

**John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
Faculty Research Working Papers Series**

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February 2003

RWP03-009

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Does ethnicity determine support for the governing party?

The structural and attitudinal basis of partisan identification in 12 African nations

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Synopsis:

Structural theories predict that the cues of social identity, particularly ethnicity, should exert a strong influence upon voting choices and party support in developing societies which are characterized by low levels of education and minimal access to the news media. To explore these issues, this study seeks to analyze the influence of ethno-linguistic and ethno-racial characteristics on identification with the governing party in a dozen African states. Ethnicity is compared with other structural and attitudinal factors commonly used to explain patterns of partisanship in many countries. The study draws upon the first round of the Afrobarometer, a cross-national representative survey of political and social values conducted in 1999-2001 in twelve nations in Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from Botswana to Zimbabwe.

We establish three main findings. (i) Even with social and attitudinal controls, ethnicity is a significant predictor of party support in most, although not all, African societies under comparison. (ii) Yet the strength of this association varies cross-nationally, with the linkages strongest in societies divided by many languages, such as Namibia and South Africa, while playing an insignificant role in African countries where ethno-linguistic groups are more homogeneous, including Lesotho and Botswana. (iii) Moreover structural explanations are limited: evaluations of the policy performance of the party in government also influenced patterns of party support, even with prior social controls. The conclusion summarizes the results and considers their broader implications for understanding the political role of ethnicity within plural societies.

One classic issue in electoral behavior concerns the relative strength of social groups and political issues in structuring voter choice and party identification. Following the seminal structural theories of Lipset and Rokkan (1967), much of this literature has focused upon the cleavages of social class, religion, and center-periphery that have long divided established democracies. Debate has centered on whether the strength of these social cues on electoral behavior have weakened in postindustrial societies during recent decades, with commentators emphasizing the process of partisan dealignment and the rise of issue voting among more cognitively-skilled citizens (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984; Crewe and Denver 1985; Franklin et al 1992; Evans 1999; Norris 2003). An important related question, although one that has received less systematic attention, concerns the strength of social cleavages in developing societies, and in particular whether ethnicity determines stable patterns of party support and electoral behavior in these countries, analogous to the anchor of social class in industrialized nations. This question is most relevant for electoral democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa, where ethnic ties based on kinship and family, language and dialect, tribal customs and local communities, as well as shared religious faiths, have long been regarded as playing a critical role in party politics (Horowitz 1985; Salih and Markakis 1998, Palmberg 1999; Bekker, Dodds and Khosa 2001; Daddieh and Fair 2002). Structural theories predict that the cues of social identity, particularly ethnicity, should exert a strong influence upon voting choices and party support in developing societies, characterized by low levels of education and minimal access to the news media. This phenomenon is important, not just for understanding the basis of electoral behavior, but also because of its potential consequences for the process of democratization. Horowitz (1985) argues that where ascribed ethnic loyalties are strong, they generate party systems reflecting rigid group boundaries: "Societies that are deeply riven along a preponderant ethnic cleavage – as in many Asian and African states – tend to throw up party systems that exacerbate ethnic conflict." (Horowitz 1985: 291). Few commentators doubt that ethnicity exerts *some* influence upon party politics in Africa; the relevant question is *how much* influence can be attributed to ethnic cues when compared with other structural factors (such as urbanization, age and education) and political attitudes (such as evaluations of government performance).

To explore these issues, this study seeks to analyze the influence of ethno-linguistic and ethno-racial characteristics on identification with the governing party in a dozen African states, compared with other structural and attitudinal factors commonly used to explain patterns of party support in many countries. The study draws upon the first round of the Afrobarometer, a cross-national representative survey of political and social values conducted in 1999-2001 in twelve nations in Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from Botswana to Zimbabwe¹. This comparative framework has the advantage of including many countries from one continent, sharing similar developing economies, cultural traditions, colonial histories, and social structures, yet with widely

differing degrees of ethno-linguistic and ethno-racial fractionalization, types of party systems, and levels of democracy. The research design uses binary logistic regression analysis with hierarchical block-wise entry, using both pooled and national samples, with identification with the governing party (coded as a dummy) as the dependent variable. The first models examine the direct effects of ethno-linguistic and racial cleavages upon partisan attachments, without any controls. The second models add controls for other standard social characteristics associated with party identification in many previous studies, including age, gender, urbanization, class, education and also 'lived poverty' as an indicator of severe economic deprivation. The third model then adds blocks of variables measuring political attitudes, including retrospective evaluations of the government's policy performance, economic evaluations, the legislature's performance, and left-right economic ideology.

The study establishes three main findings. (i) First we confirm that, even with social and attitudinal controls, ethno-linguistic cleavages are a significant predictor of support for the governing party in most, although not all, the African societies under comparison, as expected. (ii) Yet at the same time the strength of this association varies cross-nationally, with the linkages strongest in societies fragmented by many languages, such as Nigeria and South Africa, while remaining weakest in countries where ethno-linguistic groups are more homogeneous, including Lesotho and Botswana. We need to qualify theoretical claims by Horowitz (1985), as well as widespread popular perceptions that ethno-linguistic cleavages inevitably determine party politics across all African societies. Further research needs to explore important variations within the continent and establish the reasons for these differences. (iii) Moreover structural explanations based on ethnicity are limited: evaluations of the policy performance of the party in government also shaped patterns of support for the governing party in many countries, even with prior social controls. The conclusion summarizes the results and considers their broader implications for understanding the role of ethnicity in elections within plural societies.

Theories of voting behavior

The classic structural theory of voting behavior developed during 1960s by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967) emphasized that social identities formed the basic building blocks of party support in Western Europe. For Lipset and Rokkan, European nation-states were stamped by social divisions established decades earlier. They highlighted the regional cleavages of center-periphery, the class inequalities of workers-owners, and sectarian cleavages over church and state that split Christendom between Catholics and Protestants. These traditional cleavages were thought powerful in Western Europe for several reasons. First, they reflected major ideological fissions in party politics. Social class mirrored the basic schism between the left, favoring a strong role for the state through egalitarian welfare policies, fiscal redistribution, and interventionist economic management, and the right preferring a more limited role for government

and laissez-faire market economics. The religious division reflected conservative and liberal moral debates, such as those surrounding the role of women, marriage and the family. Differences between core and periphery concerned how far the nation-state should be centralized or how far power should be devolved downwards to the regions. Lipset and Rokkan theorized that organizational linkages arose when the mass franchise was expanded to most citizens and they gradually strengthened over the years, as party systems 'froze' in Western Europe from around the 1920s until at least the mid-1960s, with stable patterns of party competition revolving around the salient primary cleavages dividing each society, as exemplified by the role of class in Britain (Butler and Stokes 1974), religion in France (Lewis-Back and Skalaban 1992), and language in Belgium (Mughan 1983).

The structural theory provided by Lipset and Rokkan became widely influential as the established orthodoxy in understanding voting behavior and party competition in Western Europe, as well as in many other established democracies such as Australia and Canada (Alford 1967; Rose 1974). Nevertheless these accounts came under increasing challenge from the mid-1960s onwards as newer minor parties started to gain electoral momentum and a foothold of parliamentary representation (Rose and Urwin 1970; Dalder and Mair 1985; Pederson 1979). This led many observers to suggest that the process of societal modernization was eroding the 'traditional' social identities of class and religion that had predicted the mass basis of party support in established democracies during earlier decades (Crewe, Alt and Sarlvik 1977; Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1976; Crewe and Denver 1985; Franklin et al 1992; Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984; Evans 1999; Manza and Brooks 1999; Clark and Lipset 2001). If class and religion no longer anchored voters to parties in postindustrial societies, this promised to have significant consequences for patterns of growing volatility in electoral behavior and in party competition, opening the door for more split-ticket voting across different levels, the occasional sudden rise of protest parties, as well as more vote-switching within and across the left-right blocks of party families, and the growing influence of short-term events, party strategy, candidates and leaders, and media coverage in determining the outcome of election campaigns.

Can the structural theory be extended to provide insights into party support and voting behavior in developing societies? These are characterized by subsistence livelihoods largely based on farming, fishing, extraction and unskilled work, with low levels of literacy and education, predominately agrarian populations, minimum standards of living, and restricted social and geographic mobility. Citizens in developing societies, particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa, are commonly believed to be strongly rooted to local communities through primary ties of 'blood and belonging', including those of kinship, family, ethnicity and religion, as well as long-standing cultural bonds (Salih and Markakis 1998, Palmberg 1999; Bekker, Dodds and Khosa 2001; Daddieh and Fair 2002). Structural theories suggest that within this context, in electoral democracies, the basic cleavages within each society should provide cues linking voters to

parties representing each major social sector, whether divisions of ethnicity, region, class, or religion.

Donald Horowitz (1985, 1991, 1993) offers one of the most influential theories about the relationship between ethnicity, party systems, and voting behavior in developing societies. For Horowitz, ethnicity exerts a strong *direct* impact on electoral behavior in ethnically-segmented societies, through generating a long-term psychological sense of party loyalty anchoring citizens to parties, where casting a vote becomes an expression of group identity. By implications, other social divisions become subsumed as secondary to ethnicity. Horowitz defines *ethnic parties* as those that derive their support from an identifiable ethnic group and serve the interests of that group. "To be an ethnic party, a party does not have to command an exclusive hold on the allegiance of group members. It is how that party's support is distributed, not how the ethnic group's support is distributed, that is decisive." (Horowitz 1985:293). Horowitz quotes the examples of Guyana, Trinidad, and Ghana, where surveys during the 1960s found that parties often received 80-90 percent of their votes from one ethnic group. Those voters who crossed ethnic-party lines were subject, not just to the usual group pressures, but also to actual intimidation and even physical violence. Where ethnic parties predominate, Horowitz suggests that an election essentially becomes a 'racial census'. *Party systems* are defined as ethnic if all parties are ethnically based, as exemplified for Horowitz in the mid-1980s by the Sudan, Sri Lanka, Chad, Benin, Kenya, and Nigeria. Such party systems are prone to conflict, exacerbating existing ethnic divisions, Horowitz argues, because holding the reins of power in state office is often seen as a zero-sum game, rather than a process of accommodation. Where party systems in Africa are divided by more than one predominant issue cleavage, for example over issues of economic redistribution, then Horowitz suggests that the system can become multiethnic or non-ethnic, although he regards such cases as relatively rare. Unlike other social cues, Horowitz regards ethnicity as a particular problem for the usual process of bargaining and compromise that characterize normal politics in representative democracies, because he sees ethnicity as ascriptive, and therefore more segmented, pillorized and rigid than social identities which are more flexible and fluid, or even self-selected, such as those based on class or shared ideological beliefs. In the distinction drawn by Norris (2003), ethnic parties are regarded in this theory as essentially 'bonding' not 'bridging' types.

Yet as societies develop further, theories of partisan dealignment suggest that the economic shift in the means of production - from agriculture towards heavy industry and then the service economy - erodes traditional social identities. Theories suggest that higher levels of literacy, education, geographic mobility, and access to the news media, associated with human development and societal modernization, lay the social foundations for greater partisan dealignment and issue voting (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984; Crewe and Denver 1985; Norris 2003). Better-educated and more cognitively sophisticated citizens, it is argued, have less need

to rely upon the traditional social cues of ethnicity in electoral choices. The mass media allow citizens to compare a range of parties, leaders, and public policy issues, potentially exposing them to many dissonant values beyond those shared with family and neighbors in their local community. In Africa, geographic mobility and urbanization generate crosscutting cleavages based on location, occupation and communication, weakening linkages with local communities, extended family networks, and tribal groups. In this context, issue voting based on retrospective evaluations of the performance of the governing parties, the role of party leaders, and the prospective policy platforms of offered by each party, could all be expected to become a more important component of voting decisions. If the structural thesis is correct, then the strength of cleavage and issue politics can be expected to vary systematically among nations at different levels of development. In particular, where free and fair democratic elections are held in Africa, traditional ethnic identities based on language, region, tribe, or religion are expected to exert a strong influence on party support and voting behavior. But where societies are experiencing the process of human development these traditional cues are expected gradually to weaken, and 'bonding' parties will be displaced by 'bridging parties' that appeal to multiple overlapping social groups (Norris 2003).

What evidence would allow us to test these important claims? The strength of linkages between ethnicity and party voting has been examined in African societies by qualitative examination of particular election campaigns, and by comparing aggregate election results at district level (see, for example, Ojo 1981; Reynolds 1994; Christopher 1996; Ake 1996; Eldridge and Seekings 1996; Takougang 1996; Ayee 1997; Mozaffar 1997, 1998; Burnell 2002; Smith 2002). Research has also focused upon how far plurality, majoritarian, or proportional electoral arrangements can best accommodate ethnic parties (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972; Lijphart 1978, 1994, 1999; Barkan 1998; Reynolds and Reilly 1997; Sisk and Reynolds 1998; Reilly and Reynolds 1998; Scarritt, McMillan and Mozaffar 2001), as well as upon longitudinal trends in ethnic conflict in Africa and around the world (Gurr 1993, 2000; Saideman et al 2002). Horowitz (1985: 321) describes patterns of ethnic support in some early voting surveys conducted during the 1960s in Guyana and Trinidad, as well as a scattering of secondary studies in the literature, although without utilizing multivariate statistics controlling for factors other than ethnicity. These surveys are also very dated, given the transformation of the continent in recent years and powerful cycles of democratization (Gibson 2002). So far, however, little systematic cross-national survey evidence has been available to analyze and explore the underlying reasons for electoral behavior and party support based on representative samples of the general electorate covering a wide range of African societies, with the notable exception of South Africa (Mattes 1999; Mattes, Taylor and Africa 1999; Mattes and Piombo 2001). Comparative surveys of many countries and multivariate analysis are both essential to establish the relative influence of

ethnicity today when compared with other structural and attitudinal factors potentially shaping electoral behavior and party support.

Comparative framework, measures and hypotheses

Selection of cases

To examine this issue we can turn to analyze the impact of ethno-linguistic and ethno-racial characteristics on support for the governing party in a dozen African states, based on the first round of the Afrobarometer 1999-2001. The comparative framework used in this study provides the advantages of the 'maximum similarity' strategy (Landman 2000), which compares countries sharing similar cultural traditions within one world region while varying in their social structure and party systems in important ways. The cases under comparison, shown in Figure 1, range from newer democracies such as Botswana, characterized by effective multiparty competition, political stability, and a positive record on human rights, through systems struggling in the transition to stable democracy, to corrupt presidential dictatorships with predominant one-party states, rigged elections, and weak opposition movements, exemplified by Mugabe's Zimbabwe (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Laakso 2002; Taylor 2002). Levels of ethnic fractionalization also vary: some societies such as Botswana contain relatively homogeneous populations while others are divided by multiple divisions of language, religion, and/or region, exemplified by increasing religious tensions, communal violence, and separatist conflict evident within Nigeria. The party systems in these nations also differ in their degree of political institutionalization, meaning the regularity of party competition, how far parties have roots in society, how far winning parties assume government office, and the structure of party organizations (Kuenzi and Lambright 2001).

(Figure 1 about here)

Some of the basic features of the dozen countries in the Afro-barometer survey can be compared using the socio-economic and political indicators illustrated in Tables 1 and 2. Over 258 million people live in the countries under comparison, accounting for about one third of all Sub-Saharan Africans. The geographic distribution of countries covers mainly southern and western Africa, excluding areas north of the Sahara (see Figure 1). All are former British colonies with the exceptions of Mali (France) and Namibia (granted independence in 1990 from South Africa). The countries vary systematically in their level of democratic consolidation and party institutionalization, which has the advantage of allowing us to monitor African attitudes and behavior under very different political contexts. Botswana, South Africa and Namibia are currently classified by Freedom House's Gastil index as newer democracies, characterized by extensive political rights and civil liberties and multiparty competition². All the African societies under comparison are defined by the UNDP as relatively impoverished, with an average per capita income of around \$1000 per annum, but it is notable that the most democratic countries in the

survey have a per capita GNP about ten times higher than the other nations. Both South Africa and Namibia have a proportional representation electoral system for national parliaments yet they also continue to have one-party predominant systems, facing a fragmented and weak opposition (Giliomee 1998; Lanegran 2001). Botswana and South Africa are also the most urbanized societies under comparison. Another seven of the countries under comparison can be classified according to Freedom House as 'partly-free' or 'semi-democratic' states, with more limited political rights and civil liberties³. Some of these have a checkered history of interrupted electoral democracy since the era of decolonization, including Nigeria (Koehn 1989), while others such as Mali have held more open and competitive multiparty elections only during the last decade (Gibson 2002; Ndegwa 2001). Lastly two societies, Zimbabwe and Uganda, currently have the greatest restrictions on democracy. Uganda has introduced several Western-style reforms in restructuring the economy, as well as strengthening human rights, but nevertheless the government prevents multiparty elections. More details of party competition and the recent election results held in these countries are available from Nohlen, Krennerich and Thibaut (1999).

(Tables 1 and 2 about here)

The Afro-Barometer survey

The survey, with the first round conducted in a dozen societies from 1999 to 2001, was carried out with at least 1200 respondents of voting age drawn from each nation, including double this sample size in South Africa, Nigeria and Tanzania, producing a total random sample of 21,531 respondents. Both within country and country weights were used so that each country sample size was equal in the pooled data. The surveys used a standard multi-stage probability sample and more technical details about sampling and fieldwork procedures are available elsewhere⁴.

Measures of ethno-linguistic and racial cleavages

Ethnic identities are complex phenomenon and understood in this study as social constructs with deep cultural and psychological roots based on national, cultural-linguistic, racial, or religious backgrounds (Anderson 1996; Billig 1995; Gellner 1983; Brown et al. 1997; Taras and Ganguly 1998). They provide an affective sense of belonging and are socially defined in terms of their meaning for the actors, representing ties of blood, soil, faith, and community. No single demographic category can define ethnic identities in every society; ethno-religious cleavages are believed to be important in some, such as conflict within Nigeria between the Christian south and Moslem north, while tribal clans located in particular regions provide close kinship and family ties in others, and ethno-linguistic divisions play the more important role in still others, such as South Africa. In the literature there is considerable debate about the nature of ethnic identities, and whether these should be regarded as largely innate, ascribed and unchangeable, or alternatively as socially learnt, acquired, and plastic, or possibly as some mix between these alternative poles

(Anderson 1996). Without wading into this controversy, we assume without further argument that the social meaning of ethnicity is largely socially-derived, and that the political relevance of these identities can be exacerbated or mitigated by political parties depending upon whether they emphasize 'bridging' or 'bonding appeals (Norris 2003).

This study is limited in certain important ways. First, we only examine the impact of language and race for ethnic identity, leaving aside alternative important types of ethnic identities, including region and religion, for further research. We acknowledge that other factors might well play an important role in ethnic identities but their analysis requires a different approach, beyond the scope of this study, focused on the provincial or regional-level comparisons. For example, in Rwanda, Kinyarwanda is the universal official vernacular language, yet this did not prevent deep-rooted conflict between majority Hutu and minority Tutsi. Second, we focus upon analyzing support for the party in government, as the most important for the working of the political system, without examining support for all other parties. It could well be that minor parties serve particular ethnic communities, but in some cases we are limited by sample size, and this will also be the subject of future inquiry. This study is therefore restricted to analyzing only some important aspects of ethnic cleavages in African party politics, as the first approach to understanding these issues, but we recognize that it is far from the complete story.

Linguistic cleavages are widely regarded as important in African societies for ethnic identities, and language represents one of the indicators of ethnic fractionalization that has been most widely used in the literature (Ordeshook and Shvetsova 1994; Neto and Cox 1997; Alessina et al. 2002)⁵. In this study we assume that the ethno-linguistic identities under comparison are acquired through the socialization process in early childhood, based on the primary language spoken at home, school, and within the local community. Obviously multilingual and bi-lingual households, and the acquisition of languages through schooling, may dilute or even transform linguistic identities, for example among émigrés. The distribution of ethno-linguistic cleavages, shown in Table 3, is measured in each country by the language spoken in the home. We exclude minor groups where languages are spoken by less than 2% of respondents and any reliable analysis is limited by the size of the sample. Largely homogeneous societies are exemplified by the ubiquitous use of Sesotho in Lesotho and of Setswana in Botswana, where almost everyone shares the same language. By contrast considerable linguistic fractionalization is evident in Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia, and South Africa, where seven or more languages are spoken. The size of each group is expected to be important for patterns of competition in the party system, particularly how far there is one predominant language group, two equally-balanced groups, moderate linguistic fractionalization (with 3-5 main languages), or extreme linguistic fractionalization (with more than 5 linguistic groups). The ethno-linguistic fractionalization index in Table 3 summarizes the degree of heterogeneity, ranging from .026 in Lesotho to .856 in Uganda.

(Table 3 about here)

Alternatively for comparison we also analyze racial ethnic identities, based on the physical characteristics of skin color, dividing the populations into 'black' and 'others'. We assume that racial characteristics are primarily the product of biological inheritance, although the meaning, interpretation, and relevance of physical characteristics, and how they lead towards group identities, are also socially constructed. In all the countries under comparison, 96% of respondents were classified as black, another 2% were white, and the remainder was categorized as 'colored' or 'Asian'. In some nations, such as Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda, 100% of respondents were defined as 'black', limiting our ability to examine other more subtle types of racial characteristics, such as skin color, height, or physical features, that may well differentiate locally within this group. While many other ethnic characteristics may well overlap with language and race, requiring further research into the role of religion, shared histories, cultural ties, and regional locations, this study is restricted to the analysis of ethno-linguistic and ethno-racial cleavages at national-level.

Measures of Partisan Identification

Many studies focus upon understanding patterns of voter choice. In the absence of direct measures of voting behavior, this study examines party identification as the key dependent variable. Not only is party identification usually commonly closely related to voting choice, so that many argue that these two indicators vary systematically in tandem (Thomassen 1976; Holmberg 1994; Brynin and Sanders 1997), ever since the classic studies of *The American Voter* by Campbell et al (1960) it is also widely regarded as theoretically important as an anchor of voting behavior in its own right. The measure of partisan identification was gauged by the question: "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?" (If 'yes') "Which party is that?" For the dependent variable, patterns of partisanship were dichotomized into identification with the party in government or not. As shown in Table 4, the largest parties ranged from the Movement for Multiparty Democracy in Zambia (86% support) and the National Resistance Movement in Uganda (82%), where other Ugandan parties cannot legally contest elections, to the more moderate lead over the opposition enjoyed by the Botswana Democratic Party (59%) and the United Democratic Congress in Ghana (57%). Support in some party systems such as Lesotho and Botswana was divided between two major and one minor party, while in others, including South Africa, support was highly fragmented across multiple contestants. In this study, we make no assumptions about the psychological nature of partisan identification nor its longevity but rather use it, in the absence of voting choice, as an indirect measure of party preferences.

(Table 4 about here)

Analysis of Results

To examine the basis of party identification, our research design employs multivariate modeling using binary logistic regression analysis with block-wise entry. The models are first applied to the pooled sample and then to each nation. The dependent variable is partisan identification, measured by the attachment to the main party in government. The first model examines the direct effects of belonging to the largest ethno-linguistic group and to racial characteristics (black v. all other) upon partisan attachments without any controls. The second models then adds controls for other standard social characteristics that studies have commonly been found to influence patterns of partisanship, including age (in years), gender (male), urbanization (rural residency), social class (middle), and education (a 4-category scale)⁶. Given the existence of extreme social deprivation in Africa we also include a measure of 'lived poverty', indicating reported shortages of health care, food, and water at home. The final model then examines the indirect effect of ethno-linguistic cleavages after we add blocks of variables measuring political attitudes.

Factor analysis (with details not reported here) was used for the construction of the attitudinal scales. The models included a scale measuring retrospective evaluations of the government's performance on six issues such as health care, education and employment, as well as evaluations of the performance of the legislature. We monitored attitudes towards left-right ideology, with a 28-point scale measured by summing agreement with a series of seven items gauging support for the free market economy versus the state, such as 'The private sector should build houses', 'The private sector should fight crime', and 'The private sector should provide schools'. The economic satisfaction scale was constructed from three items concerning satisfaction with the present state of the national economy, satisfaction with the national economy during the past year, and expectations that the national economy would improve during the next year. Full details of the questions and coding are given below Table 5. It should be noted that in these models we are essentially concerned with testing the strength and significance of the relationship between the independent variables and party identification, not the direction. The structural theory makes no predictions about the positive or negative sign of the coefficients for social structure, which can be expected to vary in different countries depending upon the nature of the governing party and the type of campaign appeals that they make when seeking support from the electorate, for example whether they seek to build support among urban or rural constituents, or among younger or older voters.

(Table 5 about here)

The baseline models presented in Table 5 summarize the results for the pooled pan-African sample. There are three main findings evident from the analysis. First, ethnicity does matter for partisan identification in African societies, as many commonly claim. The results in

Model 1 confirm that both language and race are significant predictors of support for the governing party, although these two factors alone fail to explain a great deal of variance in party attachments, as shown by the low R^2 . Model 2 adds a variety of social controls to see whether this reduces the power of ethnicity. The results demonstrate that language and race remain significant, so that their impact cannot be interpreted as simply the by-product of other structural cleavages in society. Moreover all the standard structural factors that are most commonly used to explain partisan identification in many other countries are also significant in African societies, with the governing parties getting slightly stronger support among men, older citizens, the less educated, rural populations, and the poorer classes. The overall fit of the model strengthens slightly although it remains modest. Model 3 adds the attitudinal indicators and the evaluations of the government's policy record, approval of the performances of the legislature, economic satisfaction, and left-right ideology are, as expected, strongly related to support for the governing party. Even after the addition of all the other social background and attitudinal measures, the measures of ethno-linguistic and racial characteristics remain strongly significant predictors of support for the governing party, despite our most rigorous tests.

(Table 6 about here)

Are similar patterns evident if the sample is broken down by country? Table 6 explores this by replicating Model 3 in each nation. Here the results are more complex to interpret, as both the significance and the direction of the regression coefficients vary from one country to another. In part, as mentioned earlier, this can be explained by the particular characteristics of the governing party and the type of linkages they develop with the electorate through their campaign appeals. Nevertheless if we focus upon the significant coefficients then the overall picture becomes clearer. The second major findings is that, even with the range of social and attitudinal controls, belonging to the largest ethno-linguistic group is a significant predictor of attachment to the governing party in most, but not all, of the African nations under comparison. Exceptions are found in two of the most homogeneous linguistic societies, Lesotho and Botswana. Language also fails to prove significant in Mali and Tanzania, although these are more linguistically fragmented. Moreover in some states where there is a significant relationship the linkage is positive, including in Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria and Zambia, indicating that the predominant linguistic group is strongly associated with the governing party. This is shown further in Table 7, indicating the proportion of the largest linguistic group identifying with the governing party. In others the relationship proves negative, including in Ghana, South Africa, and Uganda. For example in South Africa, the ANC draws more support from Xhosa than from Zulu, although the latter are marginally larger in size. The relationship between language and party support also proves strongest in Namibia and Nigeria, indicating deep ethno-linguistic political cleavages in these states.

[Table 7 about here]

Yet the explanatory power of ethnicity remains limited, since approval of the government's policy performance on the provision of basic services such as health care, education and employment is also significantly related to identification with the governing party. This pattern is evident in all nations except for Nigeria and Uganda. Approval of the performance of the legislature was also significantly associated with party identification in many nations. Therefore although structural explanations receive further confirmation from the analysis, explaining party support in African nations in a similar way to the pattern found in many established democracies, nevertheless the role of ethnicity should not be exaggerated. A more rational calculation of how well the government and the legislature perform is also part of the reason for patterns of support for the governing party, beyond any traditional group loyalties.

Conclusions and Discussion

Structural theories have long dominated explanations of party support and voting behavior in established democracies. If these accounts are extended to elections in African societies they suggest that ethnic identities can be expected to strongly orient citizens towards the party system by providing a simple, low-cost guide to voting decisions, enabling information shortcuts that allowed people to decide which politicians and parties to support over successive contests. These cognitive shortcuts are predicted to be particularly useful for the least-sophisticated citizens, especially those with minimal literacy and schooling, and with limited access to independent political information available from the mass media. These party attachments are predicted to gradually weaken and erode through socioeconomic development, particularly rising levels of education and cognitive-skills that can help to master understanding of the complexities of public affairs and the policymaking process.

The results in the analysis of systematic survey evidence serves to confirm the common assumption that ethnic-linguistic cleavages do indeed structure party identification in many, although not all, of the African societies under comparison. In the national models, ethnicity remained significant in eight out of twelve countries. Yet ethnicity was not necessarily the primary cleavage as other structural factors are also important for partisanship, if less consistent across all societies under comparison, whether the rural-urban cleavage evident dividing cities, towns and villages in Mali, Namibia and Tanzania, the role of age and generation in Botswana, Tanzania and Zambia, or the impact of education in Ghana, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. Moreover, far from support being an automatic expression of group loyalties, judgments contingent upon how well the government delivers services to its citizens were also related to their patterns of party support in most countries.

Further analysis is required to explore the role of ethnicity in African electoral politics in far greater depth, and subsequent research will analyze a range of alternative indicators of ethnic

identity, including religious faiths, adherence to shared histories and customs, and tribal identities within particular regional communities. Ethnicity is a complex phenomenon and the impact of single indicators can be expected to vary among different societies. The geographic distribution of ethnic identities will also be explored at sub-national or provincial level, since this is critical to political representation and the role of ethnic parties, especially in majoritarian electoral systems. Moreover we also need to test the impact of ethnicity on many other factors beyond party support, including on voting choice and electoral turnout, as well as on broader attitudes towards a broad range of social and political values, such as support for democracy and satisfaction with the workings of the political system. Although the first round of the Afrobarometer covers a wide range of countries on the continent, subsequent surveys will expand coverage to additional African states, facilitating broader generalizations, such as among a range of Muslim and non-Muslim societies, as well as among countries with different colonial histories and transitions since independence. Nevertheless the results in this analysis serves to confirm that far from any 'African exceptionalism', often stressed by area specialists and students of ethnic conflict, structural and attitudinal factors explaining partisan identification in Africa reflect those established in many other countries, in both established and newer democracies worldwide.

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Figure 1: The countries included in the Afrobarometer 1999-2001

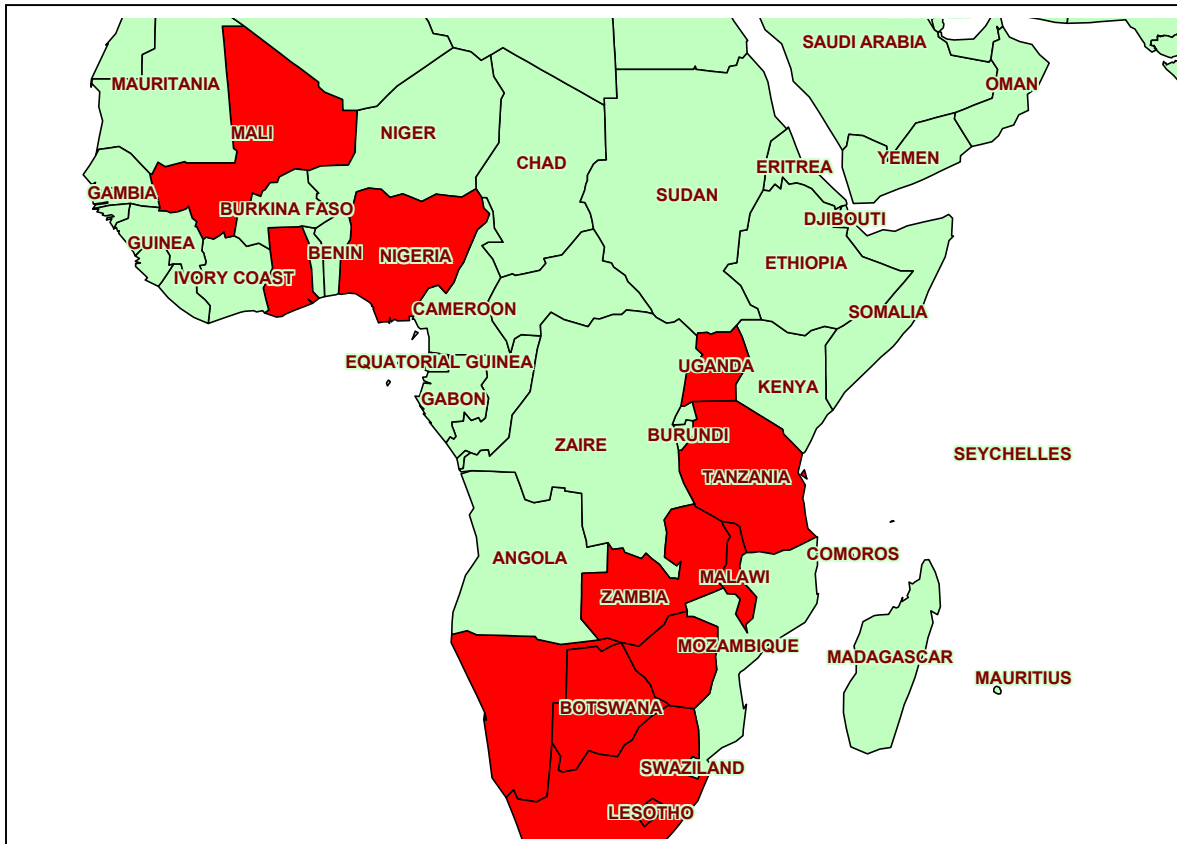


Table 1: Socio-economic indicators in the African societies under comparison

	<i>Income GDP 1998 (US\$)</i>	<i>Total Population 1997</i>	<i>Urban Population (% of total) 2000</i>	<i>Mean life expectancy index</i>	<i>Human Development Index1998</i>	<i>Human Development Index Rank</i>
South Africa	8,488	38,800,000	56.9	47	69	103
Namibia	5,176	1,600,000	30.9	42	63	115
Botswana	6,103	1,500,000	49.0	35	59	122
Lesotho	1,626	2,000,000	28.0	50	57	127
Ghana	1,735	18,700,000	36.1	59	56	129
Zimbabwe	2,669	11,200,000	35.3	31	55	130
Nigeria	795	103,900,000	44.1	42	44	151
Zambia	719	8,600,000	39.6	26	42	153
Tanzania	480	31,400,000	32.3	38	41	156
Uganda	1,074	20,000,000	14.2	26	41	158
Malawi	523	10,100,000	14.7	24	38	163
Mali	681	10,400,000	30.2	48	38	165
<i>Average</i>	<i>1,069</i>	<i>Total 258,200,000</i>	<i>34.1</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>130</i>

Note: Estimates are all derived from the UNDP *Human Development Report 2000* (New York: UNDP/Oxford University Press). The Human Development Index (HDI) combines longevity, education, literacy and income. Worldwide, the HDI ranks countries from the highest development (1) to the lowest (174).

Table 2: Political indicators in the African societies under comparison

	Colonial power prior to independence	Year of Independence	Electoral system	Type of State 1999-2000	Presidential or Parliamentary Executive	FH Mean Score 1972-1999	Party first % vote elections in the 1990s
Botswana	UK	1966	FPTP	Democracy	Parliamentary	2.3	54.3
Namibia	South Africa	1990	PR	Democracy	Presidential	2.5	74.8
South Africa	UK	1910	PR	Democracy	Parliamentary	5.0	64.5
Ghana	UK	1957	FPTP	Semi-democracy	Presidential	5.0	67.7
Lesotho	UK	1966	FPTP	Semi-democracy	Parliamentary	4.7	67.7
Malawi	UK	1964	FPTP	Semi-democracy	Presidential	5.6	48.3
Mali	France	1960	2 nd Ballot	Semi-democracy	Presidential	5.4	79.3
Nigeria	UK	1960	FPTP	Semi-democracy	Presidential	4.9	61.9
Tanzania	UK	1938	FPTP	Semi-democracy	Presidential	5.7	60.5
Zambia	UK	1980	FPTP	Semi-democracy	Presidential	4.7	69.3
Uganda	UK	1991	FPTP	Non-democracy	Presidential	5.4	74.2
Zimbabwe	UK	1980	FPTP	Non-democracy	Presidential	5.0	87.4

Notes: The type of colonial power and the year of independence are from the *CIA World Fact book*, 2001.

The electoral system is classified from Reynolds and Reilly (1997). FPTP=First-past-the-post plurality. PR=Proportional Representation.

The classification of the type of state and the mean Freedom House score on political rights and civil liberties from 1972-1999 is derived from the Freedom House '*Freedom around the World*', 1999-2000. www.freedomhouse.com.

The percentage of vote for the winning party in first place in national elections to the lower house of parliament held during the 1990s is estimated from *Elections around the World*.

Table 3: Distribution of ethno-linguistic groups by size

	Largest group	%	2 nd largest	%	3 rd largest	%	4 th largest	%	5 th largest	%	6 th Largest	%	7 th largest	%	All others	%	ELF
Lesotho	Sesotho	98.7													All others	1.3	.026
Botswana	Setswana	97.1	English	1.3											All others	1.6	.057
Zimbabwe	Shona	78.5	Ndebele	15.3	Sepedi	2.1	English	1.6							All others	2.5	.360
Malawi	Chewa	70.8	Tumbuka	9.6	Yao	5.2	Chisena	3.7	Nyanja	3.6	Tonga	2.5	Lomwe	1.4	All others	3.2	.483
Ghana	Akan	60.1	Ewe	11.8	Ga	5.9	Dangbane	2.4	Frafra	2.3	Hausa	2.0	Dangaare	1.4	All others	14.4	.630
Tanzania	Swahili	57.5	Sukuma	11.7	Haya	4.6	Nyakyusa	4.0	Nyamwezi	2.9	Chagga	2.5	Pare	2.5	All others	14.3	.650
Namibia	Oshiwambo	50.0	Afrikaans	11.3	Otjiherero	8.1	Damara	7.0	Nama	6.6	Silozi	5.2	English	3.2	All others	8.6	.718
Mali	Bambara	48.4	Sonrhai	7.9	Fulfulde/Peul	7.7	Dogon	6.1	Tamasheq	6.0	Soninke	6.0	Malinke	4.4	All others	13.5	.741
Zambia	Bemba	40.0	Nyanja	23.3	Tonga	13.1	Silozi	11.8	English	4.1	Luvale	4.0	Kaonde	2.7	All others	1.0	.751
Nigeria	Hausa	31.5	Yoruba	25.5	Ibo	16.7	Edo	3.6	Kanuri	3.4	Tiv	2.2	Ibibio-Efik	2.2	All others	14.9	.804
South Africa	Zulu	22.5	Afrikaans	17.4	Xhosa	16.6	English	11.7	Setswana	9.7	Sesotho	8.5	Sepedi	7.3	All others	6.3	.856
Uganda	Luganda	25.4	Luo	12.9	Rutooro	11.9	Lusoga	9.9	Rukiga	6.4	Lumasaba	5.2	Ateso	4.8	All others	23.5	.886

Note Q: "Let's think for a moment about the languages that you use. What language do you speak most at home?" Note that dialects within languages are not counted separately in this classification, hence 'Sesotho' includes Sotho and S.Sotho. 'Setswana' includes Tswana. Groups less than 1% of the sample are also excluded. b For the calculation of the Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalization (ELF) see fn5.

Source: Afro-barometer 1999-2001

Table 4: Distribution of party identification (%)

	Largest party	%	2nd largest	%	3rd largest	%	4th largest	%	5th largest	%	All others	%
Lesotho	Congress for Democracy	66.5	Basotho National	21.7	Basutoland Congress	8.9					All others	2.9
Botswana	Democratic	59.0	National Front	29.5	Congress	6.0					All others	5.5
Zimbabwe	ZANU-PF	72.5	Movement for Democratic Change	13.1	African People's Union	4.8	Integrated	1.7	Democratic	1.5	All others	6.4
Malawi	United Democratic Front	59.0	Malawi Congress	31.0	Alliance for Democracy	9.2					All others	0.8
Ghana	National Democratic Congress	56.9	New Patriotic	37.6	People's National Convention	2.2	Convention	1.9			All others	3.3
Namibia	SWAPO	80.1	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance	9.8	Congress of Democrats	5.6					All others	4.5
Mali	ADEMA	72.4	Parena	6.5	UDD	4.2	CNID	3.1	US/RDA	3.0	All others	10.8
Tanzania	Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM)	78.7	Civic United Front	10.2	Tanzanian Labour Party	6.6	CHADEMA	2.4			All others	2.1
Nigeria	People's Democratic	64.3	All People's	19.9	Alliance for Democracy	15.8					All others	0.0
Zambia	Movement for Multiparty Democracy	85.0	United National Independent	8.5	United Party for National Development	3.7					All others	2.8
Uganda	National Resistance Movement	81.9	Democratic	8.3	Uganda People's Congress	6.6	Uganda Young Democrats	1.8			All others	1.4
South Africa	African National Congress	75.4	Democratic	6.8	New National	5.7	Inkatha Freedom	4.3	Pan Africanist Congress	2.5	All others	5.3

Note: Question: "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?" (If 'yes') "Which party is that?" This table examines the distribution of support among those who express a party identification. Fringe parties (with less than 1% support) are grouped under 'all others'. More details about these parties are available from Dieter Nohlen, Michael Krennerich, and Bernhard Thibaut. 1999. *Elections in Africa: A Data Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Source: Afro-barometer 1999-2001

Table 5: Baseline model predicting identification with the governing party, pooled sample for 12-African nations

	Model 1 Ethnicity without any controls			Model 2 Ethnicity + social background			Model 3 Ethnicity + social background + political attitudes		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
ETHNICITY									
Language (Belong to largest linguistic group)	.171	.041	***	.160	.042	***	.196	.045	***
Race (African Black=1/else=0)	.752	.110	***	.639	.119	***	.588	.123	***
SOCIAL STRUCTURE									
Gender (male=1, women=0)				.006	.003	*	.004	.003	
Age (years)				.008	.002	***	.011	.002	***
Education (4-cat)				-.162	.025	***	-.106	.026	***
Urbanization (rural=1, urban=0)				.436	.044	***	.545	.048	***
Social Class (middle=1, else=0)				-.113	.046	**	-.120	.048	**
POLITICAL ATTITUDES									
Government policy performance scale							.079	.006	***
Approve of legislative performance							.287	.024	***
Economic satisfaction scale							.041	.008	***
Left-right attitudes towards market v. state							-.002	.000	***
Constant	-1.26			-1.88			-3.98		
Nagelkerke R ²	.010			.048			.137		
% Correctly predicted	61.1			62.0			65.9		

Note: The models represent the result of binary logistic multiple regression models including unstandardized beta coefficients (B), standardized error (S.E.), and their significance (Sig.). *** p.001 ** p.01 * P.05. The dependent variable is identification with the governing party. The data was weighted by across country and within country weights so that each country sample was equal. In total 15,783 cases were included in the pooled sample.

Party identification: This is measured by party identification with the winning party in government. "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?" (If 'yes') "Which party is that?" The 'winning party' is listed as the largest share of support in Table 4.

Language: This gauges belonging to the largest language, as measured by the language spoken most often at home. For details see Table 3.

Race: Black (1), other (0).

Lived Poverty: 16-point scale for shortages of food, water at home, and health care.

Government policy performance scale: This 24-point scale measures how far respondents approved of the performance of the government policies on basic health, education, crime, prices, employment, income equality, and AIDS/HIV.

Approve of legislative performance: "What about the way parliament has performed its job over the past twelve months? Do you strongly disapprove, disapprove, approve, strongly disapprove, or you haven't had a chance to hear enough about it?"

Economic satisfaction: This scale measured three items: (i) "At the moment, are you satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, or satisfied with the economic condition in (this country)?" (ii) "How do economic conditions in (this county) compare to one year ago?" (iii) "What about in twelve months time? Do you expect economic conditions in (this county) to be worse, the same, or better than they are now?"

Left-right economic attitudes: This 28-point scale summed agreement with a series of seven items gauging support for the free market economy versus the state, such as 'The private sector should build houses', 'The private sector should fight crime', and 'The private sector should provide schools'.

Source: Afro-barometer 1999-2001

Table 6: National models explaining identification with the governing party

	Social Structure									Political Attitudes				R²	%											
	<i>Language</i>		<i>Race (Black)</i>		<i>Gender (Male)</i>		<i>Age (years)</i>		<i>Educ.</i>		<i>Rural-Urban (Rural)</i>		<i>Class (Middle)</i>			<i>Lived Poverty</i>		<i>Approve Policy Perform</i>		<i>Approve Part. Perform</i>		<i>Left-right ideology</i>		<i>Econ. Sat.</i>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>			<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>P</i>
Botswana	.669		-.175		.000		.023	***	-.130		.536	***	.252		-.207		.135	***	.598	***	.001		.093	**	.206	67.7
Ghana	-.595	***			.009		.004		-.213	***	.392	**	-.504	**	.086		.108	***	-.111		-.013		.145	***	.229	69.4
Lesotho	-1.58				.001		.018	**	-.422	**	-.362		.057		-.334	*	.136	***	.231	**	.001		-.035		.179	67.9
Malawi	.628	***	6.40		-.225	*	-.006		-.194		.147		.061		-.584	***	.240	***	.458	***	-.038	**	.004		.299	69.4
Mali	-.214				-.238		-.001		-.065		.566	**	.080		-.046		.038	*	.371	***	.032		.055		.120	63.0
Namibia	1.72	***	.166		-.010		.010		-.146		.841	***	-.194		.448	*	.122	***	.514	***	.001		.048		.388	75.1
Nigeria	.835	***			-.568	***	.008		.180	*	.345	*	-.090		.180		.008		.236	**	-.007		.049		.106	74.2
S. Africa	-.499	***	2.17	***	-.255		.002		.003		-.028		-.327	*	-.042		.047	*	.438	***	.029	*	.067	*	.254	70.3
Tanzania	-.247				.604	***	.036	***	-.223		.333		-.114		.060		.076	***	.378	***	.022		.039		.173	67.4
Uganda	-.627	*			-.239		-.001		-.018		.274		.323				.032		-.062				.056		.032	78.7
Zambia	.427	**	-.044		-.001		.031	***	-.036		.149		-.238		.036		.123	***	.181		.001		.010		.101	69.6
Zimbabwe	.423	*	5.88		.012		.029	***	-.228	*	.858	***	-.473	**	.119		.070	*	.123		-.001		.005		.188	73.2

Note: For the full baseline model 3 and all items see Table 5. The models represent the result of binary logistic multiple regression models including unstandardized beta coefficients (B), standardized error (S.E.), and their significance (Sig.). *** p.001 ** p.01 * P.05. The total number of cases= 15,783. The dependent variable is partisan identification with the governing party. The end columns summarize the overall fit of the model provided by the Nagelkerke R² and the percentage of cases (%) correctly predicted. Race (black) is missing in countries where this includes 100% of respondents in the survey. The measure of lived poverty and left-right ideology is also unavailable in the Ugandan survey.

Source: Afro-barometer 1999-2001

Table 7: Percentage of the largest language group identifying with the governing party

	Largest language group	% Of this group who identify with the governing party
Namibia	Oshiwambo	71.4
Tanzania	Swahili	56.1
Malawi	Chewa	49.6
Botswana	Setswana	45.5
Nigeria	Hausa	35.2
Lesotho	Sesotho	34.5
Zambia	Bemba	34.2
Mali	Bambara	33.7
Zimbabwe	Shona	31.3
South Africa	Zulu	29.8
Ghana	Akan	29.3
Uganda	Luganda	13.4
Average		38.7

Endnotes

¹ For more details see www.afrobarometer.org. We would like to thank the core partners, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, the Center for Democratic Development in Ghana, and the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University, as well as all the national partners and collaborators who made this survey possible, in particular the work of Michael Bratton and Gyimah-Boadi.

² Freedom House. 2001. *Freedom Around the World 2001*. www.freedomhouse.org.

³ Ibid.

⁴ For more methodological details about sampling and fieldwork procedures and the schedule see www.afrobarometer.org.

⁵ The data most frequently used in the literature to gauge “ethno-linguistic” fractionalization was compiled in the Soviet Union in the early 1960s on the basis of primary country sources, and published in the Atlas Narodov Mira in 1964. The ethno-linguistic fractionalization variable (often referred to as ELF) was computed as one minus the Herfindahl index of ethno-linguistic group shares, representing the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a population belonged to different groups. ELF was used, among many others, by Mauro (1995), and by Easterly and Levine (1997). For a discussion see Alesina et al. 2002. ELF is summarized for the countries under comparison in the last column in Table 3.

⁶ It should be noted that we also explored the impact of including measures of access to the mass media and of political knowledge, but since these were highly inter-correlated with education these variables were eventually dropped from the models on the grounds of parsimony.