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WIDER Working Paper 2023/122

Rationality, emotions, and ethnicity

Explaining elite political alignments in a deeply divided society

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Abstract: The role of ethnicity in political behaviour remains unsettled theoretically. Instrumentalist theories emphasize cognitive processes, arguing that political actors strategically employ ethnicity to attain certain goals, while expressivist theories highlight affectual forces, arguing that actors are motivated by the intrinsic emotional power of identity. I show that neither approach adequately explains real-world intra-ethnic and cross-ethnic behaviour. I develop a new theory, integrating rationality and emotion, and argue that they work together in political decision-making. Emotional attachment to one's ethnic ingroup biases cognitive judgement against trusting a non-co-ethnic actor. I apply this integrative theory to the political alignment choices of nearly 300 Rwandan opposition elites over a 25-year period and show that it is consistent with the pattern of mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic alignments observed. I additionally analyse the reasons for the historical re-alignments of one political party and interpret interviews with various opposition leaders to reveal their preoccupation with both strategic interests and symbolic identities.

Key words: political behaviour, rationality, ethnicity, Rwanda

JEL classification: D91

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1 Introduction

What role does ethnicity play in the alignment choices of political elites? Scholars of political behaviour have long been divided over the significance of ethnicity in party political life. The increasingly dominant perspective sees ethnicity as instrumental. Ethnicity is used strategically by political actors as a means to secure power and wealth for themselves. The value of a political alignment—that is, the decision to establish, dissolve, join, leave, or ally with a political party—is calculated in terms of the advantage it offers to promote these interests. These actors are, in a broad sense, acting rationally. In the instrumentalist school, political elites thus respond to incentives when deciding how to align themselves. This belief underpins a diverse set of theories that aim to explain under what conditions mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic political alignments arise in culturally plural societies. Political entrepreneurs cooperate within or across ethnic boundaries as a function of the incentives provided by patronage benefits (Chandra 2007; Ishiyama and Fox 2006), electoral institutions (Lijphart 2004; Posner 2005; Reynolds et al. 2008; Riker 1962), financing opportunities (Arriola 2013), or social structure (Elischer 2013), among others.

In contrast, a minority viewpoint sees ethnicity as expressive. Its power is primarily emotional. Political actors align with their co-ethnics because they have strong positive feelings for their own ethnic group. A sense of loyalty, pride, and even superiority lies behind ethnic identification. Conversely, these actors avoid alignments outside their ethnic group because they hold negative sentiments toward the ethnic other. Distrust, resentment, hostility, and even fear account for the distance between ethnic groups. Identity, then, has intrinsic value. In explaining why multi-ethnic alignments are difficult to create and sustain, these theories have highlighted grievances, ethnic distrust, longstanding antipathies, and status anxieties as possible reasons (Horowitz 1985; Kaufman 2001). The expressivist position is reflected in the work of scholars of African politics, who point to ethnic censuses in the continent's elections. It is also implicit in the thinking of scholars of American politics, who highlight the role of racial prejudice in voting behaviour (Tesler 2013).

In this paper I argue that the dichotomy represented by these two approaches is false. Neither the instrumentalist perspective, which is closely associated with materialist and rationalist explanations, nor the expressivist perspective, identified with symbolic and emotionalist theories, adequately describes the actual behaviour of political actors facing ethnic alignment choices. Political elites do not make decisions on whether to align within or across ethnic boundaries solely through a dispassionate calculation of how the alignment advances their material interests in power and wealth. Nor are they driven solely by symbolic concerns with identity or feelings of ethnic prejudice. Both approaches depend on normative and unrealistic assumptions concerning human political behaviour. I offer instead an alternative interpretation of observed alignment patterns and develop a new theory of alignment behaviour in which rationality and emotion operate together to shape the alignment decisions political actors make. Incentives and identity are not incompatible. The hard distinction drawn between instrumentalist and expressivist approaches to ethnicity needs to be softened.

This integrative approach is not new. It draws on growing theory and evidence from social psychology that recognizes the interaction of cognitive and affective processes in judgement and decision-making. The two processes are not mutually exclusive. As the standard reference work for the field puts it, 'the study of emotion and reason reveals that almost every cognitive process – attention, evaluative judgments, probability estimates, perceptions of risk, outgroup biases, and moral judgment – is shaped by momentary emotions in systematic and profound ways' (Keltner and Lerner 2010: 335). I theorize, then, that political actors will respond to incentives to align

across ethnic lines. Multi-ethnic alignments will increase in number relative to mono-ethnic alignments when the incentives are strong. These decisions reflect a cognitive and rational assessment of the opportunity for advancement offered by the cross-ethnic alignment. However, despite their strategic advantage, these alignments will also exhibit a much weaker commitment to cooperation by political actors when they are multi-ethnic in nature than when they are mono-ethnic. These choices, then, also reflect identity-centred ingroup favouritism and outgroup bias, of which affect is a major determinant (Dovidio and Gaertner 2010).

I base my theory upon an analysis of the alignment behaviour of opposition political actors in a country within the non-industrialized world where ethnicity remains a central organizing principle in both politics and society. In the small, developing African nation of Rwanda, the boundaries between its two largest ethnic groups, the Hutu and Tutsi, were profoundly and tragically re-inscribed by the genocide of 1994. I test the instrumentalist and expressivist hypotheses against the pattern of elite political alignments that have emerged since the genocide among Rwanda's opposition political actors. I find that neither approach adequately describes the alignment behaviour observed. The expressivist approach fails to account for variation over time in the multi-ethnic alignments formed; it over-predicts mono-ethnic alignments. The instrumentalist perspective does not explain the strong commitment to cooperate within mono-ethnic alignments in the face of incentives to align cross-ethnically; it over-predicts multi-ethnic alignments.

I find instead a large number of *both* mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic alignments among Rwanda's political opposition. When analysing the pattern over time, I find that multi-ethnic alignments tend to increase relative to mono-ethnic alignments in the period prior to and during an election. The incentive to contest an election by aligning across ethnic boundaries is powerful in post-genocide Rwanda. The genocide has made the population wary of parties that make explicitly ethnic appeals; ethnic identification has been formally outlawed in public life; and behaviour deemed ethnically divisive has become the subject of criminal sanction. Rwanda's political opposition thus recognizes the strategic value of multi-ethnic alignment and responds to the electoral incentive to cooperate across the ethnic boundary.

Yet, at the same time, I find this commitment to cooperate much weaker in multi-ethnic than in mono-ethnic alignments. I examine three indicators of commitment. I find, first, that the institutional depth of the alignment is shallower when actors align cross-ethnically. Multi-ethnic alignments tend to take the form of *alliances* where parties retain their separate identities rather than *mergers* in which a single new political party is formed and the constituent parties dissolved. Second, I find that cross-ethnic alignments are also less durable. Multi-ethnic alignments tend to dissolve sooner than mono-ethnic alignments. Their longevity is limited. Finally, I find cross-ethnic alignments less cohesive. Multi-ethnic alignments experience a higher number of fractures than mono-ethnic alignments. They are more fissiparous. Political actors, then, make instrumentally advantageous alignment choices. However, these choices also incorporate ingroup and outgroup biases.

These findings are based on a detailed analysis compiling the alignment choices of nearly 300 Rwandan political elites across 57 distinct alignment entities over a period of 25 years. The analysis is supplemented by a detailed case study of the alignment behaviour of one Rwandan political entity selected for its level of ethnocentrism in addition to in-depth interviews with Rwanda's key opposition leaders for insights into their decision-making calculus.

The distinction between instrumentalist and expressivist explanations of ethnicity is not trivial. If multi-ethnic political alignments were normatively desirable within societies, the repertoire of strategies to be deployed would differ depending on which perspective were believed to be true. If ethnicity were expressive, social planners would consider strategies aimed at shaping identities

and reducing prejudice, for example. If it were instrumental, planners would look to strengthen incentives through electoral and other forms of institutional engineering. In the integrative explanation, however, I argue that alignment choices are the product of *both* cognitive calculations *and* affective forces. Political actors make decisions that are to their strategic advantage, but these choices are also shaped by their ingroup biases. In the integrative view, then, such strategies should not be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives. A social planner would want to use both.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework. Section 3 introduces the case of Rwanda. Sections 4 and 5 set out the research hypotheses and describe the research design and data. Section 6 presents the results, and Section 7 discusses the findings and concludes.

2 Theoretical framework

A fundamental distinction between expressivist and instrumentalist approaches to ethnicity centres on the question of how exactly ethnicity works to produce its theorized effects. For expressivists, ethnicity is a felt identity with intrinsic, affectual power that motivates the choices and actions of individuals who identify with a particular ethnic group. It is an end in itself. For instrumentalists, on the other hand, individuals choose, often consciously and intentionally, to use ethnicity to attain certain goals or to satisfy particular interests. It is the means to an end. A key issue in the debate therefore centres on the process or mechanism through which ethnicity operates. It is affectual for expressivists; but cognitive for instrumentalists.

The expressivist–instrumentalist debate is related to, but analytically distinct from, a second long-standing theoretical dispute over ethnicity: the primordialist–constructivist debate. This debate revolves around the separate question of how ethnic identities emerge and are shaped. Primordialists have generally argued that ethnic identities are immutable, eternally salient, and exogenous to human agency. Constructivists have argued the converse: that ethnic identities are mutable, variably salient, and endogenous to human actions (Chandra 2012). This debate is now generally considered settled in favour of the constructivist position. However, the expressivist–instrumentalist debate, while overlapping and often conflated with the primordialist–constructivist dispute, remains an unsettled theoretical question that continues to frame empirical research on ethnic politics. I begin by drawing out the assumptions underlying the expressivist and instrumentalist positions on ethnicity and set out the ethnic alignment patterns each would predict that we should observe. I then develop and present a new integrative theory of alignment behaviour that seeks to reconcile the conflict between expressivist and instrumentalist claims.

2.1 Expressivist ethnicity

Two foundational ideas underpin expressivist theories of ethnicity: first, the belief that ethnicity has an emotional basis; and second the claim that its nature is deterministic. Expressivist theories of ethnic politics attribute the power of ethnicity to the emotions it elicits. Co-ethnics may feel pride, respect, empathy, trust, and loyalty for their ethnic ingroup; but anxiety, resentment, fear, contempt, and hostility towards the ethnic outgroup. For expressivists, it is these sentiments that primarily motivate the behaviour of individual members of ethnic groups. The decision to align politically with co-ethnics is thus more an emotional expression than a cognitive calculation. Second, this ethnically motivated behaviour is not a matter of choice. The emotional expression of ethnicity is involuntary in nature. Ethnicity will inevitably work to produce its theorized effects whenever it is involved. The role of individual agency is limited. This deterministic view of ethnicity is also consistent with the view of ethnicity’s emotional basis. Early psychological research on

emotions characterized them as involuntary forces over which individuals exercise little choice (Ekman 1992).

Expressivist perspectives of ethnicity feature both explicitly and implicitly in research on a diverse set of political behaviours. They appear not only in explanations of electoral behaviour, but also in theories of nationalist mobilization (Connor 1993; Smith 1999), group-based violence (Horowitz 1985; Petersen 2002), civil wars (Kaufman 2006), international conflict (Huntington 2002; Van Evera 1994), and economic under-development (Easterly and Levine 1997). All rest on expressivist assumptions. The ever-expanding political economy research on the effects of ethnic diversity relies on the implicit logic that more ethnic groups will necessarily create more conflict (Esteban et al. 2012; Fearon and Laitin 2003). Early research on politics in plural societies more generally saw ethnicity as the pre-eminent force structuring political communities. ‘In the plural society competitive politics is characterized by ethnic politics. That is to say, ethnicity is the (only) major basis for the “authoritative allocation of value”’ (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972: 63). Expressivist claims, however, neither have faded with the passage of time nor are limited to the politics of pre-industrial, traditional societies. In recent American politics research, white voting behaviour has been explained in terms of prejudice or racism towards black political candidates. Racism has been cited as a predictor of partisan preferences in the US presidential elections of 2008 and 2012, which saw the election of the country’s first black president (Tesler 2013).

Expressivist perspectives on ethnic politics are, however, especially common in research on non-industrialized societies, where ethnicity remains the central organizing principle of society and politics. In societies that have not experienced an industrial revolution, ethnicity will dominate more weakly ascriptive identities based on class, religion, and ideology (Elischer 2013). The intellectual antecedents of this view of non-industrialized societies can be traced to broader sociological theories of modernity and modernization. Ethnic ties are seen as a form of mechanical solidarity (Durkheim 1960), where social cohesion is based on values and beliefs that are passed down and shared between members. In contrast, in societies based on organic solidarity, social ties result more from material interdependence than from cultural homogeneity. It is the division of labour rather than primordial attachments that explains social cohesion. A similar distinction underpins the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Weber (1978), responding to Toinnes, defined *Gemeinschaft* as a ‘subjective *feeling* of the parties, whether *affectual* or traditional, that they belong together’ (my italics). In contrast, in defining *Gesellschaft* he writes that it is ‘especially common, though by no means inevitable, for the associative type of relationship [*Gesellschaft*] to rest on a rational *agreement* by mutual *consent*’ (my italics). The two core expressivist ideas concerning affect and choice therefore also feature in classical sociological thought on transitional development.

Expressivist ethnicity is prominent in first-generation research on African political parties. Scholars have pointed to the long-standing significance of communal boundaries in African societies and assumed that these would naturally also structure the political realm. ‘[E]thnic 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’ (Norris and Mattes 2003: 2). As ethnicity constituted the dominant cleavage, scholars predicted that elections would result in ethnic censuses (Horowitz 1985). In explaining why post-material cleavages are weak in African politics and society, these scholars identified the persistence of ethnic loyalties (Basedau and Stroh 2012; Bekker et al. 2001; Daddieh and Fair 2001). Ethnic group allegiance is therefore the basis of partisan voting, and these loyalties are emotional expressions of the power of ethnicity. More recent research on African parties, however, challenges the expressivist view on the prevalence and dominance of ethnic parties and offers alternate explanations for observed variation in African voting behaviour and political alignments (Elischer 2013). Described in more depth below, these

newer theories emphasize institutional incentives, economic interests, and social structure in their explanation of African party behaviour.

2.2 Instrumentalist ethnicity

The increasingly dominant view in political science is that ethnicity is instrumental. Whereas expressivists theorize in terms of identities, prejudices, loyalties, and emotions, instrumentalists tend to employ the language of interests, strategies, incentives, and rationality. Central to instrumentalist accounts of ethnically motivated political behaviour, then, is the idea of choice. While expressivists emphasize ethnicity as deterministic, instrumentalists highlight individual agency. And while expressivists view ethnicity as producing emotions, instrumentalists see ethnicity as the product of cognition.

Ethnicity is a result of humans' cognitive drive to reduce the uncertainty they face in the world, whereas what people do with their less uncertain worlds depends on their particular interests. The most fundamental human interest, it is argued, is the maximization of life chances, from which flow the instrumental pursuits of wealth, security, and power as well as seemingly irrational desires for status and self-esteem. (Hale 2008).

The ideas of agency and cognition are therefore both foundational assumptions underlying instrumentalist approaches to ethnicity.

Instrumentalist theories of ethnicity's role in political behaviour explain the choices actors make in respect of ethnicity as a function of a diverse set of factors. Foremost among these are the choices created by institutions. In matters of constitutional governance, nation-building, and electoral design, planners face a fundamental choice between institutions that incentivize political behaviour to preserve ethnic differences and institutions that seek to eliminate them. Preservationists may advocate for federalism, multiculturalism, or proportional representation; eliminationists may instead campaign for partition, assimilation, or majoritarian voting (McDoom and Gisselquist 2016; McGarry and O'Leary 1994; Reynolds et al. 2008). Theories of electoral design predict that parties will behave differently depending on whether they operate in centripetal or centrifugal electoral systems (Reynolds et al. 2008). Centripetal systems incentivize parties to move to the centre and to find accommodative positions that cross ethnic group lines. In contrast, centrifugal systems enable parties to maintain peripheral and ethnically distinct positions.

Other instrumentalist theories of electoral behaviour emphasize economic interests over institutional incentives. The opportunity for political parties to secure finance for their electoral campaigns is theorized as an important determinant. In liberalized economies, business is less dependent on the favour of the ruling party and this autonomy allows business to choose whether to provide financial support to an incumbent ethnic party or to rival multi-ethnic coalitions of opposition parties. 'The [...] availability of private resources influences the capacity of politicians to coordinate electoral campaigns that span ethnic cleavages.' (Arriola 2013). The converse logic also holds. In patronage-based economies, ethnic parties are more likely to succeed because the availability of patronage resources enables these parties to distribute benefits to their ethnic supporters to the exclusion of other ethnic groups. Both voters and elites are 'instrumental actors who invest in an identity because it offers them the best available means by which to obtain desired benefits, and not because such identification is valuable in itself' (Chandra 2007: 11).

The ethnic structure of societies also creates incentives for political actors. Both the size and the number of ethnic groups shape the mobilizational choices of political elites, who must calculate which groups' support they must earn in order to win power. The logic has its origins in the long-

standing proposition that politicians will seek to build the ‘winning minimum coalition’ necessary (Riker 1962). Elischer (2013) examines patterns of partisan behaviour in Africa and finds that ‘Countries with a core ethnic group and a low ethnic fragmentation index are prone to the formation of nonethnic parties. Countries without a core ethnic group and a high ethnic fragmentation index are prone to the formation of ethnic parties.’ Posner (2005: 4) also claims that social structure shapes political behaviour, but shows how these social structural incentives are themselves endogenous to institutions.

[T]he ethnic identities that people use to define who they are can often be traced to specific state policies, regulations, and administrative structures: that is, to institutions. [...] the numbers, sizes, and distributions of the groups that these identities define can also be shown to be products of administrative structures and policies.

He attributes the difference in the identity salience of two ethnic groups that exist in both Zambia and Malawi to the imposition of the colonial border that changed their relative sizes and consequently the calculations of politicians in each country.

The instrumentalist approach to ethnicity has been extended to explain not only elite choices but also voter behaviour. Ferree (2006: 803) explains voting patterns that coincide with racial boundaries in South Africa as the product of a racial heuristic or a cognitive shortcut. ‘[V]oters use the “racial credentials” of parties as an informational shortcut that helps them predict how parties will behave once in office.’ Black South Africans vote for the ANC because they have decided, given the limited information they possess about the party, that it will favour Blacks over other groups. Chandra (2007: 12) expands the concept of instrumentality to include behaviour aimed at maximizing the psychic as well as material benefits of ethnicity.

I assume that individual voters and elites in patronage-democracies are motivated by a desire for either material or psychic goods or some combination of the two [...] the argument belongs to the family of ‘thin’ rational choice explanations that abandon the narrow assumption that individuals are economically motivated but retain the assumption that individuals are instrumentally rational actors who pursue their objectives, however defined, by selecting those means that maximize their chance of obtaining them.

The conceptual expansion of rationality to include the maximization of ‘psychic’ utility presumably subsumes the value individuals attach to positive feelings such as pride, love, and joy and negative feelings such as resentment, hate, and fear. Such a broad conceptualization raises the question, however, of whether irrational, emotion-driven behaviour is ever conceivable. All human behaviour becomes explicable rationally.

2.3 Integrative perspective on ethnicity

Existing research, then, treats instrumentalist and expressivist approaches as mutually exclusive explanations of how ethnicity operates to affect political behaviour. Their foundational assumptions are considered oppositional. Expressivists assume that the power of ethnicity lies in the emotions it produces in political actors. In contrast, instrumentalists emphasize reason and argue that political actors use ethnicity to achieve particular goals. I suggest that the dichotomy is false and present an alternative approach, in which I theorize that cognitive and affective processes in fact work together to produce political behaviour. Far from being opposing forces, both are necessarily involved in the production of ethnically inflected behaviour.

The dichotomous framing of ethnicity's role in political behaviour reflects a strand of classical western political thought that has historically seen emotion as inferior to reason (Nussbaum 2003). Emotions 'subvert rational judgments and decisions about matters of justice, causality, right and wrong, and the good life, and they should be extirpated from the mind and social exchange' (Keltner and Lerner 2010: 334). Rational choice theory represents the expression within modern social science of the normative belief in the superiority of reason. Most instrumentalist theories of ethnicity will draw on the language, if not the assumptions, of rational choice theory in their explanations of how ethnicity works. Strategy, calculation, logic, interests, incentives, utility, and pay-offs all feature in the instrumentalists' lexicon and reflect the normative bias toward reason, and the closely associated idea in psychology of cognition. Expressivists, in contrast, use terms such as identity, loyalty, pride, and prejudice. They see ethnicity's power to move individuals and social groups as deriving from its emotional basis. Affect is preeminent in expressivist theories.

I suggest that this dichotomous framing of ethnicity's role is mistaken. Emotion and rationality are not opposing forces. Expressivist and instrumentalist theories each make unrealistic assumptions about how political actors make choices and take actions. Political actors do not always dispassionately calculate the costs and benefits of invoking their ethnicity. Nor are they always uncontrollably driven by emotional impulses to express their ethnicity as pride, loyalty, and prejudice. Neither approach fully captures the actual political behaviour often observed. Existing work in ethnic politics implicitly recognizes the inadequacy of the dichotomous approach. Posner (2005: 7) writes:

Nor do I want to suggest that emotions such as fear, hatred, or resentment do not trump rational calculations in motivating ethnic behaviour in some contexts. Of course ethnicity can be a source of great passion. But it can also be a tool deployed by coolly calculating political actors.

Chandra (2007), as noted above, avoids the dichotomy altogether by stretching the concept of instrumentality to include the fulfilment of 'psychic' as well as material interests. I present a different approach that instead integrates the roles of emotion and reason.

I draw on several decades of research in social psychology showing that cognitive and affective processes in fact often work together. Ethnically inflected behaviour is not the product of one or the other, but of their interaction. Social psychologists have long recognized this empirical reality. 'This dualistic perspective on emotion and reason has been countervailed by 25 years of research on the interplay between emotion and cognitive processes' (Keltner and Lerner 2010: 335). I argue that this integrative approach offers a superior account of actual ethnically inflected political behaviour to either instrumentalist or expressivist approaches.

To build the integrative theory, I draw on the sub-field of social psychology that examines intergroup relations. It offers important theoretical insights into interethnic behaviour and has been built around the documented bias that can arise in individual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour of ingroup members towards outgroup members. Prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination are evident in both ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation. The willingness to show trust, empathy, and positive regard towards co-ethnics more than non-co-ethnics is an expression of intergroup bias. Social psychologists have proposed various theories for why the bias arises, including the desire for self-esteem in social identity theory; for hierarchical position in social dominance theory; for differentiation in optimal distinctiveness theory; and for certainty in subjective uncertainty reduction theory, *inter alia*. While these theories differ in the motivational basis for the bias, they all agree on its existence and impact on the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of group members.

Intergroup bias therefore affects individual choices and actions. To understand how this bias affects the behaviour of political actors, I turn to the field of judgement and decision-making, where it has been long recognized that both cognitive and affective forces work together to shape the decision-making process. Rather than simply hijacking or suppressing reason—a person in a highly emotional state being believed to be unable to think logically—emotions may in fact *interact* with it. They may influence a variety of cognitive processes, including evaluative judgements, probability estimates, and perceptions of risk (Gilovich and Griffin 2010). Emotions bias each of these processes. For instance, pride, joy, or some other positive affective state towards one's ingroup may lead an individual to evaluate an opportunity more positively or to downplay the risk in a given situation involving ingroup members. Conversely, anxiety, contempt, or resentment may lead ingroup members to negatively appraise a choice or overstate a risk involving an outgroup member (Dovidio and Gaertner 2010). Emotions thus moderate intergroup bias, which in turn affects individual judgement and decision-making.

In the context of political behaviour, therefore, and specifically political actors' alignment choices, the decision to cooperate within or across ethnic boundaries will be shaped by the strength of intergroup bias. The degree of ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation will affect an individual's judgement vis-à-vis a co-ethnic or non-co-ethnic. Pride and loyalty towards their own ethnic group may, for instance, lead political actors to overestimate the probability of an electoral victory in a mono-ethnic alignment. Conversely, anxiety or resentment towards the ethnic outgroup may lead political actors to underestimate the strategic advantages of cross-ethnic cooperation.

Intergroup bias may also impact alignment decisions through another channel: interpersonal trust. In the context of decision-making, interpersonal trust may be thought of as the confidence one individual has in another individual that the latter will act as expected and may thereby influence the former's commitment to some decision. To trust someone is itself an initial and distinct decision, impacted by ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation, that may in turn impact some subsequent decision such as the choice of how to align oneself politically. Interpersonal trust—and relational trust more broadly—also have cognitive and affective foundations (McAllister 1995). The decision to trust may involve a cognitive appraisal of the evidence such as an individual's previous reliability or past behaviour. However, it may also involve an emotional component based on some bond between the two individuals such as the bond between co-ethnics who share a group identity. This emotional bond may bias the cognitive appraisal and lead an individual to commit to a decision where the risk is very high or where there is evidence that the individual is not reliable. Conversely, if the emotional bond has negative valence and is based, for example, on contempt, resentment, or fear towards a non-co-ethnic, it may lead to distrust even when the risk is low or when the evidence is supportive.

In the context of political competition in ethnically plural societies, then, the expressivist, instrumentalist, and integrative approaches would each yield different predictions of how ethnicity should affect the behaviour of political actors. In this paper, I focus on the behaviour of *opposition political elites* and specifically on their *alignment choices*. I am careful to specify both the actor (opposition elites) and the behaviour of interest (political alignments), as the expansive literature on ethnic parties does not consistently differentiate between the types of actors and behaviours potentially observable. I offer a simple typology distinguishing, first, between party leaders and party supporters and between incumbents and challengers. Ordinary voters may respond differently to ethnicity than political leaders (Ferree 2006; Horowitz 1985). Elite actors are, for instance, often credited with rationality and instrumental behaviour, in contrast to mass actors. Furthermore, challengers may well behave differently than incumbents. An incumbency advantage may shape the calculus of those already in power and motivate challengers to take more risks to unseat them. Second, I differentiate between several types of political behaviour believed to be

shaped by ethnicity. Theories of ethnic politics have been built through the empirical observation of (i) the act of voting; (ii) the rhetorical appeals of political parties; (iii) the development of party manifestos and constitutions; and (iv) the selection of party leadership (Elischer 2013). It is important for theorization to be clear which specific behaviour is being studied.

In this paper I introduce and study the concept of political alignment. Political alignment is behaviour that indicates the commitment of a political actor to some type of formal political association with other political actors. An actor may choose to establish, dissolve, join, leave, split from, or ally with a political party. I theorize that this commitment will vary in at least two observable dimensions: direction and strength. First, in terms of direction, political actors may commit to align either towards co-ethnics or towards non-co-ethnics. Their formal associations may thus be either more mono-ethnic or more multi-ethnic in nature. Second, in terms of strength, political actors may commit strongly or weakly to a particular alignment. The strength of this commitment may be observed in three ways: (i) the institutional form of the alignment; (ii) the cohesiveness of the alignment; and (iii) the duration of the alignment. Political actors may, first, align by merging distinct political parties into a single new political party. Alternatively, they may enter an alliance in which each political party does not dissolve but retains its distinct identity. The alliance exemplifies institutional shallowness and weak commitment; a merger indicates institutional depth and a strong commitment. As a variable, institutional depth has the advantage of measuring commitment at the moment an alignment is created. Second, an alignment may hold together or factions may arise and split away. The more fissiparous the alignment, the weaker the commitment. Third, the longevity of the alignment may indicate the strength of the commitment. The longer the alignment endures, the stronger the commitment to it. I observe all three indicators to increase the confidence of the findings.

3 Case selection

I test the instrumentalist, expressivist, and integrative approaches in the context of post-genocide Rwanda. Rwanda is a multi-ethnic society comprising a numerically dominant Hutu ethnic group and a minoritarian Tutsi group whose elite classes have historically competed for power, alongside an even smaller and politically excluded Twa minority. During most of the colonial era, Belgium governed indirectly through a Tutsi monarchy and favoured Tutsi in appointments to political office. However, a Hutu-led revolution on the eve of independence toppled the Tutsi king and ushered in two Republics (1962–73; 1973–94) that were governed essentially as Hutu ethnocracies. This continued until a civil war initiated by descendants of the Tutsi exiled during the revolution culminated in a genocide that targeted overwhelmingly the country's Tutsi ethnic minority in 1994. The genocide powerfully re-inscribed the boundaries between Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa and once more reversed Rwanda's socio-political order. The mainly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) won the war, ending the genocide, and displaced the Hutu-dominated government, many of whose members went into exile overseas.

Following an initial transition period after the war, Rwanda adopted a new constitution in 2003 that established it as a semi-presidential democratic system in which power was concentrated in the presidency rather than in the prime ministership. In the first post-war elections, Paul Kagame, the RPF commander who ended the genocide, was elected president. Both president Kagame and the RPF have been in power without interruption ever since as the dominant partner in an ostensibly multi-ethnic coalition government. In this time the regime has made remarkable progress in modernizing Rwanda's state and economy. It has received much praise for reducing poverty, improving Rwandans' health and education, strengthening the state's bureaucratic capacity, and creating a pro-business regulatory environment. Despite these achievements, the

country remains fundamentally a non-industrialized economy with the majority of the population resident in rural areas and employed in the agricultural sector.

At the same time, although Rwanda has held nominally competitive elections for the presidency in 2003, 2010, and 2017, the regime has become firmly authoritarian in nature. Kagame, as the incumbent, won over 90 per cent of the vote each time and the elections were criticized by human rights groups as unfree and unfair. Rwanda's political space has progressively shrunk and the regime exercises a high level of social control through its powerful military and intelligence agencies, leading the country to be dubbed a *securocracy*. Rising repression has led both Hutu and Tutsi political elites to leave the country and to organize themselves politically in the diaspora.

Today, the incentives to organize and align across ethnic lines are powerful in Rwanda. The post-genocide government has prohibited the use of ethnic identifiers in public discourse; criminalized statements that may be interpreted as ethnically divisive; and embarked on a nationwide social re-education programme to efface ethnic thinking. Parties that would be identified as ethnic parties are not permitted. At the same time, the genocide has made deep and lasting divisions in Rwandan society. Rwandans from both sides of the historic ethnic divide feel aggrieved. Within the Tutsi community, people's perception of themselves as the primary victims of the genocide remains strong; while within the Hutu community exists the belief that reprisal atrocities were committed against them for which there still has been no redress. The government's determination to foster interethnic reconciliation underscores its concern over the continuing strength of ethnic sentiment in the country. Rwanda thus presents an unusual and fascinating opportunity to test both instrumentalist and expressivist theories of ethnic politics, as it is a case where institutional incentives and ethnic identities are both very strong but pull in opposing directions.

4 Research hypotheses

I set out the observable implications of ethnicity on elite political alignments for instrumentalist, expressivist, and integrative theories.

1. If instrumentalism were the better explanation of ethnic political behaviour, we would expect to see more multi-ethnic than mono-ethnic alignments and/or stronger commitments to multi-ethnic than to mono-ethnic alignments:
 - a. Many multi-ethnic alignments: they will be long-lived, institutionally deep, and cohesive.
 - b. Few Hutu-dominant and Tutsi-dominant alignments: they will be short-lived, institutionally shallow, and fissiparous.
2. If expressivism were the better explanation, we would expect to see more mono-ethnic than multi-ethnic alignments and/or stronger commitments to mono-ethnic than multi-ethnic alignments:
 - a. Many Hutu-dominant and Tutsi-dominant alignments: they will be long-lived, institutionally deep, and cohesive.
 - b. Few multi-ethnic alignments: they will be short-lived, institutionally shallow, and fissiparous.
3. If the integrative approach were a better explanation, we would expect to see many multi-ethnic *and* many mono-ethnic alignments. Multi-ethnic alignments will increase in number

in response to changes in institutional incentives, while mono-ethnic alignments will not. However, we would still expect to observe a weaker commitment to multi-ethnic alignments, reflecting anti-outgroup bias, and a stronger commitment to mono-ethnic alignments, reflecting pro-ingroup bias.

- a. Many Hutu-dominant and Tutsi-dominant alignments: they will be longer-lived, institutionally deeper, and more cohesive than multi-ethnic alignments.
- b. Many multi-ethnic alignments: they will be shorter-lived, institutionally shallower, and more fissiparous than mono-ethnic alignments.
- c. Multi-ethnic alignments will tend to emerge at times when incentives intensify, such as around election periods; mono-ethnic alignments will tend to emerge without regard to the timing of incentives.

5 Research design and data

The research design comprises three components: (i) an analysis of a large-N dataset on political alignments to identify patterns in the behaviour of Rwandan political actors; (ii) a small-N analysis of every alignment choice—and the reasons behind them—of one political actor over time; and (iii) the interpretation of in-depth interviews with the leaders of five of Rwanda’s key opposition parties to see whether—and how—interests and identities expressed themselves in their thinking processes.

Through extensive interviews with Rwandans and open sources, I collected data on all the major Rwandan political alignments created inside and outside the country over a 25-year period since the end of the genocide: from 1994 to 2019. The dataset identifies nearly 300 individual members of Rwandan political elites and records the behaviour of 57 distinct alignment entities in this period. These individuals represent the senior leadership of each of these alignments, having been either elected or appointed to their executive committees at the time of the alignment’s creation. The dataset records the ethnicity of each of these individuals and, using these data, I then coded each of the 57 alignments as ethnically Hutu, ethnically Tutsi, or multi-ethnic (if the alignment’s executive committee comprised both Hutu and Tutsi members). To establish an individual’s ethnicity, I shared a list of the nearly 300 individuals in the dataset with four Rwandans politically active during the study’s chosen period: two Hutu, one Tutsi, and one of mixed ethnicity. An individual was required to have their ethnicity corroborated by at least two of the four informants to be included in the dataset. Using this method, I was able to code all but five individuals’ ethnicities.

The dataset also records three dimensions of elite commitment to each alignment. First, it records the date the alignment was created and the date it dissolved, to establish its longevity. As alignments formed more recently would have had less time to experience fracturing or dissolution, I checked whether the passage of time was biasing the results by also looking at those alignments created only in the first half of the period examined. Second, the dataset records the institutional depth of the alignment, distinguishing between the creation or merging of political parties (significant institutional depth) and an alliance of existing political parties (limited institutional depth). More institutionally deep or thick alignments reflect a strong commitment, as they require a high level of trust between the political actors. Third, the dataset records the cohesiveness of each alignment by enumerating the number of times an alignment fractured and factions broke away. Less fissiparous alignments reflect a stronger commitment to the formal association. I

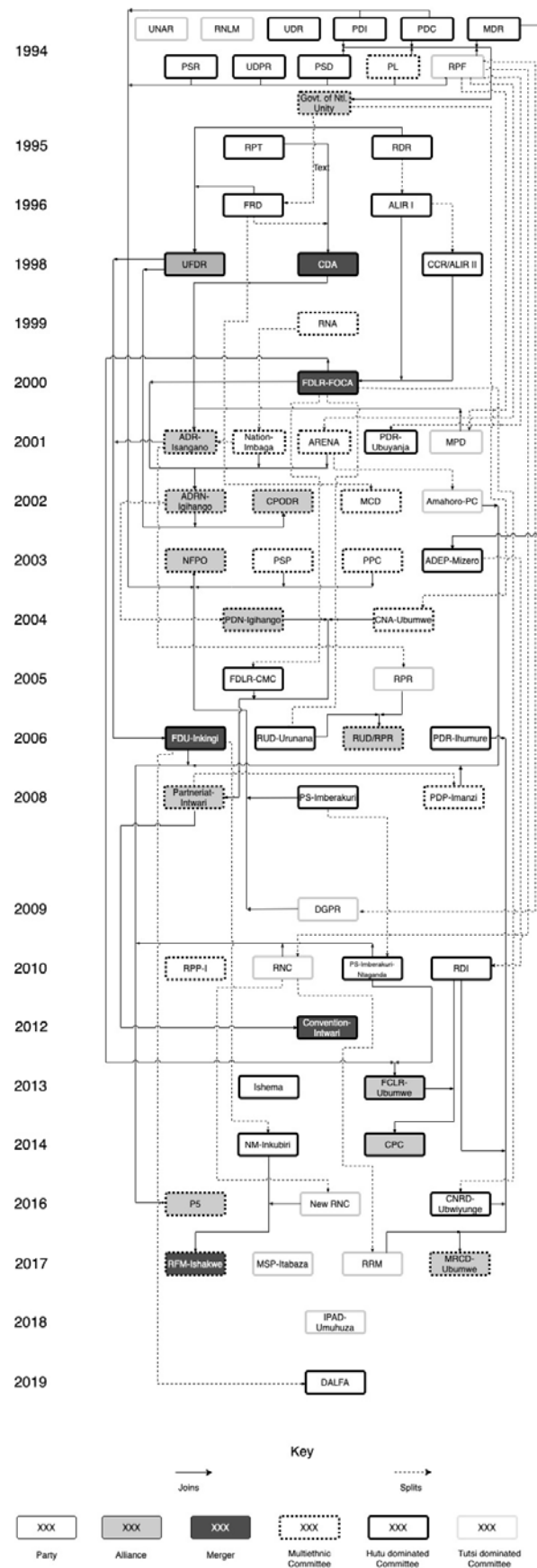
compare the longevity and cohesiveness of mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic alignments using t-tests and compare institutional thickness using a two-sample differences-in-proportions test. I also trace the evolution of these alignments over time and identify when and if they formed, fractured, dissolved, merged, and allied. Figure 1 illustrates graphically the pattern of alignments observed and the timeline along which they moved. To my knowledge, it is the most detailed mapping of the evolution of political alignments in a sub-Saharan Africa country undertaken to date.

The second component traces over time the alignment decisions of a single Rwandan political actor: the Rally for the Return of Refugees and Democracy in Rwanda (RDR). My selection strategy was to consider the value of a relevant independent variable: the actor's degree of ethnocentrism. The RDR was a mono-ethnic party created in the immediate aftermath of Rwanda's genocide to represent the interests of the sizeable Hutu refugee community and included members of the civilian administration, military forces, and militia groups involved in the genocide at the time of its establishment. It was a highly ethnocentric actor. It should therefore be an easy case for expressivist theories and a hard case for instrumentalist theories. If we found that the RDR aligned itself cross-ethnically for strategic advantage, this would be strongly supportive of instrumentalist theories and strongly disconfirmatory of expressivist theories.

However, the purpose of the case analysis is not solely to reproduce the theory-testing work of the larger-N analysis. It is also to understand in more depth the decision-making and thinking behind the actor's alignment choices. Through interviews with Rwandan political figures, analysis of public statements, and consideration of secondary sources, the study seeks to establish whether identity or interests did play a part in the actor's alignment decisions and so strengthen the causal credibility of the inferences drawn from the actor's observed alignment behaviour. The chosen case has another useful property. The RDR was founded early in Rwanda's post-genocide history. Its establishment in 1995 provides us with the opportunity to observe its behaviour in the long term. The RDR has made multiple alignment choices in the nearly 30 years since the genocide and three presidential elections took place in Rwanda during this time: 2003, 2010, and 2017. The length of time allows us to observe the RDR's alignment behaviour in the face of electoral opportunity.

The final component comprises the interpretation of semi-structured elite interviews with the most senior leadership figure in five of the most prominent opposition parties operating inside and outside Rwanda. The findings were based on 10 distinct interviews, as I had interviewed several leaders more than once over a two-year period. The interviews were conducted by myself, without an intermediary, either by telephone or in person, and in either English or French. All interviewees referenced in the paper consented to their identification, confirmed that their responses were not confidential, and understood that these could be published.

Figure 1: Evolution of elite political alignments in Rwanda, 1994–2019



Source: author's construction.

6 Results

6.1 Large-N analysis

Overall, I find evidence that both supports and conflicts with instrumentalist and expressivist predictions. Consistent with the expressivist position, and contrary to the instrumentalist prediction, elite commitment to mono-ethnic alignments is stronger than elite commitment to multi-ethnic alignments. Mono-ethnic alignments were, first, institutionally deeper. They comprised parties and party mergers more than alliances. Of all observed alignments, 73.1 per cent were institutionally deep and mono-ethnic, whereas only 15.8 per cent were deep and multi-ethnic. Multi-ethnic alignments overwhelmingly took the form of institutionally shallow alliances, even though the incentives to commit to a deep multi-ethnic alignment were powerful in post-genocide Rwanda. This suggests that ethnic distrust was high. Second, mono-ethnic alignments were more durable. The mean duration of a mono-ethnic alignment was 3,181 days compared with only 2,070 days for multi-ethnic alignments. Mono-ethnic alignments are thus 54 per cent more durable on average than multi-ethnic alignments. Lastly, mono-ethnic alignments were more cohesive than multi-ethnic alignments. The average mono-ethnic alignment experienced 0.33 splits over the course of its existence compared with 0.44 fractures for multi-ethnic alignments. However, this difference in cohesiveness, unlike the differences in longevity and institutional depth, was not statistically significant.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize these data on institutional depth, longevity, and cohesiveness of alignments. As theorized, the findings hold only for *opposition* elite alignments. When incumbent elite alignments are included in the analysis, the statistical significance of the differences between mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic alignments washes out. Incumbents therefore do appear to behave differently than challengers and their behaviour needs to be investigated and theorized separately.

Table 1: Longevity and cohesiveness of elite political alignments in Rwanda, 1994–2019

Alignment type	Frequency (no. of alignments)	Longevity (days)	Cohesiveness (no. of splits)
Opposition alignments, controlling for time			
Mono-ethnic	29	3951.3	0.38
Multi-ethnic	15	2239.3**	0.47
Average/Total	44	3367.7	0.41
Opposition alignments, not controlling for time			
Mono-ethnic	39	3180.9	0.33
Multi-ethnic	18	2070.3*	0.44
Average/Total	57	2830.2	0.37

Note: ***/**/* statistical significance at 1%, 5%, and 10% levels.

Source: author's construction.

Table 2: Institutional depth of elite political alignments in Rwanda, 1994–2019

Alignment type	Institutionally thick (parties & mergers)		Institutionally shallow (alliances)	
	N	%	N	%
Opposition alignments, not controlling for time				
Mono-ethnic	36	63.2	3	5.3
Multi-ethnic	9	15.8***	9	15.8***
Total	45	78.9	12	21.1
Opposition alignments, controlling for time				
Mono-ethnic	28	63.6	1	2.3
Multi-ethnic	8	18.2***	7	15.9***
Total	36	81.8	8	18.2

Note: ***/**/* statistical significance at 1%, 5%, and 10% levels.

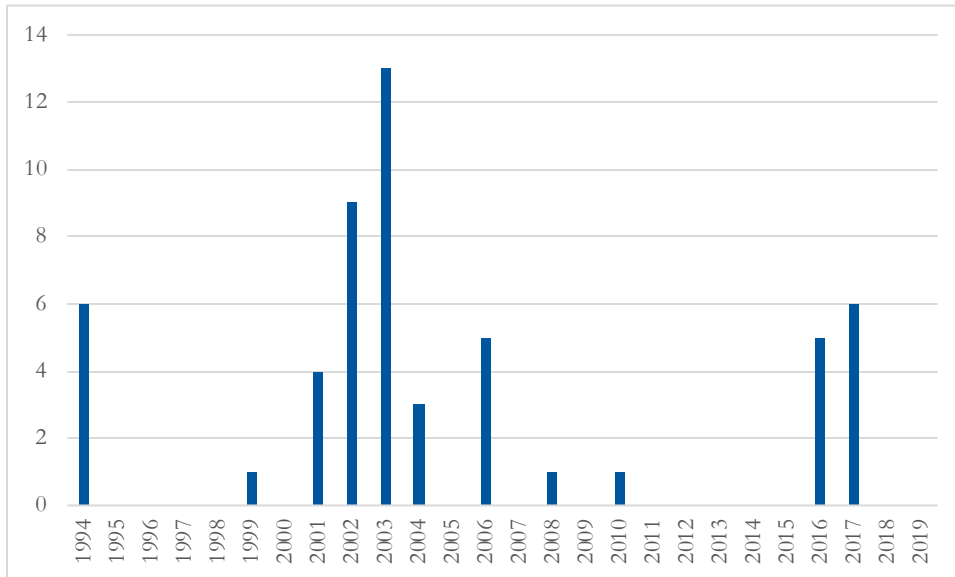
Source: author's construction.

In contrast, and contrary to expressivist and instrumentalist predictions, I documented the existence of many mono-ethnic and many multi-ethnic alignments: 39 and 18, respectively. The smaller number of multi-ethnic alignments reflects the fact that half of them (exactly 50 per cent) were alliances in institutional form and, by definition, necessarily comprised smaller constituent alignments. Neither expressivist nor instrumentalist theories fully explain the co-existence of many mono-ethnic and many multi-ethnic alignments. The expressivist proposition underpredicted multi-ethnic alignments; the instrumentalist hypothesis overpredicted them. The frequency of both mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic alignments remains unexplained.

However, when alignments are analysed diachronically, the pattern observed is consistent with the predictions of the integrative approach. The integrative approach predicts that political elites will act instrumentally and respond to incentives to align as they arise. Their alignment choices, however, will be biased by the strength of their emotional attachments to their ethnic ingroup. The incentives to align across ethnic boundaries in the Rwandan context are most powerful at the time of an election. Accordingly, we see a clear uptick in the number of multi-ethnic alignments created in the year before and the year of an election. Figures 2 and 3 document this pattern of election-driven cross-ethnic alignment. At the same time, we observe that these multi-ethnic alignments are institutionally shallow, short-lived, and fissiparous. This is also consistent with the integrative approach, which attributes a weaker commitment to intergroup bias.

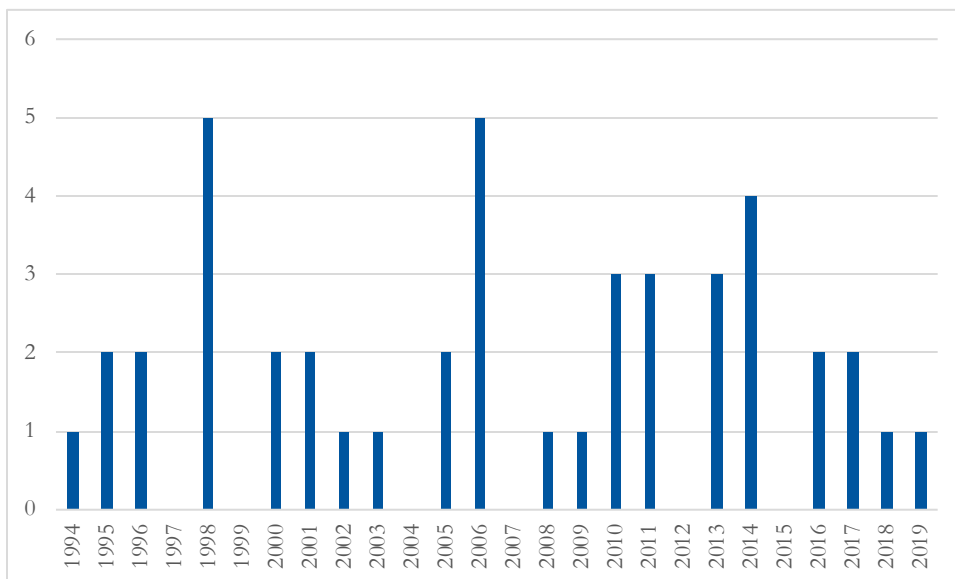
We also see that not all political actors responded instrumentally to form multi-ethnic alignments at the time of an election. Some remained as mono-ethnic alignments despite the institutional incentive around elections to cooperate across ethnic boundaries. This behavioural heterogeneity is also explicable by the integrative approach. The degree of intergroup bias varies across actors. For those actors who do not respond instrumentally, the ingroup bias may be so strong that it leads them either to conclude, mistakenly, that a mono-ethnic alignment will better achieve their aim of electoral success or else to overestimate the risk of betrayal posed by an alignment with non-co-ethnics. Ingroup bias affects the judgement made, including the decision to trust. It explains why we also observe a large number of mono-ethnic alignments that persist over time even as the institutional incentives change.

Figure 2: Multi-ethnic alignments over time



Source: author's construction.

Figure 3: Mono-ethnic alignments over time



Source: author's construction.

6.2 Small-N case analysis

The second piece of evidence, a case study of one of Rwanda's main opposition parties, the RDR, also highlights the inadequacy of instrumentalist and expressivist approaches to explain the observed alignment behaviour.¹ The RDR experienced its first re-alignment a year after it was created (April 1995), when the party fractured following the attack by the Rwandan Patriotic Army on the largest refugee camp in eastern Zaire, Kibeho, in which some 4,000–5,000 Hutu refugees

¹ The case narrative presented here is principally constructed from three written sources: Betts and Jones (2016); International Crisis Group (2002); Rafti (2004). It also draws on interviews with several Rwandan political elites in order to understand the reasons for re-alignments.

were killed. This initial split was due to an ideological disagreement. One faction, dominated by senior figures from the ex-FAR military, advocated armed struggle and aimed to return and recapture Rwanda and split away to form the Army for the Liberation of Rwanda (ALIR). The other faction, primarily civilian in composition, believed that return should be achieved through peaceful means and remained within the RDR fold. The ALIR would go on to mount an insurgency in the north-west of Rwanda between 1997 and 1998, in which it was ultimately defeated. Out of the ashes of the ALIR's defeat, a new alignment, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), was formed in September 2000. Its formation had one clear strategic purpose: legitimization. The FDLR wanted to distance itself from its roots and its association with the former Rwandan regime. While retaining a military leadership in Africa, it established a new civilian leadership in Europe composed of individuals not involved in the genocide who explicitly acknowledged that a genocide had occurred and who renounced armed return, calling instead for an all-inclusive inter-Rwandan dialogue.

The FDLR remained a mono-ethnic alignment. However, ahead of Rwanda's 2003 election, the first since the genocide, the FDLR leadership made another strategically expedient re-alignment. In March 2002, it entered an alliance with two other opposition groups to contest the election. They were strange bedfellows. Nation-Imbaga was an openly monarchist group, while the Rwandan Alliance for the Rebirth of the Nation (ARENA) comprised prominent Tutsi and Hutu who had defected from the RPF-dominated coalition in Rwanda. The multi-ethnic alliance, christened ADRN-Igihango (Alliance for Democracy and National Reconciliation; *Igihango* means 'pact sealed in blood'), offered strategic advantages to each of its three members: more legitimacy to the FDLR, still working to shake off its association with the former Hutu hardline regime; and credibility for the two smaller groups without military wings, keen to convince the RPF that they should be taken seriously. However, the alliance came at a cost. A faction of ARENA members, led by Alexandre Kimenyi, broke away in May 2002 to establish a new party, the Amahoro People's Congress in Canada, citing their distrust of the FDLR, which they still saw as linked to the genocide. The following year the alliance sought to expand further by re-aligning to incorporate two further groupings: the multi-ethnic ADR-Isangano (Rwandan Democratic Alliance), composed of several well known moderate Hutu politicians and a group of Tutsi soldiers whose commander had fallen out with the ruling RPF, and the Hutu-dominated Union of the Rwandan Democratic Forces (UFDR), the successor to the RDR faction committed to non-violent return. While the UFDR saw the strategic advantage of a broad-based coalition to contest the election, ADR-Isangano resisted. It favoured a single, fully merged party, as this would imply new leadership and dilute the influence of the larger and armed members. However, the other four groupings were unwilling to make such a strong commitment and preferred an institutionally shallower alliance. Ultimately, the expanded alliance, the Permanent Consultation of the Rwandan Democratic Opposition (CPODR), was short-lived. Unable to put forward a candidate to compete in the 2003 presidential election and incapable of holding together its highly disparate members, it dissolved a year later.

Shortly after the 2003 election, the FDLR split twice more. The first split, driven by strategic opportunity, occurred within the DRC-based military leadership in November 2003, when a faction, headed by Paul Rwarakabije, reached an agreement with the Tutsi-dominated ruling RPF to return to Rwanda and be reintegrated into the Rwandan Defence Forces. Rwarakabije himself received a position in the government, though not one of high trust, suggesting the RPF's limited commitment to him. The second scission, driven by inter-personal rivalry and distrust, occurred within its political leadership in Europe in May 2004, when the party split between support for its President, Dr Ignace Murwanashyaka, and support for Vice-President Dr Jean-Marie Vianney Higiroy. Higiroy would go on to establish the RUD-Urunana (Rally for Unity and Democracy), with a military wing RUD-Imboneza, while Murwanashyaka formed the FDLR-FOCA, with its military

wing FOCA (Abacunguzi Combatant Forces). Both groups continue to operate today but are significantly diminished as a result of the schisms.

Returning to the RDR's original ideological scission in 1996, when hardliners split away seeking an armed return to Rwanda, the remaining faction continued its journey towards a peaceful, negotiated return of the Hutu refugee community. In 1998 it re-aligned, accepting an invitation from a multi-ethnic party, the Resistance Forces for Democracy (FRD), to establish a new alliance: the aforementioned UFDR. From the RDR's perspective, the alignment served the strategic functions of reinforcing its commitment to a non-violent solution and distancing itself from the genocide. The FRD leadership comprised mainly moderate Hutu who had been invited after the genocide by the victorious RPF to serve in the transitional government before falling out and quitting. It included former Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu and former Minister of the Interior Seth Sendashonga, who had been a senior RPF figure. From the FRD's perspective, the new alignment gave it access to the mass base of Hutu refugees that the RDR represented. The UFDR proved a relatively durable alliance, lasting eight years until 2006, when it re-aligned again and merged with the multi-ethnic ADR-Isangano to form the FDU-Inkingi. This new alignment represented a strong institutional commitment, as it implied the dissolution of the RDR and the ADR-Isangano. The dissolution condition was imposed by the ADR-Isangano leadership, who wanted an unambiguous recognition of genocide and thought that the renunciation of the RDR name would provide reassurance to its own base. The FDU-Inkingi, an institutional merger, has proved to be the most durable alignment among Rwanda's post-genocide opposition groupings and continues today, 17 years after its formation.

Ahead of the 2017 presidential election, the FDU-Inkingi sought a new alignment and entered into a strategic alliance with four ideologically and ethnically diverse parties in 2016. Dubbing itself the P5, the common platform comprised: (i) the Rwandan National Congress (RNC), established by a group of senior Tutsi RPF members who had fallen out with president Kagame; (ii) the multiethnic PDP-Imanzi (Democratic Pact of the People), headed by former RPF member Deo Mushayidi; (iii) the Rwanda-based and Hutu-dominated PS-Imberakuri (Socialist Party), led by Hutu Bernard Ntaganda; (iv) the Canada-based and Tutsi survivor-dominated Amahoro-PC; and (v) the Hutu-dominated FDU-Inkingi (United Democratic Forces). The new alignment was the broadest opposition coalition successfully established since the genocide. Ultimately, however, it merely protested against the 2017 election—as it felt that this would be neither free nor fair and so put forward no presidential candidate—and its unity did not last long beyond the election. The constituent parties disagreed over the leadership of the alliance, with the two larger partners, the RNC and FDU-Inkingi, unwilling to allow the smaller members an equal say. Riven by interpersonal rivalry and power struggles, the P5 ceased its joint activities soon after the 2017 election, although it has still not formally dissolved.

In tracing the alignment evolution of the RDR, Rwanda's largest diasporic opposition grouping, I see that it was willing to create alignments both within and across ethnic boundaries. Consistent with the instrumentalist perspective, the RDR did enter multi-ethnic alignments in furtherance of a clear strategic goal. The ADRN-Igihango, CPODR, and P5 coalitions were all created immediately before an election. The goal, then, was to strengthen the grouping's position in order to increase the chances of a return to Rwanda for its supporters and a return to power for its leaders. Yet expressivist concerns drove other alignment decisions. ARENA, for example, fractured when a cross-ethnic alignment with the FDLR was proposed. The breakaway faction did not trust the FDLR, as its leadership included senior Hutu figures who had held positions in the Rwandan Armed Forces during the genocide.

At the same time, all three cross-ethnic alignments were institutionally shallow and short-lived. None lasted long beyond the immediate election period. In contrast, the UFDR, a mono-ethnic

alliance, lasted eight years and the FDU-Inkingi, a mono-ethnic merger, lasted 17 years and continues today. Consistent with the integrative approach, then, there was a strong ingroup bias in the decision-making of the RDR leadership. Ethnic trust and distrust were important factors in the alignment decisions made. Importantly, however, we also see that realignments were not driven solely by a concern for trust. Realignments both within and across ethnic boundaries also occurred for other reasons. In the RDR case, we see that, first, interpersonal rivalries and, second, ideological differences also drove its alignment choices. Power struggles within both the civilian and military leadership of the mono-ethnic FDLR deeply divided and ultimately weakened the party in the early 2000s. A similar situation arose in the multi-ethnic alignment, the P5, a decade later, when disagreement over who should lead the alliance led to its paralysis and dysfunction. Ideological differences were also a powerful driver of re-alignments. They lay at the heart of the RDR's initial scission in 1996. The questions of armed/negotiated return and (non-)recognition of the genocide divided the party. The latter issue turned on whether the label 'genocide' should be used to describe the violence targeting Hutu as well as the violence targeting Tutsi. In studying the alignment behaviour of political actors, therefore, we should be careful not to see ethnicity as the sole or even the dominant frame through which to interpret their choices and actions.

6.3 Interpretive analysis

The final body of evidence I advance to support the integrative approach draws on the interpretation of a set of in-depth elite interviews with the leaders of Rwanda's main political opposition parties. The interviews reveal these leaders to have been simultaneously concerned with both instrumentalist and expressivist issues. In choosing which parts of the interviews to present below, I decided to select those excerpts that exposed the interviewee's preoccupation with both interests and identities. One notable finding across the interviews is that individuals almost never admitted to being motivated by ethnicity themselves. Instead they suggested that their opponents were motivated by ethnicity. Their own behaviour reflected their belief in the ethnically driven behaviour of their opponents.

Theogene Rudasingwa, a Tutsi, had been a member of the RPF inner circle, holding positions of high trust including those of Secretary-General of the party and Ambassador to the United States until his falling out with president Kagame. He left Rwanda in 2005 and in 2010 co-founded one of Rwanda's main opposition parties in exile, the RNC, which brought together several moderate Hutu from within the former ruling MRND party and Tutsi dissenters from the current ruling RPF party. Theogene would become its Secretary-General. He then led a faction that split away from the RNC to form the new RNC. In answer to the question 'Why did you leave the RNC?', he explained why the cross-ethnic alignment did not last:²

In 2010, when we published the Rwandan briefing [a report critical of the Rwandan president and government], I was optimistic. It seemed possible to build a multi-ethnic coalition. But my optimism has since become less. The rift between our communities is deeper than I thought [...] One of the reasons why I broke with the RNC was because I was trying to manage two trends in the organization. The first issue was between the former RPF elements and Hutu MRND elements. It was an uneasy marriage. Each had different demands and objectives. But they agreed on the removal of Kagame. I had a problem with that. There was an outcry and they said I had sold out. I knew they wanted Kagame to go and suspected that that they wanted to restore Hutu majority power in their hearts. But under what

² Interview, 21 August 2017, by telephone.

kind of arrangements? The same arrangements as in 1959? Through Hutu power as in 1994? The second issue was with Nyamwasa's group. When it came to issues of accountability, talking about RPF crimes and especially the role of the DMI, I could see he [Nyamwasa] was uneasy about it.

Theogene first thought that there was a strategic opportunity to build a cross-ethnic opposition in exile. However, he came to distrust the Hutu elements in the coalition, whom he suspected of secretly planning to exclude Tutsi from power once back in government. He also says that there was distrust among his Tutsi co-ethnics, whom he suspected were not serious about accountability for war crimes committed by the RPF against Hutu civilians, a long-standing grievance within the Hutu refugee community.

Karoli Karere, a prominent Hutu political figure, had been a founding member and a president of the RDR before it merged into the FDU-Inkingi, at which point he became a senior Commissioner in the new grouping. He holds views some would deem hardline. For example, while he explicitly acknowledged that there had been a genocide of the Tutsi, he was also adamant that the RPF had committed reprisal violence that amounted to genocide against Hutu civilians in the DRC. When asked 'Can we move beyond ethnicity as a social and political force in Rwanda?', he commented:³

Yes, I am convinced. The P5 platform demonstrates this. We are together with Hutu and Tutsi. I am willing to accept all compromises to allow Rwandans to live together in peace. We say the Hutu-Tutsi problem is simply one created by those in power who politicize ethnicity.

Is ethnic extremism a problem for Rwanda today?

No, it is not. There was no genocide ideology. I never heard this and I was well placed to hear it. I had many Tutsi friends and there were many interethnic marriages; in 1994, the extremist thinking increased. But this exists even in Europe as racism. Racism increased from May 1994. But to say all Rwandans believed this ideology is an exaggeration. The RPF is using it as a weapon to silence critics. In my own trial, I challenged the RPF to show where in my speeches I had said something extremist.

What do you think of President Kagame?

We think Kagame is an extremist. He says that in the veins of Hutu runs the milk of genocide ideology. He stated this in *Jeune Afrique*.

Karoli implies that he is willing to cooperate across ethnic lines. He also subscribes to the view that ethnicity is instrumental, something exploited by politicians for their own objectives, and he is optimistic that a multi-ethnic future for Rwanda is possible. Hutu and Tutsi have peacefully co-existed in the past and can do so again. At the same time, he fears that his political enemy, Kagame, is motivated by ethnicity and accuses him of extremism. Once more the message is 'I am not ethnically motivated but my opponents are.'

Faustin Twagiramungu, a Hutu, is among the best-known of the pre-genocide moderate political leaders and was Prime Minister-designate under the 1993 Arusha Accord. After the genocide, he was invited by the RPF to serve in this capacity during the transitional government until the RPF's

³ Interview 11 September 2017, by telephone.

killing of Hutu civilians in the Kibeho refugee camp in 1996 led him to resign and to oppose the RPF from exile abroad. He first headed the Hutu-dominated FRD and then presided over the UFDR alliance, inviting the RDR and two minor monarchist parties to participate in it with the FRD. I asked him, ‘Can we move beyond ethnicity as a social and political force in Rwanda?’:⁴

Frankly I don’t care if a Tutsi or Hutu is president. I just want the freedom to choose. Kagame is a pseudo-monarchist. We cannot come back to this time when we [the Hutu] lived as slaves. I want someone who cares about the people [...] Tutsi believe in the Hamitic hypothesis. They believe they originated in Ethiopia. The White Fathers instilled this idea and so created racism. This myth is in the brain of all Tutsi. They have a superiority complex and believe they must lead. They have been taught they are cleverer. To unite Rwandans you must teach them they are the same. Kagame cannot do this. He is from the *Abega* clan, from which most of the Queen mothers come. He will lead Rwanda back into an old-fashioned monarchy and that will cause problems.

Twagiramungu claims that he is indifferent to the ethnicity of Rwanda’s president and believes in the possibility of ethnic co-existence. At the same time, he generalizes that all Tutsi hold ethnically chauvinist views and believes that his political opponent is an ethnic supremacist.

Frank Habineza, a Ugandan-born Tutsi, had been a journalist, an environmentalist, and an RPF member before resigning to found his own opposition party, the Democratic Green Party, in 2009 to contest the 2010 election. Although his bid for the presidency was unsuccessful, the party is as one of the very few independent opposition parties operating in Rwanda today that is openly critical of president Kagame. I asked, ‘What role does ethnicity play in Rwandan politics today?’:⁵

It has a role. We are careful not to use ethnic words because they might ignite the country. We know Rwandans still identify ethnically and believe one group should rule over another. And then there are the risks in the DRC. Some of the extremists are hiding there. Others in Brussels and London. It is the reason why the law bans identification along ethnic lines. We are all equal. People tend to use ethnicity to rule over others.

Habineza simultaneously believes that ethnicity is instrumentalized to secure power and that ordinary Rwandans—implicitly Tutsi—believe in ethnic supremacy. He believes that extremists exploit ethnicity but also that ethnicity has independent emotional salience for Rwandans, who are proud to identify ethnically.

Finally, Bernard Ntaganda, a Hutu (Tutsi mother, Hutu father), is president of the PS-Imberakuri (*imberakuri* means ‘ideal’) party in Rwanda, which evolved from the pre-genocide PSD and split in 2009 between a faction willing to work with the RPF and a faction, which Ntaganda leads, that continues to oppose the RPF. He sought to contest the 2010 presidential election but was arrested and denied the opportunity to register as a candidate. His freedom to operate politically has since been severely constrained. I interviewed Ntaganda twice, once in person inside Rwanda, and again via telephone.⁶

⁴ Interview 9 August 2017, by telephone.

⁵ Interview 17 August 2017, by telephone.

⁶ Interview 1, 7 March 2018, Kigali, Rwanda; interview 2, 1 June 2023, by telephone.

[Interview 1] *Does ethnicity still matter in Rwanda?* It is still a real social force. People know their ethnicity. When the MRND [a Hutu-dominated party] was in power, I was maltreated and felt Tutsi. Now it is the RPF [a Tutsi-dominated party] and I feel Hutu. The Tutsi hold all the positions of power and influence. Look at the civil service. At the Rwandan Revenue Authority, of the 800 staff, only 50 are Hutu. They [Tutsi] think Hutu have to be the *mugaragu* (slaves) of the Tutsi *shebujja* (masters).

[Interview 2] *Why was the P5 [a multi-ethnic alliance] created?* The idea was to put together a political force of both Hutu and Tutsi to see how we could arrive at political change in Rwanda through peaceful means. That was the objective. Victoire [head of the FDU] was in prison at the time. It started with the RNC, FDU, and Amahoro-PC parties. They asked me to write a letter asking to be a member. I refused. I told them there is no need to write a letter. Deo Mushayidi from the PDP-Imanzi did write a letter and became a member. But at a certain moment they decided to accept me with no conditions. They needed me more than I needed them because I was based in Rwanda. I could help them get members from within the country and this would make them more legitimate.

Bernard believes that ethnicity matters for Rwandans, that Tutsi are unfairly privileged, and that they hold ethnic supremacist beliefs. At the same time, he confirms that political leaders are willing to compromise to secure strategic objectives.

I have presented these particular excerpts from the interviews because each exposes both instrumentalist and expressivist thinking on the part of Rwanda's opposition leaders. Each leader believes in the possibility or desirability of interethnic coexistence. They aspire to transcend ethnicity. At the same time, each worries that their political opponents think and act ethnically. They fear that, unlike themselves, the ethnic outgroup is motivated by expressivist concerns and it is this worry that underlies their distrust.

7 Conclusion

I developed a new integrative theory of ethnicity, tested the logical predictions of instrumentalist and expressivist approaches against it, and found it better able to account for the alignment behaviour of political elites in an ethnically plural society. Existing instrumentalist and expressivist theories explain some, but not all, of the pattern of alignments observed. Expressivist theories explicitly recognize that multi-ethnic alignments often arise around elections and are often shallow alliances—vehicles created merely for electoral purposes (Horowitz 1985). However, they do not explain why only some alignments become multi-ethnic while others remain mono-ethnic. The coexistence of many multi-ethnic and many mono-ethnic alignments in Rwanda remains unexplained by expressivist theory. In fact, if the foundational assumptions of expressivist theories are followed to their logical outcome, we would expect to see very few multi-ethnic alignments, given the assumptions concerning the emotional and determinist nature of ethnicity.

Conversely, instrumentalist theories overpredict multi-ethnic alignments. If political actors behaved only instrumentally, they would form more multi-ethnic alignments and not only at election times. The fact that political elites prefer to align with their co-ethnics outside electoral periods logically points to the importance of ethnic identity to them. The persistence of many mono-ethnic alignments, even during election periods, further suggests the theoretical inadequacy of purely instrumentalist approaches.

The integrative approach I propose here offers a potentially stronger theoretical account of the observed political behaviour. It offers two theoretical advantages over instrumentalist and expressivist approaches. First, consistent with long-standing theory in social psychology, it recognizes that political actors are neither purely rational nor purely emotional in their behaviour. Elite choices are the product of both cognitive and affective processes. Emotional attachment to an ethnic ingroup biases otherwise rational decisions and judgements. This intergroup bias leads elite actors to misperceive risk, miscalculate probabilities, and wrongly evaluate situations. It also shapes their willingness to trust ingroup and outgroup members. Second, the integrative approach recognizes that cognitive and affective processes will vary in strength across actors. While some actors will identify strongly with their ethnic group and hold powerful ingroup biases, others will feel this identification less strongly. The integrative approach thus explicitly theorizes actor heterogeneity. Elites will vary in the strength of their intergroup biases. This heterogeneity explains why some elite actors continue to align mono-ethnically even when the institutional incentives to align across ethnic boundaries intensify.

The evidence presented offers three further theoretical insights into elite alignment behaviour. First, emotional attachments to ethnic identity appear to affect rational judgement with respect to alignment choices primarily through the mechanism of trust. Strong ingroup identification biases the decision to trust, and individual political actors are more willing to trust co-ethnics as alignment partners than non-co-ethnics. Second, this distrust underpins the political actor's belief that non-co-ethnics are more motivated by expressivist concerns for ethnicity than they are themselves. Ingroup members suspect outgroup members of being more ethnically biased than they are. The distrust is mutual and in turn impacts the strength of their commitment to any alignment they may enter together. Finally, ethnicity is only one factor driving political alignment behaviour in an ethnically plural society. Ideological difference and interpersonal rivalry are two other important drivers in the Rwandan context. While ideology may sometimes be correlated with ethnicity, the evidence indicates it is an analytically distinct factor. In Rwanda, non-co-ethnics were willing to enter an alignment together (the P5 alliance) and overcome an ideological difference regarding the formal recognition of violence committed not only against Tutsi but also against Hutu civilians.

These findings have a number of evident limitations. First, the data are descriptive in nature. They do not permit a causal claim to be made concerning the effect of ethnicity on political behaviour. It remains possible that a factor other than ethnicity explains the observed elite alignments. However, this is also true of the research designs on which instrumentalist and expressivist theories are built. Second, relatedly, I do not directly observe the cognitive and affective processes I believe to be at work. They are inferred using theory. The data are simply consistent with a theory that integrates rationality and emotion. Third, this theory is built on a particular case. The theoretically relevant scope conditions include the existence of deep ethnic divisions and a non-industrialized society. The generalizability of the integrative approach should therefore be confined to this context.

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