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## Competing cleavages in sub-Saharan Africa? How economic distance affects ethnic bloc politics

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WIDER Working Paper 2016/104

## **Competing cleavages in sub-Saharan Africa?**

How economic distance affects ethnic bloc politics

Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz\*

September 2016

**Abstract:** Does economic standing cross-cut ethnicity in African electoral politics? In many countries in the region, ethnicity appears to be a major consideration in individuals' political decision-making. However, there is significant variation in the extent to which coethnics support parties *en bloc*; while some ethnic groups exhibit high rates of similarity in terms of members' preferred parties, others are more fractionalized. One factor that might affect the probability that an individual will support the plurality-choice party of his or her ethnic group is relative economic standing. I expect that, as the distance between an individual's level of wealth and his or her ethnic group's median level of wealth increases, the probability of the member supporting the most-favoured party of their coethnics decreases. In other words, economic considerations can cross-cut ascriptive identities. I test this expectation with data from 27 countries included in the fifth round of the Afrobarometer and find that individuals who are significantly different, in terms of wealth, from other members of their ethnic group are significantly less likely to support their group's plurality-choice party. Specifically, economic difference increases non-partisanship and support for out-parties (i.e., those not their group's plurality choice). Further, being a member of a group that has greater levels of within-group inequality reduces support for a plurality-choice party, while living in a country with higher levels of between-group inequality increases support for a plurality-choice party. The results suggest that some ethnic groups' propensity towards bloc voting can be explained, at least partially, by group-level similarities in economic interests.

**Keywords:** Africa, elections, ethnicity, inequality, parties

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# 1 Introduction

The political salience of ethnicity in many countries throughout the developing world – and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa – is apparently so significant that Horowitz (1985) referred to “the election as census”. In these contexts, individuals tend to vote for coethnics, or for parties associated with their own ethnic group, and turn out in high numbers. Ascriptive identity is thus the overriding consideration in most voters’ electoral decision-making.

However, the census characterization is limited in at least two significant ways. First, it largely elides how elections themselves can shape ethnic identities, or at least the salience of ethnicity (Eifert et al. 2010; Michelitch 2015). Second – and along the central concerns of this project – even if we overlook these issues and assume that ethnic identity is exogenously determined, we are left with the empirical reality that, if elections are censuses, they contain many errors. Even within sub-Saharan Africa, there is substantial variation in the extent to which individuals vote for coethnics, or ethnically affiliated parties, and to which parties are polarized along ethnic lines (Basedau and Stroh 2012; Cheeseman and Ford 2007; Dowd and Driessen 2008; Elischer 2013; Keefer 2010).

Survey data suggest that a large portion of African voters support parties that are not the consensus pick of their coethnics. For example, in the Round 5 Afrobarometer, 30% of respondents supported the plurality-choice party of their ethnic group.<sup>1</sup> Among partisans, this figure was higher, at 63%. However, over a third of partisans supported a party other than their own ethnic group’s plurality choice.<sup>2</sup>

What factors might explain why some individuals in Africa support the party that a plurality of their coethnics favor, while others do not? A number of single and multi-country studies using survey and electoral data have found that, while ethnicity is associated with political preferences in many countries, it is never the only significant predictor of vote choice or party support; factors such as incumbent performance, goods distribution, and policy positions also seem to matter

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<sup>1</sup> 17% supported some other party, while 53% professed to be non-partisan.

<sup>2</sup> As discussed below, these figures are drawn from twenty-seven sub-Saharan countries, and only include individuals from ethnic groups that comprised at least 5% of their country’s population.

(Bratton et al. 2012; Conroy-Krutz 2013; Hoffman and Long 2013; Keefer 2010; Norris and Mattes 2003; Posner and Simon 2002; Wantch'ekon 2003; Weghorst and Lindberg 2013; Youde 2005). Previous studies have examined how institutional arrangements (Huber 2012; Posner 2005; Rokkan 1970), demographics (Ichino and Nathan 2013; Miguel 2004; Posner 2004), information availability (Casey 2015; Conroy-Krutz 2013), and even ballot design (Moehler and Conroy-Krutz 2016) can affect ethnic voting.

This paper takes a different direction, building on a body of literature studying the relationship between economic inequality and political outcomes. Horowitz's (1985) seminal work acknowledged that economic differences *across* ethnic groups can influence inter-group relations and distributional politics in a country; ethnicity would only swamp other electoral considerations in societies where ethnic groups were not arranged hierarchically by socioeconomic differences (i.e., "unranked" societies). More-recent work has found evidence supporting the importance of such between-group economic differences (Gisselquist 2013). Others have focused more extensively on within-group inequality. These works tend to draw on the logic of cross-cutting cleavages (Lijphart 1977), in which individuals' tendencies to vote along ethnic lines decrease as dissimilarities from others in their group along other lines, such as economic status, increase. Huber and Suryanarayan (2016) find that, in Indian states where sub-caste identity and economic well-being are more related, elections tend to look more like "ethnic censuses," in that parties have unique ethnic bases of support, and ethnicity tends to be a strong predictor of preferred party. "Party voting polarization" tends to break down as differences within ethnic groups increase. In a similar vein, Baldwin and Huber (2010) find that, as economic differences between ethnic groups increase, public goods provision is likely to decrease; when between-group inequality is large, groups are more likely to have sharply different attitudes with respect to redistribution.

Studies on the effects of within-group inequality on ethnic politics have generally looked at polity-level (i.e., state or country) outcomes, rather than at the micro level. Instead of focusing on within-group inequality as the primary causal variable of interest, I examine an individual's distance, in terms of wealth, from the median level of wealth of his or her ethnic group. Namely, I expect that, as the distance between an individual's level of wealth and his or her group's median wealth increases, the likelihood that the individual's favored party and the group's plurality-choice

party match decreases. In other words, when economic status cross-cuts ethnicity, we observe less ethnic bloc partisanship.

Analyzing individual-level data allows us to control for alternate explanations – such as education level and urban-rural residence – that so-called “first-” and “second-generation” Modernization Theory predict should affect the political salience of ethnicity. Importantly, these factors are often correlated with wealth, and groups that have high levels of within-group economic inequality likely also experience high rates of heterogeneity in terms of education, residence site, and exposure to mass media. In short, use of micro-level data allows us to identify whether individuals who differ substantially from their coethnics, in terms of economic status, also hold different political allegiances from their group, while also controlling for plausible alternate contributors to variations in ethnic bloc partisanship.

I test the predicted relationship between relative individual-to-group economic standing and political support with data from Round 5 of the Afrobarometer. I find that, as distance between an individual’s wealth and the median wealth of his or her ethnic group increases, the probability that the individual supports the plurality-choice party of his or her ethnic group decreases. Economic distance decreases the probability that an individual declares any partisan identity, as well as the probability that a partisan individual will support his or her ethnic group’s plurality-choice party. Inequality also seems to matter at the group and country levels: individuals who are members of groups with higher levels of within-group inequality are less likely to support their group’s plurality-choice party, while residing in a country with higher levels of inequality between groups increases support for plurality-choice parties. In other words, the correlation between ethnicity and partisan identity is lower when ethnic groups are more internally fractionalized, economically speaking, while it is higher as economic distance between groups increases.

## **2 Relative Economic Standing and Ethnic Bloc Partisanship**

As African countries became independent, Western scholars were already predicting that the apparent political importance of ascriptive identities, such as tribe, race, religion, and region, in these countries was only temporary. Such identities would give way to national, and perhaps even global identities (Apter 1972; Deutsch 1966; Hunter 1962; Pye 1966). These processes, many of

which were viewed to be natural outcomes of economic and technological development, could be spurred by programs of national integration (Schramm 1963).

The “first-generation” modernization approach focused on a suite of variables, viewed as mutually reinforcing, that included economic development, urbanization, the spread of mass media (Lerner 1958; Schramm 1963), and increased educational opportunities. Together, these changes would develop myriad cross-cutting cleavages (Lipset 1960), encourage inter-group cooperation and communication through increased proximity and interaction, increase feelings of empathy for non-coethnics, and inculcate symbols of a national culture. In short, first-generation Modernization Theory predicted that the likelihood that ethnic and partisan attachments overlap would decline as individuals became more urbanized, better-educated, and more exposed to mass media.

Modernization would also likely affect levels of within-group inequality. To the extent that “traditional man” is heavily reliant on subsistence agriculture, there were relatively few class differences, both within and across ethnic groups. As such, ascriptive identity was the main relevant source of potential cleavage. Increased educational opportunities, technological developments, and urbanization generated new and more varied labor markets, in which individuals took on increasingly diverse economic roles. Consequently, members of ethnic groups would look increasingly dissimilar, in terms of economic status, and as individuals voted and aligned with political parties on the basis of economic considerations, ethnic salience would decline.

Higher rates of within-group economic inequality should, *ceteris paribus*, be associated with decreased party voting polarization (Huber and Suryanarayan 2016). Further, we should expect that individuals will be less likely to support their ethnic group’s plurality-choice party as the extent to which they deviate from the group’s median level of wealth increases. In other words, individuals who are much wealthier or much poorer than the median of their ethnic group will be less likely to support the group’s favored party.

There are at least two possible reasons for such increased probability of deviation. First, individuals who are much wealthier or much poorer than most other people in their ethnic group are likely to perceive themselves to have significantly different economic interests from most of their coethnics. The resource poor, for example, are more likely to favor redistribution than the resource rich. Here, economic preferences are more likely to be driven by economic standing than

ethnic identity. To the extent that parties take different positions on issues related to welfare spending and taxation, this should result in coethnics of different wealth levels supporting different parties.

Second, politicians hoping to mobilize a particular group might tailor distributional targeting strategies on the basis of the group's median level of wealth. As the distance between the individual's economic standing and that of the group median increases, the ability to win over the voter with club and public goods declines. A relatively wealthy individual is likely to find the distributional offers made by politicians to members of a relatively poor ethnic group to be too low to sway his or his opinion. On the other hand, if members of a group are relatively wealthy, a politician might focus on strategies other than distribution to win support (Weitz-Shapiro 2012); this is likely to alienate resource-poor members of the group, who might prefer largess. In short, economic difference might trump coethnicity.

### **3 Data and Measurement**

To test this expectation, I draw upon data from Round 5 of the Afrobarometer survey, which was conducted between 2011 and 2013. I focus on those twenty-seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa where questions about ethnicity and party affiliation were asked.<sup>3</sup> In the following sections, I discuss my measures of party support (the dependent variable), economic distance from one's ethnic group (the independent variable), and several controls.

#### **3.1 Measuring Party Support**

Respondents were asked to identify whether they felt "close" to a political party and, if so, to identify that party.<sup>4</sup> I then identify the plurality-choice party of every ethnic group in the sample

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<sup>3</sup> This excludes four North African countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia), as well as two countries in which ethnic identity was not measured (i.e., Cape Verde and Sudan), and one in which parties are proscribed (i.e. Swaziland). The countries included are therefore Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>4</sup> All relevant English-language question wordings are included in Appendix A.



that comprises at least 5.0% of a country's population;<sup>5</sup> 132 groups met that criterion, representing 75% of all respondents in the study countries for whom some ethnic identity was recorded ( $N=41,880$ ).

If the Afrobarometer is any indication, most ethnic groups are not, in fact, marked by near-universal (and openly expressed) support for a single political party.<sup>6</sup> In most (83%) of the examined groups, no political party could claim a majority as adherents. Of the twenty-three ethnic groups where a majority did identify with a single party, many were clustered in dominant-party systems, like Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Tanzania. In only one country – Sierra Leone – did two different parties enjoy majority support from ethnic groups.<sup>7</sup> Only four groups enjoyed the support of at least two-thirds of respondents from an ethnic group: the Orange Democratic Movement

(ODM) (Kenya, among the Luo) (68%), the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) (Mozambique, among the Makua) (69%), the All People's Congress (APC) (Sierra Leone, among the Temne) (71%), and the *Rassemblement du Peuple Guinéen* (RPG) (Guinea, among the Malink'e) (77%). Viewed this way, it does not seem to be the case that ethnic group membership is necessarily determinative of party allegiance in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa.

Notably, the fact that most ethnic groups do not have a majority-choice party is largely attributable to the unwillingness of many respondents to identify with any party. Over half (53%) of members of the examined groups declined to associate themselves with a political party. If we limit our analysis to partisans, we find that a much larger number of ethnic groups – 80, or 61% – had a majority-choice party. Still, there were fifty-two ethnic groups in the sample that did not give majority support to a single party, even among partisans alone.

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<sup>5</sup> Some ethnic groups, such as the Hausa and the Ewe, have substantial populations in multiple countries. I identify the plurality-choice party for each country-group (e.g., the plurality-choice party for Ewes in Ghana is the National Democratic Congress, while the plurality-choice party for Ewes in Togo is the *Union pour la République*).

<sup>6</sup> Or, in some cases, a single political candidate.

<sup>7</sup> Majorities of Limba and Temne respondents supported the All People's Congress, while a majority of Mende supported the Sierra Leone People's Party.

Finally, the average level of support for a group's plurality-choice party (i.e., the political party capturing the largest percentage of a given group's support) is only .35%.<sup>8</sup> Only 30% of all respondents from studied groups supported their ethnic group's plurality-choice party; of those who did not, 25% supported another party, while 75% were non-partisan.

### 3.2 Wealth Distance

To calculate each individual's wealth in relation to his or her ethnic group, I first construct a "livedpoverty index," which sums the frequency with which an individual has gone without food, water, medical care, cooking fuel, and cash income in the last year. Responses included "never" (4), "just once or twice" (3), "several times" (2), "many times" (1), and "always" (0); higher values indicate greater levels of economic security. In constructing this measure, I follow the practice of Baldwin and Huber (2010), who use these questions to calculate between-group inequality in sub-Saharan Africa. I then calculate each included ethnic group's median on the index, and then generate a variable (*Wealth Distance*) by subtracting the individual's score from the group's score, and taking the absolute value of the result. 47% of individuals are poorer than their group, while 53% are wealthier.

### 3.3 Controls

Relative economic standing *vis-à-vis* one's group is likely an important predictor of whether or not an individual supports the plurality-choice party of one's coethnics. However, as discussed previously, first-generation Modernization Theory suggests that other factors might increase such iconoclasm. Specifically, scholars have identified a number of variables that impact the salience of ethnicity, which should, in turn, affect the likelihood of supporting the same party as one's coethnics.

It is important to note, however, that others have criticized the modernization approaches as not only tautological, but also as empirically unsupported. "Second-generation" modernization theories (Eifert et al. 2010) contended that the changes highlighted by Lipset, Lerner, and others

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<sup>8</sup> In the case of one ethnic group—the Mandé du Sud of Côte d'Ivoire—members are split evenly between two groups: the *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI) and the *Union pour la Démocratie et la Paix en Côte d'Ivoire* (UPDCI). In later analyses, individuals who support either of these parties are coded as supporting the group's plurality-choice party.

often make ethnic identity more, not less, salient. Under these logics, groups competing for shares of emerging national wealth will mobilize along ascriptive identities (Bates 1974; Melson and Wolpe 1970). Case studies often supported these contentions. Urban migrants often relied on coethnics for economic, physical, and psychological security (Busia 1950; Charsley 1974; Cohen 1969; Englund 2002; Grillo 1974; Mitchell 1956; Schildkrout 1974). Rather than acting as “melting pots” in which so-called pre-modern identities withered, urban areas were often incubators for modern ethnic politics. Mass media often seem to play a role in exacerbating ethnic divisions; the role of *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* and *Kangura* in Rwanda is only the most extreme example here (Chalk 1999; Straus 2006; Yanagizawa-Drott 2014). And education might exacerbate ethnic chauvinism in some circumstances, as well (Weiner 1978).

These contending literatures suggest a need to control for factors such as urbanization, media exposure, and education. I therefore include a measure of urban residence (*Urban*),<sup>9</sup> and measures of *Education* and reported exposure to *Radio*, *Television*, *Newspapers*, and the *Internet*. I include a measure of the individual’s lived poverty score (*Wealth*), to account for concerns that the distance measure is mainly capturing wealth or poverty, rather than difference from the ethnic group’s median<sup>10</sup> I also control for frequency of reported use of mobile phones, since access to such technologies could be associated with cosmopolitanism and exposure to alternate viewpoints.

Finally, individuals’ likelihood of supporting their ethnic group’s plurality-choice party might vary depending on local demography. Specifically, status as a local minority might decrease the likelihood of supporting the plurality choice of one’s own group, as individuals might feel pressured to support the same group as the local majority. Conroy-Krutz (2013) finds that, under experimental conditions in Uganda, local minorities are significantly more likely to vote for non-coethnics than members of larger groups are, while Ichino and Nathan (2013) find that local minorities in Ghana often vote for a party not typically associated with their ethnic group. I therefore calculate a measure, for each individual, of the share of survey respondents in the individual’s region who are coethnics of the individual (*Coethnics Region*).

I also include demographic controls, including respondent sex (a *Female* dummy) and age.

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<sup>9</sup> I code individuals who were listed as “semi-urban” as “urban.”

<sup>10</sup> Main results are robust to the exclusion of this measure, however (Appendix B).

Descriptive statistics for all variables included in analyses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<i>Support Plurality Choice</i> (1=Yes, 0=No)	28633	0.40	0.49	0	1
<i>Support Plurality Choice</i> (2=Yes; 1=No, other party; 0=No, non-partisan)	28633	1.01	0.89	0	2
<i>Wealth Distance</i> (from median)	31344	3.35	2.60	0	18
<i>Wealth</i>	31344	13.38	4.74	0	20
<i>Female</i>	31344	0.50	0.50	0	1
<i>Education</i>	31284	3.14	2.07	0	9
<i>Urban</i>	31344	0.38	0.49	0	1
<i>Age</i>	31072	37.11	14.53	18	105
<i>Radio</i>	31320	2.88	1.44	0	4
<i>Television</i>	31269	1.73	1.77	0	4
<i>Newspapers</i>	31178	0.91	1.37	0	4
<i>Mobile</i>	31102	2.34	1.49	0	4
<i>Coethnics Region</i>	31155	0.49	0.30	0	1
<i>Ethnic Group Size</i>	30986	0.24	0.17	0.05	0.74
<i>Ethnic Group Wealth</i>	31344	13.38	2.22	8.81	19.21
<i>Ethnic Group Education</i>	31344	3.14	0.93	0.69	5.63
<i>Ethnic Group Urban</i>	31344	0.38	0.18	0.06	0.96
<i>Within-Group Inequality</i>	31344	0.18	0.05	0.03	0.31
<i>Coethnic Executive</i>	30399	0.31	0.46	0	1
<i>Proportional Representation</i>	31344	0.42	0.49	0	1
<i>Two-Round</i>	31344	0.72	0.45	0	1
<i>Between-Group Inequality</i>	31046	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.06
<i>Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization</i>	31344	0.68	0.22	0.04	0.93
<i>Support Plurality Vote</i> (1=Yes, 0=No)	23016	0.56	0.50	0	1
<i>Wealth Distance</i> (from mean)	31344	3.40	2.44	0	16.42

Source: Author's calculations.

## 4 Analysis and Results

I first regress the dependent variable – a dummy indicating whether the individual supports the plurality-choice party of his or her ethnic group – on *Wealth Distance* and the controls. I include country and ethnic-group fixed effects here; in later analyses, I examine how certain country- and group-level factors affect the relationship between ethnicity and party support. Results are presented in Table 2, Column A.

Table 2: Regression Results

	Model 1		Model 2	
	A	B	C	
	Support Plurality Choice	Non-Partisan	Support Other Party	
<i>Wealth Distance</i>	-0.01*** (0.01)	0.01** (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	
<i>Wealth</i>	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)	
<i>Female</i>	-0.09*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.03)	-0.17*** (0.04)	
<i>Education</i>	-0.06*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	
<i>Urban</i>	-0.32*** (0.03)	0.43*** (0.04)	0.09** (0.05)	
<i>Age</i>	0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00* (0.00)	
<i>Radio</i>	0.06*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	
<i>Television</i>	0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	
<i>Newspapers</i>	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	
<i>Mobile</i>	0.02** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)	
<i>Coethnics Region</i>	0.43*** (0.07)	-0.43*** (0.07)	-0.42*** (0.09)	
Constant	-2.64 (0.25)	2.62 (0.26)	-0.37 (0.42)	
<i>N</i>	27769		27834	
Model	logit		multinomial logit	

Standard errors in parentheses. Includes country & ethnic group fixed effects. In Model 2, baseline category is supports plurality-choice party. \* $p \leq 0.10$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$  (2-tailed tests).

Source: Author's calculations.

First, I find that, as an individual's economic distance from his or her ethnic group increases, he or she becomes less likely to affiliate with the group's plurality-choice party. In other words,

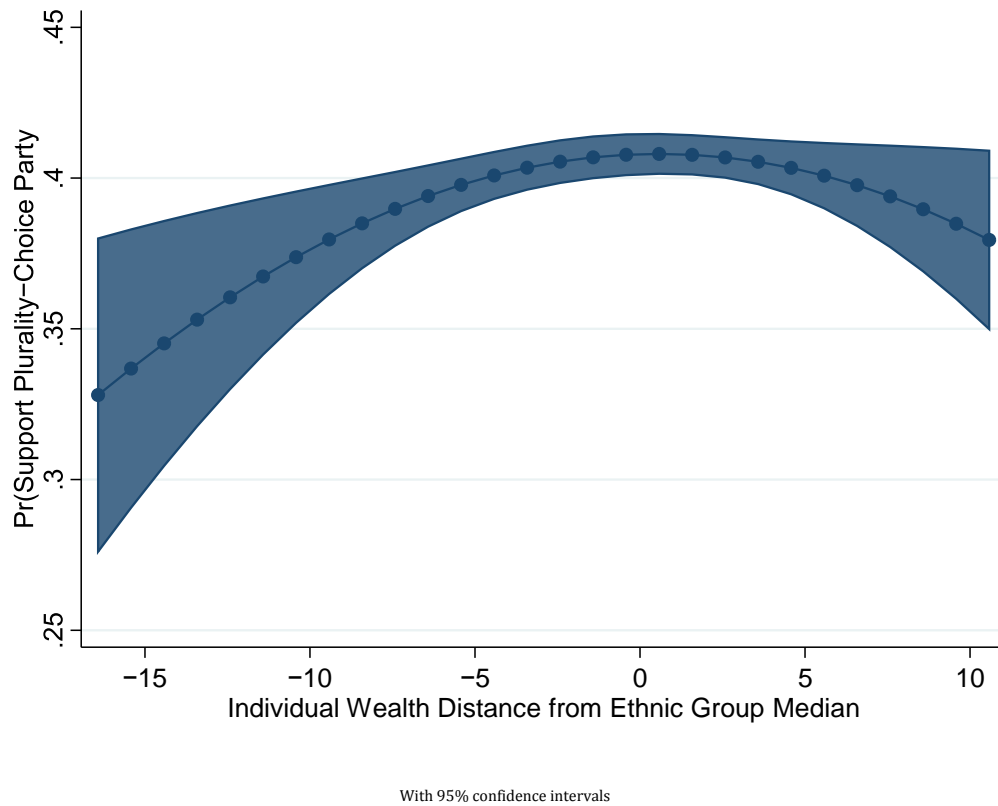
individuals whose personal economic situation is significantly different from the standard within their ethnic group are less likely to support the same party that a plurality of their coethnics does, suggesting a potential cross-cutting relationship between ascriptive identity and economic considerations. The results with regard to the controls are also generally supportive of “firstgeneration” Modernization Theory, in that better-educated and urban-dwelling respondents were less likely to support their ethnic group’s plurality-choice party. Older individuals were more likely to support the plurality-choice party, while women were less likely. Radio listenership and mobile phone usage were positively associated with support for the plurality-choice party; one explanation for these findings is that these sources of communication allowed individuals to feel more connected to fellow members of their ethnic group. In particular, radio stations, which often broadcast in vernaculars and have been associated with ethnic chauvinism in many countries, might promote in-group loyalty. I find no relationship between other indicators of media exposure (e.g., television or newspaper) and support for the plurality-choice party; these types of media generally have broader audiences and thus are less likely to attempt to appeal to narrow ethnic constituencies. Finally, an individual’s likelihood of supporting his or her ethnic group’s plurality-choice party increases as the share of coethnics in the region does.

In Figure 1, I display the relationship between economic distance and probability of supporting the plurality-choice party of one’s ethnic group. We see that the probability of supporting the plurality-choice party is highest around zero and declines considerably as the individual becomes poorer than his or her ethnic group’s median. There also appears to be a decrease in probability of supporting the plurality-choice party as the individual becomes wealthier than his or her ethnic group’s median, but this difference is not statistically significant.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> I generate this plot of marginal effects by regressing the plurality-choice dummy on a measure of economic distance (without taking the absolute value of distance), as well as the square of this term and the same matrix of controls used in Model 1, excluding *Wealth*.

Figure 1: Individual wealth distance from ethnic group's wealth median and probability of supporting plurality-choice party



Source: Author's calculations.

#### 4.1 Disengagement or Iconoclasm?

The previous analysis groups individuals who are non-partisan and supporters of parties other than their group's plurality choice in the same category. The 0s, then, are quite diverse, and the results might be capturing individuals' tendencies towards political disengagement (i.e., non-partisanship), rather than iconoclasm (i.e., supporting a party other than one's ethnic group's plurality choice). I therefore construct an alternate dependent variable, in which 0 represents non-partisan, 1 represents individuals who supported a party other than their ethnic group's plurality choice, and 2 represents individuals who supported their ethnic group's plurality choice. Given the categorical nature of the dependent variable, I use a multinomial logit model to estimate the relationship between *Wealth Distance* and the dependent variable. I set the category of those who support their coethnics' plurality-choice party as the baseline.

Results are presented in Table 2. First, we see that, as distance between an individual's wealth and his or her ethnic group's median wealth increases, likelihood of non-partisanship increases, relative to supporting the plurality-choice party (Column B). Further, individuals are also more likely to support a party other than their coethnics' plurality choice as economic distance increases (Column C).

Turning to the controls, we see that education again decreases the probability of supporting the plurality-choice party of one's ethnic group: better-educated individuals are more likely to be non-partisan and more likely to support an alternate party, as compared to supporting the plurality-choice party. Urban-dwellers are more likely to be non-partisan than support the plurality-choice party, and they are also more likely to support an alternate party. Women are more likely to be non-partisan, but less likely to support an alternate party, while older individuals are less likely to be non-partisan, as well as less likely to support a non-plurality-choice party. Results for media consumption are mixed: radio listenership is negatively associated with non-partisanship, but is not significantly related with supporting another party. And neither newspaper nor television exposure are significantly associated with partisanship or party choice. Mobile use is positively associated with supporting another party, but also with non-partisanship. Finally, as the share of coethnics in the respondent's region increases, likelihood of being non-partisan decreases, as does the likelihood of supporting an alternate party. In other words, it appears that, as predicted, individuals who are local minorities are more likely to "defect" from their ethnic group's plurality-choice party, whether by being non-partisan or by supporting another party.

## **4.2 Group- and Country-Level Factors**

Individuals' likelihood of supporting their ethnic group's plurality-choice party might depend, not just on individual-level factors, such as economic distance from median group wealth, education, age, and gender, but also on group- and country-level factors. Certainly, politics seems more ethnicized in some countries (e.g., Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia) than in others (e.g., Senegal, mainland Tanzania), while certain groups might be more or less likely to cohere around one party or candidate.



The above analyses included ethnic-group and country fixed effects; in the analyses that follow, I examine how certain group- and country-level factors might impact the relationship between ethnicity and party support.

I begin with an examination of group-level factors. From the perspective of this paper, the most important variable to consider is within-group inequality. We might expect that groups that have higher levels of within-group inequality generate fewer pressures on members to support the same political party or candidate, since those groups' members have more diverse economic interests. Conversely, groups whose members share roughly the same economic standing might find coordination easier, in that they have similar political interests and perspectives. I generate a Gini coefficient for each group using the Stata package *ginidesc*, by Roger Aliaga and Silvio Montoya.

Next, I control for whether the executive in the country – in most cases, the president, and in the case of Mauritius, the prime minister – is a coethnic of the respondent.<sup>12</sup> Executives might have greater capacity to generate cohesion among their group members, by distributing selective benefits, warning of the security or distributional consequences of an out-group taking power, or using persuasive tools, such as privileged access to media. It is also possible that the relationship runs in the opposite direction: groups that are better able, for whatever reason, to coordinate might be more likely to place a member in the country's highest office.

I also examine the effects of the group's share of the population (as measured as a proportion of Afrobarometer respondents from the country) on party support. *A priori*, I expect that larger groups will exert pressures on individuals to cohere; such groups have a higher probability of influencing electoral outcomes, and elites therefore might invest more heavily in coordination. Such groups are also more likely to field viable candidates themselves, or form important bases of parties. In short, larger groups are more relevant electorally, and thus members are more likely to be pressured to

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<sup>12</sup> These leaders and codings included Yayi Boni (Benin, Yoru'ba'), Ian Khama (Botswana, Mongwato), Blaise Compaor'e (Burkina Faso, Mossi), Pierre Nkurunziza (Burundi, Hutu and Tutsi), Paul Biya (Cameroon, Beti), Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire, Mand'e du Nord), John Atta Mills (Ghana, Akan), Alpha Cond'e (Guinea, Malink'e), Uhuru Kenyatta (Kenya, Kikuyu), Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia, Gola and Kru), Andry Rajoelina (Madagascar, Merina), Joyce Banda (Malawi, Yao), Dioncounda Traor'e (Mali, Sarakhol'e and Sonink'e), Navin Ramgoolam (Mauritius, Hindu), Armando Guebuza (Mozambique, Changana), Hifikepunye Pohamba (Namibia, Wambo), Mahamadou Issoufou (Niger, Haoussa), Goodluck Jonathan (Nigeria, Ijaw), Macky Sall (Senegal, Pulaar), Ernest Bai Koroma (Sierra Leone, Temne), Jacob Zuma (South Africa, Zulu), Jakaya Kikwete (Tanzania, Makua), Yoweri Museveni (Uganda, Munyankole), Michael Sata (Zambia, Bemba), Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe, Shona). I could not code the ethnic identify of Lesotho's prime minister at the time of the survey, Tom Thabane.

conform, or to be able to find candidates or parties that they feel represent them, on the basis of their identity. Elites from smaller groups, on the other hand, might lack the median or incentives to foster cohesion, and members are less likely to be able to find viable candidates or parties that they feel represent them, at least on the basis of ascriptive identity.

Finally, I consider group-level variables such as the share that lives in urban areas, mean wealth, and mean education level. Early Modernization Theory suggests that, as groups become more urbanized, wealthier, and better educated, their members will focus increasingly on non-ascriptive identities (e.g., class or occupation), and pressures for in-group conformity will decline.

Table 3: Regression Results, with Group-Level Variables

	Model 3	Model 4	
	A	B	C
	Support Plurality Choice	Non-Partisan	Support Other Party
<i>Wealth Distance</i>	-0.02*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
<i>Ethnic Group Size</i>	-0.66*** (0.14)	0.99*** (0.15)	0.20 (0.18)
<i>Ethnic Group Wealth</i>	-0.07*** (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)	0.12*** (0.03)
<i>Ethnic Group Education</i>	-0.15*** (0.04)	0.26*** (0.05)	-0.07 (0.06)
<i>Ethnic Group Urban</i>	-0.90*** (0.16)	0.72*** (0.18)	1.41*** (0.22)
<i>Within-Group Inequality</i>	-7.06*** (0.87)	6.20*** (0.96)	8.15*** (1.16)
<i>Coethnic Executive</i>	0.45*** (0.04)	-0.36*** (0.04)	-0.61*** (0.05)
Constant	1.44 (0.43)	-1.31 (0.47)	-3.72 (0.56)
<i>N</i>	26629	26629	
Model	logit	multinomial logit	

Standard errors in parentheses. Includes country fixed effects. Results for individual-level controls (wealth, sex, education, urban, age, media consumption, mobile usage, share coethnics in region) not reported. In Model 4, baseline category is supports plurality-choice party. \* $p \leq 0.10$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$  (2-tailed tests).

Source: Author's calculations.

Table 3 reports results of analyses including these group-level variables. Importantly, economic distance remains negatively associated with support for one's ethnic group's plurality-choice party (Model 3), and positively associated with non-partisanship and supporting alternate parties (Model 4). As predicted, within-group inequality is associated with statistically significant reductions in support for plurality-choice parties, in both models; as Gini coefficients increase, members' likelihood of being non-partisan or supporting an alternate party increase. Economically diverse ethnic groups, in other words, appear less likely to cohere around a single party. Also as expected, members of groups who claim the head of the executive branch as a coethnic are more likely to support their group's plurality-choice party; they are less likely to be non-partisan, and less likely to support an alternate party.

Surprisingly, group size is negatively associated with support for the plurality-choice party, and as group size increases, individuals become more likely to be non-partisan (their probability of supporting an alternate party remains unaffected). Larger groups might actually have more difficulty coordinating behind a single candidate. Elites might face increased collective-action problems as group size increases – communication costs increase along with size – while larger groups might face more cultural, social, and economic schisms, making political coherence less likely. Additionally, members of larger groups might feel less vulnerable; their demographic advantages mean that they can survive in the polity even without investments in coordinating. Smaller groups, on the other hand, must coordinate internally if they are to wield any influence in the national polity.

Finally, as expected, I find that members of wealthier, better-educated, and more-urbanized groups are less likely to support the plurality-choice party. Urbanization is associated with non-partisanship and support for alternate parties, education with the former only, and wealth with the latter only. Again, these findings seem in line with early Modernization Theory.

I next consider several country-level factors that might be associated with party support. First, the extent to which ethnic groups in a country are separated by economic differences could influence correlations between ascriptive identity and party support. As between-group inequalities increase, we might expect that individuals become less likely to “defect” from their ethnic group's plurality-choice party. Between-group inequality could further politicize inter-ethnic differences, in

that competition over scarce resources increasingly takes on ethnic overtones, and economic interests correlate with ethnicity. In such ranked societies, class is less likely to cross-cut ethnicity. I again use the Stata package *ginidesc* to generate a measure of between-group inequality for each country.<sup>13</sup>

Second, I include a measure of the country's ethnolinguistic fractionalization, since ethnicity might become more salient – and thus exert a larger influence on individuals' partisan leanings – as diversity increases.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the effect of ascriptive identity on partisan and electoral politics is often mediated by electoral institutions (Cox 1997; Ordeshook and Shvetsova 1994; Posner 2005). Proportional representation, for example, is associated with a larger number of effective parties in a system (Duverger 1954; Riker 1982; Taagepera and Shugart 1989), thereby increasing the probability that distinct ascriptive groups are represented by respective parties. As individuals' abilities to locate a party associated specifically with their own ethnic group increases, their probability of supporting a party that a plurality of other group members do should increase, as well. I identify thirteen countries in the Afrobarometer Round 5 that include some element of proportional representation in the selection of their national legislature.<sup>15</sup>

The relationship between ethnic identity and party support might also be affected by institutions that encourage coordination in executive elections. Namely, we might expect that rules demanding that a presidential candidate exceed some threshold of votes cast (usually half) to win would dampen the relationship between ethnicity and party support. African elections usually involve some inter-ethnic coalition building, given relatively high levels of ethnic fractionalization. These pressures are even greater when thresholds are demanded of presidential candidates. As parties struggle to develop sufficiently sized coalitions, they might attempt to make appeals on the basis of factors other than ethnicity, voters might become accustomed to voting for non-coethnics, thereby weakening the overall salience of ethnicity in their electoral decision-making, and the lack

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<sup>13</sup> This measure includes only those ethnic groups whose share of the Afrobarometer sample of their country meets or exceeds the 5% threshold.

<sup>14</sup> Data from *Atlas Narodov Mira* (1964).

<sup>15</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Guinea, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania

of a coethnic option in the second round might increase ethnic groups' coordination problems.<sup>16</sup> I identify eighteen countries in the Afrobarometer sample that have such thresholds for presidential elections.<sup>17</sup>

Table 4: Regression Results, with Country-Level Variables

	Model 5	Model 6	
	A	B	C
	Support Plurality Choice	Non-Partisan	Support Other Party
<i>Wealth Distance</i>	-0.01* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
<i>Proportional Representation</i>	0.50*** (0.03)	-0.41*** (0.04)	-0.72*** (0.05)
<i>Two-Round</i>	0.14*** (0.03)	-0.28*** (0.04)	0.16*** (0.05)
<i>Between-Group Inequality</i>	9.08*** (1.11)	-12.19*** (1.23)	-2.97** (1.51)
<i>Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization</i>	0.58*** (0.08)	-0.44*** (0.09)	-0.91*** (0.11)
Constant	-0.37 (0.32)	0.88 (0.36)	-2.03 (0.42)
<i>N</i>	26349	26349	
Model	logit	multinomial logit	

Standard errors in parentheses. Results for individual-level (wealth, sex, education, urban, age, media consumption, mobile usage, share coethnics in region) and group-level (ethnic group size, wealth, education, urban proportion; within-group inequality; and coethnic executive) controls not reported. In Model 6, baseline category is supports plurality-choice party. \*  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.01$  (2-tailed tests).

Source: Author's calculations.

<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, two-round elections have been known to increase the effective number of political parties, since the incentives for strategic voting are lower in the first round (Shugart and Carey 1992; Shugart and Taagepera 1994). In Africa, long-shot presidential candidates often hope to augment their power by acting as kingmakers in a second round (Mozaffar et al. 2003). This proliferation of candidates increases the probability that a voter will have a coethnic in the race. Even if that coethnic does not make it into a second round, the candidate will be an obvious focal elite who can organize ethnic bloc voting for one of the surviving candidates.

<sup>17</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

*Wealth distance* remains negatively associated with support for the plurality-choice party when including these country-level variables in the model (Table 4, Column A). We also see that distance from one's group's median wealth is positively associated with support for an out-party (Column C), as well as with non-partisanship (Column B) (although the former is not statistically significant, as  $p=.18$ ). As predicted, as between-group inequality increases, likelihood of support for the plurality-choice party increases, as well. Individuals who live in countries where the economic differences between ethnic groups are relatively large are more likely to be partisan, and more likely to support their group's plurality-choice party. This finding lends credence to the argument that, when economic and ethnic differences are mutually reinforcing, politics will be more ethnicized.

Ethnolinguistic fractionalization is positively associated with support for plurality-choice parties, and negatively associated with non-partisanship and support for out-parties. In other words, as diversity increases, individuals' likelihood of supporting a party affiliated with their ethnic group increases, as well.

Finally, the findings on institutions are mixed, with regard to initial hypotheses. As predicted, respondents who lived in countries with proportional representation were more likely to support their group's plurality-choice party; they were also less likely to be non-partisan, and less likely to support an out-party. Again, one possible explanation is that such institutions do not constrain the number of effective parties the way that majoritarian systems do, thus allowing for a proliferation of parties that can cater to narrower ethnic bases. Two-round systems are also associated with increased probability of support for plurality-choice parties, which appears to counter my initial expectations. However, we see in Model 6 that individuals living under such systems are actually more likely to support an out-party, which supports the argument that two-round systems encourage cross-group coordination. The positive association between two-round systems and plurality-choice support seems to be explained by the finding that such systems also discourage non-partisanship. In other words, two-round systems might increase support for plurality-choice parties (versus all other alternatives, including non-partisanship) by increasing the probability that individuals are partisan, rather than by decreasing the probability that they support an alternate party.

Finally, main results are robust to treating stated vote choice as the dependent variable: as economic distance increases, individuals become less likely to support the same candidate or party in the coming election as a plurality of their coethnics (Appendix C). And main results are also robust to measuring economic distance from ethnic group mean, rather than median (Appendix D).

## 5 Discussion

Ethnicity is a defining feature of political competition in many African countries. Although parties rarely form explicitly on the bases of ascriptive identity, candidates often appeal to voters – through rhetoric, programs, or resource distributions – on ethnic bases, and voters are more likely to support coethnic candidates in many settings. These dynamics have limited national integration in places, and resulted in myriad pathologies, including reduced public goods provision, chauvinism and discrimination, and even violence.

Reducing African electoral politics to ethnicity is, however, overly simplistic. Survey and electoral data suggest that many Africans do support parties that are not affiliated with their group, or vote for non-coethnics, even when coethnic alternatives are available. Quite often, then, elections in Africa are not ethnic censuses. Citizens' stated political concerns extend to areas such as public goods provisions, corruption, and candidate qualities other than ethnicity.

Economic considerations, in particular, likely loom large in many Africans' political decision-making. Voting for a coethnic might be considered suboptimal, if that coethnic has proven to be a poor manager of the economy in the past, or if a non-coethnic's record is particularly positive. Further, ethnic groups are often diverse, in terms of members' occupations, wealth levels, and overall economic interests. Some groups, such as Nigeria's Hausa, Ghana's Akan, and South Africa's Zulu, have over ten million members. And even in smaller groups, certain revenue extraction and redistributive policies might benefit some, while harming others, given members' income sources and wealth levels. Certain individuals might favor some public and private goods over others. In short, devising economic or distributional policies favorable to all members of an ethnic group is likely difficult. Therefore, economic concerns might cross-cut ethnic ones.

Such propositions are not new; first-wave Modernization Theory predicted that the development of so-called "cross-cutting identities," such as class and occupation, would weaken

ethnic attachments over time. However, such expectations had not, to my knowledge, been previously tested at the individual level. In other words, as the differences between an individual's level of wealth and that of his or her ethnic group's increases, does the pull of ethnicity in political decision-making, in fact, weaken?

Using Afrobarometer data from twenty-seven countries, I find that, as an individual's level of wealth, as measured by a lived-poverty index, deviates from his or her ethnic group's median wealth, probability of supporting the plurality-choice party of one's ethnic group decreases. As economic distance increases, individuals not only become more likely to be non-partisan, but also more likely to support out-parties (i.e., ones that are not the plurality choice of their coethnics). The analyses yield further evidence that economic concerns can cross-cut ethnic ones. First, individuals whose ethnic group is marked by high levels of within-group economic inequality are less likely to support a plurality-choice party. And as between-group economic inequality decreases, likelihood of supporting a plurality-choice party does, as well. In other words, as economics and ethnicity overlap less, ethnicity's influence over political decision-making seems to decline.

Further research is necessary to understand the relationships between economic concerns, inequality, and ethnic politics in Africa further. First, when voters do support an out-party, do they tend to support one whose economic platform is more in line with their own interests? Or is that party especially affiliated with an ethnic group whose members, on average, have economic interests more in line with the individual? And to what extent does economic difference matter for other political activities, in which individuals are often mobilized by ethnic appeals? In other words, are individuals who are significantly dissimilar from their ethnic group, in economic terms, less likely to engage in forms of collective action, such as voting, protesting, contributing to the production of local public goods, or participating in violence? Given the significant social, political, and economic ramifications of intra- and inter-group ethnic relations in Africa, further research on these topics could yield important lessons about the continent's political development.



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## Appendix A: English-Language Question Wordings

**Support Plurality Choice:** “Do you feel close to any particular political party?” *If yes, follow up with:*  
“Which party is that?”

**Ethnicity:** “What is your ethnic community, cultural group or tribe?”

**Wealth Measures:** “Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without”:

- 1) “Enough food to eat?”
- 2) “Enough clean water for home use?”
- 3) “Medicines or medical treatment?”
- 4) “Enough fuel to cook your food?”
- 5) “A cash income?”

*Possible responses include “never,” “just once or twice,” “several times,” “many times,” and “always.”*

**Education:** “What is the highest level of education you have completed?” *Possible responses include:*  
*No formal schooling, informal schooling only (including Koranic schooling), some primary schooling, primary school completed, some secondary school/high school, secondary school/high school completed, post-secondary qualifications (other than university, e.g., a diploma or degree from polytechnic or college), some university, university completed, and postgraduate.*

**Age:** “How old are you?”

**Media Access:** “How often do you get news from the following sources?”

- 1) “Radio”
- 2) “Television”
- 3) “Newspapers”

*Possible responses include “never,” “less than once a month,” “a few times a month,” “a few times a week,” and “every day.”*

**Mobile:** “Do you ever use a mobile phone?” *If yes, follow up:* “How often do you normally use a mobile phone to”:

1) “Make or receive a call?”

2) “Send or receive a text message or SMS?”

*Possible responses include “never,” “less than one time per day,” “one or two times per day,” “three of four times per day,” and “five or more times per day.”*

**Planned Vote:** “If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party’s candidate would you vote for?”

## Appendix B: Excluding Individual Wealth Control

	Model 1
<i>Wealth Distance</i>	-0.01*** (0.01)
<i>Female</i>	-0.09*** (0.03)
<i>Education</i>	-0.06*** (0.01)
<i>Urban</i>	-0.32*** (0.03)
<i>Age</i>	0.01*** (0.00)
<i>Radio</i>	0.06*** (0.01)
<i>Television</i>	0.01 (0.01)
<i>Newspapers</i>	0.00 (0.01)
<i>Mobile</i>	0.02** (0.01)
<i>Coethnics Region</i>	0.43*** (0.07)
Constant	-2.61 (0.25)
<i>N</i>	27769

Standard errors in parentheses. Includes country and ethnic group fixed effects. \*  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ .

Source: Author's calculations.

## Appendix C: Planned Vote

	Model 1
<i>Wealth Distance</i>	-0.01* (0.01)
<i>Wealth</i>	0.02*** (0.00)
<i>Female</i>	0.13*** (0.03)
<i>Education</i>	-0.08*** (0.01)
<i>Urban</i>	-0.16*** (0.04)
<i>Age</i>	0.01*** (0.00)
<i>Radio</i>	0.05*** (0.01)
<i>Television</i>	-0.00 (0.01)
<i>Newspapers</i>	-0.02* (0.01)
<i>Mobile</i>	-0.02 (0.01)
<i>Coethnics Region</i>	0.23*** (0.07)
Constant	-0.22 (0.20)
<i>N</i>	21626

Standard errors in parentheses. Includes country & ethnic group fixed effects. \*  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ .

Source: Author's calculations.



## Appendix D: Using Ethnic Group Wealth Mean

	Model 1
<i>Wealth Distance</i>	-0.01** (0.01)
<i>Wealth</i>	0.00 (0.00)
<i>Female</i>	-0.09*** (0.03)
<i>Education</i>	-0.06*** (0.01)
<i>Urban</i>	-0.32*** (0.03)
<i>Age</i>	0.01*** (0.00)
<i>Radio</i>	0.06*** (0.01)
<i>Television</i>	0.01 (0.01)
<i>Newspapers</i>	0.00 (0.01)
<i>Mobile</i>	0.02** (0.01)
<i>Coethnics Region</i>	0.43*** (0.07)
Constant	-2.63 (0.25)
<i>N</i>	27769

Standard errors in parentheses. Includes country & ethnic group fixed effects. \*  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ .

Source: Author's calculations.