

Boone, Catherine

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Spatial inequality and the political economy of redistribution in African countries

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Spatial inequality and the political economy of redistribution in African countries

Catherine Boone*

August 2025

Abstract: Levels of interpersonal income inequality in African countries are much higher than they were long assumed to be. The literature on politics in sub-Saharan Africa says little about the redistributive pressures arising from this, other than to argue that class politics is rarely observed in African countries and that clientelism prevails, short-circuiting the political mobilization of economic grievance. This paper highlights the fact that spatial or regional inequality is also very high in African countries and argues that this form of inequality is crucial in shaping the politics of redistribution. As argued in the literature on the political economy of spatial inequality, high levels of spatial inequality across subnational regions can impede the redistributive dynamics that, in a Kuznetsian world, could be expected to mitigate the extreme levels of inequality that we see across much of the African continent. Electoral geography analysis provides evidence of regionalism in national politics.

Key words: Africa, inequality, regional inequality, redistribution, electoral geography

JEL classification: O18, O55, P25, R11

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Note: Some text and three figures from *Inequality and Political Cleavage in Africa: Regionalism by Design* by Catherine Boone (© Catherine Boone 2024) reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

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*London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK; corresponding author: C.Boone@lse.ac.uk

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Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

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1 Introduction

Although it is not clear that Kuznets' hypotheses about economic growth and inequality capture the development dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), it is clear that levels of interpersonal income inequality in both very poor and relatively wealthy African countries are much, much higher than they were long assumed to be. The literature on politics in SSA says little about the redistributive pressures arising from this, other than to argue that class politics is rarely observed in African countries and that clientelism prevails, short-circuiting the mobilization of grievance in the political arena. This paper points to a feature of inequality that does not feature in the original Kuznetsian model—spatial or regional inequality—and argues that *this* feature of inequality is *also* very high in African countries, and that it is crucial in shaping the political economy of redistribution in those countries.¹ Indeed, as argued in the general political science literature on the comparative political economy of spatial inequality (e.g. Beramendi 2012; Rogers 2016), high levels of spatial inequality across subnational regions often work to impede the sort of redistributive dynamics that, in a Kuznetsian world, could be expected to mitigate the extreme levels of inequality that we see across so much of the African continent.

This paper draws on my recently published *Inequality and Political Cleavage in Africa: Regionalism by Design* (Cambridge, April 2024). It uses Milanovic's (2014) Gini Index measures for African countries in 2012 and Lessmann and Seidel's (2015, 2017) proxy measure for spatial inequality (across provincial units) to set the stage. Nighttime luminosity and DHS survey data offer measures of subnational, regional inequalities across 12 African countries. Constituency-level electoral data for 1990s to 2010s for these same countries shows how regional inequalities are linked to the spatial distribution of political party support and party strategies for securing power at the national level. This paper, prepared for UNU-WIDER's 'Kuznets at 70 Symposium,' draws out the implications of the argument for redistributive politics in African countries.²

Section 2 summarizes the main lines of CPE argument about how *spatial* inequalities impact and shape the politics of redistribution. Section 3 presents some descriptive statistics that capture the extent of both spatial and interpersonal income inequality in African countries, and argues that in these settings, strongly territorial institutions of governance and political representation work to bring the politics of regional inequality to the fore. Section 4 uses electoral data and electoral geography methods to underscore the extent to which voting pattern are indeed regionalized in many African countries. Section 5 draws out the consequences of regionalism for the politics of distribution and redistribution in African countries. The conclusion summarizes and draws some larger comparisons.

¹ Williamson (1965) did adopt this idea of the inverted-U shaped curve for the case of spatial inequality. Lessmann (2013; 2014: 35–51) makes this point and examines the issue using data from countries at different levels of economic development. This is an issue of long-standing interest for researchers at UNU-WIDER. See for example Kanbur and Venables (2003).

² 'New Insights on Inequality and Economic Transformation: Revisiting the Kuznets Curve at 70,' United Nations University, World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), 12–13 September 2024. Helsinki, Finland.

2 CPE: Redistribution in Territorially Divided States

High regional inequality arises from uneven development and is a feature of many national economies that are based on natural resource exploitation, especially in the late-developing world. Scholars have long associated high spatial inequalities with adverse economic and political outcomes. Lessmann (2014: 46) writes that 'spatial inequalities might be harmful for the development process itself. Recent studies on internal conflicts show that spatial inequalities increase the risk of civil wars thereby harming development.'³ Such arguments are well-known to political scientists and conflict scholars working in African studies. Less well known to scholars in development studies are arguments from Comparative Political Economy about how high levels of spatial inequality shape the politics of redistribution.

A broad swathe of CPE literature argues that high spatial inequality can also dampen the prospects for redistributive policies. I will argue here that this holds in Africa. Beramendi and Rogers (2022) have argued that strong inequalities across subnational regions, combined with strongly territorial political institutions, brings territorial politics to the fore.

Class politics and territorial politics are associated with very different forms of political competition and bargaining. Class politics revolves around social contracting to divide economic surpluses generated by growth (or the costs of decline), predominantly between two non-spatial but intrinsically interdependent parties: owners of capital and owners of labour power. Territorial politics by contrast focuses on relative advantage and disadvantage across geographic segments of the national polity. It is driven by concern not only with securing state spending 'here' rather than 'there' as scholars of the electoral logics of distributive politics at the micro level have argued, but also with the evolution of relations between leading and lagging regions, (fears of) adverse incorporation into national political economy by lagging regions or those on the sidelines of power, and caution vis-à-vis growth strategies that may channel advantages to already dominant regions. Rather than a politics around division of an economic surplus generated within firms, sectors, or the national economy, as is the case in class politics, territorial politics revolves around winners and losers created by spatial expansion and/or segmentation of markets, spatially targeted policy, the commodification and decommodification of access to immobile natural resources, and the spatial limits, autonomy, and powers of the local state vis-à-vis the centre.

A large literature in comparative political economy tracks the interactive and compounding negative effects of spatial (regional) inequalities and strongly territorial institutions on redistribution, both interpersonal and interregional. Political mechanisms that work to produce lower levels of redistribution are found at the levels of institutional design, policy choice, and political mobilization.

Where spatial inequalities are strong, regions' rival preferences over the design of state fiscal institutions will be a drag on the possibility of fiscal centralization. Territorial inequality itself shapes the evolution of fiscal structures (Beramendi 2012; Bolton and Roland 1997). In countries with

³ See also Frances Stewart (2000) on horizontal inequalities and Ostby, Nordas and Rud (2009). See Gradín, Leibbrandt, and Tarp (2021).

pronounced territorial inequalities, we are therefore likely to see weaker central governments with lower fiscal capacity and thus, *lower capacity* to adopt redistributive social policies (welfare state policies), policies aimed at territorial redistribution, active labour market policies, and the like (Keating 2009: 506; Beramendi 2012; Kyriacou and Roca-Sagales 2014: 185–87; Bakke 2015). The structure of the political system itself will be less conducive to redistribution to correct spatial inequalities.

When it comes to policy choice, as Rogers (2016) and Kyriacou and Roca-Sagales (2014) argue, high regional disparities will fuel redistributive concerns that tilt the balance of politics away from considerations of central government efficiency, public sector reform, and the provision of productive public goods. As Kyriacou and Roca-Sagales (2014) put it, politicized redistributive conflict will tend to 'spill over' in ways that reduce the quality of government.⁴ Politicians, for their part, are incentivized to mobilize voters around redistributive concerns. Beramendi (2012) makes a complementary argument, emphasizing that wealthier regions will act as veto players, throwing their weight against both interregional redistribution and against broader programmatic policies that are likely to favour poorer regions at the expense of richer ones.

The *character of political competition* within countries is itself shaped by both high regional inequalities and politics that aim at inter-regional redistribution. 'Regional redistribution regimes' (RRRs) have indeed been a characteristic of many governments' policies, both past and present. Ndulu and O'Connell (2008) identify RRRs as one of four 'anti-growth policy syndromes' typical of development policies in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s-1980s. Azam (2001, 2008) lays out the logic that connects RRR in African countries to state-building (or state holding-together) attempts in the face of strong regional tensions and/or secessionist threats. Other scholars see regional redistribution policies as helping to consolidate regions as distinct political actors, fuelling regionalism itself and compounding the challenges of inter-regional inequality (Ndulu and O'Connell 2008; Keating 2009). Beramendi (2012: 5-6) writes that subnational territorial divisions 'crystallize multidimensionality [in the national political system], thereby priming second dimensions (such as identity, territory, or race) and limiting the feasibility of large [national] redistribution coalitions.'

Regional inequalities in the presence of strong territorial institutions thus create impediments to both state-building and nation-building (Dincecco 2018). Impediments to redistribution, both interpersonal and interregional, are symptomatic of this and contribute to their perpetuation.

In *Politics of Place*, Melissa Rogers (2016) focuses on how territorial institutions shape politics and policy in 'territorially divided states.' In her analysis, strongly territorial institutions in interaction with underlying spatial inequalities work to channel regional interests into the national system, magnify territorial heterogeneity of interests, and narrow the space for (or displace) truly national policy coalitions, including coalitions for programmatic or universalistic redistributive policies. Territorial segmentation tends to produce a heterogeneous or fragmented policy space in which interregional distribution is a pivot of national politics; regional policies and indeed pork-barrelism feature strongly; and, when the president is elected from a single national constituency and levels of party and levels of party nationalization are low, countries experience more extreme deviations in policy when there is

⁴ The Kyriacou and Roca-Sagales study (2014) is based on analysis of government quality in 22 OECD countries, 1995-2005.

electoral turn-over.⁵ The analysis here shows that these effects are clearly visible in the politics of many African countries, as theories of politics in territorially divided countries would predict.

3 Inequality in African countries

Two arguments are advanced here. Section 3.1 presents some descriptive statistics that capture the African countries' inequality profiles (in terms of interpersonal income inequality and regional inequality). The data underscore the fact that both types of inequality are very high. Leveraging CPE theories of how institutional structure shapes the character of national politics, I argue that strongly territorial institutions in African countries (inherited from colonial state-building) bring spatial inequalities and territorial politics to the fore in national politics. Section 3.2 presents descriptive statistics that highlight the *persistence* of particular spatial-regional hierarchies in many African countries. Regions that were leading in terms of economic development in the mid-late colonial period tend to be strongly advantaged today. Today's lagging regions were laggards in the late colonial period, more than 75 years ago.

3.1 Spatial (regional) inequality is high

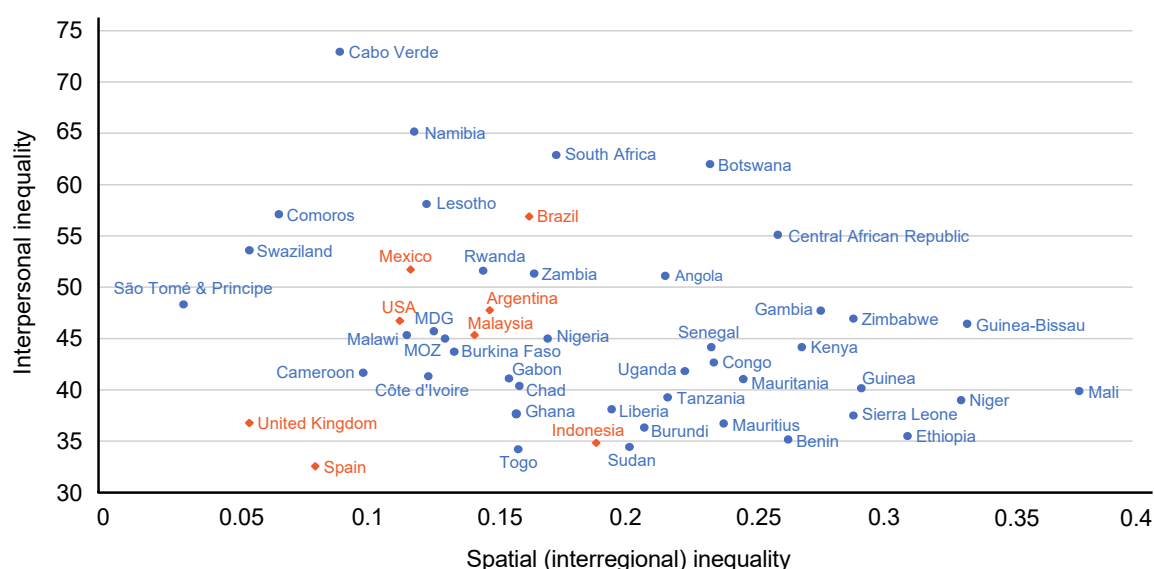
Shortly after the turn of the 21st century, scholars began to take note of the dramatic extent of both interpersonal income inequality and regional economic disparities in most African countries.⁶ Not only are some of the world's highest levels of interpersonal income inequality found in sub-Saharan African countries, but levels of spatial inequality among regions (provinces) in most African countries are *also* extremely high. Economic disparities across subnational regions in most African countries are higher than they are in textbook cases of high spatial inequality featured in the CPE literature—including Spain, the USA, Mexico, and Argentina.

These strong inequality patterns are captured in the scatterplot at Figure 1, adapted from Rogers (2016). High inequality countries from around the world—including Indonesia, Argentina, Malaysia, the UK, Mexico, and Spain—are featured in orange, for comparison. (See Appendix Figure A1 for the same figure using population-weighted data.)

⁵ On the effect of how the president is elected (and presidentialism) on targeted regional spending, see Rogers (2016: 158–9).

⁶ IMF 2022. Their analysis based on subnational budgets for only 8 SSA countries. This source and several others (Lessmann and Seidel 2015; Koukou 2022; Mvyenge 2015) offer some straightforward descriptive claims, although these are sensitive to time period, measurement, and which countries are included. The IMF 2022 report lists conflict and weak institutions as causes of spatial inequality, but many works in Political Science would consider these to be spatial inequality's effects. To mitigate spatial inequality within countries, the IMF 2022 report recommends trade openness, agglomeration, and strong institutions, but many economists would consider the first two factors as drivers, rather than mitigators, of spatial inequality.

Figure 1: Interpersonal and spatial inequality in African countries, 2012 (with comparison to some other high inequality countries)



Note: The Y axis is the coefficient of variation in adjusted nighttime luminosity across provinces (Admin1 regions), unweighted for population, in 2012 (Lessmann and Seidel 2015, 2017). The X axis is Gini of interpersonal income inequality (Milanovic 2014).

Source: Boone (2024: Figure 1.1, p. 5), © Catherine Boone 2024, reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear. See Appendix Figure A1 for the population weighted data (from Boone 2024: 243). See also Boone and Simson (2019).

The vertical axis captures interpersonal income inequality. Measured by national Gini coefficients (as shown), Africa's levels of income inequality are among the highest in the world, even exceeding Latin America's stratospheric levels by some measures.⁷ By the Gini index of household consumption expenditure for 2008, Africa was the world's most unequal macro-region, with a Gini of 67 compared to 50 for Latin America and the Caribbean.⁸ These high levels of interpersonal inequality are a long-standing feature of economic structure in African countries, traceable back to the 1950s (Bigsten 2018: 2 [in online version of article]).

The income Gini captures the familiar picture of African societies as polarized between small, wealthy elites in urban, formal sector employment (i.e., positions in the higher echelons of the state, and in top private and multinational firms) on the one hand, and large majorities trapped in low-productivity rural livelihoods (agriculture, pastoralism, etc.) and the informal sector. As Van de Walle explained (2009), the smallness and weakness of the middle class is a corollary of this bifurcation. National-level policy factors, including regressive taxation structure and very low levels of income redistribution, contribute to high levels of interpersonal inequality, but the main drivers lie on the production side. There is

⁷ World Bank Povcalnet consumption data show seven of the world's ten most unequal countries are in Africa, with the regional average country consumption Gini of 0.43 the highest regional average in the world (Beegle et al. 2016: 127).

⁸ Jirasevetakul and Langer (2016: 9). This figure includes North Africa. Shimeles and Nagassaga examine asset-inequality data for forty-four African countries over two decades and report that average asset-based Ginis are in the 40–45 percent range, which 'could easily imply that the top 1% owned 35–40% of household assets and amenities in Africa' (2017:17). See Jerven (2013) on data quality problems.

strong variation across African countries: those with higher levels of economic development tend to score higher on the Gini index.⁹ This is consistent with Kuznets' prediction that development itself would increase interpersonal income inequality.

The horizontal axis in Figure 1 measures spatial inequality. The figure captures variation in levels of economic development across provinces, proxied by nighttime luminosity, a commonly used if coarse measure of subnational GDP. By this measure, levels of spatial inequality, or inequality across provinces, in sub-Saharan Africa countries also rank among the highest in the world.¹⁰ Most African countries rank higher on this measure than country exemplars of 'very high spatial inequality' featured in the CPE literature, including the UK, Spain, Indonesia, Argentina, and Mexico. Indeed, in a global sample of countries measuring spatial inequality, almost all African countries stand out with extreme scores on the spatial inequality dimension (along with a number of non-African countries, including Syria and Pakistan).

In African countries, national capitals do have stark advantages over the provinces in terms of levels of economic development, as the urban bias literature underscores. Yet these data and many alternative measures of spatial inequality show that *there are also sharp differences across predominantly rural regions*. In Tanzania in 2016, for example, average consumption per adult in Manyara region, the richest of the provinces, is almost three times that of Ruvuma and Kigoma regions.¹¹ Similarly, in Ghana, living standards in the central cocoa-producing regions are twice what they are in the poorest rural regions of the northern savanna, where livelihoods are centred on pastoralism and subsistence agriculture. In Kenya, early childhood mortality rates are almost *four times* higher in the western county of Homa Bay, lying on the lowland shores of Lake Victoria, than they are in Nyeri County in the agriculturally rich central highlands.¹² As Sahn and Stifel argued, in most countries, indicators of poverty 'differ markedly *between rural regions* of almost every country' (2000: 593). Changes over time in rural well-being—net improvements and declines—also 'differ dramatically across rural areas' and are often highly regionalized (Sahn and Stifel 2003: 593). When countries are growing, some rural regions benefit, while others fall behind.

The existence of two forms of extreme socioeconomic inequality—interpersonal income inequality *and* spatial inequality across regions—complicates the inequality puzzle in African countries. Melissa

⁹ This relationship holds even when Africa's ten most unequal countries are removed from the sample (Shimele and Nagassaga 2017: 12 *inter alia*).

¹⁰ Lessmann and Seidel (2017) report average coefficients of variation in predicted GDP per capita at the Admin1 level (based on adjusted nighttime luminosity data) for 1992–2012. In a study based on national accounts data from all world regions, Gennaioli et al. (2014) found that the ratio of GDP per capita across Admin1 regions in 2010, excluding the region of the capital city, differed by a factor of almost 3 for Kenya, Mozambique, and Benin, and by a factor of 2.0 for Tanzania. For the UK, it was 1.3 (1.8 with the capital city included). For similar conclusions about inequality for eleven African countries from an IMF team using individual-level consumption and birthplace data, see Brunori et al. 2016.

¹¹ See Boone and Simson 2019: Appendix 1, Table E. Calculated from DHS consumption data.

¹² 'Children born in Homa Bay county were 5 times as likely to die before age 5 as children born in Nyeri county in 1965 and reduced to 3.8 times by 2013. The Western part of the country was the worst place to be born [in 1965] and remained the most disadvantaged through to 2013' (Macharia et al. 2019).

Rogers argued that ‘these indicators represent distinct potential distributional conflicts within a nation’ (2016: 27).

In Rogers’ global sample of countries, interpersonal and spatial (interregional) inequality are weakly correlated. She found this to be the case for sub-Saharan Africa, as well. Some countries are indeed marked by levels of interpersonal *income* inequality that are far more extreme (by both world and African standards) than their levels of *spatial* inequality.¹³ South Africa is the clearest example. Others exhibit the reverse combination, where *spatial* inequality appears far more extreme than *income* inequality. Mali and Ethiopia are exemplars of this pattern. Yet for most African countries, *both* income and spatial inequality are very high by world standards. The presence of both high income and high spatial inequality means that there are stark *potential* lines of socioeconomic cleavage and distributional conflict in most African countries. Will structural economic inequalities find expression in politics, and if so, which ones, and how?

CPE scholars argue that *institutional structure* is critical in shaping inequality’s political effects. A substantial line of theory predicts that, where strong regional inequalities are overlaid by strongly territorial institutions, ‘distributional conflict will exist primarily among territorial groups’ (Rogers 2016: 2). Strongly territorial political institutions will work to *accentuate* the political salience of spatial inequality and to channel the politics of inequality into ‘a distribution game ... across and within geographic districts’ (Rogers 2016: 2; see also Rodden 2019; Beramendi 2012).

In this study, I deploy this insight to identify and unlock the puzzle of inequality politics in African countries. In most African countries, spatial inequality is high, *and* structures of political representation, government administration, and resource allocation are *strongly territorial*. As CPE theory would predict, in most African countries, national competition can be described as ‘territorial politics in regionally divided countries.’

3.2 Patterns of regional inequality are persistent: Stable regional hierarchies

The old economic geography assumed that, over time, regional growth rates and income levels would converge as capital chased lower labour costs, and as migrants moved to regions that offered the best wages for their skill-mix. The old school believed that regional economic disparities would erode over time. The New Economic Geography undercut this logic, demonstrating convincingly that economies of scale in production—theorized as a type of market imperfection—generated increasing returns for already dynamic regions. (Krugman 1991, 1998). Density and agglomeration themselves have a positive effect on economic activity. Empirically, the New Economic Geography has won out, as regional convergence ended in most OECD countries around the 1970s, giving way to decades of growing regional inequality within the EU countries and the USA that would contribute to the political

¹³ Using the unweighted CoV across Admin1 regions, we also observed a strong and highly significant negative correlation between the two inequality measures (Boone and Simson 2019). The correlation coefficient is -.40 at the .01 level). Countries with higher interpersonal inequality (generally the more economically developed countries, such as South Africa and Namibia) register lower spatial inequality. In general, the poorer countries are marked by higher levels of spatial inequality (i.e., of dispersion in the nightlight-based proxy measure for regional GDP per capita).

and social strains of the 2000s. ‘The great divergence’ in regional growth patterns within the developed countries emerged as a new, politically urgent object of study in political economy and regional economics.

In Africa, too, the convergence process that 1950s’ and 1960s’ economists expected to see has failed to materialize. There is far less convergence not only between African countries and the West, but also across regions within African countries than was predicted in the heyday of mainstream development theory in the 1960s and 1970s. With a few notable exceptions, the relative rankings of regions within national economies in Africa over the last several decades (measured by regional GDP or standards of living) have proved to be remarkably stable. (See data summarized in Appendix Table A1). Analysts often describe uneven spatial distributions of income that were established in the first half of the twentieth century as *entrenched* (Moyo 2014: 11).¹⁴ This reflects inter alia the limited structural transformation of African countries over the last several decades (limited industrialization in particular, and the persistence of large and growing rural populations). But even in other settings, agglomeration theory suggests that markets tend to concentrate growth in already leading regions, making the catch-up of lagging regions a very uncertain proposition (Scott and Storper 2003). Regional economic convergence was unlikely to happen automatically, or evenly in time and space. Poverty traps are real.

4 Regionalism in national politics

In the African context, the spatial-territorial dimension of politics focuses on distributional tensions among regions. The retail-level clientelism of clinics and boreholes that is the staple of political science analysis of African politics may be an instantiation of this at the neighbourhood or micro level. Yet when analysis scales up to the national level, regional coalitions are primary contenders, especially those regions that are most deeply integrated into the national economy, and when larger, more programmatic issues and tensions are at stake in the formulation of national policy.

Four of the main findings of analysis of regional bloc voting and its overlay with regional economic hierarchy are summarized in the sub-sections below, under headings 4.1–4.4.

4.1 Evidence of regionalism in electoral data. Partisan competition is largely along regional lines

The argument that politics in many African countries can be understood as driven by distributional tensions that cleave the national *body politic* along regional lines was a leitmotif in African studies from the 1960s. In *Inequality and Political Cleavage in Africa* (Boone 2024a), I show that that such strains have persisted over many decades and are strongly visible today in patterns of coalition and

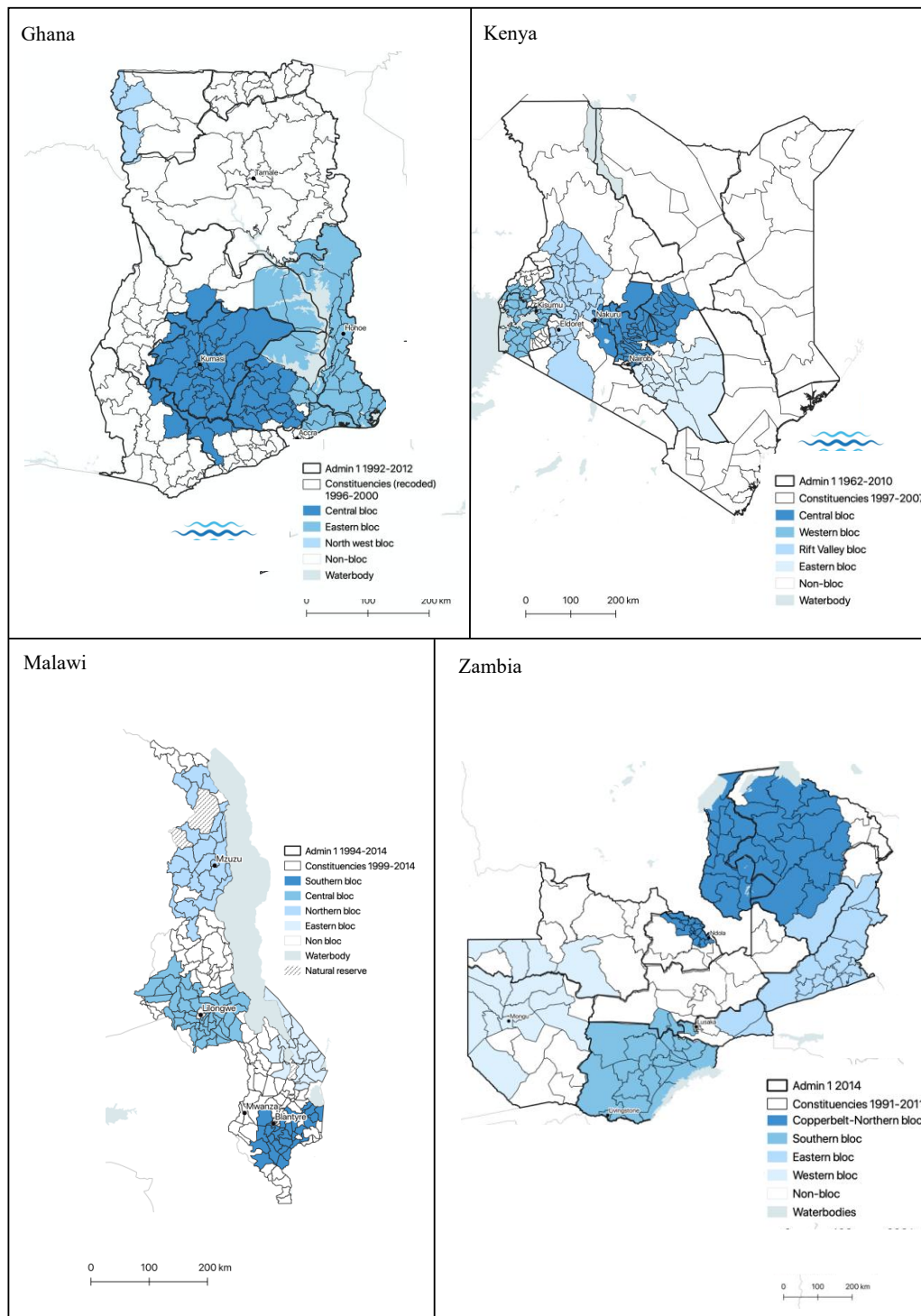
¹⁴ Persistence in regional economic profiles and in growth disparities between lagging and leading regions is a phenomenon that is not specific to Africa. In the OECD, as Rickard argues, ‘patterns of economic geography remain relatively stable over the medium run’ (2018: 31). Within the EU, cohesion policies aimed at supporting growth in lagging regions have not reversed pre-existing regional inequalities or mitigated them to the extent that proponents had hoped and expected (see Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Storper 2019; McCann 2020).

cleavage in electoral politics at the national level, as well as in cleavages around political issues that tap into regional tensions and divides.

The core of the empirical analysis in *Inequality and Political Cleavage in Africa* (Boone 2024a) shows that regional interests and tensions are manifest in *regional bloc voting* in the contemporary era of multiparty politics (1990s–2010s). In a book chapter co-authored with economist Juliette Crespin-Boucaud, and drawing on earlier work with other collaborators in economic and electoral geography (Boone, Wahman, Kyburz, and Linke 2022), we present an electoral-geography analysis of constituency-level voting in presidential elections in twelve countries over the course of 1990–2015 (44 elections).¹⁵ Regional bloc voting is visible in all twelve. Across the twelve countries, we identify a total of thirty-six distinct, regional-level electoral blocs that persist over the 5-7 presidential elections that have taken place since the early 1990s. Figure 2 summarizes the electoral geography results in map form for four of the 12 countries in our book length study.

¹⁵ In some countries, the unit of analysis is the district, Admin3, or similar, rather than the electoral constituency. See Appendix B. Bense (1984: 7) argued that roll call voting within the legislature is the best way to track regional interests in national politics, but that electoral returns were a second best.

Figure 2: Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia: persistent electoral blocs



Note: Electoral blocs defined on the basis of the Local Moran's I (constituency-level electoral data). Information on the constituency boundary shapefiles can be found in Boone (2024, Appendix B).

Source: Boone and Crespin-Boucaud (2024: Figure 4.1, p. 101), © Catherine Boone 2024, reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear. Maps created using QGIS 3.34. Shapefiles and electoral data available at Boone (2024b). See Boone and Crespin-Boucaud (2024) for data and method.

4.2 Persistent electoral blocs emerge in the economically leading regions

Leveraging a variety of data sources, we describe the economic attributes of the persistent electoral blocs and how they differ from parts of each country in which such persistent clustering of regional bloc voting does *not* occur. These data consist of forty rounds of DHS surveys for geocoded data on education and ethnicity, nighttime luminosity data, historical maps of producer regions, and raster data describing population densities and contemporary crop production profiles.

We find that most of the persistent electoral blocs arise in rural regions that are wealthier, better educated, more densely populated, and more deeply incorporated into the national economy than other rural areas. Most of the persistent blocs are specialized in high-value export crops (or traded food crops). Some have non-agricultural production profiles as labour-exporting or mining regions. Most coalesce within provincial-level or Admin1 regions that were defined in the colonial era, the boundaries of which have mostly been reproduced intact since then (sometimes with subdivisions). Rural regions in which persistent electoral blocs do not form (which we call the ‘non-bloc’ regions), by contrast, tend to be characterized by lower levels of economic development, lower educational levels, lower population densities, and the lack of sectoral economic specialization. The evidence is consistent with the argument that state institutions work to channel politics arising from uneven economic development into the national political arena.

4.3 The economic rankings of regions tend to be stable over time

Appendix Table A1 captures not only regional bloc economic hierarchy in a static sense (as in the scatterplots), but also how most electoral blocs retain that lead over time.¹⁶ Hierarchy among the blocs in terms of the GDP proxy is remarkably stable over the course of the 1992–2013 period. In most of the twelve countries (9/12), the electoral blocs that are ranked first in luminosity in 1992 retained this lead in 2013.¹⁷ Six of these blocs, including Tanzania’s Northern opposition bloc, had an *even greater lead* by 2013.¹⁸

Although this cannot be demonstrated using this data, it is clear that these rankings would hold constant in most countries for relative levels of economic prosperity and education going back to the 1950s and 1960s. Regions that were advantaged by the GDP proxy and education in the 2000s were among the economically leading regions in their respective countries in the 1950s, before the end of

¹⁶ This appeared in Boone and Crespin-Boucaud (2024: Appendix C, p. 267).

¹⁷ In Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, the second-ranked bloc in 1992 overtakes the first one by 2013. In the case of Nigeria, our correction of flares might have affected the rankings.

¹⁸ We used absolute luminosity values. Here, we do not try to assess whether this greater lead in absolute terms corresponds to an advantage of the same magnitude in living conditions. When we consider growth rates of nighttime luminosity, most blocs grew faster than the bloc that was ranked first in luminosity in 1992, as luminosity levels were very low in these blocs in 1992 (for these blocs, more than doubling of 1992 levels is commonplace).

direct colonial rule. Agglomeration, path dependency, and lock-in effects have tended to reproduce the advantages of the leading regions, at one extreme, and ‘poverty traps’ at the other. In the postcolonial era, the effects of these economic fundamentals have not been overpowered easily, even after state capture by incumbents whose main political stronghold lies in lagging regions. Opposition zones in Uganda, Tanzania, and Cameroon remain economically advantaged in 1990–2013, even though they have been out of power continuously since the mid-1960s.

4.4 Economically dominant blocs are usually power holders at the national level

The economically leading electoral blocs are indeed the dominant *political* players in most of the countries considered in this study.¹⁹ They have been incumbent strongholds (regional bases of incumbents) in most of the 12 countries considered here for much of the postcolonial period.²⁰ Tanzania and Uganda, where ‘poor regions’ have provided the regional bases for incumbent regimes since the 1960s and 1980s, respectively, are the clearest exceptions.

4.5 Regional clustering is often ‘coded’ as ethnic, but these regions are multiethnic

Cross-nationally, the observed regional bloc voting bears no systematic relation to the geographic distribution of ethnic identities. Blocs emerge in countries wherein ethnicity has low political salience (Mali, Tanzania), as well as in high ethnic salience countries like Kenya. Almost all persistent electoral blocs are multiethnic, even in Kenya where politics is highly ethnicized. Many of the blocs are non-ethnic, and/or explicitly regional (e.g. Northern Nigeria). Conversely, the non-bloc areas of all countries are home to multi-constituency ethnic groups that do not present as persistent electoral blocs.

5 Regionalism and Redistribution in African countries

For countries with high inequality, a technocratic remedy is income distribution on the basis of universalistic, need-based criteria. In the real world, however, the relationship between inequality and the rough-and-tumble of redistributive politics is highly conditional on the nature of inequality and its distribution across territory. This is especially true in political systems with elections based on territorial representation, where the combination of high levels of spatial (interregional) inequality and

¹⁹ As measured by nighttime luminosity, compared to the non-bloc regions.

²⁰ This generalization holds for 8 or 10 of the 12 countries, depending on whether we consider the entire postcolonial period or post-1990 only, and how we regard the case of Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, the Northern electoral bloc, which does not include constituencies in the capital city of Harare, has not held an economic advantage (as measured by our GDP proxy, which is nighttime luminosity) over the non-bloc region since 1994.

strongly territorial institutions predicts low levels of interpersonal redistribution (Beramendi 2012). This goes hand-in-hand with high salience on the national agenda of demands of interregional redistribution (Rogers 2016).²¹ We see both effects in redistribution politics in African countries.²²

The emblematic case of programmatic policy deficit in African countries is found in anemic demand for policies that redistribute wealth from rich to poor. This is a puzzling outcome when we consider that these are some of the world's most unequal countries. Nita Rudra (2015: 465) pointed to the same paradox for the developing world as a whole. In democracies with mass franchise, demands for programmatic social policy should surely be high. In African countries, the paradox of lower-than-expected demand for redistributive social policy is often explained as a product of ethnic politics, which saps the drive for all forms of programmatic policy. There is, however, little in the comparative political economy literature or in worldwide data on social spending that would lead one to expect most African countries to invest strongly in programmatic redistributive social policy.

Worldwide, low levels of GDP per capita and high levels of regional inequality are strongly correlated with lower levels of redistributive spending. Both levels and types of social safety-net spending in African countries conform to this worldwide pattern.²³ The World Bank's *Atlas of Social Protection Indicators of Resilience and Equity* (ASPIRE 2015) compares African countries to other low and middle-income countries in terms of social-spending effort. ASPIRE data show that in African countries, social policy's contribution to Gini index inequality reduction is indeed very low: it averages only about .07 percent for sub-Saharan Africa (minus South Africa), compared to about 1.9 percent for Latin America.²⁴ The worldwide average is about 1.8 percent. The negative correlation of *spatial inequality* with redistributive social spending worldwide also holds in African countries, on average. Sub-Saharan Africa's high levels of spatial inequality (Figure 1) predict relatively low levels of Gini index reduction through social-policy spending, low universalism in social policy, and pork-barrel type targeting, and this is indeed what we see.²⁵ Even within the OECD, high spatial inequality predicts lower levels of redistributive spending aimed at mitigating interpersonal inequality.²⁶

²¹ In an empirical study of 22 OECD countries (1996–2005), Kyriacou and Roca-Sagales (2014) argue that in countries marked by high disparities in the regional distribution of wealth (and where the public sector accounts for a large share of employment), voters and regional politicians in poor regions (i.e., regions wherein average per capita income is below the national mean) are incentivized to focus their political efforts on demands for interregional redistribution.

²² This is also consistent with the fact that redistributive social policies are better developed in countries with higher GDP per capita. Since levels of spatial inequality across regions are inversely correlated with levels of overall economic development at the country level, this finding is not unexpected.

²³ ILO data from 2011 show that 5–10 percent of national populations in East and West Africa are covered by social policy in the form of pensions or insurance. Coverage has long been higher in southern Africa (Hujo 2013).

²⁴ World Bank, ASPIRE, 2015. South Africa and Botswana are strong outliers in the sub-Saharan Africa sample, with comparable scores of 8.7 and 3.9 percent, respectively.

²⁵ For the theoretical argument, see Rogers (2016). For African countries, analysis of the composition of social transfers is also suggestive of low programmatic redistributive commitment. Unconditional cash transfers, the gold standard for tax-and-transfer policy in countries of the Global South since the mid-2000s, make up a low share of all social safety-net spending in most African countries (World Bank 2015). Targeted and conditional social safety-net spending accounts for the lion's share, as has long been the case for social-policy spending in African countries.

²⁶ See Beramendi (2012) and Rogers (2016).

World Bank ASPIRE data also allow for country-level comparisons. For GNP per capita, the countries at the very high end of the distribution—South Africa, Swaziland, Botswana—score high on social-policy effort and outcomes, as predicted. But for the rest of Africa, variation GDP per capita does not offer much leverage on predicting cross-country variation in ‘redistribution effort.’²⁷ The same is true for spatial inequality: countries with lower spatial inequality score just about the same on the Gini index reduction measure as those with higher spatial inequality. Yet when sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is placed in worldwide context, the expected relationship holds.

In most African countries, by contrast, levels of redistributive effort are extremely low, compared to both South Africa and to other low- and lower-middle income countries (Haggard and Kaufman 2009). Hickey et al. (2019) argued that actual levels of redistributive spending in African countries are even lower than what structural economic indicators (i.e., GNP per capita) would predict. To explain this, Hickey et al. point to social-structural features of African countries, elite attitudes, and the existence of other forms of social support. Low levels of redistributive effort are also predicted by most African countries’ high levels of spatial inequality, and strongly territorial systems of political representation. These features of African countries’ policy-making contexts are similar to those that produce lower-than-expected levels of redistributive social spending in other parts of the world (e.g., USA, Spain). Regional inequality dampens the appetite for regional redistribution between rich and poor when this is expected to come at the expense of economically leading regions (through taxation, mostly).

5.1 Regional redistribution regimes

Territorial politics in African countries produces a different kind of bargaining around social inequality - regional bargaining. Since the end of the colonial period, high spatial inequality has found expression in national debates and conflicts around *regional* distribution, as well as in distributive politics at the constituency level (as emphasized in many political science studies of local electoral clientelism). At the national level, the pervasiveness of the politics of *regional* distribution and redistribution in growth and spending policy in African countries was captured by Ndulu et al. (2007: 61–63, 91) in a cross-national study of 35 countries from 1960 to 2000. They find ‘regional redistribution regimes’—in which the ‘basic units of redistribution’ are regional—to typify national spending investment patterns in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s (but to have been curtailed under structural adjustment in the 1990s). Allocation is distributive or redistributive across regions, either in that central state resources are allocated by region, or in the zero-sum sense of redistributing wealth from the richest regions to poorer ones. Ndulu et al. stress that regional redistribution is most obvious and extensive in oil- and mineral-exporting countries such as Cameroon, Nigeria, Zambia, and the DRC. Such spending also figured into national development planning in agricultural commodity exporters such as Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. Elsewhere, development spending targeted at lagging regions was financed largely by external borrowing (Senegal, Tanzania). Some scholars suggested that the roll-back of regional redistribution policies from the late 1980s onwards contributed to the state fracturing and civil wars of the 1990s and 2000s (Azam 2001, 2008; Reno 2008).

²⁷ Countries like Kenya and Nigeria with higher GDP per capita do not appear to invest proportionally more in Gini index reduction than much poorer countries. Yet the role of external financing of these programs is a confounder. Donor funding accounted for over 50 percent of all social safety-net spending in African countries in the ASPIRE dataset in 2010, and this was targeted disproportionately at very poor countries of the Sahel G-5 (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) and war-affected Liberia and DRC.

Regional redistribution from richer to poorer regions could aim to draw less productive regions into the national economy (as in the case of 1970s' investments in developing the cotton sector in Northern Côte d'Ivoire) and/or to shore up national cohesion ('to buy peace').²⁸ In this double sense, regionally targeted investment and subsidies often served the same function as 'territorial cohesion' policies in the European Union.²⁹ Such distributive spending has often entailed patronage-based distribution (e.g., in allocation of government jobs), but the patronage aspect of regionally targeted investment and subsidies can coexist with the policy, functional, and territorial aspects that are the focus here. Regional redistribution regimes are a territorial strategy of economy- and state-building. They respond to regional tensions and demand, and help to consolidate regions as distinct actors in national politics (Keating 2009) and *regional identity* as a citizenship category (Cammatt and McLean 2011).

The visibility and salience of regional revenue-sharing institutions and formulae are markers of the prominence of regional distribution issues on national political agendas. In Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan, and DRC, transfers from central to regional governments are a centrepiece of national fiscal contracts. In Nigeria, this consists of sharing-out oil rents extracted from the Southeast. Kenya's 2010 Constitution created a regional redistribution regime based on transfers from the national budget to 47 new counties, following a revenue-sharing formula that takes Kenya's stark regional inequalities into account explicitly.³⁰ Regional disadvantage is measured in terms of variation across counties in economic context, captured in population density and a county-level poverty index.

5.2 'Social policy by other means'

Recent studies of social policy in African countries emphasize the significance of 'social policy by other means'.³¹ This consists largely of measures associated with what Seekings and Natrass (2005) and Hickey et al. (2019) call 'agrarian welfare regimes' (or agrarian distribution regimes) because they are centred on the rural smallholder or peasant household, rather than on the urban worker, or the urban poor.³² Agrarian welfare regimes seek to provide a subsistence floor for most of the poor by upholding the rural household as a functioning unit of consumption, production, and social reproduction. Prime instruments for doing so are land policy, regionally and locally targeted 'rural development' schemes (including farm input subsidies), locally targeted social-service delivery (especially schools and health facilities) and, in some circumstances and places, food transfers and food subsidies. Land access via neocustomary land tenure regimes has long been the anchor of such a social model. A family landholding under a neocustomary land tenure regime is a kind of asset-based entitlement that is immobile, formally non-alienable, and allocated through membership in a state-recognized social collectivity tied to an ethnic homeland. Since the 1990s, many African

²⁸ Woods 1990, Boone 2007.

²⁹ Crezensi et al. (2015) report that 'An equitable territorial distribution of the benefits of the integration process is a founding principle of all EU policies' (art. 75 of the EU Treaty). See Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Storper 2019: 287–8 on spatial-redistribution-cum-equity policies in Europe (a.k.a. equity through territorial redistribution).

³⁰ The new counties were defined along the lines of old districts, following the lines of the old native reserves. On devolution in Kenya, see Kanyinga (2016) and Ngigi and Busolo (2019). Laji (2019) situates the 2010 devolution in the context of a long history of regional planning strategies in Kenya.

³¹ Mkandawire 2016: 11; Seekings 2017; Ayeko-Kümmeth and Schlichte 2021.

³² Seekings and Natrass 2005; [Seekings 2008](#); Lavers 2019: 66, 67; Lavers 2023.

governments have responded to electoral incentives to invest in agrarian welfare regimes, including in farm subsidies (Seekings 2019: 67) and in measures that defend neocustomary land tenure.

5.3 Bargaining over state structure: Federalism, Decentralization, Devolution

Regionalism finds political expression in struggles over state structure itself. For many African countries, competition and conflict around constitutional and administrative design have been a persistent feature of national politics over the last half-century. As in other parts of the world, conflict over state design is often driven by distributive concerns.

Wibbles (2005), Rodden (2019), and others have argued that high regional disparities shape the ‘original federal contract’ in political unions. ‘Holding together’ unions may be based on co-optation of subnational units on terms that preserve the political cohesion of distinct regions, rather than (or as much as) on regional wealth-sharing agreements.³³ This choice is itself shaped by regional inequalities (as was the case with the USA, India, Spain, and Canada). These rules then shape patterns of coalitional politics that emerge in regionally unequal polities. These generalizations hold for many African countries. Independence bargains were struck among contending social and regional interests, and indeed between new national leaders and various regionally and ethnically identified populations. In effect, the *de facto* equilibrium outcome for non-governing regions was acquiescence with central government (over)rule in exchange for government recognition of distinctive communities, a measure of local self-rule (via central recognition of local neocustomary authority), and reaffirmation of the central state’s commitment to neocustomary land tenure regimes within colonial land units. In many countries, however, where regions were too weak vis-à-vis the center (northern Tanzania, especially Bukoba) or too strong (Western Cameroon, Central Uganda anchored in Buganda, Ashanti in Ghana), no such equilibrium emerged, and either political undermining of the weaker unit or conflict among regions ensued.

6 Conclusion

In Kuznets’ theory, structural changes associated with industrialization drive increasing interpersonal income inequality. In response to this, class conflict mounts, producing political pressures for redistribution. In democracies, especially, this pressure is expected to result in governmental responses that *decrease* inequality. (See Sumner 2021: 92-94 *inter alia*.) When it comes to regional or spatial inequality, however, the literature on the political economy of redistribution predicts the reverse.

³³ See Diaz-Cayeros (2006: 12 *inter alia*) on co-optation and enforcement mechanisms in federal contracts. Co-optation by the centre may mean that the centre guarantees the political power of regional leaders and allocates resources to them. Contract enforcement may require that regional actors retain the power to politically mobilize their territorial constituency. As Amuitz Garmendia Madariaga (2014) suggested for Europe, in postcolonial Africa an important part of the constitutional pact may be not interregional redistribution but rather guaranteeing regional autonomy arrangements among the units.

Distinctive dynamics arise from territorial unevenness of the system as a whole. At the national level, strong regionalism is likely to crowd out, or impede the adoption of, universal redistributive policies, as it often does in non-African countries (Kyriacou and Rocas-Sagales 2014; Rogers 2016). Regional inequalities may elicit conflicts of interest around such policies directly, as when advantaged regions resist subsidizing poorer ones. Such tensions may be mediated through institutional structures that accentuate regional interests, bring these to the fore, and impede mobilization of non-regional interests. Counterfactually, there is an association between non-territorial representation (e.g. proportional representation in national party systems) and programmatic and universalistic (centralized) social policy in industrialized economies. In these settings, institutional and social-structural factors create conditions propitious for centralized social policy. In the Republic of South Africa, the most industrialized, urbanized, proletarianized, unionized economy of the continent, the predicted effects are visible. South Africa has the strongest investment in universal/programmatic social policy.

High salience of regionally targeted policies in national politics is an effect predicted by uneven economic development and strong institutions of regional governance. Potential for a highly fragmented policy space at the national level is a corollary of this, as Rogers (2016) argues, and this can perhaps be considered a default expectation for many African countries, especially given generally low levels of party nationalization.

African countries are marked by a combination of high spatial inequality, low redistribution, weak central taxation, weak fiscal state. CPE explains how high spatial inequality, especially in the context of strongly territorial political institutions, is a driver of the political outcomes that weaken the willingness and capacity of government to mitigate inequality through strongly redistributive policies. High spatial inequality makes it harder to use public policy to redress inequality and indeed produces political dynamics that then to reinforce regionalism in national policy-making and political competition. By this logic, high regional inequalities, strongly associated with natural resource base and extractive economies, seem stuck on the left side of the Kuznets curve's inverted-U.

Understanding regional inequality dynamics is important in coming to terms with it. There are several known unknowns when it comes to predicting change for the future, including climate, demographics, possible continental-level regional integration in Africa (as foreseen by the AfCFTA) and new patterns of infrastructure development, both within countries and via transport corridors that link countries. Tracking constancy and change in patterns of regional inequality should be a priority for those seeking to understand its causes and effects, including political effects. The analysis here underscores the need for subnational level data from African countries to build basic knowledge on spatial inequality dynamics, including data on interregional trade and exchange (including labour, capital, raw materials and foodstuffs), and government spending.³⁴

It is remarkable that we find ourselves in a time when high spatial inequalities are disrupting and transforming politics and government policy making across the *post-industrial* countries of the OECD in a way that is surprisingly resonant with the divisive stalemates and zero-sum, identity-fuelled politics observed in many of *non-industrial, primary-commodities-based* African countries studied

³⁴ See Poncet 2004 for such data on China. The IMF 2022 report on spatial inequalities in SSA says that only 8 SSA countries report sub-national budgets.

here.³⁵ Opportunities to build theory and empirics around new paradigms and assumptions about twenty-first century inequality politics have opened up. The stakes in a better understanding of these dynamics are very high.

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³⁵ See Rodriguez-Pose (2018); Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Storper (2019); McCann (2020); Rodden (2019).

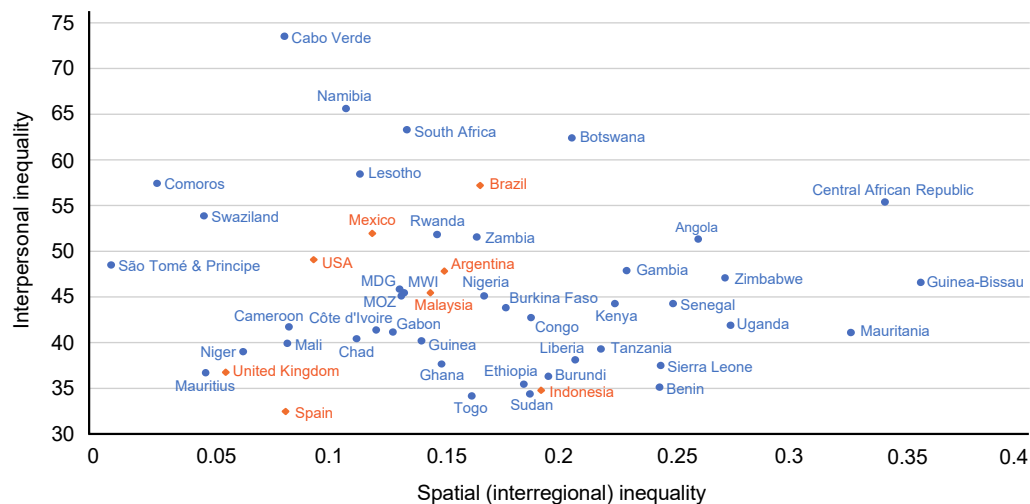
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Appendix

Figure A1: Interpersonal and spatial inequality in African countries using population-weighted CoV



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Table A1: Summary of regional electoral bloc characteristics, with stability of regional inequalities over time and consistency across indicators

Country	Electoral Bloc	Mean pixel luminosity (1992)	Mean pixel luminosity (2000)	Mean pixel luminosity (2013)	Average number of years of education	Share of adults who attended secondary school	Producer profile (overlap & specialization)	70% of bloc in colonial admin 1	Bloc is multiethnic
Cameroon	Capital city	21.91	24.43	38.28	9.8	24.3			
	Western Bloc	0.19	0.22	0.34	8.2	12.7	Type 1	No	Yes
	Centre-Sud Bloc *	0.09	0.11	0.19	8.8	16.9	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Non-Bloc	0.02	0.03	0.05	3.3	2.8			
Côte d'Ivoire	Capital city	10.65	13.51	18.13	6.1	16.9			
	Eastern Bloc	0.21	0.75	1.06	3.6	6.2	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Western Bloc	0.10	0.51	1.42	3.5	4.9	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Non-Bloc	0.06	0.28	0.43	3.2	5.0			
	Northern Bloc	0.03	0.17	0.32	2.0	4.0	Type 2	Yes	Yes
Ghana	Capital city	48.74	54.11	60.76	10.3	45.3			
	Central Bloc	0.51	0.78	1.50	8.3	25.3	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Non-Bloc	0.20	0.40	0.78	6.4	22.3			
	Eastern Bloc	0.20	0.33	0.71	6.8	18.3	Type 2	No	Yes
	NW Bloc	0.07	0.11	0.35	4.6	16.5	Type 5	Yes	No
Kenya	Capital city	27.54	27.12	39.90	11.0	57.2			
	Central Bloc	0.51	0.87	2.01	9.3	36.3	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Western Bloc	0.22	0.22	0.60	8.1	21.5	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Rift Valley Bloc	0.05	0.07	0.19	8.2	27.8	Type 1	Yes	No
	Non-Bloc	0.04	0.05	0.10	7.5	24.3			
	Eastern Bloc	0.03	0.10	0.26	8.2	23.0	Type 4	Yes	No
Malawi	Capital city	19.75	22.46	32.57	8.3	30.6			
	Southern Bloc	0.76	0.76	0.91	5.2	8.8	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Non-Bloc	0.24	0.29	0.47	5.5	8.4		Yes	
	Central Bloc	0.14	0.21	0.42	4.5	6.8	Type 1	Yes	No
	Northern Bloc	0.06	0.10	0.21	7.1	10.5	Type 4	Yes	Yes
	Eastern Bloc	0.06	0.14	0.14	3.6	3.5	Type 3	Yes	Yes
Mali	Capital city	23.17	28.81	51.90	5.8	14.1			
	Bamako Koulikoro Bloc *	0.15	0.23	0.57	4.1	9.1	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Sikasso Bloc	0.01	0.04	0.08	1.5	2.0	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Mopti Bloc	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.8	0.5	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Non-Bloc	0.00	0.00	0.01	1.3	1.4			
Nigeria	Capital city	1.83	2.75	6.25	9.9	56.3			
	Eastern Bloc	1.83	1.34	2.95	9.5	45.6	Type 1	No	Yes
	Western Bloc	1.66	1.23	3.12	9.9	54.2	Type 1	Yes	No
	Northern Bloc	0.24	0.24	0.40	4.1	18.5	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Non-Bloc	0.15	0.13	0.33	5.8	25.0			
South Africa	Capital city	20.01	19.70	24.74	10.8	50.0			
	West Cape Bloc	1.59	1.73	2.21	10.9	47.7	Type 1	Yes	
	Centre Bloc	0.85	1.16	1.89	9.8	32.2	Type 3	Yes	
	KwaZulu Bloc	0.76	1.16	1.80	9.5	36.9	Type 3	Yes	[No]
	Non-Bloc	0.49	0.59	0.77	10.2	41.0			
Tanzania	Capital city	7.09	9.07	16.27	8.4	23.5			
	N'm Opposition Bloc	0.03	0.08	0.15	5.8	6.6	Type 1	No	[Yes]
	Non-Bloc	0.02	0.04	0.07	6.1	7.0			
	CCM Bloc	0.02	0.03	0.06	5.7	6.5	Type 2	No	[Yes]
Uganda	Capital city	24.05	33.19	46.89	9.9	30.9			
	Central Opposition Bloc *	0.72	1.22	2.44	8.8	22.1	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Non-Bloc	0.01	0.03	0.06	5.8	6.2			
	Western Bloc	0.00	0.02	0.07	5.5	5.9	Type 3	Yes	Yes
	Northern Bloc	0.00	0.03	0.05	6.1	9.9	Type 4	Yes	Yes
Zambia	Capital city	32.03	35.40	48.27	9.2	32.5			
	Copperbelt-North. Bloc	0.17	0.18	0.29	7.7	20.3	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Southern Bloc	0.10	0.11	0.24	7.5	14.1	Type 1	Yes	Yes
	Non-Bloc	0.04	0.04	0.13	7.0	14.9			
	Eastern Bloc	0.02	0.02	0.07	5.4	7.7	Type 1	No	Yes
	Western Bloc	0.01	0.01	0.03	5.9	9.8	Type 5	No	Yes
Zimbabwe	Capital city	30.92	32.48	32.24	10.6	29.3			
	Southern Bloc	0.19	0.20	0.18	9.2	19.5	Type 5	Yes	[No]
	Non-Bloc	0.18	0.24	0.25	8.8	13.3			
	Northern Bloc	0.10	0.16	0.21	8.2	8.3	Type 1	Yes	[No]

Note: Luminosity values from NOAA. Education variables from DHS. In the first 5 columns containing figures, top-ranked electoral blocs (most advantaged blocs) are shaded in blue. Bottom-ranked blocs (least advantaged of the blocs) are shaded in red. The shading highlights the stability of the rankings. In the last 3 columns, the blocs that conform to our hypotheses and the dominant tendency in the data are in blue. * indicates that the capital city is part of the bloc (values for the capital city itself are still reported for reference). The use of brackets in the last column indicates that the result is an estimate based on the secondary literature, rather than on the authors' computations.

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