

# The ethnicity distraction: Political credibility, clientelism and partisan preferences in Africa

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May 4, 2009

**Abstract:** This note concludes that political competition in Africa is shaped by the inability of political parties to make commitments that are credible to large fractions of the electorate, rather than by broad appeals to the interests of co-ethnics. Political competition does not meet the conditions for ethnicity to be the cause of policy failure, slow growth, and civil war, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, as is argued in a large literature. The absence of political credibility can yield these same outcomes, however. This paper examines these conflicting positions using data on the partisan preferences of 21,000 individuals from 16 African countries. In 14 of the 16 countries, the evidence rejects the argument that competing political parties mobilize support with credible commitments to serve the aggregate interests of larger ethnic groups. In contrast, gift-giving and approval of incumbent performance are generally significant determinants of partisan preferences, consistent with the assumption that political competitors are constrained in their ability to make broadly credible promises.

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## **The ethnicity distraction: Political credibility, clientelism and partisan preferences in Africa**

Ethnicity is a prominent explanation of adverse development phenomena ranging from slow growth to the under-provision of public goods to conflict, particularly in Africa (Easterly and Levine 1997), but also more generally. However, scholars advance different and even mutually exclusive assumptions about how and why ethnicity matters, leading to correspondingly divergent responses to the development challenges that countries confront. Some argue that politicians mobilize co-ethnics with credible commitments to serve the interests of co-ethnics as a group at the expense of other ethnic groups. Other analyses maintain that politicians are *unable* to mobilize broad support with credible promises. For example, they bear no reputational or other loss if they renege on promises to make policies that benefit large groups of citizens. Instead they rely on clientelist promises to narrow groups that happen to be comprised of co-ethnics. The analysis here uses individual level data from 16 sub-Saharan African countries to distinguish between these competing approaches. The data suggest that politicians are generally unable to make broadly credible appeals to voters, including appeals to co-ethnics. Efforts to understand the sources of slow development and conflict should shift away from conflicts of interest between ethnic groups and towards the inability of political competitors to make credible commitments to citizens.

Theories that point to ethnic differences as an obstacle to peace and economic development rely on the assumption, not necessarily explicit, that political leaders mobilize electoral support by promising to pursue the interests of co-ethnics at the expense of the interests of other groups. Such mobilization succeeds if ethnic leaders can credibly promise to distribute policy benefits to all members of their ethnic groups. In this case, members of the ethnic group, given a choice between supporting their co-ethnic party or no party at all,

should rationally support the co-ethnic party. Tests reported below reject this argument for most countries, parties and large ethnic groups. For example, across the sample of more than 20,000 survey respondents examined here, approximately 40 percent express partisan disaffection.

The evidence is more consistent with the argument that the apparent effects of ethnicity are incidental to the inability of political competitors to make broadly credible pre-electoral commitments to citizens, including co-ethnics. This inability has three implications, all of which are reflected in the data. First, non-credible politicians are more likely to rely on clientelist appeals to narrow groups of citizens (as in Keefer and Vlaicu 2008). While clientelist groups are often more ethnically homogeneous than the overall population (Posner 2005 or Erdmann 2007), they comprise only a fraction of all members of the politicians' ethnic groups. Hence, though the support of some co-ethnics can be assured through clientelist promises, most citizens, including a large fraction of co-ethnics, are excluded from such promises and exhibit partisan disaffection. Consistent with this, perceptions and experience with clientelist behavior (vote-buying) have a significant effect on whether survey respondents express any partisan preference.

Second, in non-credible political settings, opinions regarding incumbent performance should have an asymmetric effect on whether citizens have a partisan preference. Barro (1984) and Ferejohn (1986) argue that voters who confront non-credible political competitors retain incumbents who surpass some performance threshold and expel incumbents who do not. However, in this latter case, voters are indifferent among challengers. Consistent with this, the data indicate that respondents who express positive opinions of incumbent performance are much more likely to exhibit a partisan preference than respondents who express negative opinions.

A third consequence of non-credibility is to influence how fear of inter-ethnic conflict affects partisan preferences of increase citizen. Co-ethnics who cannot rely on leader promises also cannot rely on promises to share the benefits from inter-ethnic predation or to protect them from attacks by other ethnic groups. This makes citizens indifferent between their own co-ethnic party and other parties that do not advocate inter-ethnic attacks. In contrast, a party that promotes attacks against their ethnic group is likely to make them worse off, making them less likely to support this party relative to all others. Consistent with this expected asymmetric response, respondents from 36 of the 47 large ethnic groups were significantly *less* likely to support some particular party relative to respondents from smaller ethnic groups. Respondents from only 21 of the 47 large ethnic groups were *more* likely.

The focus here on differences between citizens who are disaffected and those who express a partisan preference marks a significant departure from common practice in the literature, which compares citizens who prefer one party with those who prefer another. Typically, based on the latter comparison, researchers argue that politics is polarized when supporters of different parties belong to different ethnic groups, or when survey respondents say that they prefer politicians of their own ethnicity. The simple fact of ethnic clustering, however, has numerous possible causes and effects. Observing that most supporters of parties come from a different ethnic groups does not tell us whether they were mobilized with clientelist or broadly credible ethnic appeals, with corresponding policy incentives to provide targeted clientelist benefits or public goods that benefit all members of the ethnic group (and, potentially, the whole society). The characteristics of disaffected voters allow these alternatives to be distinguished.

The next section of the paper reviews the various arguments linking development outcomes to ethnic diversity. The following sections present specific hypotheses that distinguish the ethnic and clientelist determinants of partisan preference in terms of the available Afrobarometer variables, and tests these hypotheses. The paper ends by outlining some of the implications of the results for future research and policy responses to development failure.

### **Ethnicity and development in the literature**

Research on ethnicity and analyses of limited political credibility both explain a similar set of unfavorable development outcomes, but they do so with conflicting assumptions about credibility. Ethnicity arguments assume that political decision makers can achieve political advantage by promising to pursue policies that benefit their ethnic group at the expense of others. Credibility-based arguments imply, on the contrary, that narrowly targeted policies that undermine public good provision, favor special interests and slow growth, or that provide a breeding ground for conflict, arise because political competitors mobilize support among those few citizens who believe their commitments and who constitute a minority of any ethnic group. This brief review of the literature underlines these differences.

Easterly and Levine (1997), in arguing that ethnic fragmentation is a signal cause of slow growth in Africa, summarize several ways in which ethnic diversity can lead to slow growth and low public good provision. Ethnic diversity may lead to a common pool problem in which each group predares on public resources without taking into account consequences for other groups. However, groups make demands on public policy only to the extent that they can exert pressure on politicians to respond to those demands. Another possible effect of ethnic diversity is to increase the tendency of each group to oppose

reforms in the broader public interest. Alesina, Baqir and Easterly (1999) and Alesina and La Ferrara (2005) emphasize preference differences among ethnic groups and argue that diversity can therefore reduce public good provision.

The conflict literature focuses on the effects of ethnic grievance, usually represented in the data by ethnic polarization. Esteban and Rey (1994) develop a series of axioms about polarization and conclude that it is greatest when groups are approximately equally sized, large, and have opposing preferences. Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005) develop measures of polarization based on these concepts and conclude that conflict is more likely in the presence of polarized ethnic groups. Bardhan (1997) is explicit about the policy recommendation that emerges from such findings, suggesting that in the absence of institutions that permit credible inter-ethnic bargains, conflict is more likely.

In all of this research, preference diversity or other conflicts of interest among ethnic groups is key. However, these matter for government decision making only to the extent that ethnic leaders have incentives to represent the preferences of their ethnic groups in policy making. If they do not, they have correspondingly weak incentives to use public policy to further the interests of their ethnic group or to defend their ethnic group against predation by other groups. Where leader incentives to pursue the interests of their co-ethnics are weak, institutions that allow credible inter-ethnic bargaining, such as those suggested by Bardhan, may allow more credible inter-*elite* bargains, but these may or may not have desirable effects for the co-ethnics of these elites.

Other research argues that political decision makers in fact have weak incentives to pursue broad public (or ethnic) interests, leading to distorted development outcomes and conflict. One line of this literature argues that incentives are weak because political actors *cannot* make broadly credible commitments to citizens, including co-ethnics. That is, even if

they promise to provide benefits, post-election, to co-ethnics, co-ethnics cannot impose a penalty on them if they renege on those promises.<sup>1</sup> Instead, non-credible political competitors mobilize support among those few citizens who believe their commitments and who constitute a minority of any ethnic group. This mobilization strategy drives them to pursue narrowly targeted policies that undermine public good provision, favor special interests and slow growth, or that provide a breeding ground for conflict (Keefer and Vlaicu 2008, Keefer 2007). To the extent that political competitors can make these narrowly targeted promises more cheaply to co-ethnics, less credible politicians may then target public policies disproportionately to co-ethnics. This leads to the appearance that ethnicity underlies policy failures that should be attributed to the lack of political credibility.

Credibility arguments have implications for conflict, as well. Citizens governed by non-credible political actors are subjected to substantially sub-optimal policies and are less likely to oppose insurgency. At the same time, non-credible political decision makers are less able to mount a successful counter-insurgency, both because non-credible politicians gain less from ensuring the rule of law (a public good); and because they are unable to make credible commitments to counter-insurgents to compensate them in the future in the event of a successful campaign (Keefer 2008).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, parties may simply be collections of individual candidates, all relying on their individual characteristics, and not party characteristics, to mobilize support. Voters know that they cannot hold any individual politician responsible for government failures to provide policies with broad benefits, since many politicians must cooperate to make those policies. At the same time, voters cannot hold all politicians with a particular party label responsible, because party-switching is costless if candidates have only campaigned on their individual characteristics.

<sup>2</sup> The policy choices of younger democracies – those in which politicians are likely to struggle with credible commitment – exhibit the pattern of policy performance associated with non-credible politicians. However, controls for ethnolinguistic fractionalization do not account for this difference. On the contrary, they are usually insignificant in the presence of controls for the years of continuous competitive elections (Keefer 2007).

The literature on sub-Saharan Africa highlights the differences among these two perspectives. While scholars such as Easterly and Levine attribute slow growth in Africa to ethnicity, Bratton and van de Walle (1997) emphasize clientelism and the dominant role of the “big man” in African politics. Van de Walle (2001) concludes that in many African countries “democratization has had little impact on economic decision making, because the new democratic regimes remain governed by neo-patrimonial logic (p. 18).” This logic does not easily fit the assumption that these same politicians make credible promises to serve the interests of their ethnic group as a whole, since transfers from “big men” to their clients exclude many co-ethnics.

The analysis here contributes to a large body of research that has expressed skepticism about ethnicity-based arguments of policy distortion and conflict. Kasara (2007) shows that African farmers pay *higher* taxes when they are from the same ethnic group as the leader. Stroh’s (2009) field research in Burkina Faso emphasizes that parties look for candidates who are “fils du terroir”, “sons of the earth” who are deeply rooted in their local communities. Posner (2005) argues that ethnic divides in politics are manufactured by political elites, just as Fearon and Laitin (2000, p. 874) summarize six studies of ethnic violence and conclude “The narratives under review give details on how ethnic boundaries and antagonisms *follow from* the political strategies of elites seeking to gain power or undermine challengers [emphasis added].”<sup>3</sup> Numerous other studies document the fear that leaders will trigger inter-ethnic violence as the source of ethnic clustering of political

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<sup>3</sup> Blimes (2006) asks the reverse question, under what conditions of ethnic diversity can politicians succeed in leading citizens into conflict?

support.<sup>4</sup> In none of this research are ethnic diversity or intrinsic preference differences across ethnic groups, in and of themselves, triggers for conflict.<sup>5</sup>

The work here goes beyond these analyses in several respects. First, it explores a specific explanation, the absence of political credibility, for the prevalence of clientelist and absence of ethnic strategies of electoral mobilization. Second, it focuses more specifically on citizen attitudes towards parties, the vehicle through which politicians can make broadly credible commitments to citizens. Third, it exploits differences between citizens with and without partisan preferences rather than between supporters of different parties or candidates, a more revealing comparison when trying to understand whether parties are able to make broad-based promises to voters. Fourth, it does not rely on questions that directly ask whether citizens votes were influenced by gifts, by ethnicity or performance, but instead by comparing the partisan preferences of respondents who have or have not received gifts; have different ethnicities; or have different views of incumbent performance.<sup>6</sup> This approach reduces the influence of respondent bias (respondents are likely to be reluctant to admit that gifts or candidate ethnicity are the main factors in their electoral choices) and makes it more likely that ethnicity influences can emerge.

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<sup>4</sup> Mueller (2008) points to fear of inter-ethnic violence in Kenya as instrumental in driving the ethnic clustering of political support. Brass (2003) emphasizes that ethnic conflict in India is driven by politicians who use violence or the threat of violence to maintain their hold on power.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, such preference differences could exist. Chandra (2006) argues precisely this: effects of ethnicity are contingent on extrinsic characteristics of citizens other than their ethnicity that, themselves, also influence outcomes. For example, grievances over land rights in Africa have an ethnic character when ethnic groups are spatially clustered. However, spatial clustering is not an intrinsic characteristic of ethnicity and would lead to grievances over land even if ethnic groups were not clustered.

<sup>6</sup> Based on surveys they conducted in Ghana, Lindberg and Morrison (2008) dispute the idea that African voters are either ethnic or clientelist and argue that their survey respondents care more about candidate and party performance. These conclusions are based on respondents' own explanations of why they voted for candidates. The evidence for Ghana reported below offers strong evidence of performance-based voting, but also of clientelist and ethnic influences, based on Afrobarometer survey questions that do rely on respondent self-evaluation of why they support particular parties.

### **Ethnicity, credibility and the determinants of partisan preference**

The literature suggests that African parties mobilize electoral support either through broad promises to co-ethnics, or by narrow promises made by political patrons to their clients. The analysis below distinguishes between these two strategies. Broadly speaking, if political parties mobilize voters with credible ethnic appeals, members of these ethnic groups should be more likely to express support for that party than to express partisan indifference or disaffection. If, instead, politicians rely on clientelist appeals that just happen to be targeted at some co-ethnics, rates of partisan indifference or disaffection among co-ethnics will be correspondingly high, while indicators of narrowly targeted exchanges with voters should have a substantial effect on preferences. This section discusses these predictions in detail.

#### *Ethnicity and partisan preference*

A well-known phenomenon in Africa is ethnic clustering of partisan support. For example, Easterly and Levine (1997) motivate their cross-country findings that ethnic fragmentation reduces growth by examining the case of Kenya. There, the Luo candidate for president won 75 percent of the vote in the Luo region and the Kalenjin candidate 71 percent of the vote in the Kalenjin region. They cite Barkan and Chege (1989), who report shifts of up to 30 percentage points in roads spending that followed ethnic-regional lines following the transition from the Kikuyu President Kenyatta to the Kalenjin President Moi.

However, ethnic clustering does not indicate why ethnicity affects partisan preference and, in particular, cannot be taken as *prima facie* evidence that politicians mobilize voters with appeals to favor one ethnic group over others. It is possible that politicians use fear to mobilize support. Though not the main focus of the analysis here, evidence reported at the end of the paper suggests that a combination of fear and the inability of ethnic leaders

to make credible promises to co-ethnics may drive some of the results found here, particularly the fact that more parties are avoided by particular ethnic groups than are sought out by them.

More generally, patterns of partisan support should exhibit additional features, besides ethnic clustering, if political parties can make broadly credible appeals to co-ethnics (including the commitment to protect co-ethnics from inter-ethnic violence). The empirical analysis below tests each of these. First, rates of partisan disaffection should be low. If a political party succeeds in credibly committing to an ethnic group that it will favor the group's interests, then all members of the ethnic group are better off supporting the party than supporting no party at all (expressing disaffection). If all parties are able to make broadly credible appeals to different ethnic groups, then only a small fraction of voters should express partisan disaffection—no preference for any party. The results from Afrobarometer point to rampant disaffection: more than 40 percent of all respondents express no partisan preference, with similar rates in Kenya, even among the major contending ethnic groups.

Second, where ethnicity is a core obstacle to development, politicians should be mobilizing the largest ethnic groups in opposition to each other. If they have succeeded at this, members of larger ethnic groups should be significantly less likely to express disaffection than members of smaller ethnic groups. Third, along the same lines, if parties make credible commitments to members of the larger ethnic groups, then the members of each larger group should be more likely to favor a *particular* political party than to express disaffection, relative to members of smaller ethnic groups. Finally, fourth, if politics are ethnically polarized, at least two parties should have the characteristic that members of one ethnic group are both more likely to support the party than to express disaffection, relative

to members of smaller ethnic groups, and are less likely to express disaffection generally relative to members of these smaller groups.

The Kenya case highlights the relevance of these distinctions. Though ethnic clustering of partisan support is a significant phenomenon, as Easterly and Levine (1997) report, the 2005 Afrobarometer survey in Kenya points to high rates of disaffection among co-ethnics. Between 35 and 40 percent of Kikuyu, Kalenjin and Luo express support for no party, despite significant ethnic clustering in the pattern of partisan support.

*Political credibility and partisan preference: targeted transfers and vote-buying*

When political parties cannot make broadly credible commitments to voters, political competitors are more likely to rely on promises of transfers to narrow groups of voters. Direct evidence on such promises is not generally available and the Afrobarometer surveys are no exception. In particular, they do not have information on whether voters were promised transfers before elections and received them after. The surveys do, however, ask about pre-election gifts – whether respondents received them and whether they believe politicians generally make them. Scholars often use pre-electoral gifts as an indicator of clientelist strategies of electoral mobilization (e.g., Harding 2008).

The precise rationale for such gift-giving is a matter of ongoing research. In some, rarer cases, politicians can monitor the voting behavior of gift recipients, allowing politicians to use gifts to buy votes.<sup>7</sup> Less clearly, gift-giving may constitute a costly investment by politicians in building their credibility with narrow groups of voters (gift recipients).

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<sup>7</sup> This is the case in the Philippines, for example. Parties are non-programmatic (non-credible), providing strong incentives to engage in vote-buying. However, the vote-buying, at least in municipal elections, is verifiable: ballots are printed on carbon paper; voters can retain their carbon copies and present them for payment to the candidate whom they supported. Stuti Khemani, personal communication.

Certainly, gift-giving is widely observed in Africa and this motivation frequently assigned to it. (Lindberg 2003).

Regardless of the motivation, heavy reliance on pre-electoral gifts make it more difficult for politicians to fulfill any promises that they have made to channel the benefits of public policy to large groups of citizens, such as co-ethnics. Reliance on pre-electoral gift-giving should be greater the less able political competitors are to make these credible commitments. In a low-credibility political environment, citizens should be more likely to express a partisan preference if they have received a pre-electoral gift. However, this effect may be weak. First, multiple political competitors may provide gifts, leaving recipients indifferent among them and without a partisan preference. Second, in Africa, gift-giving is generally financed and controlled by candidates and aimed at building voter attachment to candidates, rather than parties.<sup>8</sup>

Citizens differ not only according to whether they have received pre-electoral gifts, but also in their perceptions of whether candidates generally give gifts. While the receipt of pre-electoral gifts should have a weakly positive effect on whether citizens have a partisan preference, citizens who believe that gift-giving is common, but who themselves have not received a gift, should be significantly less likely to express a partisan preference. Since most voters who perceive that gift giving is common do not actually receive a gift, they should be less likely to express a partisan preference. This effect should be strongest if voters do not regard political parties as making credible policy commitments, in which case perceptions of gift-giving should play a larger role in the determination of partisan preference.

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<sup>8</sup> The interpretation of vote-buying may be different in countries with well-organized parties that maintain party machines. These machines both target vote-buying according to the strength of the partisan preferences of potential voters and monitor voter compliance (Stokes 2005). More often, though, and for political parties in Africa, vote-buying is managed and financed by the candidates, not the parties, and it is costly for politicians to verify how voters cast their ballots. In this case, vote-buying is better seen as a credibility-building device.

*Political credibility and partisan preference: incumbent performance*

Incumbent performance plays a significant role in all electoral settings. Where citizens can choose among political competitors who make broadly credible commitments, both positive and negative perceptions of incumbent performance should affect partisan preference: those who approve should support the incumbent's party; those who disapprove should support a challenger party. However, the analysis in Ferejohn (1986) implies that when political promises about future policies are not credible, only incumbent approval should affect partisan preference. Ferejohn (1986) concludes that voters might rely on *ex post* voting rules based only on incumbent performance and independent of challenger characteristics. Voters who approve of incumbent performance support his re-election. The remainder oppose the incumbent, but they are indifferent among all parties, since challengers cannot credibly promise to do better than the incumbent. The group that approves of the incumbent's performance should therefore be more likely to support the incumbent's party than to be disaffected. The group that disapproves should be indifferent between supporting challenger parties and expressing disaffection.

**Data**

The key concepts needed to examine ethnicity and politics include the partisan preferences of respondents, their ethnicity, and the extent to which they have been exposed to vote-buying. The third round of the Afrobarometer surveys, undertaken in 2005-2006, yields data that can be used to examine the correlates of partisan preferences in 16 African countries. The surveys used a nationally-representative sample (generally, 1,200 respondents, but in larger countries 2,400) to probe a number of relevant respondent characteristics. This section describes all of the variables from the surveys used in the analysis below. The variables are summarized in Table 1, at the end of this section.

### *Partisan preference*

The empirical strategy below relies on the partisan preferences expressed by respondents to the Afrobarometer survey. The dependent variables in the analysis come from Questions 85 and 86 of the survey. Question 85 asks respondents whether they “feel close to any party”. All respondents who answered question 85 with “do not feel close to any party” are classified as “disaffected.” In addition, those who refused to answer or did not know were classified as disaffected, on the assumption that partisan supporters would be more likely to answer than to refuse to answer, and unlikely not to know whether they felt close to a party. The vast majority of respondents coded as “disaffected” answered “not close to any party”.<sup>9</sup> Question 86 asks, if respondents express a partisan preference, which party they prefer.<sup>10</sup> These variables capture better than voting records whether people feel a party representing their ethnic group is likely to make them better off. Unlike actual voting behavior, for example, questions such as “what party do you feel close to?” are less likely to reflect the fear of violence. Table 2 indicates that partisan disaffection is rampant in the sample, and by itself suggests that political parties across the 16 countries struggle to mobilize support with credible pre-electoral commitments to voters. Disaffection is near or above 50 percent in four of them and above 30 percent in eleven.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, in Kenya, 413 respondents out of the 472 coded as disaffected responded “not close to any party;” in Ghana all 403 respondents coded as disaffected responded that they were not close to any party; and in Benin, the figure was 793 out of 810.

<sup>10</sup> Any party that attracted the support of at least five percent of the respondents is included in the country-specific analysis reported below. Respondents who expressed support for a small party were excluded since there were too few of them to estimate stable coefficients of the correlates of their preferences. Well under 10 percent of the sample was lost because of this.

**Table 2: Percentage of disaffected respondents**

Benin	68.1	Mozambique	18.1
Botswana	22.3	Namibia	19.4
Ghana	33.7	Nigeria	53.4
Kenya	37.2	Senegal	48.4
Lesotho	24.0	South Africa	41.0
Madagascar	70.1	Tanzania	24.8
Malawi	39.9	Uganda	41.5
Mali	42.1	Zambia	49.2

Source: Afrobarometer (2005-06), Question 85.

### *Ethnicity*

The first of two ethnicity variables is based on question 79 in the Afrobarometer questionnaire, which asks respondents to self-identify their ethnic group with the open-ended question “What is your tribe?” and the prompt “You know, your ethnic or cultural group.” Ethnic classifications are therefore generated by the self-perceptions of respondents and are not driven by external judgments; nor are they influenced by external classifications into which respondents are expected to fit themselves.

If broad-based ethnic appeals are key to political competition, it should be the case that members of the larger groups are more likely to have a partisan preference and are more likely to cluster their support on a specific party. If politics is ethnically polarized, at least two such ethnic parties should exist. To examine these propositions, ethnic groups were ranked in each of the 16 countries based on ethnic distribution of survey responses; a dummy variable was assigned for each of the largest ethnic groups that, jointly, comprise at least 50 percent of survey respondents. In countries where a single ethnic group comprised slightly more than 50 percent of the population, a dummy variable was still created for the second largest ethnic group. For example, in Ghana the Akan were 52.6 percent of

respondents, so dummy variables for both the Akan and the Dagaati, the second largest group comprising 19.6 percent of respondents, are taken into account (the Ewe were the third largest, comprising 13.5 percent of respondents, were excluded). In Kenya, the Kikuyu, with 18 percent of respondents, were the largest. Together, Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya and Kalenjin respondents comprised 51 percent of respondents; variables for each of these ethnic groups were taken into account.

As Posner (2004) and others argue, ethnic identification can change depending on the salience of ethnicity in politics. This can bias estimates of whether ethnicity drives partisan preferences. However, there is no reason to expect the direction of bias to be systematically *against* the hypothesis that ethnicity drives partisan preferences. On the contrary, if citizens believe a party's promises to defend the interests of a particular ethnic group, they should be more likely both to identify themselves with that ethnic group and to express a partisan preference for that party rather than disaffection. Such a bias would *favor* the hypothesis that ethnicity drives partisan preference and disfavor the hypothesis that politicians cannot make credible promises to most members of an ethnic group.

Questions from the Afrobarometer survey also allow the effects of ethnic grievance on partisan preference to be examined. This sheds light on the ethnic polarization of politics in countries. If politics is ethnically polarized, then parties rely on credible broad-based appeals to large ethnic groups to mobilize support and the consequences of losing are high. In this case, losers should both express ethnic grievance and a partisan preference. If organized ethnic groups divide the gains from political control at the expense of unorganized ethnic groups, politics cannot be said to be polarized and those with an ethnic grievance should not express a partisan preference. Similarly, if parties cannot make credible ethnic appeals and instead relying on clientelist promises that happen to flow to some co-ethnics,

those excluded from clientelist benefits are more likely to express an ethnic grievance, but not more likely to express a partisan preference.<sup>11</sup>

Question 80a asks whether the respondent believes the economic condition of the respondent's ethnic group is worse or better than that of other groups. Question 81 asks whether the respondent believes the government treats the respondent's ethnic group unfairly. The measure of ethnic grievance used in the analysis below is a composite of these two, a dichotomous variable that equals one if, in response to question 81, respondents indicated that their group was often or always treated unfairly by the government *and* if, in response to question 80a, respondents indicated that their group was economically worse off or much worse off than other groups.

### *Gift-giving*

If political competitors are unable to make credible appeals to co-ethnics, or credible broad-based policy appeals of any kind, gift-giving should be an important determinant of partisan preferences. One of the factors that should sway voters in non-credible environments is narrow transfers (e.g., pre-election gifts) that they have received from politicians and their perception of whether gift-giving is common. Question 57f asks how often, if ever, during the last election, a candidate or someone from a party offered something like food or a gift in return for the respondent's vote. Across all 16 of the Afrobarometer surveys used here, 19 percent of respondents report having been offered a gift. Fewer than two percent of respondents report being offered gifts in Botswana (and

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<sup>11</sup> The majority of those with grievances belong to large ethnic groups that are not ignored by large parties. In Ghana, 67 of 140 aggrieved respondents were Akan or Ewe, each of which dominates a political party in Ghana. Among the aggrieved Akan and Ewe, about one-third express disaffection, about the same as the non-aggrieved. In Kenya, 60 of 154 Luo claimed an ethnic grievance, of whom 27 percent expressed partisan disaffection. This is not substantially lower than the 35 percent disaffection rate of Luo respondents who did not claim an ethnic grievance.

offers of gifts to respondents have correspondingly little effect on partisan preferences in the analysis of Botswana below); 33 percent report being offered gifts in Benin, where its effects on partisan preference are significant. Answers to this question should be weakly positively associated with whether respondents express a partisan preference. Question 78f asks respondents how often politicians offer gifts to voters during campaigns. More than 70 percent of respondents across all surveys report that politicians do this often or always. This variable should have a strongly negative association with whether respondents express a partisan preference.

Another variable included in the analysis below, Question 78c, bears directly on credibility: “In your opinion, how often do politicians keep their campaign promises after elections?” The dichotomous variable created from this question is one if respondents answered always or often and zero if they answered rarely or never. Respondents who believe that politicians keep their promises should be more susceptible to partisan appeals and more likely to express a partisan preference than those who do not believe this.

#### *Incumbent performance and political credibility*

The inability of political competitors to make broadly credible commitments should also be reflected in the asymmetric effects on partisan preference of opinions about incumbent performance. Questions 65a and 65b in the Afrobarometer survey gauge respondent opinions of the incumbent with the questions, “How well or badly is government managing the economy?” and, “How well or badly is the government creating jobs?” Similar to the role of government question, two dichotomous variables are created from each of these two questions. The first two variables equal one if respondents express any opinion, good or bad, about incumbent performance on managing the economy or on jobs creation and zero if they do not. The other two variables equal one if respondents

answered “fairly well” or “very well” and zero otherwise. If both are significant, political competitors are less likely to be credible, since those who disapprove of incumbent performance, lacking a credible challenger, are less likely to have a partisan preference than those who approve.

#### *Other credibility controls*

While the main programmatic feature of African political parties that is of concern in political economy and development analyses of the continent is their ethnic character, it is possible that they attract support with other programmatic appeals. The Afrobarometer surveys permit controls for two such appeals. First, as in established democracies, parties in some African countries might mobilize support in part through their policy stance on the role of government in the economy. Second, in less-established democracies, such as those in the sample, the simple fact that some parties are more closely associated with democratization and others with regimes of the pre-democratic era may affect partisan preferences. The analysis below takes these two possibilities into account by controlling for respondent preferences regarding the role of government and democracy.

Attitudes to government intervention are reflected in Question 19, which asks whether the respondent believes that people should look after themselves and be responsible for their own success, whether the government should bear the main responsibility for their well-being, whether neither reflects their opinion, or whether they do not know. This question relates to policy areas, ranging from the creation of a safety net to the privatization of state-owned enterprises, that are prominent in government policy making in Africa. Approximately 47 percent of all respondents believe that individuals are responsible for their own welfare, while 49 percent believe that government has an important role to play. As with the democracy question, two variables are coded based on this question. The first

equals one if respondents have a positive or a negative opinion on government intervention and zero otherwise. The second is equal to one for respondents who believe that individuals are responsible for their own success and zero otherwise.

In question 37, respondents indicate whether they believe that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, whether non-democratic governments might be preferable, or whether the type of government does not matter. Fewer than 10 percent of all respondents agree with the statement that in some circumstances, democracy is not the best form of government; more than 60 percent agree that it is the best form of government; the remainder are indifferent. This variable forms the basis for two dichotomous variables. The first equals one if respondents have any opinion on democracy, positive or negative, and zero otherwise. The second is coded one for respondents who believe democracy is always better and zero otherwise.

If parties are able to mobilize support because of credible stances on the role of government or democracy, survey respondents with corresponding preferences should be more likely to favor the particular parties that reflect those preferences. The interpretation of this association is not straightforward, however, since citizen opinions about democracy or the role of government are likely to be correlated with unobserved civic engagement. Citizens with no opinion about the role of government are likely to be less engaged in the political process altogether and for that reason, rather than the credibility of political parties, be more likely to express partisan disaffection. Citizens with no opinion about democracy, or hostility towards democracy, may similarly be less likely to express a partisan preference for reasons independent of whether pro- or anti-democracy parties exist.

In the case of the role of government, the two possibilities can be distinguished, however,. If parties have credible stances on these issues, then those who express any

opinion about self-reliance should be *both* more likely to express a partisan preference *and* to favor the same political parties as those who share their policy preferences. The estimates below indicate that only the first of these is true; those with similar opinions about democracy or self-reliance show few signs of supporting the same political party. Parties are therefore not making credible policy promises; instead, those who express a policy opinion are simply more likely to be engaged politically.

#### *Control variables*

The key comparisons made in the analysis below are between those who express support for parties and those who express disaffection. Disaffection has explanations other than party characteristics, however. These alternative explanations are taken into account in the analysis here. Poor, uneducated or rural voters may be less interested in politics or more difficult for political parties to reach. Afrobarometer surveys have questions on each of these. The survey asks households to list whether they own particular assets, from a book to a motorcycle or car. Ownership of these assets is controlled for in the analysis below. Respondents' answers to the Afrobarometer question on their level of educational attainment are also taken into account.

**Table 1: Variable summary**

	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Any partisan preference (0=disaffection)?	23075	.59	.49	0	1
Prefers democracy?	23093	.62	.45	0	1
Any opinion about democracy?	23085	.72	.45	0	1
Believes individual is more responsible for own welfare than government (“self-reliance”)?	23093	.47	.50	0	1
Any opinion about “self-reliance”?	23083	.96	.19	0	1
Approves of incumbent performance on job creation?	23093	.27	.45	0	1
Any opinion about incumbent jobs performance?	23093	.96	.19	0	1
Approves of incumbent performance on the economy?	23093	.49	.50	0	2
Any opinion about incumbent economy performance?	23093	.94	.23	0	1
Respondent offered gifts by candidates?	22822	.19	.39	0	1
Perceived frequency of candidate gift giving	21951	2.00	1.04	0	3
Perceived frequency that politicians keep their promises?	22488	.78	.85	0	3
Ethnic grievance?	23093	.11	.32	0	1
Fraction of seven public services they receive	23058	.43	.29	0	1
Fraction of five household assets they possess	23076	.30	.22	0	1
Respondent education (none to post-graduate)	23022	3.10	2.01	0	9

Harding (2008) uses citizen access to services as a proxy for whether respondents are urban residents or not, a status that is not captured directly in the Afrobarometer survey. Here, the services variable is the average of dichotomous variables that respectively indicate whether respondents have easy access to a post office, school, police station, electricity, water, sewage and health clinic.

The presence of these controls creates a bias against the hypothesis that political competitors are non-credible and that political competition is rooted in clientelist promises. For example, variables that influence the costs to parties of reaching voters also affect the costs to them of making broadly credible versus narrowly clientelist appeals to voters. The votes of poor voters are cheaper to buy, so controls for voter assets capture the likelihood that those voters will be subject to clientelist appeals.

### **Ethnic grievance versus credibility and clientelism: pooled results**

Three sets of tests all provide evidence that political parties in the 16 African countries are generally unable to make broadly credible commitments to citizens, including to co-ethnics. The first, the focus of this section, simply pools all of the data from all of the countries and examines the effects of variables more closely associated with the absence of clientelism (gift-giving and an asymmetric response to incumbent performance). Most tests of ethnicity cannot be performed in a pooled sample, since the relevant hypotheses concern the behavior of members of large ethnic groups in a particular country relative to members of smaller ethnic groups in that country, not to members of smaller ethnic groups generally. However, the pooled regressions do control for ethnic grievance. A probit specification is then used to estimate equation 1 in a pooled sample of all 16 sample countries (around 21,000 observations).

*Eq. 1*

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Partisan preference}(yes, no) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{democracy} + \beta_2 \text{self - reliance} \\ & + \beta_3 \text{incumbent performance}_{-economy} + \beta_4 \text{incumbent performance}_{-jobs} \\ & + \beta_5 \text{vote buying} + \beta_6 \text{gift giving} + \beta_7 \text{promises kept} + \beta_8 \text{ethnic grievance} + \beta_9 \text{social services} \\ & + \beta_{10} \text{household assets} + \beta_{11} \text{education} + \text{opinion}_{-dummies}' \mathbf{B}_{12} + \text{country dummies}' \mathbf{B}_{13} + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

If politicians are non-credible, and if recipients associate gifts with parties, then those who were offered a gift (*vote buying* is one) should be (weakly) more likely to express a

partisan preference ( $\beta_5 > 0$ ). Those who believe that politicians give gifts (*gift-giving* equals one), controlling for whether they received one, should be less likely ( $\beta_6 < 0$ ). If political parties cannot make broadly credible commitments to voters, then respondents who approve of incumbent performance should be more likely to have a partisan preference than those who disapprove; the coefficients  $\beta_3$  or  $\beta_4$  should be positive.

The expected sign of ethnic grievance is more ambiguous, but in general, the less able political competitors are to make credible commitments to co-ethnics, the less likely ethnic grievance is to be associated with partisan preference:  $\beta_8$  should be insignificant. The specifications also control for respondent opinions about democracy and the role of government. If parties exist that can make credible commitments to expand or to limit the role of government, then anyone with any opinion about the role of government should be more likely to express a partisan preference; if parties exist that are associated with support and resistance to democratization, then those with any opinion about democracy should also be more likely to express a partisan preference. In either case, the corresponding coefficients in the vector  $\mathbf{B}_{12}$  (whether respondents have an opinion at all) should be significant. The coefficients  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  will be positive to the extent that only parties that favor democracy or a smaller role for government can make credible commitments, or if those who hold such opinions are more likely to engage in the political process. Finally, the variable *promises kept* reflects whether respondents believe that politicians keep their promises. Those who do not should be less likely to express a partisan preference than those who do, in which case,  $\beta_7$  is greater than zero.

Table 3 presents estimates of four versions of equation 1. The base specification in column 1 includes all control variables and country fixed effects. The specification in the second column removes all of the policy preference and incumbent performance variables,

in case these are correlated with ethnicity. The third specification is the same as in column 1, but omits country fixed effects. The fourth column estimates the effects of only the core credibility variables (e.g., gift-giving) and ethnic grievance.

In all four columns, results support the conclusion that lack of candidate credibility and reliance on clientelist promises significantly influences partisan preferences. First, respondents who believe gift-giving by politicians is common (most of whom have themselves not received a gift), are significantly less likely to express partisan attachment. Second, those who approve of incumbent performance are much more likely than those who disapprove to have a partisan preference, consistent with the absence of credible challengers to whom those dissatisfied with the incumbent can throw their support. Finally, those who believe that politicians keep their promises are more likely to express a partisan preference.

In no specification is ethnic grievance significant. Although the ethnically aggrieved might be the most susceptible to party appeals to ethnicity, the evidence in Table 3 indicates that parties do not succeed in mobilizing the ethnically aggrieved. This is true even when parties exist that draw support disproportionately from the ethnic group of the aggrieved, as with the Akan in Ghana.

**Table 3: Correlates of partisan disaffection across 16 African countries**

(Dependent variable: 1 if respondent has any partisan preferences, 0 if none; p-statistics from robust standard errors reported in parentheses)

	Country fixed effects (1)	Country fixed effects (2)	No fixed effects (3)	No fixed effects (4)
<b>Was respondent offered a gift before last election? (0 – 1)</b>	<b>0.071</b> <b>(0.00)</b>	<b>0.069</b> <b>(0.00)</b>	<b>0.0053</b> <b>(0.55)</b>	<b>0.0047</b> <b>(0.59)</b>
<b>How frequent is pre-electoral gift-giving by politicians? (0, never – 3, always)</b>	<b>-0.018</b> <b>(0.00)</b>	<b>-0.020</b> <b>(0.00)</b>	<b>-0.041</b> <b>(0.00)</b>	<b>-0.043</b> <b>(0.00)</b>
How frequently do politicians keep promises? (0, never – 3, always)	0.024 (0.00)	0.029 (0.00)	0.034 (0.00)	0.043 (0.00)
<b>Expresses ethnic grievance (0,1)</b>	<b>0.0053</b> <b>(0.63)</b>	<b>-0.0060</b> <b>(0.58)</b>	<b>0.011</b> <b>(0.31)</b>	<b>-0.0082</b> <b>(0.43)</b>
Favors democracy (0-1)	0.037 (0.00)		0.022 (0.05)	
Has an opinion about democracy (0-1)	0.070 (0.00)		0.077 (0.00)	
Believes individual is more responsible for own welfare than government (0-1)	-0.015 (0.04)		-0.0030 (0.67)	
Has an opinion about government's role (0-1)	0.054 (0.01)		0.046 (0.01)	
<b>Approves incumbent performance, jobs (0-1)</b>	<b>0.055</b> <b>(0.00)</b>		<b>0.042</b> <b>(0.00)</b>	
Has an opinion about incumbent performance, jobs (0-1)	0.064 (0.00)		0.095 (0.00)	
<b>Approves incumbent performance, economy (0-1)</b>	<b>0.030</b> <b>(0.00)</b>		<b>0.086</b> <b>(0.00)</b>	
Has an opinion about incumbent performance, economy (0-1)	0.11 (0.00)		0.050 (0.00)	
Fraction of seven services they receive (0-1)	-0.077 (0.00)	-0.074 (0.00)	-0.12 (0.00)	
Fraction of five assets they possess (0-1)	0.16 (0.00)	0.19 (0.00)	0.10 (0.00)	
Highest level of education completed? (0, none – 9, post-graduate)	-0.0024 (0.25)	0.0040 (0.06)	0.0024 (0.20)	
Observations	21328	21355	21328	21469
Pseudo R-squared	0.09	0.08	0.03	0.01

Note: Probit estimates, coefficients are the change in probabilities associated with unit changes in independent variables. Respondents are from Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Constants not reported.

The policy variables are significant determinants of partisan preference, but this is unlikely to be the result of parties' credible appeals to defend or oppose democracy or a more limited role for government. Instead, those with strong policy preferences are simply more likely to participate in the political process. Both the education and asset coefficients are intuitive: education has a (weakly) positive effect on partisan preference and wealthier voters are significantly more likely to express a preference. The *services* coefficient says that the greater is respondent access to police, sewage, water, schools, etc., the *less* likely they are to express a partisan preference. One possible explanation is that for households where these services are available, the marginal utility of clientelist promises is lower. Absent parties able to make credible commitments to a broad base of voters, such respondents have no reason to express a party preference.

The country fixed effects from the column 1 regressions in Table 3 are reported in Table 4. Four countries, Benin, Madagascar, Nigeria and Zambia, have notable negative fixed effects: respondents from those countries are much less likely than average to express a partisan preference. These are consistent with the theory. For example, political parties of recent vintage should be less likely to be able to make credible appeals of all kinds. The largest governing parties in the four countries were three years old (in Benin and Madagascar) seven years old (Nigeria) and 15 years old (Zambia), or seven years old on average (the Database of Political Institutions, Beck, et al. 2001). For the remaining ten countries with information on the age of the main government party, the average is 29.5 years, of which only two are less than five years old (Kenya and Senegal).

One might be concerned that the respondents from the negative outliers, or from the two countries with no information on party age (Mali and Uganda), might drive the

results in Table 3. However, the results are robust either to omitting respondents from the four negative outlier countries or respondents from Mali and Uganda.

**Table 4: Country fixed effects from column 1, Table 2**

(Senegal is the omitted comparator, robust *p*-values in parentheses)

Benin	-0.22 (0.00)	Mozambique	0.27 (0.00)
Botswana	0.22 (0.00)	Namibia	0.24 (0.00)
Ghana	0.13 (0.00)	Nigeria	-0.078 (0.00)
Kenya	0.079 (0.00)	South Africa	0.059 (0.00)
Lesotho	0.24 (0.00)	Tanzania	0.23 (0.00)
Madagascar	-0.23 (0.00)	Uganda	0.031 (0.10)
Malawi	0.085 (0.00)	Zambia	-0.012 (0.58)
Mali	0.029 (0.16)		

Source: Country fixed effects from estimates in Table 2, column 1.

### Results – country-by-country determinants of political disaffection

More accurate tests of the role of ethnicity in politics examine the partisan preferences of members of large ethnic groups relative to those of smaller ethnic groups. Two such tests are performed in this and the following section: first, country-by-country estimates of the determinants of *whether* respondents express a partisan preference and, second, country-by-country estimates of whether members of larger ethnic groups are more likely to support a *particular* party than are members of smaller ethnic groups.

To examine the first question, Equation 1 was estimated for each of the 16 countries, taking into account whether the respondents belonged to the largest ethnic groups in the country. If a party has succeeded in making credible promises to serve the interests of one of these large ethnic groups, then members of that group should be more likely to express a

partisan preference than to be disaffected. This is a weak test of the ability of parties to make ethnic appeals, since even clientelist parties, able to make promises only to some members of an ethnic group, could trigger a similar pattern of partisan preference.

The tables in Annex 1 report the results of these estimates. With regard to the ethnic appeal of political parties, members of only 11 of the 47 larger ethnic groups, in 7 of 16 countries, are more likely to express a partisan preference than members of smaller ethnic groups. In only two countries, Mozambique and Senegal, are those with an ethnic grievance significantly more likely to express a partisan preference.

In contrast, in 13 of 16 countries, at least one indicator of the lack of credibility of political competitors, either gift giving or incumbent approval, is significant. In ten countries, respondents who receive gifts are significantly more likely to express a partisan preference or those who believe gift-giving is frequent are less likely. In ten countries, respondents who approve of the jobs or economic performance of the incumbent are significantly more likely than those who disapprove to express a partisan preference.

### **Results – country-by-country determinants of party support**

The results in the tables in Annex 1 do not identify the degree to which individual parties are organized around ethnic appeals. If appeals to ethnicity play an important role in how major parties mobilize electoral support, then members of those groups should be more likely to support individual parties than to express disaffection. That is, the odds that members of some ethnic group will prefer that party, relative to the odds that they express disaffection, should be significantly greater than zero. This is, again, a weak test for the credibility of ethnic appeals, since clientelist promises targeted at narrow groups of co-ethnics can also generate these results.

To test this proposition, equation 2 is estimated for each of the sixteen countries included in the Table 2 regressions. Equation 2 differs from equation 1 in two ways. First, it includes ethnic dummies and, second, the dependent variable is no longer dichotomous (do respondents express a partisan preference), but instead categorical (which party do respondents prefer). The correlates of a party's support base are not estimable when the number of respondents who profess support for the party is too small. The party choices analyzed below are therefore confined to parties preferred by at least five percent of respondents or disaffection; respondents who preferred a smaller party are excluded from the analysis.

If large ethnic groups are more likely to be targeted with credible partisan appeals, then members of those groups should be more likely to express a preference for a particular party than members of smaller groups. The corresponding coefficient from the ethnic coefficients  $B_{13}$  will then be greater than zero. If an ethnic group is worried that a particular party is for some reason *opposed* to its interests, then, for that ethnic group,  $B_{13}$  will be negative.

*Eq. 2*

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Partisan preference}(\text{party } i \dots j, \text{ no party}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{democracy preferences} + \beta_2 \text{self - reliance} \\ & + \beta_3 \text{incumbent performance - economy} + \beta_4 \text{incumbent performance - jobs} \\ & + \beta_5 \text{vote buying} + \beta_6 \text{gift giving} + \beta_7 \text{promises kept} + \beta_8 \text{ethnic grievance} + \beta_9 \text{social services} \\ & + \beta_{10} \text{household assets} + \beta_{11} \text{education} + \text{opinion dummies}' B_{12} + \text{ethnic dummies}' B_{13} + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

Several estimation strategies are available to estimate the determinants of discrete choices. Conditional logits and multinomial probits, for example, allow analysts to take into account the positions of the political party (e.g., moderately or extremely left-wing) relative to the preferences of the respondent (Alvarez and Nagler 1998). These are computationally

demanding; for many of the countries in the sample here, conditional logit estimates simply do not converge.

In the current study it is both less important and not possible to model the positions of political parties. Party position matters only when parties can make credible commitments to policies and when they can modulate those commitments as required by electoral circumstances. To the extent that the parties in this sample cannot make credible policy commitments, and to the extent that party characteristics that are of potentially greatest electoral importance, such as ethnicity, are not easy to modify, it matters less that party positions are not directly modeled. More practically, it is simply not possible to use Afrobarometer surveys to assess party positions since the surveys do not ask respondents to assess the positions of political parties on the issues.

Instead, for purposes of looking at the individual correlates of partisan affiliation, the simpler and most frequently employed discrete choice model, the multinomial logit, is appropriate. The multinomial logit estimation assumes that the consumer (of autos or political parties) has  $J + 1$  choices and that the utility of the  $j$ th choice is given, with error, by  $U_{ij} = \beta' z_i + \varepsilon_{ij}$ . Note that utility in the analysis here depends only on the characteristics of the individual  $i$ , not the party  $j$ . For  $\varepsilon_i = \varepsilon_{ij}$ , choices would depend on both individual and choice (party) characteristics, but we have no data on party characteristics from Afrobarometer data. On the contrary, individual characteristics are being used to infer party characteristics. If the consumer is observed to prefer the  $j$ th alternative, we conclude that this choice offers the maximum utility among all possible choices. As is well-known (e.g., in Greene 1993), if the  $J + 1$  disturbances  $\varepsilon_{i0\dots j}$  are independent and identically distributed with

Weibull distribution  $F(\varepsilon_{ij}) = \exp(e^{-\varepsilon_i})$ , then  $\text{Prob}(Y_i = j) = \frac{e^{\beta_j z_i}}{1 + \sum_1^J e^{\beta_k z_i}}$  and

$$\text{Prob}(Y_i = 0) = \frac{1}{1 + \sum_1^J e^{\beta_k z_i}}, \text{ where } Y_i \text{ is the individual's choice.}$$

Table 5 illustrates the approach with the results from Ghana; Annex 2 contains the results for the 15 remaining countries. The table reports the odds ratios: how does the presence or absence of a particular respondent characteristic (e.g., ethnicity or views on democracy) affect the odds that a respondent would support the party rather than express disaffection? Coefficients greater than one indicate that the odds would increase; coefficients less than one indicate that they would fall.

The two main parties in Ghana are the NPP and NDC. The NDC is the party created by Jerry Rawlings, who was the unelected leader of Ghana through the 1980s and 1990s and is traditionally viewed as a party of the Upper Volta region, particularly attractive to the Ewe, who are the predominant group in that region. The NPP is traditionally viewed as the party of the Akan. If one followed common practice and looked only at who supports the two parties, one would indeed conclude that parties make broad-based ethnic appeals and that politics is heavily polarized on ethnic lines. Of Akan respondents, 54 percent favor the NPP versus 11 percent that favor the NDC. Forty-one percent of Ewe respondents favor the NDC, versus 27 percent who favor the NPP. The Dagaati are the second largest ethnic group among the respondents to the Ghana survey, but are not viewed as having a party that is focused on their interests. They are more evenly split in their support, 33 percent for the NPP and 24 percent for the NDC.

This comparison misses the important fact that rates of disaffection are high: 35 percent of the Akan, 31 percent of the Ewe and 38 percent of the Dagaati do not feel close to any political party. As the results in the Annex 1 table indicate, the Akan (from whom the NPP draws support) and the Dagaati (not linked with any party) are *both* significantly less likely to express a partisan preference than members of other ethnic groups, including the Ewe.

Table 4 offers a more detailed look at the partisan loyalties of these two groups. Compared to members of smaller ethnic groups, including the Ewe, the Akan are no more likely to support “their” party, the NPP, than to express disaffection. In specifications that explicitly control for Ewe respondents, the same is true; in addition, the Ewe are no more likely to support “their” party, the NDC, than members of excluded ethnic groups. Ethnic grievance also has no effect on the decision to prefer either of the two major parties.

Table 4 is also informative about the absence of credibility in Ghanaian politics. Ghanaian parties are older and more established than those of many other African democracies, have experienced leadership changes, and therefore may in fact be able to make broader promises to citizens. Consistent with this, not only are those who approve of incumbent performance more likely to favor the incumbent party (the NPP at the time of the survey), those who disapprove are more likely to vote for the challenger party, the NDC. However, gift-giving plays a substantial role in partisan effects.<sup>12</sup>

Greater reliance on gifts is likely among less programmatic parties, and is a well-known phenomenon in Ghanaian politics. After interacting extensively with Ghanaian MPs

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<sup>12</sup>One puzzling result, atypical across all 16 countries, is that the perceived frequency of gift-giving is a significant positive correlate of support for the NDC. One likely explanation is that disappointed respondents associated gift-giving with the behavior of the incumbent party, the NPP, and therefore were more likely to support the NDC.

around the 2000 elections, Lindberg (2003) reported, “All interviewees expressed great concern that the amounts they were forced to spend on personal patronage to constituents had increased dramatically as compared to previous election campaigns” (p. 130). The sums devoted to this are also relatively large. Of 73 MP candidates interviewed, 46 percent reported spending at least 2 years salary on their campaigns. Only 10 percent of those candidates who also ran in the 1996 elections reported spending as much. 57 percent reported that they devoted at least 25 percent of their total spending to personal patronage in 2000, compared to 50 percent in 1996.

Candidate behavior during electoral campaigns further indicates the lack of programmatic content in electoral decision making. The Center for the Development of Democracy-Ghana (CDD-Ghana) held debates for parliamentary candidates in 24 constituencies across the country in 2004 and recorded the proceedings of 15 of them in detail (Center for Democratic Development, no date). Of 14 NPP candidates who appeared in the 15 debates, eight made no mention at all of the national party, either its program or its past performance, despite the generally recognized success of the NPP’s first four years in government. Only five of all the NPP candidates mentioned policy issues that extended beyond the constituency; the remainder confined themselves exclusively to constituency-level policy interventions. Candidates focused instead on their individual past performance, generally their contribution to local public works projects and to targeted transfers, such as student scholarships, many funded out of their own pockets or out of the MPs’ Common Fund.

**Table 5: Correlates of Partisan Preference, Ghana***(Robust p values in parentheses)*

	Ghana	
	NPP	NDC
Favors democracy (0-1)	1.34 (0.34)	0.61 (0.14)
Believes individual is more responsible for own welfare than government (0-1)	0.95 (0.73)	0.79 (0.22)
Approves incumbent performance, jobs (0-1)	1.67 (0.00)	0.74 (0.21)
Approves incumbent performance, economy (0-1)	1.67 (0.01)	0.41 (0.00)
Was respondent offered a gift before last election? 0 – 1	2.10 (0.00)	1.89 (0.03)
How frequent is pre-electoral gift-giving by politicians? 0 (never) - 3 (always)	1.03 (0.67)	1.29 (0.01)
How frequently do politicians keep promises? 0 (never) - 3 (always)	1.20 (0.06)	1.29 (0.02)
Expresses ethnic grievance (0,1)	0.88 (0.59)	1.17 (0.54)
Fraction of seven services they receive(0-1)	0.62 (0.07)	0.36 (0.00)
Fraction of five assets they possess(0-1)	2.17 (0.04)	1.70 (0.24)
Highest level of education completed? (0, none - 9, post-graduate)	1.02 (0.56)	1.00 (0.91)
Akan	1.14 (0.47)	0.29 (0.00)
Dagaati	0.77 (0.27)	0.51 (0.01)
Observations	1067	1067
Pseudo R-squared	0.13	0.13

Note: Results from multinomial logit estimations for Ghana. Constants and coefficients indicating effect of respondents having an opinion on incumbents, democracy or role of government are not reported. The comparator category is “disaffected”. Coefficients are odds ratios: the probability that a respondent will prefer the particular party divided by the probability that the respondent will prefer to be disaffected. Odds ratios less than one imply a lower probability of preferring a party rather than expressing disaffection.

It is not unusual for local issues to loom large in parliamentary elections, even in mature democracies. What is unusual in mature democracies, but much less so in younger democracies, is for the positions of the candidates' parties on key national issues to be of practically no relevance to electoral decision making. It is especially unusual for non-incumbents, with no track record of personal accomplishment, to ignore the party. However, of 12 non-incumbents from the NPP, only half mentioned the accomplishments of the NPP government. The NDC candidates were even more emphatic in underplaying the national party, with only three of 12 candidates mentioning the national party's accomplishments, and only two of 12 mentioning policy issues that transcended constituency borders.

In addition, the data provide no indication of that parties are able to make any credible programmatic appeal to voters, ethnicity-based or otherwise. For example, in contrast to much of the literature, the tests in Table 5 show no evidence of significant clustering of support for the NPP or the NDC according to whether respondents favor or oppose a more limited role for government in the economy. Based on qualitative evidence and the historical record, observers have made the opposite claim.

For example, the NPP is a part of the anti-Nkrumah tradition of J.B. Danquah and President Kofi Busia, typically viewed as the party of business (or at least, of successful businessmen, or "big men") (Nugent 1999, 290). The NDC, on the other hand, began as a revolutionary, socialist party that rapidly became more populist and "developmental" (oriented towards public works).<sup>13</sup> *The Economist Intelligence Unit* (2006, p. 10-12) describes the NPP as the party of the market and of business, opposed to interventionist policies of Ghana's post-independence leader, Kwame Nkrumah, and virulently opposed to the

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<sup>13</sup> Parties in the tradition of Kwame Nkrumah, also with a more left-leaning ideology, persist as well, but none approaches the two main parties as a political force; in the 2000 elections, the two main parties won 93 percent of the presidential votes and all but eight parliamentary seats (Nugent 2001, 422).

aggressive anti-business policies followed by the Rawlings government immediately after taking power in 1981. The NDC, in contrast, traditionally favored more significant government intervention in the economy, though it lost a definite policy identity as a result of major liberalizations that began under the Economic Recovery Program (ERP) around 1983.

Lindberg and Morrison (2005) use survey evidence from 690 voters in 2003 to argue that partisan preferences differ by education, the rural-urban divide, income and occupation, the same dividing lines that one observes in mature democracies. Based on this, they also conclude that Ghanaian parties convey policy messages to voters. However, they are not able to examine directly whether partisan preferences among their respondents cluster according to policy preference.

#### **Summarizing the results: credibility and clientelism versus ethnicity**

Table 6 summarizes the results of these tests across all 16 countries and permits a synthetic examination of the question: are parties able to make credible commitments and, in particular, are they able to make them to co-ethnics? The results already discussed from the tables in Annex 1 on gift-giving and incumbent performance underline the difficulties that political competitors have in making credible commitments. Column 7 indicates that gift-giving variables are significant determinants of whether respondents have a partisan preference in 10 countries; column 8 indicates that incumbent approval, but not incumbent disapproval, is associated with having a partisan preference in 10 countries. Column 9 summarizes these results and indicates that in 13 countries, the partisan preferences of respondents are guided by candidate gifts and their approval of incumbent performance.

In contrast, ethnic effects are weak. If political competitors can make broadly credible commitments to citizens, then, first, large ethnic groups should be more likely to

support a particular party than to express disaffection, relative to smaller ethnic groups and, second, members of those such large ethnic groups should be less likely to express partisan disaffection than members of smaller ethnic groups. Column 1 indicates that of 47 large ethnic groups, 21 were more likely to support a particular party. Column 2 focuses on those 21 ethnic groups identified and records whether their members were *also* less likely to express disaffection generally. Only 11 of the 21 groups identified in column 1 have this characteristic.

Column 3 focuses on the parties rather than the ethnic groups. Of 38 political parties, only 11 are able to attract the support of particular ethnic groups and exercise enough attraction that members of the groups are less likely to express disaffection than members of smaller groups. These results indicate that perhaps in one-fourth of all cases, political parties may be able to use broad promises to co-ethnics to mobilize support. However, even this fraction is likely to be an upper bound, since clientelist promises directed towards co-ethnics could also be responsible for these results.

**Table 6: Summarizing the evidence: is political mobilization reliant on broadly credible appeals to co-ethnics or narrowly credible appeals to clients?**

	(1) Number of larger ethnic groups who are more likely to support a particular party than to express disaffection, relative to smaller ethnic groups  <i>(total number of larger ethnic groups in parentheses).</i>	(2) Number of groups in (1) whose members are more likely to express a preference for any party than to express disaffection	(3) Number of parties for which conditions in columns (1) and (2) hold  <i>(total number of larger parties)</i>	(4) Number of parties for which conditions in columns (1) and (2) hold for only one ethnic group, and that ethnic group is attached only to one party	(5) Number of parties that the ethnically aggrieved are more or less likely to support than to express partisan indifference	(6) <b>Are politics organized around broad ethnic interests?</b> Yes if at least 2 different parties are included in columns (4) and (5)	(7) Respondents who receive gifts more likely or respondents who believe gift-giving is common less likely, to express a partisan preference	(8) Respondents who approve of incumbent performance are significantly more likely to have a partisan preference	(9) <b>Are politics clientelist /political actors non-credible?</b> Either (7) or (8) is true
Benin	2 (2)	0	0 (3)	0	0	No	Yes	No	Yes
Botswana	1 (5)	0	0 (3)	0	0	No	No	No	No
Ghana	0 (2)	0	0 (2)	0	0	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kenya	2 (3)	0	0 (3)	0	1 (more likely)	No	No	Yes	Yes
Lesotho	0 (3)	0	0 (2)	0	0	No	No	No	No
Madagascar	0 (3)	0	0 (1)	0	0	No	No	Yes	Yes
Malawi	3 (4)	0	0 (3)	0	0	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mali	1 (4)	1	1 (4)	0	0	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mozambique	2 (2)	2	2 (2)	0	1 (more likely)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

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 Saylor URL: <http://www.saylor.org/courses/polsc325>

**Table 6 (Con't): Summarizing the evidence: is political mobilization reliant on broadly credible appeals to co-ethnics or narrowly credible appeals to clients?**

	(1) Number of larger ethnic groups who are more likely to support a particular party than to express disaffection, relative to smaller ethnic groups <i>(total number of larger ethnic groups in parentheses).</i>	(2) Number of groups in (1) whose members are more likely to express a preference for any party than to express disaffection	(3) Number of parties for which conditions in columns (1) and (2) hold <i>(total number of larger parties)</i>	(4) Number of parties for which conditions in columns (1) and (2) hold for only one ethnic group, and that ethnic group is attached only to one party	(5) Number of parties that the ethnically aggrieved are more or less likely to support than to express partisan indifference	(6) <b>Are politics organized around broad ethnic interests?</b> Yes if at least 2 different parties are included in columns (4) and (5)	(7) Respondents who receive gifts more likely or respondents who believe gift-giving is common less likely, to express a partisan preference	(8) Respondents who approve of incumbent performance are significantly more likely to have a partisan preference	(9) <b>Are politics clientelist /political actors non-credible?</b> Either (6) or (7) is true
Namibia	1 (2)	1	1 (3)	1	0	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nigeria	1 (3)	1	1 (2)	1	1 (less likely)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Senegal	0 (2)	0	0 (2)	0	0	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Africa	3 (3)	3	1 (1)	0	1 (less likely)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tanzania	0 (2) (see notes)	0	0 (1)	0	0	No	No	No	No
Uganda	2 (4)	1	2 (3)	2	2 (more likely)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Zambia	3 (3)	2	3 (3)	2	1 (more likely)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21 (47)</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11 (38)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2 Yes</b>	<b>10 Yes</b>	<b>10 Yes</b>	<b>13 Yes</b>

Notes: In Tanzania, the list of ethnic groups to which at least some respondents said they belonged was large – more than ten. Nevertheless, the largest category of responses was “Other ethnic group”, to which more than 40% belonged; the next largest response was the Miskuna; these are the two analyzed here. Results are based on 16 multinomial regressions of equation 2 (one for each of the sixteen countries). “Fraction” refers to fraction of respondents for that country. “Ethnic groups with significant ethnic coefficients” refers to the coefficients on the ethnic group dummies in regressions such as those in Table 3. “Clustering” is defined to occur when respondents with higher scores on the respective “cluster” variable (e.g., particular ethnic identity, ethnic grievance, self-reliance or democracy) are more likely to favor a particular party than to be disaffected in regressions such as those in Table 3.

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Column 4 addresses whether countries exhibit ethnically polarized political competition, by counting the cases in which multiple political parties are able to credibly represent the interests of *particular* ethnic groups. In particular, how many parties exist in each country for which the following is true: members of only one ethnic group are significantly more likely to prefer a party than to express disaffection, they are not significantly more likely to prefer any other party than to express disaffection, and the attraction of the party is such that (from the tables in Annex 1) members of the ethnic group are generally more likely to express a partisan preference than disaffection. There are only six parties in four countries for which this is true. Moreover, polarization requires at least two opposing groups, but in only two countries are there at least two such groups, in Uganda and Zambia. These results are inconsistent with the concept of polarization elaborated by Esteban and Ray (1994), where polarization is greatest when the preferences of large, equally-sized groups with internally cohesive preferences are in conflict.

Parties that attract the support of the more or less ethnically aggrieved might also be symptomatic of polarization; there are seven such parties altogether, as column 5 reports. One can take the results in columns 4 and 5 and ask whether countries exhibit political competition organized around the mobilization of broad ethnic interests. Column 6 indicates that in 14 of 16 countries the data reject this hypothesis.

### **Violence, credibility and ethnicity**

Table 6 does not report one final phenomenon that emerges in the regressions reported in Annex 2, foreshadowed already in the Ghana results in Table 5. Although neither the Akan nor the Dagaati were significantly more likely to support a party than to express disaffection, they were both significantly *less* likely (71 and 49 percent, respectively) to express disaffection than to support the NDC. Ethnic *rejection* of parties is in fact far

more common than affirmative support for parties. Ethnic groups were more likely to express disaffection than support for a party in 36 cases; in only 21 cases was the reverse true. Even if ethnic parties are unable to credibly commit to benefit the members of their own ethnic groups, they can increase the concern of other ethnic groups that they will allow party insiders to predate on non-co-ethnics. Even when intrinsic inter-ethnic hostility is low, in a world of limited information citizens may fear that elites will attempt to use inter-ethnic violence to build political support (e.g., de Figuereido and Weingast 1999).

The asymmetry between the number of parties that attract ethnic voters and the number that repel them supports the claim that political credibility is a significant challenge for political mobilization. If ethnic parties cannot credibly commit to defend co-ethnics from this violence, the threat of violence will not make members of large ethnic groups less disaffected than those from small ethnic groups. However, if threats to an ethnic group are emanating from a particular party, members of the target group could be more likely to express disaffection than support for that particular party, relative to smaller ethnic groups. This is what the data reveal in Africa.

Evidence from Kenya supports this interpretation. Scholars have recognized historical grievances over land that divide ethnic groups, patronage is ethnically targeted, voting patterns are ethnically skewed and, recently inter-ethnic political violence became significant. At the local level, Miguel and Gugerty (2005) argue that at the local level, ethnicity is responsible for low public goods provision. Moreover, in the annex tables one can see that the Luo and the ethnically aggrieved are far more likely to support the LDP, and the Kalenjin the KANU. However, a broader review of the evidence suggests that neither party makes credible commitments to improve the welfare of Luo and Kalenjin, generally.

First, gift-giving was a more significant determinant of support for the LDP, despite its strong ethnic appeal, than it is for the other two main parties. Second, compared to members of smaller ethnic groups, members of the dominant ethnic group, the Kikuyu, were not more likely to vote for “their” party, NARC, than to express disaffection. They were, however, more likely to express disaffection, compared to smaller ethnic groups, than to favor the LDP or the KANU. That is, members of the largest ethnic group had no confidence that their own party would serve their interests, but did believe that they would be more likely to be excluded, relative to smaller ethnic groups, from the fruits of clientelist policies distributed by other parties.

High rates of disaffection are the most important indication that Kenyan ethnic parties do not make credible promises to further the interests of their respective ethnic groups. Thirty-three percent of Luo respondents and 41 percent of Kalenjin expressed disaffection, compared to thirty-seven percent of all Kenyan respondents who did. Neither is more likely to express any partisan preference than smaller ethnic groups. The Kikuyu are as likely to be disaffected as members of any other ethnic group. These rates of disaffection are unexpected if the LDP or KANU could make credible promises to improve the welfare of the Luo or Kalenjin. They suggest that, in contrast to conclusions that Miguel and Gugerty draw from village level evidence, public policy performance at the national level is not the result of conflicts of interest between ethnic groups, but rather the result of non-credible leaders serving clientelist rather than broader public, or at least co-ethnic, interests.

### **Robustness issues**

While the tests here are generally biased in favor of finding that political parties mobilize support across ethnicities, since clientelist networks are likely to be more ethnically homogeneous than the population at large, one might claim that some features of the

estimations bias the tests in the other direction. First, it might be the case that incumbent performance variables are rooted in ethnicity and therefore spuriously drive out ethnic variables. In fact, all of the results presented here, particularly those summarized in Table 5, are essentially unchanged when the incumbent performance variables are omitted.

Second, it might be the case that the asymmetric incumbent performance results are the product of asymmetric party choices. That is, it is possible that those who disapprove of the incumbent simply do not have a challenger to whom they can turn. As a consequence, incumbent approvers are by definition more likely to express a partisan preference than those who disapprove. This is not inconsistent with the credibility argument: the less able challengers are to make broad credible commitments, the more fragmented they are likely to be. However, it is possible that incumbents systematically undermine challengers with all the legal and extra-institutional instruments at their disposal. This effect does not appear to drive the results, however, although it is true that in most countries the ruling party is dominant. Among the 10 countries in which incumbent approval had asymmetric effects on partisan preference, of respondents who expressed a partisan preference, 44 percent favored the ruling party and 10 percent favored the second largest party. Of the six countries in which effects were symmetric (those who approved of incumbent performance were not more likely to express a partisan preference), these numbers were almost exactly the same, 41 and 12 percent.

Third, countries vary substantially in their ethnic composition. In some cases, there is a large dominant ethnic group; in other cases, the ethnic groups are smaller and more evenly divided. The literature distinguishes between ethnic *diversity* and ethnic *polarization*. The first is usually operationalized as the probability that two randomly chosen individuals belong to a different ethnic group; the second is the degree to which large ethnic groups

with opposing interests exist in a society. When the largest ethnic group is small, diversity is likely high and polarization low. It could therefore be that heterogeneity across the 16 countries with respect either to diversity or polarization drive the results.

This is unlikely, however. The size of the largest ethnic group (the ethnic group to which the plurality of respondents claimed to belong) is unrelated to whether members of at least one of the larger ethnic groups were less disaffected than members of the smaller, reference ethnic groups. Of the nine countries in which at least one of the larger ethnic groups was less disaffected, 30 percent of respondents, on average, claimed membership in the largest ethnic group. Of the seven countries in which all large ethnic groups were no less disaffected than members of the reference groups, on average 33 percent of respondents said they belonged to the largest ethnic group.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, a key assumption in the estimates reported in Table 4 and the results in Annex 2 is the independence of irrelevant alternatives – are the correlates of partisan preferences for particular parties robust to the presence of different party choices? Specifically, the estimation assumes that the error terms associated with each choice  $j$  are independent and, therefore, the odds ratios  $P_j / P_k$ , are independent of the remaining probabilities. A central argument here is that the African democracies analyzed here lack programmatic parties, including parties that make credible, broad-based ethnic appeals. This is precisely the setting in which the IIA assumption is most likely to hold, however, since the emergence of additional parties that are not programmatic and can make no credible commitments to voters should have no influence on their choices.

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<sup>14</sup> Given the small sample size, it almost goes without saying that a two-tailed  $t$ -test does not reject the null hypothesis that these averages are the same ( $p = .84$ ).

Hausman tests of the IIA assumption indicate that the assumption is valid and, indirectly, therefore provide additional support for the central conclusions of the paper. In three cases the question is irrelevant: in Madagascar, Tanzania and South Africa, only one (the ruling) party is included in the analysis because respondents who prefer the ruling party or express disaffection make up a large fraction of total respondents. For the remaining cases, the Hausman test can be used to evaluate whether parameter estimates are stable when the available choices change. For all of these cases, the coefficient estimates of two specifications were compared with a Hausman test. One was the base regression, as in Table 3. The other was the same regression, but excluding from the estimates the most popular party and the respondents who preferred it. In six of these cases, the asymptotic assumptions of the Hausman test were fulfilled and the chi-square statistic failed to reject the null hypothesis that the estimated coefficients were the same. In the seven remaining cases the asymptotic assumptions of the Hausman test were not met. However, either by omitting the second largest party from the analysis rather than the largest, or by dropping controls for some ethnic groups that exhibited no signs of clustering, in five of these cases the asymptotic conditions of the test were met and the test did not reject the null hypothesis of IIA. In all of these cases, the key results were the same as in the original specifications.

## **Conclusion**

This paper makes two claims. First, respondents to the Afrobarometer survey do not behave as if political parties make broadly credible commitments to co-ethnics. Respondents generally are often no more likely to support a co-ethnic party than to express disaffection. Respondents do not expect co-ethnic leaders to represent their interests in political decision making regarding public goods, and they do not expect to benefit if these leaders launch attacks on other ethnic groups.

Second, politics is instead driven by party efforts to deliver benefits to that fraction of the population to which it can make credible promises. The very fact that parties fail to attract co-ethnics is evidence of this. So is the fact that they are much more susceptible to gift-giving and positive impressions of incumbent performance. Another is that they fail to attract like-minded citizens on issues related to the role of government. Even when they do, the like-minded are as likely to express disaffection as the average respondent from the country.

The evidence here therefore supports claims that ethnic clustering in African voting patterns is a *consequence* of the clientelist basis of political competition in African democracies, but goes further to support one particular explanation for this bias: the inability of political actors to make broadly credible commitments to citizens. For reasons outlined in Keefer and Vlaicu (2008): it is cheaper for non-credible political competitors to make credible commitments to narrow groups of co-ethnics than to others. This explains why, even when members of an ethnic group are more likely to favor a particular party than to express disaffection, they are not less likely to express disaffection generally. It explains why members of ethnic groups are more likely to reject a party than to favor one.

The interaction of ethnicity with political and other distortions explains the fragility of many results that link ethnic fragmentation or polarization to growth or policy outcomes. Keefer (2007) concludes that ethnic fractionalization does not explain stark differences in the policy choices of democracies; those choices are explained by the age of democracy, providing support for the argument that differences in the political credibility of political competitors drives the under-provision of public goods. Keefer (2008) can find no robust link between ethnic fragmentation and conflict among poor countries (where more than 90

percent of conflicts occurred), but does identify robust effects on conflict vulnerability of political characteristics associated with clientelism.

These results are important because many analysts argue for institutional reforms specifically targeted at ethnicity to mitigate the risks of conflict. Reynal-Querol (2002), for example, points to evidence that particular types of electoral and political institutions are likely to mitigate the risks of conflict, precisely because they facilitate inter-ethnic agreement, arguments reflected as well in Bardhan (1997) and institution-building strategies pursued by donors in post-conflict and other fragile countries. The effects of institutional reforms are unlikely to be significant, however, in environments where politicians are unable to make broadly credible commitments to citizens. Keefer (2007, 2008) finds, in fact, that several institutional strategies, such as proportional representation, have a limited impact on the policy choices of democracies or the probability of conflict among poor countries when one controls for measures of political credibility.

The results are also important for understanding the performance of democracies. When parties represent only narrow interests – and not even the interests of co-ethnics – the provision of public goods and the implementation of policies that accelerate broadly beneficial economic growth are likely to be slowed. Democratic decision making is less likely to operate in the public interest. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that rates of respondent disaffection reported in Table 5 were as high or higher in countries with multiple competing political parties as in those with dominant ruling parties, such as South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.

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