

DIFFERENCES IN ETHNIC FAVORITISM ACROSS COUNTRIES AND OVER TIME: THE CASE OF AFRICA

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Using several rounds of the Afrobarometer surveys, we examine whether a person's perception of government fairness depends on whether he shares the same ethnicity as the country's leader. We also compare results based on this subjective measure of unfairness from those that consider whether various public amenities (like a school or clinic) are more likely to be present for those with the same ethnicity as the leader. We find that perceptions of unfair treatment are held more often by those of differing ethnicity as the leader. These findings weaken for democracies but not over time where they may even have intensified during Africa's slower growth after 2010. Finally, differences across ethnicity in perceptions of unfairness are stronger than differences arising from the presence of amenities.

Keywords: Ethnic Favoritism; sub-Saharan Africa

JEL Classification: J15, J16, O55

1. INTRODUCTION

Many have considered different aspects of ethnic diversity and examined both benefits and hindrances to development. While some see diversity promoting specialization, entrepreneurship and innovation (Depetris-Chauvin and Özak, 2017; Fafchamps, 2000) others find that such diversity too often leads to problems such as an inefficient provision of public goods or resource misallocations (van de Walle, 2003; Alesina et al., 1999; Easterly et al., 2006; Frank and Rainer, 2012; Burgess et al., 2015). Easterly and Levine (1997) conclude that ethnic diversity is a key hindrance of Africa's development.

Although ethnic diversity transcends regions, many studies focus on sub-Saharan Africa [SSA], the region with the largest degree of ethnic diversity. Kramon and Posner (2016) examine whether differences in educational outcomes in Kenya were driven by such favoritism. Burgess et al. (2015) assess whether a leader's ethnic group

disproportionately benefited from road construction and repair. Franck and Rainer (2012) using data from 18 African countries investigate how primary education and infant mortality of ethnic groups were affected by changes in the ethnicity of the countries' leaders. Kramon and Posner (2013) examine patterns of favoritism with respect to infant survival, educational attainment, access to improved water sources, and household electrification. On the other hand, some studies found no support for ethnic favoritism. Kudamatsu (2009) did not find higher child survival rates in Guinea for members of the leader's ethnic group. Kasara (2007) even found that cash crop farmers having the same ethnicity as the leader paid higher taxes.

In this paper, we focus on perceptions of ethnic favoritism within countries, namely we examine to what extent perceptions of unfair treatment by the government increases when an individual has a different ethnicity than does the president. The study most closely related to this one is from Ahlerup and Isaksson (2015) who distinguish between ethnic and regional favoritism while investigating their relative influence in sub-Saharan Africa using individual level survey data from 19,000 respondents across 15 countries. They find evidence of ethnic favoritism in that a person sharing the same ethnicity as the leader is less likely to perceive unfair treatment by the government.

We extend their examination in three important ways. First, we rely on greater coverage both over time and in the number of countries surveyed. Use of several survey rounds allows one to see if perceptions have changed over time. One possibility is that the prevalence of ethnic favoritism declines over time as ethnic divisions become less important as groups become familiar with one another, especially regarding shared governance. However, the perception of ethnic favoritism could also cycle over time instead of trend as it correlates with the business cycle.

Second, we allow associations to differ between democracies and nondemocracies. A democratic leader could take different actions and promote different policies than a nondemocratic one although whether ethnic favoritism is stronger or weaker in democracies is not a priori clear. Democratic governments might need to allocate more resources to foment support among potential partisans. On the other hand, autocratic leaders without facing as many checks and balances might be better able to direct resources towards favored groups. Holder and Raschky (2014) find that regional favoritism is more prevalent in autocratic countries. On the other hand, Burgess et al. (2015) find evidence of ethnic favoritism but that the degree lessens when countries become democratic.

Third, we acknowledge the subjectivity of a respondent claiming unfair treatment. We compare results using this measure with objective measures, namely whether various amenities (such as a school or clinic or whether the household enjoys piped water) exist. Looking at both types of measures provides several benefits. For one, results are more comprehensive given the use of multiple dependent variables. Second, one can make better inferences as to how and why treatment could be 'unfair'. Third, subjective measures could better incorporate short run events influencing perceptions whereas the presence (or lack thereof) of amenities does not instantly change and so can capture longer run developments. Finally, one might be concerned that subjective

responses more greatly signal biases among respondents instead of those from leaders. Comparing results from these responses to those stemming from the presence of amenities can better ascertain to what extent this might be a concern.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the data. Section 3 develops the empirical model. Section 4 presents the results and Section 5 offers concluding discussion.

2. EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY

Data comes from Afrobarometer, a non-partisan, pan-African research institution that conducts regular surveys on political and social topics in over 30 countries. We use rounds 3 through 7 of the survey years 2005-2019.¹ Although multiple rounds of the survey are considered, the individuals surveyed differ across rounds and so the data is pooled but does not comprise a panel. Countries are included in the analysis if data can be found in more than two of these five rounds of surveys.²

The measure of ethnic favoritism is the same as used in Ahlerup and Isaakson (2015) and stems from whether the individual believes her/his ethnic group has been treated unfairly by the government, denoted as *UNFAIR*. Respondents can answer “never”, “sometimes”, “often”, or “always” and so *UNFAIR* takes on one of four values. A disadvantage of this measure is that it is subjective. An advantage is that the question goes to the heart of the matter, namely how the government is viewed in terms of how it treats one’s ethnic group. Another advantage is that it is holistic in that it could encompass the overall treatment of the ethnic group and not just one specific facet of government treatment. Given these four possible response, we will employ an ordered probit methodology when considering *UNFAIR* as dependent variable.

In addition to other demographic variables such as age and gender, the self-reported ethnicity of the respondent is also provided which is then used to construct two dummy variables. The first dummy equals one if the respondent shares the same ethnicity as the leader. The second dummy equals one if the respondent shares the same ethnicity as the largest ethnic group in the country. The ethnicity of the leader is determined through various sources such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The identity of the largest ethnic group comes from the CIA’s *World Factbook*.

Table 1 shows the countries in the sample and the leader’s ethnicity during each of the survey rounds. A blank cell in Table 1 indicates that the country was not included in that particular round of Afrobarometer surveys. Table 2 provides summary statistics.

¹ Rounds one and two did not include questions on ethnic favoritism.

² In addition, countries like Tanzania and Mali were removed due to uncertainty as to the ethnicity of their respective leaders. Lesotho was removed since over 99% of the population is from the Sotho ethnic group.

22% of the sample comprises individuals who share the same ethnicity as the leader whereas 33% belong to the largest ethnic group within the country. Almost 40% of the sample comes from urban areas whereas 28% completed at least a secondary education.

Table 1: Ethnicity of Leaders

Country	2005	2008	2011-3	2016	2019
Benin	Somba	Yaruba	Yaruba	Yaruba	Fon
Burkina Faso		Mossi	Mossi	Mossi	Mossi
Cameroon			Beti	Beti	Beti
Cote d'Ivoire			Dioula	Dioula	Dioula
Ghana	Akan	Akan	Akan	Gonja (Guan)	Akan
Guinea			Malinke	Malinke	Malinke
Kenya	Kikuyu	Kikuyu	Kikuyu	Kikuyu	Kikuyu
Liberia		Gola	Gola	Gola	Kru
Madagascar	Merina	Merina	Merina	Merina	Merina
Malawi	Lomwe	Lomwe	Lomwe	Lomwe	Lomwe
Mozambique	Ronga	Ronga	Ronga	Makonde	Makonde
Namibia	Ovambo	Ovambo	Ovambo	Damara	Damara
Niger			Hausa	Hausa	Hausa
Nigeria	Yaruba	Fulani/Hausa	Ijaw	Fulani/Hausa	Fulani/Hausa
Senegal	Wolof	Wolof	Pulaar	Fula	Fula
Sierra Leone			Temne	Temne	Mende
South Africa	Xhosa	Xhosa	Zulu	Zulu	Venda
Togo			Kabye	Kabye	Kabye
Uganda	Banyankole	Banyankole	Banyankole	Banyankole	Banyankole
Zambia	Lenje	Lenje	Bisa	Bantu	Bantu
Zimbabwe	Shona	Shona	Shona	Shona	Shona

Notes: A blank entry indicates the country is not in the sample for that year.

Table 2. Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Eth_Leader	0.22	0.41	0	1
Eth_Majority	0.33	0.47	0	1
Log(Age)	3.52	0.37	2.89	4.87
Age	36.17	14.15	18	130
Male	0.51	0.50	0	1
Urban	0.39	0.49	0	1
Secondary	0.28	0.45	0	1
# obs:	125,952			

We will later replace *UNFAIR* as dependent variable with the objective measures: *SCHOOL*, *CLINIC*, *GRID*, *WATER*, and *SEWAGE*. Each is a dummy variable, equaling one if the amenity exists in that area and zero otherwise. Of note is that the presence of these amenities is not reported by the respondent. Instead, the interviewer “in conjunction with the field supervisor” mark whether the amenity is present. A school or clinic is present if one exists in the primary sampling unit or if one is “in easy walking distance”. Electric, water, and sewer services (respectively) are present as long as most houses can access it. Obviously, a house might not be able to take advantage of a service that others enjoy access (and so would be miscoded) which becomes a concern if ethnicity is tied to this lack of access. Moreover, no information regarding the quality of the amenity is provided. Presumably, groups receiving unfair treatment would be less likely to have these amenities although allocations of these features cannot be that refined if different ethnicities live in close proximity to one another. Given the binary nature of the dependent variable, these estimations will be performed using a logit methodology.

The econometric specification is:

$$y_{ijt} = f(\alpha_t + \gamma_j + \beta ETH_LEADER_{ijt} + \Gamma X_{ijt} + \varepsilon_{ijt}). \quad (1)$$

The dependent variables are described above. *ETH_LEADER_{ijt}* equals one if individual *i* in country *j* at time *t* belongs to the same ethnic group as the country’s leader and equals zero otherwise. Although one’s ethnicity does not change, the identity and so the ethnicity of the leader could change and so this dummy could vary over time even for the same individual. *X_{it}* is a vector of control variables that include: the log of age, gender (*female* = 1), an urban dummy, an education dummy equaling one if the respondent completed secondary schooling, and a dummy indicating whether the respondent belongs to the country’s largest ethnic group. Including such a control is important since a leader could favor the largest group for its political clout and not because he could be from that group.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Baseline Results

Table 3 presents results from the ordered probit regressions. Column 1 removes many of the control variables whereas column 2 includes these controls. The coefficient on *ETH_LEADER* changes only slightly across the two specifications. The bottom half of the table provides the marginal effects. For *UNFAIR* = 0 (meaning the respondent does not believe her ethnic group is ever treated unfairly) the marginal effect falls from 0.66 when *ETH_LEADER* = 1 (respondent has same ethnicity as leader) to 0.52 when

ETH_LEADER = 0 (different ethnicities). Cases when at least some unfair treatment is reported become more prevalent with differing ethnicities between respondent and leader. Columns 3 and 4 show that results are more pronounced in nondemocracies.

Table 3. Baseline Regressions

Column	1	2	3	4
Dep Variable	<i>Unfair</i>	<i>Unfair</i>	<i>Unfair</i>	<i>Unfair</i>
Methodology	Ord Probit	Ord Probit	Ord Probit	Ord Probit
			DEM	Not DEM
<i>Eth_Leader</i>	-0.378*** (0.010)	-0.381*** (0.010)	-0.228*** (0.017)	-0.448*** (0.012)
<i>Eth_Majority</i>	0.049*** (0.008)	0.050*** (0.008)	-0.090*** (0.015)	0.105*** (0.010)
Log(<i>Age</i>)		-0.035*** (0.009)	-0.009 (0.016)	-0.048*** (0.011)
<i>Male</i>		0.034*** (0.007)	0.014 (0.012)	0.042*** (0.008)
<i>Urban</i>		-0.045*** (0.007)	0.015 (0.013)	-0.077*** (0.009)
<i>Secondary</i>		-0.001 (0.008)	-0.034** (0.015)	0.013 (0.010)
2008	0.088***	0.088***	0.081***	0.054***
2011	-0.230***	-0.227***	-0.284***	-0.267***
2016	-0.223***	-0.222***	-0.156***	-0.276***
2019	-0.379***	-0.380***	-0.280***	-0.456***
# of obs	127,543	125,952	35,686	90,266
	Predicted Probabilities (All other variables set at means)			
<i>Eth_Leader</i> = 0				
<i>Unfair</i> = 0	0.522	0.521	0.543	0.515
<i>Unfair</i> = 1	0.264	0.264	0.263	0.265
<i>Unfair</i> = 2	0.114	0.114	0.104	0.118
<i>Unfair</i> = 3	0.100	0.100	0.091	0.103
<i>Eth_Leader</i> = 1				
<i>Unfair</i> = 0	0.657	0.657	0.628	0.671
<i>Unfair</i> = 1	0.217	0.217	0.232	0.210
<i>Unfair</i> = 2	0.075	0.075	0.080	0.072
<i>Unfair</i> = 3	0.051	0.051	0.060	0.047

Notes: All regressions include country dummies. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4. Amenities

Column	1	2	3	4	5
Dep Variable	<i>SCHOOL</i>	<i>CLINIC</i>	<i>GRID</i>	<i>Water</i>	<i>SEWAGE</i>
Methodology	Logit	Logit	Logit	Logit	Logit
Panel A: Full Sample					
<i>Eth_Leader</i>	0.061** (0.025)	-0.122*** (0.019)	0.171*** (0.020)	0.281*** (0.021)	0.079*** (0.022)
<i>Eth_Majority</i>	-0.033 (0.021)	0.074*** (0.016)	0.060** (0.017)	0.126*** (0.018)	0.134*** (0.019)
Log(<i>Age</i>)	-0.056** (0.023)	-0.073*** (0.017)	-0.112*** (0.019)	-0.082*** (0.020)	0.001 (0.022)
<i>Male</i>	-0.013 (0.017)	-0.028** (0.013)	-0.035** (0.014)	-0.049*** (0.015)	-0.054*** (0.016)
<i>Urban</i>	0.958*** (0.020)	1.277*** (0.014)	2.279*** (0.017)	2.480*** (0.017)	2.477*** (0.017)
<i>Secondary</i>	0.327*** (0.021)	0.361 (0.016)	0.503*** (0.017)	0.603*** (0.080)	0.568*** (0.018)
2008	0.443***	0.502***	0.249***	0.140***	0.014
2011	0.338***	0.293***	0.400***	0.209***	0.035
2016	-3.641***	-1.318***	-1.193***	0.912***	1.865***
2019	0.056*	0.167***	0.257***	-0.066**	-0.163***
# of obs	124,988	124,342	125,062	125,158	124,425
Predicted Probabilities (All other variables set at means)					
<i>Eth_Leader</i> = 0	0.697	0.510	0.508	0.490	0.326
<i>Eth_Leader</i> = 1	0.704	0.486	0.536	0.534	0.337
Panel B: Only Democracies					
<i>Eth_Leader</i>	0.125*** (0.039)	-0.125*** (0.030)	-0.181*** (0.037)	-0.053 (0.036)	-0.128*** (0.035)
<i>Eth_Majority</i>	0.053 (0.035)	0.043 (0.028)	0.193*** (0.035)	0.532*** (0.033)	0.097*** (0.033)
	35,282	35,195	35,321	35,515	35,442
Predicted Probabilities (All other variables set at means)					
<i>Eth_Leader</i> = 0	0.710	0.559	0.644	0.729	0.509
<i>Eth_Leader</i> = 1	0.726	0.532	0.618	0.722	0.490

Notes: All regressions include country dummies. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

The discussion in the introduction raised a concern with the subjective measure, namely are respondents able to accurately measure unfair treatment by the government? Table 4 provides a different, more objective perspective of possible unfair treatment by replacing the measure of unfairness with dummies indicating the presence of various amenities. The coefficients on *ETH_LEADER* for four of the five amenities in panel A is positive and statistically significant although, surprisingly, is negative in column two examining the presence of a clinic. Except for this exception involving *CLINIC*, results with these objective outcomes qualitatively mirror those using the subjective response of unfairness. However, differences in magnitudes lessen. Panel B provides predicted probabilities of the presence of an amenity when one shares ethnicity with the leader versus when one is not. The largest difference in these predicted probabilities occurs with whether piped water flows into the home with a gap of 0.044, less than five percentage points. Quantitatively, these objective measures imply that ethnic favoritism is less pronounced.

Panel B shows coefficient estimates just for the sample of democracies which show. For schools, results for being a co-ethnic of the leader grow stronger with a coefficient estimate double than that for the entire sample. However, the coefficients for the three infrastructure variables are negative although not significant when considering piped water. Therefore, the estimated coefficient on *ETH_LEADER* is negative in four of the five columns. A possible explanation is that leaders in democracies want to avoid being perceived as favoring their own ethnic group. A second possibility is that democratic leaders already have the support of their own ethnic group and so allocate resources to groups where support is more tentative. In either case, no evidence arises that ethnic favoritism arises in sub-Saharan African democracies using these more objective measures, a finding that contrasts when using perceptions of unfairness.

3.2. Favoritism over Time

The use of several survey rounds also allows examination of whether responses differ over time. Perceptions of favoritism could weaken, especially in relatively new countries, as members of different ethnic groups foster trust among one another although the 14-year window of the sample period spans less than one generation so perhaps such an evolution needs more time. On the other hand, perceptions could become less trusting or harden at low levels of trust if conflicts over resources intensify or an outbreak of violence erupts. A third possibility is that perceptions do not trend but cycle as the strength of the economy waxes and wanes. As resources become more abundant and allocated to all groups, perceptions of unfairness could diminish.

To examine these possibilities, we restrict the sample of countries to those with observations across all survey rounds as shown in Table 1. We then change the specification to interact *ETH_LEADER* with year dummies. Results are presented in Table 5, both for all countries and then with the sample of democracies. Although not presented to conserve space, regressions include the same control variables as used in

Table 3.

Table 5. Results over Time Using Consistent Sample

Column	1	2	3	4	5	6
Dep Variable	<i>Unfair</i>	<i>SCHOOL</i>	<i>CLINIC</i>	<i>GRID</i>	<i>Water</i>	<i>SEWAGE</i>
Methodology	Ord Probit	Logit	Logit	Logit	Logit	Logit
Panel A: Full Sample						
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2005	-0.334***	-0.107**	-0.297***	0.085*	0.090*	-0.073
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2008	0.070**	-0.112	0.132**	-0.052	0.509***	-0.269***
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2011	0.048	0.020	-0.119**	-0.102*	-0.006	-0.056
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2016	-0.117***	0.061	0.343***	0.087	0.228**	0.655***
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2019	-0.046	0.566***	0.463***	0.380***	0.682***	0.088
# countries	13	13	13	13	13	13
# of observations	97,187	96,358	95,881	96,369	96,615	95,961
Panel B: Democracies						
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2005	-0.258***	-0.098	-0.307***	-0.085	-0.180***	-0.372***
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2008	0.086*	0.123	-0.053	-0.425***	0.291***	-0.220**
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2011	0.202***	0.364***	-0.005	-0.313***	-0.331***	0.194**
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2016	-0.261***	-0.198	0.093	-0.091	-0.045	1.072***
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2019	0.039	0.662***	0.814***	0.380***	0.826***	0.321***
# countries	5	5	5	5	5	5
# of observations	35,686	35,282	35,195	35,321	35,515	35,442
Panel C: Nondemocracies						
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2005	-0.261***	-0.491***	-0.320***	-0.123*	0.218***	0.393***
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2008	0.009	0.127	0.521***	0.294*	0.482***	-0.095
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2011	-0.099**	0.368***	0.298***	0.199**	0.252**	-0.193*
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2016	-0.131***	0.635***	0.754***	0.131	0.319***	0.371***
<i>Eth_Leader</i> × 2019	-0.260***	1.011***	0.402***	0.519***	0.624***	-0.094
# countries	8	8	8	8	8	8
# of observations	61,501	61,076	60,686	61,048	61,100	60,519

Notes: All regressions include country dummies. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

We draw two inferences from these results. Although exceptions arise, more evidence of favoritism arises for the group of nondemocracies, suggesting that democracies could be better able to rein in such practices. Of course, a competing explanation could be that countries with greater inclusiveness are more likely to become

democratic. The second inference is that greater evidence of favoritism arises in later survey rounds with coefficient estimates becoming substantially larger. African growth fell in the 2010's compared to the previous decade and so one possibility is that slower economic growth contracted resource allocation towards providing amenities but did not do so evenly across the population, suggesting that these practices become more pronounced under weaker economies.

4. CONCLUSION

This study revealed several findings. First, more striking results arise with the subjective measure of 'unfair' treatment. Differences across amenities are less pronounced. One possibility is that the subjective measure is more comprehensive than each one of the objective measures that capture only a specific type of amenity. That is, unfair treatment arises but not in any one particular, consistent way. Under this explanation the subjective measure is superior to more specific, objective ones. Then again, perhaps respondents, especially those from different ethnicities more often blame government bias for any negative shock regardless of its true cause. The subjective measures then more accurately reflect frustrations than leader bias. A third possibility is that the subjective measures indicate the presence of ethnic bias but among respondents. In light of these possibilities, we caution that results from subjective surveys should be tempered but not dismissed as evidence of fewer amenities for those differing in ethnicity from the leader still arises.

Second, associations between the co-ethnicity of the leader and the perception of unfair treatment or the presence of amenities are stronger under nondemocracies. In fact, no consistent evidence of bias arises for the objective measures in the subset of sub-Saharan African democracies. If anything, leaders in these democracies might provide fewer amenities for their co-ethnics in order to garner more support from other groups. One might conclude that democratization lowers ethnic bias. However, whether democracies limit such favoritism or countries where favoritism is limited become more democratic remain open questions.

Finally, results are stronger at the end of the sample period, especially for the group of nondemocracies. However, even when using the amenity measures for the democratic sample, results of favoritism arise in 2019. The slowdown in economic growth for many African countries could have strengthened connections between ethnicity in resource allocation relative to those in stronger economies, suggesting that magnitudes wax and wane over the business cycle. Of course, this is somewhat surprising given that the presence of these amenities is presumably slow to change over time. On the other hand, Mattes (2020) reports that many African countries saw improvements in living standards between 2005 and 2015 according to the Afrobarometer surveys but then saw a subsequent deterioration. Our findings complement this view and indicate that such deterioration could have been more striking for those that were not co-ethnics with the president. Further examination of this possibility is left for future work.

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