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## Abstract

Why do some citizens in new democracies attach to parties while other do not? We investigate the determinants of partisanship in Africa by theorizing the role of parties' group mobilization tactics and testing our arguments alongside existing explanations from Latin America and Eastern Europe. First, we propose that partisanship is more likely among rural (versus urban) residents, due largely to "public" bloc voting led by traditional authorities. Second, using original data on candidate ethnicity, we evaluate a debate as to whether coethnicity with presidential and vice-presidential candidates is associated with greater partisanship. We find robust, continent-wide support that rural villagers are more likely to be partisan, and that this is likely driven by citizens' links to traditional authorities. We find no relationship between partisanship and candidate coethnicity. As in other new democracies, partisanship is positively associated with experience with multiparty democracy, the electoral cycle, age, male gender, and education.

## 1 Introduction

In new democracies, partisanship has been found to be associated with political participation (Brader and Tucker 2001; Conroy-Krutz et al. 2016), biased information processing (Carlson 2016), and discrimination between citizens (Michelitch 2015). Thus, a growing scholarship examines why some individuals attach to parties, while others do not. Existing work, mostly focusing on Eastern Europe and Latin America, has broadened theory to include such factors as electoral cycle effects (Michelitch and Utych 2018), experience with democracy (Brader and Tucker 2008),

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and party institutionalization (Dalton and Weldon 2007). In this study, we investigate the determinants of partisanship in sub-Saharan Africa (hereafter Africa). We expand on previous work by theorizing the role of parties' group mobilization tactics in this context and testing our arguments alongside existing theory.

In African democracies, distributive politics largely revolves around geographic targeting of "valence" public goods (e.g., schools, roads) to particular communities rather than a left-right ideological continuum (Bleck and van de Walle 2012). We argue that such distributive politics leads parties to more effectively mobilize two types of groups, increasing those groups' propensity to attach to parties: (1) rural (versus urban) dwellers and (2) coethnics of presidential or vice-presidential candidates (versus those without such a candidate).

First, scholars have shown that parties and traditional village authorities collaborate to mobilize a "bloc vote" in rural villages in return for public service improvements (e.g., Baldwin (2013); Gottlieb and Larreguy (2018)). Such bloc voting encourages public political participation and expressions supporting a particular party. Public acts and expressions backing a party engenders and mutually-reinforces a sense of commitment, loyalty, and ultimately attachment to the party because individuals seek psychological conformity between behavior, expressions and identity (e.g., Brader and Tucker (2001); Dinas (2014); Huddy et al. (2015); Michelitch and Utych (2018)). Urbanites, by contrast, are mobilized on an individual-level by multiple parties in a mixed-partisan environment, lacking such brokers (Dulani et al. 2018; Resnick 2012). Cross-pressuring dampens partisanship by increasing internal uncertainty regarding partisan positions and external discomfort with publicly taking partisan sides to avoid social conflict (e.g., Moehler and Conroy-Krutz (2016); Mutz (2002)). Thus, partisanship may be higher in rural versus urban areas.

Second, scholars of African politics have underscored that coethnicity with presidential or vice-presidential candidates mobilizes citizens by generating expectations of public goods targeting and "expressive utility" (e.g., Bates (1974); Carlson (2015); Ferree (2006); Horowitz (1985)). Stated more broadly, descriptive representation of one's identity group can motivate beliefs in enhanced substantive and symbolic representation (Pitkin 1967). Horowitz (2017) further argues that having such a coethnic candidate facilitates citizens' identification of partisan congruence because a clear, credible signal of belonging to a party's core constituency exists, while other groups are courted by multiple parties and become cross-pressured. Indeed, strong, clear signals of representational "fit" with a party facilitates partisan attachments, while muddled signals weaken such attachments (Lupu 2013). Thus, partisanship may be higher among citizens with a coethnic presidential or vice-presidential candidate in the race versus those without such a candidate.

However, important reasons exist to doubt this hypothesis. First, little *marginal* value of coethnicity with presidential and vice-presidential candidates may exist above and beyond other

signals of inclusion in the party necessary to build multi-ethnic winning coalitions in elections (Ariola 2012; Ferree and Horowitz 2010). Second, ethnic groups may be too large and diffuse identity groups for parties to effectively mobilize citizens “en bloc” through coethnic descriptive representation alone (Harris 2015; Koter 2013). In many contexts, candidate coethnicity, and ethnicity in general, may simply be irrelevant in electoral politics — scholars may falsely overgeneralize what may be true only in certain prominent cases to the continent as a whole (Bleck and van de Walle 2018). Finally, citizens may have other strategic considerations that lead them to support different (and at times non-coethnic) candidates in non-presidential elections (e.g., Conroy-Krutz (2013); Ichino and Nathan (2013); Nathan (2016); Weghorst and Lindberg (2013)), cross-pressuring and dampening attachments to the party offering coethnic presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

To evaluate these arguments, we analyze data from 30 African countries using Afrobarometer Rounds 1-6 (1999-2015). Through archival work with additional coauthors, we generate an original dataset of presidential and vice presidential candidates’ ethnicity from all major parties during this time period (citation omitted). To evaluate existing scholarly arguments, we leverage, and extend forward in time, datasets from Michelitch and Utych (2018), Weghorst and Bernhard (2014), Przeworski (2013), and Cruz et al. (2018).

The results both extend and challenge existing wisdom regarding African politics.<sup>1</sup> The data support the hypothesis that rural dwellers are more likely to be partisan than urbanites, as well as observable implications of the argument that those reporting feeling closer to traditional brokers are more likely to be partisan. These results broaden our understanding of the consequences of urban/rural divisions in party mobilization tactics to partisanship, expanding existing knowledge of rural/urban divides in public goods provision, turnout, and the bloc vote (Baldwin 2013; Gottlieb and Larreguy 2018; Harding 2019).

However, coethnicity with a presidential or vice-presidential candidate is neither a significant determinant of partisanship across the region (according to many alternative codings and modeling specifications), nor significant conditional on a range of other factors inspired by the literature. This study thus joins others challenging the importance and straightforward impact of coethnicity with major party candidates for African politics (e.g., (Koter 2013)). We broaden existing work, mostly centered on vote choice in case studies, by examining this phenomenon cross-nationally and focusing on partisan attachments.

Only certain theories stemming from partisanship theories in Eastern Europe and Latin America hold true in Africa. As elsewhere, a positive association exists between partisanship and experience with democracy, proximity to elections, male gender, age, and education. However, aspects of party systems found to be salient in these other regions (electoral volatility, party age, party fractionalization) have no relationship with partisanship in this context. This study thus

contributes to comparative politics more generally in two ways: (a) by testing the external validity of existing partisanship theories related to demographics, institutions, and electoral cycle effects in Africa, and (b) by expanding and testing theory to examine a class of arguments centered around parties' group mobilization tactics. Moving forward, comparativists studying partisanship in new democracies should incorporate context-specific group mobilization in their theories of partisanship alongside other determinants.

Finally, some scholars may question the importance of partisanship in Africa, labeling it as shallow, minimalist, or thin. Following other scholars analyzing partisanship in new democracies (e.g., [Lupu \(2015\)](#)), we demonstrate its meaning by showing a very strong relationship between partisanship and diverse acts of political and civic participation: African partisans are more likely to raise issues to government authorities, attend community meetings, attend election rallies, attend election meetings, mobilize others to support a party (informally and formally), and turn out to vote.

## 2 Partisanship in Africa

Scholars of new democracies define partisanship as a party attachment where an individual “feels close to a political party.” ([Brader and Tucker 2001](#); [Dalton and Weldon 2007](#)). Given the diversity of party politics cross-nationally, this definition is broad and inclusive of any type of congruence or attachment an individual may perceive themselves to have with a party. We follow this approach.

Given the relative newness of multiparty competition and party systems in Africa versus other regions ([Bleck and van de Walle 2018](#)), scholars studying advanced democracies may question the existence of partisanship. Joining [Brader and Tucker \(2001\)](#), we believe scholars often underestimate how quickly citizens attach to parties in new democracies. Indeed, leveraging Afro-Barometer rounds 1-6 (1999-2015), AmericasBarometer 1-6 (2004-2014), and European Social Survey 1-5 (2002-2012) data, we find that the level of partisanship is relatively higher in Africa than other regions (Figure 1). Pooled together, 60% of African citizens feel close to a party, compared to 51% in Western Europe & North America, 41% in Eastern Europe, and 33% in Latin America.

Our theoretical and empirical focus in explaining the determinants of partisanship across Africa centers on how parties' group-mobilization tactics affect which groups of individuals within a country are more likely to be mobilized and thus attach to parties.<sup>2</sup> Seminal literature on party institutionalization in Western Europe (e.g., [Huntington \(1968\)](#); [Lipset and Rokkan \(1967\)](#)) emphasized party formation around dominant social cleavages, focusing primarily on industrialized

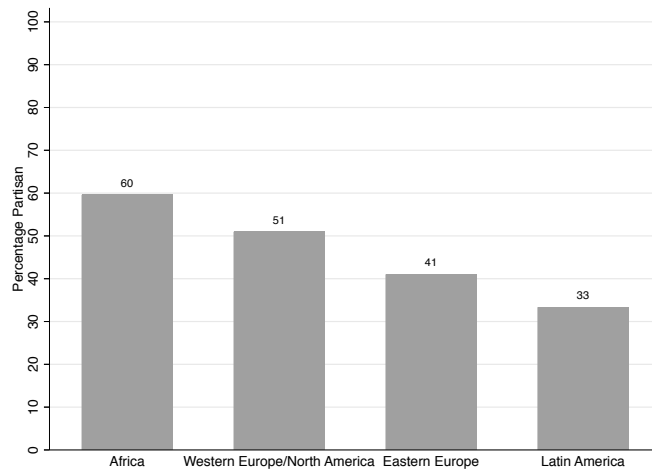


Figure 1: Percentage “close to a political party” from Afrobarometer Rounds 1-6, AmericasBarometer Rounds 1-6, and European Social Survey Rounds 1-5.

contexts where distributive politics often revolved around left-right class-based interests. Seeking to mobilize the largest number of citizens at the lowest cost, parties endeavored to capture existing groups of voters, rather than individual citizens. Explanations for group-based mobilization, typically of urban worker or business interest groups, focused primarily on common interests and identity shared among group members, as well as vote brokerage by group leaders.

Which groups are most likely to be mobilized is, of course, context-specific, but the literature on partisanship in new democracies has thus far paid little attention to group mobilization. In African democracies, in the absence of large scale industrialization, distributive politics largely revolves around geographic targeting of “valence” public service improvements (e.g., in health or education) to particular communities rather than redistribution among class-based groups (Bleck and van de Walle 2012). Such distributive politics leads to group-based mobilization of two major kinds that we argue affect individuals’ propensity to attach to parties: (1) rural (versus urban) dwellers and (2) coethnics of presidential or vice-presidential candidates (versus those without such a candidate). We test these arguments alongside existing explanations of partisanship culled from other regions. Table 1 summarizes these hypotheses in columns one and two.

## 2.1 Rural versus Urban Dwelling

We theorize that rural dwelling is associated with a higher likelihood of partisanship than urban dwelling. Rural villages, often stemming from pre-colonial times, are commonly headed by traditional village authorities (chief, chairperson, elders), who are paramount in day-to-day governance and household welfare, and therefore command a large degree of authority (Bleck and Michelitch

Table 1: Hypotheses and Support

Explanatory Variable	Hypothesized Effect on Partisanship	Supported in Data?
Rural (versus Urban) Dwelling	+	YES
Presidential and/or Vice-Presidential Candidate Coethnicity	+	NO
Electoral Cycle	U-shaped	YES
Experience with Democracy	+	YES
Party Entry/Exit Electoral Volatility	-	NO
Party Age	+	NO
Party Fractionalization	-	NO
Age	+	YES
Male Gender	+	YES
Above (versus Below) Median Education	+	YES

2018). Political parties leverage these traditional authorities as intermediary vote “brokers” to reduce the cost of establishing local personal ties on an individual basis with citizens (e.g., Baldwin (2013); Gottlieb and Larreguy (2018); Koter (2013); Nathan (2016)). Traditional authorities have incentives to mobilize villagers to vote “en bloc” for a particular party in a quid-pro-quo exchange for public service improvements and handouts around election time, increasing their authority and personal welfare (Gottlieb and Larreguy 2018).

Voters align with the bloc vote because they believe bloc voting will better secure public service improvements from parties (Baldwin 2013; Gottlieb and Larreguy 2018) or out of personal loyalties and norms of diffuse reciprocity (e.g., Lemarchand and Legg (1972)). Bloc voting entails supporting a party with rather public acts and expressions. Ballots are typically counted in front of expectant onlookers, who know parties can observe polling-station level results. Limited mass media with cross-pressuring partisan ideas in rural areas (Hyden et al. 2003) renders the bloc vote all the more unchallenged.

Voting en bloc facilitates partisanship for two main reasons. First, politically participating in support of a party, especially through public collective acts, engenders and reinforces partisanship (Brader and Tucker 2001; Dinas 2014; Huddy et al. 2015; Michelitch and Utych 2018). As these scholars relate, partisan behavioral acts and expressions reinforce a sense of commitment and loyalty to the partisan identity, as individuals seek conformity between partisan behavior, attitudes, and identity to reduce cognitive dissonance. The collective and public nature of group support for a particular party in rural areas should thus facilitate partisanship. Second, strong, clear, and reinforcing signals of one’s fit with a “party brand” — for whom (or what) a party stands, facilitates

partisanship (Lupu 2013), especially where individuals can easily identify how their group fits into a single party (Green et al. 2002).

By contrast to en bloc mobilization occurring in rural areas, scholarship characterizes party mobilization in urban areas as a dynamic in which citizens are approached individually and face a large degree of partisan cross-pressuring — which we argue dampens partisanship. Given the recent and rapid urbanization across the continent, urban areas where people live, work, and shop are highly diverse on ethnic and partisan lines, including intermarriage (Dulani et al. 2018). Urban areas tend to be competitive between multiple parties, which try to compete for voters on an individual-level, short-term basis — especially the urban poor, which constitutes by far the largest swath of urban voters (Resnick 2012). Since parties lack capacity to forge long-term clientelistic relations on an individual basis, they tend to engage in strategies that include flooding the urban poor with handouts and gifts — voters often accept gifts from multiple parties.<sup>3</sup> Further, and given lack of left-right ideological competition, parties make appeals based on leaders' personality and charisma or promises to improve urban services (e.g., roads, electricity availability) — often in large urban rallies. Urban media is significantly more rich and diverse than rural media, further reinforcing exposure to diverse partisan viewpoints (Conroy-Krutz and Moehler 2015).

Non-Africanists may wonder why entrepreneurial urban neighborhood brokers have not emerged, unlike other regions. One reason may be that the authority of rural traditional authorities to coordinate the bloc vote cannot be easily replicated in urban areas, given that traditional authorities derive authority from longstanding precolonial village institutions (Bleck and Michelitch 2018). It may take more time for high-capacity urban brokers to emerge, given the recency of democratization and urbanization.<sup>4</sup> Urbanites continue to view informal authorities as those traditional authorities associated with their rural “home village” — their (or their ancestors') village of origin — even after multiple generations of urban living, relying on such authorities for a range of social (e.g., rite of adulthood passage), economic (e.g., planting/harvesting, welfare if sick), and religious (e.g., weddings) reasons (Riedl and Robinson 2016). Another reason may be that little incentive exists to forge a bloc vote in urban neighborhoods because public goods cannot be exclusively targeted — urbanites constantly move across neighborhoods using infrastructure and public services (Ichino and Nathan 2013).

Joining Mutz (2002) and Conroy-Krutz and Moehler (2015), we argue such individual-level cross-pressuring dampens partisanship for two reasons. First, cross-pressuring renders individuals internally uncertain of their own positions with respect to political issues and parties, moderating political views. Second, cross-pressuring renders some individuals externally (publicly) uncomfortable taking partisan sides in order to avoid social conflict. Individuals are thus incentivized to downplay partisanship publicly.<sup>5</sup>



## 2.2 Coethnicity with Major Candidates

Seminal scholarship holds that descriptive representation of one's identity group in office motivates beliefs in enhanced substantive and symbolic representation (Pitkin 1967). As the theory goes, candidates may claim to represent diverse voter groups, but sharing identity with the candidate provides a credible signal that the candidate will in fact represent the group. Horowitz (2017) relates that in African politics, coethnicity with a party's presidential or vice-presidential candidate (or party leader and second in command in parliamentary systems) is seen as a clear and unambiguous signal of core group representation within a party, while citizens without such a candidate are more heavily cross-pressured with inclusive rhetoric by multiple parties attempting to woo non-coethnics to form a winning coalition. The former hold a large degree of certainty about party fit, while the latter face more uncertainty. As related in the previous section, reinforcing, clear, and strong signals of party fit increases, while cross-pressuring and ambiguous fit reduces, partisanship (Green et al. 2002; Lupu 2013; Moehler and Conroy-Krutz 2016; Mutz 2002).

Indeed, scholars of African politics have long noted that many parties emerged as ethnic group alliances and strategize to mobilize support (at least in part) along ethnic lines by courting candidates' coethnics (e.g., Elischer (2013); Ferree (2006); Posner (2005)). Citizens' beliefs are very strong that parties favor their constituents in targeting public goods — coethnicity with a candidate has been shown to govern support among citizens, even overriding candidate competence (Carlson 2015).<sup>6</sup> When citizens lack concrete information about actual targeting or other policy provision, coethnicity operates as a useful heuristic (Conroy-Krutz 2013).

Explanations abound for the success of the mutually-reinforcing relationship between citizens' support for coethnic candidates and candidates' desire to represent coethnics. First, given the geographic concentration of ethnic groups, congruence in preferences for where public services should be targeted can be proxied by voters and party leaders sharing coethnicity (Bates 1974). Second, coethnics often engage in similar economic activities and thus share similar preferences for which public goods are most important (Lieberman and McClendon 2012). Third, coethnic office holders have a relatively stronger credible commitment to deliver, because they can be held accountable more readily (e.g., through shared language or denser networks) (Posner 2005). Fourth, especially among the urban poor, parties can cost-save by targeting only individual handouts or gifts to coethnics of the party elite (Nathan 2016). Finally, the link between candidate coethnicity and partisanship may follow from a more expressive, symbolic-psychological mechanism activated by ethnic appeals that may play on historical group rivalries from precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial times (Eifert et al. 2010; Horowitz 1985).

However, recent literature casts doubt that candidate coethnicity with presidential and vice-

presidential candidates facilitates partisanship. First, perhaps little *marginal* value of sharing co-ethnicity with such candidates exists for attaching to parties *above and beyond* other signals of inclusion in the broader multiethnic coalition that a party seeks to represent. [Arriola \(2012\)](#) argues that parties must successfully reach across ethnic lines by offering patronage to build their party as a multiethnic coalition, especially with successive elections. Parties, for example, give, or promise to give, leaders of ethnic groups in their coalition key ministerial positions to ensure access to state resources, often creating positions and ballooning the bureaucracy to do so. Through both symbolic and substantive policies that reach across ethnic lines, citizens can view parties as inclusive ([Ferree and Horowitz 2010](#)). As a result, coalitions may become so obvious that candidate coethnicity offers little *marginal value* in signaling party fit, and thus attaching to parties.

Second, scholars have questioned the strength and relevance of the notion that ethnicity plays a paramount role in partisanship at all, at least as a generalization for the sub-continent as a whole. [Koter \(2013\)](#) argues that in many countries, ethnic groups are simply too large and diffuse to provide the type of effective bonds or accountability relations necessary to really draw citizens in, at least compared, often times, to the effectiveness of traditional authorities. Relatedly, heterogeneity can exist in the degree to which citizens identify with their ethnic group and see an expressive symbolic value of a coethnic candidate ([Harris 2015](#)). Yet others argue that in many contexts, ethnicity may simply be irrelevant in electoral politics ([Bleck and van de Walle 2018](#)). Prominently studied countries (e.g., Kenya, South Africa, Ghana) may falsely drive a general continent-wide expectation that candidate coethnicity is important for partisanship.

Others argue that strategic considerations may lead citizens to align themselves at times with parties led by non-coethnic candidates. Ethnicity may only be an important heuristic absent other information, and as media environments grow stronger, citizens may encounter more information about performance ([Conroy-Krutz 2013](#)). Citizens can be retrospectively responsive to non-coethnics' delivery of both symbolic and distributive politics ([Ferree and Horowitz 2010](#)). Additionally, strategic incentives may lead citizens to vote prospectively for non-coethnics in legislative elections, due to promises to target public goods and private handouts ([Weghorst and Lindberg 2013](#)), or voting for a (non-coethnic) ethnic majority candidate who seeks to target his/her coethnics ([Ichino and Nathan 2013](#); [Nathan 2016](#)). Such “skirt and blouse” (split-ticket) voting may reduce attachments to a coethnic presidential or vice-presidential candidates' party, given the inconsistency of behavioral acts in support of a single party.

### 3 Research Design

We leverage a variety of data sources to test our argument alongside existing explanations. Table 1 summarizes the hypotheses and data sources used for variable operationalization. Descriptive statistics are presented in the Supplemental Information (SI) Section A.

#### 3.1 Outcome and Primary Explanatory Variables

**Partisanship:** We code an indicator variable for whether respondents “feel close to any particular political party” from Afrobarometer Data Rounds 1-6 (over 180,000 respondents across 30 countries). Cross-national variation within Africa is stark, ranging from 29% to 83%.<sup>7</sup>

**Rural:** - We code an indicator variable for rural (versus urban) dwelling defined in Afrobarometer in their survey sampling frames, which are constructed from the most recent national population census data in each country.

**Coethnic Candidate:** In what will become a publicly available dataset with additional coauthors (citation omitted), we code the ethnicity of winning and losing presidential and vice-presidential candidates, or the equivalent in parliamentary systems (see SI Section D for coding details). We code the indicator variable *Coethnic Candidate* as one if an individual had a coethnic incumbent or opposition presidential or vice-presidential candidate in the upcoming election for respondents surveyed in the final year of the electoral cycle, and for all other respondents we code the variable as one if they had a coethnic incumbent or opposition presidential or vice-presidential candidate in the previous elections. Extensive care has been taken over the coding of coethnicity in each country, but because Afro-barometer coding is often not as fine-grained as ideal, and some countries might hold anomalies, we have checked that any results are robust to sequentially dropping each country from the analysis.

#### 3.2 Variables Testing Existing Explanations

Due to space constraints, we briefly summarize existing determinants of partisanship in new democracies.

**Electoral Cycle:** Given cyclical fluctuations in the degree of citizen mobilization, [Michelitch and Utych \(2018\)](#) argue that partisanship strengthens during election season due to increased exposure to partisan political information and higher net benefit from political participation around elections. Across 86 countries, they find that the probability of partisanship rises 6 percentage points from cycle midpoint to an election. We extend their data forward in time, following the

authors in operationalizing the electoral cycle as the percentage of time that has passed in the electoral cycle between the last and next election at the time of the survey. Because the hypothesized relationship is quadratic, this variable and its square are included.

**Experience with Democracy:** Repeated multiparty elections habituate citizens to voting and other acts of political participation, encouraging citizens to take a stake in who wins the election, thereby facilitating and mutually reinforcing attachments to a party (Brader and Tucker 2008; Lupu 2015). Conversely, when disruptions to regular elections occur (e.g., through military coup), citizens experience a break in this process and perceive partisanship as futile in an unstable political environment. Przeworski (2013)'s Political Institutions and Political Events (PIPEs) dataset contains country-year data covering all countries from independence until 2008, which we extended to 2015. We operationalize experience with multiparty democracy at the individual-level as the number of continuous multiparty years an individual has experienced in their country since adulthood.

**Electoral Volatility:** (Lupu 2013) argues that party system institutionalization stabilizes the choice set of parties from which individuals must choose, facilitating partisanship. We extend Weghorst and Bernhard (2014)'s dataset forward in time, which measures volatility from party entry and exit.

**Party Age:** When parties are older and well-established, their reputations become more widely known, facilitating partisanship (e.g., Dalton and Weldon (2007)). We use the Database of Political Institutions (Cruz et al. 2018), which calculates the average age of the largest two government parties and the largest opposition party, or the relevant subset of these for which age of party is known.

**Party Fractionalization:** As the number of parties increases, the party landscape becomes more complex to navigate, which scholars argue reduces partisanship (e.g., Lupu (2015)). We follow others in using the Database of Political Institutions (Cruz et al. 2018), which reports the probability that two legislators picked at random will be from different parties.

**Age:** Older people are more likely to be partisan (Resnick and Casale 2011), given they have more time and social mandate to engage in politics. Age is a continuous variable from the Afrobarometer.

**Male Gender:** The traditional division of labor holds that men operate in the public, and women the private, sphere, which generally reduces women's political engagement (Bleck and Michelitch 2018). Men have more free time and collective forums for political discussion and participation (e.g. *baraza, grin*), while women often face more work in and outside the home. We code an indicator variable for male gender from Afrobarometer.

**Education:** Education (ranging from none, to primary, to secondary, to a few tertiary in the Afrobarometer) grants fluency in the language of government (English, French, or Portuguese) and civics training. Literacy and civics lower the costs of accessing and processing political information, facilitating political participation and partisanship (Wantchekon et al. 2014). We code whether respondents are above median education level in their country (for each country-round).<sup>8</sup>

### 3.3 Empirical Strategy

We examine the determinants of individuals' partisanship. Having multiple surveys for each country over time allows us to leverage temporal variation in country-level factors. We thus estimate linear probability models with country and survey round fixed effects and standard errors clustered by survey-round.<sup>9</sup> Results are robust to a variety of alternative model specifications (as presented in SI Section E), including: (1) logistic regression, (2) random effects, and (3) mixed-effects maximum likelihood regression with random intercepts and random slopes. Results also hold when an indicator variable for the respondent believing the enumerator was from the government or a political party is included. We deal with missingness by assigning the variable mean and adding an indicator variable to indicate missing status on a particular observation for the particular variable,<sup>10</sup> but the results are also robust to list-wise deletion (as presented in SI Section E).

## 4 Results

The empirical results are presented in Table 2, while Table 1 summarizes hypothesis support in column three. First, the results demonstrate that citizens in rural areas are significantly more likely to be partisan than urbanites, a result robust to a range of specifications. The effect is substantively large – rural residents are almost 8 percentage points more likely than urbanites to be partisan. Second, sharing coethnicity with major national election candidates does not appear to make citizens any more likely to be partisan than those citizens who do not share coethnicity with any such candidates.

The results also support some existing explanations of partisanship in new democracies in other regions. The likelihood of partisanship increases by one percentage point for each additional three years of experience that an individual has with multiparty democracy after the age of 18, underscoring the finding that experience with democracy is associated with partisanship found in both Latin America and Eastern Europe (Brader and Tucker 2008; Lupu 2015). As expected and consistent with elsewhere, older, male, and educated citizens are more likely to be partisan. Finally, support exists for the U shaped electoral cycle effect, consistent with global estimates

Table 2: Determinants of Partisanship in Africa

<i>DV = Partisanship</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Rural	0.0746** (0.0055)	0.0741** (0.0055)	0.0755** (0.0053)	0.0748** (0.0054)	0.0754** (0.0051)
Coethnic Candidate	-0.0072 (0.0082)	-0.0076 (0.0081)	-0.0082 (0.0084)	-0.0042 (0.0082)	-0.0067 (0.0084)
Age	0.0016** (0.0002)	0.0007** (0.0002)	0.0016** (0.0002)	0.0016** (0.0002)	0.0006* (0.0002)
Male	0.0738** (0.0059)	0.0746** (0.0059)	0.0735** (0.0059)	0.0739** (0.0059)	0.0742** (0.0059)
Educated	0.0128 <sup>†</sup> (0.0065)	0.0143* (0.0066)	0.0157** (0.0059)	0.0133* (0.0065)	0.0186** (0.0058)
Experience with Democracy		0.0033** (0.0006)			0.0037** (0.0006)
Electoral Volatility			-0.0004 (0.0007)		0.0000 (0.0006)
Party Age			-0.0008 (0.0013)		-0.0008 (0.0012)
Party Fractionalization			-0.0408 (0.0501)		-0.0439 (0.0477)
Electoral Cycle				-0.0052 (0.1223)	-0.1787 (0.1216)
Electoral Cycle <sup>2</sup>				0.0734 (0.1103)	0.2206 <sup>†</sup> (0.1134)
Observations	180091	180091	180091	180091	180091
Number of countries	30	30	30	30	30

Note: Linear probability models with country and year fixed effects, survey-clustered standard errors in parentheses.  
<sup>†</sup>p<.1, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

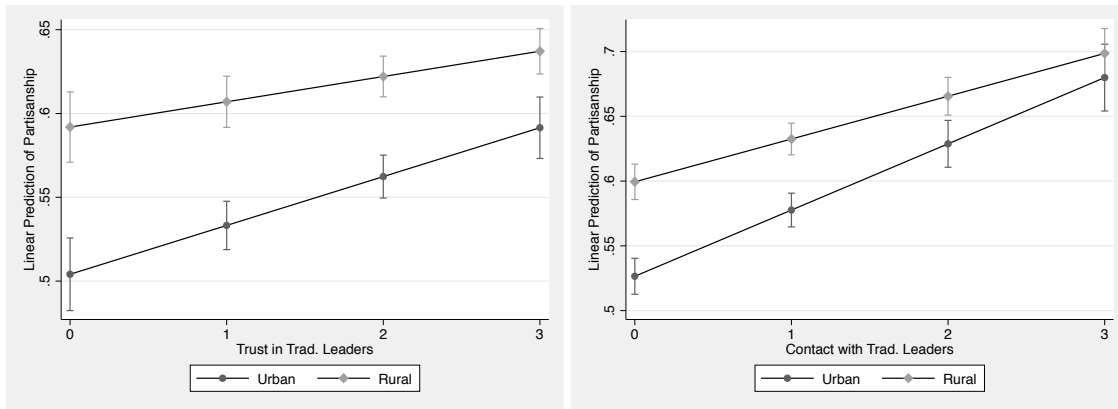


Figure 2: Closeness with traditional authorities and partisanship. Predictive margins with 95% confidence intervals of trust in (top panel) and contact with (bottom panel) traditional authority on partisanship.

(Michelitch and Utych 2018); this is demonstrated in a plot of predictive margins of partisanship over the electoral cycle (included in SI Section E). Interestingly, we find that none of the variables capturing party system institutionalization are significantly correlated with partisanship, unlike other regions (Dalton and Weldon 2007; Lupu 2013, 2015).<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.1 Rural Dwelling Argument Extension

We examine an observable implications of the rural-urban dwelling argument. According to our argument, partisanship in rural areas is facilitated by traditional authorities’ mobilization role for bloc voting, stimulating public acts and expressions to support a party and engendering and reinforcing partisanship. Riedl and Robinson (2016), however, demonstrate that urban citizens vary in their degree of connectedness to their rural “home village,” including to traditional authorities. If connections to traditional authorities encourages partisanship, we should see that those with more trust in and contact to such authorities (questions available on the Afrobarometer), regardless of living in a rural or urban area, should be more likely to be partisan. Further, such trust and connectedness may have a larger marginal effect on partisanship for urbanites. Rural dwellers that are not close to traditional authorities may have buoyed partisanship from the bloc voting of their neighbors or lack of cross-pressuring media — forces that are not present in the urban environment.

We thus re-estimate the model in column 1 of Table 2, adding in the variables *Contact with Traditional Leaders* and *Trust in Traditional Leaders* and interaction terms between these and the *Rural* variable in order to evaluate whether the effect of trust and contact on partisanship is

<sup>1</sup>That this holds with random and mixed effects models shows that it is not simply due to the inclusion of fixed effects in the main specification.

conditional on rural-urban dwelling. Results are displayed graphically in Panels (a) and (b) of Figure 2, which plot the predictive margins of *Rural* by trust in and contact with traditional leaders, respectively (question wording and regression results included in SI Section F). Consistent with our argument, those having greater trust in or higher rates of contacting such leaders are more likely to be partisan among both rural and urban dwellers. Without closeness to traditional authorities, rural dwellers are much more partisan than urbanites. The effect of closeness with traditional authorities, however, closes the urban-rural gap, rendering the effect of closeness with traditional authorities significantly stronger for urbanites.

## 4.2 Robustness and Extensions of Candidate Coethnicity

To interrogate the null result between candidate coethnicity and partisanship more thoroughly, we undertake two types of analyses (see SI Section E for results). First, we rerun all models using the following alternative codings of candidate coethnicity: (a) coethnicity based on the identity of the candidates in the prior election (regardless of the time point in the electoral cycle), (b) coethnicity only with party flagbearers, not running mates, (c) coethnicity only with the incumbent, and (d) examining (a), (b) and (c) based on living in the candidate's birth region, which some might argue offers a better measurement of ethnicity. We find no evidence of a relationship.

Second, we investigate the following country-level moderators that may yield country-level heterogeneity in the relationship, but find no evidence.

- As parties develop a performance record with successive years of democracy, they often successfully demonstrate greater inclusion to citizens beyond coethnics (Elischer 2013; Ferree and Horowitz 2010). Thus, candidate coethnicity may be more important as a marginal signal of party fit in the earlier days of democracy, and less important with increasing experience with democracy.
- The importance of ethnic identity decreases in urban areas (Robinson 2014), thus candidate coethnicity may be more important in rural areas.
- Ethnic group structure may render coethnicity with candidates differentially important. We examine (a) ethnic heterogeneity, measured in a variety of ways, and (b) presence of a single or multiple ethnic minimum winning coalition, using data from Weghorst and Bernhard (2014) (drawing on Ferree (2006)).
- The electoral cycle may render ethnic identity, and thus candidate coethnicity, more salient at election time than otherwise (Eifert et al. 2010).



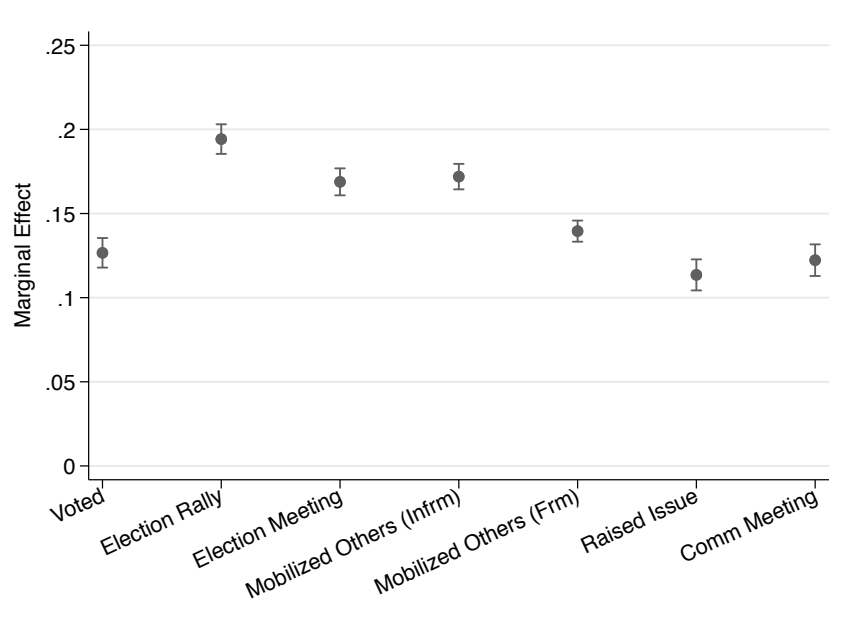


Figure 3: Marginal effect of partisanship on political participation from logistic regressions using Afrobarometer Round 6.

- Dominant party presence may reduce the salience of candidate coethnicity by forging a reliable multi-ethnic coalition (Arriola 2012). We use Weghorst and Bernhard (2014)’s coding of dominant party systems.<sup>2</sup>

## 5 Is Partisanship Meaningful in Africa?

Is Africans’ partisanship an “empty label” or a meaningful identity? Although we have demonstrated that partisanship is high in Africa and governed by important demographic, institutional, electoral cycle, and party mobilization factors, some scholars may wonder whether it is superficial — merely an indicator of affiliation with a spoils coalition (Cho and Bratton 2006; Moehler et al. 2011) or a casual opportunity for patronage (Bratton et al. 2012). One way scholars in Latin America and Eastern Europe have demonstrated that partisanship is a meaningful identity is to examine whether a positive relationship exists between partisanship and diverse acts of political and civic participation (Brader and Tucker 2001; Lupu 2015).

Regressing forms of political behavior on partisanship using the latest round of Afrobarometer data (Figure 3 — see SI Section G for descriptive statistics and regression tables), partisanship

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<sup>2</sup>We also examine whether having a dominant party system has a direct effect on partisanship by including this variable in random effects estimates, and find no evidence for this.

indeed appears to be highly correlated with political behavior in Africa, as elsewhere. Partisans across Africa are 12 percentage points more likely to vote, 20 percentage points more likely to have attended an election rally, 16 percentage points more likely to have attended a pre-election party meeting, 18 percentage points more likely to have informally mobilized others to vote for a particular party (14 for formal mobilization), 11 percentage points more likely to raise an issue to an authority, and 12 percentage points more likely to have attended community meetings. We interpret these findings as associative rather than causal, given that partisan attachments mutually-reinforce with such acts of participation.

We conclude from this final analysis that discovering the determinants of partisanship in Africa is not pre-mature. Demonstrating that partisanship is so highly associated with diverse acts of political participation underscores the importance of knowing why some groups are more likely to be partisan. This study joins others in contending that partisan attachments are meaningful in Africa, demonstrating partisan ingroup/outgroup discrimination (Michelitch 2015), cuing for vote choice (Conroy-Krutz et al. 2016), motivated reasoning (Adida et al. 2017), and attribution bias (Carlson 2016).

## 6 Conclusion

Public opinion data reveals that partisanship is quite high in Africa, compared to other regions. Why do some citizens in such new democracies attach to parties while others do not? This study examines two arguments related to parties' group mobilization tactics, alongside existing explanations, across 30 African countries.

First, by contrast to the seminal literature from Western Europe that emphasizes the early growth of mass partisan mobilization among class-based groups with urban brokers, it is more conducive for parties in Africa to mobilize with rural brokers: traditional village authorities. Seeking to bargain for improved public goods, such brokers mobilize villagers to vote "en bloc" for a party, entailing a large degree of villagers' expressed support and public participation. Such public acts and expressions engender and reinforce partisan attachments. Urbanites, by contrast, tend to be mobilized by parties on the individual-level in the absence of such brokers — they are cross-pressured in a mixed partisan environment. Cross-pressuring dampens partisan attachments by increasing individuals' internal uncertainty and external discomfort with taking partisan sides publicly. Indeed, we find that rural dwellers are more likely to be partisan, and find supportive evidence for observable implications of our argument: those closer to traditional authorities are more likely to be partisan.

We also evaluate the influence of coethnicity with major party leaders — the president or vice-presidential candidate — on partisanship. According to one line of reasoning, when citizens observe coethnic party leaders, they receive strong signals of fit with the party and expect better representation, strengthening partisanship. However, the data do not show cross-national evidence that citizens are more likely to be partisan if they share coethnicity with such candidates, and moreover, no consistent relationship conditional on theoretically-driven moderators: experience with democracy, rural/urban dwelling, ethnic group structure, the electoral cycle, or dominant party presence. This finding supports new work questioning the importance of candidate coethnicity. Scholars have argued that coethnicity with party flagbearers is a weak marginal signal of representation above and beyond other signals of inclusion — other ethnic coalition partners within the party are represented visibly in other leadership positions (e.g., minister positions) and/or otherwise successfully wooed in campaigns. Others question the importance of candidate coethnicity for generating party support per se — in many contexts ethnicity may be too diffuse of an identity group to effectively rally citizens, or does not constitute an important political cleavage, or citizens face other strategic considerations pulling them away from parties with coethnic flagbearers. Perhaps scholars have falsely over-generalized the importance of candidate coethnicity from prominently-studied cases where the relationship exists (e.g., Ghana, Kenya).

We further find support for some, but not all, theories of partisanship from other regions with new democracies. Basic demographic patterns hold: older, male, and more educated citizens, on average, are more likely to be partisan. Experience with democracy and closer proximity to an election are also associated with higher partisanship. Yet party system explanations - party fractionalization, age, and electoral volatility do not hold in this context. One reason may be that party system changes are more salient for partisanship where party competition largely revolves around class-based redistribution, as in Eastern Europe or Latin America, because citizens may have more difficulty finding fit with repositioning parties along an ideological spectrum. This topic is ripe for future research on global determinants of partisanship. A second reason is that perhaps the data overestimate the level of party system newness or change in Africa. Some parties might change names but the leaders of the parties may persist and carry their following. Some leaders have roots that go back to independence movements, or autocratic single parties that pre-date the multiparty era, but this longevity may not be accurately represented in data on African parties.

Discovering which groups are more likely to be partisan is important because it affects participation in politics, attitude formation, and even treatment of other citizens. Future research on partisanship in new democracies should consider party mobilization tactics that target certain groups of voters. Which groups are mobilized is likely to be context specific, and comparativists

must draw on contextual knowledge to localize the theory moving forward.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This study advances theoretically and empirically from the only previous cross-national study of African partisanship, [Ishiyama and Fox \(2006\)](#), who test whether demographic characteristics notable in other regions are associated with partisanship in 12 African countries using Afrobarometer Round 1.

<sup>2</sup>A related literature examines why individuals attach to certain parties over others (e.g., [Ferree and Horowitz \(2010\)](#)), while in this study we seek to understand why some individuals develop partisanship towards any party whatsoever.

<sup>3</sup>[Nathan \(2016\)](#) disagrees somewhat with this account of individual-level targeting, arguing that the urban poor are targeted, not by diverse parties, but rather on the basis of coethnicity with parties' leading candidates, while in wealthier neighborhoods, citizens strategically vote for the ethnic majority (if one exists) to win public goods. In the next section we discuss co-ethnic mobilization.

<sup>4</sup>Religious figures may start to become entrepreneurial in this role moving forward ([McCauley 2012](#)).

<sup>5</sup>In urban areas, individuals often avoid markets and public spaces, for example, directly around elections, other than turning out to vote.

<sup>6</sup>Although beliefs in co-ethnic targeting may be strong, in reality diversity exists in the distribution of different public goods across coethnic and non-coethnic groups ([Kramon and Posner 2013](#)).

<sup>7</sup>The dataset includes the following countries: since Round 1 - Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe; since Round 2 - Cape Verde, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal; since Round 3 - Benin, Madagascar; since Round 4 - Burkina Faso, Liberia; since Round 5 - Burundi, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Guinea, Niger, Sudan, Togo; since Round 6 - Gabon, Sao Tome & Principe.

<sup>8</sup>Results are robust using an indicator variable for any post-primary education (*Secondary Education*), although the coefficient is insignificant in most specifications (see SI Section E).

<sup>9</sup>Such models ease coefficient interpretation and avoid problems of identification via functional forms that can result from maximum likelihood. This approach allows us to estimate the impact of the time-varying contextual factors, while the impact of time-invariant contextual factors will be soaked up by the country fixed effects, thereby controlling for any unobservable and potentially confounding time-invariant factors at the country level. Further, linear probability models are also less prone to bias via the incidental parameter problem that can result from models with large numbers of fixed effects.

<sup>10</sup>This practice allows observations to remain in the analysis to factor into other coefficient testing, while unable to affect results for the missing variable. For example, some Afrobarometer country-rounds lack data on respondent ethnicity and in some cases electoral volatility can not be calculated because it requires two contiguous elections.

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