5

Voting Intentions in Africa: Ethnic, Economic, or Partisan?

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When Africans consider their voting choices, do they do so on ethnic or economic grounds? On the one hand, advocates of identity voting draw attention to a citizen's sense of belonging to cultural collectivities—like ethnic and linguistic groups—that aggregate individual choices into blocs of votes. Studies in Zambia and Kenya find that the structure of ethnic groups in society is the predominant influence on vote choice (Posner and Simon 2002; Erdmann 2007; Bratton and Kimenyi 2008). On the other hand, backers of interest-based accounts of voting argue that citizens use the opportunity of periodic elections to punish or reward incumbents based on economic performance. Evidence from Ghana, for example, suggests that economic evaluations drive vote choice (Jeffries 1998; Bawumia 1998; Youde 2005; Fridy 2007; Lindberg and Morrison 2008).

In the new electoral democracies of sub-Saharan Africa, voting motivations may not be quite so clear-cut. For if Africans vote ethnically, why do so many African presidents hail from minority ethnic groups? And if Africans vote economically, why are incumbents routinely reelected even when economic conditions are bad? The literature on voting behavior in Africa is therefore divided: some country studies report that ethnic attachments trump economic calculations, whereas, in other analyses, popular evaluations of government performance overshadow attachments to language and tribe. A definitive arbitration of this debate is long overdue.

In this chapter, we present systematic, cross-national evidence to the effect that, alongside ethnic identities, economic interests play a larger role in African elections than has hitherto been recognized. We also consider alternative formulations. Perhaps voting intentions in new African democracies are driven by other factors, such as the partisan calculations made by

clients in search of patronage. If so, then voters will seek to gain access to the positive benefits that ruling parties can bestow and to avoid the negative sanctions that can follow from supporting opposition groups. When voters express close identification with the ruling party, they may be either sincere or strategic. But either way, they epitomize a widespread popular recognition that incumbents at the helm of dominant parties are most likely to win in African elections.

The chapter proceeds in three steps. First, we present theories of ethnic, economic, and partisan voting. Second, we describe operational indicators to distinguish voters' intentions along these lines, as well as relevant controls. Third, we present logistic regression models that explain why African voters say they plan to support ruling parties. In specifying these models, we compare the effects of ethnic and economic motivations while, at the same time, considering other voting rationales and the effects of country contexts. As previously stated, we find evidence to support a thesis of economic voting in a context of dominant patronage parties. A concluding section draws out the implications of the evidence from Africa for the further development of theories of voting behavior.

Theories

Ethnic Voting

In Africa, ethnic identity—that is, the inclination of individuals to define themselves and others in terms of cultural origins—is widely perceived to be the predominant organizing principle of society and politics (Olorunsola 1972; Horowitz 1991; Berman, Eyoh, and Kymlicka 2004). Most thoughtful analysts agree, however, that, far from being primordial or atavistic, ethnic identity is constructed, fluid, and one among multiple identities that actors can adopt depending on the situations in which they find themselves (see Chapter 4). Importantly, however, "identities . . . constitute distinct social roles and are not simply surrogates of nascent social classes; cultural pluralism is more than simply 'false consciousness'" (Young 1976: 65). In short, from the subjective perspective of individual African citizens, feelings of ethnic identity are sufficiently concrete to constitute a basis for forming political opinion and stimulating political action.

Ethnic voting occurs whenever members of a cultural group show a disproportionate affinity at the polls for a particular political party (Wolfinger 1965). In short, they tend to vote as a bloc. The logic of ethnic voting is as follows: by expressing solidarity, subnational groups seek to elevate leaders from their own cultural background into positions of power, especially the top executive spot, thereby gaining collective representation (Posner 2005). In extreme manifestations, this form of identity-based voting can lead to outcomes that are mere head counts of ethnic groups. If voter turnout is high, and if all voters choose parties associated with their own communal identities, then an election can even resemble an ethnic "census" (Lever 1979; Horowitz 1985; Ferree 2006; McLaughlin 2008). Under these circumstances, cultural demography is the principal determinant of the distribution of votes.

Economic Voting

The voluminous literature on economic voting posits a powerful alternative explanation. At its heart is a simple proposition: citizens vote for the incumbent government if economic times are good; otherwise they vote against it (Key 1964; Tufte 1978; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). Concisely stated, elections are won or lost on the economy. Moreover, voters punish governments for poor economic performance but do not necessarily reward success. Some even argue that "economic conditions may be far more important determinants of the vote in developing countries than in the West, at least when times are bad" (Pacek and Radcliff 1995: 756–757; see also Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2008).

In recent years, analyses of aggregate patterns of economic voting have taken an institutional turn. At issue is whether institutional arrangements clarify or obscure the ruling party's responsibility for economic conditions (Anderson 2000, 2007). Although the effects of formal political institutions are evident across Western democracies, it remains to be seen whether these are also manifest in new multiparty political systems in Africa. Other generalizations have emerged from survey research at the individual level: that, when estimating economic interests, voters more commonly refer "sociotropically" to the condition of the economy as a whole rather than "egotistically" to their own living standards (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Lewis-Beck 1988), and that prospective expectations of personal well-being are more determinative than retrospective evaluations of government popularity, at least in Britain and Russia (Price and Sanders 1995; Hesli and Bashkirova 2001). We have yet to learn whether voters in Africa make the same sorts of economic calculations at election time.

Problematically, however, models of economic voting may suffer from circularity. We know that vote choice and partisan identification are closely related, not least because some studies use the latter as a proxy for the former. But partisan identification may also color economic perceptions: supporters of the incumbent party are often too generous in their evaluations of the government's economic performance, while opponents are overly critical. At issue, therefore, is whether economic perceptions are sufficiently independent of vote preference to serve as the foundation of a theory of economic voting (Evans and Andersen 2006; Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Elias 2008). At minimum, party identification must be included in any multivariate explanation,

preferably in an operational form that strictly distinguishes partisanship from considerations of economic performance.

A Reinterpretation

On the basis of cross-national research in Africa, we argue that the distinction between ethnic and economic voting is overdrawn. Both patterns of voting behavior are evident in African elections. These complex contests cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional construct, for example as an ethnic census or an economic referendum. It remains to be seen whether ethnic or economic considerations—or some other influences—are paramount in driving a multivariate explanation. But, at minimum, we argue that African voting intentions do not adhere to media stereotypes of Africans as exclusively ethnic voters, nor to the popular assumption that elections always and everywhere are about "the economy, stupid."

The present study departs from previous efforts in several important ways. First, the scope of the study is not limited to one election in one country, which has been a hallmark of the literature on Africa to date. Instead, we employ a large cross-national set of Afrobarometer survey data with identical indicators for 23,093 adult citizens in sixteen countries in 2005–2006. Popular preferences about vote choice were standardized with a hypothetical ballot at the time of the survey.

Second, the object of explanation is a citizen's *intended vote choice* rather than proxies like presidential popularity, which were too often used in prior research. The main advantage is that voting intentions are a better guide to actual voting behavior, though obviously the reliability of this indicator decreases with temporal distance from the next election.

Third, we recognize that rival concepts—ethnic identity and economic interest—are multidimensional and that their various aspects may have differential explanatory power. We therefore seek to capture the richness of each concept by measuring several facets with alternative indicators. By decomposing the broad concepts of ethnic identity and economic interest, we hope to cast light on the mechanisms that lead our respondents to arrive at an intended vote choice.

Fourth, we propose a multilevel explanatory model in a bid to account for variance in intended voting behavior across countries as well as among individuals. Guided by prevailing theoretical debates, we explore the influence of relevant social, economic, and political differences at the country level using data gleaned from standard sources of aggregate data.

Finally, we emphasize that the candidate preferences of African voters may be driven by political considerations rather than by ethnic or economic factors. Analysts have long recognized that *partisan identification*—a voter's underlying allegiance to a political party—explains a great deal about individual attitudes and actions (Campbell et al. 1960; see also Shively 1980; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). Indeed, recent studies of electoral participation in African countries have confirmed the central mobilizing role of political parties (Bratton 1999; Kuenzi and Lambright 2007) and the stability of partisan alignments (Lindberg and Morrison 2005; Young 2009).

Thus, one would expect voters to plan to vote for the party to which they say they feel closest. To avoid the obvious circularity in this relationship, we refine the concept of partisan identification in this study by distinguishing sincere and strategic voting. *Sincere partisans* are individuals who intend to vote for a party out of deep attachment or ingrained habit; they express partisan loyalty without reference (sometimes even in direct contradiction) to the party's actual performance. We expect to find many such "uncritical citizens" among the adherents of the long-standing ruling groups in one-party-dominant regimes (see Chapter 9).

Alternatively, the structure of incentives in Africa's neopatrimonial regimes (Clapham 1982; Nugent 1995; Bratton 1997a; Wantchekon 2003; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Erdmann and Engel 2007) also gives rise to strategic voting. In Africa's "winner take all" politics—where electoral victory conveys political control over state-dominated economies—the credibility of patronage parties depends on their ability to actually attain, hold, and exercise power. Since opposition parties are novel and weak, an incumbent ruling party can make the most credible patronage commitments. Under these circumstances, an individual's expressed preference of "closeness" to a ruling party may therefore be deeply instrumental, reflecting a calculation that incumbents will routinely win. Regardless of real preferences, *strategic partisans* will also associate themselves with the ruling party in the hope that they will be rewarded—or at least not punished—after the election.

If these accounts are correct, then we would expect three important outcomes. First, a large portion of intended voting behavior should be explicable in terms of expressed partisan identification—whether sincere or strategic, or whether motivated by positive or negative incentives. Second, the greater the dominance of the ruling party over opposition parties—and thus the firmer the former's control of material and coercive resources—the greater the likelihood that voters will signal an intention to vote for the ruling party. And third, ethnic identities and economic interests, far from being rival sources of intended vote choice, would both matter. Table 5.1 presents a full set of independent variables plus associated hypotheses.

Measurement and Hypotheses

Intended Vote Choice

This study seeks to explain an African citizen's intended vote choice. The survey asks, "If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party's

Table 5.1 Voting Intentions in Sub-Saharan Africa: Hypotheses

Other things being equal, we expect to find that an intention to vote for the ruling party is positively related to indicators of an individual as follows:

Hypothesis	Concept	Indicator
	Ethnic identities	
H1A	Nominal ethnic identity	Membership in the largest ethnic group
H1B	Ethnic group in power	Shared ethnicity with the head of government
H1C	Salience of ethnicity	Preference for ethnic over national identity[a]
H1D	Interethnic distrust	Distrust in members of other ethnic groups[a]
H1E	Ethnic discrimination	Perception of unfair group treatment (negative relationship)
	Economic interests	
H2A	Retrospective, sociotropic assessments	Positive evaluation of past economic conditions
H2B	Retrospective, egocentric assessments	Positive evaluation of one's own past living standards
H2C	Prospective, sociotropic assessments	Positive evaluation of future economic conditions
H2D	Prospective, egocentric assessments	Positive evaluation of one's own future living standards
H2E	Attitude to economic policy performance	Positive evaluation of government handling of economic policies
	Political considerations	
H3A	Partisan identification (sincere + strategic)	Remains "close" to ruling party, even if president has underperformed
H3B	Expectation of patronage	Perception that politicians will deliver development after election
H3C	Expectation of compulsion	Perception of survey as government-sponsored (proxy)
	Demographic characteristics	
H4A	Gender	Female
H4B	Age	Years since birth
H4C	Education	Years of schooling
H4D	Poverty	Lack of access to basic human needs (negative relationship)
H4E	Residential location	Rural
	Country contexts	
H5A	a. Ethnic fragmentation b. Ethnic polarization	Contexts where one ethnic group is dominant, (a) demographically or (b) politically
H5B	a. GDP growth rate b. Inflation rate	Contexts where (a) the macroeconomy is expanding and (b) consumer price rises are moderate
H5C	a. Presidential constitutions b. Effective number of parliamentary parties c. Level of democracy	Contexts of (a) institutional clarity of political responsibility, (b) limited vote choice, and (c) inverted 2005 Freedom House 14-point scale

(continues)

Table 5.1 Continued

Note: a. We expect the sign to depend on whether the respondent belongs to the ethnic group in power—positive if yes, negative if no.

candidate would you vote for?" Because the stakes in African elections are high—winners control state resources in a context where private economies are weak—election campaigns often have the tenor of life-or-death struggles. On this uneven playing field (Schedler 2006; Levitsky and Way 2010), elites do not hesitate to manipulate electoral rules and offer patronage inducements; for their part, voters commonly feel exposed to surveillance, monitoring, and intimidation. Thus we wondered if people would volunteer honest answers.

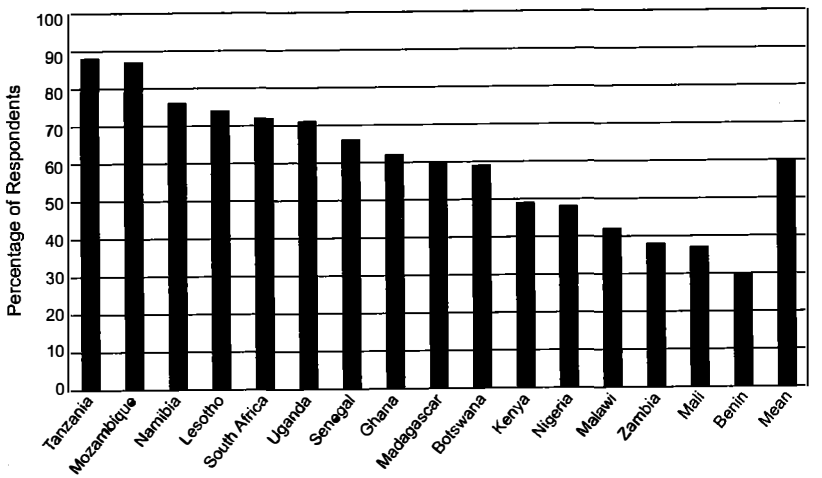
Results are reassuring. Only 6 percent of respondents refused to divulge their voting intentions, for example by invoking ballot secrecy, and just 13 percent said that they "didn't know" how they would vote. The remaining respondents were scored 1 if they intended to vote for the ruling party or 0 if they planned to support a ruling party.

Overall, the distributions of intended vote choice revealed by the survey enjoy face validity since they conform to known patterns, such as official results of previous or subsequent elections (*African Elections Database* at http://africanelections.tripod.com). On average, 60 percent of eligible voters reported an intention to vote for the presidential candidate of the ruling party in 2005, with the remainder saying they intended to vote for opposition candidates (33 percent) or to abstain (7 percent). Yet the strength of support for the ruling party varies considerably across African countries, from a high of 88 percent in Tanzania to a low of 30 percent in Benin (see Figure 5.1). Hence an intention to vote for the political status quo depends not only on the attributes of individual citizens, but also on national contexts, thus requiring multilevel analysis.

Measuring Ethnic Identities

Turning to explanatory factors, we measure nominal ethnic identity in terms of an individual's answer to the blunt question, "What is your tribe?" The

Figure 5.1 Intended Vote for Ruling Party in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2005



Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2005–2006.
Notes: Afrobarometer question: "If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?" Survey size of 23,093 respondents.

controversial term "tribe" is part of the everyday lexicon in African countries and never evoked resistance from Afrobarometer respondents. From the 319 groups named in the survey, we classify four comparable types: (1) *majority* ethnic groups, which constitute 50 percent or more of the national population; (2) *plurality* ethnic groups, which are the largest group in the country, but constitute less than 50 percent of the population; (3) *secondary* ethnic groups, which constitute more than 10 percent of the population; and (4) *minority* ethnic groups, which constitute 10 percent or less of the population. Either a majority or a plurality group constitutes each country's *largest ethnic group,* whose sheer demographic weight might be expected to convey political ascendancy in a mass democracy (hypothesis H1A in Table 5.1).

Because ethnicity becomes politically germane via a group's access to governmental authority, we also measure whether an individual is a member of the *ethnic group in power.* Ideally, one would take account of a range of top officeholders in determining which group (or groups) is actually in charge. Absent comprehensive data on the social backgrounds of cabinet ministers or permanent secretaries in African countries, however, we resort to a conventional indicator: the ethnicity of the head of government. This operational pointer does "an excellent job of picking out the group locally regarded as most powerful . . . [because] the president's ethnic group is the most favored and politically dominant" (Fearon, Kasara, and Laitin 2007: 190). Individuals with the same nominal ethnic identity as the incumbent

head of government are scored as members of the ethnic group in power, which should predict their support for the ruling party (hypothesis H1B). Interestingly, however, there are few places in Africa where one group constitutes half the population or more; a majority ethnolinguistic group holds power in only three countries: Lesotho, Botswana, and Namibia. And the largest ethnic group rules in fewer than half the countries studied.

But demographic distributions and power positions do not exhaust the complexity of ethnicity. Three other dimensions are plausibly important to a voter's intended choice. First is the *salience of ethnicity,* or the weight that individuals place on ethnicity as a core identity, for example in comparison to other available identities (Bhavnani and Miodownick 2009). We measure ethnic salience by asking respondents to choose between nominal ethnic identity and national identity, a critical cultural tension. Across sixteen African countries, some 40 percent of survey respondents claim to value national above ethnic identity, with some 15 percent taking the opposite view (42 percent value both equally). If these voters are genuinely nationalistic rather than sectarian, we would expect them to spurn ethnic identity as a basis for voting for the ruling party (hypothesis H1C).

Second is *interethnic distrust.* Voters are guided at the polls not only by self-described cultural attachments, but also by expectations about the political behavior of others. To get at this reactive dimension of ethnic voting, the survey asks about an individual's trust in a range of other social actors: family members, neighbors, members of one's own ethnic group, and most importantly, members of other ethnic groups within the country. Whereas 43 percent say they trust people from other ethnic groups "somewhat" or a "lot," 55 percent do so "just a little" or "not at all." If a vote for the ruling party is to any degree a rejoinder to expected bloc voting by ethnic rivals, we would expect it to be captured by this indicator (hypothesis H1D).

Third, the expression of ethnic identity in the voting booth may be triggered by an individual's sense of collective grievance. To measure perceived *ethnic discrimination,* the survey asks, "How often is [your named ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?" Almost half say "never" (49 percent) and a further quarter say just "sometimes" (24 percent). Across the sixteen countries, a relatively small proportion of the adult population, averaging only 18 percent, reports unfair treatment "often" or "always." Minority ethnic groups are more prone than others to perceive ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, we expect a sense of ethnic discrimination to undermine citizens' willingness to return the sitting government back to power (hypothesis H1E).

Measuring Economic Interests

Several standard indicators capture economic influences on voting intentions. For popular views of *past economic conditions*—whether sociotropic

or egocentric—the survey asks, "Looking back, how would you rate economic conditions in this country [or your living conditions] compared to twelve months ago?" And for *future economic conditions* the question is, "Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country [or your living conditions] to be better or worse in twelve months time?" In all cases, responses are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from "much worse" to "much better."

The Africans surveyed apparently harbor mixed feelings about past economic performance. On average, 37 percent see the economy getting worse, but 34 percent see it getting better (with considerable cross-national variation). And when asked about personal living conditions over the last year, the number of respondents who feel their conditions are worsening (35 percent) is similar to the number who feel their conditions are improving (34 percent). However, when asked about their opinion of future economic conditions in their country, roughly twice as many individuals think performance will be better (56 percent) as think it will be worse (25 percent). And citizens everywhere harbor high hopes for future personal living standards; only 18 percent see life getting worse, with 49 percent seeing it getting better. Whether looking forward or back, and regardless of referent—national or personal—we expect voters to lean toward incumbents if they see life getting better economically (hypotheses H2A–H2D).

In addition, we introduce an original indicator of policy perceptions. *Economic policy performance* is a valid and reliable 4-point index of how well or badly the incumbent government is seen to handle economic management, job creation, control of inflation, and income distribution. Respondents generally resent the prevailing policy regime, which usually features austerity measures to reduce state spending. Two-thirds think that governments are managing the economy badly (66 percent). Other things being equal, one would expect these negative sentiments to reduce electoral support for the ruling party (hypothesis H2E).

Measuring Political Considerations

Among individuals, the main political considerations measured in this study are partisanship, patronage, and compulsion. As discussed, we expect that clients who seek patronage (or wish to avoid exclusion and compulsion) will be inclined to express partisan identification with the ruling faction. To stiffen the criterion for partisanship, we consider only those individuals who *disapprove* of the incumbent president's performance in office yet *still* say that they feel "close" to the current ruling party. Some of these self-described partisans will vote for continuity out of party loyalty (the *sincere* partisans), but others will do so because they know that their preferred candidate cannot win (the *strategic* partisans). Either way, we expect that ruling-party identification (strictly defined) will strongly bolster incumbents' chances of retaining office (hypothesis H3A).

For at least some voters, however, overt expressions of partisanship are instrumental: they want to reap the benefits of associating with prospective winners and to avoid the costs of attachment to likely losers. To test this conjecture, we add independent variables that directly measure the costs and benefits of neopatrimonial rule. On the positive side, we measure citizen expectations of future patronage rewards with a question about the credibility of politicians: how often do they "deliver development" after elections? On an average 4-point scale ranging from "never" to "always," some 40 percent of respondents say "never" and 15 percent say "often" or "always." We anticipate that the minority of voters who find promises of patronage rewards to be credible will be inclined to vote for the ruling party (hypothesis H3B).

On the negative side, we test for compulsion-driven voting with a specification about political monitoring. As a parting question, the Afrobarometer asks, "Who do you think sent us to do this interview?" Even though interviewers introduce themselves as affiliated with "an independent research organization" that does not "represent the government or any political party," only 31 percent of respondents see the survey as autonomous. The remainder either "don't know" (17 percent) or see the survey as sponsored by an agency of the incumbent government (52 percent). Under these circumstances, it is essential to consider the possibility that people might censor their stated vote choices according to misperceptions about who is asking politically sensitive questions. Because perceptions of official sponsorship are higher in less democratic countries and among more evasive respondents, we regard this indicator as a viable proxy for the costliness of political dissent. We expect it to be positively related to an intended vote for the ruling party (hypothesis H3C).

Measuring Contextual Effects

Voting behavior is guided not only by political "nurture"—an individual's learned political attitudes—but also by the "nature"—the country context in which voters find themselves. These contextual factors may be economic, social, or political. For simplicity's sake, we take account of only two relevant country-level indicators of each type (see Table 5.2). To capture *economic context,* we consider average growth of gross domestic product (GDP) and average inflation rates for the five-year period up to 2005. To capture *social context,* we measure the fractionalization of "politically relevant ethnic groups" (Posner 2004) and the degree of ethnic polarization, that is, fractionalization weighted by relative group size (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005). The *political context* is represented by three institutional

variables: (1) the constitutional form, whether presidential or parliamentary; (2) the party system, measured as the effective number of parliamentary parties in 2005 (Laakso and Taagepera 1979); and (3) the level of democracy, measured as a country's combined inverted Freedom House score in 2005.

Analysis and Results

A multilevel model allows us to examine how covariates measured at each of two levels—individual (level 1) and country (level 2)—affect a respondent's stated intention to vote for the ruling party, our outcome of interest (Raudenbusch and Bryk 2002; Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Specifically, Table 5.3 presents a logistic random-effects model that provides a maximum-likelihood estimation of vote choice using adaptive quadrature to approximate integrals (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2008). We start by estimating the combined effects of individual-level variables on vote choice in model 1, controlling for standard demographic influences. We then specify model 2 in an effort to test whether the inclusion of country-level indicators improves the estimation of intended vote choice. Given the difficulty associated with a direct interpretation of multilevel logistic coefficients, we end our discussion by reporting predicted probabilities. A number of interesting insights arise.

Ethnic Identities

Model 1 suggests that ethnic identities do indeed affect voters' intentions, albeit with some dimensions of ethnicity pushing in unexpected directions. For example, being a member of the largest ethnic group (hypothesis H1A) is no guarantee that voters will express intent to support the party in power. This result calls into question the assumption that, in African countries, the largest ethnic group is always able to attain political dominance. Instead, what really matters is an individual's relationship to the ethnic group—regardless of size—that currently controls executive power. An individual who belongs to the same ethnic group as that of the incumbent president (the ethnic group in power) is far more likely to express an intention to vote for the ruling party (hypothesis H1B). This strong and significant result lends credence to the interpretation that people expect leaders to treat coethnics more favorably than others when exercising public power.

On the other hand, we find that the salience of ethnicity—measured as the tendency to self-define in terms of ethnic rather than national identity—reduces a voter's intention to support incumbents (hypothesis H1C). And interethnic distrust (hypothesis H1D), which fails to reach statistical significance, also disinclines a voter to back the ruling party. Two caveats are in

Table 5.2 Country-Level Contextual Factors in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2005

	GDP Growth (%), Average Annual (2000–2005)	Inflation (%), Average Annual (2000–2005)	Ethnic Fractionalization (politically relevant ethnic groups)	Ethnic Polarization	Constitutional Form (1 = presidential, 0 = parliamentary)	Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties	Level of Democracy[a]
Benin	4.2	09.5	0.30	0.44	1	4.95	10
Botswana	5.9	11.7	0.00	0.65	0	1.56	10
Ghana	4.8	89.8	0.44	0.66	1	2.10	11
Kenya	3.1	08.6	0.57	0.38	1	2.21	8
Lesotho	2.8	18.7	0.00	0.34	0	2.16	9
Madagascar	3.0	29.2	0.00	0.02	1	2.31	8
Malawi	2.6	53.1	0.55	0.74	1	4.22	6
Mali	5.9	11.4	0.13	0.42	1	4.61	10
Mozambique	7.5	39.9	0.36	0.50	1	1.85	7
Namibia	4.4	21.8	0.55	0.72	0	1.68	9
Nigeria	5.5	40.1	0.66	0.40	1	2.15	6
Senegal	4.4	05.0	0.14	0.56	1	1.76	9
South Africa	3.9	20.2	0.49	0.72	0	1.94	11
Tanzania	6.3	19.7	0.59	0.27	1	1.30	7
Uganda	5.6	11.6	0.63	0.28	1	2.04	5
Zambia	4.6	70.2	0.71	0.61	1	2.99	6

Sources: World Bank, 2008; Posner 2004; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005; Laakso and Taagepera 1979; Freedom House 2006.
Note: a. Inverted 2005 Freedom House scale, civil liberties + political rights.

Table 5.3 Multilevel Logistic Regression: Intention to Vote for Ruling Party in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2005

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Level 1 (individual)				
Constant	–1.766***	(0.241)	–0.230	(0.617)
Ethnic identities				
Member of largest ethnic group	–0.006	(0.090)	–0.019	(0.096)
Member of ethnic group in power	0.462***	(0.134)	0.478***	(0.142)
Salience of ethnicity	–0.067**	(0.023)	–0.067**	(0.024)
Interethnic distrust	–0.023	(0.018)	–0.025	(0.019)
Ethnic discrimination	–0.202***	(0.041)	–0.210***	(0.046)
Economic interests				
Retrospective sociotropic	0.048	(0.025)	0.049	(0.027)
Retrospective egocentric	–0.015	(0.022)	–0.015	(0.024)
Prospective sociotropic	0.125***	(0.029)	0.129***	(0.031)
Prospective egocentric	0.014	(0.024)	0.016	(0.026)
Economic policy performance	0.551***	(0.069)	0.579***	(0.068)
Political considerations				
Partisan identification	1.946***	(0.336)	1.972***	(0.333)
Expectation of patronage	0.058*	(0.029)	0.061*	(0.031)
Expectation of compulsion	0.228***	(0.044)	0.243***	(0.045)
Demographic controls				
Female	0.086*	(0.038)	0.091*	(0.041)
Age	–0.001	(0.002)	–0.001	(0.002)
Education	–0.024	(0.022)	–0.026	(0.024)
Poverty	0.042	(0.040)	0.042	(0.043)
Rural	0.230***	(0.056)	0.243***	(0.058)
Level 2 (country)				
Ethnic fragmentation			0.495	(0.826)
Ethnic polarization			–0.725	(0.966)
GDP growth rate			0.038	(0.118)
Inflation rate			0.003	(0.004)
Presidential constitution			–0.409	(0.339)
Effective number of parliamentary parties			–0.359***	(0.077)
Level of democracy			–0.083	(0.055)
Variance components				
Intercept	0.518[a]		0.383[b]	
–2 × log-likelihood	63,235.32		64,834.46	
Number of level-1 units	23,093		23,093	
Number of level-2 units	16		16	

Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2005–2006. See also sources for Table 5.2.

Notes: Coefficients are maximum-likelihood multilevel logit estimates, with country specified as random intercept.

a. $\chi 2$, 15df = 37.6, $p < 0.001$.

b. $\chi 2$, 8df = 23.6.

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.

(continues)

order. First, the way in which these ethnic traits affect vote choice hinges essentially on the relationship of the voter to power holders. Depending on whether the voter belongs to the same ethnic group as that of the sitting president (i.e., the ethnic group in power), ethnic salience and distrust have divergent effects for intended vote choice: positive if voters are coethnics and negative otherwise. But since interactive terms do not reach statistical significance, neither is reported.

Much more influential is a citizen's sense that his or her group suffers ethnic discrimination at the hands of the state authorities (hypothesis H1E). As expected, a sense of political grievance—namely that the government has meted out unfair treatment to one's cultural group—helps to shape the voting calculus. Unlike people who belong to the ethnic group in power, however, individuals who perceive ethnic discrimination are strongly and significantly inclined to vote *against* the ruling party.

Economic Interests

Turning to economic interests, model 1 in Table 5.3 confirms that Africans also express intentions to vote economically, with two of the five indicators of economic interests being statistically significant. A voter's views about the past condition of the economy-at-large (hypothesis H2A) appear slightly more formative for voting decisions than views about past personal living standards (hypothesis H2B), though neither is statistically significant. Instead, a voter's expectation about the future condition of the economy has an important influence (hypothesis H2C), more so than views about future personal living standards (hypothesis H2D). Most important,

however, an individual's assessment of the government's performance (hypothesis H2E) at implementing a range of macroeconomic policies—managing the economy, creating jobs, controlling inflation, and closing income gaps—is a major economic influence on intended vote choice.

As such, we infer that Africans in the countries surveyed take economic considerations into account as they form their voting intentions. Like voters elsewhere in the world, they calculate their economic interests with greater reference to the condition of the national economy than to the state of their family finances. And, contrary to the easy view that Africans think fatalistically, we find that they place greater weight on hopes of future economic prosperity than on evidence of past economic performance.

Political Considerations

As a final contender among rival explanations, we confront the possibility that voters fall back on partisan feelings of closeness to the ruling party. To repeat, we do not take reports of "party identification" at face value. Instead we consider only those voters who claim affinity to the incumbent's party while also judging that, as national president, he has performed poorly and does not deserve reelection. We surmise that some of these partisans are sincerely motivated by party loyalty, while others are positioning themselves strategically behind the party most likely to win. In one of the strongest results in the study, we discover that partisan identification, even when defined narrowly and instrumentally, is powerfully associated with intended vote choice (hypothesis H3A).

Consistent with this outcome, popular anticipation of future patronage rewards adds extra impetus to a voter's intention to choose the ruling party (hypothesis H3B). Some voters apparently calculate that incumbents are more credible than opposition politicians in promising the delivery of development after the election. At the same time, other voters are strongly motivated by concern about potential negative sanctions. People who (wrongly) suspect government involvement in the Afrobarometer survey are likely to say that they will vote for the ruling party (hypothesis H3C). We interpret this result as fear of political surveillance and monitoring. Being seen by the ruling party to have voted the "wrong" way exposes individuals to the risk of postelection retribution. Not wanting to be excluded from official patronage networks or exposed to coercive state sanctions, some individuals opt for the safe strategy of voting for the ruling party.

Demographic Controls

It may be tempting to regard African voting intentions as a direct function of an individual's place in the social structure. To be sure, women and rural dwellers are more likely than other voters to say they will cast a ballot for the ruling party (hypotheses H4A and H4E). But other demographic controls, including age, education, and poverty, remain insignificant.

Country Contexts

Past analysis has paid scant attention to the distinctive social structures, economic conditions, and political institutions prevailing in particular countries. We therefore take account of social, economic, and political factors at the country level. Model 2 in Table 5.3 reveals that only one contextual factor is important: the effective number of parliamentary parties. As expected, the larger the number of political parties that secure seats in the national legislature, the less likely voters are to opt for the presidential candidate of the ruling party (hypothesis H5Cb). We interpret this result to mean that some voters feel that they have little choice but to vote for the incumbent in one-party-dominant systems. By contrast, as multiparty competition increases, so voters are better able to express their identities and interests when choosing who will rule.

Marginal Effects

The concrete implications of this study are best expressed as the marginal effects of independent variables on the likelihood of an individual's intent to vote for the ruling party. These effects are computed as the differences in predicted probabilities from the lowest to the highest response category on each independent variable (not shown). The point of reference is a rural female voter who does not belong to the ethnic group in power, who evaluates the government as performing badly on economic policy performance, and who does not identify with the ruling party.

With respect to ethnicity, membership in the ethnic group in power increases this sort of voter's intention to cast a ballot for the ruling party by a margin of 11 percentage points. But if she feels the sting of ethnic discrimination, then the outcome is a reduction of 15 percentage points. Thus the negative consequence of felt group discrimination outweighs the positive inducement of belonging to the most powerful ethnic group.

With regard to economic factors, faith in the economic future (prospective sociotropic voting) increases support for the ruling party by 13 percentage points. And a favorable evaluation of the government's policy performance increases support by 37 percentage points. This hefty individual-level effect is the largest in the model, suggesting that a voter's overall response to public provision of job opportunities, low prices, and income distribution is the prime mover of voting intentions. Indeed, this performance-based economic interest has at least twice as large an impact as any aspect of ethnic identity.

With regard to political factors, partisan identification increases support for the ruling party by 32 percentage points, also a large effect. In weighing incentives for voting for the incumbent, the lure of patronage rewards has the expected positive effect (of 4 percentage points), but expectations of compulsion are even more influential (at 6 percentage points). Finally, at the country level, a shift from a party system in which one party is dominant to a system fragmented by multiple parties reduces intended support for the ruling party by a margin of 31 percentage points. In other words, the pattern of voting intentions reported here is most common in country contexts where a dominant incumbent party commonly wins.

Conclusion

This chapter confirms that conventional theories of voting behavior provide leverage as starting points for understanding the outcomes of multiparty elections in sub-Saharan Africa. Using survey and aggregate data, we have shown that, to measurable degrees, Africans seek to engage in both ethnic *and* economic voting.

Thus elections in Africa are much more than mere ethnic censuses or straightforward economic referenda. The complexity of voting motivations is evidenced by unforeseen facts: contrary to the stereotype of ethnic voting, many African heads of government hail from secondary or minority ethnic groups; and converse to the economic voting thesis, incumbent presidents often gain reelection despite the poor performance of African economies. It is therefore necessary to move beyond confirmatory results about single-factor explanations in order to make several original claims.

First, our cross-national test yields an unexpected result. Regardless of the commonplace trope that African voters are motivated mainly by ethnic solidarities, we find that economic interests are uppermost. Without denying that ethnic sentiments play a role in shaping vote choice, we note that rational calculations about material welfare are apparently at the forefront of voters' minds. We take this observation as a positive sign that African politicians cannot count indefinitely on cultural appeals to kith and kin but, in order to be consistently reelected, must also establish a track record of social and economic delivery.

Second, by distinguishing various dimensions of economic interest and ethnic identity, we cast light on the mechanisms that drive the formation of voting preferences. As for economic interests, we note that voter expectations about the future health of the economy outweigh any other past, present, or future evaluation, especially of personal living standards. Thus, while we have confirmed that Africans resemble the sociotropic voters so common in other parts of the world, we also find that they think about the economy more like future-oriented "bankers" than backward-looking "peasants" (MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2000). Moreover, for the Africans we interviewed, rational assessment of actual government performance at macroeconomic policy management is the principal economic influence on intended vote choice.

Regarding ethnic identity, an individual's connection to the largest ethnic group and distrust of ethnic strangers play almost no role in shaping a vote for the political status quo. What matters instead is membership in the ethnic group that currently holds political power. Conversely, an intention vote for the opposition is driven mainly by whether an individual partakes in a collective sense of ethnic discrimination. In this regard, the principal line of ethnic cleavage in the context of electoral competition is whether individuals are "insiders" or "outsiders" to the prevailing distribution of political power.

How might parallel manifestations of economic and ethnic voting be reconciled? We propose that voters arrive at political loyalty to an ethnic group as a rational calculation that, if one's group can capture state power, group members will reap economic dividends. In this regard, ethnic voting is economically instrumental (rather than merely culturally expressive) as well as being forward-looking (hinging as it does on the expectation of future rewards). Thus, building on the findings presented in Chapter 4, we regard ethnic voting as not only constructed and situational, but also rooted in a solid economic logic.

A related third point is that an individual's partisan attachments have instrumental underpinnings. Because the distribution of development resources in a winner-take-all system depends upon political connections, voters have a strong incentive to declare fealty to the incumbent, including by saying they will vote for him. Their hope is that, by overtly (but not necessarily sincerely) demonstrating political loyalty, material rewards will follow. Especially where one party is dominant and opposition parties are weak — the only contextual factor that we have found to be important—it is sometimes too risky to come out openly and express an intention to vote against an incumbent.

The incentives for reelecting incumbents turn out to be positive as well as negative. On the positive side, the perception that incumbent politicians are able to make credible campaign promises to deliver patronage after elections leads to a measurable increase in ruling-party support. On the negative side, some would-be voters state an intention to back the ruling party because they worry about harmful political and economic repercussions from agents of the state. For reasons of self-protection, some unknown but probably substantial proportion of these citizens therefore follow through with actual votes for the party in power.

Fourth and finally, we have traced voting intentions to a feature of African political institutions at the country level. Our multilevel model suggests

that African citizens are much more likely to vote for incumbents in places where there is a low effective number of parliamentary parties—that is, where dominant parties continue to stride the political stage. In places with weak oppositions—such as Tanzania, Namibia, Mozambique, and even Botswana and South Africa—voters have a restricted range of political choice; they essentially face the narrow option of endorsing or rejecting some form of de facto single-party rule. It is for this reason that instrumental expressions of partisanship are so widespread among African electorates. Thus, even as African voters increasingly seek to hold political leaders accountable for economic performance, they encounter the institutional constraints of party systems inherited from a postcolonial past.

Part 2

Vote Buying