (2003: 288) highlights one persistent concern in the reporting of opinion data: “What to do with the respondents who give “don't know” or “no opinion” responses? In light of the representation problems...it seems inappropriate to omit the percentages of these responses when reporting survey results.”

This need for selectivity underscores Bordieu's fear that the aggregation of opinions meant that marginalised and less vocal groups would see their interests expunged from public discourse by the weight of majoritarian rule through opinion polls. He writes: "Its most important function is to impose the illusion that there is something called public opinion in the sense of the purely arithmetical total of individual opinions; to impose the illusion that it is meaningful to speak of the average of opinions or the average opinion" (Bourdieu, 1979: 125). Those less conversant in politics are more likely to give 'don't know' and 'no opinion' responses than more knowledgeable people. This means that public opinion tends to be disproportionately well educated, affluent, male, middle-aged, and partisan relative to the population it purports to represent (Berinsky, 1999). Althaus (2003: 278) argues that "because ill-informed survey respondents tend to behave differently than models of collective rationality expect them to, aggregating individual opinions turns out to be a surprisingly inefficient way to pool information dispersed across a mass public...the mass public is often unable to compensate for its inattentiveness to politics."

2.1.2 Opinion Polling as a Behavioural Form of Political Participation

Another conception of opinion polling ascribes a more behavioural quality, more or less equating it with other forms of political participation. Certainly Tilly (1983: 462) believed that the emergence of public opinion polling was tantamount to the emergence of a new, modern form of participation, arguing "we now live in a world in which the idea of a defined aggregate set of preferences at a national level, a sort of public opinion, makes a certain amount of sense. It makes enough sense that nowadays we can consider the opinion survey a complement to, or even alternative to, voting, petitioning, or protesting."

Indeed, such is the appeal of public opinion polling that some observers believe that opinion polls may be more successful even than traditional forms of participation (Berinsky, 1999). But this emergence of public opinion polling as a form of political participation did not sit well with everyone. Wacquant (2004: 7), drawing on Bourdieu's analysis, complained that "polls are an instrument not of political

knowledge but of political action whose widespread use tends to devalue other means of group-making, such as strikes, demonstrations, or the very elections whose formally equalitarian aggregative logic they ostensibly mimic.”

Verba (1996) disagrees, arguing that opinion polls are actually a more representative form of political participation as they require no resources and reduce selection bias. Viewed in the context of participatory processes, opinion polling exhibits no more flaws than do other forms of participation. It is not perfect, without doubt, but then political participation itself is generally inadequate to some extent. While not advocating a ‘referendum democracy’ Verba does contend that the addition of polling to the arsenal of political participation makes for a powerful tool for equal representation.

This conception of polling harkens back to its origins in the United States. George Gallup, founding father of modern polling, was a populist who believed that voters should have some input into decision-making processes. His vision for opinion polls was that they would objectively capture the preferences of voters, which, in turn, could be shared with their representatives, thus providing a critical link between these two components of representative government. Elites could be more responsive to public opinion, and citizens could feel more engaged in what has become a more participatory political process (Gallup, 1939).

On the other hand, there is a strand of criticism that argues that opinion polling is potentially restrictive for political participation. Opinion polling can be just as much a weapon of mass manipulation as mass empowerment. Indeed, the statistical nature of polls makes them particularly susceptible to deception and bias. As easily as polls can open the flow of new information, those in positions of power can control its message and its timing. Understanding the electorate better can give politicians a keener awareness of how to present themselves in a positive light. Moreover, polls can also be used to spread misinformation to the benefit of one candidate over another (Marsh, 1984).

One argument focuses on the influence opinion polls have on voter decision-making and participation. Justin Lewis (2001) contends that the creation of a body of poll results in citizens becoming passive observers rather than active participants and actually represses real discussion of issues. Lewis expands directly on the claims made by Benjamin Ginsberg. Ginsberg (1986) broadly saw the establishment and existence of electoral institutions and processes and the rise of opinion polling in the United States as important means by which governing elites control and manipulate the nation's citizenry. The symbolic existence of these institutions and processes helps maintain the legitimacy of political leaders and government and helps foster the appearance of a national consensus, while obscuring whose interests actually dominate political life.

Ginsberg also argued that opinion polling actually converts public opinion from a behavioural phenomenon controlled by the actors themselves to an attitudinal phenomenon controlled instead by the researchers conducting the surveys. Perceived in this way, public opinion polling could actually be construed as devaluing the political power of traditional forms of political mobilisation. (Mattes, 2007)

2.1.3 Implications for the Influence of Public Opinion Polling

Converse suggests the ubiquity of polls has conditioned people to view polls as expressions of public opinion. "If ... any deflection whatever of behaviour by the representative which arises as a result of some exposure to poll data, even the most vague 'taking account of it,' classifies as an instance of actual influence, then of course public opinion in poll form must be said to have a great deal of influence. And this kind of minimal influence must occur in very large doses among political practitioners, or it would be extremely hard to explain why such users pay many millions of dollars a year for this expensive class of information" (Converse, 1987: S21-22).

Others contend that public opinion polling "is the handmaiden of modern democracy," a necessary corollary for political systems that both encourage citizen reliance upon the state in the form of welfare and other public services and yet limit citizen participation in politics and influence on decision-making to relatively infrequent elections (Bradburn and Sudman, 1988). Where this influence is likely to take place and

the relative value of that influence is another of the great debates within the public opinion literature. It also has implications for this research in determining how best to conceptualise public opinion polling in the theoretical framework.

2.2.1.1 Polling-Public Policy Nexus

Asher (1988) contends that opinion polls serve a dual purpose for enriching the citizen-state relationship. They provide political information, making the system more transparent, while also creating opportunities for citizen influence on political elites who must be seen to be responsive to their demands. The exact of nature of the influence of opinion polls on policy outcomes remains unclear (Jacobs & Shapiro, 1994; Page, 1994), but its influence political processes appears well entrenched in Western democracies. In some cases, polls have been used by political elites to catalyse expressions of support for their preferred policies (see S. Herbst, 1993). In short, public opinion on its own is unlikely to trigger policy change, but information drawn from opinions can and does shape the formation and implementation of policy (Sobel, 2001).

Indeed, there is convincing evidence that public opinion has a strong influence on policymaking or at least in fashioning the context in which political elites must make their policy decisions (Foyle, 1999, 2004; Kull & Ramsay, 2003). Surveying the use of polling in post-Communist countries in the early 90s, Matt Henn (1997: 133) finds that “polls both feed directly into the process of defining democratic structures and institutions in post-communist societies and also help to ensure that political elites are kept in touch with people's views, needs and aspirations. [The evidence] also suggests that polls may be used in governmental and parliamentary debate to influence the course of policy-making and legislation.”

Stimson's model of dynamic representation is more nuanced, contending that public opinion actually rarely matters in a democracy, but that public opinion change is crucial. It argues that policy adjusts over time to changes in public opinion, both through elections themselves and through the personal perceptions of policy-makers. Public opinion only matters, at least in terms of stimulating change, when the general

public rouses itself beyond its usual levels of political indifference. “When public opinion changes, governments rise or fall, elections are won or lost, and old realities give way to new demands...when electoral politicians sense a shift in public preferences, they act directly and effectively to shift the direction of public policy. We find no evidence of delay or hesitation” (Stimson et al., 1995, p. 560). At the same time, while preferences are often stable and systematic, it is important to distinguish between policy changes arising due to changes in attention and those due to changes in preferences (Jones, 1994).

By contrast, Weissberg contends: “The conventional poll is inherently unsuited to making policy choices regardless of expert claims to the contrary. Moreover, all the proffered ‘new and improved’ possibilities, such as deliberative polling, or untold electronic variants are probably even less adequate” (Weissberg, 2001: 8). By treating substantive responses from filtered questions as though they represented the entirety of a population's opinions is misleading because it obscures the potential for misrepresentation of voices. He continues: “This analysis suggests that contemporary polls are seducing respondents, not offering them hard choices of the type faced by legislatures or policy analysts Polls do not provide worthwhile advice about policy; they measure only wishes for a world of benefits with no costs” (*Ibid*: 13).

What these critiques largely have in common is their conception of public opinion polling as an attitudinal phenomenon, and indeed, in the context of public policy influence, this conception may be appropriate. In the periods between elections, polls may not be broadly representative of people's political participation for the reasons mentioned above, but there is reason to believe that their character changes when applied to electoral processes, requiring a different conception of public opinion polling.

2.2.1.2 Polling – Elections Nexus

The most obvious locus for influence of public opinion polling, and also the focus of this thesis, is elections. Opinion polls are most prominent during these periods and as a result the relationship between the two has received some consideration. Prompted

by the pervasive penetration of opinion polling into Western electoral campaigns, scholars began to raise concerns about the possible consequences for voters (West 1991). Some have worried that polls released during election campaigns will alter voter preferences or that surveys will change campaign dynamics as politicians attempt to adapt to rapidly changing voter preferences (Asher, 1987; Sabato, 1981). There are also concerns that polls will distort voters decision-making as to how or whether to vote, with scholars contending that opinion polling influences voter behaviour through mechanisms such as the 'bandwagon effect' when "the information about majority opinion itself causes some people to adopt the majority view for whatever reason" (Marsh, 1984: 51).

Similarly, Noelle-Neumann theorised that polling created 'spirals of silence,' arguing that people use the media and personal experience to perceive those opinions that are popular and those that are not. When people believe that their opinions are shared by the majority of people, they are happy to express them openly, even to strangers. If, however, they feel that their opinions place them in the minority, they lack confidence in them and are less likely to discuss their opinion beyond their immediate social circle (Noelle-Neumann, 1984). But while these concerns address principally the influence of polls on voters, which is not the subject of this thesis, opinion polling's influence on other political actors within the context of elections is important.

It is argued that "however they become visible and with whatever mistakes they include, public opinion polls often shape and constrain actors (including politicians, policy makers, interest groups, and social movement organizations), irrespective of their ultimate truth content" (Manza and Brooks, 2012: 91). This suggests that the political elite bring their own perceptions to their analysis of public opinion. How political elites react to public opinion and how they adapt their behaviour is driven as much by what they *think* the public want as what public opinion may actually *be*. Politicians and political parties in elections, then, have clear incentives to understand the politics of public opinion polling and situate themselves appropriately.

For example, public opinion research followed closely on the heels of political liberalisation in Asia. Opinion polling's first major contribution to democratic politics

came in the Philippines in 1986. Following decades of dictatorship, Ferdinand Marcos announced a 'snap' election, relying on recent survey evidence giving him a supposed 16-point lead in any presidential race. In the weeks immediately preceding the election, state-sponsored media released polls giving Marcos a healthy lead but with a large number of voters undecided.

A confidential poll taken at around the same time but only published years later used more sophisticated techniques for assigning undecided voters to compile numbers which gave the victory to Marcos' challenger, Corazon Aquino. Controversy over the election results in which observer tallies did not match official numbers culminated in a popular movement that succeeded in overthrowing Marcos and installing Aquino as the new president. Speculation still abounds as to the identity of the sponsor of the confidential poll and the role it played in mobilising elite and popular support for removing Marcos, but subsequent elections have seen opinion polling solidify its place in Filipino politics (Mangahas, 2000)

Other countries where political liberalisation has allowed for the emergence of opinion polling have also experienced significant changes in its democratic processes as a result. Analysing the impact the rise in opinion polling has made in Indonesia since the fall of Soeharto, Marcus Mietzner writes: "Despite obvious complications and downsides of Indonesia's prospering polling business (threats of populism, corruption, and manipulation), one crucial finding of the scholarly literature on political opinion surveys should not be forgotten: the existence of open, competitive, and uncensored activity by pollsters is a strong indication of a dynamic democratic system. More importantly, opinion surveys and quick counts have significantly increased the credibility of all post-authoritarian elections since 1998, making a substantial contribution to the relative stability of Indonesia's young democracy" (Mietzner, 2009: 123).

The use of polls by electoral campaigns has important implications. Rather than motivating a move by candidates towards the centre on policy issues in an effort to appeal to the greatest numbers of voters, polling is instead being used to attune strategies selectively, based on their fitting certain targeted subgroups. "Polls are

being used to narrow rather than widen the appeal of candidates” (Jacobs and Shapiro, 2005: 639). In the United States, this use of polls to ‘microtarget’ individual voters has signalled an important change in campaign tactics, as candidates have moved away from broad-based, and often expensive, media strategies toward personalised techniques. Such approaches can have important implications for campaigns in less-developed political systems where such localised approaches can exacerbate existing political divisions. Indeed, Bergan et al. demonstrate in their research how in the US campaigns have honed in on localised mobilisation as the new focus of electoral energy and resources, using new hyper-specific polling data to guide the scope and depth of their engagement (Bergen et al., 2005).

The extent to which public opinion polling can be universally modelled as a form of political participation is open to debate, but I would argue that in the confines of electoral processes such a conception is both warranted and necessary for explaining its influence on electoral politics. Indeed, there is very little that distinguishes the actual election from the pre-election polls that precede it. They are measuring the same thing in essence, and as Verba argued above, polls could actually be construed as more representative of the electorate than elections themselves. A theoretical framework for explaining influence, I argue, must conceptualise public opinion polls related to elections and referenda as forms of political participation to capture its impact effectively.

2.2 Contextualising Public Opinion Polling and Political Change

However public opinion polling is conceived, there is general consensus that it has become and is becoming both pervasive and powerfully influential within the politics of Western democracies and the transitional democracies of Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Indeed, Slavko Splichal (2012: 43) argues that the analytical value of public opinion polls lies less in their scientific merits than in their political effectiveness. He argues that much of the empirical evidence indicates that “opinion polls are a political rather than a scientific phenomenon ... specific functions of polls are not their intrinsic characteristics but depend on, and are defined by, users and

observers [and] are always relative to observer and context.” If we are to understand how public opinion polling is influencing the elections and politics of sub-Saharan Africa it is useful first to review the existing literature on how this influence manifests itself in other contexts. This includes understanding the locus of that influence, the contextual factors, and the likely conduits of that influence, all of which are addressed below.

2.2.1 Polling in Transitional Polities

A longstanding failure of the political science literature on public opinion polling has been its generally narrow focus on western liberal democracies and the particular characteristics of those societies. As a result most of the existing research deals with excoriating the methodological shortcomings of polling or debating their validity as representations of public opinion. Nazanin Shahrokni (2012: 205), in her study of opinion polling in Iran, argues that “by overlooking the social, political and historical processes within which both polling and the interpretation of its results are embedded, critics fail to understand the variation in the meanings that are attached to these practices across time and space. In other words, a study of polling is simultaneously a study of the changing character of polling, the different kinds of ‘publics’ that are constituted by it and the socio-political environment within which it is embedded.”

Having established the general pathways for influence of public opinion polls in the form of public policy and elections, it is necessary now to investigate the particular conditions under which public opinion polling is operating in the transitional democracies of sub-Saharan Africa. Understanding this context shapes the theoretical options open to those investigating public opinion polling and African elections.

Indeed, Robert Mattes (2007: 119) argues that what distinguishes opinion surveys in new democracies from surveys in Western polities is their political nature. “Put simply, surveys of transitional societies are not purely social scientific instruments. While political scientists and sociologists might initiate public opinion surveys in transitional societies as vehicles for scientific inquiry, the vast majority of cross-national research is supported by international foundations and bilateral aid agencies precisely because of

their potential political and developmental impacts.” Survey researchers in transitional societies are, by their very existence, political actors in that opinion polls and the information they provide can be construed as a tangible threat to the political elites in these countries. In demonstrating the real political ‘lay of the land,’ opinion polls can break down carefully constructed veneers of legitimacy developed through various means by existing political elites and challenge their attempts “to overload the meaning of their electoral ‘mandate’.”

Mattes (2007) further argues that very distinct characteristics in these societies and political systems imply important consequences for the exercise of public opinion polling. Broadly, three of his contextual factors are relevant to the focus of this research. First, the novelty of public opinion polling has an inevitable impact on its quality and its credibility. Generally, in African politics there is a certain level of scepticism and suspicion toward empirical research of any kind, but particularly toward public opinion polling. The political elite are comfortable with their methods for measuring support and question the impartiality and accuracy of relatively inexperienced polling companies. Indeed, the pollsters themselves often do themselves few favours. While the more established and reputable firms publish their methodologies, other firms operate in mysterious ways that undermine the credibility of all polling.

Moreover, the media do a poor job of covering opinion polls in general. They often do not interrogate the numbers or analyse them appropriately, preferring instead to quote press releases verbatim or to fit the polls to existing political storylines. This is not ubiquitous, of course, but it is widespread enough that a significant level of uncertainty exists as to whether the story presented in the press is an accurate reflection of the underlying polling data. The political elite must sift through this to establish the ‘truth,’ something Mattes claims the “relatively innumerate and sceptical political class of elected leaders, policy-makers, civil society leaders and news journalists” struggle to do.

Lastly, the problem of ethnic identity-based politics, bequeathed first by the vagaries of colonial mapmakers but often exacerbated by post-colonial regimes, creates a

number of challenges for opinion polling. The relative heterogeneity of these societies complicates efforts to draw representative samples, while the entrenched bitterness derived from constant political one-upmanship shrinks the space for open inquiry amid claims of bias and ethnically-driven rigging (Posner, 2005). It also intensifies elite reactions to increasing competition, ultimately driving behaviour that reverses the logic of most representative democracy theory.

The following explores these contextual factors further. These issues prescribe the limits of public opinion polling's influence on electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa and so cannot be dismissed. Indeed, any model seeking to explain elite electoral strategies in relation to the introduction of public opinion polling must be able to address these factors and build them into its explanation.

2.2.2 The Uncertainty of the Media and Polls

The media in its various forms has been shown to have a clear influence on the relationship between public opinion and electoral politics. Rounce (2004: 23) cites Iyengar and Reeves (1997) who contend that "as the most important mediator between 'the public' and policy-makers, the media has an important function to perform in terms of information transmittal." Susan Herbst (1998) found that journalists' perceptions of public opinion significantly altered their presentation of political issues within their articles. Rather than specifically referencing opinion polling data, reporters generally rely on their own conception of what the public think, adding a further layer of perceptions to the relationship between polling and politics.

Lewis (2001) argues that the reporting and interpreting of poll results provide a mechanism that protects elites' interests even in the U.S. Rosenstiel (2005) shares this view, arguing that the media's presentation of polls in the United States reflects a serious decline in journalistic standards. Specifically, he argues that journalists use polls to avoid having to investigate issues more deeply, choosing instead to draw upon their own unique interpretation, which further damages polling's credibility with the public. In his view, the increasingly dependent relationship between polling and the

media has compromised the quality of campaign journalism while also exacerbating the influence of corporate interests in political media.

Ansu-Kyeremeh (1999: 67) highlights the weakness of the media in accurately reporting the findings of opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa. Citing Yankelovich (1996), he argues “no matter how thorough the polling methodology, journalists' treatment of its results is the key to its legitimacy in society. Hence, Lavrakas et al. (Lavrakas et al., 1995: 14) emphasize the need for 'proper' coverage of polls by the media, citing Morin's belief that 'most news media are data rich but analysis poor'.” Indeed, in many developing countries, innumeracy may make journalists unwilling or unable to engage with survey data.

Henn (1998: 209) argues the same: “the use of polls in the political process by the new regimes as a means of consulting the public enhances the latter's positive view of polls, and ultimately improves their reliability; on the other hand, the experiences of polling undertaken or utilized by parties and the mass media organizations serves to diminish the public's confidence of and participation in opinion polls, and ultimately undermines the quality of polls.” In sub-Saharan Africa, many media houses are often overtly state-owned or covertly connected to particular political parties, undermining their impartiality in commissioning or reporting opinion poll results. Even in cases of independent ownership, poor journalism often results in blatantly partisan polls being presented as objective facts (Seligson, 2005). In both cases, the credibility of opinion polling suffers.

In addition to distorting the information that voters receive during the campaign, the media can also be guilty of reporting incorrect polling results as a result of their own misunderstanding of the data. Patterson (2005) finds evidence of journalists exaggerating the importance of statistically insignificant changes in polling numbers, usually due to their not having sufficiently understood the press releases given them by the campaigns. Certainly within the sub-Saharan African media environment, this practice is readily apparent and so understanding how the media perceive and exercise their role as mediators and communicators, given their specific contextual constraints, will help to illuminate the relationship between public opinion and politics.

2.2.2 Elites and the Nature of Political Competition in sub-Saharan Africa

Having conceptualized public opinion polling and located its influence within political processes of transitional democracies, the final step is to establish the principal actors upon which this influence is being exerted. Here, the nature of electoral politics in transitional democracies provides the rationale behind restricting the focus to political elite responses to public opinion polling (Luong, 2002). In many African countries the state itself has been the locus of class formation and elite activity, undermining the ability of society to hold the state to account. Van de walle (2006: 66) considers it “more useful to think of clientelistic politics in Africa as constituting primarily a mechanism for accommodation and integration of a fairly narrow political elite rather than the logic of mass party patronage. Most of the material gains from clientelism are limited to this elite.”

The preponderance of centralized decision-making in African states facilitates elite capture of the political process whereby a small group of influential individuals shapes policy for the country as a whole. The concentration of these institutions of governance in the capital also leads to a detachment between representatives and their constituencies,⁸ a problem that is further exacerbated by the often poor quality of infrastructure in many African countries.

⁸ Ekeh (1975) argues that the structure of colonialism created the African phenomenon of the dual publics: the first a primordial public based on traditional values and the second a civic public based upon imported Western practices. Within the primordial public, the expected reciprocity of citizen is observed, with individuals claiming rights and privileges from the community in exchange for the fulfilment of certain duties and obligations — the social contract in practice. Within the civic public, however, the individual seeks only to gain and measures his relationship with the collective interest merely in material terms. In contrast to the primordial public, there is no moral obligation inherent in the relationship with the civic public; rather one is expected to extract the maximum amount of personal gain at the lowest possible cost to oneself.

This separation between the governed and the government breeds distrust that can be easily manipulated by political and social actors.⁹ Recently, it has manifested itself in electoral violence when voters feel that their voices have been manipulated or quashed in favour of incumbent candidates or political elites. These competing influences create an unstable political system, characterised by authority exerted through both formal and informal institutions (Hyden, 2008). Elite politics becomes a matter of 'politics of survival' where these institutions must be manipulated in such a way as to ensure the continuation of elite survival (Migdal, 1988).

Introducing public opinion polling into this combustible mix does not alter the underlying dynamics of elite-driven politics. Rather it operates within this milieu, necessitating that elites are made endogenous to the model. Both from practical and theoretical considerations, this is the most likely means by which public opinion polling will exert influence on electoral politics.

These contextual factors must be incorporated into any theories purporting to explain the influence of public opinion polling on the quality of sub-Saharan African elections. The specific historical and ethno-regional characteristics of the countries involved require the theory to be sufficiently flexible as to accommodate variations in context. The centrality of elites in African politics suggests that in determining the pathways through which polling influences electoral quality the perceptions and behaviour of elites must be taken into account. Lastly, the contradiction between the prominence of the African political media during elections and their apparent inadequacies in delivering consistent coverage suggests that journalists and editors should be central to the investigation but that the quality of coverage should be somehow incorporated

⁹ Mamdani builds upon the theme of divided society, but draws the distinction not between conceptions of 'publics' but between groups of individuals. Following upon Ekeh, he asserts that colonialisms created an urban elite type of African who sought to emulate Western characteristics through the acquisition of education and wealth, while simultaneously creating a rural, politically disengaged type of African who laboured in the service of the collective interest but received little to no material or political benefit from it. At independence, the urban elite has as little in common with the rural peasants as the Europeans, and as such, politics continues in a form of domesticated colonialism, built upon a fundamental division between citizens (the urban elites) and subjects (the rural peasants) (Mamdani, 1996).

into the model to remove an exogenous variable that could undermine the explanatory power of the theory.

2.3 Theorising Opinion Polling and Political Change

This review of the existing literature on the intersection between public opinion polling and politics provides the context in which to analyse the relationship between opinion polls, political elites, and elections in sub-Saharan Africa. I have argued above that political elites are central to my analysis of the impact of opinion polling on elections in sub-Saharan Africa; it is through their decisions and actions that change is catalysed, whether good or bad in terms of outcomes.

Any model that attempts to explain this interaction must therefore be comprised of two stages. This is consistent with the literature on elite decision-making which defines the two stages as an influence stage followed by a decision stage. “During the influence stage, the action is dominated by informal contacts among decision makers, and perhaps also actors without formal decision power. In the decision stage, decision makers must reach a decision outcome” (Naurin and Thomas, 2009: 1).

At the influence stage, opinion polling can shape political discourse and the interactions between prominent players, such as political commentators, editors, and politicians. Democratic politics is very much a learning process, with all actors trying to determine the appropriate role for them to play. The introduction of opinion polling into this mix adds a new element for those involved to accommodate. Politicians must choose how to engage with political opinion polling. Do they reject it as guesswork or do they adopt it as another informational tool in their arsenal? The media must learn to report polling, but to do so accurately requires understanding the mechanisms behind the polls. Is polling merely a convenient headline grabbing statistic to be regurgitated without comment or is the media responsible for analysing and interpreting the data that emerges from the polls?

Pollsters themselves face difficulties in managing their role in the political discourse. The prominence of polls within the media gives them an almost celebrity status as the

people with the answers, but with this prominence comes the risk of politicisation. In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, this almost invariably comes attached to labels of ethnicity and/or regional or religious affiliations. Polls are believed or dismissed on the basis of the demography of the pollster, rather than the soundness of the methodology. What occurs at this stage lays the foundation for what occurs in the second, decision stage. This results in a first stage hypothesis that states:

First stage hypothesis: Polling forces political elites to recognize facets of public opinion to which they were previously ignorant or resistant.

With regard to the second stage, fundamentally, this thesis is about political change, in the form of the emergence of public opinion polling, and the role of political elites in adapting to that change in the context of elections. Revisiting Tilly's classification of mechanisms for political change in an attempt to understand and explain this relationship, two models have been proposed, based on relational and environmental mechanisms: collective action theory and institutional theory, respectively. No existing theory models opinion polling as a cognitive mechanism for change, an omission that this thesis addresses by incorporating the concept of elite perceptions into its model for explaining the impact of public opinion polling on the quality of elections. Where the other two models place their emphasis on the decision stage, taking the influence stage somewhat as a given, the model proposed later in this chapter brings the influence stage to the fore, arguing that it is the perceptions of elites, particularly with regard to shifts in competition, that drives elite decision-making and ultimately the quality of elections.

2.3.1 Collective Action Model

The collective action model is based on the premise espoused first by Mancur Olson (1965: 2) that "unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests." The collective action problem becomes how to overcome this innate tendency against cooperation even where the rewards are clear. This model

corresponds most closely to the original intentions of Gallup's first use of opinion polling, where it would improve the practice of democracy by creating a means by which citizens could participate in political processes and by confirming that "the sum total of individual views adds up to something that makes sense" (Gallup, 1944: 84). In the context of this research, one theory suggests public opinion polling is a possible solution to this intractable problem.

Shahrokni (2012), in her study of opinion polling in Iran, develops the theory that polling does not merely reflect public opinion; it can also harness it and force government responses by overcoming the collective action problem. Through the kinds of questions asked and through its aggregation, opinion research can capture diffuse and disorganized strands of public thought and channel it as one, coherent voice. Alexander quotes the example of the Watergate scandal in the U.S., when, through "public response registered in small but fateful numerical shifts in the polls, seismic changes in state institutions would follow" (Alexander, 2006: 87).

Shahrokni's theoretical model focuses on the effects of polling in more authoritarian societies, where the ability to express individual opinions is restricted. In this context, polls can expose people to new or different questions from new angles or different perspectives. The act of polling public opinion becomes a proxy for opinion expression, not just a tool to represent, persuade or manipulate public opinion. "In turning latent opinions into measurable entities, [opinion polls can become] a reliable means of documenting dissent and difference" (Shahrokni, 2012: 217). Using this model, opinion polling is the locus of a struggle within the political system between competing concepts of truth, of structure, and most importantly of power.

Under this model, one would expect the emergence of public opinion polling to be accompanied by new interpretations within the political discourse, as existing political elites acknowledge the development of differing opinions within the political system. Overcoming the collective action problem through aggregation stirs elites into political change. The shift in the political discourse would be reflective of improved transparency in the electoral process, while changes in elite behaviour, in adapting to

hitherto unknown opinions, would move toward greater responsiveness of the electoral system to citizen interests and demands.

Second stage hypothesis 1: Public opinion polling's contribution to transparency and representativeness is dependent on its ability to shift the political discourse in such a way as to overcome the collective action problem and enable civil society to force elites to adopt more transparent and representative strategies.

To test this hypothesis, I will analyse news media and key informant interviews to discern evidence of broad-based collective action as a result of public opinion polling and map this against shifts in elite electoral strategies, defined as being either more transparent or representative or less. If this hypothesis is to hold, one would expect to see political movements emerging on the basis of the aggregation of opinion presented in public opinion polling, overcoming the collective action problem and compelling elites to choose electoral strategies that may or may not be more transparent and representative.

2.3.2 Institutional Model

The institutional model prioritises the importance of institutions. The theory concerns itself with the creation of structures that intermediate between the generation of demands in society and the government itself. For institutionalists, change arrives generally in the form of an exogenous shock; the ability of the system to absorb and adapt to this change is dependent on its degree of institutionalisation.¹⁰ In the context of this research, public opinion polling is modelled as an exogenous influence for change that is mediated through political institutions.

¹⁰For historical institutionalists, the explanation for variation in political outcomes lies in the particularity of institutional arrangements. "States are not generic. They vary dramatically in their internal structures and relations to society. Different kinds of state structures create different capacities for state action" (Evans, 1995: 11). The emphasis becomes on the ordering of relations and the understanding of political institutions "as acting autonomously in terms of institutional interests" (March and Olsen, 1989: 4). For more discussion see Lichbach et al. 1997.

Roderic Camp (1996), making specific reference to the Mexican 1994 elections in his book *Polling for Democracy*, argues that the emergence of opinion polling in the Mexican political sphere deserves significant credit for pushing the liberalization of Mexico forward. In spite of very real flaws in both the design and the coverage of opinion polling data before the elections, the presence of the information had a positive effect on institutional change in the previously restrictive Mexican system. He also finds supportive evidence for the theory that leaders, however removed from their constituencies, will choose policies that maximise the likelihood of their being re-elected. In short, institutional change creates greater political competition that in turn drives more democratic outcomes by compelling the elites to adapt their strategies to match the preferences of the electorate.

According to Henn (1998) this model for opinion polling's influence can be traced back to Schumpeter and Gallup. Henn argues that George Gallup's assertion that opinion research can "bridge the gap between the people and those who are responsible for making decisions in their name" (Gallup, 1940) implicitly assumes that the structure of political power in these societies corresponds with Schumpeter's 'classical doctrine of democracy.' This posits the existence of an "institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will" (Schumpeter, 1976: 242). This model theorises a political system that is "sufficiently flexible to enable opinion polls to operate as links between the electorate and political representatives, and as mechanisms through which citizens can play a meaningful role in political affairs" (Henn, 1998: 10).

Henn, however, presents a model in which this assumption does not hold, much as it does not in the case of most of sub-Saharan Africa. He argues that much of East European polities correspond more closely to Schumpeter's model of 'competitive elitism' where democracy is defined as "an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which the individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter, 1976: 269). Under this construct, political elites commissioning opinion polls are less interested that they

offer a form of participation for the voter than they are that polls help them gain further political power. As such, Henn argues, polls do not fundamentally change the dynamics of elite power and political dominance. “Instead, they provide information with which these elites might devise strategies to compete successfully with rivals to secure political power” (Henn, 1998: 11). The premise behind opinion polling becomes not the expansion of political participation but elites striking the balance between holding onto the votes of the party base and extending their influence over unaffiliated voters.

Under Henn’s model, then, the influence of opinion polling is contingent upon the nature of the political system into which it is introduced. Much as Huntington (1968) contended that the increase in political participation, in this case in the form of polls, would require a proportionate increase in political institutionalization, Henn bases his analysis on the institutional composition of ‘complex politics’ to determine under what conditions polling is likely to make a ‘democratic’ impact. To stimulate transparency and responsiveness in elections under this model, stable institutions, such as the media and political parties, would need to operate to publicise and operationalise the results of opinion polls, creating an environment in which polls are consumed to inform political strategies and set realistic expectations.

Second stage hypothesis 2: Public opinion polling’s contribution to transparency and representativeness is dependent on the ability of existing political institutions to absorb and adapt to a new form of political participation.

To test this hypothesis, I will analyse news media and key informant interviews to discern evidence of institutional adaptations as a result of public opinion polling and map these against shifts in elite electoral strategies, defined as being either more transparent or representative or less. If this hypothesis is to hold, one would expect to see institutions changing in the face of public opinion polling, compelling elites to choose electoral strategies based on the character of the institutional change.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

These models offer useful contributions to the understanding of public opinion polling's ability to influence political change. They have certain limitations in explaining the variations in influence on the transparency and representativeness of elections in sub-Saharan Africa, however. The first, while appealing in its presentation of public opinion polling as a means of overcoming collective action problems, struggles to address variations in elite behaviour in response to the emergence of public opinion polling where the context of political information and opportunities for collective action are similar. Likewise, the second theory, while eminently comparative in its focus on institutions present across democratic systems in Africa, suffers from an inability to capture variations across time within countries where institutional structures have not changed in any significant way. The story of public opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa is as fluid as the political systems it measures; it requires a more dynamic model to explain its variations effectively.

This thesis proposes a new model using elements of each of the above models while incorporating a more robust concept of elite response to explain the variations observed. The model is predicated on the notion that "survey research is a historically situated political institution as much as a scientific technology" (Sanders, 1999: 249). A pragmatic analysis allows for a better understanding of how public opinion polls interact with other institutions and actors within the political sphere. Recognising that existing theories have failed to model opinion polling as a cognitive mechanism for political change, the new framework posits that changes in the electoral system should be modelled through the lens of elite perceptions *and* behaviour in response to public opinion polling. The political elite are the principal actors when it comes to the design and reform of electoral processes, and they determine what issues and opinions matter in the context of electoral information, strategies, and outcomes.

This new framework is necessary for several reasons. First, it explicitly recognises that in the case of opinion polling in particular, it is not actual polling results that matter but rather the interpretations of them by elites and the media (Fried, 1997). The contextual factors described above illustrate the challenges faced by public opinion

polling upon its introduction into sub-Saharan politics, the uncertainty with which it is viewed and digested within the public sphere. This uncertainty requires that we move beyond arguments of structure or agency to understand perceptions and motivations in the context of incomplete or unreliable information.

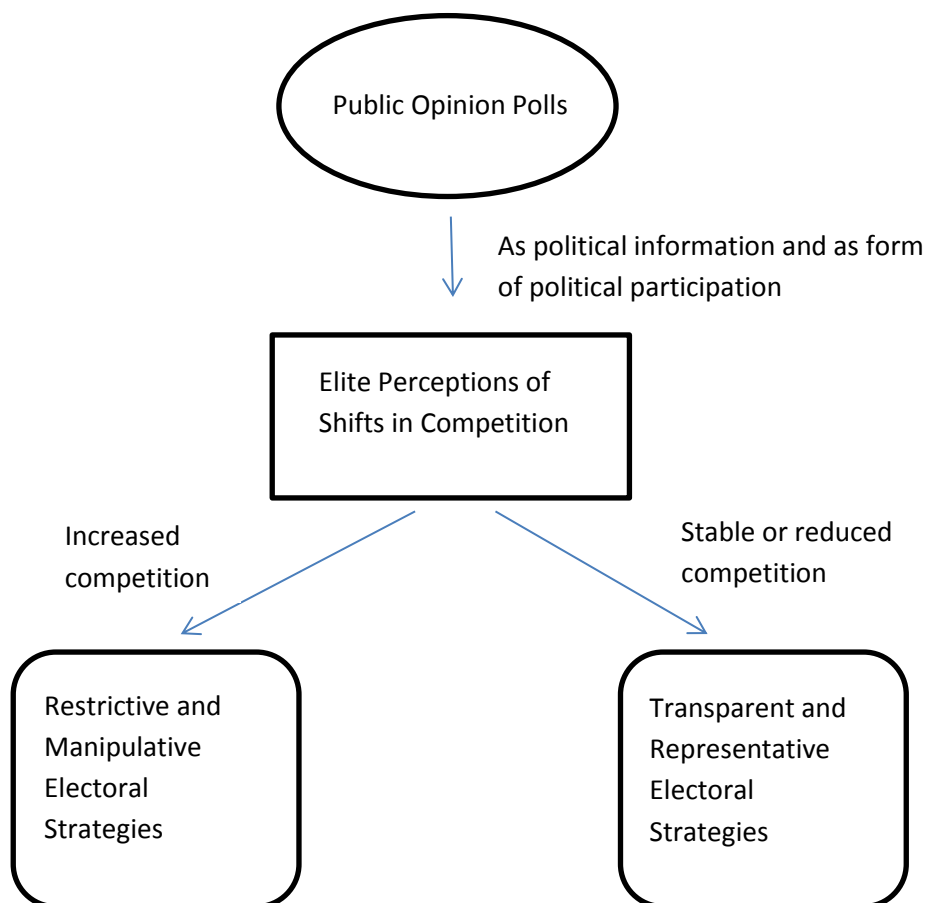
The novelty of public opinion polling within sub-Saharan politics, I argue, is also more likely to trigger in political elites a ‘third-person’ effect where “individuals who are members of an audience that is exposed to a persuasive communication (whether or not this communication is intended to be persuasive) will expect the communication to have a greater effect on others than on themselves. And whether or not these individuals are among the ostensible audience for the message, the impact that they expect this communication to have on others may lead them to take some action. Any effect that the communication achieves may thus be due not to the reaction of the ostensible audience but rather to the behaviour of those who anticipate, or think they perceive, some reaction on the part of others” (Davison, 1983: 3). This effect means that it is not just elite opinions we must concern ourselves with, but rather their *perceptions* of how public opinion polling is shaping the electoral landscape.

Based on this notion, this model contends that elite perceptions of competition are central to the explanation of variations in transparency and representativeness brought about by the introduction of public opinion polling into sub-Saharan African elections. In a seminal work on public opinion, journalist Walter Lippmann (1922) argued that the reality of the world of public policy, including politicians and the media, is that it concerns perceptions, not facts, and that these must be analysed to determine their nature. Specifically, elites’ perceptions of competition shift play a critical role in shaping both the degree of change within the electoral process and the direction, whether toward greater or reduced transparency and responsiveness, of that change. Because elites are primarily concerned with either increasing or preserving their own power, perceived shifts in relative competitive balance, as illustrated through public opinion polls, instigate changes in political behaviour.

In the classical model observed above, one might expect to see elites reacting to perceived increases in competition by offering greater openness in their campaigns

and directly tailoring their policy platforms to the wishes of the electorate, in short making themselves more electable by fitting most voters' preferences. In sub-Saharan Africa, however, the political structure corresponds far more closely to the 'competitive elitism' described by Schumpeter. Moreover, the addition of ethnic-identity politics noted in the previous section makes the link between policy stances and 'electability' all the more tenuous. In fact, I would argue that under this system the logic of political competition is reversed, as seen in Figure 1. In the first stage below, the introduction of public opinion polling influences elite perceptions of the political dynamics of the election, creating opportunities for political change. In the second stage, I argue that elite perceptions of shifts in competition in particular impact elite behaviour and electoral strategies resulting in better or worse quality elections.

Figure 1: Two-stage model of opinion polling's impact on elections



Under this model, where existing elites feel that opinion polls are threatening the existing competitive landscape, they will act to restrict transparency and representativeness of elections to avoid reality matching the evidence of the polls. By contrast, where polls support the existing balance of political competition, elites are generally ambivalent to the proliferation of polls and will, at times, embrace opinion polls as a means of further advancing their popularity with the electorate. This is not to say that polls are incapable of engendering political change. Rather it argues that opinion polls cannot be the catalyst for political change, as their presence as outliers within the system can be easily suppressed. In contexts, where fundamental political change is already brewing, however, opinion polls can amplify the strength of that movement, overcoming elite attempts to repress it.

Hypothesis 3: Public opinion polling's contribution to transparency and representativeness of elections is dependent on elite perceptions of shifts in political competitiveness, the more competitive the election is perceived to be the more likely elites will seek to restrict and manipulate the process and result.

To test this hypothesis, I will analyse news media and key informant interviews to discern trends in shifts in elite perceptions that mirror shifts in public opinion polling outcomes and map these against shifts in elite electoral strategies, defined as being either more transparent or representative or less. If this hypothesis is to hold, one would expect to see elite perceptions aligning with the public opinion polling and that as competition tightens, elites pursue strategies that restrict and manipulate the electoral process and result.

2.5 Defining Variables of Analysis

This research aims to construct an evidence base that tests competing hypotheses as to why public opinion polling has contributed to greater transparency and representativeness in some cases in sub-Saharan Africa and not in others over the past decade. Specifically, it is interested in answering the question: why does the presence of public opinion polling influence the political elite to restrict and distort campaigns

and outcomes in some elections but not in others in twenty-first century Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda? This requires capturing and interpreting shifts in both attitudes and behaviour in the four countries across time. The research design is a parallel-case study using key informant interviews and content analysis of print media during the electoral cycle of four sub-African countries (Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and Ghana).

2.5.1 Key Variables

This research uses as its independent variable “the presence of public opinion polls.” The variable is specifically narrowed to include only those polls directly related to political issues, such as elections and constitutional referenda. This allows the research to focus on the politics of institutionalising opinion polls into political processes.

Additionally, this thesis tests three mediating variables to determine through which mechanism public opinion polling is most likely to contribute to changes in elite political calculations and to greater transparency and representativeness. These mediating variables equate to the models described above, namely: collective action, institutional adaptation, and elite perceptions of competition. In identifying examples of each, the research will determine the magnitude and direction of influence each has on the dependent variables, defined below.

In defining its dependent variables, transparency and representativeness, this research draws on Hillygus (2011), who delineates three different functions for public opinion polling in U.S. presidential elections that are universally relevant and apt for testing the above hypotheses. These are the following: understanding voter behaviour; planning campaign strategy; and forecasting election outcomes. Namely, polls are posited to affect information dynamics in the political sphere; to influence elite decision-making and behaviour; and to have an impact on electoral practices and outcomes.

The first influence variable, what this research calls “transparency” relates largely to the process of politics, specifically how information is managed and controlled, and how the introduction of opinion polling directly alters the manner in which the

dynamics of that information market function. The second variable, “representativeness,” is a composite variable (consisting of electoral strategies and electoral expectations) and relates more to the outcomes of politics.

2.5.1.1 Transparency

Wolf and Ireri (2010: 7) in their study of Kenya’s experience with opinion polling through 2005 concluded that “Africa is slowly awakening to the need and use of survey based research such as opinion polls. Opinion polls are slowly transforming Africa into an information based society, one that is listening to what the public wants and using research based data for decision making.”

Transparency has become a prerequisite for good governance. Without it, society cannot observe or monitor the behaviour of policymakers who may adopt policies that are not in the general interest. Policymaking ceases to be responsive to the will of the “people” when policies are made secret, away from the prying eyes of public scrutiny.¹¹

Elections are no different in so much that transparency emerges when electoral institutions operate in a way that their operations are open to the public. Indeed, the media and citizens in many countries are demanding more information about how elections are managed and how results are reported.¹² Opinion polls have a potentially important role to play in reinforcing the transparency of elections and their outcomes.

The advent of polling has thrown open political party primaries that were once the domain only of the party elite, casting public glare on the selection of candidates for major races in many sub-Saharan African countries. In a relatively low information

¹¹ For a review of evidence on democracy and transparency, see Hollyer, J. R., B. P. Rosendorff and J.R. Vreeland. 2011. “Democracy and Transparency.” *The Journal of Politics*, 73, pp. 1191-1205. Also Islam, R. 2006. “Does More Transparency Go Along With Better Governance?” *Economics and Politics*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 121-167.

¹² See Kenya in 2013, even if the process was beset by technical difficulties

context, the ability of opinion polling to inform voters who their candidates will be is a strong contribution for transparency.

Perhaps more importantly, opinion polling draws back the curtain on the tallying of election results. While in the past, vote-rigging and election-day fraud could only be implied, opinion polling provides open data with which to compare official results with polling projections. This scrutiny puts electoral institutions and the elites who populate them under pressure to provide more open and more honest results.

In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, the control of political information has always been heavily tilted in favour of the political elite. Opinion polling popularises that information, moving the political discourse out into the open, and changing the dynamics of electoral politics to boot. This variable, then, addresses both the quantity and quality of information provided through mainstream media on voter preferences.

2.5.1.2 Representativeness

According to neo-patrimonial theory, African politicians rarely consider the needs of the mass public. Their positions depend on delivering only to those within their patronage network, limiting their responsiveness significantly and creating a tendency for policy to be based on personal rather than public interest. The emergence of opinion polls at the national, and in some cases the sub-national level, creates a new dynamic for elite decision-making. Now the preferences of the larger community can be captured and expressed, politicians must make a choice between continuing to serve the interests of their smaller network and appealing to the wishes of the masses.

Public opinion has been shown to be particularly effective in swaying elite opinion when the strength of opinion is high. Opinion polls showing divided or moderate opinions are unlikely to have an impact on politics, but those showing overwhelming majorities in favour of or against a policy are difficult to ignore. Even in neo-patrimonial settings, where the independence of public opinion is often in doubt, the revelation of poll data that shows strong preferences can be highly influential.

In electoral terms, Lindberg argues that “elections are not legitimate just because certain procedures have been used fairly but when actors involved consent and testify to its legitimacy. Although legitimacy is often framed in terms of attitudes and sentiments, behaviour is arguably the best indicator” (Lindberg, 2007: 12). The extent to which political elites view elections as legitimate is best measured by their acceptance of the official results. Only if the election is free and fair and the losing candidates accept the results can a result be considered fully legitimate. Expectations can be a powerful thing in terms of guiding behaviour, and opinion polls have been demonstrated to be particularly adept at setting expectations, either rightly or wrongly, in advance of elections. Determining how strong the influence of opinion polls is in terms of guiding elites to accept or reject election results is a particularly intriguing strand of the research.

Opinion polls as sources of information are also important in setting electoral expectations for political observers and general citizenry alike. People may only regularly interact with a self-selected group of like-minded individuals, such that their perception of potential electoral outcomes is likely to be skewed. Without the benefit of impartial polling data, one may assume that because everyone in one’s group supports a particular candidate that that candidate is the preferred choice more generally.

Whether people choose to accept its validity or not polling data provides much needed perspective in these situations. Indeed, in highly charged electoral campaigns, such information may be critical in avoiding widespread violence if parties believe that election results have been tampered with or altered against their candidate. Systematic polling through a campaign period establishes baselines and thresholds against which actual results can be judged. While there will undoubtedly be surprises and shifts, vast discrepancies between multiple opinion polls and the final tally will be suspicious.

2.6 Defining Methods of Analysis

2.6.1 Case Selection

The research will centre on four countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, and Nigeria. In selecting a case study methodology, I have accepted its inherent limitations in terms of ensuring statistical representativeness of my sample. The nature of this research, however, demands that any explanatory framework is built through an exploration of how processes work in particular contexts and under different sets of circumstances. I have employed, then, more of an idiographic approach, where I construct a broader argument from an “understanding of particularity,” seeking to understand how opinion polling has emerged and interacted within existing political processes and institutions differently in various settings, based on an analysis of cases (Baker and Edwards, 2012). This entails building in sufficient variation of circumstance in the cases using a number of different conditions.

The selection of the four countries is based on a number of criteria. First and foremost, they have all conducted democratic (to varying degrees) elections in the past decade. Second, independent public opinion polling research has been carried out during at least two of these past electoral periods. These two criteria ruled out a great number of sub-Saharan African, while simultaneously ensuring that there would be sufficient data upon which to base an analysis.

The countries were further selected on the basis of geographic considerations and variation across the dependent variables. The thesis aims to be as representative as possible of sub-Saharan African democracies and, as such, selected two countries from East Africa and two from West Africa to ensure geographic spread. More importantly, however, was the need for institutional variation among the cases with respect to the independent variables. For instance, one expects to see a different landscape for political information in the more diffuse media environments of Kenya and Nigeria than the smaller, more ideologically aligned media in Uganda and Ghana. Likewise, campaign strategies and adaptation to polling will differ in the more politically competitive contexts of Kenya and Ghana from the one-party dominant systems in

Uganda and Nigeria. Finally, the propensity toward electoral violence seen in Nigeria and Kenya places a far higher importance on elite expectations than in the less combustible settings of Ghana and Uganda.

It is relevant to note here that while the methodology was constructed to ensure variation between countries, the research revealed that there was also significant variation among the elections held in each country. Indeed, this finding informed the construction of a model that allowed for different outcomes across time within countries. It also contributes to the evidentiary richness and explanatory strength of the proposed model.

2.6.2 Methods of Analysis

The variables being tested in this research are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. In many cases, they are ephemeral, here today, gone tomorrow, like much of public opinion. But just as public opinion polling captures preferences in that instant and records them for posterity, so too does the political news media capture the mood and behaviour of the political elite and imprints it upon the historical record. In attempting to capture data on both elite strategies and the various influences that shape them, it is appropriate that we turn to the country's media for information. Flawed though it may be, and this research has demonstrated many problems with the media in sub-Saharan Africa, media coverage, and particularly prominent newspapers remain the best window into the perceptions and ambitions of the political elite, for they are a part of it.

The principal interest in this research was to make comparisons across countries over time with respect to the influence of public opinion polling. It was critical therefore to select a reliable, consistent method of assessing attitudes and behaviours that would enable such comprehensive analysis to be done. On this basis, content analysis was chosen as the best available option. Content analysis is a research method used to systematically and objectively describe and quantify phenomena (Krippendorff, 1980) and is often principally associated with analysing documents.

Of specific relevance to this research, content analysis of news media has emerged as a viable method for measuring attitudes and values and assessing attitude change among the political elite. Labelled the Media Indexing Hypothesis, there is strong evidence that media coverage accurately reflects the tenor of elite debate, thereby rendering the media in effect a conveyor belt (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2006). The argument is that the media are largely passive, essentially “reflecting the actual substance of elite debate, and especially that emanating from the most powerful elites” (Groeling and Baum 2008: 4). Newspaper were selected as the preferred analytical medium because there is evidence to suggest that “structural characteristics of the print media make newspapers more effective...for acquiring detailed information about political issues, party policies, and the government’s record” (Norris and Sanders, 2003: 233-4). As such, the media serves as a dual source in the context of this study. The journalists and editors, themselves, are direct sources targeted for interview while the articles and op-eds they have written stand in as a proxy for the prevailing opinions among the political elite.

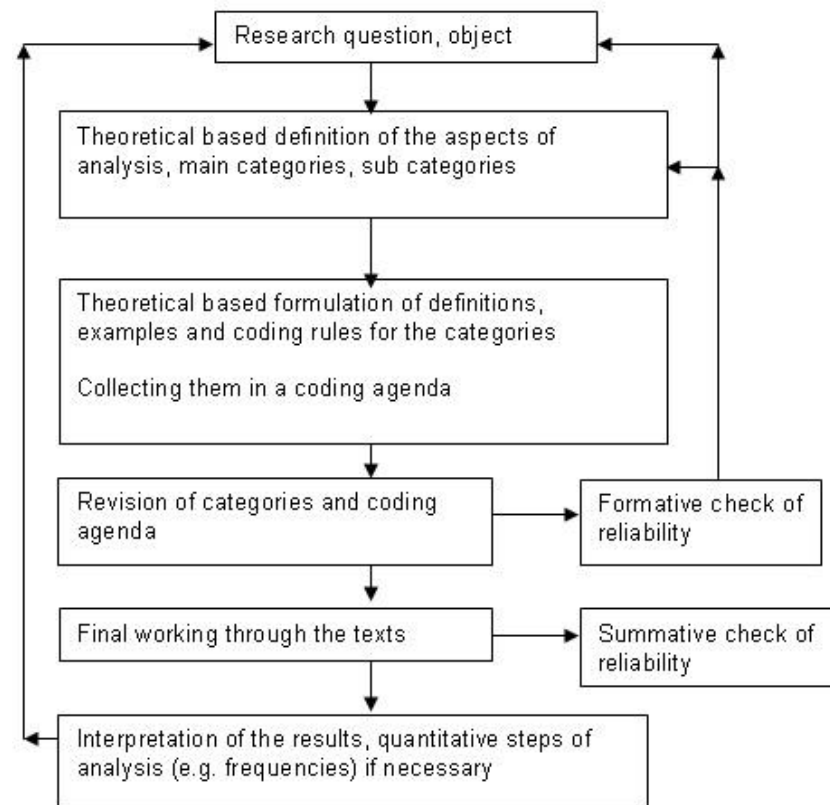
Newspaper articles drawn from the leading daily and weekly papers were analysed from six months before the election/referendum through one month after, resulting in a seven month overall which was standard across each country and time period. The period was selected to encompass the bulk, if not the entirety, of the pre-election campaign, while allowing one month for post-election fallout or analysis to filter into the coverage. Newspapers were selected on the dual criteria of circulation/prominence and availability of archives during the relevant periods. This process generated the sample of articles available for content analysis for each particular event under study. Additional newspapers did contribute to the overall knowledge base of the work without being included in the more rigorous content analysis.

The sample for each country case study was first analysed using quantitative content analysis techniques. Quantitative content analysis collects data from media content in the form of volume of mentions, circulation of the media (audience reach), and frequency. Using these techniques, an illustration of the relative penetration of public opinion polls in the respective national media could be established. Where more

mentions of the term ‘opinion poll’ or related terms were present, I could infer that polling was of greater significance to the country’s political media.

However, one cannot assume that quantitative factors such as frequency of media messages equate to impact. Nor can one assume that quantitative factors alone drive media impact and political influence. A mixed method approach was required, in which qualitative content analysis techniques could complement the findings derived from the purely quantitative analysis. The strength of this approach to content analysis is that it allows the researcher to test theories in order to extract better understanding from the text. Figure 2 provides an illustrative schematic of the process of deductive content analysis used in this research.

Following these techniques, the articles were reviewed using three broad categorisations: information only, mediating variables, and elite strategies. Items which included polls but no analysis were coded as ‘information only.’ Items which discussed mediating variables were sub-coded under ‘collective action’, ‘institutional adaptation’, or ‘elite perceptions’. Items which discussed elite strategies were coded as either ‘transparent/representative’ or ‘restrictive/manipulative’. Using this method, a huge database of articles was distilled into usable analytical chunks, which have subsequently informed this research.

Figure 2: Flow chart of deductive content analysis

Source: Mayring, 2000

The principal online sources for articles were African newspapers online archives, where available; allafrica.com, an African-focused media aggregator with over 900,000 articles from across the continent stretching back to 1997; and BBC Monitoring, a UK-based service which monitors and archives media from every country in the world. The British Library also holds several African archives, which were used to supplement the electronic resources, where necessary. The specific newspapers reviewed are provided in each country case study.

While this approach has many strengths, there are a number of limitations that deserve mention. First, the sample is necessarily limited due to the availability of sources. Not all newspapers are available online or via other accessible sources, although every attempt was made to include articles from the principal newspapers in each country. Second, while the quantitative analysis portion of the research is by nature impartial, the qualitative analysis is almost exclusively reliant on this author's

interpretation of text and meaning within the text. To counter this, I included a third element to this dissertation's research methodology: key informant interviews.

The key informant interviews were done principally in person during periods of fieldwork in each of the four countries between March 2011 and May 2013 (a list of interviewees is attached in Appendix 2). These interviews were essential for the success of the research for two reasons. First, the interviews were able to validate the findings gained from the in-depth content analysis. It was important for this research, given its emphasis on difficult-to-measure concepts like influence and attitudes, that the evidence to support its assertions could be triangulated and verified. The interviews spanning different professions and political affiliations were the most appropriate means of doing this. Second, where the interviews did not corroborate the findings of the content analysis precisely, they introduced different contextual and structural considerations that enriched the research and contributed to the development of the overall analytical framework. However versed one may be in the literature of a subject, there remains no substitute for having lived experience of events and personalities. The key informant interviews provided the research with that window to the past.

The selection of respondents was based on what is casually known as the 'snowball' approach. Key individuals were contacted initially who subsequently recommended further respondents for interviews. Using an accepted qualitative test of 'saturation', interviews were sourced until the responses began to duplicate (i.e., if all new respondents were essentially repeating what had already been recorded, the interview list is deemed to be sufficient) (Baker and Edwards, 2012). The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured methodology through which a set of standard questions were asked both to address the principal research questions and to provoke further discussion within the topic. Where targeted respondents were not available in person, these interviews were conducted via phone or email, as required. Nevertheless, not all planned interviews were conducted due to scheduling conflicts or outright refusal of access. While this is not considered to have significantly impaired the research, it is a limitation worth noting.

2.7 The Intersection of Polling, Elites, and Elections

This thesis examines the impact of the recent introduction of public opinion polling on the quality of elections in sub-Saharan Africa. Having surveyed the relevant literature, this chapter has suggested a new framework to understand the underlying characteristics that shape the interface between polling, the political elite, and electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa. The arguments developed above posit opinion polling as a new, modern form of political participation to which the political elite must adapt. This creates opportunities for either the expansion or contraction of political space around elections. Using a two-stage model, I hypothesise that it is by shaping elite perceptions—more so than changing the nature of political participation or by changing political institutions—that public opinion polling is having the greatest impact on electoral processes.

I have argued in this chapter that opinion polling can influence electoral dynamics by altering the flow of information that drives political elite decision-making and by shifting the locus of political contestation from the private to the public sphere. Polling catalyses a surge in demand for political information that in turn forces electoral politics out into the open, with each development played out in the headlines. Politicians and their advisors, faced with this new tool, will often have no choice but to embrace polling's potential, irrespective of the caveats. As it pervades the political discourse, opinion polling concentrates and intensifies attitudes and preferences that may have otherwise been more diffuse or transient. This intensity demands a response from the political elite, and however they may resist it ultimately engenders adaptation in electoral strategies.

Two assumptions pertaining to the political conditions in sub-Saharan African underpin the application of this framework to the four countries covered in my case studies. The first is the uncertainty of political information, as characterised by generally poor media capacity, inexperienced pollsters, and general scepticism of research in general. The second is that ethnic-identity politics, far from encouraging progressive adaptation, actively induce politicians to grasp for the familiar in the face of change, prompting renewed emphasis on clientelism and ethnic-centred messaging.

On the basis of these assumptions, my model predicts that once polling has pervaded the political discourse it shapes elite perceptions of the degree of political competition they face in any given electoral period. Where opinion polls illustrate an increasingly competitive contest, elites will react to undermine the openness and transparency of that election with an eye toward manipulating the outcome in their favour. Moreover, contrary to conventional wisdom, elites will not seek to broaden their base of support through responsive platforms or policies, but rather will fall back on strategies designed to mobilise core supporters predicated on issues of ethnicity, religion, or other such divisive factors. The four chapters that follow will examine the evidence that public opinion polling in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda is changing the way in which politics is conducted around elections and will seek to determine whether polling has contributed to more transparent and representative electoral processes in these selected countries.

This thesis shows that public opinion polling is emphatically influencing the political dynamics of its four country cases. Moreover, in those elections and referenda where public opinion polling can be argued to have contributed to greater transparency and representativeness it has done so due to specific shifts in elite perceptions of competitive balance within the electoral process. For instance, President Daniel arap Moi's decision not to exert his influence to manipulate the 2002 Kenyan election result toward his favoured candidate was, at least partly, based on his perception of relative electoral position emerging from public opinion polling. Likewise, stable perceptions of lack of competition as expressed through polling have enabled Presidents Museveni and Jonathan, of Uganda and Nigeria respectively, to allow for, if only marginally, greater transparency and representativeness in their most recent elections in 2011.

With respect to the nature of these elite perceptions, I examine how the quality of the media and the specific ethno-regional character of each of the countries intersect with public opinion polling to shape perceptions of competition shifts in elections. I show that by focusing on the *perceptions* of elites, the quality of media coverage can become endogenous to the model, placing the onus for discerning accuracy on the elites, rather than on the researcher. I also demonstrate that the role of ethno-regional

politics matter only in the way in which they structure politics, not in motivating any particular movement toward or away from transparent and representative elections. The quality of electoral institutions is also seen to be integral to establishing polling's ability to deliver greater transparency and representativeness. Ultimately, the research shows that public opinion polling is most likely to improve the transparency and representativeness of sub-Saharan elections in non-competitive environments where the pressure for elite survival is lower and where it cannot be instrumentalised as a tool for obtaining or retaining power.

This finding has important implications for the continued implementation of public opinion polling in sub-Saharan African elections. It suggests that public opinion polling is no panacea for the problems observed in these elections. Its ability to instigate change is inherently limited by the underlying context of the political system in which it operates. It can, however, facilitate political change by amplifying the strength of that change, potentially overcoming elite attempts to repress it. Let us turn to the case studies now to understand why.

Chapter 3. Public Opinion Polling in Kenyan Elections 2002–2011

Prior to the 1990s, election opinion polling in Kenya was rare and sporadic. This was largely the result of elite control of political information. Hornsby (2001) argues that Kenya elites had little interest in gathering data about their ability to deliver what the voters wanted, precluding any need to capture the views of ordinary citizens. They were able to exert this will as elite control of the media was considerable, making newspaper editors loath to publish data on citizen preferences or government performance on political issues.

Opinion polling in Kenya has come a long way since then, but its impact on Kenyan elections and the country's on-going political development remains controversial. This thesis tests three hypotheses related to the way in which opinion polling influences elite strategies and the quality of elections. Specifically, it attempts to determine whether it is opinion polling's ability to substitute for collective action, to force institutional adaptation, or to shape elite perceptions around electoral competition that determines the likelihood that elites will move toward or away from more transparent and representative electoral processes.

This chapter reviews the evidence of opinion polling's influence on Kenyan elections and finds that it is generally supportive of the third hypothesis. Under President Moi in the 1980s and 1990s, the opinion polling that was carried out was largely irrelevant due to his political clout and control of state resources to manage the electoral process. By 2002, the political environment had changed sufficiently that opinion polling was able to contribute to a more transparent and representative election. Likewise in the constitutional referendum of 2005, political elites strategically backed down in the face of overwhelming popular opinion against the constitution.

By 2007, opinion polling had become increasingly sophisticated and pervaded much of Kenyan politics, shaping perceptions and party choices for candidates. Polling pointed to a close race, and its inability to make a definitive pronouncement contributed to an increasing focus on ethnic mobilisation and a chaotic response to Kibaki's controversial victory. Chastened but undeterred by its role in the melee, opinion polling continued

to feature heavily in political media coverage. Indeed, its prominence in 2007 convinced many hitherto sceptical politicians as to the merits of engaging pollsters in their campaigns.

The integration of opinion polling into Kenyan politics has been by no means a smooth transition. The prominence polling has gained within elite political circles is undeniable, although its reception has been mixed. The instances where public opinion has been clear and decisive, the advent of polling has provided an invaluable channel for that information to reach the political elite. Indeed, its role in the political process seems likely only to grow in the near future, particularly with the arrival of a new decentralised system of governance in Kenya. The incomplete understanding of polling and how it relates to politics, however, creates broad opportunities for its misuse within the media and among politicians. The ability of polling to consistently affect the quality of elections and consequently the country's political institutions remains muddled by the inexperience of the media and the complex incentives of the political elite.

3.1 The Context of this Research

3.1.1 Historical Context

Kenya, at independence, inherited a colonial system of governance that featured a highly centralised state with a dominant executive branch. The colony had a significant population of European settlers who had been drawn to Kenya by the prospects of wealth from plantation agriculture, occupying land that had been appropriated from local populations. Operating as an almost feudal system, these plantations ran principally on the labour of the rural Africans. To maintain this codified system of inequality, the colonial government ensured that Africans could only mobilise politically in ethnically defined regions, precluding an attempt to form nationwide movements. As a result, many of the key features of Kenya's current political landscape can be considered as having their genesis in the colonial period, namely: "a centralised state with a powerful executive, political conflict around the issue of

inequality, particularly with reference to land, and a tradition of violent confrontation between the state and popular movements in opposition” (Marquette et al., 2008).

Two major political parties dominated the politics of the early years of Kenya’s independence. Jomo Kenyatta’s Kenya African National Union (KANU) represented the dominant Kikuyu ethnic group and forged an early alliance Oginga Odinga and his Luo grouping. Opposing them was the Kenyan African Democratic Union (KADU) which was largely constituted by the Kalenjin and other marginal ethnic groups in the Rift Valley, while also garnering support in the Coast Province and among the white population. The competition was short-lived. Using state patronage, Kenyatta lured KADU leaders into defecting to his party, culminating in the merger of KADU with KANU in 1964, and Kenya became, essentially, a one-party state (Mueller, 2008).

Opinion polling influence on early politics was equally tumultuous. Before independence, there were attempts made to apply election polling techniques to Kenya but with little success. Post-independence, this process continued. Hornsby’s (2001) research has uncovered records on four opinion polls conducted on Kenya in the period 1964-66. Hornsby also notes that “Tom Mboya as Secretary-General of KANU and Minister also ran a small polling unit, which prepared surveys on national issues for the government, but these were never published” (*ibid*).

When the Kenya People’s Union (KPU) was founded in 1966 and KANU began to face tangible political competition, all opinion polls were immediately halted, already reflecting a certain animosity on the part of political elites towards political competition. Kenyatta was not at all interested in engaging in a fair competition for votes with the KPU; nor did he have any regard for the opinion of the general public on key political issues. Instead, Hornsby argues that “opinion-canvassing...took place informally through the network of politicians and civil servants who provided the transmission belt from the centre to the periphery of the country, and also fed back to the leadership the views and strength of views of local communities on key problems facing them” (Hornsby 2001). Indeed, under Kenyatta and his successor Daniel arap Moi from 1978, one could argue that general elections themselves became a form of

opinion poll — a non-binding method of expressing the nation's views on the conduct of events.

Until the combination of democratisation and the physical development of independent communications and analysis media (mobile phones, computers) in the early 1990s, the control of the various media exercised by the government meant that they generally followed the agenda defined by the dominant KANU coalition. Where they did challenge it, it was with a specific objective and set of 'masters' in mind. From the late 1960s until 1992, efforts to register voter opinion were negligible (Branch and Cheeseman, 2005).

4.1.2 Recent Political Context

After years of domestic political protests and increasing international pressure linked to the wave of democratisation, President Daniel arap Moi's decision to repeal the constitutional clause defining KANU as the sole political party in December 1991 ushered in a new era of multiparty politics in Kenya. In anticipation of general elections scheduled for the end of 1992, political parties once again coalesced around ethnic identities (Throup and Hornsby, 1998). Despite widespread unpopularity, Moi emerged victorious from the presidential elections, with KANU winning clear majorities in parliament in both 1992 and 1997. Brown (2004: 327) contends that "this was made possible by a blatantly uneven playing field and the ruling party's use of numerous corrupt practices, ranging from gerrymandering and the stuffing of ballot boxes to violent intimidation, all facilitated by the opposition's fragmentation."

KANU's victories in these general elections were achieved amid violence and allegations of electoral irregularities. While the government maintained that the violence was ethnically motivated triggered by the advent of multi-party politics, others have argued that politicians instigated the violence as a tool for winning the elections (Dercon and Gutierrez-Romero, 2012). Yet, the lack of a coherent opposition meant that the fundamental legitimacy of the results was rarely challenged. There was no credible alternative to Moi (Kagwanja, 2003).

In a reversal of early political alignments, in 1992 and 1997 elections, Moi's KANU drew its strongest support from his own Kalenjin group and other Rift Valley groups, while the opposition parties had strongholds in Kikuyu and Luo areas (Barkan and Ng'ethe, 1998). This reflects the persistent reality that Kenya's presidential races are usually won through coalition building and appeals to the swing voters in provinces that lack significant population of dominant ethnic groups and, therefore, rarely vote as a bloc (ICG, 2008).

Moi had a distinct advantage going into these elections in as much as the opposition parties were rarely more than the ethnic constituencies of particular candidates. Throup (2001: 3) suggests that "over the last decade the country's political parties have become ever more exclusive." In 1992, a broad-based alliance of ethnic groups joined together under a political party named FORD (Forum for the Restoration of Democracy) that presented a real opportunity for defeating KANU in the elections, but it ultimately disintegrated into rival ethnic factions. The trend of opposition disintegration gained pace in the run-up to the 1997 elections. "FORD Kenya lost most of its Luo followers to Raila Odinga's National Development Party (NDP), and FORD-Asili self-destructed when its veteran leader, Kenneth Matiba, decided to boycott the 1997 polls. Even the Democratic Party, a previously cohesive coalition of Kikuyu and Kamba, lost its Kamba supporters to the revamped Social Democratic Party (SDP)" (*ibid*).

Despite its second electoral victory in 1997, the KANU government was never as securely in place as it had been before. Internal schisms and in-fighting, drought and flood, economic decline, the rapid development in news gathering and communications technologies and a gradually growing civic awareness all served to weaken the government's control over the media and over the population. At the same time, opinion polls began to flourish, building a constituency of consumers among the political elite.

Chastened by their defeat in 1997 elections, three opposition leaders Mwai Kibaki, Michael Kijana Wamalwa and Charity Kaluki Ngilu (who would later come to be known as the Big Three) determined that they must find a way of working together.

Recognising the importance of publicity, they pushed the idea of opposition unity through media sources and prominent meetings, but nobody took them seriously, not even KANU. Amutabi (2009: 70) sees this as “the impetus that would see inter-ethnic bridge-building develop later to become the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC). The opposition leaders had realised that this was the only way they could defeat KANU at elections. The populous Kikuyu had realised that they could not go it alone.” While it was a difficult lesson to take, it would prove strategically important in the elections of 2002.

3.1.3 Ethnicity in Kenyan Politics

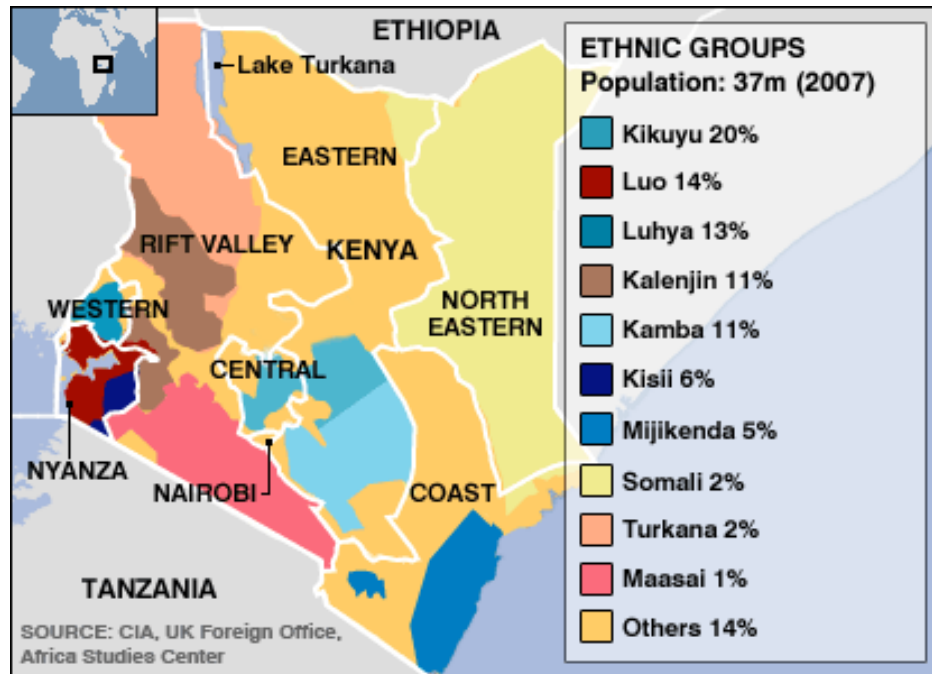
That ethnicity has long been central to political mobilisation in Kenya is a commonly accepted premise among scholars (Barkan, 2011). Linked to clientelistic theories of governance, the perception is that Kenyans vote along ethnic lines to maximise their community’s share of public goods by ensuring the presence of their own representatives in government. If a certain community votes someone into a position of power, the people of that community will benefit from the largesse of the state once that person had obtained power.

Kenya is a multi-ethnic society and has more than 40 ethnic communities. The principal ethnic communities are the Kikuyu, the Luyha, the Luo, the Kalenjin, the Kamba, and the Kisii (see Map 1 below). As discussed above, power in Kenya since the colonial period has usually been associated with one particular ethnic group or another. From independence until the death of the first president Jomo Kenyatta in 1978, power was increasingly restricted to a small cadre of trusted Kikuyu. By contrast, under Moi, political power became concentrated in the hands of Kalenjin elites. The on-going ethnicisation of government, the civil service and even political parties has for years been considered one of the major contributors to poor governance and weak accountability in Kenya, as well as conflict (Omolo, 2002).

Ethnicity is most often exploited during elections, as it tends to be an easy identity through which to mobilise people. An Afrobarometer study finds that although Kenyans don’t generally define themselves in ethnic terms, their electoral behaviour is

shaped by ethnic identity politics. “Respondents also show a high degree of mistrust of members of other ethnic groups and consider the behaviour of these other groups to be influenced primarily by ethnicity. In general, voting in Kenya is therefore defensively and fundamentally an ethnic census” (Bratton and Kimenyi, 2008: 20).

Map 1 Ethnic distribution in Kenya



Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/7172038.stm

As previously noted, the particular composition of ethnic identity in Kenya often requires politicians seeking election to form alliances and coalitions with leaders of other ethnic groups. Sebastian Elischer (2008) has labelled these ‘coalitions of convenience,’ where erstwhile political enemies forge a relationship against a common adversary. The 2002 election was a good example of this in the form of NARC, which survived only three years beyond the election. The potential link between opinion polling and the formation of these coalitions is something which emerges from several case studies in this thesis and would benefit from further research.

3.1.4 The Media in Kenyan Politics

Kenya has a fluid political environment characterised by personality, ethnicity, and party affiliation. Although Kenyans have long agitated for ideology-driven party politics, this has not been achieved due to weak party political systems, and practices that seem to favour short-term political gains. Kenya's media suffers from similar flaws. Most of the media in Kenya are commercial in nature and profit is the principal motive. As such, the media favours content that sells, focusing on personalities, celebrities, and other 'soft' issues that do not require much investment in terms of time, monetary and even specialised human resources that would offer deeper and meaningful coverage of issues.

Kenya's media, particularly its print sector, is largely independent and does not shy away from criticising leading politicians and the government. The sector is pluralistic and relatively rigorous, although the influence of the commercial advertisers can impact of the quality of reporting. In the print media, there are four daily newspapers, one business daily, and several regional weekly newspapers. Among broadcast media, the state-controlled Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) predominates in markets outside major urban areas, and its coverage generally favours the government. Two private media houses, the Standard Media Group and the Nation Media Group, also run television networks and popular daily and weekly newspapers. Radio is also prominent, particularly in rural areas, although these tend to be ethnically aligned (Lansner, 2012).

The content analysis that informs this chapter is drawn from articles published in three principal (i.e., those with greatest circulation and greatest prominence in Nairobi) newspapers (*The Daily Nation*, *The Standard*, and *The Star*) and follows two parallel tracks. The first quantitative track reviews articles over a seven month period around elections to determine quantity of opinion polling coverage while the second qualitative tracks examines the writings of key political commentators across the entire period of 2002–2010 to determine shifts in perceptions and attitudes to opinion polling on the basis of content and tone.

3.2 Public Opinion Polling in Kenyan Elections

The addition of opinion polling into this combustible crucible of elite politics has the potential for both extraordinary gains and losses in the quality of electoral processes. This research builds on the premise that electoral politics is principally about elite strategies and behaviour. Therefore, for opinion polling to influence the quality of elections, it must first influence political elites. To analyse this influence on elites in Kenya, this chapter takes a two stage approach and applies across the four electoral/referenda periods under review. Firstly, while the physical act of opinion polling can be consequential as being representative of the relative openness of a society, this thesis focuses almost exclusively on the information it produces. Specifically, it examines the process by which that information is interpreted, disseminated, and consumed by the political elite of specific sub-Saharan democracies. This process of institutionalising public opinion polling data into the political discourse is the first facet of analysis of its impact on the quality of elections in Kenya. A negative finding in this stage clearly precludes any influence on Kenyan political elites and consequently on the quality of elections.

Secondly, information does not exist in isolation. Once it has been analysed and consumed by the relevant actors, they must choose either to act upon it or not. Collectively, these are the outcomes of the introduction of public opinion polling on Kenya's electoral processes. In this stage, I test my hypotheses as to *how* opinion polling can contribute to more transparent and representative elections by reviewing and analysing elite responses to public opinion polling through the news media and through first-hand accounts. How political elites respond to political information is often as revealing as the information itself.

What has emerged is a picture of elite politics that conforms very closely to the clientelistic system assumed in the model introduced in Chapter 2. Growing political competition as captured and publicised by opinion polls, far from instigating greater transparency and representativeness, actually occasions a growing reliance on patronage and ethnically-focused politics. By contrast, periods of less competition

allow for greater openness and responsive electoral processes based on the data emerging from opinion polls.

Indeed, public opinion polling's role in shaping perceptions here is readily apparent. Politicians have adopted an almost schizophrenic love-hate relationship with the polls, often conditioned on their treatment by those same surveys. Publicly, opinion polls are often sneered at or ridiculed as bought and paid for by the opposing party, particularly when the results are poor. But privately, politicians regularly pay to have their questions added to large public surveys or, in some cases, have polling companies formed on their behalf (Private interview, 16 April 2012). The political elite will acknowledge and react positively to opinion polls that either publicly confirm their preeminent position within the competitive landscape or privately point to new strategies they might employ to improve their competitive position. This dichotomy between public and private strategies and behaviours confirms that perceptions matter.

The media has an equally complex relationship with opinion polls. In one capacity, they are meant to provide a conduit, reporting only the facts and data with which they are provided. When those facts are incorrect or biased, however, the media becomes implicated in the manipulation. Being new to the polling game, media do not yet have the capacity to provide the kind of specific analysis needed to decipher the landscape of opinion polling in Kenya. Indeed, where media tries to act as a filter, it often leads its readership further astray, by focusing on the wrong headline numbers or misinterpreting data that is not directly comparable. Media has come a long way in ten years, but inconsistencies remain. This uncertainty also plays a role in shaping elite perceptions and strategies.

Likewise, the pollsters themselves are learning how to operate effectively in a politically charged environment, steeped in ethnic tensions that pervade much of the political process. Even non-partisan pollsters find themselves tarred as biased based on the ethnicity of their managing director (Private interview, 17 April 2012). Alliances with international polling firms provides much needed credibility for pollsters, but

their science is still too easily dismissed as mysterious and artificial, with even educated Kenyans questioning the validity of sampling as a statistical technique.

Table 1: Pollsters in Kenyan politics

Polling Organisation	Elections Active	Affiliation or other ties¹³
Consumer Insight	2007	Considered to be biased toward Kikuyu candidates
Infotrak	2007, 2010	Considered to be biased toward Odinga and his affiliates
International Republican Institute	2007	US agency funded by USAID and affiliated with the US Republican party. Has extensive election programmes around the world.
Ipsos/Synovate/Steadman	2002, 2005, 2007, 2010	Independently owned, now part of international brand. Has been variously accused of favouritism but no formal links
Strategic Research	2007, 2010	Independent, generally considered quite credible
RMS	2007	Independent, now part of global TNS brand

2002 changed the stakes of Kenyan elections. They were no longer stage-managed with predetermined outcomes; they were open, competitive, and winner takes all affairs. This opened the door to a whole new set of problems for the political elite. Questions of boycotts, which arose during the early stages of the 2002 campaign, and rejections of official results, as in the 2007 elections, became important strategic decisions for politicians. 2002 also provided the first real opportunity for opinion polling to flourish, and there have been numerous ups and downs in the decade since. What follows is a narrative that charts the emergence of opinion polling in 2002; follows it through the first constitutional referendum in 2005 where it accurately predicted a rejection of the draft; analyses the influence of polling on the crisis of the 2007 election; and culminates in the 2010 constitutional referendum.

¹³ This applies to the organisation only. It is not always possible to discern the data source or funding agent of individual polls released under the names of organisations or newspapers. Independent firms may be open to accusations of bias when they conduct and publish polls on behalf of particular parties or individuals.

3.2.1 The 2002 Elections

Brown (2004: 328) notes that “in June 2001, one-and-a-half years before Kenya’s ground-breaking December 2002 elections, the Kenyan political scientist Rok Ajulu wrote: ‘There is ... little prospect that President Moi will give way to a replacement at the end of his second five-year term in 2002’.” Given the facts at the time, there seemed no reason to argue with this assertion at the time it was made. By the end of 2002, however, Moi was no longer president and his protégé, Uhuru Kenyatta, had lost the election by over 30 points with only 31 per cent of the popular vote. Kibaki’s NARC also won 125 out of 210 seats in parliament to KANU’s 64.

The margin of Kibaki’s and NARC’s victory was, at first glance, surprising. Moi had ruled Kenya since 1978, surviving attempted coups and maintaining his grip on power through a skilful manipulation of Kenya’s ethnic and regional divisions. Moi’s strategy to expand his network of patronage using state resources was partly made possible through what Branch and Cheeseman has termed the “informalisation” of the state (2008: 4). “Increasingly, the Presidency took on extra powers, while the checks were weakened. This was a deliberate strategy to maintain control and to ensure that the President could manoeuvre as he wished, unencumbered by external controls. This led to a weakening of state institutions, which were increasingly seen as serving the country’s elite rather than the people” (Sundet et al., 2009: 7).

With Moi stepping down in 2002, the election represented an opportunity for Kenya to break with its authoritarian past and press forward with its democratisation. To do so meant constraining the power of its dominant elites and resisting efforts by Moi and his KANU colleagues to impose a successor on the country. Yet, as the above quote suggests, the prospects for such a turn of events seemed bleak as the campaign for the 2002 elections began in earnest.

Having decided to relinquish power, Moi turned his hand to king-making, appointing Uhuru Kenyatta, son of the late president of Kenya, as his replacement at the helm of KANU. Perhaps recognising that KANU’s popularity and appeal to voters was ebbing, Moi used this manoeuvre to reconnect with past sentiments while revitalising the

ruling party under new, younger leadership. Unfortunately for him and for KANU, this campaign never really gathered momentum.

3.2.1.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

Tracking the quarterly opinion polls issued throughout 2002 illustrates this well. Early surveys in August 2002, gave Kenyatta a slim lead among prospective candidates (*The Standard*, 12 August 2002), but pundits were already cautioning KANU from relying too heavily on these early numbers: “The poll, in fact, should send alarm bells ringing in Mr. Kenyatta’s camp...If Mr Odinga is not the KANU nominee, a full 68 per cent of his supporters will not vote for whoever gets the party nomination” (*Daily Nation*, 13 August 2002).

The advice proved prophetic. Once Odinga had guided former vice president Saitoti and other key cabinet ministers first out of KANU and into the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and then into the Rainbow Coalition in early October, “Project Uhuru” was in jeopardy. By October, polls were showing a landslide victory for Kibaki’s NARC, and Moi was being urged to reconsider his selection of Kenyatta as the KANU candidate (*Daily Nation*, 12 October 2002).

It was not merely the poll data, however, that had turned against Kenyatta and KANU. This new source of information became grist to the mill of political punditry, providing the raw data for the creation and dissemination of the “received wisdom” of the day. As the chart below demonstrates, as the polls began shifting so did the collective opinion of political commentators, reinforcing not only the messages coming from the quarterly polls but also the importance of the polls themselves in driving political discourse.

Table 2: Political Commentators in the Kenya 2002 Election Campaign

2002 Elections	Mutahi Ngunyi (political scientist and columnist)	Macharia Gaitho (political editor, <i>Daily Nation</i>)
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2002 Elections	Mutahi Ngunyi (political scientist and columnist)	Macharia Gaitho (political editor, Daily Nation)
Pre-August 12 Poll	28 July: "If Mr Kenyatta gets nominated as KANU's presidential candidate there will be no point fighting him...If they nominate Mr Kenyatta, he will be seen as a 'legitimate' candidate."	9 July: "The opposition has demonstrated once again why it simply does not have what it takes to pose a real threat even to a rudderless KANU."
Post-August 12 Poll	8 September: "What would happen if the Kenyatta project falls down on the face or if something were to happen to Mr Kenyatta? Who would be the beneficiary? I submit that after the Rainbow exodus, the beneficiary would be Mr Mudavadi."	17 September: "Mr Kibaki would obviously be the strongest candidate amongst the Big Three... But only for those caught up in old-fashioned thinking. A recent opinion poll which placed KANU's Uhuru Kenyatta ahead of all opposition challengers was quite revealing."
Post-October 11 Poll	27 October: "But Mr Kenyatta is caught in a tricky situation. On the one hand, he needs the state machinery to win the election, and as a result he has to stick with the President. On the other hand, he realises that President Moi is likely to be a liability to his campaign. This is so because to most Kenyans, voting Uhuru Kenyatta is voting for Moi. And the president has told us as much. As the opposition wave peaks, Mr Kenyatta should get pragmatic. He needs to take charge and play hard politics."	18 November: "The rebels bolting to the Opposition left Mr Kenyatta carrying the ticket of a severely weakened ruling party that, for the first time since Independence nearly 40 years ago, is in real danger of losing its hold on power. The Opposition, by contrast, is energised and united like never before, and is in a position where victory seems almost certain. How Mr Kenyatta makes use of the resources KANU can command, including the ability to blatantly steal the election, will determine whether he will be Kenya's third president."
Post-December 9 Poll	"KANU should stop whining about the IRI opinion poll. They should, in fact, thank the Washington-based organisation for providing them with the worst-case scenario. If the poll is right, it will have at least forewarned them! Mr Kenyatta ...should counter the effects of the IRI poll. If he does not do it, people will begin to perceive Mr Kibaki as the forerunner in this election. And since people like to associate with winners, some of Mr Kenyatta's supporters are likely to find Mr Kibaki attractive."	22 December "KANU had absolutely no quarrel only a few months ago when the very same pollsters released a survey which showed Mr Kenyatta winning the presidency. A lot, of course, changed since then, and that does not include, to my knowledge, a change in the management and ownership of the polling firm. All indications are that the National Rainbow Coalition is pulled massively ahead and that Mr Kibaki is set to become Kenya's third president."

The coverage and analysis of the quarterly polls reflects the process of assimilation of this new form of political information into the political sphere. The early polls are treated with caution, with the pundits hedging their bets between the ill-conceived “Project Uhuru” and the as yet amorphous Rainbow Coalition. The October quarterly poll, however, shakes them from the fence, and the onus is placed firmly on Kenyatta to beat back the opposition juggernaut. By December, the political media has given up on KANU and its chances of beating the opposition coalition, and the quarterly polls have clearly influenced their own positions on the campaign.

By December, Kibaki’s lead appeared insurmountable, with opinion polls predicting he would win with almost 70 per cent of the vote against just over 20 per cent for Kenyatta (*Daily Nation*, 10 December 2002). Political observers warned that KANU ignored these numbers at its peril: “If Mr Kenyatta decides to hide his head under the sand, he will be like the little bird that decided to jump from the 10th floor of a city building. As it passed each floor with speed, the bird quipped: ‘Everything is alright!’ What it failed to see was the tarmac pavement waiting down there!” (*Daily Nation*, 15 December 2002)

The evidence from this section supports the notion that political opinion polling is shifting political discourse, opening up new sources of information that counter the prevailing wisdom espoused by the government or other elite interest groups. Indeed, this author’s review of over 15,000 newspaper articles published in Kenya between June 2002 and January 2003 unearthed 62 mentions of the term “opinion poll.” Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 4.03 mentions per thousand a not insignificant number, given the relative novelty of opinion polling to Kenyan politics. Opinion polling therefore must have some capacity to influence elite strategies in the context of competitive elections. The question that remains is through what means will that influence be channelled.

3.2.1.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

Nevertheless, in spite of the overwhelming polling data, Kibaki's and NARC's victory exceeded the predictions of many commentators, and it certainly seems to have taken Uhuru's supporters by surprise. "In the end, the campaign's undoing was the misplaced confidence they retained that, somehow, Moi would pull a trick that would see Uhuru through. Even when the cause appeared lost, Uhuru's handlers were still exuding confidence that they remained unbeatable. They kept up the smugness even after a series of opinion polls showed Kibaki leading by an overwhelming margin. It was a lesson that Uhuru, even as he gears himself for a possible repeat run in 2007, is never going to forget" (*The Standard*, 26 January 2003). This determination to ignore the opinion polls highlights that while the data had penetrated deeply into the political media and political classes, the techniques were sufficiently unknown within the Kenyan political landscape that their predictions could be dismissed or downplayed at the highest levels.

President Moi and the KANU hierarchy, however, seemed to accept the polling results as valid and reflective of public opinion having turned against them. "Unlike in 1992, President Moi and other senior KANU figures were willing to let their candidate go down to defeat" (Throup, 2003: 2). Uhuru certainly benefited from state resources throughout the 2002 campaign but it would seem that the amounts were much less than Moi enjoyed in 1992 or 1997. It also appears that Uhuru himself and his family provided a significant chunk of his campaign funds in the absence of financial support from the president and other KANU 'big men.' Without these resources, Uhuru's campaign could not rely on the anticipated campaign of bribery, rigging, and intimidation. "KANU did bribe, it did rig, it did intimidate voters, but in a spasmodic, half-hearted manner, which merely ensured its defeat" (*ibid*: 1).

That KANU would be on the end of such an election drubbing seemed a forlorn hope for those in the opposition in the run-up to the 2002 election campaign. The ruling party had become too adept at dividing its opponents, manipulating the election process, and outright rigging elections when necessary. Yet, in this campaign, the

opposition was able to unite and present a consensus candidate for the voters of Kenya to elect, and the victory was emphatic.

It seems not unreasonable to argue that the emergence of opinion polling and its impact on the political campaign was a contributing factor in this outcome. For an opposition prone to disharmony, the aggregation of public opinion through polling presented a powerful tool for overcoming their collective action problem. By force of numbers, the public, reluctant to openly reject the regime, could express their dissatisfaction privately but no less forcefully through surveys. The steady stream of positive poll data created a driving momentum for the opposition, making it easier to offset the incumbent advantages of KANU and maintain coalition unity.

Polling here also exhibits an ability to influence the strategic calculus of elite politicians where the strength of public opinion is too difficult or costly to overcome. It provided Moi with quantitative evidence upon which to make his choice between intervention and acceptance. Had the numbers been closer, it may have reassured him of the benefit of intervening on Kenyatta's behalf. Overturning a close to 50 per cent margin, however, proved too speculative and too uncertain to risk. In this case, Moi's perception of the competitive landscape, as seen through these polls, persuaded him that pursuing a course that reduced the quality of the election would be counter-productive.

A further outcome exhibited by this evidence is that opinion polling becomes a means of managing expectations among the media, politicians, and the public. Rather than viewing election-day in isolation, the political class use polling data to devise strategies for interpreting and reacting to electoral outcomes. This creates a further buffer against shock results where election numbers do not closely match the perceptions of various political actors. Ideally, this foreknowledge mitigates the likelihood of "spontaneous" violence accompanying election announcements.

Indeed, the institutionalisation of violence as a viable election strategy is one of less salubrious sides to Kenyan politics campaigns. Although prevalent throughout Kenya's history, it really came to the fore under Moi in the newly democratised regime on the

1990s. Reports on elections held in early days of Kenya's democratic transition implicated high ranking political figures in organising and employing vigilante gangs to intimidate potential voters in opposition areas. These gangs used violence to displace people from their home regions, essentially preventing opposition supporters from voting (Akiwumi report, 1999). In this period, violence became a means of securing political power and winning elections.

While it cannot be directly linked to the impact of opinion polling, the 2002 elections were noteworthy for their relative lack of systemic violence. Both of the previous elections had featured targeted attacks on members of ethnic groups that generally supported the opposition. "Between 1991 and 2001, the so-called clashes killed thousands of Kenyans and displaced hundreds of thousands more. It was widely feared that similar attacks would occur in 2002. This threat, however, failed to materialise" (Brown, 2004: 332). Though clearly effective in disenfranchising certain constituencies, NARC's lead over KANU in the opinion polls was too large to be overcome by violence alone. Electoral violence also likely did not feature in 2002 because, in the past it had involved attacks of Kalenjin on Kikuyu settlements in their areas (as there were Kikuyu opposition candidates) but in 2002 both presidential candidates were Kikuyu (*Ibid*).

3.2.1.4 Implications for Research

The 2002 Kenyan election signals an intriguing trend in the way in which the political elite engage with political opinion polling. When it is first introduced into electoral politics, its novelty appears to disrupt existing elite strategies. While the media and opposition elements press their advantage in terms of new information, the old guard clings all the more fervently to their pre-conceived notions of electoral politics and to their time-honoured strategies, until it is too late to adapt successfully. In an era prior to polling, Moi and his team could have relied upon their election machine to build support around Uhuru and downplay Kibaki's chances for victory. In the absence of independent evidence to the contrary, the voice of the President and the state apparatus would have been more greatly valued than that of Kibaki's campaign. Opinion polling removed this window and set new terms for the electoral contest, ultimately creating an impossible task for Moi to achieve. The popular expectation was

now clearly set on a Kibaki win, and the effort necessary to overturn that perception was either unfeasible or unappealing.

This apparent success argues strongly for opinion polling's ability to contribute to more transparent and representative elections. In the context of this thesis's hypotheses, it makes a strong case for the theory that polling's ability to mobilise popular sentiment against Uhuru was essentially a collective action movement, forcing Moi to accept an outcome he would not normally have been willing to accept. There is also a case to be made for the centrality of elite perceptions here. Moi had ridden against popular sentiment before as president. What differed here was that Moi (and the general public) was able to perceive clearly Kibaki's insurmountable lead and made a strategic decision to renege on any attempts to restrict or manipulate the electoral process.

3.2.2 The 2005 Referendum and Inter-election Manoeuvring

Getting rid of Moi and KANU, however, did not mean that Kenya was rid of its elite old guard. On the contrary, Kibaki was an old political hand, and when faced with the prospect of reforming the constitution to the detriment of his own political position, he unsurprisingly demurred. Again, it would take a chorus of popular protest to constrain this anti-democratic behaviour, and again opinion polling featured strongly in the debate.

The advent of opinion polling meant that the 2007 presidential campaign effectively kicked off within months of NARC's victory in the 2002 elections. Polls which rated popular opinion of government performance held the spectre of impending electoral defeat over the heads of incumbent politicians. In September 2003, the *Daily Nation* warned the government it should learn from the results of on-going polling, citing opinion polling as "a reliable guide of what Kenyans think, what they want and how they are likely to vote" (*Daily Nation*, 15 September 2003).

In 2005, Kenyans voted in a referendum to decide whether or not to adopt a new Constitution. Constitutional reform had been an issue for opposition groups even prior to the 2002 elections, but it had been put aside in order to tackle the primary objective

of unseating Moi. Nevertheless as part of a pre-election agreement among the leaders within NARC, a proposed new constitution was proposed that would dilute the power of the presidency by creating a position of prime minister with executive powers. Raila Odinga, one of the major political figures in NARC, was put forward as the leading contender for this new position. Throughout the drafting, disagreements within the coalition delayed the process (Dagne, 2008).

Ultimately, President Kibaki and his supporters forced through a draft that maintained the strong executive role of the President, angering many both in and out of government who had long campaigned for a more restricted presidential role. It was seen as an attempt by Kibaki to manipulate the political system to his advantage and to further entrench the dominance of his ethnic group, the Kikuyu. Kenya went through a tumultuous pre-election period with isolated confrontations between the proponents and opponents of the constitution. Kenyans were asked to vote their preference by choosing between the symbols of a banana for 'Yes' or an orange for 'No' (Wolf and Ireri 2010).

3.2.2.1 Polls Reifying Perceptions

Following the excitement of the 2002 campaign and consequent optimism over Kenya's political future, reality and its slow pace for change cast a decided pall over Kenyan public opinion in years that followed. Indeed, declining public confidence in the government became a prominent media theme throughout 2003 and 2004, sometimes without credible evidence to support it. In April 2004, *The Standard* reported that: "Public confidence in President Kibaki's government has plummeted in the past 12 months" (3 April 2004).

In July of the same year, a prominent newspaper ran the headline 'Uhuru floors Kibaki in popularity rating,' claiming that, if an election were held in July 2004, Kenyatta would defeat Kibaki. The poll, however, was only conducted in the urban areas, where Kenyatta drew the majority of his support. "The reporting of urban-only polls consistently underestimated Kibaki's support by missing out his strongholds, focusing instead on the strengths of his opponents" (Branch and Cheeseman, 2005: 333).

Misrepresented or not, opinion polling became a near permanent feature of the political landscape. Polling showed that while public confidence in the government, and, to a certain extent with NARC itself, was waning, Kibaki was actually maintaining strong personal support among the population (*Daily Nation*, 19 December 2004). Nevertheless, opposition supporters continued to tout urban polls predicting Kibaki's downfall (*The Standard*, 19 February 2005; 11 June 2005) to refute national polls demonstrating a clear, though shrinking, Kibaki lead (*Daily Nation*, 24 July 2005).

A falling out between Kibaki and prominent Luo politician Raila Odinga over constitutional reform shaped Kenyan politics following the 2002 elections, culminating in the 2005 referendum campaign. Opinion polling, now quite entrenched in the political media, featured prominently as the competing sides pressed their respective cases for and against the constitution to the voters. As in 2002, opinion polling showed a consistent pattern, with the Orange "No" campaign regularly leading in the polls. Opinion polls that emerged during the campaign faced criticism from both sides with each deriding the results as 'doctored' (*The Standard*, 23 October 2005). The Banana camp argued that its support was on the rise, citing gains in polling numbers while rejecting the actual results of the poll itself (*The Standard*, 22 October 2005). The Orange side claimed that their numbers were artificially deflated to hide the magnitude of its lead (*The Standard*, 22 October 2005).

These polls revealed how divided Kenya had become along regional and ethnic lines over the constitutional issue. The Banana campaign's strongest presence lay in the Kikuyu heartland of Central province and some areas of the Rift Valley, while the Orange campaign held sway in every other region, sometimes by a wide margin. The results also showed a pronounced urban-rural divide, with support for the "Yes/Banana" side coming overwhelming from the countryside and support for "Orange/No" dominant in the cities. While in the end, the gap was too vast to overcome, the campaign served as an important preface to the main event in the 2007 presidential elections.

Two opinion polls were conducted in October and November 2005 before the referendum, with the last one done just four days before. These predicted that the

draft constitution would win only 43 per cent support. Unsurprisingly, these poll results were dismissed by the proponents of the draft constitution. The final outcome of the actual referendum, however, proved the polling accurate, as 43 per cent voted in support of the proposed constitution with 57 per cent against. The opinion poll had predicted the official results from the Electoral Commission of Kenya precisely (Wolf and Ireri 2010).

2005 witnessed the further development and institutionalisation of public opinion polling into Kenyan electoral politics. From over 14173 newspaper articles published in Kenya between May 2005 and December 2005 there were 63 mentions of the term “opinion poll.” Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 4.45 mentions per thousand. That the prevalence did not recede in spite of the relative lack of competition in the referendum points to the growth of interest in polling. This further saturation was accompanied by a growing acceptance and understanding of the concept of public opinion research among the political elite. This trend cuts two ways in relation to the theories posited in this thesis. On the one hand, a better grasp of opinion polling by elites undercuts its ability to mobilise new opinion. Rather, polling merely surfaces political realities and, certainly in the case of Kenya, political battles that may have previously gone unseen by the general public. At the same time, the nature of polling allows political elites to quantify differences and to map support in a more systematic way, opening the door for a refinement of old strategies and the introduction of new ones.

3.2.2.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

Contrary to Moi’s capitulation in the face of popular opposition, however, the opinion polls in this instance stirred Kibaki and his supporters into action. Unfortunately, rather than pursuing open political competition, Kibaki harkened back to the days of authoritarian governance in his tactics. “President Kibaki seems to have adopted retired President Moi’s style in handling the political storm created by the referendum...With the referendum campaigns in top gear, and the Banana side trailing according to an opinion poll, the President has been smoked out of his privacy” (*The Standard*, 23 October 2005).

This coincided with government ministers publicly announcing that “the Government would use all its resources to carry the day” (*The Standard*, 23 September 2005). These assertions raised concerns that the government would not be beyond using illicit tactics to ensure that the constitution passed in November. These fears escalated as the polling day approached and discussions centred on the use of opinion polling data to target potential swing provinces. Both sides had commissioned independent polls to assess their regional support, with the Orange campaign fearing that this was a precursor to targeted rigging and intimidation (*The Standard*, 20 November 2005).

Ultimately, the Banana camp conceded defeat early, vowing reconciliation between the opposing camps following such a bruising campaign. It was a devastating defeat for Kibaki and his team, and one that would usually occasion a collapse of government or other such repercussions. The aftermath of the referendum defeat, however, proved deceptively peaceful. This, for some, “falsely created the impression that Kenya had a stable and democratic political culture” and “hardened feeling and greatly weakened the legitimacy of the Kibaki regime from 2006 onwards” (Kanyinga et al., 2010: 11-12).

The opposition, in particular, appear to have placed great credence on the data emerging from political polling. Branch and Cheeseman found that: “While politicians have been slower to embrace the potential of opinion polling than journalists, they are now beginning to do so, but rely principally on the misinformed findings reported in the media” (2005: 335). Indeed, the credibility gap in media reports on polling played a leading role in the leadership struggles that characterised Kenyan opposition politics through 2005-2007. On the one hand, there was Kalonzo Musyoka, Environment Minister in the government, who from early 2005 began to emerge as the popular choice among potential opposition candidates according to the polls (*The Standard*, 10 April 2005). On the other, there was Raila Odinga, widely regarded as the kingmaker of Kenyan politics, who had fallen back on the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) following his rupture with Kibaki over the constitutional process.

In polls, Odinga barely registered as a viable presidential candidate in his own right, but his refusal to back Musyoka, in spite of his high poll ratings, prevented Musyoka from becoming the consensus candidate for the LDP (*Daily Nation*, 19 June 2005).

Rumours began to abound that Odinga was no longer satisfied with the potential prime minister's post and was seeking to position himself for a presidential run (*The Standard*, 12 June 2005). Following the successful battle against the draft constitution, Odinga officially declared his candidacy, again in spite of opinion polls regularly listing Musyoka as the most popular politician (*Daily Nation*, 8 January 2006).

An analysis of the editorials of two key political commentators during this period reveals the extent to which political opinion polling was pervading political discourse, while not yet driving elite decision-making. At the time of Odinga's declared candidacy, the reaction appears ambivalent in the press. Popular perceptions deem Odinga to be unelectable, a notion supported by his low opinion ratings, and yet, pundits are less than convinced of Musyoka's ability to maintain his predominant position.

Table 3: Political Commentators in the Kenya Inter-Election Period

2005-2006 Campaign Coverage	Mutuma Mathiu, Daily Nation columnist	Macharia Gaitho, Daily Nation editor
January 2006, following December quarterly poll Kalonzo – 35% Kibaki – 26% Uhuru – 17%	"I don't know when it became a political truism that Mr Odinga couldn't win a straight presidential contest. But politicians and bar-room analysts have hitherto assumed that Mr Odinga's best route to power is through proxy. Mr Musyoka has been watching the opinion polls with rising confidence."	"For Mr Musyoka, there was the recent Steadman opinion poll where he was rated the most popular politician at present. The conventional wisdom is that the Steadman opinion poll flattered Mr Musyoka. The fact of the matter is that Mr Odinga must be acutely aware of the supreme importance Mr Musyoka attaches to his support."
July-August, following July quarterly poll Kibaki – 30% Kalonzo – 27% Raila – 14% Uhuru – 13% Ruto – 5%	"As usual, the political pieces are arranging themselves on the board in a most opportune and advantageous fashion for Mr Kibaki. And, perhaps for the first time in his presidency, he is looking good politically, a situation which is probably too good to last."	"It is becoming increasingly clear that there is an on-going evolution of the Kenyan political party scene. The formation of Narc Kenya, and now ODM Kenya, sees the emergence of two formidable political machines. All other parties might slowly become redundant."

<p>October 2006</p> <p>Kibaki – 41%</p> <p>Kalonzo – 20%</p> <p>Raila – 13%</p> <p>Uhuru – 5%</p> <p>Ruto – 3%</p>	<p>“As a united force, ODM has the potential to play a big role in politics, perhaps even win next year's election. As scattered bits and pieces, each representing a Bantustan, they are all finished.”</p>	<p>“If ODM sticks together, not all the candidates will be in the running, and there is a possibility that they will all throw their support behind one of their own. It could be assumed that once ODM settles on a single candidate and that vote rallies behind him, then the picture could dramatically change.”</p>
<p>December 2006</p> <p>Kibaki – 42%</p> <p>Kalonzo – 20%</p> <p>Raila – 14%</p> <p>Uhuru – 5%</p> <p>Ruto – 3%</p>	<p>“Today, Mr Odinga is leading a strong force to liberate us from Mr Kibaki. The force includes Mr Musyoka, Mr Kenyatta and Mr Ruto and has unsuccessfully tried to enlist Mr Moi's support in the process. Mr Moi, it would appear, may have chosen to stand with President Kibaki, the man who liberated us from him.”</p>	<p>“We enter the election year with a lot of political uncertainties. President Kibaki, it is clear, will be going for a second and final five-year term. But it is not clear even at this late stage on which ticket he will be standing. On the opposition side, ODM-Kenya, another loose coalition very much in the Narc mould, has positioned itself as the main challenger for the reins of power. It faces the task of choosing a flag bearer without the losers walking away in a huff along with their supporters to look for alternative tickets.”</p>

At least at this stage, political polling in Kenya is not seen as robust enough to prevent Odinga from declaring his candidacy in the face of consistently low polling data. Indeed, instead it points to a belief among the political elite that polls can be shifted, that the numbers of today need not be the numbers of tomorrow. Odinga, a prominent user and consumer of polls, clearly felt that the polls were not adequately capturing his inherent support or that through force of personality and perhaps a few favours, poll numbers could become more positive (Private interview, 26 April 2012). The strategic relevance of polling, then, remains notional and highly dependent on personalities and context.

In transitional democracies, opposition parties and movements face considerable obstacles in mobilising popular support against the ruling government. Beyond the disadvantage in resources and access, they also often face inertia in those who feel that whatever they do the government is likely to win in the end. Public opinion polling goes some way to overcoming this challenge, when it can provide potential opposition sympathisers with credible hope that their side is capable of victory. Odinga and his

side used their slow but inexorable rise in the polls to generate momentum that was ultimately sufficient to secure a rejection of the draft.

The success of opinion polling in so accurately predicting the outcome of the election convinced some that Kenya, its pollsters, and its media had “come of age.” This pronouncement overshadowed many obvious weaknesses both within the polling industry and those that disseminated and consumed the information (Private interview, 16 April 2012). 2005, though significant, proved something of a false dawn in the learning process of Kenya’s comprehension of political opinion polling.

3.2.2.4 Implications

Clearly, opinion polling features significantly in the 2005 referendum campaign and in shaping the electoral landscape for the upcoming 2007 elections. The politics of the referendum were played out in horse-race fashion across the front pages of the newspapers, enabling politicians to base their projections on publicly available information rather than conjecture. Again the outcome of the referendum can be said to provide support to two of this research’s hypothesis. The triumph of the Orange camp can be represented as a victory for collective action over the government, with polling playing a key role in aggregating disparate opinion and channelling it into the campaign.

By contrast, it could also be portrayed as illustrative of the role elite perceptions play in the elite electoral strategies. The government, perceiving themselves to be on the losing end of the referendum, folded their cards early in the hopes of living to fight another day. Rather than persisting with a campaign they knew they could not win, they regrouped and prepared themselves instead for the 2007 elections, a competition that was ultimately far more important for them to win.

The idea of perceptions remains important here because in spite of opinion polling’s growing profile in Kenyan politics the information it provided was always tinged with uncertainty. The proliferation of polling was not matched by a similar improvement in media coverage. Numbers were printed unfiltered, lumping together reputable polling

firms with dodgy organisations and transparent statistical techniques with shady survey methods. The overall effect was to undermine polling's strength as a purveyor of political information, a realisation that would not become truly apparent until 2007.

3.2.3 The 2007 Elections

As Kenya approached the 2007 general elections, it was increasingly clear that the many significant promises that were left unaddressed over the previous five years had exacerbated the existing political polarisation. The constitution review process had been frustrated largely by Kibaki and his party; the anti-corruption agenda was going nowhere; and ethnicity continued to drive political appointments in the public sector. The government's legitimacy having been weakened by the referendum result and its popularity declining in most of the country, Kibaki faced real uncertainty heading into the 2007 elections. This had important consequences, culminating eventually in the controversial general elections.

When 2007 began, Kenyan politics were so fluid as to be almost unfathomable. President Kibaki, still personally popular, was the consensus choice of a number of political parties which had thus far coalesced around the name NARC-Kenya. Meanwhile, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), although the most popular political party, had neither agreed its nominee nor the process by which it would select its candidate. It seemed everyone thought their candidate had a chance to win. One commentator noted: "The opinion polls have gone to some people's heads, so consensus will be difficult. It should also confound voters to thrust a candidate at them after all the excitement of the prospect of voting for their presidential choice" (*The Standard*, 3 February 2007).

ODM, united in their opposition to the constitution, proved unfit for purpose for the upcoming general election. Its component elements began to unravel with each side backing their preferred candidate (*Daily Nation*, 8 January 2006). Polling in March 2006 had Musyoka maintaining his position as most popular, marginally ahead of Kibaki, but with Odinga beginning to move up the ranks. By mid-2006, new alliances had begun to take shape. The LDP was asserting itself as the most popular party with 36 per cent

support at the expense of the ODM, with NARC, now no longer associated with Kibaki's candidacy for president, registering 24 per cent (*The Standard*, 22 July 2006). These results had the LDP pronouncing that it would contest the election independently and without partners, if no viable alliance could be made. This gave it a strong bargaining position from which to seek out allies across the political spectrum (*Daily Nation*, 4 August 2006).

These bargains ultimately resulted in the emergence of two new political entities, formed from the fragments of existing parties. The LDP, FORD-Kenya, and elements from within KANU united to reconstitute the Orange Democratic Movement under the name ODM-Kenya, while Kibaki and his supporters broke away from the existing NARC to form NARC-Kenya. By October 2006, polling showed these two entities to be engaged in two-horse race, notwithstanding confusion among the population over the 'fluidity' of the party offerings (*The Standard*, 13 October 2006).

3.2.3.1 Polling Dichotomising Perceptions

Yet, while opinion polling seemed unable to adequately reflect the intra-elite politics that were driving the candidacy squabbles among the opposition, political pundits still viewed polling data as a suitable source of information on which to base predictions for the forthcoming election. While confusion over who would represent ODM-Kenya still persisted, for the first time, the electoral landscape was reflecting the bi-partite division that would characterise the highly contested election of 2007. A Steadman poll in October 2006 saw Kibaki's ratings reach 41 per cent, his highest in years, but it also found that the combined numbers for the four presumptive ODM candidates, Kalonzo Musyoka (20), Raila Odinga (13), Uhuru Kenyatta (5), and William Ruto (3), also equated to 41 per cent as well. If the opposition stuck together, there was a chance for victory (*Daily Nation*, 16 October 2006).

The interpretation and dissemination of this still relatively new source of information became a permanent fixture in political punditry throughout the 2007 election campaign. Indeed, the process of institutionalising polling data into political discourse was already well underway. Even before the respective parties had selected their

candidates, political commentators were able to use polling data to make assessments and predictions as to the likely storylines and outcomes of the election. From over 16,400 newspaper articles published in Kenya between June 2007 and January 2008 there were 295 mentions of the term “opinion poll.” Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 17.92 mentions per thousand. This is a rapid explosion in frequency, propelled somewhat by the role polling was said to play in post-electoral violence, but given the time frame on study, this can only explain part of the meteoric rise in polling’s coverage in the media.

This has several implications for the political process. On one hand, it represents something of an institutional adaptation-in the sense that intra-party discussions and manoeuvring that would hitherto have taken place behind closed doors finds itself thrown open for public consumption. The actions of politicians can be seen to have consequences in the form of voter reactions, as captured through opinion surveys. Candidates can position themselves to be more in tune with voter aspirations to make themselves more electable in the future. At the same time, it places the nation in permanent campaign mode, with quarterly polls pitting prospective candidates against each other at a whim. Less well-known aspirants can be quashed by a run of poor polling data, while more powerful candidates can push through difficult times in the hopes of turning the polls around. An already fluid landscape has been made all the more uncertain and competitive by the addition of opinion polling.

Turning again to a content analysis of key political commentators, one can track the rapid changes that took place in Kenyan politics over the year preceding the December election. The first half of the year marked the ascendancy of Raila Odinga, emerging from “unelectable” kingmaker to candidate in his own right. At no point, however, does Kibaki appear to be in any danger of losing. The political class, based on the polls, continue to warn of the perils of opposition coalition, but the discord within the ODM is repeatedly deemed to be too entrenched to allow for a repeat of 2002.

Table 4: Political Commentators in the Kenya 2007 Election Campaign (1)

2007 Campaign Coverage	Gitau Warigi, Daily Nation columnist	Philip Ochieng, Daily Nation columnist	Macharia Gaitho, Daily Nation political editor
February 2007	<p>"I have been hearing the argument that the best way out of the ODM stalemate is to side-step the two principal combatants and settle for a less abrasive, compromise candidate.</p> <p>With the exception of one or two of the candidates who are capable of instructing their supporters who to vote for in case it is not them, the rest are unlikely to carry the same weight with their people if they lose the nomination contest."</p>	<p>"If, for instance, it had tackled the constitution with honesty, Narc might have remained united. There might have been no embarrassing referendum, no ODM-Kenya, no demand for 'minimum reforms' to ensure fairness in the next General Election.</p> <p>Raila Odinga's confederates would not now be having fun raising such issues as to whether or not Mr Kibaki swore to serve only one presidential term. Some claim that this is an inconsequential issue."</p>	<p>"This is the sobering message that the President has been receiving from some of his closest advisers. Part of the concern has been driven by a closer analysis of opinion polls.</p> <p>There has been a general feel-good factor in the Kibaki camp that he continues to enjoy favourable ratings over all his rivals. There has also been the sobering realisation that...if the ODM-K contenders come together and settle on a single candidate, the race will be too close to call."</p>
<p>April 2007</p> <p>Kibaki – 44% Kalonzo – 15% Raila – 18% Uhuru – 4% Ruto – 3%</p>		<p>"In a society where real issues matter so little, figures such as Steadman tosses around can powerfully sway the mass as to whom to vote for. That is why those alleged to score low marks can - rightly or wrongly - accuse the pollster of cooking up the figures in somebody else's interest."</p>	<p>"With the latest figures from Steadman Group, President Kibaki must be purring like a Cheshire cat. Mr Kalonzo Musyoka must be wondering when he fell off the catwalk.</p> <p>Mr Raila Odinga is accusing the pollster of denying him a tie for top place with President Kibaki. If he was running closer to the number one spot, he would have no problem at all with Steadman."</p>
<p>June 2007</p> <p>Kibaki – 45% Kalonzo – 14% Raila – 28%</p>	<p>1 July: "Mr William Ruto added a new dimension to the saga when he disclosed the existence of a new ODM report</p>		<p>19 June: "When the leader of the Official Parliamentary Opposition defied Mr Moi and agreed to take</p>

2007 Campaign Coverage	Gitau Warigi, Daily Nation columnist	Philip Ochieng, Daily Nation columnist	Macharia Gaitho, Daily Nation political editor
Uhuru – 4% Ruto – 3%	citing Mr Odinga, Mr Kalonzo Musyoka and Mr Ruto, as the only hopefuls capable of beating President Kibaki in the General Election if the entire Orange group united behind either.”		Kanu to ODM, he seemed to have hit on a winning strategy. ODM at the time looked like a sure bet to send President Kibaki packing, and it seemed like good strategy to go with the winning horse.”
July 2007 Kibaki – 45% Kalonzo – 11% Raila – 25% Uhuru – 2% Ruto – 2%	22 July: “Analysts view the [ODM nomination] contest as being between Mr Odinga, Mr Mudavadi and Mr Musyoka. But with an opinion polls rating Mr Mudavadi at only three per cent, the battle increasingly is narrowing down to Mr Odinga and Mr Musyoka.”	31 July: “It seems like a large number of Kenyans are inclined towards President Kibaki having his second term. This is due to the muddle in ODM-Kenya, and also because over the last four years, the President's cool demeanour has made him a darling of many people.	17 July: “All the polls so far show that the two [Ruto and Mudavadi] are relative minnows. ODM can take the Steadman polls or commission its own and use those numbers to weight the candidates. The fact of the matter is that the contest for the ODM presidential nomination is a two-horse race between Mr Raila Odinga and Mr Kalonzo Musyoka, with the former pulling away and the latter going backwards.”

Tom Wolf, a leading pollster in Kenya, has argued that “lack of familiarity that most public figures and their aides have with survey techniques encouraged inconsistency in the assessment of particular poll results, depending upon whether they produced joy or gloom. So, too, did the uneven capacity of media practitioners in reporting and interpreting them” (2009: 283). Without a monitoring mechanism to oversee polling practices, unfounded suspicions could easily fester. “The fact that only a handful of firms were engaged in such work meant a lower risk to professional reputation if any one of them produced results at great variance with those of the others, whatever the cause of such deviation” (*ibid*).

The political in-fighting was beginning to make an impact on the campaign. By April, Kibaki had consolidated his lead with 51 per cent support, with other candidates trailing far behind. For the first time, however, Odinga overtook Musyoka as the preferred opposition candidate (*The Standard*, 1 April 2007). While he only claimed 17 per cent of the responses, this symbolic victory over his fellow prospective nominees proved decisive. Odinga's strategy noticeably shifted, as he began to campaign as if he had already won the ODM nomination, regularly painting the election as a two-horse race between him and Kibaki (*Daily Nation*, 3 April 2007).

Odinga's newfound position as frontrunner became the dominant theme of the ODM nomination process. By July, reports of a deal struck among the candidates to clinch the nomination for Odinga began to make the rounds: "Mr Musyoka [was asked] to drop his bid in support of Mr. Odinga because opinion polls had shown that the Lang'ata MP was the frontrunner and for the sake of ODM-K unity" (*Daily Nation*, 22 July 2007). Musyoka, having been dismissed as frontrunner in spite of his earlier high poll ratings, refused and broke with the party. By a quirk of logistics, Odinga and his supporters managed to secure the name Orange Democratic Movement, which had been hitherto unavailable, allowing Musyoka and his group to remain as ODM-Kenya. On September 1, Odinga was officially nominated as the candidate for ODM; while Musyoka carried the banner for ODM-K.

While Odinga was claiming his place at the top of the opposition pyramid, successive months at the bottom of the opinion polling league table had taken their toll on Uhuru Kenyatta. As noted in the analysis above, his position among the opposition politicians had fallen to its nadir, and following months of the opposition candidates trailing Kibaki in the polls, it seemed a good time to jump ship to the "winning side." When Kibaki launched his new re-election party—the Party of National Unity (PNU)—a few months to the elections, it came as a shock to the country that the Official Leader of the Opposition, KANU's Uhuru Kenyatta, announced that he would be supporting Kibaki's re-election whom he had run against in 2002 (*The Standard*, 14 September 2007). Besides its unprecedented nature in normal democracies, for an official opposition leader to support the incumbent in an electoral contest, this move fitted

into the ethnicisation narrative of Kenya's politics. Given that Kibaki and Uhuru are both from the Kikuyu community, and that the rest of the country had voted for each of them in 2002 when they were in different parties, Uhuru's move could only be seen as an ethnic solidarity move (*New Vision*, 19 September 2007). To the rest of the country, it was the ultimate 'confirmation' that some Kikuyu elite were plotting to capture and monopolise power to the exclusion of other ethnic groups and that to them, the niceties of political party democracy did not matter much (Private interview, 27 April 2012).

The theories of opinion polling's potential for influencing elite strategies and behaviour emphasise two key areas where polls can shift the calculus. The first is the introduction of 'new' information into controlled contexts, giving populations information they did not know existed, as in 2002. The other is to open up known political processes to greater scrutiny, elucidating that of which had hitherto been only whispered. The experience of 2007 certainly supports the ability of polling to do the latter, with its publicisation of the internal struggles within parties and coalitions and its 'democratisation' of the process of candidate selection through the court of public opinion.

A darker side to the politics of opinion polling also began to emerge, however, building upon the trend observed in the 2005 referendum. As well as setting the nation in an almost permanent state of political campaigning, the consolidation of opinion polling as a principal source of political information also brought with a hardening of popular preference and of popular expectation. The consistent focus on hard numbers within an incredibly fluid political context lent a false sense of certainty to very inconstant preferences. Elites began picking up on these perceptions and turning away from strategies that emphasise responsiveness to win new voters and moved toward more clientelistic strategies that could effectively guarantee the turnout of their core constituencies. This trend would have negative repercussions in terms of strategic decision-making and post-election reactions.

3.2.3.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

The closeness of 2007 presidential election campaign contributed significantly to the tensions that surrounded the race. This competition gave increasing impetus to opinion polling. The industry had developed quickly since the last election, and the perceived animosity between the Kibaki and Odinga camps fuelled public interest and speculation in opinion polls, driving them to the forefront of media coverage. “These polls, conducted by companies including the Steadman Group, Infotrak Harris, Consumer Insight, and Strategic Research, were painstakingly pored over by voter and aspiring politicians alike” (Cheeseman, 2008: 168).

During the campaign, a clear pattern emerged in the opinion polls, with Kibaki jumping out to an early lead between October 2006 and August 2007 before Odinga took over the leadership of ODM. Musyoka, who had been the leading opposition to Kibaki in the early stages, changed his mind on the validity of opinion polling when Odinga took his place behind Kibaki in April. Odinga then opened a wider lead in September and October 2007 before settling into the slim lead he held almost to the election. An incumbent was trailing in the opinion polls for the first time in Kenya’s history (Oucho, 2010).

Table 5: Polling Predictions versus Actual Results in the Kenya 2007 Election

	Share of Votes in Presidential Election (%)		
	Kibaki (PNU)	Odinga (ODM)	Musyoka (ODM-K)
Actual results	45.97	43.65	8.82
Steadman 18 December 2007	43	45	10
Strategic Research 12 December 2007	36	46	17
Steadman 23 November 2007	43.3	43.6	11.4
Strategic Research 23 November 2007	38.6	45.2	14
Consumer Insight 21 November 2007	41.4	40.7	14.7
Steadman 23 October 2007	39	50	8
Infotrak 21 October 2007	31	52.2	14

Strategic Research 20 October 2007	35	51	14
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The opinion polls themselves became a key locus of candidate political activity. Kenyan politicians refused to allow polls to go unanswered in the media, lest their opponents get a jump on them by using the polls to garner positive coverage or to generate momentum for their campaigns. “Despite bullish public pronouncements, the campaign teams on both sides appreciated how tight the race was: increasing turnout by one per cent might have been enough to secure victory” (Cheeseman, 2008: 169).

The process leading to the December 2007 general elections was generally peaceful. The parties campaigned across the country. A distinguishing feature of the campaign was the key messages. ODM had a mobilising slogan for each region, an approach that reflected the party’s policy on regionalism and development. On the other hand, PNU campaigned on the government’s success in reviving the economy and numerous infrastructural development projects underway across the country. But these issues appeared non-divisive. The campaign was generally peaceful. There were no major incidents of violence. Notable, however, is that both parties did not successfully campaign in each other’s strongholds. PNU did not get a foothold in Luo Nyanza and had difficulties launching campaigns in the Rift Valley Province. On the other hand, ODM had difficulties penetrating Central Province and the Mt Kenya region in general.

Early figures from the Electoral Commission estimated that 60 per cent of the prospective electorate would hail from just three of the provinces: Rift Valley, Eastern, and Central. At the time, January 2007, ODM-K was polling as the most popular party in all but Central province, a Kibaki stronghold (*Daily Nation*, 18 January 2007). By December, the political calculus had shifted substantially as a result of newly registered voters and the regional affiliations of the presidential candidates. With the provinces of Central, Nyanza, and Eastern securely in the bag for Kibaki, Odinga, and Musyoka respectively, four provinces, with seven million voters between them, had become the deciding factor for all three principal parties. “All three candidates have been targeting Rift Valley, which has 3.3 million voters, Western with 1.5 million, Coast

with 1.1 million, and Nairobi's 1.2 million...The three candidates have not made any significant trips to their strongholds" (*Daily Nation*, 8 December 2007).

The twists and turns of the final months of the electoral campaign are particularly evident in the writings of three key political commentators. Raila Odinga's steady rise in the polls over the summer months, as his campaign, accelerated prompt many to question whether Kibaki has the necessary mettle for a political fight with the charismatic leader. After months of to-ing and fro-ing over who will represent which party, the autumn sees the opinion polls narrowing the field down from five candidates to two with a serious chance to win. Significantly, even those among the political media who questioned the legitimacy of polls (Ochieng) cannot deny that the polls are correctly capturing the "vicissitudes" of Kenyan politics, as Raila surges into the lead.

Table 6: Political Commentators in the Kenya 2007 Election Campaign (2)

2007 Campaign Coverage	Gitau Warigi, Daily Nation columnist	Philip Ochieng, Daily Nation columnist	Macharia Gaitho, Daily Nation political editor
August 2007 Kibaki – 47% Kalonzo– 13% Raila – 36% Uhuru – 1%	26 August: "President Kibaki, in an eerie echo of the 2005 referendum campaign, has so far left everything to retainers who are doing their own thing. And whereas ODM is working hard to be a tight-knit machine as it gears for its September 1 convention, the pro-Kibaki parties are still far from full throttle."		4 August 2007: "There will be president Kibaki defending his seat on whatever ticket his grouping settles on after failing to wrestle Narc from Mrs Ngilu. Then there will be Mr Odinga at the head of a reconstituted opposition alliance, with Mrs Ngilu by his side as well as Mr Ruto and Mr Mudavadi."
September 2007 Kibaki – 38% Kalonzo– 8% Raila – 47%	30 September: "Many political operatives are sharply critical of Kibaki Tena, whose activities seem confined to the boardroom rather than the grassroots. The recriminations were		3 September: "Even though President Kibaki has handsomely led the recent opinion polls, his ratings were roughly equal to the total combined ratings of the ODM candidates. Those

2007 Campaign Coverage	Gitau Warigi, Daily Nation columnist	Philip Ochieng, Daily Nation columnist	Macharia Gaitho, Daily Nation political editor
	bound to intensify with the latest Steadman poll showing Kibaki trailing Mr Raila Odinga by almost 10 percentage points."		are the votes, with the exception of what Mr Musyoka took away, that could now have Mr Odinga neck- and-neck with President Kibaki."
October 2007 Kibaki – 37% Kalonzo– 8% Raila – 53%	14 October: "In the heightened political campaigns, President Kibaki has campaigned intensively in the Rift Valley province, thrice in as many weeks, a twin pointer to the new style of vote-hunting that he has adopted, and the importance his campaign strategy places on that region's votes. With Western Province and the lion's share of Nyanza looking virtually lost to ODM, it is increasingly becoming apparent that President Kibaki's most crucial stand is going to be in the Rift Valley."	21 October: "Just a few weeks to the General Election, nothing can be more 'newsworthy' than Steadman's polling figures. A commercial newspaper ignores these figures only at its own peril. Yet, if you gave any analytical thought to Steadman's present statistics, Mr Odinga's lead might not surprise you...two months ago, Mr Odinga became the sole ODM presidential banner-carrier, in the same process, bagging all the popularity votes that once belonged severally to [his competitors]."	9 October: "I spent the weekend in President Kibaki's backyard. And what I found was completely different from the confident swagger in everyone just a month ago when the issue of a second term was raised. The confidence is gone. The realisation that President Kibaki can actually lose to Mr Raila Odinga is hitting home. Many people are coming to think the unthinkable; that the President can actually be voted out of office. Right now, it looks like the election is Mr Odinga's to lose. He is ahead in every opinion poll and would seem to be gaining ground with every passing day."

Party activists on both sides needed their strongholds to turn out in big numbers to ensure victory. "This involved forming local 'cells', each given responsibility for a small number of polling stations. Party agents took a systematic approach to identifying and targeting marginal, undecided, and infirm voters to make sure that they made it to the polling stations. Voter mobilisation was also sometimes coercive. In Central Province and Nyanza voters were informed that they would be denied access to shops and transport if they could not show their 'inky finger' as proof that they had voted"

(Cheeseman, 2008: 169). Candidates backed up these moves at consolidation by spending their final weeks of the campaign trail for ‘mop-up’ exercises, visiting solid constituencies in effort to ensure that people did not fall complacent and fail to vote. As Odinga declared, “We are entering the climax of the campaigns and we are leaving no margin for error. We see victory in sight but you must come out with your vote” (*The Standard*, 19 December 2007).

This emphasis on base turnout becomes a permanent feature of Kenyan electoral politics and greatly undermines opinion polling’s ability to contribute to more responsive campaign strategies. Far from democratising, polling almost becomes an instrument of coercion, used in tandem with electoral base-maximising strategies to elicit the largest turnout for a particular candidate. Indeed, in the absence of significant ideological differences between the candidates, this is the default electoral strategy and one for which opinion polling can be especially useful.

The evidence from the December articles, written in the aftermath of the election, is clear. The polls, while narrowing into the final days, have convinced the best part of the Kenyan media that Odinga and ODM are headed for an easy victory. ODM and its supporters were equally convinced. While Kibaki and his backers would have held out hope for victory, it is sufficiently clear that his team were preparing themselves for defeat in the weeks leading up to the election. That opinion polling, still only a nascent industry within the country could exert such power upon the political elite, political and media alike speaks significantly to the process of institutionalisation that had occurred in Kenya from 2002 to 2007.

Table 7: Political Commentators in the Kenya 2007 Election Campaign (3)

2007 Campaign Coverage	Gitau Warigi, Daily Nation columnist	Macharia Gaitho, Daily Nation political editor
December 2007 Kibaki – 43% Kalonzo– 10%	30 December: “One thing was clear all along: ODM was headed for a massive sweep of parliamentary seats, perhaps even more than Narc did in 2002. The party might	30 December: “On Friday, a day after the elections, the Odinga camp was upbeat and ready to declare victory, even asking President Kibaki to concede defeat and start making

2007 Campaign Coverage	Gitau Warigi, Daily Nation columnist	Macharia Gaitho, Daily Nation political editor
Raila – 45%	also win the Presidency. ODM will almost rival KANU in the latter's heyday in terms of strength. I have a feeling all those giants who were felled are privately very resentful of President Kibaki and his inarticulate conduct of politics.”	arrangements for a handover. By contrast, President Kibaki's troops seemed to have surrendered and accepted the inevitability of defeat. By late on Friday night, however, the tide had started changing. As presidential results from pro-Kibaki regions started coming in, the gap started closing swiftly, and a shocked opposition began to realise that preparations for a triumphant entry into State House might have to be put on hold.”

That opinion polling as a process had established itself within Kenyan politics in clear, but the outcomes of that institutionalisation are less so. Throughout the campaign period, the above discussion has demonstrated points at which political elites have altered course or been otherwise influenced by the emergence of opinion polling data. There are also clear examples, Odinga's candidacy for instance, where the political elite have been able to work against the grain of popular opinion with a mind toward influencing it in their favour (Private interview, 17 May 2013). This argues strongly for the addition of perceptions into any analysis of opinion polling in the context of sub-Saharan African politics. Polls in these contexts are not an exact science and the nature of politics in Kenya makes articulating definitive statements as to the competitive landscape nigh on impossible.

Indeed this idea of perceptions guiding strategic action comes to the fore in the light of the post-election violence which swept Kenya. On the face of it, opinion polling should provide sufficient evidence to create credible expectations that avoid the spontaneous violence associated with accusations of fraud, rigging, and other election manipulation. In the case of Kenya in 2007, however, the opposite appears to be true. Odinga and the ODM had held such a commanding lead for the several months leading up to the

elections that popular opinion and, as shown above, even received wisdom among political pundits was that they were coasting to an easy victory.

What these collective perceptions did not pick up was the narrowing of that lead that occurred in the weeks immediately preceding the election, which to the minds of statistical pollsters indicated more or less a dead heat. Having built themselves up for victory, the suddenness of their defeat was too difficult to swallow, and violence, so often associated with Kenyan elections in the past, became the only recourse for that frustration and anger. This prolonged, sectarian violence became the defining feature of the 2007 election.

On 17 April 2008, the international community witnessed the swearing in of a new Kenyan cabinet and Prime Minister, as part of a negotiated power-sharing agreement between the incumbent President Kibaki and his principal opposition Raila Odinga. It was an 'elite bargain' which brought a close to almost four months of devastating violence that had racked Kenya since the disputed presidential elections held at the end of December. In a few short months, Kenya's democratic credentials had sustained a severe blow and destabilised an entire region, including countries once thought to be relatively secure. Amid the accusations and recriminations that followed the events of early 2008, opinion polling emerged as a frequent scapegoat for those seeking catalysts for the violence.

In spite of the disputed presidential vote count, the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) announced the incumbent, President Mwai Kibaki of PNU, as the winner (Kanyinga, 2009). Raila Odinga's immediate reaction was to reject the election results. He accused the ruling party of fraud and called for a vote recount. Odinga also rejected advice by the incumbent and countries like the U.S. that "those alleging vote tampering may pursue legal remedies" (*The Standard*, 30 December 2007). He maintained that the election dispute was not a legal matter but a political conflict that required a political solution.

Odinga's ODM declared that it would not go to court over the results because it had no confidence in Kenya's judicial system, an institution that had failed to resolve past

political disputes and was said to be controlled by Kibaki loyalists (Harneit- Sievers and Peters 2008). After Mwai Kibaki was hurriedly sworn in, the ODM called on its supporters to hold protest rallies as a way of forcing Kibaki to concede defeat and accept that the election was rigged in his favour. While the rallies were meant to be peaceful, violence erupted in at least five of the country's eight provinces.

The uprising morphed into an ethnic conflict in a period of about two days. Over 500,000 Kikuyu were displaced from their homes in Rift Valley, Western and Nyanza provinces. Displacement of thousands of other ethnic groups in Kikuyu dominated areas also followed as the conflict escalated. By the end of it, no less than 350,000 Kenyans had been internally displaced and over 1,100 had died (ICG, 2008).

Many prominent polls having declared Odinga the likely winner, coupled with an extremely close official result was deemed sufficient evidence for the opposition to reject Kibaki's election on the grounds of fraud. "Significantly, while polls conducted by Steadman and Consumer Insight matched many observers' assessment that the election was too close to call, polls by Strategic Research and Infotrak Harris using smaller and more tightly clustered samples consistently gave Odinga a sizeable majority. These misleading polls contributed to the disappointment and outrage in pro-Odinga areas at the declaration of a Kibaki victory" (Cheeseman, 2008: 169).

For instance, in the *Saturday Standard* (October 13, 2007:2) it was reported of the Steadman opinion poll, "on the negative score, 68 per cent of voters in Central province would never vote for Raila, while only 43 per cent of voters in Nyanza would not vote for Kibaki." Given that it was widely known that Central Province was the Kikuyu home base and Nyanza the Luo's, the reporting of such numbers served only to fuel existing rivalries that were better left alone. Indeed, it is not surprising that the two communities would ultimately target each other in the ensuing post-election violence.

Moreover, the last Steadman poll before the election gave a provincial breakdown of how voters might vote (see below). The poll demonstrated the relative strength each candidate had in his respective home constituencies with Kibaki predicted to receive

91 per cent of the vote in Central and Odinga 83 per cent in Nyanza. It also points to some obvious anomalies which fall outside of usual margins of error.

Table 8: Polling Predictions versus Actual Results in Kenya 2007 Election

	Steadman Predictions		Actual Results	
	Kibaki (PNU)	Odinga (ODM)	Kibaki (PNU)	Odinga (ODM)
Nairobi	40	47	47.4	43.6
Coast	31	57	32.8	58.8
North eastern	42	48	50.4	47.4
Eastern	48	7	52.2	5.2
Central	90	8	96.4	1.8
Rift Valley	37	61	35.7	61.7
Western	26	68	32.5	66.6
Nyanza	15	83	16.8	81.7

While Odinga's numbers, in most provinces, are in line with or slightly down on the Steadman estimations, Kibaki's numbers are almost uniformly higher, and in some cases significantly higher. Kibaki polls 7 points higher in the important battleground of Nairobi, as well as eight and six points higher in Northeastern and Western provinces respectively. It is these salient differences which raise the spectre of rigging and electoral malfeasance (Long, 2010). Without the polls, many have argued, there would have been no expectation of victory from the opposition, and they would have accepted their defeat more willingly.

The availability of public opinion data in this instance clearly contributed to the outbreaks of violence that followed the election result. This finding adds further credence to the hypothesis that opinion polling influences elite strategies and the quality of elections through elite perceptions of political competition. Perceptions of a Raila victory stolen by Kibaki supporters within the electoral institutions precipitated elite strategies that emphasised violence over judicial arbitration. But this outcome was not based entirely on these perceptions, rather the uncertain but hyper-

competitive atmosphere, fed by opinion polls, throughout the campaign, intersected with underlying ethnic orientation of Kenyan politics to create perceptions that precluded transparent and representative elections from occurring. Having election results which do not match the preceding polls does not necessitate outbreaks of violence it merely provides the evidence for doubt. It is up to the elites to decide how they act upon it. In 2007, Kenyan elites were influenced by their perceptions of the competitive environment to adopt negative tactics which undermined the quality of the election.

3.2.3.4 Implications for Research

Having grown in prominence over the inter-election period, opinion polls became inescapable in the 2007 campaign season. Their influence became too pervasive, with every poll released receiving widespread, if almost universally shallow, attention and analysis. The result was a political discourse saturated in numbers, which could vary substantially at times and which put into stark relief the inherent divisions within Kenyan society. The persistent reiteration of these ethno-regional fissures heightened the atmosphere of the election and exacerbated the 'winner-take-all' mentality that already pervaded Kenyan presidential politics. Strategically, the inevitability and rigidity of quantitative polling almost certainly contributed to over-confidence in the Odinga camp, which in turn influenced the expectations of their supporters.

The strength of conviction of these supporters was such, buttressed by the consistent leads in the public polls, that it is little surprise that the expectations of Odinga's supporters were artificially high. That they went unmet created a highly charged post-election environment which needed only the slightest of provocation to ignite (Private interview, 16 April 2012). Here the influence of perceptions rather than collective action or institutional mechanisms is readily apparent. The polls were not systematically manipulated to create a situation of chaos. Rather a relatively undeveloped, yet hyper-competitive, political system had not yet achieved the necessary understanding of polling to accommodate the rapid influx of public opinion data. Elite perceptions of increasing competition led to the adoption, not of more

transparent and representative strategies, but rather of strategies that focused on ethnic mobilisation and clientelistic relationships.

3.2.4 The 2010 Referendum

The failure of the 2005 referendum meant that the constitutional question remained unresolved through the 2007 election, contributing in no small part to the intensity of the contest that ultimately broke out into open conflict. Among the points of agreement in the unity government was to provide the country with a new constitution before the next general elections in 2012. This process culminated in a referendum in 2010, where voters overwhelmingly accepted a new draft which, contrary to initial predictions, maintained a strong executive president, eschewing the idea of balancing power between a president and prime minister. Opinion polling was conducted throughout the process, raising the question: what influence did it have on the constitution that was eventually promulgated?

Violence was eventually subdued, and the Kenya National Accord and Reconciliation Agreement was signed on 28 February 2008. It led to the issuing and passage into law of the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008. The Accord has reconfigured the Kenyan political landscape with the establishment of a Grand Coalition Government. The government was to be led by two principals: the President Mwai Kibaki leading the PNU and the Prime Minister Raila Odinga leader of the ODM. Among its first mandates was to institute a process for revising the constitution.

The existing constitution concentrated power disproportionately in the executive branch of government, creating what has been called an 'imperial presidency' (ISS Africa, 2010). Weaknesses in other institutions, such as parliament and the judiciary, meant that Kenya's could operate unchecked, often resulting in the marginalisation of certain ethnic groups and regions. As the culture of impunity strengthened, prospects for accountability both between state institutions and between the state and its citizens worsened. Undoubtedly, this context contributed to the violence that marred the 2007 elections. Amongst the objectives of the review of the former Constitution

was to move toward a freer and more democratic system of government that would guarantee good governance, the rule of law, and human rights.

Once announced, those supporting the draft constitution, labelling themselves ‘the greens,’ and those opposed to it, labelling themselves ‘the reds,’ initiated national campaigns to win voters over to their sides. The leaders of the two parties in the coalition, Kibaki and Odinga, represented the ‘Yes’ campaign, while William Ruto, a cabinet minister, became the leader of the ‘No’ campaign. As the referendum drew near, many feared that the violence that followed the 2007 elections would recur. In June, a bomb exploded at an opposition rally, sparking a stampede that left six dead and many more wounded (*Daily Nation*, 13 June 2010). The ethnic divisions between the competing sides did not go un-noticed, inciting hate-speech and threats.

Early in the campaign, leaflets began appearing in certain areas that warned ‘outsiders’ to leave the area before the referendum. “In Tenderet, in the southern Rift Valley, leaflets dated July 5th warned the communities to prepare for war should the ‘Yes’ team win. Local vigilante groups, ‘Home Boys’, some of who were believed to have carried out the atrocities in the post-election violence in Nandi East and Tenderet, were thought to be operating again” (Veritas, 2010: 1). In response, three MPs, accused of encouraging hate speech and violence in their constituencies, were arrested. One of them, reportedly a government minister, was alleged to have told a rally of predominantly Kikuyu participants that they ‘should prepare to leave Rift Valley en masse’ if the constitution was passed (ISS Africa, 2010). The rhetoric echoed that of the leaders during the worst of the post-election violence in 2008, and it heightened tensions in an already apprehensive atmosphere.

3.2.4.1 Polling Reinforcing Perceptions

All the polls pointed to a widespread victory for the “Yes” camp, with only the Rift Valley and Eastern provinces siding with the “No” side (*Daily Nation*, 4 June 2010). Nevertheless, some prominent personalities in the ‘Yes’ campaign expected to lose their parliamentary seats if the constitution were approved in the referendum. “They therefore showed ambivalence about supporting the Draft Constitution, earning

themselves in the process the nickname, ‘watermelons’ – green on the outside and red on the inside” (ISS Africa, 2010: 4).

Newspaper reports confirmed that both ODM and PNU were conducting opinion polls in their strongholds to gauge popular sentiments on the draft constitution, with one leader acknowledging that “the polls influenced the way the team conducted campaigns...[we] had to change tact in Central and Eastern Provinces after initial results showed lukewarm support for the document. We turned to leaders at the grassroots after discovering we could not fully rely on politicians alone in the two provinces” (*Daily Nation*, 8 August 2010).

As the stumbling block in the previous referendum had been the concentration of powers within the executive branch of government, it was assumed by most observers that a similar obstacle would present itself during this phase. This was made all the more likely by the fact that Odinga was now occupying the position of prime minister which stood to gain significantly in power should a new, power-balancing, constitution be ratified. Indeed, the panel of experts came back with a draft that did just that, stripping the presidency of some of its duties and enshrining them in the office of the prime minister. It did so in the face of strong public sentiment against such an arrangement. The unity government’s ‘division of labour’ had proved frustratingly slow and cumbersome for most Kenyans, who instead expressed a preference for a return to a strong executive (Private interview, 21 April 2012). This preference captured frequently by polls conducted at the time has led some to postulate that this influenced the constitutional committee to change the draft before the final stage to reinstate the executive presidency.

While this is possible in theory, interviews with those familiar with the process suggest that in actuality, the change was due to shifts in the power dynamics within the elite. Odinga now felt he had a realistic shot at the presidency and his cohort felt it should have an opportunity to exercise the same powers Kibaki currently held. Likewise, Uhuru and his allies also had their eyes set firmly on the ultimate prize of the presidency. Sharing power just wasn’t very appealing in the final calculation.

3.2.4.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

Where opinion polling did play a key role was in shaping elite reactions to the final draft of the constitution. Among its provisions, the document included some fairly significant land reform and land redistribution clauses that did not play well with the well-moneyed elites of Central province. Uhuru Kenyatta and Kibaki were initially considered to be against the constitution on those grounds. Odinga and his allies taking a firm stance on the 'Yes side', however, changed the equation. Opinion polls, which had been relatively inconclusive early on, began to move noticeably and inexorably toward the Yes vote (Private interview, 21 May 2013).

With the wounds of 2007 still very recent, for Kenyatta and Kibaki to openly campaign for the No side would be political suicide. Their advisors took the opinion polls at face value and urged them to join the 'Yes side' to ensure that Odinga would not hold the upper hand in 2012, having defeated them again in a constitutional referendum. Having pushed through a document that restored the presidential prize, it was critical that Uhuru and his allies still have a hand to play when the general election rolled around. As a result, Uhuru and Kibaki joined the Yes bandwagon and the constitution swept to victory by a significant margin (Private interview, 27 April 2012).

Again, polling proves a powerful weapon in shaping elite strategies. This case supports a kind of 'bandwagon' effect but not among the ordinary voter but among the political elite, who don't wish to see themselves on the wrong side of the vote. While such an effect could prove detrimental to a system in the long-term where politicians constantly switching sides may undermine party ideologies and platforms. In the context of Kenya where personality politics still predominates, this constraining of elite choice is likely to improve the quality of elections, with representatives forced to align themselves more closely to their constituencies than their own preferences (Private interview, 25 April 2012). Indeed, the lead for the "Yes" camp was so consistent and so significant that it appears that, like 2002, polling was capable of calming fears of election tampering or widespread violence and intimidation.

Table 9: Polling Predictions versus Actual Results in Kenya 2010 Referendum

Poll	Yes	No
Steadman/Synovate April 24, 2010	64	17
Infotrak May 29, 2010	63	21
Steadman/Synovate June 4, 2010	57	19
Steadman/Synovate July 23, 2010	58	17
Final result	68.55	31.45

The success of polling correctly predicting the outcome of the referendum restored public confidence in polling, leading one reporter to declare: “The correct prediction of the outcome of the referendum on draft constitution shows that opinion polling in Kenya has come of age” (*Daily Nation*, 8 August 2010). Another, writing months later, summed up the current thinking on opinion polling well: “Remember, politicians have concocted opinion polls previously with a view to swaying the public which means they believe in the power of opinion polling. The problem is they would want polls that tell them what they want to hear. Unfortunately for the politicians, opinion polling by the above pollsters is professional and has come of age” (*Daily Nation*, 2 October 2010).

Lacking, as it did, the competitive edge of a presidential election the 2010 referendum provided a relatively safe opportunity for polling to earn back some credibility and some stature after the recriminations that followed the 2007 election aftermath. Polling remained as popular as ever among the media houses, focusing again on the horse race aspect of the referendum campaign. From over 10,800 newspaper articles published in Kenya between February 2010 and September 2010 there were 104 mentions of the term “opinion poll.” Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 9.57 mentions per thousand, down from the previous election but still a significant number.

What is particular noteworthy for the purposes of this thesis's hypotheses is the manner in which prominent politicians adapted their positions on the basis of public opinion polls. The campaign saw evidence of Kenyan politicians responding to popular preferences rather than seeking to drive public opinion toward their own point of view. Again with an eye toward the larger prize of the upcoming presidential campaign, the political elite perceived a greater advantage in adopting more responsive strategies than in attempting to restrict or manipulate public opinion. Given the reduced competition, this is consistent with the model that predicts opinion polling contributing to more transparent and representative electoral processes under conditions of less perceived competition.

3.3 Conclusions

This review has revealed an industry that reflects rather than transforms the nature of the political system in which it exists. Its potential for elucidating what is often a tremendously convoluted context is for the most part undermined by the sharp divisions within the Kenyan political elite. While Kenya does possess a number of independent, professional polling companies, the spectre of ethnic bias looms over all data that is presented. The media, while consistently craving the numbers that opinion polling generates, has done little to equip itself with the necessary capacity to interpret and analyse those numbers objectively. However critical politicians or analysts may be of the data that emerges, they are still obliged to react to it, due to the sheer force of popularity these numbers carry among voters. Opinion data is political information of high priority that, whether good or bad, must be interpreted and strategised around. For the Kenyan political elite, opinion polling has become equal parts indispensable and incensing. It is a balancing act that neither the politicians, the media, nor the pollsters have fully mastered.

Opinion polls as a source of political information have clearly exploded over the course of the past three elections in Kenya. This can be traced using the content analysis presented above, capturing the number of mentions opinion polls received in major newspapers in the country. But for all its pervasiveness, it remains a largely

misunderstood science. Even two decades into the country's experience with opinion polling, it is viewed as a mysterious art tinged with ethnic and political biases. Always mediated through a filter of hyper-competitive, ethnically-centred elite perceptions, public opinion polling's ability to catalyse improvements in electoral quality will always be limited.

Polling's influence on strategy and expectations is likewise constrained by the character of the political system. There is first-hand evidence that political parties value polls for their campaign strategies, but the focus is not on attuning party platforms to public preferences but rather on the usefulness of polls as a means of identifying target areas for 'get out the vote' campaigns. In this, Kenyan politicians are not substantially different from their Western counterparts, but the consequent hardening of ethnic cleavages as a result of these targeted forays further exacerbates electoral tensions.

Indeed, in a political system in which parties are increasingly fluid and predominantly personality or ethnically composed, opinion polling's role becomes less about setting realistic expectations and more about reinforcing preconceived expectations, whether accurate or not. The impact of the introduction of a nascent and still under-developed public opinion research industry into a competitive and constantly shifting political environment appears to hinge on the perceptions of political elite driving their strategic responses. This confirms this thesis's hypothesis as to the likely influence opinion polling has on political dynamics around elections. If anything, opinion polling has served merely to amplify the weaknesses in Kenya's on-going political development, surfacing most acutely the underlying tensions and power struggles that have long characterised the political system.

Chapter 4. Public Opinion Polling in Ghanaian Elections 2004–2012

“As soon as it became clear that John Kufuor and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) had won the December 2004 elections, hawkers took to the streets of Accra selling commemorative electoral maps. With cartoon elephants positioned over constituencies won by the NPP and cartoon umbrellas over those won by the National Democratic Congress (NDC), these maps gave their readers a rough understanding of where the strongholds of each party lie. The pictorial representation of Ghanaian politics illustrated the cleavages within the system: the NPP is an Asante party and the NDC is an Ewe party; the NPP is a southern party and the NDC is a northern party; and the NPP is a city party and the NDC is a country party” (Fridy, 2007: 285).

Political opinion polling is a growing phenomenon in Ghanaian electoral politics. Grounded in governance traditions that span back to pre-colonial leaders, the modern polling industry is nevertheless still in the early stages of development (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1999). Influenced principally by the sharp party dichotomy that characterises Ghanaian politics, opinion polling has fallen too easily for the allure of ‘horserace’ politics, with rival media outlets driving political news as much as reporting on it. At the same time, the country’s political stability, especially in light of persistently contentious election outcomes, has provided a solid foundation for the growing professionalisation of opinion polling in Ghana. An industry that developed initially to help a ruling party maintain its grip on power has the potential to contribute to Ghana’s further political evolution toward a sophisticated democratic system. This thesis tests three hypotheses related to the way in which opinion polling influences elite strategies and the quality of elections. Specifically, it attempts to determine whether it is opinion polling’s ability to substitute for collective action, to force institutional adaptation, or to shape elite perceptions around electoral competition that determines the likelihood that elites will move toward or away from more transparent and representative electoral processes.

This chapter reviews the evidence of opinion polling’s influence on Ghanaian elections and finds that it is generally supportive of the third hypothesis. It finds that the

integration of opinion polling into Ghanaian politics continues to be uneven. Even as first-hand evidence emerges as to the importance politicians and their campaigns place on opinion polling information, publicly, political strategy remains non-committal and decidedly partisan in nature. While polling is beginning to play in an important role in increasing the transparency of internal strategy of political parties, its ability to influence positively the quality of electoral processes in Ghana is highly compromised by the uncertainty of its profile and the competitively charged political atmosphere in which the polls are released.

4.1 The Context of this Research

4.1.1 Historical Context

Formed out of the consolidation of two British-ruled territories, Ghana became the first decolonised country in West Africa in 1957. It had a liberal democratic constitution with all the requisite institutions. The outlook seemed hopeful. Within a decade, however, the original constitution had been scrapped, the ruling Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) had been declared the only legal party, and President Kwame Nkrumah had been granted lifelong tenure. This increasing autocracy ultimately triggered a military coup in 1966, with officers seizing power and ending the First Republic. A short-lived Second Republic followed from 1968 to 1972 before the military once again took control (Gyimah-Boadi, 1994).

From 1972 to 1979, Ghana was ruled by a series of military officers, culminating in a military regime headed by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings. The Rawlings government decided to allow the on-going process of constitutional restoration to run its course, including the scheduled multiparty elections, and handed over power to the duly elected Hilla Limann and the People's National Party on 24 September 1979 (*ibid.*). This Third Republic, however, was also short-lived, as, by the end of 1981, Rawlings and the military had revoked the 1979 Constitution and seized power once again.

4.1.2 Recent Political Context

In the early 1990s, the global wave of democratisation reached Ghana and the governing military council, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), yielded to pressure to return the country to constitutional rule. In 1992, multi-party presidential elections were held in which, the chairman of the PNDC, Jerry Rawlings, won as the candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), a party formed by the PNDC to contest the election (Gyimah and Brobbey, 2012).

4.1.2.1 Transition to Democracy

In Ghana, it has been argued that “a combination of both domestic political resistance by civic groups and organisations to authoritarian rule, and calls for the promotion of good political governance by external bilateral and multilateral agencies and donors, set the stage for the transition to democratic rule” (Arthur 2010: 207). However it was achieved, by May 1991, the PNDC government had accepted that Ghana would return to civilian, multi-party, democratic rule. A new constitution was approved via referendum in April 1992 and the ban on political activity was abolished. In relatively short order, opposition political parties were forced to find candidates and develop the logistical capacity to be able to contest an election that was scheduled to take place in just six months.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the NDC, the government’s new party led by Jerry Rawlings, won the presidential elections with 58.4 per cent of the vote, defeating Albert Adu Boahen of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) who won 30.29 per cent. Candidates from other political parties cumulatively garnered less than 11 per cent of the vote. In the parliamentary elections which followed, the NPP, the main opposition party, refused to participate as they considered the presidential elections have been rigged in favour of Jerry Rawlings by the PNDC (*ibid*). Ghana was now a democracy, albeit an imperfect one.

4.1.2.2 Opinion Polling in Ghanaian Politics

The concept of public opinion is not foreign to Ghanaian politics. Pre-colonial political leaders in Ghana, as in many indigenous African political systems, made use of certain mechanisms for gathering public opinion, including voice votes at village and town meetings and other informal gatherings (Jones-Quartey, 1963). Indeed, it could be argued that many of the rituals surrounding the succession of Akan chiefs required participatory political techniques that relied on public opinion (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1999). As Jones-Quartey relates: “A chief has no opinion of his own; he can only express the opinion of his people, and from this it follows that he can express no view until he has a chance of finding out through formal discussion what his people's view is” (Jones-Quartey, 1963: 147; quoted in Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1999: 61). Other institutions such as “the *asafo* (militia) and *nkwankwaa* (youth association)” have also been noted as potential methods for ascertaining and measuring public opinion (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1999).

Modern public opinion polling, however, did not arrive until the 1960s, emerging first under the auspices of a military dictatorship. Ghana's first 'scientific' opinion poll emerged in 1967 when the *Daily Graphic* newspaper reported that “an independent foreign firm of consultants, Jeafan Limited' was conducting an opinion poll for it on the 'vital subject' of return to civilian rule” (*ibid.*: 62). The content and production of the poll proved extremely controversial, undermining the growth of opinion research until the advent of democratic elections in 1992.

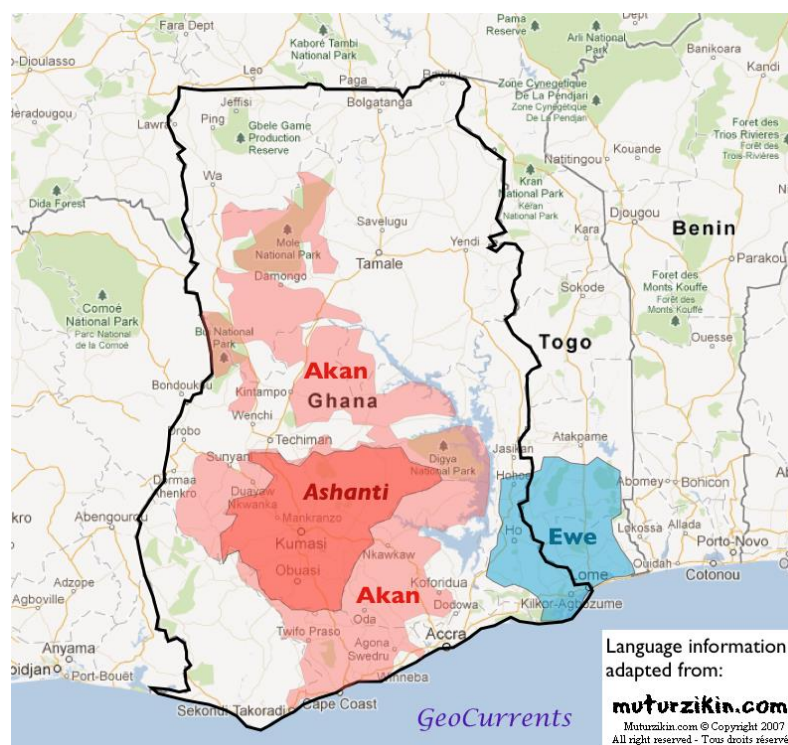
4.1.3 Ethnicity in Ghanaian Politics

Ghana is a multi-ethnic society composed of five large ethnic groups: Akan, Mole-Dagbani, Ewe, Ga-Dangme, and Gume (Frempong, 2001). Their relative share of the population is as follows: Akan, 44.1 per cent; Mole-Dagbani, 15.9 per cent; Ewe, 13 per cent; Ga-Dangme, 3.7 per cent; Gume, 3.5 per cent; and all other groups cumulatively account for 11.5 per cent. The groups share many common traits, even though significant variations do exist. They are also not overly concentrated geographically.

Thus, “while regions do show a predominance of certain tribes, none is ethnically homogeneous” (Oelbaum, 2004: 245).

Since independence, ethnicity’s importance in Ghanaian politics has varied substantially (Arthur, 2009): at “certain times ethnic tensions have manifested themselves overtly, only to be followed by long periods when the importance of ethnicity is denied by virtually all sides” (Lintz and Nugent, 2000: 22). The current constitution specifically bans ethnically-based political parties, stating that “each political party is expected to have ‘branches in all regions of Ghana and is in addition organised in not less than two-thirds of the districts in each region, and the party’s name, emblem, colour, motto or any other symbol has no ethnic, religious or other sectional connotation that gives the appearance that its activities are confined only to a part of Ghana’” (Arthur, 2009: 51). This overt stipulation creates incentives for the parties to pull voters, not only from their established ethnic strongholds, but also from areas of the country where their support is weaker.

Map 2 Ethnic distribution in Ghana



Source: <http://geocurrents.info/geopolitics/elections/ethnicity-and-political-division-in-ghana>

Nevertheless, scholars have argued that in spite of these legal efforts to reduce the role of ethnicity in politics that it is impossible to dismiss the ethnic dimension in Ghana's electoral politics. As shown above, the two principal parties, the NDC and the NPP, are largely considered strongholds of the Ewe and Asante/Akan, respectively (Map 2 above). This ethnic cleavage at the party level reflects back on Ghanaian voters, sometimes fuelling tensions between Ewes and Asantes during election campaigns (Oelbaum 2004).

4.1.4 The Media in Ghanaian Politics

Given the emphasis placed on media in this research, some analysis is required as to the composition and quality of the institution in Ghana and its relationship with the political processes of the country. The media is facing increasing scrutiny in Ghana, with the general public beginning to doubt the credibility of certain news outlets. This growing public dissatisfaction with the performance of the media in Ghana is not lost on the political elite and was summed up by then Vice President of the Republic, John Dramani Mahama: "A cursory look at our media would seem like we are a nation at war. Newspapers and radio stations are lined up in the political trenches with their political allies or paymasters. Throwing printed and verbal grenades and taking pot shots at the 'enemy lines', each side trying to outdo each other in inflicting maximum damage on the perceived 'enemies'." (Mahama, quoted in Owusu, 2012: 12)

Some argue that the Ghanaian press is overly dependent on the political parties for their sources of political information. During election periods, this significantly hinders their ability to act as a viable filter for their readership. Instead, political 'spin doctors' are allowed to guide the news agenda by controlling what information is disseminated when and by whom (Diedong, 2013). This complicates the dissemination of opinion polling data, as the facts are always received through the filter of party-affiliation, rendering the reader more or less likely to believe the results based on their own political preference.

Ghana's media is relatively diverse. There are over 135 newspapers, including two state-owned dailies, published in Ghana. An estimated 110 FM radio stations, 11 state-

run, broadcast nationwide, while there are approximately 27 television stations currently on air. While radio remains the most popular medium for the general public, the print media are viewed as the media of record. Radio stations host newspaper discussion panels where commentators review the main headlines and discuss top stories for those without access to print copies. Indeed, circulation remains very low for newspapers and limited revenue from advertising and other sources endangers the survival of private media houses (Gyimah-Boadi and Brobbey 2012).

The content analysis that informs this chapter is drawn from articles published in four principal newspapers and follows two parallel tracks. The first quantitative track reviews articles over a seven month period around elections¹⁴ to determine quantity of opinion polling coverage while the second qualitative tracks examines the writings of key political commentators across the entire period to determine shifts in perceptions and attitudes to opinion polling on the basis of content and tone.

4.2 Public Opinion Polling in Ghanaian Elections

As in previous chapters, this chapter begins with the premise that electoral politics is principally about elite strategies and behaviour. Therefore, for opinion polling to influence the quality of elections, it must first influence political elites. Using the same two stage approach employed in previous case studies, this chapter reviews three electoral periods between 2004 and 2012. It first locates public opinion polling within prominent news media to assess its integration within political discourse. Based on this analysis, the chapter proceeds to examine the various possible avenues through which opinion polling has influenced elite electoral strategies in Ghana, testing the validity of the three hypotheses.

¹⁴Through purposive sampling, four Ghanaian daily newspapers were selected for the study. Two state-owned newspapers, the *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times*, were selected based on their circulation and their prominence within elite circles. Two privately-owned papers were selected for the study, *The Chronicle* and the *Daily Guide*, to offer editorial balance and due to their notoriety in political coverage. The articles covered the period of six months before each election-day and one month after to cover the campaign period and the immediate aftermath of the voting.

The evidence from Ghana provides a useful contrast to the Kenya case study in so much as it demonstrates that elite strategies in competitive elections need not be based on violence, even where ethno-regional tensions pervade the political culture. At the same time, this chapter lends further credence to the model that suggests that the principal mediating factor for opinion polling's influence on the quality of elections is elite perceptions of competition. Polling in Ghana has made key inroads into the political discourse as represented by news and editorial articles in the major newspapers in the country, with some significant outcomes emerging as a result.

A consistent theme throughout is the ambivalent posture adopted by the political elite to the emergence of polling. In the case of Ghana, public references to opinion polling are rare, but private commissioning and interpreting of polls and their results is rife (Private interview, 22 May 2013). This ability to publicly discredit information that ultimately informs campaign strategy is not unique to sub-Saharan Africa, but it highlights the need for the political elite to control their messages, and most importantly, to understand perceptions of polls in order to formulate their electoral strategies.

Table 10: Pollsters in Ghanaian politics

Polling Organisation	Elections Active	Affiliation or other ties ¹⁵
Daily Dispatch	2004, 2008, 2012	Independent, although suspected of being partial to NDC
Danquah Institute	2008, 2012	Linked to the NPP
Ipsos/Synovate	2012	Independently owned, now part of international brand. Has been variously accused of favouritism but no formal links
Policy Alert Group	2004	Short-lived pollster, possibly linked to NDC
Primary Research Associates	2008	Short-lived pollster, possibly linked to NPP
Research International	2012	Ostensibly independent pollster with alleged links to NPP
Policy and Strategy Associates	2008, 2012	UK-based, Ghanaian-owned pollster, accused of NDC bias

¹⁵ This applies to the organisation only. It is not always possible to discern the data source or funding agent of individual polls released under the names of organisations or newspapers. Independent firms may be open to accusations of bias when they conduct and publish polls on behalf of particular parties or individuals.

The partisan nature of the media in Ghana complicates the role of opinion polling immensely. That major newspapers are openly aligned to one party or the other has an inevitable impact on the quality of polling commissioned by those media houses and also on how it is analysed and interpreted (Private interview, 23 May 2013). At the same time, the relatively institutionalised party structure in Ghana would be expected to play some role in mediating elite strategies with relation to polls. The evidence for this is mixed. Certainly at the presidential level, where this analysis is focused, the perceptions of the candidate and his team appear in most cases to trump those of the party, triggering electoral strategies that while conducive to short-term gains may contribute to a long-term decline in the transparency and representativeness of elections in Ghana.

The advent of multi-party politics marks the departure point for public opinion polling in Ghana. The media's desire to publish public opinion polls far outweighed the need for sound methodology. As a result, newspapers printed anything that resembled polling data, regardless of the methodology used in compiling it. In one instance, the polling content was so dubious that one columnist wrote sarcastically: "God has given him (the journalist) the talent of opinion polling, such that he can decide to opinion-pull you down today, and opinion-pull you up the next day" (Yankah, 1996; quoted in Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1999: 68).

The 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections were similarly covered with the media latching onto anything resembling an opinion poll (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1999). Politically, however, something had changed. The NDC were the only party to employ polling as part of its election strategy. The significance of its contribution to their success is debated but there is certainly an implicit acceptance by the NDC that opinion polls can form part of a winning electoral strategy (*ibid.*). By contrast, the People's Convention Party (PCP) and the NPP, after uniting to form the opposition Great Alliance, chose to rely on more traditional techniques for selecting candidates and judging their popularity with voters. Ansu-Kyeremeh notes that these "consisted largely of symbolism—observing the number and frequency of flying flags and

billboards and attendance at offices, as the basis for selecting common candidates” (*ibid.*: 67). Ultimately, the NDC poll numbers proved relatively accurate in predicting their share of the vote in the election.

By the time of the 2000 elections the political landscape had changed again. President Jerry Rawlings, the charismatic leader who had ushered in Ghana’s democratic era, had served the constitutional limit of two terms in office and could not compete. The incumbent NDC were also running against an economy that was underperforming with high inflation and unemployment. The NDC’s vulnerability had already been revealed in several by-election losses to the NPP; it was becoming increasingly clear that the Ghanaian electorate were looking for a change (Boafo-Arthur, 2008).

This sentiment was supported by the evidence of opinion polls commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which showed that 52 per cent preferred the NPP and their candidate Kufuor to NDC’s candidate, the sitting vice president John Atta Mills, who garnered only 31 per cent. Nevertheless, the lack of regular opinion polling still allowed room for the NDC to muddy the waters in the run-up to the election by presenting their own poll which showed that Mills was favoured by 43 per cent over his opponent Kufuor’s 38 per cent. In the end, Kufuor secured an easy run-off victory, after winning the first round but failing to reach the 50 per cent threshold. It marked the first peaceful transition of power from incumbent to opposition in Ghana’s history (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001). It was also the point at which Ghana’s opinion polling industry began to transition from ad hoc survey techniques to more regular and more professionalised opinion research.

4.2.1 The 2004 Elections

The 2004 elections were considered something of a crossroads for Ghanaian politics. It was an opportunity for the NPP to strengthen their hold on power in the country while the NDC faced a tough challenge to recover lost ground. In light of its defeat in 2000, to many observers it appeared that the NDC was going to disintegrate into various factions. For the party to remain politically competitive, it had to rebrand itself away from the authoritarianism that had characterised the party before democratisation

and under Rawlings' two terms. For its part, the NPP had to guard against complacency. With a strong presidential candidate at the helm, "leading members of the NPP had already written off the NDC before the 2004 elections" (Boafo-Arthur, 2008: 38). What began as a long re-coronation for incumbent President Kufuor ultimately tightened into a much closer race, with opinion polling arguably playing a key role in promulgating the re-emergence of the NDC.

4.2.1.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

The adoption of opinion polling in Ghana was not instantaneous. Public opinion polls are by their very nature a reflection of prevailing moods and judgments, and in the early stages of the 2004 campaign, the prospects for an NDC victory looked ominous indeed. Polling seemed to corroborate this general sense. In late July, one newspaper poll reported that at that time 49 per cent of Ghanaians would vote for President Kufuor while the main challenger John Atta Mills would receive less than half that or just 24.3 per cent of the vote. It also revealed that a sizable 18.6 per cent were undecided as to which of the presidential candidates to vote for (*The Statesman*, 27 July 2004).

Throughout the summer of 2004, further public opinion polls continued to emerge predicting a landslide victory for the NPP in the 2004 elections. As a result, the NPP went into the final months of the 2004 elections very confident that the NDC was all but beaten (Boafo-Arthur, 2008). A Lecturer at the University of Ghana, Professor Yankan Bediako, on the basis of an opinion survey conducted by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) on the pre-election popularity of political parties in the country even went so far as to suggest that the NDC start thinking about the 2008 elections, since the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) "has already won the December 2004 elections" (*The Chronicle*, 10 September 2004). As the chart below demonstrates, as the polls began shifting so did the collective opinion of political commentators, reinforcing not only the messages coming from the polls but also the importance of the polls themselves in driving political discourse and perceptions.

Table 11: Political Commentators in the Ghana 2004 Election Campaign

	Kofi Akosah-Sarpong, freelance political columnist
12 October 2004	“The two main parties, NPP and NDC, are fighting not only across wide ideological divide (the NPP's foundation is rooted in capitalism and the NDC's social democracy; and both have violent past) but as voters feelers indicate the margin in the polls is not widening, as the NDC increasingly closes in, extreme negative campaign is at the center of the action. So come to think of the hot acrimonious climate leading into the December 7 general elections.”
2 December 2004	“In a measure that shows the Ghanaian/West African culture of deep prophetic predictions dancing confusingly with modern scientific opinion polls each of the main political parties, the NPP and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), pollsters claim their party is leading in the swelling opinion polls. The credibility of most of the myriad of polls is in doubt. In the 2000 general elections opinion polls commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme, 52 per cent of 5,000 interviewed preferred candidate Kufuor to then Vice President Atta Mills who got 31 per cent. The contradictory nature of most of the current polls reflects the domination of the voter population by the youth who are mostly floaters with no traditionally emotional ties to the core political traditions of Danquah-Busia and Nkrumaist.”
17 January 2005	“The 2004 general elections saw a surge in Ghanaian political activity through not only internal Ghanaian non-political groups but also those in the diaspora that represents the basis for an active core of support rooted in Ghanaian communities rather than a passive shell that coalesces on the December 7 general elections. To work out how they can win, the NDC must first work out why and how they lost. The NDC had broad message but the NPP were different. The NPP were smart, they separated the party machine from government and skillfully separated personalities. The NPP came into NDC areas with very specific targeted messages to take NDC voters away from NDC.”

Yet as the campaign gathered momentum, the pendulum began to shift, and opinion polling became among the first media to point to a resurgence of NDC support, especially in their strongholds. “A random sampling of opinions plus intelligence permutations survey conducted by the paper in this former colonial capital shows that the fortunes of NDC presidential candidate, John Evans Atta Mills are changing. The electorate is now saying ‘adze wo fie a oye.....’ This means that majority of the electorate had decided to vote for their own son this time around.” (*The Chronicle*, 28 September 2004).

On the eve of the election, both major political parties, the NPP and the NDC, took to the offensive, each citing polling data that pointed to a first round victory in the December 7 elections. In the local political parlance, both sides predicted 'one touch' victories, avoiding the need for a run-off election as had occurred in 2000. Indeed, the two main parties each claimed to be expecting victory with "60 per cent and above in the forthcoming elections" (*The Chronicle*, 23 November 2004).

The evidence from this section supports the contention that political opinion polling is shifting political discourse and capable of shaping the perceptions of the political elite. This influence, however, remains strategic and not widespread. Indeed, this author's review of over 7,900 newspaper articles published in Ghana between June 2004 and January 2005 revealed just 19 mentions of the term "opinion poll." Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 2.40 mentions per thousand. This is relatively small, significantly less than in Kenya, but still reflective of an issue that deserves coverage in the prominent elite-focused news media of Accra. Opinion polling therefore must have some capacity to influence elite strategies in the context of competitive elections. The following section reviews the locus and pathways of that influence and its impact on the electoral quality.

4.2.1.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

Building on the improving opinion polling numbers, the listless NDC campaign gained momentum as the campaign entered September. With former president Jerry Rawlings throwing his full political capital behind the party, the NDC was quickly able to reinvigorate its support in its principal regions and constituencies. Indeed, the campaign of the NDC "became more ethnic-orientated" (Boafo-Arthur, 2008: 39). Hitherto a foregone conclusion, the race was now tinged with excitement, as the political media began to speculate on possible outcomes. Most importantly, the NPP had to increase their effort to match the surging NDC campaign as the opinion polls began showing that the NDC had narrowed the gap.

A further development in the 2004 election, which would have significant consequences on both immediate political strategic calculations and the importance of

more sophisticated opinion polling, was the emergence of 'skirt and blouse' voting, where a voter votes for one party's presidential candidate but votes for a different party's parliamentary candidate. In 2004, "16 constituencies could be labelled as having voted 'skirt and blouse' where the presidential candidate obtained very high votes in a particular constituency but the parliamentary candidate failed to win the seat" (Boafo-Arthur, 2006: 47-8). This "growing political sophistication" of the Ghanaian voter implies that political candidates must convince their constituencies at an individual level, having little recourse to ride the coattails of his or her party. It also ushers in a kind of politics where highly specific opinion polling is far more relevant, both to politicians seeking election and political commentators seeking to make informed predictions of electoral outcomes.

Not everyone was convinced that the preponderance of opinion polls now flooding the media market was a good thing. In August, Mr. David Adeenze Kanga, deputy chairman of the Electoral Commission (EC), advised journalists to be judicious in reporting opinion poll results lest they deceive the electorate. "He observed that in a situation where journalists put a spin to promote a particular presidential candidate or political party, which did not reflect the actual facts on the ground, could generate heat when electoral results did not favour that candidate or party. He added that the most crucial thing in election was the result and that if a smaller party did not accept the result of an election that party could go to bush and cause confusion to the whole nation" (*The Chronicle*, 5 August 2004).

As could be expected, his words went unheeded. As the campaign wound toward its conclusion, the opinion polls began to come thick and fast. With less than two weeks to go before the election, most polls agreed that President Kufuor was on course to win a second term. "'If no-one wins more than 50 per cent of the vote, there will be a run-off but most commentators think that unlikely. He really has to do something very foolish or outrageous to lose. The election is his for the taking and my surveys indicate there will be only one round of polling,' said Ben Ephson, the editor of the privately-owned Dispatch newspaper, who has accurately predicted the last two elections. 'If

everything goes well, the incumbent will be able to obtain 55 per cent of the vote''' (*IRIN*, 26 November 2004).

Nevertheless, there was still time for one last ditch effort by the NDC to sway public opinion. A final poll from the Policy Alert Group, commissioned by the NDC, found that opposition candidate Atta Mills would just secure victory with 50.2 per cent of the votes. To the credit of the Ghanaian media, however, it was clearly remarked that: "It is the only poll result that has given Professor Mills an edge over the NPP's candidate and incumbent President Kufuor. Earlier survey by the Daily Dispatch Research Team predicted a first round win for President Kufuor with between 53-55 per cent votes" (*GhanaWeb*, 6 December 2004). Kufuor won the presidential vote with 52.4 per cent to that of Mills with 44.6 per cent.

Table 12: Polling predictions versus Actual results 2004 Ghana election

	Share of votes in presidential election (%)			
	Kufuor (NPP)	Atta Mills (NDC)	Mahama (PNC)	Aggudey (CPP)
Actual results	52.4	44.6	1.9	1
Daily Dispatch November 2004	53 – 55	37 – 39	2.5 – 3.5	1.5 – 2.5
Primary Research Associates November 2004	56	25	5	2

4.2.1.4 Implications

Following the 2004 elections, it was now clear that Ghana was a two-party state. The marginal parties made almost no impact on the presidential elections while the NPP and NDC similarly dominated the results in the parliamentary election. The implications for opinion polling were equally significant. As a source of political information, opinion polling was now achieving far wider coverage and far better integration into political analysis. Its ability to capture and elucidate the resurgence of the NDC mid-campaign also highlighted its potential for campaign strategy, both on the side of the leader and the chasing pack. The development of ‘skirt and blouse’ voting pointed to a very clear need for better information on voter aspirations and intentions that could be linked to constituency-specific campaign strategies.

All the while, opinion polling continued to battle against the entrenched conception of opinion polls as tools of propaganda. While the efforts of the political parties to inject life into their campaigns through commissioned polling did nothing to counter these impressions, the ability of more independent pollsters to predict accurately the final outcome of the race spoke well for the on-going growth and maturation of the opinion polling industry in Ghana. Indeed, as the hypothesis on elite perceptions would predict, as the opinion polls tightened in the middle of the race, the two parties moved toward more ethnic-identity style politics to energise support from among their core constituencies, raising concerns that the election would overheat. A steady stream of polls granting NPP the victory by a clear margin, however, took the competitive sting

out of the campaign. The political elite developed a consensus of expectations based on the polls, which was largely matched by the official result, translating into a relatively transparent and representative election.

4.2.2 The 2008 Elections

On 7 January 2009, John Evans Atta Mills of the NDC was inaugurated the new president of Ghana having narrowly won the 28 December 2008 runoff election with 50.1 per cent of the vote. It was Ghana's second such peaceful transition of power from incumbent party to opposition, an important milestone for the young democracy and one which further cemented Ghana's reputation for political stability. The NDC also enjoyed success in the parliamentary elections, winning 114 of the 230 seats to the NPP's 107 (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009).

4.2.2.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

By 2008, political opinion polling was well entrenched in the political culture in Ghana. But its pattern of implementation remained somewhat random, with surveys springing up as and when they were commissioned rather than following a set schedule from which clear trends can be discerned. As a result, the polling information available throughout the 2008 campaign remained disjointed and partisan in composition, with institutions aligned with different parties alternating in their issuance of polling data.

Among the first polls of the 2008 campaign came one under the auspices of Afrobarometer, conducted by the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana). The results immediately stirred up controversy as they put the New Patriotic Party ahead in the December elections. The results of the survey predicted that the NPP would win by 46 per cent if elections were held in March this year. The NDC garnered 23 per cent, while the other opposition parties registered just over four per cent between them.

Reaction from opposition parties was swift and incredulous: "The NDC and the CPP have questioned the poll. The General Secretary of the NDC, Mr. Johnson Asiedu-

Nketia has dismissed the report ... According to him polls conducted by the NDC indicate that the party will win the December elections by more than 50 per cent...The General Secretary of the CPP, Mr. Ivor Greenstreet said he thought the NDC should have done better than the NPP. 'I don't know the basis upon which they made their calculation but if I was being entirely honest with you, I would say that from where I stand the figure should be the other way round. NDC should have 46 per cent and NPP 23 per cent'" (*Ghanaweb*, 24 June 2008).

In direct contradiction, the National Committee for Civic Education in Ghana released its own poll just six weeks later which found the race to be all but deadlocked. The opposition NDC was ahead of its closest rival the ruling NPP with 44.6 per cent, with the NPP pulling a close 44.3 per cent. Again, however, the parties were quick to challenge the veracity of the information. "The NDC's National Organiser, Ofori Ampofo said that their own research shows that they would certainly breast the tape with a convincing straight victory, optimistically indicating that the NPP's one touch victory should be theirs, because they stand to win the race without a run off. The Campaign Director of the Campaign Team of Nana Akufo-Addo, Arthur Kennedy on his part said, NPP was not sure whether the survey was accurate, since their own study had proved that 27 per cent of the electorate were still undecided" (*The Chronicle*, 8 August 2008).

The exchanges continued deep into the campaign. The Danquah Institute, openly aligned with the NPP, released a poll in mid-November predicted a clear victory for Nana Akufo-Addo, the New Patriotic Party's flag bearer, with a margin of 56 per cent to 33 per cent over the opposition NDC (Press release, 12 November 2008). In response, an NDC-aligned group released a poll four days later contending that "the NDC's Atta Mills enters the final month of the Election 2008 Campaign in a very favourable position to be elected President of the Republic of Ghana, having made significant inroads on formerly NPP turf, while NPP candidate Nana Akufo-Addo plays competitive defence. In a comprehensive survey and analyses of the polling data, the national average of all regional polls indicates 53.6 per cent of respondents favour the NDC's Atta Mills to be elected Ghana's next head of state as against 42.0 per cent that

favour NPP's Nana Akufo-Addo" (Policy and Strategy press release, 16 November 2008).

Muddying the waters still further, a government agency, Ghana's equivalent of the FBI in the US, the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI), was rumoured to have conducted a survey which predicted a first round victory for the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and its candidate Nana Akufo-Addo. It also predicted that the NPP would drop some seats, even though the party would maintain its majority in parliament (*The Chronicle*, 1 December 2008). While the leak was vigorously denied by the agency, the façade of authority given to the results by its association with the BNI meant the rumours were difficult to ignore. An analysis of the editorials of two key political commentators during this period reveals the extent to which political opinion polling was pervading political discourse.

Table 13: Political Commentators in the Ghana 2008 Election Campaign

	Kofi Akosah-Sarpong, freelance political columnist	Ben Ephson, editor Daily Dispatch
October 1 2007	"Added to the sophisticated campaign machine, most polls put Nana Akufo-Addo ahead of not only other NPP presidential aspirants but also the main opposition National Democratic Congress candidate, Prof. John Atta-Mills. In an opinion poll conducted by the respected Research International, an international research institute, and carried by the Ghanaian media, Nana Akufo-Addo led other three top presidential aspirants by 40%."	
June 6, 2008		"Voter attitudes in opinions polls revealed an increasing tendency by voters towards relying on a Presidential candidate's personal abilities, as against the person being the candidate of a political party. Opinion polls have revealed that the gap between the NPP and NDC has dwindled from 8% to 3%"

November 23 2008	<p>“Opinion polls are everywhere in the run-up to the December 7 general elections. Overall, most of the polls point to Akufo-Addo and his NPP winning the December 7 presidential and parliamentary elections.</p> <p>The clash between the scientific and the 'spiritualists opinion' polls may explain the row between the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the main opposition National Democratic Party (NDC) over the various opinion polls that tell them that each will win the December 7 elections. Scrambles everywhere but they reflect the real Ghana.”</p>	
January 2009		<p>“As far as August 2008, the newspaper’s opinion polls had a sense of the very high probability of a presidential run-off election. We had, in August, done an opinion poll in the constituencies where the CPP and PNC did very well, on which of the two main parties their supporters would support. The supporters, on the average, were split and based on the analysis of the results of the first round, we decided to publish an opinion poll on the run-off.”</p>

In the midst of this contentious exchange of contrasting information, the Ghanaian elite began searching for a stable source upon which to base their political analysis. By 2008, Ben Ephson, independent pollster and newspaper editor, had emerged as the consensus choice, having accurately, if obscurely, predicted previous elections using his methodology, which, importantly, assessed parliamentary as well as presidential candidates. Throughout the campaign, his pronouncements came to be seen as the baseline against which all other opinion polls were measured, creating a credible source of political information for commentators across the political spectrum. This is not to say that Ephson was not accused of bias or alignments, but his perceived independence granted him greater sway than other institutions and media outlets that were publishing opinion polls at the time.

In the run-up to Election Day, Ephson predicted a presidential runoff following the December 7 election, estimating that the ruling New Patriotic Party would get between 48.2 and 50.2 per cent of the vote and the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) polling between 44.7 and 46.7 per cent. His surveys also showed the parliamentary race tightening, with significant losses for the NPP and some gains for the NDC. He projected NPP with 106 definite seats (they held 128 seats going into the election) and NDC with 102 seats, up 8 from previously.

With this source of detailed information established and proliferating through the Ghanaian press, it's perhaps unsurprising that opinion polling in general begins to gain wider acceptance. As one commentator put it, "Opinion polls are increasingly serving as a useful guide for not only elections but for decision-makers generally. While Ghanaians must welcome the growth in surveys, especially for our political competition, we should also ensure that the pollsters respect the principles associated with it" (*Daily Mail*, 18 November 2008). This author's review of over 6,900 newspaper articles published in Ghana between June 2008 and January 2008 revealed 39 mentions of the term "opinion poll." Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 5.64 mentions per thousand, almost double that of the previous election cycle.

As in 2004, the confluence of opinion polling data in the final weeks before the election served more to obfuscate the political landscape than clarify it. Media analysts lamented that "at some moment it appears all the opinion polls coalesce, making them fuzzy and difficult to comprehend. Such polling behaviour may distort the politicians' sense of how Ghanaian voters are informed by their messages and how the politicians will respond to the voters' views and their will" (*Modern Ghana*, 23 November 2008). This uncertainty places a focus on the centrality of elite perceptions; the absence of reliable and stable information on the political campaign meant that opinion polls were open to interpretation by the political elite.

4.2.2.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

The 2008 campaigns followed familiar patterns. The leading parties campaigned nationally but tended to concentrate the bulk of their efforts on their respective

strongholds, indirectly courting ethnic votes. The NPP pinned its hopes on generating votes from the regions dominated by the Akan group—especially the Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, and Eastern regions—while the NDC systematically mobilised votes in its traditional centres of support, the Volta Region and the three northern regions, as well as in non-Akan communities in the other areas (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009).

What differed in the 2008 cycle was the environment in which the campaigning was conducted. The election was highly competitive, but the parties faced few obstacles to their campaign strategies. Most parties had developed and publicised their manifestos, helping to make the elections relatively issue-based. Unexpectedly tense local disputes led to episodes of sporadic violence in the north of the country. Nevertheless, in the context of a hotly contested election, the major parties enjoyed relatively equal opportunities to pursue votes (*ibid.*)

What also differed was the extent to which opinion polling was now driving the decision-making in campaign war rooms. Allegedly in July 2008, Arthur Kennedy and other members of the NPP Campaign Team met Professor Larry Gibson, a law professor from Maryland, who also did consultancy work as a political polling strategist. By August 2008, Gibson had analysed the data emerging from current opinion polls and had advised the NPP campaign that their candidate would fail to achieve an outright majority in the first round and that in the run-off the NDC's Atta Mills would win (*Daily Dispatch*, 1 December 2009).

Kennedy relates the conversation in a book he would later publish on the 2008 campaign:

“Larry told me he had informed Nana Akufo-Addo that he was waiting for the completion of a survey that would measure his favourability and disapproval ratings against that of Professor Mills. When the results came in, Professor Mills was slightly more popular than Nana Akufo-Addo. However, the NPP was more popular than the NDC. Reviewing the polls, he [Larry] indicated that Nana Akufo-Addo would win the first round but would not get an outright majority and, when pressed further, he said he would give the second round to Prof. Mills by a whisker. On support, he indicated that we were strong in Ashanti, Eastern and Brong Ahafo and nearly even in the north

but were not doing well at all in Volta, Central and Greater Accra. He indicated that we should write off the Central and Greater Accra regions. On this, virtually the entire group disagreed with him. We all agreed that conceding those regions would be tantamount to conceding defeat in the elections.” (Kennedy, 2009: 81)

The proliferation of opinion polling led one commentator to opine that “opinion polls are everywhere in the run-up to the December 7 general elections. It appears all the political parties have certain polling organisations and spiritualists that help them manipulate Ghanaians' opinion to their advantage” (*Modern Ghana*, 23 November 2008). Indeed, so pervasive was opinion polling in 2008 that it even allegedly led to bribery and corruption.

Ben Ephson would later claim in an interview with a political officer at the US Embassy that the NPP, through an intermediary, Gabby Ochere-Darko, a cousin of the party's candidate, Akufo- Addo, had tried to bribe him with at least \$20,000 to produce a poll favourable to them. He also claimed that the NPP was trying to get the names of polling agents for other parties in order to offer them \$1,000 to collaborate with vote rigging. Over a six week period, using a very targeted approach in ten swing constituencies, the NPP had spent large sums of money trying to secure the parliamentary seats. Asked where the money was coming from, Ephson said it was coming out of the government's coffers, primarily from kickbacks on government-awarded contracts (US Cable from Wikileaks, 2008). On December 7, the day of the first-round elections, voting was orderly and peaceful, and the results were generally credible. Akufo-Addo won 49.1 per cent of the vote and Mills won 47.8 per cent.

Table 14: Polling Predictions versus Actual Results 2008 Ghana Election

	Share of Votes in Presidential Election (%)			
	Akufo-Addo (NPP)	Atta Mills (NDC)	Nduom (CPP)	Others
Actual results	49.13	47.92	1.34	1.61
Daily Dispatch November 2008	48.2 – 50.2	44.7 – 46.7	5.3 – 7.3	1.8

	Share of Votes in Presidential Election (%)			
	Akufo-Addo (NPP)	Atta Mills (NDC)	Nduom (CPP)	Others
Primary Research Associates November 2008	50.6	35.6	7	2.1
Research International November 2008	52	38	8	2

By contrast, the December 28 presidential runoff — mandated by the constitution since no candidate had won a majority of the vote — proved far more contentious. Having won a plurality of parliamentary seats and having finished a close second in the first round, the NDC ticket possessed clear momentum heading into the second round. The Akufo-Addo campaign, for its part, blamed its failure to secure a victory in the first round on low voter turnout due to its supporters' certainty of a win, on the popular outgoing president's inadequate involvement in the campaign, and on weakly substantiated claims of NDC poll rigging (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009).

During the campaign, concerns as to whether the election would be free and fair had led the opposition to threaten street protests if the results did not meet popular expectations. Such a threat illustrated the fine line between stability and violence that characterised politics in Ghana. Indeed, as the campaign had progressed, politics had become more polarised by ethno-regional animosities, culminating in several incidents of violence in the northern regions of Tamale and in parts of Accra, including the killing of supporters of the NDC and NPP (ISS Africa, 2009).

The Electoral Commission took two days to announce the results of the election, further fanning the flames of an already tense situation in which supporters of the two main parties were taking issues into their own hands. "A group of NDC supporters, incited by a local pro-NDC radio station, marched on the Electoral Commission as it was in the process of certifying the votes and camped there overnight to demand that Mills be declared the victor. NPP supporters, meanwhile, besieged another local radio

station to protest its reporting of the NDC's lead in the vote tally" (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009: 144).

Finally, after much delay, it was announced that neither candidate had won a sufficient number of votes to claim victory. Due to logistical problems, one constituency (Tain, in Brong-Ahafo Region) had not yet submitted its results; the outcome of the whole election hinged on these few votes. After another day of tensely watching the results filter in, the NPP's Akufo- Addo conceded defeat to the NDC's Atta-Mills on the basis of only the narrowest of victory margins. Atta-Mills had won by only 40,586 votes out of the 9,001,478 (0.46 per cent) valid votes cast (*ibid.*).

The NDC victory was something of a surprise to those who had paid only cursory attention to the opinion polls throughout the campaign. Jerry Rawlings continued prominence within the NDC was seen as an insurmountable electoral liability for the relatively soft-spoken Atta-Mills to overcome. At the same time, it has been argued that "in the run-off, it became clear that Mills and the NDC benefited from the support of undecided voters who wanted to see another democratic change of government in Ghana, to prevent the NPP from becoming a hegemonic party, complacent and therefore running the risk of undermining the vibrancy of Ghana's democracy" (Zounmenou, 2009: 11).

4.2.2.4 Implications

By 2008, political opinion polling is deeply entrenched in Ghanaian electoral processes; yet it remains deeply flawed in many respects. As a source of political information, it is still highly volatile, with pollsters flitting in and out of the industry, undermining attempts to gauge long-term political trends. When some continuity does emerge, particularly in 2008, it does so in the form of an almost one-man operation in Ben Ephson and his Daily Dispatch newspaper. While this concentration of information in the hands of one man may seem unstable, it is important to remember that many prominent pollsters in the US and Europe began in just the same way, with some highly regarded contemporary pollsters still operating as independent researchers. All this volatility, however, makes it difficult to assign a character to the influence of

political polling in Ghana. In the context of high political competitiveness, its ambivalence shapes its influence on elite perceptions.

Indeed, the NPP had a strong incentive to use its power of incumbency to attempt to guide public opinion away from its preference for a change in government. If Ephson is to be believed, they did this through means of bribery and the manipulation of figures in polls and, perhaps, the ballot box. Interestingly, they felt the need to resort to these tactics based largely on the analysis of opinion polls conducted relatively early in the election campaign (Private interview, 22 May 2013). Faced with the ethno-regional realities that those polls depicted, their American strategist advised them to prepare themselves for defeat. Reflecting perhaps the stark contrast between the American data-centric campaigns and the African image-centric campaigns, the NPP campaign team refused to accept his advice to abandon huge swathes of the country and focus their efforts on key areas. The polls didn't lie. In the end, the American strategist had called the outcome of the election precisely.

This is an important finding in the context of this research. I have argued that in the context of high political competition opinion polling instigates elites to pursue strategies that undermine the transparency and representativeness of electoral processes. They do so based on their own perceptions drawn from uncertain polling data and due to the specific elite incentives that exist within the political system. In this case, the credibility of Ghanaian polls, even by 2008, is still mixed at best. The partisanship which pervades the production of the polls largely undermines the consumption of them, with media and readers unable to separate the legitimate from the suspect, the biased from the non-aligned (Private interview, 23 May 2013). Nevertheless, the NPP did not acquiesce to their political consultant's request that they narrow their campaign to exclude NDC-favoured areas, choosing instead to try and appeal more broadly. That their strategy was ultimately unsuccessful suggests that this is the exception that proves the rule. Indeed, given the prescient predictions presented to the NPP in August 2008, it does not seem a stretch that these numbers were in the back of their minds when they ultimately decided to concede defeat, having lost in exactly the manner they were warned.

4.2.3 The 2012 Elections

Ghana doesn't do landslide elections anymore. To prove this point, the country endured yet another close contest, with an outcome that again surprised political analysts both in the country and abroad. While many election experts expected Akufo-Addo to win, the 7 December 2012 elections played out differently. Out of the over 14 million registered voters in Ghana, Mahama won an overall majority of 50.7 per cent of the vote and was declared the winner by the EC. Surprisingly, Akufo-Addo received only 47.7 per cent of the vote, far below what he got in the 2008 election. On the parliamentary front, the NDC took control of 147 of the 275 seats and now holds significant majority over all other political parties.

4.2.3.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

The 2012 political opinion polling season began in abrupt fashion. According to local media, internal polling conducted by the ruling National Democratic Congress had struck fear into senior party officials. As it stood in March 2012, President Mills was set to become the first one-term President in Ghana's history. The opinion poll, conducted by a South African PR firm, put the NPP's Nana Akufo-Addo, at 49.07 per cent, ahead of Atta-Mills who could only manage 47.07 per cent (*New Statesman*, 22 June 2012).

It presaged another frantic polling campaign for the myriad pollsters that continued to ply their trade in Ghana during election time. The persistent influence of opinion polling on the electoral campaign is particularly evident in the writings of two key political commentators in the chart below. Again, as in 2004, conventional wisdom which had come to accept that the NDC was headed for electoral defeat found their preconceptions turned on their heads with the death of President Mills in August. The contest flipped almost overnight with newly anointed President Mahama leading the NDC ticket. A poll by market and political researchers, Synovate (now Ipsos), issued a poll in early September showing that the NDC would obtain 34.2 per cent of the total votes cast with the opposition New Patriotic Party following closely with 31.8 per cent. (Ghanaweb, 5 September 2012) This was corroborated two days later, when a new

national poll suggested that Mahama held a six-point lead over NPP presidential candidate Nana Akufo-Addo (*The Republic*, 7 September 2012).

Table 15: Political Commentators in the Ghana 2012 Election Campaign

	Kofi Akosah-Sarpong, freelance political columnist	Ben Ephson, editor Daily Dispatch
9 November 2011	“The NPP, bent on wrestling power from Atta Mills and his NDC, isn’t joking. In Moctar Bamba, the NPP is playing the political spiritual games with the NDC. Such excessive concentrations on the spiritual games have made scientific opinion polls less listened to. Few scientific opinion polls are independent; most are conducted by the political parties. Like the spiritual predictions, each poll appears coloured by where the polling organisation is coming from. Each political party disagrees with any poll that doesn’t favour their forecasts.”	
19 September 2012		“The December election is too close to call. We will have to wait until first or second week of November to be able to categorically state which party is most likely to carry the day. The selection of Vice-president Amissah Arthur as running mate to John Mahama for the 2012 polls will have little influence over the people of the Central region. Let the NDC tickle themselves and laugh if they think Amissah Arthur’s selection will deliver to them Central region, the people don’t vote on tribal lines, that is why late president Mills lost in Central in 2000 and 2004. If the former first lady, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings contests as flag bearer on the ticket of the newly licensed National Democratic Party (NDP), that will make victory for the NDC easier.”

Even as the numbers began trending in the direction of the NDC, prominent pollster Ben Ephson urged caution. Contrary to the recent opinion poll publications, he argued that results for the crucial upcoming December election were still too close to call. (Ghanaweb, 20 September 2012) Perhaps latching onto to this opportunity, new polls began quickly emerging throughout the autumn pointing to an NPP resurgence: “according to the latest opinion poll conducted by Research International, President John Dramani Mahama and his ruling NDC are destined to capture 46.9 per cent, well short on the 50 per cent plus one vote needed to remain at Government House” (*The Chronicle*, 20 November 2012). This author’s review of over 11,610 newspaper articles published in Ghana between June 2012 and January 2013 revealed 53 mentions of the term “opinion poll.” Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 4.57 mentions per thousand, a small reduction on the previous electoral cycle but nevertheless still a newsworthy topic.

Just days before the election, however, Ephson returned to prominence releasing a poll that countered all expert analysis offered to that point by indicating that the 2012 Presidential election would not likely require a run-off. It predicted that President Mahama would win the ‘one touch’ victory with 52.2 per cent of the votes while Nana Akufo-Addo would win 44.7 per cent of the votes. (*Daily Dispatch*, 4 December 2012). Controversial though it was at the time, the polling would prove prophetic.

Far from using the glut of opinion polling data to justify and support their electoral expectations, the political parties instead took great pains to distance themselves from the polls. “The Campaign Coordinator of the NDC, Elvis Afriyie Ankrah, says the NDC does not believe in polls. He is convinced that the party will win the elections ‘one touch’ due to the massive development projects undertaken by the government. The New Patriotic Party, NPP, has also rubbished the credibility of the polls. The Director of Research and Elections of the party, Martin Adjei Mensah Kosah, told GBC’s Radio Ghana that, the NPP does not believe in opinion polls.” (*GBC*, 9 November 2012) This clearly speaks to the partisan perspective in which opinion polling is held in the Ghanaian political elite. Neither side is willing to let the other hold the upper hand on information management.

4.2.3.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

From a strategic perspective, 2012 was notable as the year in which democracy began to filter into the party structures themselves. Opinion polling data revealed that while the NPP was struggling to maintain its profile as a national party, the NDC was proving itself capable of winning votes across the country. Over the course of Kufuor's presidency, the NDC had successfully rebranded itself from the party of authoritarianism to the party of the disenfranchised. By contrast, the NPP was increasingly seen as being the preserve of competing power blocs in the Ashanti and Eastern Region, leaving the rest of the country essentially spectators.

During the 2012 campaign, there is evidence to suggest that both parties attempted to improve the transparency of their internal processes. "The NPP expanded the number of electors participating in the selection of their 2012 presidential candidate from fewer than 3,000 to over 110,000. This made the party's presidential primary more democratic and enabled it to avoid repeating some of the mistakes of the previous cycle, when the primary involved lavish spending on campaign advertising and allegations of attempts to bribe delegates" (Gyimah-Boadi and Brobbey, 2012: 3). The NDC also made its primary process more accessible, allowing candidates from its various factions to participate in the party's national executive elections. This resulted in vehement opponents of the incumbent president being elected to senior party positions. Indeed, Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings' (wife of NDC founder and former president Jerry Rawlings) attempt to unseat President Mills in the NDC primary demonstrated the growing acceptance of internal competition within the party (*ibid*).

For the first time, opinion polling played a role in shaping the politics of candidate selection. Nana Konadu's primary challenge was expected to cause Atta-Mills some serious concern. The Rawlings political machine remained very strong, and it was anticipated that the former president would be able to exert his influence over a sizable portion of the delegates. Before the primary, however, Synovate released a poll which revealed Konadu's popularity among the party to be extremely low. The data undermined her attempts to paint herself as a serious contender and derailed any efforts to sway delegates to her side (Private interview, 24 May 2013).

Yet, for all the increasing openness internally, externally the strategy remained predicated on image manipulation and information control. The emergence of polls predicting healthy leads for the NPP over the summer, particularly those commissioned by the party, sparked panic in the NDC. According to news reports at the time, “this development did not amuse the NDC party hierarchy and therefore subsequently commissioned ‘pollster’ and Editor-in-Chief of the Daily Dispatch Newspaper, Ben Ephson, to conduct an ‘independent’ opinion poll in April on the chances of President Mills ahead of the 2012 poll. Ben Ephson’s poll, according to sources at the party office, killed the morale of the top functionaries of the NDC as the results made for grim reading.” (*New Statesman*, 22 June 2012)

Yet, following President Mills’ death, the calculus of the election campaign changed. From the spent force described above, the NDC reenergised itself under Mahama, reclaiming the lead from the NPP. Forced to respond, the NPP sought opinion polling data that could buttress their own campaign. Finding none, they allegedly began creating their own. Research International, the firm producing many of the pro-NPP polls was rumoured to be closely connected with the NPP. Local media alleged that “the release of the NPP inspired survey was timed to come and neutralise the recent survey that put President Mahama ahead of their struggling torchbearer Akufo-Addo. If the NPP truly believes that report, then NDC should heave a sigh of relief because it indicates that the complacency and self-delusion within the opposition Party have reached such levels as to make the task of the NDC much easier in 2012.” (*Ghanaweb*, 21 November 2012)

Underneath this façade of public propaganda, however, there is evidence that political parties were taking the strategic value of polling seriously in the 2012 campaign. In one instance, the NPP commissioned a private poll from one professional pollster which revealed that they were underperforming their historical numbers in Greater Accra and Takoredi areas. The party quickly mobilised their candidate to begin a house to house campaign in those areas to drive base turnout and to convince undecided voters (Private interview, 22 May 2013).

Likewise a poll released by Synovate, focusing on the 'swing' areas in the election, sparked a great deal of interest in both political parties. While causation is impossible to prove, the NDC was clearly outspending its rivals on political advertising, aimed principally at winning over these swing areas. While the NDC relied more heavily on their own in-house research teams to guide their electoral strategy, it would be foolish to think that they discounted public polls which provided insight in potential electoral outcomes (Private interview, 23 May 2013).

The 2012 campaign exhibited a number of unsettling characteristics. Both parties became more recalcitrant and uncompromising, with the rhetoric emanating from their representatives appearing increasingly partisan. This has been attributed to a belief among NPP supporters that the 2008 election was lost because the party did not adequately counter the NDC's strong-arm tactics on election-day, convincing many of the need for greater vigilance in the run-up to the 2012 poll. Even Akufo-Addo, the leader of the NPP and usually a level-headed politician, exhorted his party's supporters not to be intimidated by the tactics of the NDC, openly declaring that his supporters should be ready to "fight to the death." (Gyimah-Boadi and Brobbey, 2012: 3)

Impartial commentators, however, argued that an active opinion polling industry was necessary to prepare the electorate before the general elections. Polling information could ease tensions ahead of elections by giving the general populace a better idea of its likely outcome. "If we had a more active opinion poll system in this country on issues, on the candidates and their opinions and this is more regular, it will probably help tame the atmosphere so that Election Day will just be the icing on the cake" (Peace FM Online, 31 July 2012).

4.2.3.4 Implications

Opinion polling faced something of a backlash in 2012. Having become pervasive in the political media, the political elite began reacting negatively to their inability to control the numbers coming out of the polls. In some cases, this took the form of disputing the content of the polls, casting aspersions on the source and methodology of the data. In other cases, it meant issuing their own polls to try and control the messages emerging

in the media. In either case, the legitimacy of opinion polling as a source of reliable political information suffered.

Strategically, polling became far less about the practicalities of the information and far more about reacting to the content of the polls, either positively or negatively. This was driven by the increasingly partisan nature of Ghanaian politics as the main political parties solidified their bases and consolidated their electoral positions. While polling continues to play an important role in increasing the transparency of internal strategy of political parties, its ability to influence positively the quality of electoral processes in Ghana is highly compromised by the uncertainty of its profile and the competitively charged political atmosphere in which the polls are released.

In spite of these difficulties, opinion polling, at least the reliable polls, seems to have got the prediction right in the end. While election experts fully expected the vote to go to a run-off, Ephson's last poll correctly called a 'one-touch' victory for Mahama and the NDC. The NPP has taken the decision to court, but the weight of evidence is against them. People have been angry, but widespread violence has not ensued. While this can largely be credited to the politicians who have appealed for calm, there is also the possibility that the political elite were prepared to accept this outcome based on the information available to them prior to the vote.

4.3 Conclusions

This chapter offers some intriguing contributions to this thesis's overarching question regarding the impact of opinion polling on electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa. While highly relevant, highly sought after, and highly coveted, opinion polls are also publicly dismissed, mistrusted, and manipulated by the political elite. As a source of political information, Ghanaian opinion polling spans the spectrum from well-managed and accurate surveys to fly-by-night operations organised explicitly for the purpose of serving the interests of one political party over another. The media, craving anything that resembles a story or a trend worth analysing, are not always diligent in ascribing correct motives to the data they report.

Polling's influence on strategy and expectations is likewise disparate, ranging from clear and incisive to vague and implied. There is first-hand evidence that political parties value polls for their campaign strategies, and yet, in the run-up to the election neither major party is ready to stand publicly by the opinion polls as an accurate representation of the electoral outcome (Private interview, 23 May 2013). The reason behind this, I argue, is the ever-increasing competitive profile of politics in Ghana, coupled with a general uncertainty related to the accuracy and impartiality of the opinion polling in the country. Political elites rely on perceptions of competition illustrated by opinion polls to shape their electoral strategies. Faced with uncertainty and high levels of competition, in the context of Ghanaian politics, the political elite have generally not chosen to broaden their appeal through issue-based campaigns as Gallup's vision of polling intended. Rather, they retreat further to the clientelistic and patronage strategies that characterise ethnic-identity politics in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Ghana, these divisions have been institutionalised in the form of political parties who pull from decidedly disparate constituencies. Whereas in previous elections, there remained a substantial number of unaligned voters whose preference could have been swayed by targeted campaigning (some 27 per cent of the electorate) in 2008, their number seems to be falling. As the party affiliations become more rigid, the emphasis turns from broad-based appeals to narrow voter turnout as the best strategy for electoral victory. The increasingly charged competition, fuelled by ever increasing polling, therefore, far from encourage more transparent and representative strategies, actively works against it, aligning incentives for elites to restrict, manipulate, and otherwise undermine the quality of elections in their interests.

Polling's shifting influence on political strategy during presidential campaigns in Ghana is clear in the cases presented above. In the 2004 election, public opinion polling, though a misunderstood newcomer on the political scene, nevertheless made a significant contribution to the political discourse that, in spite of NDC's best efforts, was ultimately reaching a consensus of perceptions as to the NPP's inevitable victory. Even in this case, however, it was evident that as the polls showed them narrowing the

gap, the NDC began shifting their strategies toward more ethnically-focused campaigning in an effort to energise voter turnout.

By 2008, opinion polling had become increasingly pervasive in Ghanaian politics, as evidenced by the inclusion of American polling experts in the campaign team of at least one of the major candidates. Opinion polling consistently pointed to a close race, and ultimately proved remarkably accurate in its predictions. Indeed, the NPP were counselled on the basis of the polling numbers to pull out of certain regions in preference of increasing their inputs into areas where they had a chance of improving their numbers. The strategy seemed counter-intuitive, abandoning whole regions to the opposition seemed ludicrous. In this case, in spite of the competitive landscape illustrated by polls, the NPP chose not to narrow their focus and remained committed to portraying themselves as a national party. While this does somewhat contradict the hypothesis of this research, it does reflect another prominent tendency within African politics of preferring anecdotal evidence over quantitative evidence. Again, old tactics are given greater credence than the novelty of opinion polling.

By 2012, party competition had intensified. Political alignments were reifying and opinion polling could make little impact on the political discourse as partisan media and openly manipulated polls undermined their influence. Yet, opinion polling was able to capture the major shift in the competitive environment which occurred following the death of President Atta-Mills. For the NPP, which assumed it was coasting to victory, the turnaround was shockingly unwelcome. Again, this shift in competition sparked shifts in elite electoral strategies, marking a further departure from open and representative ideals.

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that the influence of opinion polling on elections in Ghana is highly contingent upon the perceptions and behaviour of the political elite. On the knife edge of modernity in terms of the technology and processes available to them, but still convinced of the predominance of image, personality, and personal ties in the minds of the voters. This transitional struggle is playing out before the backdrop of Ghana's increasingly rigid and increasingly competitive two-party democracy.

Chapter 5. Public Opinion Polling in Nigerian Elections 2003–2011

Nigeria has long been a political enigma. Although endowed with a strong civil society, a vibrant press, and a relatively independent judiciary, it has never been able to maintain long-term stability. The 1999 Constitution created a basic foundation for constitutional and representative democracy, but it was the result of elite political calculation not an expression of public will.

Public opinion is very much at the forefront of Nigerian politics in the aftermath of President Jonathan's capitulation on the issue of the removal of fuel subsidies in the face of public outcry. Opinion polling had predicted that the move would be extremely unpopular, and, more insightfully, also predicted that people would be willing to take action to fight the proposal. (*Leadership*, 26 January 2012) The government's decision to forge ahead and its subsequent quick reversal reflect the complex relationship between public opinion and politics in Nigeria.

The use of opinion polling to capture public opinion is a relatively recent phenomenon in Nigeria. As late as 2006, a Nigerian academic writes: "The Nigerian press for instance is yet to realise the value and thus the necessity of carrying out credible and well conducted opinion polls on political parties, their programmes and candidates as well as their chances of success or otherwise in elections" (Adesoji, 2006: 46). The press themselves recognised their late entry into the field of scientific opinion polling in 2007: "Apart from the online version of Punch newspaper, which had, rather unnoticeably, hitherto carried on a polling culture, polling was a relatively new phenomenon until a few years ago" (*Vanguard*, 10 April 2007).

Since its introduction into Nigerian politics, however, public opinion research has proliferated, but very little research has been done into the extent to which it is influencing political attitudes and behaviours. Nor has there been much investigation into how this influence is contributing to or hindering Nigeria's democratic transition. This chapter examines the emergence of public opinion polling in the Nigerian political context and assesses its influence on elite electoral strategies either as a substitute for

collective action, through instigating institutional adaptation, or by shaping elite perceptions around electoral competition to determine the likelihood that elites will move toward or away from more transparent and representative electoral processes.

Contrary to the previous chapters on Kenya and Ghana, in Nigeria, the structure of political competition differs under a one-party dominant system. This clearly has repercussions on elite perceptions of competition, and this thesis would hypothesise that under reduced competition Nigeria is more likely to embrace opinion polling's potential for contributing to transparent and representative elections. This hypothesis is further tested using gubernatorial contests in Nigeria where competition is invariably more intense than at presidential level. The evidence suggests that the hypothesis is more or less valid, although the size and complexity of Nigeria's political system makes the emergence of new forms of political participation, such as polls, difficult to measure. At the presidential level, the 2007 and 2011 elections offer early signs of opinion polling's influence on elite behaviour, both in the form of elite coalition building (and breaking) and in the form of issue-specific campaigning, even though the elections themselves could not be construed as transparent or representative. At gubernatorial levels, however, the evidence is far clearer that opinion polling amplified competition and compelled elite strategies more toward restriction and manipulation of elections. The only glimmer of hope is the emergence of opinion polling as a potential source of evidence for post-election court cases against blatantly rigged elections.

5.1 The Context of this Research

5.1.1 Historical Context

Describing Nigeria as anything approximating a classical democracy faces strong historical opposition. Like many African states, Nigeria was a colonial creation. The resulting ethnic and regional tensions erupted in political violence and, ultimately, civil war in the late 1960s, an event which has coloured Nigeria's politics ever since. The prospects for democracy faded still further in 1966 when the military overthrew the

first parliamentary government. Indeed, Nigeria's political life has been dominated by military coups and extended periods of military-managed transitions, with the military ruling Nigeria for approximately 28 of its 50 years since independence. Even its democracy has been largely the result of elite political engineering.

In August 1985, the then military leader General Muhammadu Buhari was deposed by another, General Ibrahim Babangida, who implemented a transition program that culminated in a general election in June 1993. While these were generally believed to have been won by Chief Moshood K.O. Abiola, General Babangida annulled the presidential election and scheduled a new election in which Abiola and his challenger were excluded from participating. The ensuing political turmoil provided an opening for another military leader, General Sani Abacha, to seize power in November 1993 (Dagne, 2006). Abacha had been involved in several previous Nigerian military coups and presented himself as an authoritarian figure capable of ruling Nigeria with a strong hand.

Nevertheless, in October 1995, under increasing pressure to reform, Abacha was forced to embark upon a programme that promised transition to civilian rule (Lewis, 2011). Progress was purposely slow with Abacha tightly managing the programme until his death in June 1998. Following Abacha's death, the Provisional Ruling Council quickly announced Major General Abdulsalam Abubakar as the new president. In contrast to Abacha, Abubakar set out a clear schedule for the transition to civilian rule, establishing an official hand-over date on 29 May 1999. Under the new political system, the three major parties became the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All People's Party (APP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) (Dagne, 2006).

Even under democracy, the long years of colonial and military authoritarianism in Nigeria have constricted political space. Prolonged authoritarianism has hindered the development of strong formal linkage between the elite and the masses in Nigeria. Nigeria lacks strong participatory (linkage through parties) and representative (linkage through elections) linkages, essential for citizens' participation in the formal institutions of the political system (Orji, 2010).

5.1.2 Ethnicity in Nigerian Politics

Ethnicity is a central theme to Nigerian political analysis. “The country’s turbulent political history spans two previously failed democratic regimes, six successful military coups, and a devastating civil war (1967–70) that claimed more than a million lives. Many of these pivotal events were instigated by ethnic rivalries or driven by communal conflicts” (Lewis, 2007: 1).

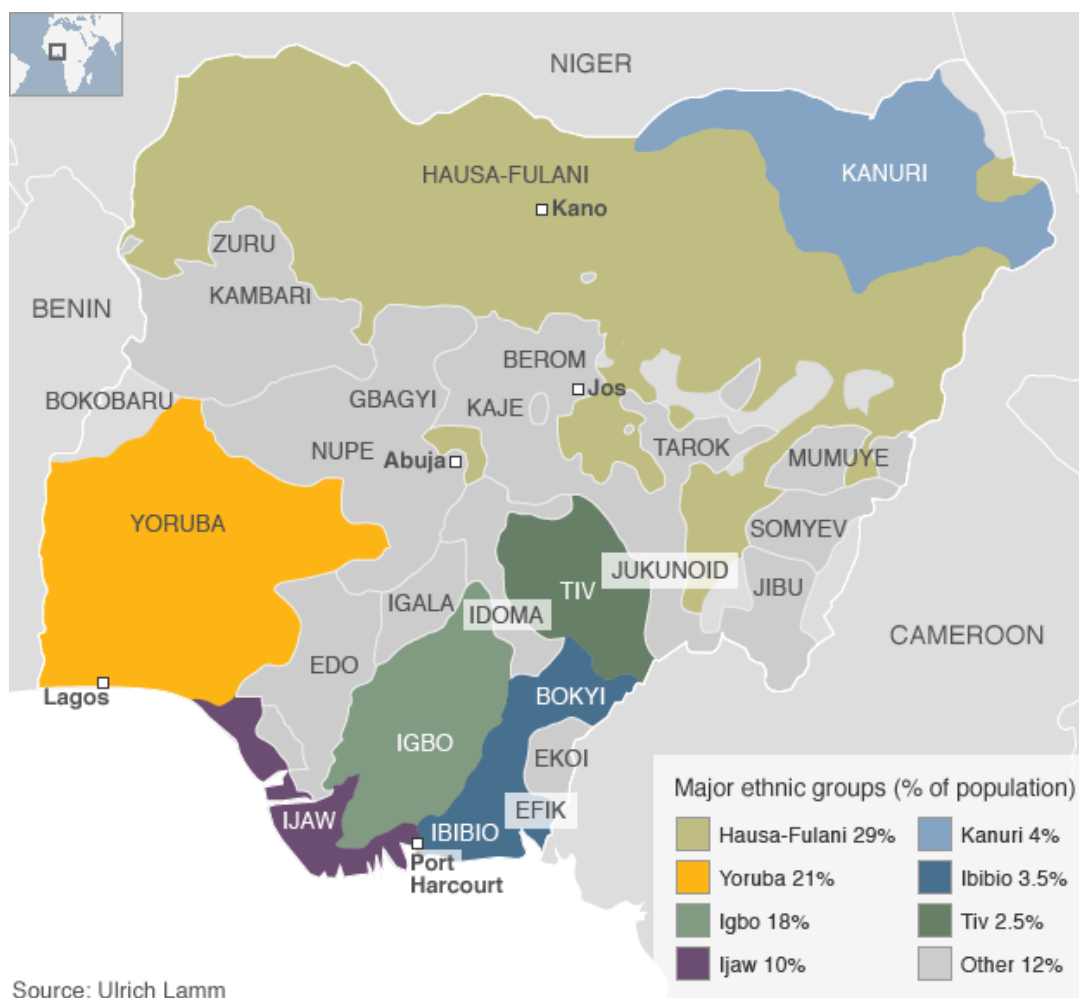
Nigeria has approximately 374 ethnic groups that can be broadly divided into ethnic ‘majorities’ and ethnic ‘minorities.’ The major ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani, based in the north (27 per cent), the Yoruba from the southwest (21 per cent), and the Igbo in the southeast (17 per cent) (see Map 3 below). These three principal ethnic groups constituted 57.8 per cent of the national population in the 1963 census. All the other ethnicities can be classified as being of ‘minority’ status. The dominance of these three ethnicities was codified under the colonial administration through a tripodal regional administrative structure in the 1950s that gave each majority ethnic group a region. On the basis of this social and political context, Nigeria has “evolved a tripolar ethnic structure, which forms the main context for ethnic mobilisation and contestation” (Mustapha, 2004: iv).

Since the transition to democratic rule in 1999, this mobilisation along ethnic identity lines has become a principal characteristic of Nigerian politics, often undermining efforts to secure political stability. Peter Lewis (2007: 3) argues that patterns of group mobilisation have begun to change away in recent decades from the historical focus on the competition between the country’s three largest groups. “‘Minority’ groups are often regarded as being marginal to political competition. However, political action by communities in the Niger delta and the ethnically-diverse ‘middle belt’ of the country has been increasingly prominent in national politics. Also, religious mobilisation (both by Muslims and Christians) has often overshadowed ethnic solidarity, especially in the northern states.”

Lewis further argues that major institutional changes have accompanied changing identities, creating new opportunities for political participation in Nigeria. “The central

features of Nigeria's federal system have been repeatedly modified, shifting the political geography of the country from three regions at independence to 36 states today. Major regional blocks have been subdivided into discrete states, and many smaller minorities now constitute majorities within their states." (*ibid.*) Fiscal decentralisation has also altered the pattern and distribution of funds from the central government down to the states. At a constitutional level, the formation of ethnic-based parties has been banned and election laws put in place that make it more difficult for politicians to achieve national office based purely on ethnic qualifications.

Map 3 Ethnic distribution in Nigeria



Source: Ulrich Lamm

Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17015873>

5.1.3 Media in Nigerian Politics

Nigeria has a large and diverse media environment. There are, however, sharp divides within the sector. Geographically, the media is generally concentrated in the south of the country, particularly around Lagos. This is hardly surprising given the economic importance of Lagos as Nigeria's financial capital, but it does sometimes present the false impression that the media is dominated by people from the southwest of the country.

There are also differences between the media sectors. While the broadcast networks are predominantly state-owned, the print media is largely privately held, with private newspapers controlling not only market share but also the greater share of political influence. All this is in spite of relatively low circulation among all Nigerian newspapers. "Although there are no reliable data, no newspaper in Nigeria sells up to 100,000 copies per day. The daily print-run of some is as low as 5,000 copies. And they all go by the description 'national newspapers'. Ironically, this does not affect their influence in the nation's politics and among politicians" (Oso, 2012: 8-9).

While no newspaper is currently owned by any of the political parties, the main national newspapers make no secret of their political alignments. Similar to many other African media sectors, the principal owners of major media houses also tend to be politically active, either as politicians themselves or as high level functionaries within the main political parties. Nevertheless, Oso argues that "the degree of political partisanship has now been attenuated by certain factors. First, all the political parties are legally expected to be national in their structure. Related to this is the fact that the leading political actors with their eyes on the presidency, are trying to present themselves as 'national leaders' not champions of ethnic, regional or religious groups" (*ibid.*: 30).

In contrast to the print sector, government ownership in the broadcast sector is pervasive. According to the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), of 82 television stations in the country, the Federal Government owns 41; State Governments own 29; while private proprietors own 12. The Federal Government owns 43 radio stations out

of 121, while state governments own 54 and private proprietors own 24. While these ownership figures do impact the kind of coverage seen in the print and broadcast news, profit has become a decisive moderating force, ensuring that the ethnic, religious or political affiliation of their owners do not undermine the commercial viability of the media house. This has tempered the partisan predilections of the media and has generally improved the quality of the coverage (LeVan and Ukata, 2012).

The content analysis that informs this chapter is drawn from articles published in five principal newspapers (those with the greatest circulation and popular prestige): *Vanguard*, the *Guardian*, *This Day*, *Daily Trust* and *Leadership*. The analysis follows two parallel tracks. The first quantitative track reviews articles over a seven month period around elections to determine quantity of opinion polling coverage. It records mentions of the phrase “opinion poll” or similar variations, normalised across 1,000 articles, to get a picture of the frequency with which polling appears in major newspapers. The second qualitative tracks examines the writings of key political commentators across the entire period of 2003–2011 to determine shifts in perceptions and attitudes to opinion polling on the basis of content and tone. These are opinion writers, editors, and prominent journalists who represent an important subset of the electoral intelligentsia and can be viewed as a proxy for that group as a whole. Analysing their writings in greater depth provides important insights into the way in which polling is consumed, interpreted, and translated into the political discourse.

5.1.4 Recent Political Context

5.1.4.1 Flawed Elections of 1999 and 2003

Political change came quickly to Nigeria following Abacha’s death. The initial transition toward civilian rule, that culminated in General Olusegun Obasanjo’s swearing in as president on 29 May 1999 took less than a year. In those twelve months, major institutional reforms took place: political parties were legalised, press and political freedoms expanded, and four rounds of elections were conducted.

Political change, however, wasn't easy. Obasanjo's initial election in 1999 suffered from some significant flaws, and it could be argued that each successive election since has deteriorated further. The second election of the new democratic regime took place in April 2003 with President Obasanjo again representing the ruling PDP. His competition included General Muhammadu Buhari, a former military leader; Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, a former secessionist leader from Nigeria's civil war in the 1960s; and former foreign minister Ike Nwachukwu. PDP and Obasanjo swept to sizable victories.

Both domestic and international observers criticised the elections on the basis of accusations of widespread fraud and rigging, due largely to poor election management. In some states, observers noted "systematic attempts at all stages of the voting process to alter the election results" (IRI, 2003: 65). While the incidence of rigging was uneven across the country and often highly localised, the extent of irregularities led the EU mission to assert that they "compromised the integrity of the elections where they occurred" (NDI, 2003: 7).

Opinion polling played only a small role in these elections, with the industry centred almost exclusively around newspaper-sponsored polls in key political areas and on the presidential election. At gubernatorial level only a few states, mostly close in proximity to the media centres in Lagos, received opinion polling coverage. Independent pollsters, such as there were, seem to have largely been consulting organisations conducting polls on the behalf of individual candidates rather than sampling races in general. Indeed, in the run-up to the election some in the media were lamenting the lack of hard opinion polling data to back up prevailing wisdom of Obasanjo's weakness heading into the contest. "If a poll analysis had been conducted at the onset of Obasanjo's administration compared with what exists today, his popularity would have been seriously deflated." (*Weekly Trust*, 18 January 2002)

Ironically, just a few days later, a competing newspaper did release a poll which suggested that Obasanjo was not heavily favoured to win the election the next year, with several of his colleagues ranking closely in popularity. It also suggested that "the outcome of the opinion poll carried out by the presidency ahead of the 2003

presidential election may have forced Aso-rock back to the drawing board to map out new strategies that would ensure the re-election of President Olusegun Obasanjo” (*This Day*, 25 January 2002). Based on the evidence from monitoring reports, it would appear that Obasanjo and his team decided at this point that they would not lose, no matter how the voting went.

Speaking closer to the election, one of Obasanjo’s advisors felt it necessary to address the popular impression among the electoral intelligentsia that the president's prospects for re-election were waning. He was clear that "it is wishful thinking and not reality that the image of the president is dwindling. I have no evidence to support that claim. Reports of opinion polls show that there is no cause for alarm" (*Vanguard*, 30 September 2002). Nevertheless, the perception certainly coloured the electoral landscape and cast significant doubt upon the veracity of the official result when Obasanjo was announced the winner with almost 62 per cent of the vote. For a president concerned with dwindling popularity, it was a prodigious victory.

Scholars view the Obasanjo legacy as “a paradoxical one of both far-reaching reforms and anti-reformist actions” (Joseph and Kew, 2008: 167). He clearly deserves credit for moving Nigeria away from military rule, and he was the first Nigerian leader to hand over power to an elected successor after his two terms in office. But he did so begrudgingly, having attempted to force through a constitutional amendment that would have enabled him and state governors to serve more than two consecutive terms. The move brought out a major political crisis, while creating an opportunity for an emergent public opinion polling industry to assert itself into politics.

5.1.4.2 The Third Term Crisis

For a system to become truly democratic, officials “must give up the habit of placing themselves above the law” (Carothers, 1998: 100). Without this, a culture of impunity emerges among the political elite undermining not just the quality of democracy but also its stability. As Larry Diamond argues, for a democracy to be considered consolidated, political actors must “obey the laws, the constitution, and mutually accepted norms of political conduct” (1999: 69).

Overcoming a culture of impunity has been problematic in Nigerian politics. Lewis (2010) argues that Nigeria's civilian regimes (like their military counterparts) reflect patterns of neo-patrimonial politics, marked by the influence of personal networks and distributional politics in a context of weak formal institutions. Clientelist relationships and the disbursement of patronage are dominant features of the system. In a state dominated by centralised petroleum revenues, struggles over the circulation of rents provide central goals in seeking and utilising public office. Nigerian law even shields elected officials from prosecution, allowing the political elite to openly ignore the law and for the political process to be manipulated at will.

Nowhere was this better in evidence than during the months of political turmoil that characterised Obasanjo's attempt to secure himself a third term as president. While Obasanjo stayed largely on the sidelines, his supporters within the ruling PDP party made moves to change the constitution to do away with term limits for the president and the governors of the states. According to sources, Obasanjo and his supporters were prepared to invest huge amounts of money in this endeavour, with bidding for legislators' votes reaching 50 million naira each (about \$400,000) and apparently more than 100 payments having been disbursed (Ademola, 2011).

The effort proved hugely unpopular with the public. Polls by both the *Guardian* newspaper and the Afrobarometer revealed that 80 per cent of Nigerians opposed the change in the constitution. Nevertheless, the *Guardian* poll also showed that "A minimal one in every ten respondents (about 14 per cent) however expressed faith in the National Assembly to ward off any undue influence of the Executive towards the achievement of the third term gambit" (12 December 2005).

Contrary to public expectation, the campaign for the third term galvanised resistance from diverse quarters in the Assembly (*This Day*, 21 April 2006). Opposition parties raised concern about the creation of a political oligarchy under the PDP, a party led by a former military ruler. Similar objections arose from within the PDP, especially the group arrayed around Vice President Atiku. The northern political establishment, anticipating the return of the Presidency to their region in 2007, feared that the third term was an effort to freeze them out of power.

Importantly, members were also aware of opposition from within their own constituencies. The *Guardian* poll reported its figures down to local levels, and senators were clearly also gauging public opinion through their own means as well. As one opposition leader put it: “They worked against it...because their constituents were opposed to it, and the media played a leading role in bringing home to the people what their representative was saying in Abuja” (VOA, 29 May 2006) In declaring their votes, several of them specifically referenced the outcomes of opinion polls as being decisive in their decision to reject the amendment (*This Day*, 15 May 2006).

In the aftermath, the opposition made it clear to where they credited their victory, claiming that “public opinion polls showing a lack of support for changing the constitution combined with heavy media coverage of the parliamentary debate on the issue were behind the final tally against the measure” (VOA, 29 May 2006). In the aftermath of the defeat, while Obasanjo claimed it as a ‘victory for democracy,’ political analysts ascribed it political naiveté on the part of Obasanjo’s advisors who failed to comprehend the importance of public opinion and bringing popular will on their side before launching the third term campaign (*This Day*, 25 May 2006). In this example, outside the context of elections, opinion polling delivers solid proof of its ability to aggregate opinion and overcome collective action problems to influence elite behaviour in a positive fashion.

5.2 Public Opinion Polling in Nigerian Elections

This thesis emphasises the significance of elections. Elections have been presented as being central to competitive politics. A source both of political participation and competition, elections are also instrumental to an “orderly succession in a democratic setting, creating a legal-administrative framework for handling inter-elite rivalries” (Omotola, 2010: 537). Michael Bratton (1998: 5) observes that “the consolidation of democracy involves the widespread acceptance of rules to guarantee political participation and political competition. Elections — which empower ordinary citizens to choose among contestants for top political offices — clearly promote rules.”

The use of polls to measure public opinion has made a clear impact on political competition in Western democracies. Where politicians formerly had to rely on local officials, media and their own partisans for information, opinion polls can now serve as an objective source of information about voter preferences. Political candidates and their parties can use poll results to set and revise campaign strategies. Whether the same is true of developing countries like Nigeria is unclear.

Following the emergence of opinion polling on the political stage through the Obasanjo affair, Nigeria's burgeoning media discovered the merits of public opinion research as both commercial products and political tools. It was said of the 2007 electoral campaign that "it is the first time ever that national dailies are conducting independent surveys which, when removed from the malignant factor of corruption, have been accepted by the public as credible. It is the first time that politicians themselves as well as their parties are arranging for opinion polls to be carried out to the end of appraising their chances vis-à-vis those of their opponents" (*Vanguard*, 10 April 2007). The prominence of opinion polling in these elections brought more players to the field (Private interview, 5 February 2013), making the 2011 election the most researched in Nigeria's history with regard to public opinion.

Table 16: Pollsters in Nigerian politics

Polling Organisation	Elections Active	Affiliation or other ties ¹⁶
International Republican Institute	2011	US agency funded by USAID and affiliated with the US Republican party. Has extensive election programmes around the world.
Ipsos/This Day	2003, 2007, 2011	Independently owned, now part of international brand. Has been variously accused of favouritism but no formal links
NOI Polls	2011	Founded by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, current Finance Minister. Have gone to great lengths to distance themselves from PDP but still assumed bias
IFES	2007	US agency funded by USAID, broadly impartial
RMS	2011	Independent, now part of global TNS brand

¹⁶ This applies to the organisation only. It is not always possible to discern the data source or funding agent of individual polls released under the names of organisations or newspapers. Independent firms may be open to accusations of bias when they conduct and publish polls on behalf of particular parties or individuals.

African election campaigns have largely become “opportunities for politicians to engage in mass mobilisation and manipulation of electoral rules. All too often, campaign strategies feature material inducement and political intimidation” (Bratton 2008: 1). This includes but is not limited to vote buying and electoral violence. Nigeria has a history of highly competitive elections. In all cases, three issues have been shown to persist: crises of political succession, zero-sum intra-elite battles for control of the resources of the state, and questions as to the credibility of the electoral process (Obi, 2007). The scope of this study is limited to those elections where public opinion polling was prevalent and potentially influential, those of 2007 and 2011.

Nigerians went to the polls for a third time since the democratic transition in the April 2007 general elections. Following Obasanjo’s failure to obtain his desired constitutional amendment, these elections would witness the first transfer of power from one civilian president to another in the country’s history. Given the credibility issues around the results of the previous elections, the 2007 elections also provided an opportunity to restore public confidence in the country’s electoral institutions and its democratic process.

The 2011 elections, by contrast, were generally anticipated with apprehension and mistrust. The poor experience of 2003 and 2007 meant that public and international opinion expected the worst. Moreover, the death of President Yar’Adua mid-term threw Nigeria’s power-sharing settlement off course, as southerner Goodluck Jonathan, vice president under Yar’Adua assumed the role and pledged his intention to run for office again. The stage was set for a showdown between the south and the north and a possible disintegration of the political arrangements that had held Nigeria together for more than a decade.

The remainder of this chapter examines the influence and the growing force of public opinion research had on the electoral behaviour of the political elites and their supporters through a comparative study of electoral quality in 2007 and 2011. Reviewing evidence from both the presidential and the gubernatorial elections, it

assesses the relative importance of collective action theory, institutional theory, and this thesis's own model of elite perceptions in explaining elite electoral strategies.

5.2.1 The 2007 Presidential Elections

In 2007, three issues dominated political discussion prior to the elections. Would the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar be allowed to compete in the presidential polls? Would the opposition unite in an alliance against the PDP in an effort to secure the presidency? Or would it call for a boycott of the elections in anticipation of electoral machinations from the incumbent PDP (Ibrahim, 2007)? The role of public opinion in determining the outcome of these questions is decidedly mixed.

The third term debate led to major realignments within the Nigerian political landscape. Vice President Atiku Abubakar, who was widely tipped as Obasanjo's successor within the PDP, felt aggrieved by Obasanjo's attempt to retain power and vehemently opposed the third term amendment (EU, 2007). This 'betrayal,' however, was repaid when Obasanjo succeeded in having Atiku's nomination as PDP's presidential candidate blocked, forcing Atiku to abandon the party and move instead to the Action Congress (AC) party. In his place, Obasanjo manoeuvred the former governor of the Northern state of Katsina, Umaru Yar'Adua, to represent the PDP in the presidential poll.

This feud between Atiku and Obasanjo did not end there; its ups and downs came to influence much of the election period. Likely at Obasanjo's instigation, the electoral commission disqualified Atiku from participating in the presidential election, a decision that was only overturned five days before the poll by the Federal High Court. For such a momentous issue, public opinion is strangely muted throughout the process. Pollsters continued to include Atiku in their surveys on likely presidential election outcomes, but the only hint of protest appears in the *Vanguard* newspaper, with the author arguing that "in any democracy only the court of law, and the court of public opinion can determine the qualifications of candidates in an election" (*Vanguard*, 11 March 2007)

This author's review of over 18,400 newspaper articles published in Nigeria between October 2006 and May 2007 unearthed 42 mentions of the term "opinion poll." Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 2.38 mentions per thousand, a relatively insignificant number but pertinent nonetheless in the context of Nigeria's extensive media market. The complexity of the Nigerian political system coupled with opinion polling's slow penetration into lower level electoral contests, such as parliamentary and other state level votes, explains the small share of the market occupied by polling coverage.

5.2.1.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

That opinion polling had become more prevalent since 2003 within the electoral campaign is indisputable. Newspapers throughout both of the elections carried opinion polling data as front page news whenever it appeared. "As the April polls edge closer, opinion polls have become popular as a yardstick to measure the level of acceptance of candidates (mostly presidential) vying in the upcoming elections" (*Daily Trust*, 24 March 2007).

Readers were regularly treated to polls giving them the latest trends in presidential electability or detailed analyses of the on-ground party politics in the various hotly-contested states (*Daily Trust*, 14 March 2007; *Daily Champion*, 3 April 2007). This section addresses whether that growth in readership and prominence corresponded with an increased influence in politics and specifically a contribution towards democratisation.

Opinion polling also guided media coverage of candidates, with those leading the polls receiving the lion's share of the attention. An EU monitoring report found that "national broadcasters allocated the majority of their election coverage to the presidential elections and, in some instances to the governorship elections. News and current affairs programmes of private and state broadcasters focused on a limited number of parties: predominantly PDP, AC and ANPP" (EU, 2007: 24). That these three main parties received the bulk of the coverage was judged to have been based on their position in opinion polls.

This focus did result, however, in an imbalanced representation of the political landscape. While there were fifty registered parties, the media simply lacked the capacity and resources to cover them all. Therefore, in spite of their legal obligations to provide equal coverage, it seems only logical that the media chose those candidates and those parties that opinion polls said had the greater likelihood of winning. An analysis of the editorials of two key political newspapers during this period reveals the mixed feelings with which public opinion polling was received in the political media.

Table 17: Political Commentators in Nigeria 2007 Election Campaign

	<i>This Day</i> , editorial page	<i>Vanguard</i> , editorial page
October 29 2006	"Many Nigerians view Obasanjo as a "good president" because of his ability to take decisions and stand by them irrespective of public outcry. To change Nigeria, you must be stubborn and dead to public opinion, so says a school of thought. To put it crudely, you need a "mad man" in power if Nigeria is to be sanitised once and for all."	
April 10 2007		"If anything is looking sure, it is that any politician with or without integrity looking for office in 2011 will do himself a favour doing some professional research before he puts his hand to the plough, and those who do find themselves in office this year will do well for themselves by having regular polls done on their behalf to the end of appraising their performance vis-à-vis that of their competition. Most importantly, this kind of independent study could be an almost fool proof way of reconciling public opinion with whatever figures a dependent INEC presents to us by way of results."
April 20 2007		"Before the election, commissioned hack professionals had conducted various laughable opinion polls showing that some candidates were leading others in the various

	<i>This Day</i> , editorial page	<i>Vanguard</i> , editorial page
		elective offices to be filled. Anyone who is close to the grassroots needs not be clairvoyant to see the fallacy inherent in these opinion polls that were conducted in some air-conditioned offices. In the law of evidence, a principle is called laying of foundation. And this is what that party did through these opinion polls; that is to lay foundation for the perceived rigging of last Saturday's elections."
April 29 2007	"Generally speaking, I believe PDP was in a position to win the general elections without the senseless rigging. But the margin wouldn't have been this scandalously wide. To the best of my knowledge, merit or performance occupies little or no position in the hierarchy of what influences the voting behaviour of the Nigerian populace. The real question, the real criterion that can make Nigeria a great nation, should be: who has the best ideas or programmes? Sadly, this question hardly gets asked and hardly plays any role in voters' behaviour."	

One columnist encapsulated well the dual nature of opinion polling in Nigeria: "The results of polls like these will help the ruling class to maintain course or change course in line with the overwhelming perception of citizenry" but "it is self-evident the opinion polls [are] already being used to sell political candidates" (*Daily Trust*, 24 March 2007). Indeed, the dominance of the PDP in the 2007 elections complicated polling's ability to change the political state of play through increased information. The numbers merely reflected the superior appeal of the major parties and helped to drive further media coverage in their direction, effectively restricting rather than opening political space.

5.2.1.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

Public opinion and polling did, however, contribute to other elite decisions with regard to electoral strategies. Looking at the electoral landscape in 2007, the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) candidate Muhammadu Buhari advised opposition parties to unite behind one candidate to avoid splitting the vote and handing the election to the PDP. Clearly based on analyses of opinion polling, the attempt to create a single candidate capable of winning by drawing from the strengths of the various disparate opposition parties is an important tactical shift. Opinion polls released before the elections suggest that represented a sound strategy and one which would yield a majority victory. Nevertheless, the alliance fell apart. Whether this is on the basis of further analysis of public opinion or simply the result of conflicting egos, the proposal itself shows that polling, however, nascent was beginning to inform political strategies.

Public opinion also featured in Buhari's decision in 2007 not to boycott the presidential elections. Following rampant reports of electoral fraud in the local and assembly elections, many opposition politicians, including Atiku who was at this time still technically disqualified from running, began calling for a boycott of the presidential polls to express their lack of trust in their legitimacy. The decision went right to the end, but ultimately Buhari opted to participate in the elections, writing in the *Daily Trust* the day prior to the vote: "Public opinion is urging candidates against any action that may stop the elections" (*Daily Trust*, 20 April 2007).

The impact of public opinion on these examples of elite behaviour is mostly a matter of conjecture, but there is compelling evidence that opinion polling is becoming institutionalised in the selection process of candidates within political parties in Nigeria (Private interview, 6 February 2013). The example above illustrates PDP's use of opinion polling on its website as part of its primary selection process. On the other hand, a decidedly negative side to opinion polling is the way in which its data can be operationalised in political campaigns. While in advanced democracies, this may be construed as a good thing, where politicians are better in tune with the particular needs of their constituents, in countries like Nigeria it can become a template for better targeting electoral manipulation through corruption and intimidation.

Nigeria's political system is particularly open to this kind of manipulation at the presidential level due to its requirement that successful candidates not only win the popular vote but also win at least 25 per cent of the vote in 2/3rds of the states. Data for the 2007 presidential election was never released so it's impossible to base any conclusions on that, notwithstanding the fact that it was largely fraudulent in any case. In analysing the 2007 Nigeria elections, Collier and Vicente (2008) found that parties in positions of strength, principally the PDP, but opposition parties in their power bases would typically opt for two strategies for winning elections: ballot fraud and vote-buying. With resources scarce, the application of public opinion research may have facilitated this process in both the 2007 and 2011 elections. That the practice was widespread is well-documented. By February 2007, "some 12 per cent of Nigerians interviewed acknowledged that a candidate or a party agent had offered something in return for your vote" (Bratton, 2008: 4).

Collier and Vicente's analysis also found that where parties found themselves in positions of weakness, they often resorted to violence as a last ditch attempt to influence the electoral outcomes (Collier and Vicente, 2008). Indeed while initially a peaceful campaign, the incidence of violence increased as the elections approached. A monitoring report from the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa, 2007) found evidence that at least 200 people, including some police, had been killed in election-related violence. Key incidents included clashes between ANPP and PDP supporters in Obasanjo's home state of Ogun state and between Labour Party and PDP supporters in Oyo state.

Another study found that threatened campaign violence has a more significant effect on election outcomes than actual violence. For an average Nigerian it was found that a threat of violence reduces the likelihood of intending to vote by 52 per cent. Moreover, intimidation's effect appears to be persistent, carrying over between elections, and very effective, with many who faced threats withdrawing entirely from the election process (Bratton, 2008).

The 2007 general election itself was dogged from the start with accusations of manipulation and political interference at the highest level. Obasanjo's personal

selection of Yar'Adua as his successor rankled with those who considered Nigeria's democracy compromised by such an obvious transgression of authority. Nevertheless, with Yar'Adua as its candidate the PDP pursued a vigorous national campaign.

With Atiku Abubakar excluded for much of the campaign, Buhari of the ANPP was the only credible opposition to the incumbent party which had dominated Nigerian politics since 1999. But Yar'Adua proved an unpopular choice among the electorate, the relatively unknown governor of Katsina state failed to excite significant support from the PDP faithful, with polls as late as 9 April showing him to be in a statistically dead heat with Buhari.

Yet, the PDP machinery was clearly making inroads into public opinion. Indeed, among the noteworthy features of the late polls at both presidential and gubernatorial levels is the disproportionately large number of undecided voters. With the trends moving marginally in his favour, Election Day arrived. On the basis of the polls below, Buhari and even Atiku, notwithstanding his late official entry into the contest, could go into the election with a degree of confidence, feeling that at least they would give Yar'Adua a genuine challenge.

Imagine their surprise when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced the results two days later, claiming that the PDP's Umaru Yar'Adua had captured the presidency with 69.82 per cent of the votes. The All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) under Muhammadu Buhari had secured 18.72 per cent of the votes while the Action Congress (AC) under Atiku Abubakar, polled just 7.47 per cent of the votes. The table below illustrates the disparity between the prevailing opinion polls in the run-up to the election and the official election results.

Table 18: Polling Predictions versus Actual Results in Nigeria 2007 Election

	Share of votes in presidential election (%)		
	Yar'Adua (PDP)	Buhari (ANPP)	Abubakar (AC)
Actual results	69.82	18.72	7.47
This Day polls	39.4	32	20

21 April 2007			
This Day polls 9 April 2007	29	27	24
IFES polls February 2007	25	28	12

Opposition response was swift. Buhari refused to accept the results of the ballot and called on parliament to impeach Obasanjo for election manipulation. Buhari also threatened to organise mass protests if the PDP claimed victory. Atiku described it as "the worst election ever in Nigeria," declaring that the government had "no alternative than to cancel the election altogether ... In fact, I have already rejected these elections" (Quist-Arcton, NPR, 23 April 2007).

Criticism centred primarily on the Obasanjo government and the INEC which was deemed to have been corrupted by the PDP elite. Indeed, people expressed surprise that the final result of the presidential elections was available when a number of states had not finished voting and others had admitted to not having enough ballot papers to hold the election in all areas. Quick to react to the controversy, Obasanjo and his advisors fell back upon opinion polling to legitimise the election.

Speaking with the media, one advisor argued that the election must be valid because all pre-election opinion surveys had predicted Yar'Adua victory, the margin was inconsequential. Obasanjo trotted out the same story presenting the straw man argument that some polls, mostly PDP sponsored, had predicted that the PDP would win by larger margins so how could the election have been a fraud? (*Daily Trust*, 26 April 2007)

One political insider confided later that "Shortly before the 2007 elections, a government cabinet minister came to see me with polling results that ostensibly showed overwhelming support for the governing People's Democratic Party. In hindsight, the Obasanjo government's sharing of poll results with the diplomatic community looks like it was part of an orchestrated campaign to try and give credibility to the electoral outcomes despite the massive PDP rigging of the elections." (Campbell,

2011: 1) Yet, in spite of robust international condemnation and appeals to national protest, widespread violence in reaction to the fraudulent election failed to materialise (BBC, 1 May 2007). In the northern city of Kano, groups supporting the opposition candidate Buhari ignited bonfires in protest and threatened passing motorists, but the incidents were largely isolated.

Under these conditions, it is understandable why opinion polling in Nigeria in 2007 was often dismissed as exercises in propaganda. As with most things, perceptions of credibility and impartiality are all relative and tied to where one sits in the political spectrum. PDP supporters viewed the huge victory as entirely feasible and considered the stream of polls predicting a close contest as the desperate attempts of an opposition and international community intent on breaking the PDP stranglehold on power. Opposition supporters, by contrast, viewed the independent polls as the true representation of the political landscape, believing the final tally to have been the result of massive rigging and co-option within the electoral institutions of Nigeria (Private interview, 6 February 2013). This lack of trust in these institutions adds a difficult obstacle to the idea of political polls setting more realistic expectations. If the relevant institutions cannot be relied on to deliver the election freely and fairly, then the introduction of polls does not promote acceptance of results but rather the opposite. It provokes those on the losing end to contest, usually to the detriment of all.

In assessing opinion polling's political impact at a strategic level, then, the evidence of 2007 points to an elite dominant system, using polls to maximise personal gain over the needs/wishes of the electorate. While opinion polling played an important role in persuading the opposition to contest the elections and therefore preventing a PDP monopoly on power, once the campaign was joined the strategic calculus deteriorated considerably. In the personality-dominant arena of politics, the power of numbers lies not in convincing voters of your merit but in convincing voters of your ability to deliver, either to their benefit or to their detriment depending on how they choose to vote. While opinion polling may not directly contribute to the exercise of these tactics, it appears that the presence of hard data enabled politicians to be more ruthless and yet more selective in their application. While this may represent value for money for

Nigerian 'big men', it does not speak well for opinion polling's ability to influence positively Nigeria's quest for more transparent and representative elections.

5.2.2 The 2007 Gubernatorial Elections

The outcome of the presidential election was presaged by the conduct of the gubernatorial elections the previous week, which also ended in calls for rejecting results, re-runs, and long-running court challenges. As Obasanjo told the BBC, the PDP's internal polls set a high bar for electoral success in 2007; in the case of the governor's race, they predicted a clean sweep for the party. Independent polling predicted differently, setting up a keen political battle in some 'swing states' (BBC, 2007).

The gubernatorial elections were characterised by pervasive fraud that called the results of many states into question, undermining the legitimacy of a number of 'elected' governors. These included, but were not limited to, the PDP candidate in Delta state being declared the winner of his by INEC headquarters before the tabulation of votes had finished; the results of gubernatorial elections in Imo State where APGA's candidate was leading being annulled due to electoral violence while elections in states won by the PDP where similar violence was reported were allowed to stand; and the disqualification of the AC candidate in Adamawa State just 12 hours prior to the start of the elections when it became clear that he was the likely victor (NDI, 2007).

After the polls, the election tribunals became inundated with petitions based on irregularities in the 2007 elections. 106 petitions were filed challenging gubernatorial outcomes, emanating from all but one of the federation's states. The results had important ramifications for the country. While the presidential elections achieve greater notoriety internationally, for the Nigerian political elite, the gubernatorial elections almost equally significant due to governors' access to the country's natural resource revenues and their position at the top of many important clientelistic networks.

5.2.2.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

Media reports suggest that opinion polling provides instructive information on questions of candidate selection and party participation, particularly at local levels. In the 2007, gubernatorial contest in Kwara state, one of the candidates interviewed revealed how he anticipated the process would pan out. “Let everybody express their intentions, from Kwara South, we are four major candidates, there are other people though, but the four major ones people are talking about are four. But out of the four, what my own party and my own person is saying is that, let everyone of us go out and sell ourselves to the electorates, because it is not just the party or the Kwara south that is going to elect us, it is the Kwarans. We hope by early March, there would be an opinion poll on who is more popular, it would be clear; then we can now say that let this person go” (*Vanguard*, 13 February 2007).

The extent, however, upon which politicians at this level rely on opinion polling is restricted by the structure of the politics. The parties and the selection of candidates are dominated largely by political ‘godfathers’ whose preferences reckon far greater than those of the electorate in deciding who will contest the election (Private interview 9 February 2013). In this context, polling may be a contributory factor in decision-making, but it certainly does not open up political space in any meaningful way.

5.2.2.2 Strategic Responses to Polling

The content of political opinion polling does present some opportunities for strategic prioritising at the gubernatorial level. While not shifting the political reality in any meaningful way, the data provides measurable targets for those political operators looking to arrest opposition momentum or push voters in their candidate’s direction through strategic communication in the media and on the campaign trail. The gubernatorial race in 2007 in Ekiti is a good example. Throughout the campaign, political commentators believed the election to be securely in the hands of the Action Congress. Coincidentally, as the polls approached, reports began to leak about impending vote rigging and electoral fraud, forcing the PDP candidate Olusegun Oni and President Obasanjo to deny the accusations (*This Day*, 10 April 2007). Oni went

further accusing the AC of fraud: "In fact, it is the AC that has been inducing people with money to perpetuate fraud in the elections" (*Daily Champion*, 13 April 2007).

Threats of corruption also hung over the gubernatorial election in Edo, where "suspicion of rigging in Edo has been heightened in recent times because of what many observers have seen as an indication that Oshiomhole [the Action Congress candidate] may win the election. Various opinion polls and reports have given the former labour leader the edge over Professor Osarhiemen Osunbor, the PDP candidate" (*This Day*, 5 April 2007). The PDP countered that the AC were "sponsoring opinion polls through media and manufactured facts and figures all in a bid to create false alarm" (*Vanguard*, 13 April 2007).

Similar concerns faced opposition candidates in Imo state where APGA candidate Martin Agbaso enjoyed huge leads over his PDP opponents who were caught in a legal struggle of their own over who should represent the party. One commentator related a story of a visit to a friend in Imo who began "I can bet my life that Agbaso will win the governorship overwhelmingly, but ... 'But what?' I asked. I knew where he was going. 'PDP may rig it. You know our country'" (*This Day*, 1 April 2007).

For opinion polling to have a hope in influencing elections in a positive way, certain assumptions must hold. First among these is that the electoral process itself will at least approximate the behaviour of the selected sample, through both good statistical design and through upright institutions. At the level of the gubernatorial elections in 2007, Nigeria clearly fails to support this assumption. Political parties could not realistically use polls to craft strategy as there was no guarantee the numbers would bear any relation to the official results. Instead, polling could only be used by incumbent candidates and parties to determine the extent to which they need to adjust the final figures to ensure victory. The only compelling contribution therefore could be to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of election rigging.

Yet, while polling had limited strategic effect before the election, it did have its uses after the election. As the only record of note, the polls were often used as justification for court challenges and subsequently produced as evidence of rampant rigging in

certain cases. In other states, polling which suggested a close race contributed to triggering violence when one party or another was declared the winner by significant margins.

In Ekiti, Obasanjo's strategy of personal intervention, discussed above, seemed to backfire as Olusegun Oni persistently trailed Action Congress's candidate Kayode Fayemi in the opinion polls. On April 14, however, the INEC in Ekiti declared Oni the resounding winner. Protests broke out almost immediately led by thousands of women of the Ekiti Women's Alliance who took to the streets to protest against the declaration of the PDP candidate as the winner, contending that the AC was "robbed of victory" (*Daily Champion*, 18 April 2007). The situation escalated to such an extent that Obasanjo was forced to declare a state of emergency following the total breakdown of law and order in the state as violent protests left many people dead and homes of prominent members of the ruling party destroyed (*This Day*, 19 April 2007).

Confident that the official result had been fabricated, Fayemi appealed the result, winning a re-run in 2009. These polls, held on 25 April, were marred by violence that prevented a viable result from being achieved, forcing a further poll on 5 May 2009. After a series of dramatic incidents, including the disappearance of the Resident Electoral Commissioner, Oni was again announced the winner with 111,140 votes over Fayemi's 107,011. Fayemi appealed once more and ultimately was awarded the victory on 15 October 2010 after over 41 months of legal battles.

This story was repeated across numerous states in the south of the country. In Edo state, a south central state, again with a history of electoral dysfunction, violence erupted after the announcement of another PDP victory. In spite of opinion polls predicting a narrow victory for the AC candidate Oshiomhole, the INEC had declared PDP's Osarihem Osunbor as the winner by a margin of almost two-to-one, far beyond any realistic tally for the PDP candidate.

In the immediate aftermath, three officials of the INEC in Edo State were killed by the protesters, with groups threatening further violence if the INEC did not reverse its verdict and announce the AC candidate the victor (*This Day*, 18 April 2007). Yet, while

Oshiomhole was arrested for inciting violence, the governor-elect declared the election to have been the 'best ever.' Osunbor said "The people have rejected the evil plans of the disguised enemies of democracy, whose pre-elections caustic rhetoric was targeted at inciting violence, disruption and unrest, which they will then use as a platform for protest" (*Daily Champion*, 17 April 2007).

Following a long court battle, almost a year later in March 2008, the state election tribunal annulled the election results, declaring the AC's Oshiomhole the winner. The decision was appealed again, with a final decision only emerging in November 2008, when a federal Appeal Court upheld the ruling of the state's elections tribunal installing Oshiomhole once and for all as the Governor of Edo State.

The rigging reached its most blatant in Imo state in the southeast where opinion polls had long given the APGA candidate Martins Agbaso a substantial lead heading into the election. On the day of election, citing voting irregularities in some of the local districts, the INEC in the state cancelled the election, setting 28 April as the new date for the poll. This was met with protests from Agbaso supporters which urged the INEC to release the result of the polls. The National Labour Congress (NLC) released a statement: "We are rather astonished that after claiming that the widespread fraud and irregularities were prevalent in seven local government areas where voting for the two elections were held simultaneously, INEC still went ahead to cancel the gubernatorial election and accepted that of the House of Assembly" (*This Day*, 21 April 2007). In the run-off, the PDP establishment in Imo supported a third party candidate, Ihedi Ohakim from the Progressive People's Alliance (PPA), who won a resounding victory. Efforts to overturn the election proved fruitless and after almost four years of legal battles, Agbaso's case was eventually thrown out.

While the bulk of the irregularities occurred in the south of the country, the northern states were not immune from electoral violence. Violence was also reported in the northern state of Katsina, where opposition supporters torched government buildings while protesting the announcement of the PDP's victory in the state's gubernatorial polls. This followed reports of late opinion polls which had the two candidates running in a statistical dead heat.

These examples reiterate the potential that opinion polling has in competitive environments of instigating rather than reducing violence and conflict by establishing appropriate expectations of election results. This is rarely as a result of shortcomings in the polling but rather deficiencies in the electoral process which create vast chasms between the data presented in the pre-election polls and official election tallies. The pertinent question is whether the transparency that polls provide and the conflict it subsequently provokes is good for democratic development in the long-run, even if it is disastrous in the immediate aftermath of elections. Will it ultimately lead to greater accountability of politicians and state institutions to the electorate or will it simply engender a new generation of politicians more adept at manipulating polls in advance to conform to their electoral preferences?

5.2.2.4 Implications for Research

The record then for the influence of public opinion polling on political information and electoral strategies is decidedly ambivalent. On the one hand, it is credited with ensuring that the opposition took part in the 2007 general elections. Nigerian academics were now arguing that “a government that wants to remain in power and still have its popularity among the people needs to take public opinion into consideration...public opinion now plays an important role in politics. They are used throughout the course of election campaigns by candidates and by media to see which candidates are ahead and who is likely to emerge victorious” (Church and Onyebuchi, 2012: 233). Yet, on the other, it seems to function more prominently as means for elites to present ‘consensus’ candidates to the electorates, using opinion polls as a way to presage the outcomes of the elections and ensure they are on the winning side (Private interview, 6 February 2013). In this context, participation is no longer representative of open and fair contestation but rather a pre-organised game, that while not necessarily rigged from start, does present Nigerian citizens with a reduced scope for choice (Private interview, 9 February 2013).

5.2.3 The 2011 Presidential Elections

The 2011 general election was overshadowed by the political crisis brought about by the death of President Yar'Adua in 2010. The succession crisis within the PDP that followed centred on the geographic origin of its preferred candidate for the forthcoming election. Following the country's transition to democracy, the political elites had concluded an agreement that required the presidency to rotate between Nigeria's north and south, an arrangement generally referred to as 'zoning' (Tayo, 2011).

Based on this agreement, there was a consensus, particularly in the north, that because Yar'Adua, a northerner, had died before completing his first term it remained the North's turn to hold the presidency. Despite efforts of these northern elites to block him, Goodluck Jonathan, the vice-president and a southerner, assumed the presidency following Yar'Adua's death. Undeterred, the focus of the northern coalition turned to preventing Jonathan's nomination as the PDP candidate for 2011 to prevent what they saw as a southern usurpation of power.

Returning to the PDP, Atiku presented himself as the Northern candidate that could smooth over the ethno-regional divide caused by Jonathan's candidacy. In support of his campaign, he pointed to an opinion poll conducted on the PDP website which gave him a slim lead over Jonathan to become the party's presidential nominee (*Daily Trust*, 3 January 2011). Proving that popularity is not sufficient, the poll was hastily removed from the website, and legal proceedings began seeking his disqualification from the campaign. Jonathan with the support of the PDP elite sailed to victory in the PDP primary later in the year, and Atiku faded from the political scene.

It was a similar story with Buhari, this time competing under the banner of the CPC (Congress for Progressive Change), seeking an alliance with the ACN and its candidate Nuhu Ribadu. In this case, the initial agreement on power-sharing collapsed following the results of parliamentary elections in which the CPC did not perform as well as expected (*This Day*, 14 April 2011). A possible interpretation of this outcome suggests that the original bargain was struck on the basis of anticipated results drawn from

opinion polls. When the final tallies emerged with CPC, and its senior statesman Buhari at a disadvantage, the power balance of the coalition became unmanageable, forcing dissolution.

5.2.3.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

At a national level, opinion polling became a principal means for establishing one's right to candidacy. As already discussed, Atiku frequently cited opinion polls in his bid to gain the PDP nomination. Other minor candidates also tried to use the tactic to 'test the waters' for their candidacy (*Daily Trust*, 17 November 2006). In 2011, public opinion data became a crucial element to the arguments of Goodluck Jonathan that he was capable of winning a national election, in spite of his southern heritage (*Vanguard*, 19 February 2011). It remained a niche market though, targeted principally at the political elite. Indeed, this author's review of over 28,000 newspaper articles published in Nigeria between October 2010 and May 2011 revealed only 72 mentions of the term "opinion poll." Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 2.57 mentions per thousand. A slight increase from the 2007 election, but opinion polling, while influential, was by no means a consistently popular news item.

Reflecting the growing importance of public opinion in electoral campaigns, Jonathan had his Senior Special Assistant to the President on Research, Documentation, and Strategy doing his own independent polling in the run-up to the election. Defending his candidate's ability to win, he claimed "From the analysis, internal and external, it has become clear to us that Dr. Goodluck will win the presidential election by as much as 75 per cent of the total votes cast. You don't need to look too far to see where the opinion polls are pointing towards" (*Vanguard*, 28 March 2011). Such a public statement may have done much to reassure any potential PDP voters who feared that Jonathan lacked the broad base of support necessary to win the presidential vote.

Over the campaign, it became clear that Jonathan and his team were consuming and responding to the public opinion polls that were being released regarding the presidential race. When NOI Polls released a poll listing the electorate's top three issues for their candidates to address, Jonathan's speeches were adapted to ensure

that each issue was addressed in the exact order in which they had been listed in the poll. Even in an environment of low public accountability and limited political pressure from opposition, Jonathan and his advisors deemed it a necessary step to incorporate that information into their communication strategy (Private interview, 7 February 2013).

For 2011, it is interesting to note that while Goodluck Jonathan coasted to victory attaining the appropriate 25 per cent margin in 32 states (well above the requisite 24), there were a number of northern states where his vote tally came perilously close to falling short. Notably in Zamfara, Katsina, and Niger states where his share of the votes amounted to 25.35, 26.13, and 31.54 per cent respectively. In a closer election, those kinds of spreads could mean the difference between winning and losing.

Information from public opinion polling, according to prominent newspaper editors, not only enriches the articles on the political campaigns, they sometimes serve as a “game changer.” Where the atmosphere is tense and political horse-trading has become the order of the day, the introduction of a demonstrative poll can shift the political calculus and begin to drive electoral intelligentsia opinion. Indeed, its credibility was such that local academics used public opinion polls to fashion a statistical model design to predict, ultimately incorrectly, the outcome of the 2011 presidential election (Ojamruaye, 2011). Polling information, without doubt, had become a critical factor in any political analysis (Private interview, 7 February 2013).

5.2.3.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

By 2011, the PDP, while still the dominant party, was increasingly less secure in its hold over public opinion. Polling results on the eve of the gubernatorial elections threatened losses in up to nine states. Coupled with a tenser national electoral mood, it produced Nigeria’s most violent election to date.

Jonathan’s victory over the northern alternative, Atiku, in the PDP primaries marked an important juncture in Nigerian politics, throwing a long-standing elite agreement into disarray. Opposition parties were eager to capitalise on PDP’s internal preoccupations

and build on the gains made at state level where opposition parties have made inroads into overturning PDP's dominance. Buba Galadima, CPC national secretary, warned that the party would not accept the results should its candidate lose, because it had no confidence in the ability of the security agencies to oversee credible elections (*This Day*, 1 April 2011).

Nevertheless, Jonathan never really trailed according to the national opinion polls conducted during the campaign. The PDP while struggling to maintain support in parliamentary and gubernatorial elections never looked like losing the presidential vote. Not that Buhari's supporters weren't above condemning this poll, with one claiming that Jonathan had "lost the perception war" (*This Day*, 5 April 2011).

For example, the handlers of President Goodluck Jonathan framed a strategy where they urged Nigerian voters to desire "Fresh Air". This was a deliberate strategy to deviate attention from the rancorous political campaigns which used to be the norm in the past. Most of the electorate that voted for candidate Jonathan voted based on their desire to see a clean break from the past and truly experience this 'fresh air.' This was something of an extraordinary feat for a candidate of Jonathan's political credentials, but it reflected an appreciation of public opinion desire for something new (Agbo, 2013).

According to local sources, polling's place in Nigeria's political system has now begun to solidify. While politicians may often feign that they do not rely on newspaper reports owing to misinformation and lack of credibility for some newspapers. The truth is that on a larger scale, strategies of politicians and their parties are fluid during the period and as such, they change depending on the prevailing political situation as indicated by the polling outcome (Private interview, 7 February 2013).

Following the election, the official results confirmed the polls predictions, declaring Goodluck Jonathan winner with approximately 59 per cent of the vote, well within the margin of error for some of the major polls. Buhari managed 32 per cent, which was significantly higher than the opinion data suggested. His supporters were either significantly underrepresented in the sampling of the polls or were among undecideds

who ultimately decided to vote against the ruling party. The table below shows the correspondence between polls and official results.

Table 19: Polling Predictions versus Actual Results in Nigeria 2011 Election

	Share of votes in presidential election (%)			
	Jonathan (PDP)	Buhari (CPC)	Ribadu (ACN)	Shekarau (ANPP)
Actual results	58.89	31.98	5.41	2.40
This Day polls 7 April 2011	62	23	n/a	n/a
This Day polls 23 March 2011	60.3	22	4.7	n/a
RMS poll 29 March 2011	65	18	6	3
NOI poll	53	N/A	N/A	N/A

The relative accuracy of the other voting results supports a number of different conclusions relative to 2007. First, polling practice may have improved over the course of four years to better estimate trends. Second, the 2007 election was rigged beyond recognition such that no amount of opinion polling would have successfully predicted the outcome. Third, the 2011 election was perhaps manipulated with an eye toward matching opinion polling data to create a veneer of legitimacy.

Buhari's CPC certainly believed the latter to be case, rejecting results in 22 states on the basis of electoral fraud and intimidation. While such targeted rejections were to be expected, what surprised the security and intelligence communities was the intensity of violence that followed the announcement of the results of the presidential election. Violence erupted in fourteen Northern states with the worst effects felt in Adamawa, Kano, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Bauchi and parts of Niger states. According to reports, over 1,000 people were killed and 74,000 people displaced. (Human Rights Watch, 2011)

In a powerful argument against the contention that opinion polls help establish realistic expectations, some media reported that "some protesters believed that

because Buhari won in their immediate vicinities, he had become president. They equated victory in their own states to a Nigeria-wide victory” (*Daily Sun*, 29 April 2011). On the whole, however, most observers attribute the violence to a combination of disillusioned youths and northern unease at being potentially frozen out of the Nigerian political system. Nevertheless, it supports the contention that no amount of opinion polling can undo expectations which are too fervently held as to withstand all evidence to the contrary.

5.2.4 The 2011 Gubernatorial Elections

It was in the wake of these violent clashes that the gubernatorial elections for 2011 were held. Opposition optimism was nonetheless high on the basis of opinion polling which showed them making significant inroads into PDP’s dominant position. Bucking the national trend and following the pattern of the 2007 election, disputes in the gubernatorial arena were based exclusively on local issues, although the violent atmosphere in which they were conducted certainly added tension.

5.2.4.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

The subtle but emergent trend in Nigerian politics is the weakening of the power of political godfathers with each passing election. The rapid growth in social media and opinion polling has shed far greater transparency on political information and political decision-making. Politics are still dominated by a small number of powerbrokers, but the tide may be turning (Private interview, 9 February 2013).

In the 2011 Abia state gubernatorial race, the Conference of Nigeria Political Parties was said to be “perfecting arrangements to adopt a consensus candidate for the governorship election” by conducting an opinion poll (*Daily Champion*, 18 February 2011). The Northern Youth Assembly undertook a similar exercise in the presidential contest, using an opinion poll of its delegates to decide which ‘consensus candidate it would endorse (*Daily Independent*, 8 April 2011).

This is not to say that everyone embraces the growth of public opinion polling. Even among civil society, there are grave doubts as to the veracity of the information obtained through polling. “Speaking yesterday on the backdrop of controversies surrounding opinion polls few days to the April general elections, President, Civil Rights Congress, Kaduna, Malam Shehu Sani said that Nigerian pollsters are paid fortune tellers, entrepreneurial seers and false prophets. ‘Nigerian pollsters imagine and coupled results in their offices and homes and churn it out as a product of a conducted survey. Over the years and prelude to elections, they have a consistent but fraudulent pattern of predicting victories for incumbents and their paymasters’” (*Daily Trust*, 29 March 2011).

Opinion polling at this level of election is fraught with difficulties. Conducting polls at state level requires far greater organisational capacity and resources than operating at national level only. Given the size of Nigeria both in terms of area and population, this precludes all but the largest and best financed polling outfits from attempting it. The appetite for public opinion polling is certainly growing both in the media and among the political class (Private interview, 6 February 2013). Social media regularly picks up polling data, and politicians have come to recognise its importance in shaping political discourse. In practice, however, this is not always sufficient.

5.2.4.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

Many politicians will pay for polling to improve their standing in an electoral contest (Private interview, 9 February 2013). And such is the dilemma for polling at the gubernatorial level. Trying to balance credibility and impartiality with the realities of polling expense create a tension that underpins much of opinion polling’s role in state level politics in Nigeria.

In Edo state, Governor Adams Oshiomhole noted rising tensions in his state after troops, allegedly acting on behalf of the PDP, were said to have attacked potential voters during the parliamentary elections (*This Day*, 6 April 2011). In Benue state, spates of violence erupted throughout the election period. One commentator described the campaign: “The attempt on the life of a Senatorial candidate in the state,

Major-General Lawrence Onoja, is a clear testimony of the level of political violence in the state. One is not sure who it will be next. Political contenders in the state appear to be ferocious in their quest to be declared winners after the elections no matter the cost. The result will be more violence” (*Vanguard*, 1 April 2011).

By contrast, in Imo state where opinion polls gave APGA candidate Rochas Okorocha a commanding lead of 64 to 18 per cent, the same commentator had this to say: “The personalities lined up for the gubernatorial and senatorial elections, present what is called the 'Group of Death' and this makes the elections to be more attention-grabbing. Apart from criminal kidnapping and political intimidation and harassment, nothing has been reported in the area of a more life threatening political violence and killings as it was in the past” (*ibid*).

These examples suggest that the opinion polling can influence strategic considerations in the sense that gubernatorial candidates will abstain from violence in contests where there is no chance for success. While sporadic violence may occur at any point, engineered violence such as was seen in the 2007 in Kenya or in these elections in Nigeria derives from a conviction that the violence will achieve a particular end. Thus where polling suggests a close race, pre-election violence may be considered more likely, given the right underlying conditions, while where a poll suggests a landslide, there may be little to be gained by strategic violence.

Strategies may shift however in the aftermath of elections. Politicians and supporters operating under certain expectations will react differently, especially in politically-charged environments. Indeed, several key governorships seemed to run counter to the prevailing climate of free and fair elections in 2011.

In the south, Imo state was once again the centre of intrigue. With opinion polls giving APGA candidate a solid lead, the INEC within the state decided to delay his election on grounds of voting irregularities in certain districts. The delay sparked tensions especially around the office premises of INEC where angry partisans fashioned roadblocks to prevent vehicles entering or exiting the INEC compound (*Vanguard*, 29 April 2011). Following a supplementary election, Okorocha of the APGA was ultimately

declared the winner, but with a far slimmer margin than pre-election polling would have expected.

Further allegations emerged in Bauchi state, which had its election post posed due to the post-presidential election violence. Amid extraordinarily tight security, voter turnout was low, an outcome which likely favoured the PDP incumbent and contributed to his victory. Opposition CPC and ANPP candidates rejected the result citing electoral fraud on the basis of opinion polling conducted immediately prior to the election which suggested the election could go either way (*Daily Trust*, 30 April 2011).

The biggest surprise, however, came in another northern state, Katsina. The home of CPC candidate Buhari, it was seen as a CPC stronghold and certainly a state where opposition could gain ground in an election year where PDP was relatively weak. Pre-election polling supported this assessment, giving the CPC candidate a nine point lead heading into the election. Official tallies, however, gave the victory to the PDP with the incumbent Shema accumulating 1,027,912 votes to the CPC's Bello Masari's 555,769. Masari rejected the entire process of the poll: "We are totally rejecting whatever comes out of this election, because there was total disregard for due process in the conduct of the election" (*Leadership*, 28 April 2011).

5.2.4.4 Implications for Research

For many of the elections reviewed in 2011, public opinion polling did succeed in establishing the eventual winners. In a volatile political environment like Nigeria, such predictions may or may not have prevented rejections of elections and the further escalation of violence. It is clear, however, that the imperfections in both the science of polling in Nigeria and the Nigerian electoral system itself contrive to create situations where pre-election polling possibly exacerbates the problem of politically-motivated violence.

Broadly, there is growing evidence that the way in which Nigerians participate in elections is changing. Young people are voting in greater numbers; technology is

allowing the media and citizen groups to capture and share election data more quickly and easily; and there is an emerging capacity within the context of opinion polling to measure and analyse electoral behaviour and preferences (Campbell, 2011). In doing so, opinion polling can be seen to be working towards the greater good of removing electoral fraud and supporting more transparent and representative elections, but its short term contribution to Nigerian politics has been a reputation for igniting electoral controversies.

Indeed, irrespective of opinion polling's contribution, the electoral outcome was ultimately determined by the same elites who have always dominated Nigerian politics. Nevertheless, if these developments in public opinion research can persist and expand, they could have a significant and positive impact on the improvement electoral practice and outcomes. Whatever its influence, it cannot be denied that public opinion polling has made a forceful entry into the Nigerian political system, shaping elite behaviour both for the better and, unfortunately, often for the worse.

5.3 Conclusions

This chapter offers several new contributions to this thesis's overarching question regarding the impact of opinion polling on electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa. Opinion polls as a source of political information have clearly grown over the course of the past decade in Nigeria. Among the more convincing evidence that public opinion is considered pertinent by Nigerian political elites is the time and effort spent by politicians and the media in trying to ascertain the opinion of ordinary Nigerians. However, the connection between political outcomes and public opinion may not always be clear, leading some to doubt its relevance in the Nigerian context. It also is apparent that the current generation of politicians in Nigeria has been relatively slow in recognising the potential in opinion polling as both a source of information and as a means of managing it.

Nevertheless, it is clear that opinion polls exert some influence over key segments of the political elite. The third term crisis amply demonstrates the potency of a 'sudden'

swing in popular opinion. While the anti-amendment campaign was already extant, the introduction of polling numbers gave it a potency it could not have mustered alone. At the same time, the evidence in this chapter has shown the negative side to political responsiveness in the form of strategic rigging and intimidation based on the targeted information provided by opinion polling.

Indeed, in spite of the gains opinion polling has made in Nigeria, its influence is hampered by a number of structural factors. Nigerian politics have been, since the military dictatorships, largely non-ideological. As one Nigerian author noted, “rather than a battle of ideas, they are about who can pump in the most money and buy the most access. Debating ideas, spurred by youth participation, might bring more substance. Candidates will no longer merely hold colourful rallies, but will answer questions about important issues such as education and electricity.”(Adichie, 2011: 1)

The story of opinion polling in Nigeria has largely been about expectations unmet. Whether as an electorate deprived of duly elected leaders or as pollsters and politicians deprived of legitimate numbers against which to base their projections, Nigeria’s experience with polling has developed far more slowly than its counterparts in this study. Barring a few notable successes, the political structure has restricted its ability to influence its elections in a systematic way.

Chapter 6. Public Opinion Polling in Ugandan Elections 2001–2011

Just four days before the 2011 presidential elections, controversy emerged regarding the likelihood of President Museveni's re-election, an outcome that had been all but confirmed in the minds of most local and international observers. The source of the controversy was opinion polling. A local media source published an article questioning why Museveni's rival was winning all of the major newspaper online opinion polls in the run-up to the election while independent face-to-face and telephone polling was calling for a large Museveni victory (Uganda Correspondent, 14 February 2011). Whether the item was written in earnest or designed merely to generate interest in an electoral contest long since decided, the article and its surrounding debates are representative of the opportunities and challenges facing opinion polling in Uganda.

Political opinion polling is still in its infancy in Uganda. While it has been present in the country for well over a decade, the industry has focused its attention on the presidential elections, held every five years. This intermittent approach, coupled with the specific challenges of operating in a restrictive political environment, has stifled growth of an institution that may otherwise have developed into a more significant political force. As it stands, media, politicians, and pollsters are still locked in an ambivalent stance toward political opinion polling, where questions as rudimentary as the one posed above can still inspire argument and recriminations.

This is not to say that political opinion polling in Uganda has not developed over the past 15 years, but its impact on Ugandan electoral politics remains controversial. This thesis tests three hypotheses related to the way in which opinion polling influences elite strategies and the quality of elections. Specifically, it attempts to determine whether it is opinion polling's ability to substitute for collective action, to force institutional adaptation, or to shape elite perceptions around electoral competition that determines the likelihood that elites will move toward or away from more transparent and representative electoral processes.

This chapter reviews the evidence of opinion polling's influence on Ugandan elections and finds that it is generally supportive of the third hypothesis. There is little evidence to suggest that shifts in elite strategies around elections over this time period had anything to do with opinion polling's ability to aggregate opinion or to change institutions. There is, however, evidence that opinion polling's ability to shape elite perceptions of shifts in political competition was influential in terms of altering elite electoral behaviour and consequently the quality of those elections.

6.1 The Context of the Research

The history of Ugandan politics is one of incomplete national integration and ever narrowing elite dominance. Ethnic, regional, and religious divisions fomented during the colonial era have often been intensified by post-independence politics. Having failed to address these fundamental issues, successive leaders relied on increasingly narrow sections of the population to sustain their power. Recent efforts to paper over ethnic divisions through various means have reduced the saliency of ethnicity in Ugandan elections. The strength of personality of President Yoweri Museveni has instead divided the political elite into pro- and anti-Museveni camps, a bifurcation which colours the context of Uganda politics through this period.

6.1.1 Historical Context

Conflicts that have their impetus in the colonial period continue to influence politics more than a century later. Indeed, failed policies designed to promote greater nationalism have often had the opposite effect of turning local conflicts into national disputes. The central government increasingly intervened in local affairs, mediating on issues over which it previously had no jurisdiction. Yet, even as the state inserted itself more and more in the lives of its citizens, it found itself relying increasingly on authoritarian policies to maintain order and coercion to ensure continued popular support.

In the 1960s, the complex federal arrangements implemented following independence provided ample opportunities for existing conflicts to fester. Milton Obote, a northern Protestant and Uganda's first prime minister, chafed under the restrictions of its inter-ethnic alliance and moved to consolidate power within the central government. In 1966, Obote appointed himself president and abandoned the federal system and the bargaining it entailed on the basis that he would be able to govern more effectively through a unitary presidency.

The move made Obote vulnerable. In 1971, General Idi Amin, Uganda's highest-ranking military officer and a Muslim from a different part of the north than Obote, seized control of the country. Quickly, it became clear that Amin's religion and regional origin would be distinct disadvantages in fashioning a sufficiently broad political base to enable him to rule effectively (Kasfir, 1998). Trying to unite Ugandans against a common enemy, in 1972, he expelled most residents of Asian descent, decimating the country's merchant class and sending the economy into tailspin. Economic decline led to food and supply shortages, sparking rapid increases in levels of corruption. Under pressure, Amin became increasingly erratic and ruthless in his rule, resulting in spiralling death tolls.

Amin was eventually overthrown in 1979 by the Tanzanian army, which was accompanied by rival Ugandan factions headed by Obote and one Yoweri Museveni, following a botched invasion of northwestern Tanzania. An ineffective transitional government followed, composed of bickering factions whose disagreements brought the country to a standstill. Obote emerged victorious in the end having convinced most of the army to support him. He quickly organised the 1980 elections, which returned Uganda to 'civilian' rule, based on a multi-party ethos (*ibid*).

6.1.2 Recent Political Context

Uganda has held five post-independence national elections, in 1980, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011. The controversial 1980 elections sparked another wave of political instability. Obote, with the backing of the military, declared himself the winner, spurring Museveni and other small renegade groups to resort to guerrilla war. After

five tempestuous years, in July 1985, Obote was overthrown in a military coup. Six months later, the National Resistance Army (NRA), led by Museveni, vanquished all remaining military opposition, effectively gaining control of the country.

6.1.2.1 The “No-party System”

The capture of state power by the NRA, later renamed the National Resistance Movement or NRM, in 1986 marked the advent of the “no-party system” of governance (Crook, 1999). Museveni and the NRM initiated an ambitious programme designed to effect a “fundamental change in the politics of this country.” To do this, the NRM first established a four-year interim period during which it would brook no competition, later extending this to seven years and finally to eight. When the NRM allowed the first national legislative election to take place in 1989, it ensured that it was carefully managed. Nevertheless, there was optimism that its initiatives would ultimately bring democracy and an end to the divisions that had toppled previous regimes (ICG, 2012). As if to emphasise this commitment to unity, the 1995 Constitution essentially banned political parties from contesting all elections in the country.

The NRM, for its part, used this ban on political parties to entrench itself politically and to undermine the existing parties (Makara, 2010). In 1996, however, facing political uncertainty after he organised a presidential election, Museveni took the unconventional step of appearing in full military attire on national television on the eve of voting to declare that if he lost he was not going to hand over ‘[his] army’ to criminals, as he referred to the opposition. In spite of or perhaps due to this threat, 72.6 per cent of registered voters cast ballots in a poll that a deputy electoral official, years later, confessed was rigged for Museveni at tallying centres (Mulumba, 2011).

6.1.2.2 Advent of Multi-party Democracy

The ban on political parties in Uganda ended with the 2005 referendum. Following the vote, the Political Parties and Organizations Act (PPOA) legalised the existence of political parties and reduced restrictions on their activities. Re-introduction of

multiparty politics was precipitated by both internal and external considerations. In 2001, it became apparent that Museveni's popularity was declining (Makara, 2010). His popularity had fallen from 76 per cent in 1996 to 69 per cent in 2001 and would fall to 59 per cent in the 2006 elections. The intensity of competition he faced in the 2001 national elections persuaded Museveni that the no-party system was no longer tenable (ICG, 2012).

Museveni also faced domestic and international pressure (especially from the donor community) to implement political reforms that would create greater political space. Internally, the NRM began to recognise the weaknesses within their political organisation (Makara, 2010).

Faced with these realities, key Movement members began to view the return of multi-party politics as potential strategy for reinvigorating the party and strengthening its hold on power. Movement supporters used a variety of means to ensure that the constitutional term limits for presidents were removed. Indeed, it is hardly a coincidence that the return of multi-party politics "coincided with the termination of presidential two-term limits, which in effect gave Museveni indefinite eligibility to stand for the presidency" (*ibid*: 4).

6.1.3 Ethnicity in Ugandan Politics

Depending on the method of classification there are between 30 and 80 ethnic groups in Uganda. According to some calculations, it is the most ethnically diverse country in the world (Alesina et al., 2003). The southern half of the country, comprising 70 per cent of the population, is composed of groups from the larger Bantu ethno-linguistic family. Kampala and the rest of Central Region are dominated by the relatively large Baganda tribe. The West is populated by a closely related group of tribes, including the president's tribe, the Banyankole. Those who live in the North/Northeast are of smaller and more varied tribes, including those more closely related to groups in Kenya and Sudan. No tribe in Uganda forms a majority. The largest tribe in Uganda are the Baganda, who comprise 17 per cent of the population. The president's tribe, the Banyankole, are the second-largest, at 9 per cent of the population.

growing dominance of the Baganda. That said, following its ratification, Obote made every effort to ensure that the balance of power was reversed (Sathyamurthy, 1986).

Obote's and Amin's political strategies in the years following independence only served to exacerbate the political divisions inherited from British rule and, in some cases, created new problems. Their status as northerners engendered suspicion among the southern political elite that their policies were designed to favour the north and in particular their own ethnic group. While their ascent to power was built on the basis of ethnic coalition, once they attained power these alliances invariably disintegrated, causing both Obote and Amin to rely "increasingly on centralisation, patronage and coercion. The prospects for inclusion in each succeeding regime shrunk progressively" (ICG, 2012: 3).

Upon coming to power, Museveni offered a solution that purported to overcome divisions by transcending them. The NRM's Ten-Point Programme emphasised 'participatory democracy' that prioritised 'individual merit' in elections (Kasfir, 1998). The stated intent was to resolve the ethno-regional cleavages that had brought down previous governments, although the NRM ultimately argued for the suspension of the activities of political parties (Mamdani, 1988). The measures, however, produced significant popular enthusiasm.

The reintroduction of multi-party politics has re-ignited debates regarding the role of ethnicity in Ugandan politics. Indeed, historically, there is a link between ethnicity and the political parties of Uganda. After independence, two principal political parties emerged in Uganda: the DP (Democratic Party) and UPC (Uganda People's Congress). The DP traced its origins to the kingdom of Buganda, creating a stronghold for the party in the country's Central region. The UPC was founded by former President Obote, who belonged to the Lango ethnic group from the north of the country. By consequence, the UPC was always more popular in Northern Uganda. The FDC (Forum for Democratic Change), the current principal opposition party, purports to be a national party but nevertheless generally finds the bulk of its support in the Eastern and Northern regions (Kim, 2012).

6.1.4 The Media in Ugandan Politics

Given the emphasis placed on media in this research, some analysis is required as to the composition and quality of the institution in Uganda and its relationship with the political processes of the country. The lack of credible political opposition for the better part of Museveni's time in power has meant that the media has become the principal resource for news concerning opposition politics. This has been beneficial in one sense in that the media has certainly played a key role in shaping and contributing to the political liberalisation achieved since the reintroduction of multi-party politics in Uganda thus far. At the same time, it has resulted in segments of the print media being branded "opposition mouthpieces" due to the tone and tenor of their reporting regarding government activities (Mutabazi, 2009).

The increase in political reporting over the past decade has not necessarily been accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the quality of coverage. In the case of opinion polls, they are often reported in the media without analysis or explanation as to the context of the poll. As both sides of the political divide began to increase their usage of polling, the vastly different results emerging from the different surveys present a confusing picture of the political landscape. This wide variation, without explanation, does little to clarify the state of a race and can be used to discredit or undermine the reliability of opinion polls.

According to Freedom House, there are more than two dozen daily and weekly newspapers and more than 180 private radio stations. *New Vision* is government-owned and while it is capable of demonstrating editorial independence at times, it reverts to being decidedly pro-government during election campaigns. Private print media, such as the *Monitor*, the *Observer*, and the *Independent*, are considered to be aligned with the opposition and are often critical of the government. Radio is considered to be the most widely accessed news source, and as a result, the number of community stations has expanded in recent years (Kasfir, 2012).

Although radio and TV play a major role in disseminating information, print media remains the likeliest outlet for political discourse, especially among elites living in

urban areas (BBC, 2012). One potential concern is that newspaper circulation remains rather low, but the national press play a critical role for two reasons: first, because the Kampala press sets the agenda for national conversations and second, many radio stations across the country review the national papers and discuss their major stories with listeners who call in.

The content analysis that informs this chapter is drawn from articles published in all four principal newspapers listed above and follows two parallel tracks. The first quantitative track reviews articles over a seven month period around elections¹⁷ to determine quantity of opinion polling coverage while the second qualitative tracks examines the writings of key political commentators across the entire period of 2001–2012 to determine shifts in perceptions and attitudes to opinion polling on the basis of content and tone.

6.2 Public Opinion Polling in Ugandan Elections

As in previous chapters, this chapter begins with the premise that electoral politics is principally about elite strategies and behaviour. Therefore, for opinion polling to influence the quality of elections, it must first influence political elites. Using the same two stage approach employed in previous case studies, this chapter reviews three electoral periods between 2001 and 2011. It first locates public opinion polling within prominent news media to assess its integration within political discourse. Based on this analysis, the chapter proceeds to examine the various possible avenues through which opinion polling has influenced elite electoral strategies in Uganda, testing the validity of the three hypotheses.

The evidence from Uganda complements that of the Nigeria case study in so much as it contradicts prevailing theories as to the way in which opinion polling should influence elite electoral strategies in one party dominant states. Consistent with the findings of previous chapters, this chapter presents evidence that the principal mediating factor

¹⁷ Articles selected covered the period of six months before election day and one month after to cover the campaign period and the immediate aftermath of the voting.

for opinion polling's influence on the quality of elections is elite perceptions of competition. After a tumultuous start, polling in Uganda has begun to gain a foothold in terms of contributing to more transparent and representative electoral strategies, but the movement is incremental and tied directly to the level of political competition observed by elites.

Public opinion polling's ability to shape perceptions becomes evident quite early on, but as in the other case studies, the political elite adopt an ambivalent posture to the emergence of polling. In the case of Uganda, this often takes the form of candidates belittling polling numbers while directing their campaign officials to commission ever more surveys to try and ascertain their relative position within the political landscape. Again, the public/private divergence speaks to the importance of elite perceptions in determining their strategic behaviour.

Table 20: Pollsters in Ugandan politics

Polling Organisation	Elections Active	Affiliation or other ties¹⁸
International Republican Institute	2006	US agency funded by USAID and affiliated with the US Republican party. Has extensive election programmes around the world.
Daily Monitor	2001, 2006, 2011	Independent newspaper; generally considered to favour the opposition
Ipsos/Synovate	2006, 2011	Independently owned, now part of international brand. Has been variously accused of favouritism but no formal links
New Vision	2001, 2006, 2011	State-owned newspaper; generally considered to be NRM controlled
Wilsken Agencies/ Afrobarometer	2006, 2011	Independent agency contracted by Afrobarometer to conduct polls; accused of anti-opposition bias but no real evidence

Uganda's media environment is far less diverse than that of Kenya or Nigeria, resembling more closely the partisan alignment of Ghana. This has an inevitable impact on the quality of polling commissioned by those media houses and also on how

¹⁸ This applies to the organisation only. It is not always possible to discern the data source or funding agent of individual polls released under the names of organisations or newspapers. Independent firms may be open to accusations of bias when they conduct and publish polls on behalf of particular parties or individuals.

it is analysed and interpreted. While ethnicity plays little role in the coverage, regional tensions and pro- or anti-Museveni ideologies colour the political media. Even non-partisan pollsters find themselves tarred as biased based on the coverage or presentation of their findings (Private interview, 15 May 2013). Alliances with international polling firms provides much needed credibility for pollsters, but the consistent divergence between polling results and the official election tallies have undermined their case, even if the official results have likely been doctored. All of this speaks to the relative uncertainty of both the politics of Uganda and the opinion polling that covers it, an uncertainty that can only be mediated through elite perceptions.

2001 was a pivotal year for Ugandan elections. The introduction of multi-party politics meant that they were no longer stage-managed affairs but were imbued with real competitive spirit. This institutional change was accompanied by the emergence of public opinion polling, which also contributed to changes in elite calculus. What follows is a narrative that charts the emergence of opinion polling in 2001; follows it through the violently competitive 2006 election; and ends with the comparative landslide of 2011 in which Museveni seems to have got everything right.

6.2.1 The 2001 Elections

In March 2001, Museveni won a second term in an unusually contentious presidential election. This time, rather than facing an opponent drawn from one of the ailing historical political parties, the challenge emerged from within Museveni's own inner circle. Colonel Kizza Besigye, a former friend of Museveni's, put himself forward as an alternative to five more years under Museveni. While he clearly belonged to the Movement camp, Besigye sought to portray himself as a reformer operating from within the Movement itself, campaigning vociferously against corruption and nepotism.

While there were to be no formal endorsements within the "individual merit" system, the Movement and its state institutions, to all intents and purposes, endorsed Museveni's candidacy. Nevertheless, there were reasons to believe that the election

would be competitive. Besigye's ethnic ties to Museveni's strategic voter base in the southwest threatened to split the president's main area of support. Informal support from some of the moribund political parties also suggested Besigye would poll well in the Buganda region and in the north. With four other candidates also drawing votes away from Museveni in their specific local constituencies, Besigye's prospects seemed hopeful. A run-off was viewed a serious possibility.

Public opinion polling throughout the campaign confirmed these conclusions, suggesting a tight race between the two candidates. Opinion polling, however, was still in its early days in Uganda, and while its coverage became almost immediately prominent in the daily newspapers, polling's place as a source of political information remained largely superficial. Nevertheless, the scale of Museveni's final victory, however, did surprise local and international media, based principally on trend analyses of the opinion polling conducted throughout the campaign. In being 'wrong,' the polls established themselves as far more credible than if they had been 'right.'

6.2.1.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

This author's review of over 5400 newspaper articles published in Uganda between September 2000 and April 2001 unearthed 36 mentions of the term "opinion poll." Normalised per 1000 articles, this results in 6.36 mentions per thousand, a not insignificant number, given the relative novelty of opinion polling to Ugandan politics. Yet, in spite of this prominence of coverage, the depth of analysis of these results remained low throughout the campaign, with media satisfying themselves with promoting the 'horse race' nature of the election. Below is a sample drawn from the writings of Charles Onyango-Obbo, a prominent political editor and analyst, demonstrating the limited scope opinion polls played in examining the politics of 2001. Any reference to opinion polls is merely implicit, suggesting prior to the election that Museveni lacked the necessary votes for a clear victory and after the election that the results did not match expectations.

Table 21: Political Commentators in the Uganda 2001 Election Campaign

Date	Charles Onyango-Obbo, Daily Monitor editor
29 November 2000	"Word is that the Museveni camp has decided that having many candidates helps greatly because, as the most recognisable figure in the field, he is likely to come on top in that situation, although without the 51 per cent of the vote required to win outright. The election would therefore go into a second round, and the president's team is hoping that if they can strike a deal with some of the other candidates, they could shift their support to Museveni and he would win with over 51 per cent in the second round."
19 March 2001	"All parties agree on one thing; the election was stolen. The disagreement is over the 'theft margin' and, to use the expression recently made famous here by a flamboyant army officer, Col Kasirye Gwanga, "whodunnit." In many ways, Ugandans were unprepared for the pre-election violence, and the low road that the campaign took."

The first victory in the statistical battle was won by Museveni, as a donor funded poll conducted by the US-based International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) revealed the president's approval rating to be at 93 per cent as of June 2000, prior to Besigye's announced candidacy in October. The new entrant made a significant impact, as by January 2001 the percentage of Ugandans supporting Museveni had dropped to 54 per cent in a poll sponsored by the state-owned newspaper *New Vision* (14 January 2001). While a decided drop, these numbers nevertheless meant that Museveni would carry the vote in the first round, eliminating the need for a run-off.

In February, *The Monitor*, a privately held paper, responded with its own opinion poll, claiming that Museveni's share of the vote had dropped still further, below the 50 per cent mark to 47 per cent, while his main challenger, Besigye, was garnering 43 per cent. The race was well and truly joined. Museveni's supporters were quick to dismiss the poll, arguing that "we are sure that candidate Y.K Museveni will win the March presidential elections [in] the first round with more than 70 per cent" (*The Monitor*, 14 February 2001). The 70 per cent figure would prove significant.

New Vision again responded four days later with a poll that placed the race at 57 per cent for Museveni and 34 per cent for Besigye (*New Vision*, 18 February 2001). If this

poll was designed to assuage fears in the Museveni camp, however, it apparently did no such thing. It was reported that in a closed door meeting pro-Museveni “MPs said that The New Vision opinion poll which showed Museveni in a relatively weak position captured the reality on the ground adding that the situation could even be worse than the poll reflected” (*The Monitor*, 25 February 2001). In the final run-up to the election, both daily newspapers ran opinion polls that gave the margin between Besigye and Museveni as about 12 percentage points. The *Daily Monitor* poll had 50.6 per cent for Museveni and 38.3 per cent for Besigye, while *New Vision* gave Museveni 52.9 per cent and 39.4 per cent to Besigye.

The evidence from this section supports the notion that political opinion polling is shifting political discourse, opening up new sources of information that counter the prevailing wisdom espoused by the government or other elite interest groups. Museveni’s hope that the 2001 election would be a mere formality was belied by the evidence emerging from the polls. This belief that Museveni might be vulnerable pervaded the political media, particularly those aligned with the opposition (Private interview, 22 March 2011). That this forced Museveni to act is clear; the question that remains is through what means this impact is channelled.

6.2.1.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

Museveni and his supporters were clearly concerned, and their campaign strategy reflected these worries. Interestingly, angry as Museveni was over the perceived betrayal by Besigye in declaring his candidacy, his advisors allegedly “counselled him not to use ‘hard words’ against Besigye as it could be counter-productive; they advised him instead to conduct a survey and gauge Besigye’s popularity in the central region” (*The Monitor*, 6 November 2000). As the campaign reached its climax, the Movement went so far as to issue its own internal poll, just days before the election, declaring that Museveni would capture 70.6 per cent of the vote. While widely at odds with existing polling, this final poll, which also gave Besigye just a 24 per cent share of the vote, would ultimately prove accurate.

These early forays in opinion poll politics, however, were but a small part of Museveni's re-election strategy in 2001. These elections were also characterised by considerably more violence and intimidation than previous ones, much of it ascribed to 'illegal involvement of some agents of the state.' According to ICG, the police reported 1,216 arrests for violent election offenses, including seventeen deaths. The parliamentary committee reviewing the elections unearthed several examples of corruption and poor electoral commission planning. In spite of the violence, the Electoral Commission reported that 70.31 per cent of registered voters had turned out. The electoral campaign, marked as it was by numerous instances of intimidation and violence, however, gave Museveni an easy victory, with no need for a second round run-off. With an almost 70 per cent share of the vote, Museveni fell just 5 points short of his performance in 1996, while Besigye only garnered 28 per cent.

The result was unexpected: "The big surprise about Uganda's just-concluded presidential elections is not so much that Yoweri Museveni won, but that he did it on the first ballot and by such a huge margin (70 per cent), against his nearest rival, Col Kizza Besigye, who had 25 per cent. Political observers and opinion polls had agreed before the election that the race between Museveni and Besigye was too close to call. There was a distinct possibility that none of the two main contenders would garner 50 per cent of the vote. Indeed, just before the election, reports indicated that the Uganda Electoral Commission was already preparing for a re-run." (*The Daily Nation*, 15 March 2001)

Efforts to estimate the effects of violence and fraud on the electoral outcome have calculated that around 10 per cent of the president's vote might have derived from these strategies (Carbone, 2003). This suggests that Museveni still enjoyed significant support across Uganda and may not have needed to resort to such electoral tactics. Clearly, the opinion polling results had unnerved him and forced his hand. Others later used the opinion polling data to supplement their evidence that the election was rigged, going so far as to say that the polls may have actually accurately predicted what a free and fair election would have looked like (*The Monitor*, 15 February 2006).

Besigye appealed to a five-judge Supreme Court panel that agreed there had been serious violations. The election was so chaotic and openly rigged that even the largely pro-Museveni Court judged the victory substantially flawed. Nevertheless, it voted three to two to sustain Museveni's victory on the grounds that the irregularities were not decisive.

6.2.1.4 Implications

2001 was extremely early days for the Ugandan opinion polling industry. Generally confined to newspaper-commissioned polls, the sector lacked experience and credibility to support the claims presented in the data. The partisan nature of the media meant that numbers could be easily dismissed as propaganda. In terms of coverage, the polls received little analysis in the print media beyond a basic presentation of the facts, which were also often conflated or misconstrued.

In spite of these limitations, the coverage does illustrate the rapidity with which polling penetrated the perceptions of the political elite in Uganda. This is equally encouraging and alarming. On the one hand, the readiness with which the political elite were willing to embrace polling data suggests a latent regard for the power of public opinion. On the other, their willingness to accept and even act upon largely unverifiable data suggests a lack of understanding which could ultimately lead to a backlash against public opinion research.

It is clear from their rhetoric that Museveni's camp was caught off-guard by the polls that placed Besigye in such competitive positions during the 2001 campaign. Their initial response was to obfuscate the picture through counter-claims of their own, citing 'internal' polls or their own predictions based on crowds at rallies or whistle stop tours of the country with the president. Failing this, they reverted to a strategy of rigging the election to ensure that Museveni would win with a large majority, eliminating a need for a run-off. In both cases, the effect of a perceived increase in competition was a move toward less transparent and representative electoral strategies.

Interestingly, the 2001 Ugandan elections illustrate a potential role opinion polling can play in providing a 'sense-check' for official election results, particularly in contexts where trust in the electoral institutions is low. While there was little doubt that Museveni would win re-election, the sizable discrepancy between his polling trends and his final tally fuelled opposition claims of vote manipulation. Indeed, journalists from *The Monitor* took the extraordinary step of using the opinion polls as supporting evidence for their calculations of fraud that had befallen the 2001 elections. Their analysis argued that were the elections actually free and fair, the result would have looked very much like the independent opinion polls circulating at the time. In this way, while opinion polling in competitive settings is unlikely to deliver more transparency and representativeness during the electoral period in question, it could have potential influence on institutional change in the future.

6.2.2 The 2006 Elections

Following his defeat in the 2001 elections, Besigye retreated from the political scene, leaving Uganda in the August. His return from South Africa in 2005 can be said to mark the beginning of the 2006 campaign. Almost from the start, Besigye was beset by obstacles set up by Museveni and his supporters and designed to prevent him from successfully competing in the 2006 elections. Chief among the strategies employed was the use of criminal cases that pulled Besigye's attention away from the campaign trail and often entailed long stints in prison during key periods of the campaign.

In the 2001 presidential campaign, Besigye had been charged with 'seditious intent' and in the run-up to the February 2006 elections, he was charged again, this time with treason and terrorism charges, resulting in Besigye's arrest. Later, a rape charge was also added that was based on weak evidence and was clearly politically motivated. Besigye's arrest fits a pattern of arresting political opponents on 'un-bailable' charges such as murder, treason and terrorism, whereby they can be kept imprisoned for extended periods, particularly prior to elections (Gloppen, Kasimbazi, and Kibandama, 2008).

On appeal, the High Court decided to grant bail to Besigye on the basis that bail is a constitutional right, irrespective of what subsequent legislation may prescribe. To keep Besigye and his political allies in jail, the government re-charged them with terrorism under the military court system. By detaining Besigye, the government had intended to prevent his being nominated as a presidential candidate, but the electoral commission undermined their strategy by accepting his nomination anyway. When the NRM protested, the Constitutional Court upheld the nomination, at the same time re-confirming the independence of the electoral commission. Nevertheless, Besigye remained in prison until six weeks before the elections after which he was released on 'interim bail' but still required to appear at court hearings in between campaign events. This severely limited his ability to campaign effectively throughout the country (*ibid*).

6.2.2.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

The highly contentious atmosphere around the election fuelled demand for opinion polls within the news media. Polls began appearing with greater frequency and featured more prominently in both the political coverage and the political analysis coming out of the two main daily newspapers. This author's survey of over 10,000 articles published during the campaign and immediately after the elections yielded 94 articles mentioning the term "opinion poll." At a rate of 8.98 articles per thousand, this represents a significant increase in exposure from the 2001 election.

Indeed, the evidence suggests that opinion polls became a key battleground as the two sides jostled for media attention and voter momentum. The excerpts of analysis, again drawn from the writings of analyst Charles Onyango-Obbo, demonstrate the subtle shift away from an emphasis on crowds (a crude predictor of voter support) to more substantial evidence taken from the prevailing opinion polls. The decreasing discrepancy between Museveni's official tallies and those of the final opinion polls underpins the hypothesis that Museveni's power to manipulate elections is weakening.

Table 22: Political Commentators in the Uganda 2006 Election Campaign

Date	Charles Onyango-Obbo, Monitor editor
1 November 2005	<p>“In one-party systems (which Uganda was from 1986 to a few weeks ago) people tend to support the ruling party for tactical reasons - to keep away its wrath. In these circumstances, the level of support for the regime is always far less than it would seem from the percentage of the vote the president gets at elections. It would seem the large crowds that turn out for opposition leaders are fairly representative of the level of their support.”</p>
13 December 2005	<p>“After Museveni has gone as far as he has to have the Constitution changed so that he might run again, it's impossible that there can be a free election that allows Besigye, who is leading the president nationally in opinion polls, to win. Today, an election in which both men are running begins with Besigye as a favourite. Therefore, the whole purpose of such an election is to prevent him from winning.”</p>
6 January 2006	<p>“The latest Daily Monitor opinion poll showing President Yoweri Museveni is leading Dr Kizza Besigye, and that the two men are the main contenders, is not surprising for this stage of the campaign. With Museveni at 47.1 per cent, and Besigye 31.9 per cent, if the pattern holds and there is no rigging, then there is a real possibility that we might have a run-off as the victor wouldn't garner the required 51 per cent in the first round. The results also suggest that for Besigye to win, the most important thing he has to do is to mount a robust operation to protect his and FDC's votes. This opinion poll suggests that the election is going to be quite volatile. Uganda, then, has become like many an African country, where it's not the voting that determines the winner, but the counting.”</p>
8 February 2006	<p>“We wake up on the morning of February 24, and Dr Kizza Besigye has won the election! No laughing matter. He and his Forum for Democratic Change are President Yoweri Museveni's and NRM's main rivals, and indeed some opinion polls last year put them ahead. A Besigye victory is therefore possible. Whether it will actually happen depends in part on whether, unlike 2001, the elections will this time be truly free and fair.”</p>
28 February 2006	<p>“My sense is that what these numbers tell us is something more structural - the ability of the NRM government and President Museveni to use state power to influence election outcomes. Put more crudely, the ability Museveni and NRM have to rig is gradually deteriorating.”</p>

The uptick in quantity of polls, however, was not necessarily accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the quality of coverage. In many cases, the opinion polls are reported in the media without analysis or explanation as to the context of the

poll. As both sides of the political divide began to increase their usage of polling, the vastly different results emerging from the different surveys present a confusing picture of the political landscape. This reality points to the inherent difficulty opinion polling has in terms of effectively aggregating public opinion or catalysing institutional change; there is too much uncertainty as to the content of the polls to make a significant impact. Elite perceptions, however, already contextualise the polls, discounting for various factors, to inform their behaviour. Whether they get their perceptions right or wrong goes a long way to determining the relative success of their chosen strategies.

One of the first major polls of the 2006 campaign, interestingly, came from the government-owned *Sunday Vision*. It garnered big headlines from opposition aligned newspapers as it revealed that Besigye was leading Museveni in a head-to-head race 46 per cent to 32 per cent. Buried in the article, however, the key information that the poll covered only urban areas could be easily missed by less discerning readers. *Sunday Vision's* editors chose to lead with the result that Museveni was leading Besigye 43–37 in Kampala, generally considered an opposition area. This example was emblematic of the kind of coverage polls would receive throughout the campaign.

At this stage, there remains a general distrust of polling in Uganda. Overwhelmingly, this emanates from the political class which has conditioned ordinary citizens to believe that political manipulation drives opinion polls, regardless of political affiliation. Part of this is derived from a conscious strategy to discredit polling, unless it is favourable to your cause, but it also reflects a lack of statistical education even among the political elite which leaves them unable to accept the credibility of sampling techniques and other methods for capturing public opinion (Private interview, 16 May 2013). As a result, this attitude filters down through society, leaving opinion polls' status in political discourse decidedly ambiguous but no less influential.

6.2.2.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

In spite of these issues, it is clear that once the campaign was in full swing opinion polling had become an integral element of both candidates' strategy for the elections. In January 2006, *The Monitor* released its first poll of the campaign, which gave

Museveni a healthy 47.1 to 31.9 per cent lead over Besigye (*The Monitor*, 5 January 2006). Importantly, Museveni again was failing to achieve the 50 per cent total that would guarantee victory in the first round. Polling in a head-to-head race gave Museveni a much slimmer lead of 45.5 to 38.2, reinforcing the importance for Museveni in winning the election outright on the first ballot.

NRM immediately disputed the findings contending that “this opinion poll result has been calculated to show that candidate Museveni is weak, and to prepare the public mind and grounds for...rejection of the election in future.” The NRM spokesman went on to claim that the party had its own election research department which was employing professional pollsters to ascertain Museveni’s support. These efforts revealed support of “between 67 and 75 per cent countrywide” (*The Monitor*, 6 January 2006). The FDC spokesman countered this by also assuring voters that they too tracked opinion polls “to understand the issues” (*New Vision*, 15 January 2006). The government’s Information Minister confirmed the rising importance of opinion polls in Ugandan politics by later claiming that the NRM conducted weekly polls, all of which pointed to a resounding victory for President Museveni (*New Vision*, 10 February 2006).

Yet, for all their prevalence in the political media and on the lips of party representatives, politicians in Uganda continued to treat opinion polls with ambivalence. While it is unsurprising that politicians trumpet polls that favour them while eschewing those which do not, Ugandan politicians, like many of their African counterparts, appear to have a distinct reluctance to abandon the personal style of politics that relies less on numbers and more on relationships. Museveni, in particular, represents this love-hate relationship with polling. While he is clearly happy to have his campaign team conduct and publicise opinion polls which support his candidacy, the President himself labelled opinion polls “opinion jokes” (*The Monitor*, 21 February 2006). The ambivalence is even more pronounced, if less caustic, among less popular opposition candidates. Their spokesmen were keen to declare that the opinion polls are underrating their candidate or that their campaigns have yet to hit full swing, suggesting, no doubt correctly, that opinion polls are as much about name recognition

as they are about voter preferences. Yet, at least one political analyst decried this refusal to adapt strategy to the polling data, claiming “if the recent opinion poll is a broadly accurate reflection of the national mood, then the opposition may suffer worse for their immature defiance of a popular wish that they get behind a single candidate” (*The Monitor*, 16 January 2006).

The final month of the campaign saw a flurry of opinion polls flying back and forth between the two camps, interspersed with independent polls sponsored by local newspapers. The discordance was significant. In early February, the NRM released a private poll which suggested they would win the election with 60 per cent of the vote; a number they would continually revise upwards in the final weeks of the campaign: 65 per cent on 7 February and 75 per cent on 10 February. Meanwhile the FDC was also releasing private polls which claimed that Besigye was ahead with 56.5 per cent of the vote against 30.1 per cent for Museveni. To its credit, *The Monitor* did point out to its readers that this poll represented only 27 districts of the country and differed starkly from existing polling data (*The Monitor*, 21 February 2006). These final polls pointed to a close race, with Museveni holding an 11 per cent lead but still short of the numbers needed to win on the first ballot.

The need to secure the necessary votes in this competitive atmosphere resulted in widespread intimidation and violence. The campaign had been characterised by threats, personal attacks, and growing resentment among voters, and election day was no different. There were irregularities in the counting and tallying of results, and bribery, intimidation, violence, multiple voting, and vote stuffing compromised the election in parts of the country. In spite of all these challenges, the official tally declared that 69 per cent of registered voters had turned out to cast ballots. The final outcome was victory for Museveni with 59 per cent of the vote, a 22 point spread over his nearest rival Besigye.

Local and international press again expressed surprise at the margin of victory, noting that Museveni had rarely registered such a lead in independent polling carried out during the campaign. This discrepancy fuelled the indignation of the opposition who felt that another election had been stolen from them, but international observers,

while noting obvious problems, nevertheless gave their blessing to Museveni's victory. Again, perceptions played a key role in determining elite behaviour. Museveni, insecure in his victory, appeared to resort to violence and manipulation, while the opposition were forced to reconcile their perceptions of a close contest with the official results or else challenge the results as fraudulent.

10 days after Museveni's victory was announced, Besigye filed his second presidential election petition in the Supreme Court. President Museveni's margin was narrower in 2006 than it was in 2001, and based on the Court's ground for upholding the 2001 election, the opposition sought to demonstrate that this time the *scale* of irregularities was sufficient to affect the outcome. The Court agreed that the Electoral Commission had disenfranchised voters by arbitrarily removing them from the voters' register or otherwise preventing them from voting and that problems had occurred during the elections both in the voting process and in the tallying of the votes. Yet, on a 4–3 majority decision, the court concluded that "it was not proved to the satisfaction of the Court, that the failure to comply with the provisions and principles ... affected the results of the presidential election in a substantial manner," once again confirming Museveni's victory (Gloppen, Kasimbazi and Kibandama, 2008).

6.2.2.4 Implications

The content analysis demonstrates that both the quantity and penetration of opinion polling coverage increased during the 2006 electoral campaign. The period saw political commentators incorporate polling data far more readily in their opinion pieces, and the political parties themselves began to engage with polls as viable political information, even if that engagement was outright dismissal. Indeed, by 2006, both campaigns were more savvy about their use of opinion polls. The NRM became less reactionary in their polling strategy, choosing instead to issue their own polls at regular intervals as well as reinforcing those of the state-owned *New Vision* newspaper. Yet, in spite of their growing role in his campaign, Museveni remained removed from the polling war of words and numbers. Whether this was a calculated strategy or merely the reluctance of an old politician to adopt new methods, the dichotomy within the campaign was very marked.

Indeed, the 2006 campaign became a war of perceptions, with opinion polling as the weapon of choice. The opposition, for their part, also adopted a more proactive approach, feeding the media with positive polling stories at critical junctures in the electoral season. These numbers would be used to undercut news stories hyping alternate, more traditional measures of popularity: numbers of people at rallies, key informant interviews with political power brokers within certain regions, etc. For Besigye, given the challenges he was facing in terms of sustaining his campaign in the face of the repressive tactics of the Museveni regime, the key was to appear as a credible alternative to the president (Private interview, 25 March 2011). Opinion polling gave him that ability, without requiring the kind of national campaign that the government prevented him from implementing.

At the same time, Museveni perceiving his margin of victory to be shrinking resorted to violence and the physical incarceration of his opponent. Ironically, these old tactics backfired to a certain extent, with evidence to suggest that Besigye's popularity only grew following his arrest, as his media profile consequently increased (Private interview, 28 March 2011). Ultimately, Museveni and his team, having eliminated the hope of a transparent election, went a step further to ensure that the result would also be unrepresentative. These outcomes are strongly supportive of the hypothesis that opinion polling shapes elite perceptions of competition, engendering negative strategic reactions in the face of increased competition.

6.2.3 The 2011 Elections

As the 2011 elections approached, Uganda's political landscape was decidedly ambiguous. On the one hand, Museveni had never seemed weaker; his downtrend over the past three elections looked set to continue, threatening his hold on power. His old alliances were pulling apart; intermittent urban and rural violence underscored the failure of his policies to resolve old ethnic tensions. While Museveni could claim victory of sorts over the LRA, the forced resettlement of almost two million displaced persons created new pressures and reignited old debates about ethnic and regional marginalisation.

At the same time, the opposition was similarly weak. It had not been able to fashion a viable alternative to the NRM in the five years since the 2006 elections. With at least one political commentator declaring the opposition to be 'dead': "according to recent opinion polls, the prevalent public sentiments confirm that the opposition is not ready to lead" (*New Vision*, 1 September 2010). Indeed, throughout the majority of the campaign the question was not whether the opposition would win but whether Museveni could once again crack that 51 per cent barrier in the first round. The lack of a credible competition led to a dip in opinion polling coverage from the previous election with 95 mentions (7.38 per thousand articles published) recorded over the seven month period before and after the election.

6.2.3.1 Polls Shaping Perceptions

The coverage the opinion polls received, however, was frenetic and tinged with controversy. In December 2010, Afrobarometer and its local partner Wilsken Agencies released a poll that gave Museveni 66 per cent of the vote while Besigye only garnered 12 per cent. It directly contradicted an earlier *Monitor* poll which had suggested Museveni only leading 43–35 and ignited intense debate in the local media. Some observers had thrown their lot in with polling, in general, irrespective of its findings: "Politicians must know that polls only tell the public which way the cat is jumping. It is the work of the politician to sway public opinion in their favour" (*New Vision*, 7 September 2010). Others sought to discredit the Afrobarometer survey, questioning its methodology and most significantly drawing attention to another of its key findings: that 63 per cent of those polled thought the poll was being conducted by the government. That this figure almost identically matched the percentage voting for Museveni was not lost on commentators who attributed his high numbers to respondent fears of reprisals.

Subsequent independent polls published in January also gave Museveni healthy leads, although not always with such a high percentage of the vote. Then, on 11 January a minor scandal hit the polling sector. *New Vision*, the state-owned newspaper, alleged that it had obtained the results of a Synovate poll commissioned by the FDC that put Museveni's support at 67 per cent (*New Vision*, 11 January 2011). Almost immediately,

Synovate officials dismissed the *New Vision* story and claimed no knowledge of such a poll (*The Monitor*, 13 January 2011). The controversy sparked claims of foul play, with the FDC asserting that the poll was “concocted by the NRM to psychologically prepare the voters for rigging.”

The furore ultimately abated as still further polls from Afrobarometer and others continued to place Museveni at 65 or above per cent of the vote. As stated above, the static nature of the race was reflected in marginally less coverage of polls in the print media, but the depth of coverage was far superior to that of previous elections, with political journalists often referencing polls as part of their assessment of electoral prospects and trends. Excerpts from two prominent journalists are included below to demonstrate the changes in tone over the course of the campaign.

Table 23: Political Commentators in the 2011 Uganda Election Campaign

Date	Timothy Kalyegira, Daily Monitor columnist	Eriasa Mukiibi Sserunjigi, columnist for The Independent
December 2010	<p>“While the western donors who commissioned it had intended it to be an opinion poll in the professional, informative sense of the word, somebody might have got wind of it and possibly pressured or threatened Afrobarometer to falsify the results.</p> <p>It will be a most interesting irony that what started out as a poll intended to create the impression of an inevitable Museveni victory and have a demoralising effect on the millions of opposition voters will turn out to be the very catalyst not only to greater watchfulness during the voting and counting. It could be one of many sparks for violence that might erupt should such obvious efforts at fraud happen on and after February 18.”</p>	<p>“To correctly appreciate the survey findings, however, it must be noted that it was conducted just a few weeks after the presidential candidates were nominated on October 25-26. In the preceding period, the opposition candidates remained invisible to the electorate as President Museveni, who has been in power for 24 years, hogged all the visibility and freely campaigned.</p> <p>The results of the poll couldn't have been shocking only to Besigye's team. Even NRM, which was busy thinking up ways to invigorate its campaign when the poll results came out, could have been both pleasantly surprised and disturbed. The Independent is aware that NRM's internal projections indicate that Museveni wouldn't win outright if voting took place today. The state-run daily conducted a survey last August that placed Museveni at 52 per cent. The parties have limited time to reconcile the poll results with the objective reality on the ground.”</p>
January/February 2011	<p>“By publishing this fraudulent poll that Synovate publicly dismissed, the election is back into the territory of the unknown.</p> <p>The mid 60s percentage points that had started taking shape in people's minds as a figure to believe or dismiss or at least debate, are now irrelevant. We are now back to the place where we do not know anything about who is in the lead, which is next and by what percentage points.</p> <p>This frenzy over opinion polls and with it the vast sums of money reportedly being offered to opposition figures and activists is a</p>	<p>“The controversy over the misrepresenting or outright faking of opinion poll results involving Synovate, which disavowed a poll attributed to it by the New Vision newspaper, threatens to suck the entire coming election into a downward spiral of mendacity.</p> <p>The history of opinion polling is littered with scrupulously fair and accurate polls which did not predict an election result. That's because there's a lot more to an election than voting, and because it's impossible to know and therefore measure with a poll all factors which can influence an election's</p>

Date	Timothy Kalyegira, <i>Daily Monitor</i> columnist	Eriasa Mukiibi Sserunjigi, columnist for <i>The Independent</i>
	subtle indicator that within itself the NRM might not necessarily believe it has the mid-60s per cent lead it is trying to project.”	result. At the end of the day, trust the polls but realise they aren't the end of the story.”
February 2011	“After all the anticipation that started as soon as the 2006 general election ended, February 18 has come with much less drama than had been anticipated.”	“Not even the rigorous campaigning the candidates have done, shows the poll, has led to significant change on voter choices. Only 10 per cent of the respondents say they have changed their choices since the campaigns began. The pollsters, however, have a window to be absolved by the actual final election results coming on Feb. 20. But if the results don't in any way reflect the results of Afrobarometer's two polls, then the future of opinion polling in Uganda could be thrown in jeopardy.”

Throughout, however, the focus remained largely on the presidential race. Citing resource constraints, local pollsters argue that it's simply too expensive for them to sample the breadth and depth necessary to poll elections at lower levels. This remains the exclusive remit of better funded international outfits whose forays into Uganda tend to be sporadic (Private interview, 15 May 2013). This lack of grassroots information actually serves to undermine further the efforts of the opposition to unseat the NRM regime. Lacking the NRM deep political structures, reaching into the district and local levels and feeding the national machine with voter data, the FDC and others are almost completely dependent on independent polling as their source of reliable information. This reduces their ability to target their strategies and perhaps denies them the chance to exploit the latent potential of local level politics as a means of encouraging regime change (Private interview, 12 May 2013).

6.2.3.2 Strategic Responses to Opinion Polling

From an opinion polling perspective, the 2011 election was strategically significant for two reasons. The first was the infiltration of opinion polling into party primaries.

Previously, polling had been limited to the presidential race and some other major contests such as the Kampala mayoral race. In 2011, polling became institutionalised enough to feature in NRM primary races (*New Vision*, 7 September 2010) and evidence suggests that it also played a controversial role in the selection of NRM's party Secretary General. In a heated battle, the incumbent Amama Mbabazi overcame his two opponents with a little help from polling and technology. "Prior to and during the voting, phone text messages were sent to delegates claiming NRM opinion polls had put Mbabazi in the lead with 72 per cent followed by Bukenya 15 per cent and Otafiire 13 per cent. At 7:00 pm another text message was sent to the delegates that provisional results now showed Mbabazi in the lead. Yet at this time, voting was still going on in all polling stations. These text messages swung the voters' mood. It would be futile to vote a losing candidate" (*The Independent*, 22 September 2010).

Secondly, NRM appears to have finally learned how to adapt their strategy in an era of opinion polling. Moving away from merely producing self-aggrandising polls, the NRM began to exert greater control over the opinion polling industry and began using polls more effectively to target constituencies and voters that needed persuading. In the first instance, the government introduced new regulations to restrict the content of opinion polls, requiring that all pollsters obtain permits prior to surveying the general public. Opposition leaders contend that these proposals are forwarded to the President's office for approval, giving Museveni undue influence over the content of the polls. Moreover, even in the field, pollsters are required to report to the Resident District Commissioner (often an NRM party man) who approves the conduct of the poll under the auspices of 'national security.' The interests of these local officials often rest squarely on Museveni's achieving a good level of support within their regions, so pressure can be brought to bear (*The Observer*, 22 December 2010).

There is also evidence to suggest the Museveni and his campaign team used the information gleaned from their regular opinion polls to support a more efficient patronage system to deliver the necessary votes (*The Independent*, 22 February 2011). Sometimes the bribery was direct, such as with cash inducements. At other times the bribery was institutionalised. Prior to the elections, Uganda increased the number of

sub-national units, effectively expanding the already bloated patronage system at whose helm Museveni had sat for a quarter century. Since Museveni came into power, Uganda's sub-national units or districts have grown from 33 to 112. Districts are staffed with ruling-party loyalists, led by presidentially appointed resident district commissioners, and each adds a new representative to parliament. Whereas in Nigeria, for instance, a member of parliament represents about 430,000 people, the same MP in Uganda represents about 89,600 people.

As the opinion polling industry in Uganda has grown more sophisticated, its ability to provide more strategic useful data has developed as well. Polling data from the major pollsters in the 2011 campaign was generally disaggregated by region, gender, etc. This trend is instructive when analysing the way in which Museveni and the NRM conducted their campaign. While it's impossible to be certain, there is a high likelihood that Museveni's strategy targeting northern voters was based on polling which showed that the NRM had a chance to break the FDC stronghold there. In comparison to previous elections, NRM allocated far more campaign resources to the north, blanketing it with polling agents. Similarly efforts to engage specifically the youth populations in the major urban areas (again a traditionally FDC-leaning sub-group) were strategic forays by the NRM into FDC strongholds which must have been based on some kind of information (Private interview, 15 May 2013).

The general trend is that, while politicians remain publicly underwhelmed, for political operatives opinion polls are shifting priorities of campaigns. Contrary to previous election cycles, 2011 saw the NRM and Museveni adjust their campaign to meet people's preferences, almost certainly drawn from polling data. Recognising that public expressions of dissatisfaction provide the grist for the opposition mill, the NRM began responding directly to the issues raised in polls in its campaign platforms, promising improvements in areas highlighted as underperforming by citizens. Whereas in the past, they were likely to ignore such data, experiences from the past few elections have taught them that polls and clear responses to them can be an effective instrument to drive voter turnout (Private interview, 12 May 2013).

Nevertheless, 2011's presidential polls were Uganda's most peaceful post-independence polls. The 2011 campaign is the first in which government has defeated opponents without resorting to massive violence and massive rigging. President Yoweri Museveni convincingly overcame his main opponent, Dr Kizza Besigye, and six other presidential candidates with more than 68 per cent of the vote. In addition, the ruling party won a convincing number of seats in parliament, 295 out of 365, to set up a fail-proof majority. Yet, despite a return of peace to former Lord's Resistance Army affected regions, the turnout fell drastically to 59 per cent.

A post-mortem article dissecting Besigye's defeat had this to offer: "Opinion polls played an important part in this election, and they consistently showed Museveni in the lead. But the opposition buried their head in divisions. Unfortunately for Besigye, his team missed even the well-known view that polls, even bogus ones, create the so-called 'herd' mentality of voters swing to the side of the one reported to be winning. Besigye's should have countered them by commissioning a more respectable firm to do a poll in his favour. Why didn't he? Possibly it is because he commissioned the Synovate one, which also showed he was trailing. All this confusion worked on the mind of the voter" (*The Independent*, 22 February 2011).

Moreover, Besigye was fighting against the full force of the Ugandan government, with the President, his staff and some family members regularly using state facilities, such as planes, choppers and vehicles on campaign trails. In effect, the state bankrolled Museveni's campaign. While an Afrobarometer study after the election asserted that money in the form of bribes did not play a significant role in determining the outcome of the election, it could not deny the overwhelming power of incumbency that Museveni brought to bear on the 2011 campaign (Conroy-Krutz and Logan, 2012).

Yet, some international election monitors gave Uganda's 2011 election a clean bill of health. Other observers, such as the Commonwealth, avoided tagging the polls as being free and fair or not. Some labelled the election anything but credible: "The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of February 2011 were by all standards not free and fair. There were numerous cases of illegal detention of opposition supporters on trumped up charges and the Electoral Commission was not independent but

appointed and controlled by President Museveni” (IDU, 2011: 1). Yet, in spite of this, the broad margin of victory was convincing for many that whatever the irregularities, there was no denying that Museveni had won the electoral battle once again.

6.2.3.4 Implications

The 2011 campaign differed from its predecessors in many significant ways. For one, Museveni and his campaign team recognised the power of perceptions early on and worked hard to control the perception battle in the media. The government enacted laws which restricted the conduct of opinion polling, requiring that pollsters obtain government permission and approval before entering the field. Secondly, the NRM set up a strong internal research department, whose job it was to conduct and analyse opinion polls about the state of the race.

More importantly in the context of this research, Museveni’s initial electoral advantage and the persistent publications of these polls, which all but precluded the likelihood of anything but another Museveni victory, set the tone of the race before it even got started. 2011 saw Museveni and his party launch a media offensive, with opinion polls as their principal weapon. Wielding data which pointed to a convincing Museveni victory from the get-go, they drained the campaign of any competitive zeal. This ability to quash competition early had important implications for Museveni’s strategic responses and his electoral behaviour. First, he was able to turn polls to his advantage, rather than constantly battling against their impact. NRM used the information gathered from extensive polling to allocate their campaign resources more strategically to ensure that the election result was beyond doubt. At the same time, the NRM used polls and media monitoring to assess how their politicians and the party were being perceived on radio and in newspapers. This seems to be part of the trend of political parties starting to come to grips with brand strategy and the role polling can play in defining their identity in the minds of voters (Private interview, 15 May 2013).

The reduced competition also meant that Museveni could avoid heavy-handed tactics such as violence, using more covert methods to ensure clear victory. Following the

2007/8 Kenyan electoral disaster, many pundits believed that similar tensions would simmer over during the Ugandan campaign. Previous elections had seen violence, and there were real fears as Uganda approached 2011 that should the outcome have been similar to 2006 that opposition supporters would take the streets. In the end, the violence never materialised. Opposition politicians and their campaigns rejected the election result, but unlike previous elections, they had precious little hard evidence on which to mount a serious case for victory. Of course, there may have been malfeasance and intimidation, but the margins were so great and so in line with all media predictions that their complaints fell largely on deaf ears.

Instead, the violence and the outrage were postponed until later in the year when huge crowds took to the streets to protest fuel and food prices. This mass mobilisation indicates that the potential was there for opposition politicians to build a viable campaign but that the odds, at least during the campaign, were never in their favour. Indeed, the FDC appears to have learned some lessons from the 2011 campaign. Far from shying away from opinion polls, the party has embraced them, engaging independent pollsters to investigate issues related to leadership, voter expectations, and key vote drivers (Private interview, 12 May 2013). The recent FDC leadership election was polled throughout to give delegates a chance to gauge trends among the competing candidates. This points to a future in which opinion polling is far more, rather than less, institutionalised within Ugandan politics.

6.3 Conclusions

This chapter offers some intriguing contributions to this thesis's overarching question regarding the impact of opinion polling on electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa. Opinion polls as a source of political information have clearly grown over the course of the past three elections in Uganda. This can be traced using the content analysis presented above, capturing the number of mentions opinion polls received in major newspapers in the country. While overall mentions were down in 2011 as compared with 2006, they are still above 2001 levels when the competitiveness of elections and thus demand for opinion polls were far higher.

More importantly than quantity of mentions, the quality of coverage also improves over time. While in 2001 the mentions are generally restricted to short articles merely reporting the results, by 2011, opinion polls regularly feature in the columns of political analysts and elicit immediate and substantial responses from political party spokespeople. This increasing profile of polls speaks to, at least, a superficial shift in Ugandan politics, whereby political debates move into the open, based on statistical data rather than just hearsay and gossip.

At the same time, the Synovate polling fiasco in 2011 demonstrates how far Uganda has to go in terms of accurately and impartially presenting opinion polls in its media. Journalists are still far too likely to report opinion polls without comment and to attempt trend analysis of different polls, conducted by different pollsters using different methodologies. Juxtaposing polls in this way, often focusing on the vastly different outcomes, undermines the credibility of polling as a profession, as ordinary voters begin to view opinion polls as arbitrary and volatile when in reality they are relatively stable.

Uganda is fortunate to have escaped, for now, the ethnic dimension which has crept into polling in Kenya and, to some extent, Nigeria. The limited political landscape in Uganda allows only for two sides of the political divide: pro-Museveni or anti-Museveni. While other ethnic divisions certainly exist and are critical to the assumption and retention of political power, Museveni's longevity has become such a polarising issue that in the politics of opinion polling these other issues take second position. Indeed, one of the major takeaways from the Afrobarometer poll conducted in 2010/2011 was the reluctance the Ugandan people had in speaking about politics. Critics of Museveni seized on the finding that some 63 per cent of Ugandans felt they had to be careful talking about politics to dismiss the poll's other results which heavily favoured Museveni. This inconsistent level of political competition has had a clear impact on the influence of opinion polling on elections in Uganda.

Just as opinion polling as a source of political information has witnessed a tumultuous journey over the past decade or so in Uganda, so too has polling's influence on political strategy during presidential campaigns. Under the no-party system, the opinion polling

that was carried out was largely irrelevant due to Museveni's control of 'party' resources to manage the electoral process. By 2001, Museveni's power had waned to the extent that competition within the 'Movement' was viable, encouraging a number of challengers and sparking political opinion polling in Uganda into life. Indeed, this chapter has argued that the emergence of polling quantifiably demonstrated the risks Museveni faced in a transparent and representative election, providing justifiable evidence for his implementation of tactics to ensure that the election would be anything but.

By 2006, opinion polling had become increasingly pervasive in Ugandan politics, inspiring public wars of words between the opposing campaigns whenever a new poll was released. Anticipation was heightened by a series of polls pointing to a close race. The competitiveness of the race again prompted a clear strategic response from Museveni and the NRM, ensuring that the election would be neither transparent nor representative. While Museveni was ultimately declared the clear winner, it spoke to the growing credibility of polling that most media credited the discrepancies to fraud and corruption rather than polling inadequacies. Indeed, its prominence in 2006 seems to have convinced important members of the ruling party of the merits of engaging pollsters in their campaigns.

In the absence of a counter-factual, it is impossible to assess the real impact of these strategic moves. The opposition in 2011 were fractured and weak, while Museveni was riding a wave of relief at the cessation of hostilities in the north, so an NRM victory was always the most likely occurrence. But Museveni's seemingly interminable reign as president was beginning to grate on many within the country, and it is likely that had an opinion poll appeared showing an opposition candidate with a realistic chance of unseating the president, the campaign could have taken an entirely different trajectory. Indeed, in light of limited competition, Museveni was able finally to operationalise his opinion polls, adjusting his speeches to include items highlighted in public surveys and adjusting his campaign to maximise his appeal to voters across regions, not just his core constituencies.

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that in spite of the gains opinion polling has made in Uganda, its influence is hampered by a number of structural factors. Recent efforts notwithstanding, political party identity is still low, given the relative novelty of multi-party politics. As a result, personality politics still dominate — a holdover from the “merit-based” system of the previous political system — which often means that the selection of the candidate is infinitely more important than the issues/party platform in determining voter decision-making. Moreover the lack of credible alternatives means that opinion polling’s ability to aggregate opinion and point to possible opposition coalitions is also abrogated. This undermines opinion polling’s strategic influence for change.

Moreover, trust in institutions remains low, complicating efforts to set realistic electoral expectations. Polls may be accurate, but if electoral institutions fail to deliver free and fair results, the relevance of polling data is somewhat moot. Trust in polls themselves also remains an issue. As one interviewee quipped, “Opinion polling and politicians in Uganda are like a lamppost and drunken man; it’s used far more often for support than for illumination” (Private interview, 14 June 2013). Until the public strategy of politicians matches their private interest in opinion polls, people will continue to believe that polls should be discredited. Opinion polls will only become an instrument for systemic change when the political elite fully embrace its potential publicly, driving a sea change in demand for and perceptions of public opinion research.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

To what extent is public opinion polling changing electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa? I have argued that public opinion polling has made a significant impact on the way in which electoral politics is conducted in sub-Saharan Africa; not by changing the nature of political participation or by changing political institutions, but rather by shaping elite perceptions, particularly in the media, of the nature of political competition during key election periods. I have proposed a two-stage model for analysing this impact, with corresponding hypotheses for each stage.

In my framework, opinion polling shapes electoral dynamics by changing the kinds of information underpinning political elite decision-making and by changing the locus of political calculus from the private to the public. As the demand for political information grows and deepens, electoral politics gets played out less in the backrooms and more on the front pages of the daily newspapers. Opinion polling quickly becomes the dominant source of campaign information, often eclipsing older methods of gathering information. In this way, opinion polling concentrates and intensifies the political information that would otherwise have reached the political elites and public in a more diffuse way. However much they may try and avoid it or suppress it, opinion polling ultimately forces political elites to adapt their electoral strategies in some tangible way.

How the political elite change their behaviour is far more complex, and this research only addresses a small subset of elite electoral behaviour. Nevertheless, this thesis's model predicts that once polling has infiltrated elite perceptions it influences principally their impressions of political competition. Given the concentration and intensity of opinion polling data, elites form far more extreme perceptions than they would previously, which in turn triggers more extreme electoral strategies. A finding which supports the contention made by Jacobs and Shapiro (2005) in the United States that polling can have a restricting rather than inclusive effect on political strategies. In the context of these cases, the model predicts that where opinion polling shows a narrowing of competition, elites react to restrict and manipulate the election in their favour, falling back on strategies of core mobilisation rather than broad-based appeal.

This prediction is predicated on two assumptions of political conditions prevailing in sub-Saharan Africa. The first relates to the uncertainty of political information, of which opinion polling is a part, in the context of poor media coverage of political issues, inexperience of pollsters, and a general scepticism around quantitative research. These factors clearly had not changed, even in Kenya where polling has a longer history; if anything the fallout of the 2007 elections had exacerbated them.

The second assumption, however, is that the nature of ethnic-identity politics is such that increased political competition; rather than prompting strategies that broaden electoral appeal (as theorised in Western democracies) actually induces the political elite to cling still more strongly to patterns of clientelistic and patronage politics. In the face of a new form of political participation in the form of polling, political elites do not adapt positively but rather retrench into tried and trusted tactics.

This thesis has had three goals: first, to ask whether there is evidence that public opinion polling in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda is changing the way in which politics is conducted around elections; second, to develop a theoretical framework to understand the underlying characteristics that shape the interface between polling, the political elite, and electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa; and third, to determine whether polling has contributed to more transparent and representative electoral processes in these selected countries.

Influential Opinion Polling

This research has argued that public opinion polling should not be considered only in its abstract form or in isolation. Rather, it should also be examined within the political context in which it is operating. This means engaging with the realities of political change and electoral politics in the African countries now adopting opinion polling. Proponents of public opinion polling contend that it can have a liberalising effect on political systems, delivering more transparent and representative governance, but this contention puts the cart before the horse. Given the particularities of sub-Saharan

African politics it must first be established that public opinion polling can actually make an impact on the structure or character of these systems.

In Uganda, I documented how the quality of coverage improves over time. While in 2001, the mentions are generally restricted to short articles merely reporting the results, by 2011, opinion polls regularly feature in the columns of political analysts and elicit immediate and substantial responses from political party spokespeople. This increasing profile of polls illustrates a small but significant shift in Ugandan politics, moving political debates into the open, based on verifiable information rather than rumours.

Largely limited to newspaper-commissioned polls, the polling sector in Uganda in 2001 lacked experience and credibility to support the claims presented in their data. The partisan character of the media led to polling results being equated principally with propaganda from both the state and the opposition. In terms of coverage, the polls received little analysis in the print media beyond merely described the results, which were also often incorrectly presented and analysed.

Yet, in spite of the limitations of polling in 2001, the coverage presented in the case study illustrated the rapidity with which it penetrated the perceptions of the political elite in Uganda. This presented opportunities and challenges for the political system. On the one hand, the readiness with which the political elite were willing to embrace polling data suggested a latent recognition of public opinion's potential. On the other, the elite's willingness to believe and even act upon largely unverifiable data exposed a lack of statistical nous which ultimately led to a backlash against public opinion research.

The content analysis from my research demonstrates that both the quantity and penetration of opinion polling coverage increased during the 2006 Ugandan electoral campaign. Political analysts quoted polling data with increasing frequency in their opinion pieces, and the political parties came to accept polls as viable political information. Both campaigns were more tactical with their use of opinion polls throughout the campaign. The NRM pursued a less reactionary polling strategy,

publishing their own internal polls at regular intervals to validate those of the state-owned *New Vision* newspaper.

The 2006 campaign became a war of perceptions, with opinion polling central to each side's cause. The opposition, for their part, became more assertive with their use of data, feeding the media with positive polling stories at key points in the campaign. These numbers would counter state-sponsored news stories promoting more traditional measures of popularity: numbers of people at rallies, key informant interviews with political power brokers within certain regions, etc. For Besigye, given the challenges he was facing in terms of sustaining his campaign in the face of the repressive tactics of the Museveni regime, the key was to appear as a credible alternative to the president. Campaigning through the medium of opinion polling gave Besigye that ability, precluding the need for the national campaign that the government prevented him from implementing.

By contrast, in the 2011 campaign, it was Museveni and his campaign team that acknowledged the power of perceptions from the outset and implemented a strategy to dominate the perception battle in the media. New laws were enacted that restricted the conduct of opinion polling, requiring that pollsters obtain government permission and approval before entering the field. The NRM also established an internal research department, tasked with conducting and analysing opinion polls about the state of the race.

Museveni's initial electoral advantage and the persistent publications of these polls, all of which pointed to sizable Museveni leads, drained the campaign of any competitive spirit. Pertinent to this thesis's hypotheses, these moves to minimise competition enabled Museveni's strategic responses and his electoral behaviour to differ from the previous two elections. For one, polls became an advantage, rather than a hindrance to his victory. Political analysts noted how NRM was able to use the information gathered from extensive polling to allocate their campaign resources more strategically. At the same time, the NRM used polls and media monitoring to assess how their politicians and the party were being perceived on radio and in newspapers. This seems to be part of the trend of political parties starting to come to grips with

brand strategy and the role polling can play in defining their identity in the minds of voters.

In Ghana, the influence of opinion polling on elections is highly contingent upon the perceptions and behaviour of the political elite. Despite advances in the technology and processes available to them, politicians remain convinced of the predominant role that image, personality, and personal ties play for voters' opinion formation. Ghana's increasingly rigid and increasingly competitive two-party democracy exacerbates the tensions between the old- and new-style politics.

The results of the 2004 elections affirmed that Ghana was a two-party state, with the NPP and NDC dominating both the presidential and parliamentary elections. The arrival of opinion polling onto the political scene served as a means of capturing this phenomenon and its associated effects on the political system. As a source of political information, opinion polling was now achieving far wider coverage and far better integration into political analysis. All the while, opinion polling continued to confront the entrenched impression of opinion polls as instruments of propaganda. While the efforts of the political parties to stimulate their campaigns through commissioned polling did nothing to counter these conceptions, the ability of more independent pollsters to predict accurately the final outcome of the race spoke well for the on-going growth and maturation of the opinion polling industry in Ghana.

By 2008, political opinion polling had become deeply entrenched in Ghanaian electoral processes; yet it remained deeply flawed in many respects. As a source of political information, it was still highly volatile, with pollsters entering and exiting the industry, complicating attempts to judge long-term political trends. One constant throughout, however, particularly in 2008, was the almost one-man polling operation, Ben Ephson and his Daily Dispatch newspaper. Though not an ideal structure, it is not uncommon even in developed countries to see small scale but influential polling operations fronted by charismatic personalities. Nevertheless, the general inconsistency of the pollsters belied any attempt to characterise political polling in Ghana. In the context of high political competitiveness, its ambivalence shaped its influence on elite perceptions.

Hostility around opinion polling escalated in 2012. Having become pervasive in the political media, the political elite grew increasingly uncomfortable with their lack of control over the numbers coming out of the polls. Reactions varied from disputing the content of the polls based on accusations of bias in sources or methodologies to issuing competing polls to try and control the messages emerging in the media. Consequently, the legitimacy of opinion polling as a source of reliable political information deteriorated.

In Nigeria, the case study also showed that opinion polls as a source of political information have clearly grown over the course of the past decade in Nigeria. This is perhaps most apparent in the time and effort spent by politicians and the media attempting to gauge the opinion of ordinary Nigerians. That said, a consistent link between political outcomes and public opinion is often elusive, leading some to doubt relevance of opinion polling in the Nigerian context. The current generation of politicians in Nigeria has been slow to acknowledge the potential of opinion polling as both a source of information and as a means of managing it.

Given the prevailing political conditions in Nigeria, critics' dismissal of opinion polling following its emergence in 2007 as an exercise in propaganda is understandable. Specifically, perceptions of credibility and impartiality were highly correlated with political dispositions. PDP supporters considered the emphatic victory fully justified and rationalised the polls predicting a close contest as the desperate attempts of an opposition and international community intent on undermining the PDP's dominance. Opposition supporters, by contrast, viewed the independent polls as an accurate reflection of the political reality, believing the final tally to have been the result of massive rigging and co-option within the electoral institutions of Nigeria. This lack of trust in these institutions adds a difficult obstacle to the idea of political polls setting more realistic expectations. If the relevant institutions cannot be relied on to deliver the election freely and fairly, then the introduction of polls does not promote acceptance of results but rather the opposite. It provokes those on the losing end to contest, usually to the detriment of all.

Broadly, there is growing evidence that the way in which Nigerians participate in elections is changing. Young people are voting in greater numbers; technology is allowing the media and citizen groups to capture and share election data more quickly and easily; and there is an emerging capacity within the context of opinion polling to measure and analyse electoral behaviour and preferences. In doing so, opinion polling can be seen to be working towards the greater good of removing electoral fraud and supporting more transparent and representative elections, but its short term contribution to Nigerian politics has been a reputation for igniting electoral controversies.

In 2011, public opinion polling was largely successful in predicting the eventual winners across the elections reviewed. In a volatile political environment like Nigeria, these prognostications have an ambiguous impact on the likelihood of election rejection and violence. The data presented in this research supports the contention that no amount of opinion polling can undo expectations which are too fervently held as to withstand all evidence to the contrary. It is clear that the imperfections in both the science of polling in Nigeria and the Nigerian electoral system itself contrive to create situations where pre-election polling possibly exacerbates the problem of politically-motivated violence.

While in Kenya, where polling is most developed, with a political system in which parties are increasingly fluid and predominantly personality or ethnically composed, opinion polling's role has become less about setting realistic expectations and more about reinforcing preconceived expectations, whether accurate or not. The impact of the introduction of a nascent and still under-developed public opinion research industry into a competitive and constantly shifting political environment appears to hinge on the perceptions of political elites driving their strategic responses. If anything, it has served merely to amplify the weaknesses in Kenya's on-going political development, surfacing most acutely the underlying tensions and power struggles that have long characterised the political system.

For Kenya, the 2002 election was a key moment in the way in which the political elite perceive political opinion polling. When first introduced into electoral politics, it

challenged existing elite strategies to managing expectations and information. In the face of rapid adoption from media and opposition candidates, KANU refused to adapt to the changing electoral landscape, convinced that they would be able to control perceptions as they had previously. Moi and his team were confident the party election machine could build support around Uhuru and crowd out Kibaki, relying on the public's faith in the credibility of the voice of the President and the state apparatus. Opinion polling broke down this asymmetry and set new terms for the electoral contest, undermining Moi's ability to drive popular opinion. The general expectation was for a Kibaki win, and the effort required to reverse that perception proved impossible.

Perceptions remained important in 2005 but with increased competition came increased uncertainty. In spite of opinion polling's growing profile in Kenyan politics the information it provided was always tinged with ambiguity or dogged by potential bias. The proliferation of polling was not matched by a similar improvement in media coverage. Numbers were printed unfiltered, combining the data from reputable polling firms with dubious organisations and juxtaposing transparent statistical techniques with unreliable survey methods. The overall effect was to undermine polling's strength as a purveyor of political information, a realisation that would not become truly apparent in the next election.

Having grown in prominence over the inter-election period, opinion polls became pervasive in the 2007 campaign season. Their influence became too prevalent, with every poll released receiving extensive, if almost universally superficial, attention and analysis. The political discourse became inundated with numbers, which could vary substantially at times and which starkly reflected the inherent divisions within Kenyan society. The persistent reiteration of these ethno-regional fissures heightened the atmosphere of the election and exacerbated the 'winner-take-all' mentality that already pervaded Kenyan presidential politics. Strategically, the inevitability and rigidity of quantitative polling almost certainly contributed to over-confidence in the Odinga camp, which in turn influenced the expectations of their supporters and created an environment conducive for violence.

Corresponding to the influence stage of my two-stage model, the evidence presented demonstrates clearly that public opinion polling is shaping political discourse in the four cases, as represented in the mainstream media in each country. Across the four cases, there is broad similarity in the way in which polling emerges and ultimately comes to pervade the political sphere. Generally, it is opposition parties that first recognise the potential of opinion polling, both as a media instrument and as a campaign technique. Political commentators closely follow these early adopters, legitimising what may otherwise have remained an obscure political tool.

The political opposition faces a challenge in the early days, however, given their initial weakness relative to the ruling party in many of these cases. They must adopt an ambivalent stance of embracing the potential of polling while refusing to acknowledge the data it produces, which often shows them trailing by large margins. Only once they can demonstrate strong gains in their support can they fully condone the veracity of the polling.

The broad similarity in the integration of opinion polling into political culture across the four cases is strong evidence of its increasing influence in sub-Saharan African politics. Political elites are seeking out the information that opinion polling offers on the electoral state of play, and they are adjusting their perceptions of the political dynamics of the campaign as a result of the data they receive through polling¹⁹. This substantiates my first stage hypothesis and opens the door to the further question of explaining the variation in reactions to opinion polling exhibited by political elites across these countries.

¹⁹ This is consistent with Hedman's (2010: 106) findings in the Philippines where "the growing practice of would-be candidates and their handlers commissioning their own surveys has also revealed an acute appreciation of the significance of public opinion *polls* for influencing the prospects of any given election campaign, by establishing candidates as genuinely 'bankable' in the eyes of prospective supporters."

The Power of Perceptions

Having established that public opinion polling is having an impact on the way in which elites perceive electoral politics, I proceeded to analyse whether that impact led to better quality elections, as the proponents of polling would suggest. Beginning from the premise that electoral quality is a function of elite strategies, I have hypothesised that elite perceptions of competition are the most likely pathway to predicting elite election strategies.

Under the classical model of opinion polling conceived by George Gallup, opinion polling provides clear and impartial evidence as to the state of the electoral race, providing candidates with the information they need to tailor their strategies in order to attract the greatest number of voters and win the election. As competition increases, the importance of polling increases as politicians seek to attune themselves ever closer to the preferences and interests of the highest proportion of the electorate. In this way, the election becomes more transparent in its conduct and more representative in its outcome.

This classical model, however, is not what is observed when reviewing the four cases presented here. Indeed, this research suggests that opinion polling's ability to influence elite perceptions and behaviour does not necessarily bring with it a concomitant improvement in democracy. I theorise that this is due to two contextual factors: uncertainty of polls and media and ethnic-identity politics in a 'competitive elitist' system. Ultimately, the transparency and representativeness of elections is contingent upon elite perceptions of levels of competition. Where polling shows a marked increase in competition, strategies will inhibit transparency and representativeness; where polling shows stability or decreases in competition, strategies are more accommodating of transparency and representativeness.

In Kenya, polling's influence on strategy and expectations thus is constrained by the character of the political system. There is first-hand evidence that political parties value polls for their campaign strategies, but the focus is not on attuning party platforms to public preferences but rather on the usefulness of polls as a means of

identifying target areas for 'get out the vote' campaigns. In this, Kenyan politicians are not substantially different from their Western counterparts, but the consequent hardening of ethnic cleavages as a result of these targeted forays further exacerbates electoral tensions.

Moi's apparent capitulation in 2002 in the face of overwhelming numbers argues strongly for opinion polling's ability to contribute to more transparent and representative elections. In the context of this thesis's hypotheses, this example supports the theory that polling's ability to mobilise collective sentiment against Uhuru compelled Moi to accept an outcome he would not normally have been willing to accept. There is also evidence of the centrality of elite perceptions here. Moi had challenged popular sentiment before as president. What differed here was that Moi (and the general public) was able to perceive clearly Kibaki's insurmountable lead and made a strategic decision to renege on any attempts to restrict or manipulate the electoral process.

In 2005, opinion polling featured significantly throughout the referendum campaign. The politics of perception were played out daily across the front pages of the newspapers. With politicians able to base their projections on publicly available information rather than conjecture, elite perceptions came to play an important role in driving elite electoral strategies. The government, perceiving themselves to be on the losing end of the referendum, conceded defeat at an early stage to preserve political capital for future contests. Rather than persisting with a campaign they knew they could not win, they regrouped and prepared themselves instead for the 2007 elections, a competition that was ultimately far more important for them to win.

Indeed, by 2007, the strength of convictions among the competing parties was such, buttressed by the consistent leads in the public polls, that it is little surprise that the expectations of Odinga's supporters were artificially high. In this highly charged post-election environment, their unmet expectations proved the necessary provocation to ignite tensions and provoke violence. In this, the influence of perceptions rather than collective action or institutional mechanisms is readily apparent. The polls were not systematically manipulated to create a situation of chaos. Rather it was the political

system itself that proved ill-equipped to accommodate the rapid influx of public opinion data. Elite perceptions of increasing competition led to the adoption, not of more transparent and representative strategies, but rather of strategies that focused on ethnic mobilisation and clientelistic relationships.

In Nigeria, it is clear that public opinion exerts influence on key segments of the political elite. The third term crisis corroborated theories espousing the power of a 'sudden' swing in popular opinion. While the anti-amendment campaign was active prior to polling, the publication of opinion data gave it a potency it had not previously demonstrated. At the same time, the evidence from Nigeria illustrated the negative side to political responsiveness in the form of strategic rigging and intimidation based on the targeted information provided by opinion polling.

In assessing opinion polling's political impact at a strategic level, the evidence of 2007 points to an elite dominant system, where politicians use polls to maximise personal gain over the interests of the electorate. While opinion polling played an important role in persuading the opposition to contest the elections and therefore preventing a PDP monopoly on power, once the campaign was joined the strategic calculus deteriorated considerably. In personality-dominant politics, data is used not as a means of convincing voters of the ideological merit of the candidate but as a means of proving the ability of the candidate to deliver tangible benefits. Opinion polling may not directly contribute to the exercise of these tactics, but it appears that the presence of hard data enabled politicians to be more ruthless and yet more selective in their application. While this may represent value for money for Nigerian clientelist politicians, it does not speak well for opinion polling's ability to influence positively Nigeria's quest for more transparent and representative elections.

The examples from 2007 and 2011 in Nigeria reiterate the potential that opinion polling has in competitive environments of instigating rather than reducing violence and conflict by establishing appropriate expectations of election results. This is rarely as a result of shortcomings in the polling but rather deficiencies in the electoral process which create vast chasms between the data presented in the pre-election polls and official election tallies. The pertinent question is whether the transparency

provided by polls and the conflict it subsequently provokes is good for democratic development in the long-run, even if it is disastrous in the immediate aftermath of elections.

While opinion polling's contribution remains limited in terms of shaping electoral outcomes, public opinion research has the opportunity to make a significant and positive impact on the improvement electoral practice and outcomes in future elections. If existing gains can be built on and expanded, there is potential that those political personalities that currently dominate Nigerian elections can be counteracted. Whatever its influence, it cannot be denied that public opinion polling has made a forceful entry into the Nigerian political system, shaping elite behaviour both for the better and, unfortunately, often for the worse.

The influence of public opinion polling on political information and electoral strategies in Nigeria remains uncertain. This thesis argues that it can be credited with ensuring that the opposition took part in the 2007 general elections. At the same time, it seems to function more prominently as a means for elites to present 'consensus' candidates to the electorates, using opinion polls as a way to presage the outcomes of the elections and ensure they are on the winning. In this context, participation is no longer representative of open and fair contestation but rather a pre-organised game, that while not necessarily rigged from start, does present Nigerian citizens with a reduced scope for choice.

In Ghana, polling's influence on strategy and expectations has been likewise disparate, ranging from clear and incisive to vague and implied. Personal interviews conducted for this research have shown that political elites rely on perceptions of competition illustrated by opinion polls to shape their electoral strategies. Yet, faced with uncertainty and high levels of competition, in the context of Ghanaian politics, the political elite have generally not chosen to broaden their appeal through issue-based campaigns as Gallup's vision of polling intended. Rather, they retreat further to the clientelistic and patronage strategies that characterise ethnic-identity politics in sub-Saharan Africa.

The ability of opinion polling to capture and elucidate the resurgence of the NDC mid-campaign in 2004 highlighted its potential for campaign strategy, both on the side of the leader and the chasing pack. Moreover, the development of 'skirt and blouse' voting, where a voter votes for one party's presidential candidate but votes for a different party's parliamentary candidate, illustrated the potential importance of better information on voter intentions that could be linked to constituency-specific campaign strategies. Indeed, as the hypothesis on elite perceptions would predict, as the opinion polls tightened in the middle of the race, the two parties moved toward more ethnic-identity style politics to energise support from among their core constituencies, raising concerns that the election would overheat. A consistent series of polls assigning a clear victory to the NPP, however, undercut the NDC's efforts to maintain the competition. A consensus of expectations based on the polls emerged, later validated by the official result, translating into a relatively transparent and representative election.

In 2008, the NPP had a strong incentive to use its power of incumbency to attempt to guide public opinion away from its preference for a change in government. According to pollster Ben Ephson, this was done through means of bribery and the manipulation of figures in polls and, perhaps, the ballot box. Interestingly, the NPP were compelled to resort to these tactics based largely on the analysis of opinion polls conducted relatively early in the election campaign. Faced with the ethno-regional realities that those polls depicted, their American strategist advised them to prepare themselves for defeat. Reflecting perhaps the stark contrast between the American data-centric campaigns and the African image-centric campaigns, the NPP campaign team refused to accept their strategist's advice to abandon huge swathes of the country and focus their efforts on key areas. The polls were proved correct. In the end, the American strategist had called the outcome of the election precisely.

This outcome is an important finding in the context of this research. I have argued that in the context of high political competition opinion polling instigates elites to pursue strategies that undermine the transparency and representativeness of electoral processes. They do so based on their own perceptions drawn from uncertain polling

data and due to the specific elite incentives that exist within the political system. Even by 2008, the credibility of Ghanaian polls was mixed at best. The partisanship which pervaded the production of the polls largely undermined the consumption of them, with media and readers unable to determine which are credible and which propaganda. Perhaps based on this uncertainty, the NPP rejected proposals to narrow their campaign to exclude NDC-favoured areas and chose to fight as broadly as possible. That their strategy ultimately failed to deliver victory makes this the exception that proves the rule. Knowing the predicted outcome August 2008, these numbers likely played a role in expediting their conceding defeat.

By 2012, polling at a strategic level, became far less about the practicalities of the information and far more about reacting to the content of the polls, either positively or negatively. This was driven by the increasingly partisan nature of Ghanaian politics as the main political parties solidified their bases and consolidated their electoral positions. While polling continued to play an important role in increasing the transparency of internal strategy of political parties, its ability to influence positively the quality of electoral processes in Ghana became highly compromised by the uncertainty of its profile and the competitively charged political atmosphere in which the polls are released.

In spite of these difficulties, opinion polling, at least the reliable polls, seemed to get the prediction right in the end. While election experts fully expected the vote to go to a run-off, Ephson's last poll correctly called a 'one-touch' victory for Mahama and the NDC. The NPP has taken the decision to court, but the weight of evidence is against them. People have been angry, but widespread violence has not ensued. While this can largely be credited to the politicians who have appealed for calm, there is also the possibility that the political elite were prepared to accept this outcome based on the information available to them prior to the vote.

Finally, in spite of the gains opinion polling has made in Uganda, its influence is hampered by a number of structural factors. Recent efforts notwithstanding, political party identity is still low, given the relative novelty of multi-party politics. As a result, personality politics still dominate — a holdover from the "merit-based" system of the

previous political system — which often means that the selection of the candidate is infinitely more important than the issues/party platform in determining voter decision-making. Moreover the lack of credible alternatives means that opinion polling's ability to aggregate opinion and point to possible opposition coalitions is also abrogated. This undermines opinion polling's strategic influence for change.

Museveni's campaign was clearly caught off-guard by the polls that placed Besigye in such competitive positions during the 2001 campaign. Their initial response was to obfuscate the picture through counter-claims of their own, citing 'internal' polls or their own predictions based on crowds at rallies or whistle stop tours of the country with the president. Failing this, they allegedly reverted to a strategy of rigging the election to ensure that Museveni would win with a large majority, eliminating a need for a run-off. In both cases, the effect of a perceived increase in competition was a move toward less transparent and representative electoral strategies.

Consequently, the 2001 Ugandan elections demonstrate how opinion polling can provide a 'sense-check' for official election results, particularly where trust in the electoral institutions is low. While there was little doubt that Museveni would win re-election, the sizable discrepancy between his polling trends and his final tally fuelled opposition claims of voter manipulation. Indeed, journalists from *The Monitor* took the extraordinary step of using the opinion polls as supporting evidence for their calculations of fraud that had befallen the 2001 elections. Their analysis argued that had the elections actually been free and fair, the result would have looked very much like the independent opinion polls circulating at the time. In this way, while opinion polling in competitive settings is unlikely to deliver more transparency and representativeness during the electoral period in question, it could have potential influence on institutional change in the future.

2006 followed broadly similar lines. Museveni perceiving his margin of victory to be shrinking resorted to violence and the physical incarceration of his opponent. Ironically, these old tactics backfired to a certain extent, with evidence to suggest that Besigye's popularity only grew following his arrest, as his media profile consequently increased. Museveni and his team, having reduced prospects for a transparent

election, acted emphatically to ensure that the result also would be unrepresentative. These outcomes are strongly supportive of the hypothesis that opinion polling shapes elite perceptions of competition, engendering negative strategic reactions in the face of increased competition.

The reduced competition throughout the 2011 campaign meant that Museveni could adjust his tactical techniques, using more covert methods to ensure clear victory. There were fears that if Museveni pursued strategies similar to those he had used in 2001 and 2006 Uganda could erupt into the same political violence that followed the 2007/8 Kenyan elections. Museveni's persistent superiority in 2011, however, defused any potential tensions. While opposition politicians publicly rejected the election result, their arguments of voter fraud and manipulation lacked conviction. With the margins of the victory so great and so consistent with all media predictions, their complaints were largely ignored.

This is not to say that there is not potential for opposition politicians to build a viable campaign. The FDC appears to have learned some lessons from the unsuccessful 2011 election. Far from shying away from opinion polls, the party has embraced them, engaging independent pollsters to investigate issues related to leadership, voter expectations, and key vote drivers. The recent FDC leadership election was polled throughout to give delegates a chance to gauge trends among the competing candidates. This points to a future in which opinion polling is far more, rather than less, institutionalised within Ugandan politics.

My hypothesis for this second, decision stage of the model was that opinion polling changes elite perceptions of the state of competition within the electoral process, necessitating a change in electoral strategy. Where competition is seen as stable or reduced, elites can adopt strategies that are more conducive to transparent and representative elections. Where competition is seen to be increasing, elites choose to adopt strategies that ensure victory, which in the case of sub-Saharan Africa are rarely transparent or representative.

The evidence from the cases broadly confirms this hypothesis while lending little support to the collective action models or institutional models previously proposed in the literature. In Ghana and Kenya, increasingly competitive electoral processes saw opinion polling used not as a means of channelling policy messages or opening up political processes but rather as a means of targeting ethno-regional party blocs or obfuscating the state of the electoral contest. In Uganda, likewise, Museveni viewed opinion polls showing a narrowing race as sufficient justification to pursue manipulative and coercive tactics to ensure victory. Only when that threat of competition faded did he give opinion polling the political space to inform policy platforms and more open campaign strategies.

This is not to say that opinion polling has made no impact. Evidence from Nigeria shows how opinion polls can be used to counter electoral fraud in the aftermath of flawed elections, and all cases showed the potential it has for making African politics more data-driven. However, opinion polling has done little to force change in the political or electoral institutions of sub-Saharan Africa. While other scholars have found transformative, liberalising effects of opinion polling in cases in Latin America and Asia, in Africa public opinion polling is very much *defined by* the institutional context rather than *shaping* it. Opinion polling has certainly shifted the locus of political gamesmanship from the private to the public in the cases observed, but it has done little to change the rules of the game.

Likewise, opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa has not been the rallying instrument for opposition and civil society that some proponents had hoped it would be. While shaping the political discourse, it is not changing the protagonists. The greatest success for this model observed in this research actually occurred outside the context of elections. The defeat of President Obasanjo's attempt to rewrite Nigeria's constitution to allow himself a third term in office is an example where civil society was able to use opinion polling to set the agenda and turn collective wisdom to their point of view. Indeed, that these kinds of successes were not readily observed during the period of research does not imply that they are not possible, given the appropriate conditions.

The Potential for Polling and Civil Society

Kenya is something of a crucible for research into opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa. The nature of its media, its politics, and its burgeoning opinion research industry puts it at the forefront of issues of polling and elections, both positively and negatively. Trends which emerge here may portend the future of other African nations grappling with the emergence of this new phenomenon in electoral campaigns. It is therefore useful to examine the recent Kenyan election in light of this research's conclusions as a precursor for the future of opinion polling in Africa.

In March 2013, Kenyans went to the polls again in the first presidential election since the violence of 2007-8. Many things had changed. The new law referenced in the introduction to this thesis had taken effect, restricting the publication of opinion polls in the days immediately before the election. Electoral institutions had been reformed to try and dispel the mistrust that pervaded electoral politics following the debacle of the previous cycle. A new constitution was in force which changed the rules of the game. But most importantly, the political climate was imbued with an overwhelming commitment to avoid violence and ensure peace, almost at any cost.

In spite of the new restrictions, opinion polling nevertheless continued to feature prominently in the media coverage of the campaign. Using the same frame of analysis as in previous cases above demonstrated that at approximately nine mentions per thousand articles, opinion polls remained very much a newsworthy feature of the campaign. The results of the polls bore an eerie resemblance to those of 2007. Raila Odinga, running again, jumped out to an early lead which he maintained throughout much of the race. Toward the end of the campaign, however, Uhuru Kenyatta's numbers began creeping up, eventually placing the race into a statistical dead-heat going into election-day.

Voting itself was peaceful, and, in spite of numerous technical failings and delays, Uhuru was eventually announced as the new president of Kenya, having achieved not just a comfortable margin of victory but also having surmounted the constitutionally required 50 per cent plus one milestone. Odinga and the opposition were again

incredulous and took their case to court, but throughout, peace was declared to be paramount. Following an unsuccessful appeal, Odinga conceded the race without fuss and appealed to all his supporters to abide by the new constitution and accept Uhuru as their new president.

How does this electoral episode fit within the model proposed by this research? At first glance, elite strategies here appear to contradict the hypothesis that heightened political competition will instigate elite behaviour detrimental to the conduct of transparent and representative elections. The opinion polls were consistently tight, mirroring the competitive atmosphere that existed during 2007. While the ethnic coalitions were drawn differently, the perceptions of much of the media suggested that this would be a very tight race. Under these conditions, one would expect to see the two campaigns moving toward restricting political space and manipulating voter opinion in their core constituent areas to ensure maximum voter turnout.

Yet, Odinga, even as the polls pointed to a strong surge in support for Kenyatta, stuck doggedly to his strategy of issue-based campaigning and national appeal (VOA, 25 February 2013). Kenyatta likewise struck a nationalistic tone through his campaign, appealing to all Kenyans to rally to him in the forthcoming election. And when the results came through, Odinga and his supporters strictly followed the guidance against violence, pursuing instead a transparent judicial process. Failing in that, Odinga publicly declared the election to be representative of the wishes of Kenyans.

In Kenya in 2013, I would argue that contextual factors emerged which temporarily suspended the rationale for restricting the political space, changing the elite calculus and thus the influence of elite perceptions of competition and opinion polling. The first was the issue of the International Criminal Court indictments hanging over Uhuru and his running mate William Ruto. The instrumentalisation of this issue by Odinga's campaign appears to have backfired against them. Kenyatta's appeals to nationalism around this issue appear to have resonated with unaligned voters, essentially trumping any efforts to mobilise them along ethno-regional lines.

Secondly, and more importantly, the spectre of 2007 and the need for peace essentially changed the character of competition in the race. The political elite could not be seen to be stoking the same fires that had sparked the post-election violence in 2007. Likewise, the media self-censored themselves to avoid any accusations of stirring tensions. Opinion pollsters, already restricted, feared still further backlash if their data were seen to be used for the wrong means. Even international organisations took their polls behind closed doors, choosing to engage the political elite privately rather than risk the public side of public opinion polling (Private interview, 20 May 2013).

Thus in Kenya in 2013, public opinion played a key, but unexpected, role in determining the character and outcome of the election. The fear of a repeat of 2007/8 was such that a collective movement, not necessarily organised but nonetheless effective and visible through opinion polling, was able to shape political dynamics in such a way as to force the political elite to adopt more transparent and representative electoral strategies. This success gives hope that while opinion polling is currently constrained by the contextual factors influencing sub-Saharan African politics, there are circumstances in which the relationship between polls, elites, and elections can more closely approximate the ideal envisioned by George Gallup over seventy years ago.

Opinion Polling and Elites

The Kenya example suggests that there is a growing realisation among donors that public opinion polling is strongly shaping electoral politics in the countries in sub-Saharan Africa where it has been introduced. It has become the principal source of electoral information for political elites, particularly in the media, and colours significantly the way in which they view politics and the way in which they behave. Contrary to expectations, however, the influence of public opinion polls has not been particularly positive on the quality of elections, giving cause for reflection on how public opinion polling is actually influencing elite perceptions and behaviour around elections in sub-Saharan Africa.

Democratic politics is very much a learning process, with all actors trying to determine the appropriate role for them to play. The introduction of opinion polling into this mix adds a new element for those involved to accommodate. Politicians must choose how to engage with political opinion polling.

At the outset, I argued that opinion polling is a form of political participation and should be modelled as such. This was based on previous theorists who contended that it must be construed as more than just an aggregation of attitudes or opinions. In the act of capturing and publishing this data, pollsters actually introduce a new kind of political participation that is capable of shifting elite understanding of politics. This is not to say that opinion polling fundamentally changes the political dynamics of elections, but it certainly changes how elites perceive and react to those dynamics.

In Chapter 2, I noted the argument that public opinion polling could be considered “the handmaiden of modern democracy,” providing citizens with an essential alternative to voicing their opinions on key issues in between relatively infrequent elections (Bradburn and Sudman, 1988). While this research focuses almost exclusively on the impact of polling within the context of those ‘infrequent elections,’ it does contribute something to the debate regarding the locus and relative value of the influence of polling within these, at least nominally, democratic systems.

The four cases studied here have revealed an industry that reflects and amplifies rather than transforms the nature of the political system in which it exists. Yet, however critical politicians or analysts may be of the data that emerges, they are still obliged to react to it, due to the sheer force of popularity these numbers carry among voters. Opinion data is political information of high priority that, whether good or bad, must be interpreted and strategised around. For the political elite, opinion polling has become equal parts indispensable and incensing. It is a balancing act that neither the politicians, the media, nor the pollsters have fully mastered.

Opinion Polling and Elections

Earlier in this thesis I presented two contrasting perceptions among scholars as to the likelihood of African elections ever consistently meeting external criteria for freeness and fairness. The pessimistic view contended that existing elites are just adapting to changing realities, adjusting their strategies only in order to maintain their economic and political power. More optimistic observers note the growing pressure, both internationally and within countries, on elites to change, to become more 'democratic' in their behaviour around elections.

Underpinning this expected movement toward more democratic elections are two core attributes that were the focus of the second stage of this research. The first was ***transparency***, a level of openness and availability of information about the electoral process, which is crucial to avoiding basic electoral fraud and to informing citizen decision-makers about their electoral choices. The second was ***representativeness***. The term was chosen deliberately to encompass two distinct though related concepts in electoral quality. One, elections are meant to be representative of citizen interests and preferences, meaning that politicians should be responsive to these and adjust their strategies accordingly. Two, elections should be representative of the true outcome of citizen voting, meaning that results should reflect actual vote tallies rather than those manufactured or manipulated by political operatives.

Analysing the impact of public opinion polling on elections through these two variables revealed the potential and the limitations offered by polls in sub-Saharan Africa. Knowing through the first stage of the research that polls have become an influential source of political information for elites in the four countries, it was left to discern the extent to which that new knowledge shaped decision-making and, more importantly, behaviour with regard to electoral strategies.

The evidence suggests that polls are indeed capable of changing elite behaviour but not their underlying motivations. Opinion polling forces elites to recognise and respond to public sentiments that would otherwise have been silent or easily muted, but the presence of these new voices does not fundamentally change the rules of the

political game or the actors that play it. In one sense, it can make the electoral process more transparent, through more open candidate selection and through putting pressure for improved tallying and reporting of official election results. It can also make the process more representative by allowing easier correlation between pre-election predictions and official election tallies and by encouraging elites to focus their campaigns more on issues than on identities.

But this capability is contingent upon factors outside the control of public opinion polling itself. The example of Kenya in 2013 demonstrates the potential of collective public opinion when channelled appropriately, but it stands out as an exception to the general rule of sub-Saharan African politics where the politics of personal survival trump that of national interest. In this context, opinion polling's most likely contribution correlates more closely to the pessimistic view espoused above where elites use the new information to adjust to new circumstances. This does not imply a universally negative view of opinion polling — some of these adjustments may ultimately lead to greater rather than less political liberalisation — but it does suggest that the benefits of public opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa are more context-specific than initially understood.

Indeed, an anecdote from Tanzania further emphasises this point. For decades, the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party has dominated the country's politics with a varying, but always significant, majority in both presidential and parliamentary elections. In 2010, rumours began to circulate that the party might be vulnerable to an electoral challenge from the opposition CHADEMA party. As if to confirm this, in October, a poll emerged, conducted by a small NGO called the Tanzania Citizens Information Bureau (TCIB), which predicted victory for the opposition in the upcoming election. The poll, however, only sampled a selection of the country's districts, many of which were known to be opposition strongholds. Nevertheless, news of the poll exploded in the media, and the ruling party, far from engaging with the idea of increasing competition, ordered a media blackout, compelling their candidates to refuse all interviews and all appearances. The election atmosphere immediately intensified, and the quality of the election suffered. Only the appearance of

competition, in the form of a very suspect poll, had motivated complete panic on the part of the ruling party with clear repercussions for the electoral process in Tanzania (Makulilo, 2011).

In short, at this stage, public opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa is not a transformative instrument; rather it is a tool of amplification. It intensifies politics, exposing institutional weaknesses rather than reforming them. It shapes elite perceptions of political dynamics without forcing them to alter fundamentally the assumptions upon which those perceptions are made. Nevertheless, it has cast the light of transparency on certain aspects of electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa. While this has occasionally had short-term negative repercussions in the form of violence and rigging, it is likely to have a longer term beneficial impact on the quality of elections on the continent.

Implications for Opinion Polling

This research was motivated by a desire to understand how the proliferation of public opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa was changing the way elections in those countries were contested. It has shown that polling has become an indelible feature of these elections, irrespective of the recriminations and critiques that have been thrown its way. The political elite now consider public opinion polling as an integral part of their electoral strategy, even if some are more willing to own up to it than others.

The research has also suggested that opinion polling's ability to contribute to better quality elections is contingent on the competitive environment into which it is introduced. Given the incentives facing contemporary African political elites, increased competition does not imply a greater need to connect with individual voters; rather it implies a greater need to connect with core constituencies whose trigger issues are less likely to be policy-based and more likely to be identity-based.

What does this mean for public opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa? Above it was noted that in Kenya, significant amounts of opinion polling is now commissioned by donors in private, conferring only with the political parties themselves rather than

publishing the findings in the media. This supports the contention that opinion polling is influential on elite perceptions and that it is the 'public' nature of the polling that skews elite behaviour. By working with the political parties in private, the donors are hoping to avoid the negative repercussions of increasingly competitive polling by allowing them to adjust their electoral strategies outside of the glare of the media.

The evidence presented here suggests there is some rationale for this approach. Removed from the competitive atmosphere of the media horse race, opinion polling can potentially better serve its function of informing more representative strategies from elites. It certainly can reduce the prospects of conflict around opinion polling data itself. But in keeping the surveys confidential, one also loses the transparency of information they afford by throwing the race open to even casual observers. Far from revealing more about elite decision-making, limiting the results of polls to behind closed doors further distances elites from citizens who will not necessarily know the content of the polls or understand the direction that policy is now taking.

This caution on the part of donors, however, does not imply anything inherently wrong with public opinion polling in the sub-Saharan African context. Indeed, like any new addition, it may simply require time for the systems to adjust to the new information. The rapidity with which opinion polling has been adopted by the political media and increasingly by the campaign operations in the four case studies is remarkable. Indeed, while a consistent undercurrent persists contending that opinion polling is ill-suited to African politics and will not make an impact (Private interview, 14 June 2013), the preponderance of evidence suggests otherwise. It is being embraced, and the battle is not to get the political elite to react to the polls; they are already doing that. The next battle for proponents of opinion polling in Africa is to ensure that the polls are used to enhance political freedom rather than restrict it.

Prospects for Polling

Public opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa is only likely to expand. Both politicians and the media, two prominent actors in all countries' electoral processes, have

embraced it, in spite of its flaws and its detractors. For all its weaknesses, it has gained a foothold in the collective consciousness of many democratic societies, including an increasing number of transitional and emerging democracies in developing countries. Just as the industry of opinion polling has evolved over the decades it has been active in Western democracies, it is likely to change and adapt to meet the needs of new consumers of political information.

This research has shown the challenges faced by public opinion polling in the context of sub-Saharan African politics. I have argued that it has surmounted the first challenge in overcoming institutional reluctance to quantitative research to become a principal source of information for the political media and political campaigns alike. Its second challenge is to overcome the institutional aversion to open competition that instead sees elites restricting and manipulating elections when faced with potential defeat. While opinion polling may in the short term trigger such activity from elites, there seems no better antidote to this kind of political activity than increased information and pressure based on that information. In Nigeria, we've already seen opinion polling used in court cases to overturn obviously fraudulent election results. It may be contentious at the outset, but this is a potentially beneficial way in which polling can improve the quality of elections in sub-Saharan Africa.

Opinion polling also has the potential to be transformative of the structure of political competition in the long-run as well. In Kenya and Nigeria, we saw fleeting glimpses of political party coalitions coalescing and/or crumbling on the basis of data from public opinion polls. This is particularly encouraging in the one-party dominant states of Uganda and Nigeria where the official opposition has little hope of overturning the large majority on its own. Using the numerical strategy provided by opinion polling, opposition parties can build viable coalitions, changing the political dynamics of elections. This is also true in the more competitive arenas of Kenya and Ghana where in spite of distinct cleavages among the elites, coalitions are often more important than they first appear.

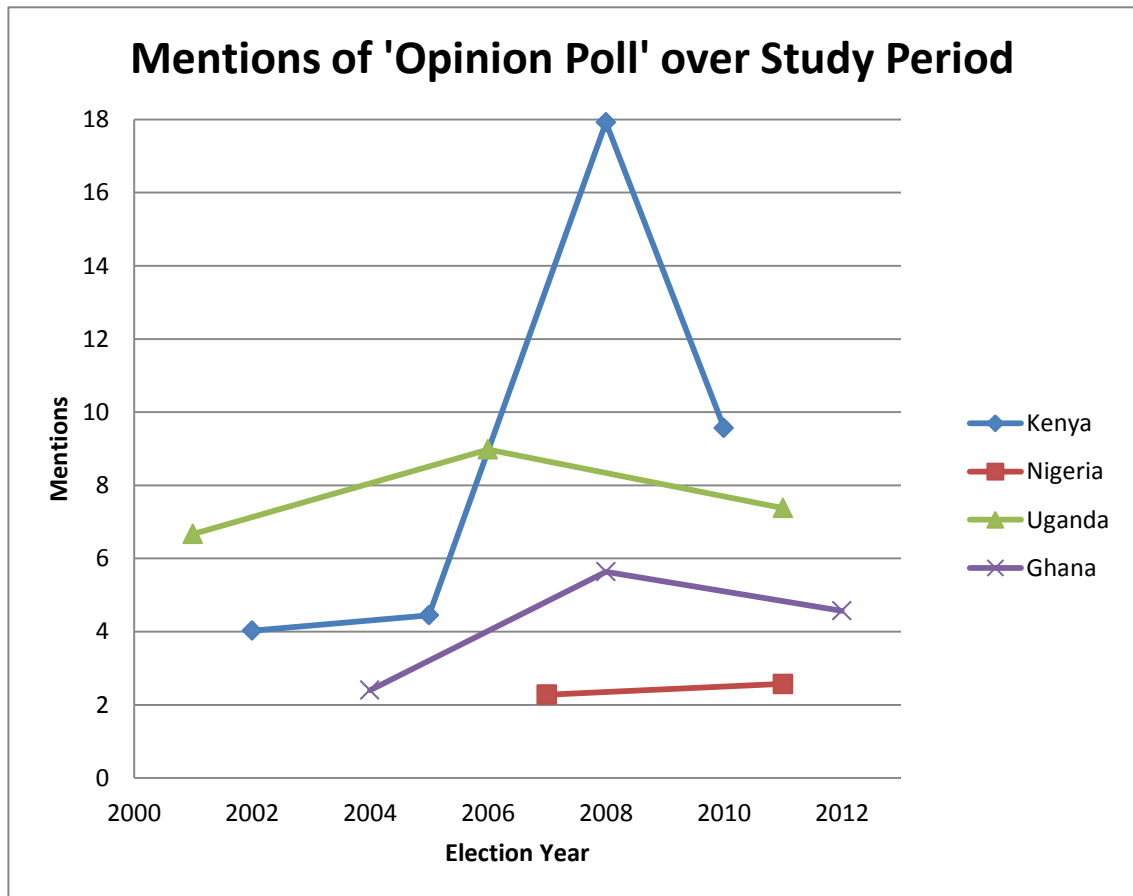
The process of researching this thesis flagged up a number of areas in which future researchers could add value to understanding how opinion polling is influencing sub-

Saharan African politics more broadly. This thesis has restricted itself to a study of elites and their interactions with polls, but there is potential for research into the influence of polling and elite performance. Data in this area remains scarce, but it would be fascinating to see whether the presence of opinion polling contributed to more responsive governance at the constituency level. There is also potential, as the data becomes more readily available, for investigations into opinion polling and its influence on voter behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa. It would instructive to know whether the same concerns that dog opinion polling in Western democracies are also replicable in the context of more transitional democracies. There is still much to learn about opinion polling in sub-Saharan Africa to be sure.

At the outset of this research I asked *to what extent is public opinion polling influencing the dynamics of electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa and what explains the variation in that influence across countries?* I can conclude that public opinion polling is having a significant influence on elite perceptions of electoral politics in the four cases reviewed, even if it has yet to make a clear impact on the structure of politics during elections. Nevertheless, I contend that through these perceptions opinion polling can and does influence elite political behaviour and their decision-making on the electoral strategies they employ. In doing so, opinion polling can contribute to either positive or negative changes in the quality of elections by intensifying the perceptions of elites as to the level of competition they face for victory.

Image is important in African politics. Parties represent themselves with pictures and colours to differentiate themselves for uneducated voters. In this context what people perceive may be more important than what they know. Opinion polls, whether openly embraced or publicly shunned, are now an indelible part of that heady mix that African elites recognise as the power of perceptions.

Appendix 1. Charting Mentions of 'Opinion Poll' over Time



Appendix 2. List of Key Interviewees

Abeeku Essuman-Johnson – Academic, Ghana

Arthur Okwemba – Journalist, Kenya

Bell Ahua – Pollster NOI Polls, Nigeria

Ben Ephson – Journalist, Editor of Daily Dispatch, Ghana

Daniel Kalinaki – Journalist, Uganda

David Somers – Pollster, Ipsos Nigeria

Deus Kibamba – Civil society practitioner, TCIB

Ebere Uneze – CSEA Nigeria

Franklin Oduro – Academic and civil society practitioner, CDD Ghana

Elvis Kwashie – Journalist, Uganda

Frederick Ssemwanga – Civil society practitioner, Uganda

Nkoyo Toyo – Member of Parliament, Nigeria

James Kakande – Pollster, Synovate Uganda

Jill Kyatuheire – WFD, Uganda

Joseph Asunka – Academic, UC Berkeley

Karen Rothmyer – Journalist, Kenya

Kwamchetsi Makokha – Journalist, Kenya

Kwendo Opanga – Journalist and Editor, Kenya

Maggie Ireri – Pollster, Synovate, Kenya

Murithi Mutiga – Journalist, Kenya

Ndubisi Anyanwu – Ministry of Finance, Nigeria

Oge Modie – Pollster, NOI Polls, Nigeria

Olawale Olaleye – Journalist, Nigeria

Olawale Rasheed – Journalist, Nigeria

Patrick Wakida – Pollster, Research International, Uganda

Paul Kagwanja – Academic and campaign advisor, Kenya

Paul Nwabuiku – Journalist and government advisor, Nigeria

Peter Mwesige – Journalist, Uganda

Philip Okullo – Pollster, Synovate, Ghana

Philip Osafo-Kwaaku – Academic and government advisor, Nigeria

Robert Sentamu – Pollster, Wilsken Agencies, Uganda

Simon Osborn – NDI, Uganda

Titus Lee – Civil society practitioner, Kenya and Uganda

Tom Wolf – Pollster, Synovate, Kenya

Victor Rateng – Pollster, Synovate Kenya

Willie Mensah – Pollster, Synovate, Ghana

Zakaria Yakubu – Civil society practitioner, Ghana

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