



*Working Paper No. 130*

**WHEN POLITICIANS CEDE CONTROL OF  
RESOURCES: LAND, CHIEFS AND  
COALITION-BUILDING IN AFRICA**

*by* Kate Baldwin

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*by* Kate Baldwin

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## **When Politicians Cede Control of Resources: Land, Chiefs and Coalition-Building in Africa**

### **Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

Why would politicians give up power over the allocation of critical resources to community leaders? This article examines why many African governments have ceded power over the allocation of land to non-elected traditional leaders. In contrast to the existing literature, which suggests traditional leaders' power is a hang-over from the colonial period that has not been eliminated due to weak state capacity, I argue that African politicians often choose to devolve power to traditional leaders as a means of mobilizing electoral support from non-coethnics. I test the explanatory power of this argument using a new data set including approximately 180 sub-national regions in Africa; the data set was constructed by combining data from surveys with environmental, anthropological and historical data. The article finds that historical and geographic constraints do not fully explain patterns in the devolution of power to chiefs, and that traditional chiefs in a position to mobilize electoral support from politically unaligned ethnic groups are given greater responsibility over the allocation of land. The cross-sectional analysis is complemented by an analysis of changes in land legislation across time in each country, which shows that the prospect of competitive elections often triggers decisions to devolve power to chiefs.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Wonbin Cho, Jesse Ribot, Alex Scacco, Matt Winters, Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro and participants in the CSDP seminar at Princeton University for helpful feedback and discussions. All mistakes are my own.

## Introduction

Why would politicians ever cede control over the distribution of resources to community leaders? This behavior challenges an important tenet of political science - that politicians seek to maximize control of resources. But in recent years, traditional chiefs in Africa have seen a resurgence in their power, including their responsibility to allocate land (Englebert 2002; van Rouveroy van Nieuwall 1999). Why have politicians allowed these leaders greater power to allocate resources?

The existing literature views the power of chiefs as a historical hangover, rather than a political choice to be explained. In this view, politicians have not chosen to empower chiefs, they simply haven't had the institutional capacity to displace the powers bestowed on these chiefs during earlier periods (cf. Herbst 2000; Skinner 1968). In contrast, this article argues that politicians consciously choose how much power to devolve to traditional leaders based on electoral calculations. Specifically, I argue that political leaders cede power to traditional chiefs as a means of mobilizing electoral support from non-coethnic groups.

The article tests the explanatory power of this argument against existing theories using an original sub-national data set that includes data on land administration, geography, social structure and ethnicity in as many as 189 regions in 19 countries.<sup>2</sup> Using a multi-level modeling framework, the article finds that political leaders are not completely captive to historical and geographic constraints. Traditional leaders in a position to mobilize support from groups who are ethnically unaligned with the major political parties in a country have greater responsibility over the allocation of land. The cross-sectional analysis is complemented by an analysis of changes in land legislation across time in each country, which demonstrates that electoral concerns typically drive decisions to devolve power to traditional chiefs.

## Patterns in Devolving Land Administration to Traditional Leaders

Traditional leaders are local authorities who have status by virtue of their association with the customs of their communities.<sup>3</sup> These positions are typically hereditary, with leaders selected from within "royal families" according to local custom. In Africa, the colonial powers often chose to rule indirectly through these leaders; traditional leaders typically had the power to raise taxes, preside over courts and allocate land during the colonial period (Herbst 2000; Mamdani 1996; Posner 2005). At independence, many governments took steps to reduce the formal powers of chiefs or to eliminate traditional authorities all together; however, even in cases like Mozambique, where "régulos" were officially banned, traditional leaders often continued to be acknowledged as important authorities within their communities (West and Kloeck-Jenson 1999).

The authority of traditional leaders stems in part from informal community customs, rather than their position in the formal state apparatus. As a result, devolving power to these leaders can be viewed as a more dramatic decision than allocating power to local governments or local administrative bodies, which are more clearly subordinate to the central government in the formal administrative hierarchy. Ribot calls the devolution of power to customary authorities "non-market privatization" in order to emphasize that the empowerment of these leaders involves transferring power outside the administrative hierarchy of the state (Ribot 2004).

This article focuses specifically on the amount of power traditional chiefs have over the allocation of land. In the agrarian economies of sub-Saharan Africa, land is the critical resource for the majority of citizens' livelihoods, so one would expect politicians to attach particular importance to gaining control of this

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<sup>2</sup> This data set represents one of the first efforts to collect comparable data on sub-national units across a large number of countries in Africa. See Ostby, Nordas and Raleigh (2009) for another source of data on sub-national units in Africa, constructed by aggregating Demographic and Health Surveys to the regional level.

<sup>3</sup> For a similar definition, see Logan (2009), 104. I follow convention in referring to these authorities as traditional leaders. The term is not meant to imply that their powers and positions have not changed over time. For a discussion of the "invention of tradition" in colonial Africa, see Ranger (1993).

resource.<sup>4</sup> But traditional chiefs continue to have a large amount of influence over the allocation of land in many communities, as the data in figure 1 illustrate.

Figure 1 indicates the percentage of respondents in sub-national regions that said traditional chiefs, rather than the national or local government, had primary responsibility for administering land in their community. The sample consists of the sub-national regions in countries where the Afrobarometer survey was conducted in 2008/09.<sup>5</sup> Although the state monopolizes the administration of land in some countries, such as Tanzania and Madagascar, a majority of citizens believe traditional chiefs have primary responsibility for allocating land in regions of Burkina Faso, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The map shows significant variation in the perceived influence of traditional chiefs over land allocation across and within countries in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in Zambia, less than 10 percent of respondents in Lusaka province believe that chiefs are primarily responsible for allocating land, whereas in Northern and Central provinces, more than two thirds of respondents say chiefs have this power.<sup>6</sup>

The existing political science literature views the continued power of chiefs as a historical hangover from earlier periods. Mamdani describes how colonial powers gave traditional leaders vast and unprecedented powers to tax their subjects and distribute lands (Mamdani 1996). The powers of chiefs may have been particularly pronounced in former British colonies, where strategies of indirect rule gave traditional leaders particularly great autonomy in administering their territories (Crowder 1964; Crowder 1968; MacLean 2002). In the post-colonial period, most existing scholarship claims that political leaders wanted to reduce the power of traditional leaders but lacked the institutional capacity to administer rural areas without them. As Herbst describes it, states did not have the ability to project power over the scarcely populated territories within their boundaries. As a result, the attempts of politicians to displace customary authorities, particularly in the area of land administration, often came to naught (Herbst 2000, chapter 7; Theis 2009).

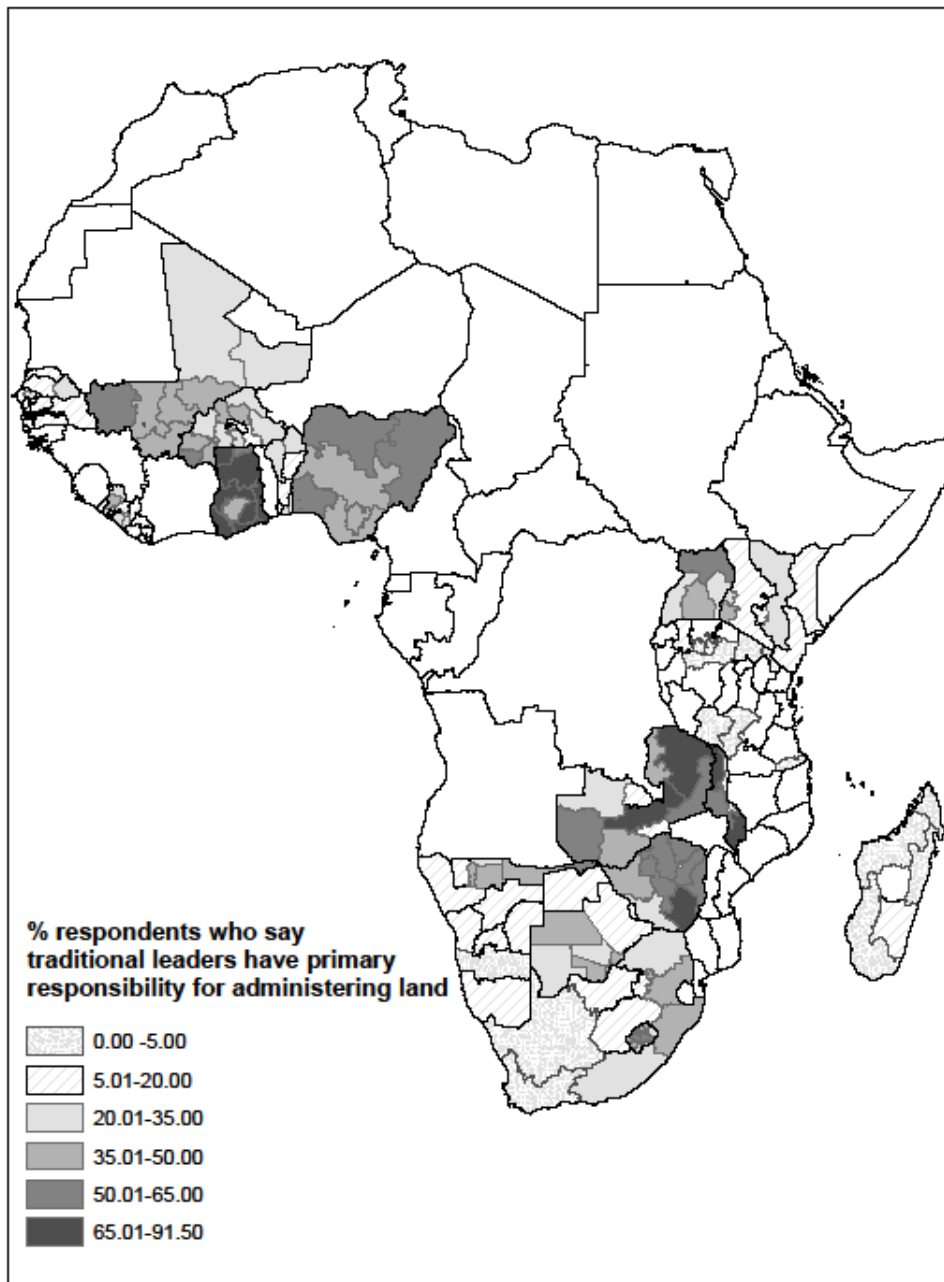
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<sup>4</sup> For discussions that highlight the political value of controlling land in Africa, see Boone (2009), Klopp (2002), and Onoma 2010. Klopp and Onoma argue that the Kenyan government has been able to convert its control of land to political advantage. However, this article will argue that most governments in Africa do not have adequate institutional capacity to convert control of land into votes in areas inhabited by non-coethnic groups.

<sup>5</sup> 19 countries are included in this study - Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. However, Mozambique is not included in this figure, even though it is included in some parts of the later analysis, because respondents were not given the opportunity to say that traditional leaders were responsible for land allocation. An Afrobarometer survey was also conducted in Cape Verde in 2008/09 but it did not include any questions that asked about traditional leaders, and so the country is excluded from this analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, respondents in a number of sub-national units are evenly divided in whether they believe the government or traditional leaders have greater responsibility for the allocation of land, which probably reflects administrative procedures which require input from both sets of leaders before decisions can be made.

**Figure 1: Power of Traditional Leaders over Land by Sub-national Region**

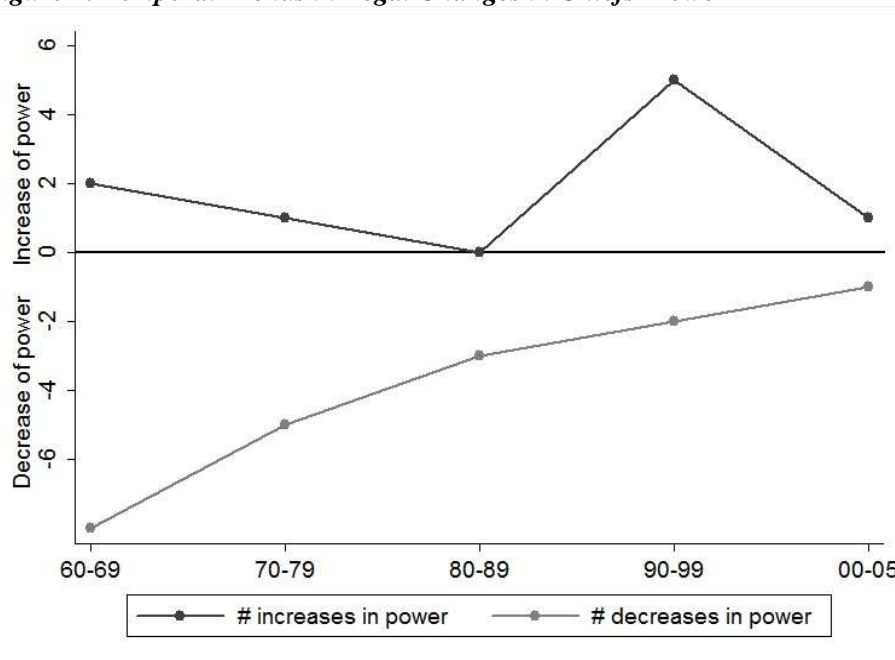


However, trends in the legal power of chiefs over land allocation suggest this is not the full story. Figure 2 indicates how many of the 19 countries in this analysis legislated increases and decreases in chiefs’ power in the decades between 1960 and 2005.<sup>7</sup> Countries are considered to have legislated a decrease in the power of traditional leaders if they passed laws or decrees that (a) decreased the power of traditional leaders (or their

<sup>7</sup> Countries only enter the data set upon achieving independence. There are two exceptions to this rule. Liberia enters the data in 1960, and South Africa enters the data in 1990.

appointees) over the allocation of land, (b) withdrew recognition from traditional leaders with power over the allocation of land, or (c) decreased the amount of land held in trust by traditional leaders. Countries are considered to have increased the power of traditional leaders if they passed laws or decrees that (a) increased the power of traditional leaders (or their appointees) over the allocation of land from the previous law/official policy, (b) recognized previously unrecognized traditional authorities and gave them power over the allocation of land, (c) increased the amount of land held in trust by traditional leaders, or (d) reversed an earlier decrease in the power of traditional leaders over land.<sup>8</sup> Figure 2 shows that before 1990, it may have been correct to view chiefs' power as a historical legacy. During this period, few politicians *chose* to empower traditional leaders. Indeed, many independence-era politicians made significant efforts to reduce the power of chiefs. From 1960 to 1990, 16 laws in 13 countries were passed decreasing the power of traditional leaders over land. During this same time period, only 3 laws in 2 countries increased the power of traditional leaders. However, the story is quite different after 1990. Between 1990 and 2005, six laws in 5 countries were passed that increased the power of traditional leaders over the allocation of land, while only three laws were passed that tried to decrease their power. After 1990, many politicians were choosing to devolve power to chiefs.

**Figure 2: Temporal Trends in Legal Changes in Chiefs' Power**



In viewing the devolution of power to traditional leaders as an institutional choice made by political leaders, this work builds on Boone's analysis of institution-building in West Africa (Boone 2003a; Boone 2003b). As in her story, politicians consider the authority structures and resources controlled by traditional leaders in different communities, and then decide whether devolving power to them will advance or hinder their goals. But the article departs from Boone in the primary goals that it attributes to politicians. The leaders in Boone's analyses (which focus largely on the period prior to 1990) are primarily driven by the economic goal of "extracting the agricultural surplus" (Boone 2003a, xi). They are only likely to administer territories directly in contexts where land is of high commercial value and hierarchically organized traditional institutions do not exist that can be co-opted into mobilizing resources for the state. But figure 1 hints at another motivation of politicians, which was of particular importance in the period after 1990. In explaining politicians' institutional choices, this article emphasizes politicians' *electoral* goals. The premise that

<sup>8</sup>More details on how this data was coded are available in an on-line appendix available at [http://plaza.ufl.edu/kabaldwin/CODEBOOK\\_LEGAL\\_CHANGES\\_CHIEFS\\_POWER.pdf](http://plaza.ufl.edu/kabaldwin/CODEBOOK_LEGAL_CHANGES_CHIEFS_POWER.pdf).



electoral motivations drive decisions to devolve power has been shown to have significant explanatory power in other regions of the world.<sup>9</sup> This article expounds the electoral incentives of politicians in Africa, where electoral fortunes are dependent on a factor that has not been emphasized in the rest of the literature on devolution - the ability of politicians to build multi-ethnic coalitions.

### **An Electoral Explanation: Multi-Ethnic Coalition Building**

This article proposes an electoral coalition-building explanation for variation in the amount of power devolved to traditional leaders within and between countries in Africa. Particularly in recent years, politicians in Africa have faced the challenge of how to build coalitions that can win elections. Although many early observers of the third wave of democracy in Africa feared elections would just be window dressing, in the past 20 years, elections have been institutionalized in many countries, and electoral outcomes now largely determine who holds office across sub-Saharan Africa (Lindberg 2006; Posner and Young 2007; Stasavage 2005).

What do politicians need to do to ensure they win elections? This article focuses particularly on the competition for executive office, given the concentration of power in the office of the president in Africa (van de Walle 2003). In order to win the presidency, politicians need to build a coalition encompassing a majority of voters in the country. They can build part of the coalition by making ethnic appeals. Voters in Africa prefer co-ethnic candidates, as many scholars have demonstrated (Conroy-Krutz 2009; Horowitz 1985; Posner 2005). Co-ethnic candidates may provide them with “psychological” benefits, they may share similar policy preferences with them, or they may find promises of redistribution more credible if they are made by co-ethnics.<sup>10</sup> Through a combination of these mechanisms, political candidates can usually count on the votes of their own ethnic group. But any party leader can only make ethnic appeals to one ethnic group, and in the multi-ethnic countries of sub-Saharan Africa, there are few places where politicians can be confident of winning a majority if they only win the support of one group. As a result, politicians need to find ways of appealing to voters beyond their own ethnic group.<sup>11</sup>

How can politicians make appeals beyond their own ethnic group? One option is to promise redistribution to other ethnic groups in return for votes. But, in contexts like sub-Saharan Africa where both party institutions and the state bureaucracy have weak organizational capacity, politicians and voters from different ethnic groups face great difficulty exchanging resources for votes.<sup>12</sup> Politicians and voters from different ethnic groups are less likely to share expectations of repeated interaction that would allow them to overcome the commitment problem inherent in sequential exchanges. Once voters have supported a politician, the politician has little incentive to provide resources to them; conversely, once the politician has provided resources to voters, voters have little incentive to support the politician. It is particularly difficult for politicians to make clientelistic appeals, promising resources to individual voters from different ethnic groups contingent on how they cast their ballots, since politicians are not part of the same ethnic networks as voters and cannot monitor how they vote. In addition, norms of reciprocation may be weaker among non-coethnics.<sup>13</sup> Thus, politicians are often ineffective in making direct redistributive appeals to voters from other ethnic groups.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The literature on electoral motivations for decentralization in Latin America is most developed (Eaton 2004; Garman, Haggard and Willis 2001; Escobar-Lemmon 2003; and O'Neill 2003). For a discussion of electoral incentives to decentralize in India, see Bohlken (2010).

<sup>10</sup>For a discussion of the different mechanisms which may drive ethnic voting, see Ferree (2006). For a discussion of credibility and “psychological” benefits, see Chandra (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Dunning and Harris (2010) emphasize this point in their discussion of how Malian politicians make appeals to ethnic “cousins.”

<sup>12</sup> On the inability of political parties in Africa to employ clientelism due to their weak institutions, see van de Walle (2006).

<sup>13</sup> Habyarimana et al. (2004) provide evidence that co-ethnics are better able to “find” each other through their social networks than non-coethnics, and that co-ethnics select strategies of cooperating more frequently than non-coethnics.

<sup>14</sup> In a field experiment in Benin, Wantchekon (2003) finds some evidence that political parties’ promises of clientelism are more effective when they are made by co-ethnics.

Given that politicians cannot make ethnic or distributive appeals to voters from other ethnic groups, how can they mobilize their support? One possibility is ceding power over the distribution of resources to local intermediaries who are in a position to mobilize votes from the group members. Politicians often enlist the support of traditional leaders in mobilizing votes from other ethnic groups in rural Africa (Baldwin 2010; Koter 2009; Lemarchand 1972).

There are a number of ways the empowerment of traditional leaders can help to rally voters behind a politician. First, the empowerment of traditional leaders puts these leaders in a position to make clientelistic exchanges with the voters in their communities. Unlike politicians from different ethnic groups, traditional leaders are enmeshed in the networks of their local communities, and so they do not face the same commitment and monitoring problems. They are more likely to be able to monitor how individuals vote than presidential candidates are, and their threats to withhold access to resources based on how individuals vote are more credible. As a result, voters may support the candidate preferred by their traditional leader for fear of losing access to resources the leader controls if they do not.<sup>15</sup> In addition, where traditional leaders have control over key local resources, like land, they must cooperate with politicians in order for development projects to be realized. This gives voters an incentive to support candidates with close relationships with their chiefs in order to ensure the two sets of leaders can work together fruitfully.<sup>16</sup> In both cases, the empowerment of chiefs gives these leaders control over the votes of other community members. Because chiefs are likely to rally behind the politician who has empowered them (at least initially), the empowerment of chiefs should increase support for the president/prime minister in the short-run.

A third way the empowerment of traditional chiefs may work to mobilize votes is by signaling the redistributive intentions of politicians. The promise to empower traditional chiefs after the election may provide a credible signal of a politician's future redistributive intentions in a way that promises to redistribute resources to individual voters is not. Politicians have more incentive to fulfill promises to powerful traditional leaders than they do to individual voters because there is greater expectation that they will need to approach these leaders again for support in the future. But because traditional leaders are generally thought to favor their indigenous subjects in the allocation of land, the promise to devolve power to these leaders effectively signals a commitment to empowering indigenous community members.<sup>17</sup> Thus, indigenous voters may view promises to empower their chiefs as credible promises to provide them with resources.

Thus, the empowerment of traditional leaders provides politicians with an indirect way of mobilizing support from non-coethnic voters. Of course, the strategy is not without its costs. First, politicians lose the power to allocate whatever resources they devolve to traditional leaders. Second, although newly empowered traditional leaders are likely to rally behind the government for at least one electoral cycle, a politician has no guarantee how long they'll stay in his or her camp. Thus, politicians will typically devolve power unevenly to chiefs within their country, only empowering those chiefs who are able to deliver significant numbers of votes the politician could not otherwise win.

Which chiefs will political leaders empower? They have no need to empower co-ethnic chiefs, since they can directly appeal to voters from their own ethnic group. Just as co-ethnic voters have been found to be taxed more heavily in Africa (Kasara 2007), co-ethnic chiefs get less power than other chiefs. In addition, given the importance of ethnic appeals in Africa, political leaders are likely to see limited returns from empowering chiefs of the same ethnicity as their major political opponent; voters that are ethnically aligned with the major opposition leader are likely to vote on ethnic lines, rather than being swayed by their chiefs. Instead, political leaders will empower chiefs of non-aligned ethnic groups, who are not allied with the government or its major opposition, and therefore do not have ethnic motivations for supporting either party.

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<sup>15</sup> For further exposition of this logic, see Medina and Stokes (2007).

<sup>16</sup> For a more thorough treatment of this argument, see Baldwin (2010).

<sup>17</sup> According to Boone (2009), this type of vote mobilization strategy was used in recent elections in Cote D'Ivoire.

The empowerment of chiefs cannot override ethnic voting, but it can mobilize non-aligned populations. For example, in Zambia, the effect of a chief's relationship with politicians on electoral results is almost twice as large in places that are not ethnically aligned with the leaders of the major political parties.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, political leaders will consider the ability of chiefs to mobilize votes from significant numbers of voters before devolving power to them. Politicians will only empower chiefs who already have significant social standing. Chiefs of very small ethnic groups or decentralized ethnic groups are unlikely to be able to turn their control of resources into significant numbers of votes, and so politicians will not empower these chiefs, even if they are non-aligned. Thus, the argument predicts that politicians will empower chiefs of large hierarchically organized groups that are not ethnically aligned with the government or the opposition. The argument also implies that politicians facing greater electoral pressure should be more likely to devolve power to traditional chiefs; politicians who have small ethnic constituencies and who face elections for the first time should be particularly likely to devolve power to chiefs. The remainder of the article draws on two separate data sets to test each of these empirical implications. First, I employ a cross-sectional dataset measuring the devolution of power to traditional leaders at the sub-national level to analyze the characteristics of traditional chiefs that are empowered. Then, I analyze the timing of laws devolving power over land to traditional leaders.

### **A Comparison of Chiefs' Power Between and Within Countries**

Where do traditional leaders have greater power over the administration of land in Africa? The existing literature suggests that these should be places where the state does not have the capacity to remove chiefs. Traditional chiefs should have more power in places where the colonial powers relied more heavily on indirect rule and where geography has prevented the post-colonial state from developing an effective bureaucracy. In contrast, this article argues that politicians often choose to empower chiefs for political reasons. According to the logic of this argument, chiefs of large politically non-aligned ethnic groups with hierarchical traditional institutions should be given greater power. This section tests these theories using a new sub-national data set.

### ***A New Sub-National Data Set***

This article uses a new data set including as many as 189 sub-national units in 19 countries to examine the characteristics of regions in which traditional chiefs have greater influence over the administration of land. This data set was constructed by combining data from the Afrobarometer survey with georeferenced environmental data, anthropological measures of social structure, and information on the political history of each country. Close to one hundred articles, books and data sources were consulted in the process, and the resulting data set provides one of the first sources of information on sub-national units in Africa.

The sample is made up of all the sub-national regions in the countries included in the fourth round of the Afrobarometer survey, which are listed in table 1. This biases the sample towards countries where elections are more institutionalized, leaving out entire sections of the continent where competitive elections are rarer occurrences. Southern, eastern and western Africa are well represented, but the sample does not include any countries in central Africa. Although this is an unfortunate omission, the sample still contains a great deal of variation. The countries in the sample have varied colonial experiences (settler colonies, non-settler colonies and protectorates; French, British and Portuguese territories), varied geographies (from tiny Lesotho to sprawling Mali), and varied administrative capacities (from high-functioning states, such as Botswana and South Africa, to post-conflict countries, like Mozambique and Liberia).

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<sup>18</sup>Results available from the author upon request.

**Table 1: Countries in Study**

<b>Country Name</b>	<b>Name of Administrative Unit</b>	<b>Number of Units</b>
Benin	Department	7
Botswana	District	9
Burkina Faso	Region	13
Ghana	Region	10
Kenya	Province	8
Lesotho	District	10
Liberia	County	15
Madagascar	Province	6
Malawi	Region	3
Mali	Region	9
Mozambique	Province	11
Namibia	Region	13
Nigeria	Zone	6
Senegal	Department	11
South Africa	Province	9
Tanzania	Region	26
Uganda	Province	4
Zambia	Province	9
Zimbabwe	Province	10

The sub-national units in the data set are generally the highest level of administrative boundaries within each country; for example, in Benin, they are departments, in Ghana, they are regions, and in Zambia, they are provinces. The reason for using these units is largely practical. The Afrobarometer survey is designed to be representative within these regions, but not at lower levels of aggregation. In addition, when governments vary their land administration practices within their countries, we would expect the greatest amount of variation to be between these sub-national administrative units. Table 1 also indicates the types of administrative units that serve as the units of observation within each country. Most countries in the survey have around 10 sub-national units; however, both Malawi and Uganda have very few sub-national units (3 and 4 respectively), while Tanzania is a huge outlier with 26 sub-national units.

This article is concerned with differences in the power of traditional leaders over the administration of land both within and between countries. As Boone has discussed at length, governments often employ different administrative strategies in different parts of the same country (Boone 2003a; Boone 2003b). Sometimes, this is because of de jure administrative differences - different laws apply in different regions of the country. The legal position of land in areas that were formerly protectorates is often different from the legal position of land elsewhere (i.e. Barotseland (Zambia) and Northern Nigeria immediately after independence), and at times, governments have passed laws which apply specifically to particular chiefdoms (i.e. the Asanti Stool Land Act, 1958 and the Akim Abuakwa (Stool Revenue) Act, 1958 in Ghana, and the Ingonyama Trust Act, 1994 in South Africa).<sup>19</sup> However, more often this is because of de facto administrative differences - the government takes advantage of ambiguities in the laws governing land and the position of traditional leaders to engage in different levels of de facto devolvement of power to chiefs (van Rouveroy van Niewall 1999). As a result, one would ideally use a measure of the devolution of power to traditional chiefs that captures differences in administrative practices in different communities, not simply differences in the laws on the books.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, almost 90 percent of the laws coded as decreasing the power of traditional leaders over land were designed to apply uniformly within countries. However, more than 50 percent of laws coded as increasing the power of traditional leaders over land were designed to apply in only parts of a country, suggesting that political leaders are reluctant to uniformly increase the power of traditional leaders.

The measure used in this paper is based on responses to a question about land administration practices, and therefore encompasses both de jure and de facto differences in the power of chiefs over the allocation of land. Specifically, the measure is based on a question from the fourth round of the Afrobarometer survey (2008-2009) that asks respondents who is primarily responsible for allocating land – “the national government,” “the local government,” “traditional leaders” or “members of your community.” This article is interested primarily in the power of traditional leaders vis-à-vis the government, whether this be the central government or the local government, since local governments in Africa are largely an appendage of central governments (Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Olowu 2001; Wunsch 2001). As a result, I collapsed the individual responses into two categories, the government or traditional leaders, dropping the small group of respondents who answered “members of your community.”<sup>20</sup>

The data set is able to assess the power of different explanations for traditional leaders’ responsibility by combining this survey measure with variables measuring the geography, social structure and political history of different countries and sub-national units. Most of these are original variables, and a few of the measurement strategies require some explanation. The remainder of this section focuses on explaining the more innovative variables, leaving a full explanation of all the variables in the data set to the data appendix.

The claim in the existing literature is that governments would like to remove traditional leaders’ administrative powers but do not have the capacity to disempower them. In particular, Herbst argues that the difficulty of projecting power over large and sparsely populated territories has constrained bureaucratic development in Africa and left chiefs considerable power in outlying areas. According to this logic, chiefs should have more power in more “geographically difficult” countries. Herbst divides states into four types, those with “difficult” geography, those with large “hinterlands,” those with “neutral” geography, and those with “favorable” geography. He takes two variables consistently into account when making these decisions - the area of the country, and the shape or elongation of the country. In this article, I create a continuous variable capturing how difficult a country is to govern by combining continuous measures of a country’s area (logged) and elongation.<sup>21</sup> I measure elongation using Schwartzberg’s measure of compactness, which has been used in research on gerrymandering to assess how much an area’s shape deviates from being circular; specifically, it measures how much longer a shape’s perimeter is than the perimeter of a circle of equal area (Schwartzberg 1966). My measure of *Difficult Geography* is the sum of the standardized version of these two variables. This measure appears to capture a great deal of Herbst’s logic, as it correlates strongly with an interval variable based on his original coding ( $r=.67$ ).<sup>22</sup>

The data set also includes a number of sub-national variables designed to test the argument that states have not displaced traditional leaders due to difficulties building bureaucratic capacity. By this logic, one would expect sub-national units that are further from the capital and more sparsely populated to devolve more power to traditional chiefs. I constructed measures of *Distance from Capital (log)* and *Population Density* using georeferenced data sets described in more detail in the appendix.

The alternative view is that politicians actively choose to devolve power to traditional chiefs. Boone advances this line of argument, theorizing that governments consider the commercial value of land and the

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<sup>20</sup> Across all countries, only seven percent of respondents indicated that members of their communities were primarily responsible for allocating land.

<sup>21</sup> Herbst (2000), chapter 5. In particular, he ranks countries by size in table 5.1 on page 146. The importance of shape and elongation are particularly important in his discussions of Mozambique, Senegal, and Malawi (pages 150, 141 & 159 respectively). Herbst also frequently invokes a third variable - population concentration. I experimented with including measures of spatial concentration in my measure of geographic difficulty, but the inclusion of these measures reduced the correlation between the continuous measure and Herbst’s categorical measures, so I did not include this component variable in the final measure.

<sup>22</sup> In order to examine the correlation, I created an interval variable based on Herbst’s coding. Countries with favorable geography were coded as 0, countries with neutral geography/hinterlands were coded as 1, and countries with difficult geography were coded as 2.

social structure of communities before deciding whether to administer territory directly or indirectly through intermediaries. Similarly, the explanation outlined in the previous section posits that politicians weigh the political advantages of devolving power to chiefs based on the political alignment and social structure of communities. In order to evaluate these explanations, the data set includes measures of land quality, social structure and the political alignment of different sub-national units.

Boone predicts that politicians will permit local leaders, such as traditional chiefs, significant power over the administration of territory in contexts where land is either of little value, or where there are leaders of hierarchical groups who can be co-opted. The measure *Land Quality* captures the average land quality across the area covered by each sub-national unit. This measure is based on a metric created by the Food and Agriculture Organization rating the suitability of land for agriculture on a scale of 0 to 8. The measure *Hierarchical Group* indicates whether the largest group in a region (as determined by respondents' self-identification during the Afrobarometer survey) has paramount chiefs with significant jurisdictional power; it was coded based on anthropological sources, such as Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas* (Murdock 1967).

The coalition-building explanation predicts that politicians should go to particular efforts to win the support of politically non-aligned ethnic groups with hierarchical authority structures and significant numbers of voters. The variable *Hierarchical Group* described above is also used to test this explanation. The Afrobarometer data set was used to establish whether each group was a non-trivial percentage of the population of the country; any ethnic group that makes up more than 5 percent of a country's population is coded as being of significant size (*5 % Group*). Secondary historical research was then consulted to evaluate whether or not a sub-national unit was politically aligned. A region is considered to be politically aligned if either the president/prime minister or the leader of the largest opposition party is from the largest ethnic group in the region. (In the event that there is no significant opposition party in the country - i.e. places where no opposition party won more than 15 percent of the vote in the last election - no groups are considered to be aligned with the opposition.) But because a political leader may not be able to devolve power immediately to traditional chiefs upon assuming power, the measure of political alignment considers not simply the alignment of groups in the year of the Afrobarometer survey but over each of the years in the previous decade (1998-2007). The variable *Proportion Years without Political Alignment* measures the proportion of years in the past decade in which neither the president/prime minister nor the leader of the largest opposition party was from the largest ethnic group in the region.

The measure used to test the political coalition-building theory in the analysis below, *Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment*, is constructed by combining these three measures as follows:

*Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment* = *5 % Group* \* *Hierarchical Group* \* *Proportion Years without Political Alignment*

The variables *5 % Group* and *Hierarchical Group* are both dichotomous variables. A region automatically takes a value of 0 on *Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment* if the dominant group in the region does not have hierarchical traditional authority structures or the group makes up less than 5 percent of the population across the country as a whole. In cases where the dominant ethnic group is more than 5 percent of the population and is hierarchically organized, the measure indicates the number of years in which neither the president/prime minister nor the leader of the largest opposition party was from that ethnic group. If either of these leaders belonged to the region's dominant ethnic group for each year in the previous decade, the measure takes on a value of 0. However, if neither of these leaders belonged to the region's dominant ethnic group for the entirety of the decade, the measure takes on a value of 1. If the president/prime minister or leader of the opposition was a co-ethnic for a part of the previous decade, the measure takes on an intermediate value between 0 and 1.

### Cross-Sectional Analysis of Chiefs' Power

The analysis in this section employs multi-level models, which allow examination of the influence of both national and sub-national variables on the amount of power vested in traditional leaders. The main advantage of multi-level models in this context is that they permit the inclusion of country-level predictors and country intercepts (country random effects). In a classical regression framework, it is not possible to include intercepts that vary by country in models with country-level predictors, which means it is not possible to capture differences between countries beyond those measured by country-level predictors (Gelman and Hill 2007). The multilevel models take the following form:

$$y_i = \alpha_j + X_i\beta + \epsilon_i$$
$$\alpha_j = \gamma + Z_j\gamma + \epsilon_j$$

where  $i$  indexes sub-national units and  $j$  indexes countries. The dependent variable  $y_i$  is the proportion of respondents who say traditional leaders have primary responsibility for allocating land in their sub-national unit,  $X_i$  is a vector of sub-national variables,  $Z_j$  is a vector of country-level variables,  $\epsilon_i$  is a normally distributed error term at the sub-national unit level, and  $\epsilon_j$  is a normally distributed error term at the country level.

What national and sub-national variables help explain the power of traditional chiefs over the allocation of land? In table 2, the top portion of model 1 shows that the “historical hangover” theories have limited purchase in explaining differences in chiefs’ power across countries. On the one hand, chiefs are perceived to have more power in former British colonies; on average, 13 percentage points more people report chiefs were responsible for allocating land in countries that were colonized by the British, a relationship that is statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level. On the other hand, countries with difficult geography may actually devolve less power to chiefs. A one standard deviation increase in the geographic difficulty of a country is associated with an 8 percentage point decrease in the perceived power of chiefs, an effect that is statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level. Chiefs are reported to have more influence over the allocation of land in small and compact countries, such as Ghana and Lesotho, which may be due to the better fit between traditional territories and national boundaries in these countries.<sup>23</sup>

Arguments about state capacity have more power in explaining differences in chiefs’ power within countries. Chiefs are reported to have more responsibility over the allocation of land in places that are sparsely populated and far from the capital. Specifically, an increase in population density of 1000 people per kilometer is associated with a 6 percentage point decrease in the number of people who believe chiefs are responsible for allocating land, an effect that is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. The distance variable is logged, making a substantive interpretation of its coefficient more difficult, but a one standard deviation increase in the logged distance from the capital is associated with a 2 percentage point increase in the number of people who believe chiefs are responsible for allocating land. This effect is statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level. At the sub-national level, then, geographic constraints on bureaucratic development have important explanatory power.

Is there any evidence that politicians are actively choosing to devolve power rather than failing to centralize it? Boone hypothesizes that governments will choose to administer territory directly in areas where land is of higher value (Boone 2003a, 37). Surprisingly, model 1 shows that chiefs are perceived as having significantly more power over the allocation of land in places where land is of greater value, which suggests that the government has not been able to centralize the administration of land even when this would be

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<sup>23</sup> I obtain similar results if I use Herbst’s own coding. On the importance of congruence between traditional kingdoms and national boundaries, see Englebert (2000a; 2000b).

economically advantageous. A one standard deviation increase in the measure of land quality (equivalent to a 1.65 point increase in the 8 point scale) is associated with a 6 percentage point increase in the number of respondents who state chiefs are responsible for allocating land. However, Boone's theory about when governments devolve power is more sophisticated than the specification in model 1 indicates. She hypothesizes that politicians will devolve authority either in circumstances in which land is of little value or where land is of high value but there are cooptable traditional leaders at the top of a hierarchical social structure. Model 2 tries to capture this logic by including a dummy variable for places where either land is of low value, or land is of high value but traditional authorities are hierarchical.<sup>24</sup> The coefficient on this variable is negative (but statistically insignificant), indicating that this hypothesis cannot explain variation in the influence of traditional leaders during this time period.

But what about the political considerations of political leaders, which may have been more important than economic concerns during this time period? Are the sub-national regions where traditional leaders have greater influence those where calculating political leaders should have sought support to broaden their electoral coalitions? Model 3 suggests that political considerations were indeed at play. The coefficient on Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment is positive, substantively large and statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Traditional leaders who lead large ethnic groups with hierarchical authority structures that have not been ethnically aligned with the major political parties in the past decade are perceived to have more power over the allocation of land than traditional leaders of groups that are small, non-hierarchical groups, or ethnically aligned with one of the major political parties. Respondents in regions dominated by powerful non-aligned groups are 6 percentage points more likely to say traditional leaders are responsible for allocating land than respondents in regions dominated by groups who are small, decentralized or politically aligned.

The findings in model 3 are consistent with the electoral coalition-building explanation, but it is important to check whether one of the component variables used in the construction of Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment is driving the relationship. For example, it is possible that leaders of hierarchical ethnic groups have more power over the allocation of land because they are better able to administer the territories under their control, or because it is more difficult for the government to usurp power from more senior traditional leaders. Similarly, it is plausible that political leaders lack the capacity to build bureaucratic institutions in areas inhabited by other ethnic groups. Model 4 assesses whether one of these variables is driving the relationship observed in model 3 by introducing controls for each variable used in the construction of Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment. Interestingly, lack of political alignment by itself actually has a negative, but statistically insignificant, effect on the perceived power of traditional leaders. Similarly, traditional leaders of hierarchical groups are actually thought to have less influence over the allocation of land unless their groups are politically non-aligned and sufficiently large.

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<sup>24</sup> Boone also differentiates between cooptable and noncooptable leaders of hierarchical groups, arguing that local intermediaries will only be empowered in the former case. I am not able to capture this nuance in her argument because data do not exist that would permit me to systematically classify traditional leaders as cooptable or noncooptable. See Boone (2003a), 29.



**Table 2: Explaining the Power of Traditional Leaders in Administering Land**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<b>Country Predictors</b>				
British Colony	0.134* (0.081)	0.129 (0.082)	0.123 (0.079)	0.130* (0.077)
Difficult Geography	-0.056* (0.032)	-0.061* (0.032)	-0.060* (0.031)	-0.060** (0.030)
<b>Sub-national Predictors</b>				
Population Density	-0.059** (0.027)	-0.053* (0.028)	-0.062** (0.026)	-0.065** (0.026)
Distance from Capital (log)	0.017* (0.010)	0.013 (0.010)	0.015 (0.010)	0.022** (0.010)
Quality of Land	0.035*** (0.009)		0.033*** (0.009)	0.033*** (0.009)
Low Commercial Value or Social Hierarchy (Boone)		-0.023 (0.025)		
Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment			0.061** (0.029)	0.094* (0.050)
Proportion Years without Political Alignment				-0.030 (0.041)
Hierarchical Group				-0.046 (0.034)
Group Bigger than 5 % of Country's Population				0.042 (0.034)
N	178	178	178	178
Country	18	18	18	18
AIC	-156.9	-144.4	-154.1	-138.7
Standard errors in parentheses. ***, ** & * indicate significance at the 99, 95 and 90 percent confidence levels respectively.				

As another way of analyzing this, figure 3 explicitly examines how the size/structure of ethnic groups interact with the political alignment of groups to influence the powers of chiefs. Specifically, figure 3 examines whether the positive effect of being a large hierarchical group is conditional on being politically non-aligned, and vice versa. The variable *Large Hierarchical Group* is a dichotomous variable that takes the value 1 if a group is more than 5 percent of the population and hierarchical, and the value 0 if a group is less than 5 percent of the population or decentralized. The top panel of figure 3 shows the effect of Years without Political Alignment on chiefs' perceived responsibility for allocating land by whether a region's dominant group is large and hierarchical. The graph shows the predicted power of chiefs over land across different values of Years without Political Alignment and Large Hierarchical Group, holding the continuous control variables at their mean and assuming the country is a former British colony. The solid line shows that when the dominant ethnic group is hierarchical and greater than 5 percent of the country's population, the proportion of years without political alignment is associated with an increase in the perceived power of chiefs. In contrast, the dashed line shows that when the dominant ethnic group is either non-hierarchical or very small in size, years of political non-alignment are associated with a decrease in the perceived powers of chiefs.

The bottom panel of figure 3 plots the interaction a different way, showing the effect of being a large hierarchical group at different levels of political alignment. The solid line indicates the predicted effect, while the dotted lines indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals. The graph shows that chiefs from hierarchical groups of a certain size are thought to have significantly greater power over their counterparts from small or non-hierarchical groups only when their ethnic group has been without political alignment for

three quarters of the previous decade.

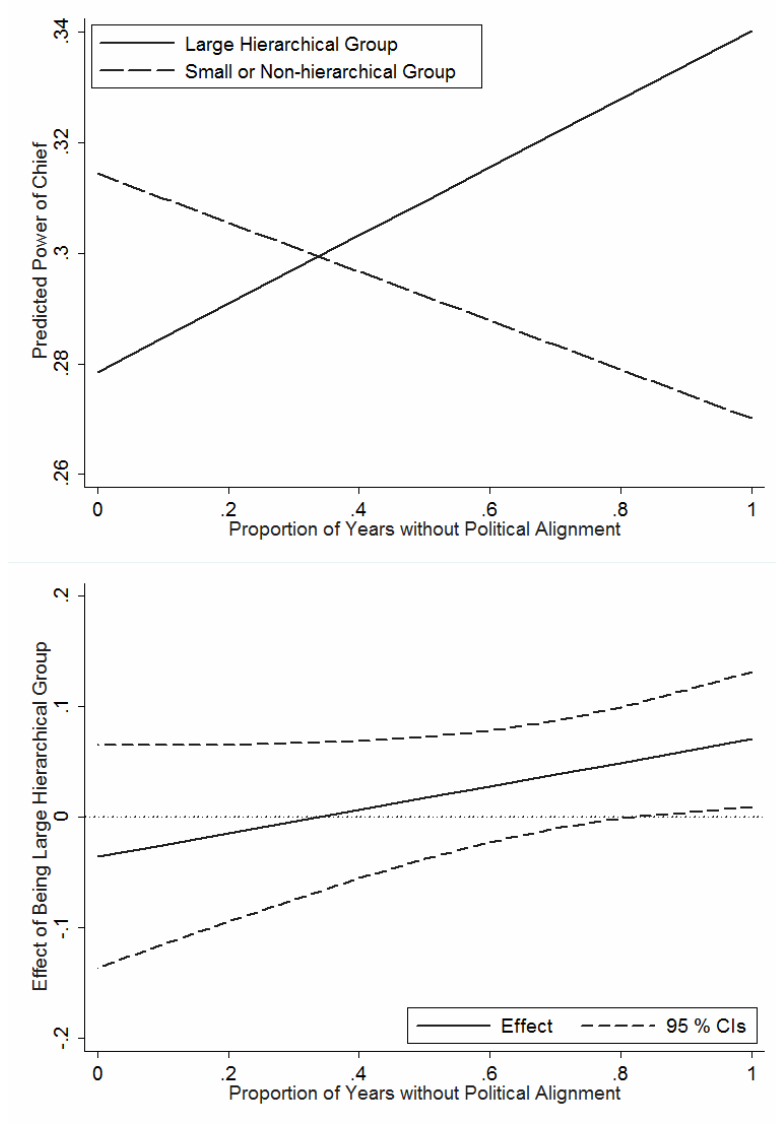
The results thus far indicate that there is something particular about being the traditional chief of a large non-politically aligned hierarchical ethnic group. This is consistent with the electoral coalition-building explanation, which argues that these are precisely the chiefs politicians should choose to empower if they want to expand their electoral coalitions. However, further analysis is required to determine that current political considerations, rather than past political strategies, are driving the relationship in model 3. In order to assess whether past political strategies could be driving the effect in model 3, model 5 in table 3 examines whether chiefs have greater power in regions with large hierarchical groups that were not politically aligned during the 1980s. There is a high degree of correlation between political alignment in the 1980s and political alignment between 1998 and 2007 ( $r=.7$ ), suggesting political power passes slowly between ethnic groups in Africa, and making it harder to disentangle the effects of the two variables. Still, as the electoral coalition-building explanation would expect, the coefficient on the historic variable is half the size of the coefficient on the current variable, and it is not statistically different from 0.

The remainder of the models in table 3 check whether the effect of being a significantly sized hierarchical group without political alignment is robust to different model specifications. The dependent variable in the models thus far has measured the perceived power of chiefs over the allocation of land. Land is a particularly valuable resource in the agrarian economies of sub-Saharan Africa, but politicians may also devolve other forms of power to chiefs in order to win their support. Model 6 examines whether traditional leaders generally have more influence over the governance of their communities in places where large hierarchical groups are not politically aligned.<sup>25</sup> This measure is constructed from question q65 of the Afrobarometer survey, which asked respondents “how much influence traditional leaders currently have in governing your local community”; the variable indicates the proportion of respondents who said that chiefs have “a great deal” of influence. The model shows a positive effect, but it is not statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level, suggesting that power over land may be particularly influenced by the need to build multi-ethnic coalitions.

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<sup>25</sup> This question was also asked in Mozambique, increasing the sample size in these models.

**Figure 3: Interaction between Size/Structure of Groups and their Political Alignment**



Model 7 shows that the results are robust to dropping the sub-national units in Tanzania from the analysis. As was noted earlier, some of the countries in the data set have many more regions than others. To the extent that the devolution of power occurs across sub-national administrative units, one could reasonably argue that countries with fewer administrative units contain fewer observations and should not have equal weight in the analysis. Still, it is concerning that trends in Tanzania - which has 11 more regions than any other country in the data set - count twice as much as trends in Burkina Faso and four times as much as trends in Nigeria in the estimation of the sub-national effects. In order to ensure that the analysis in the paper is not being driven by one country with a large number of regions, I have run the main model dropping countries one-by-one. Model 7 shows the results when Tanzania is dropped; the coefficient on Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment remains large and statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

**Table 3: Robustness Checks**

	(5) 1980s data	(6) DV=power over governance	(7) Data w/out Tanzania	(8) Controls for education	(9) Country FEs
<b>Country Predictors</b>					
British Colony	0.133* (0.080)	0.011 (0.072)	0.165** (0.070)	0.144* (0.079)	
Difficult Geography	-0.056* (0.031)	-0.043* (0.024)	-0.045* (0.028)	-0.054* (0.031)	
<b>Sub-national Predictors</b>					
Population Density	-0.059** (0.027)	-0.116*** (0.031)	-0.068** (0.029)	-0.051* (0.027)	-0.060** (0.026)
Distance from Capital (log)	0.018* (0.010)	0.013 (0.011)	0.023* (0.012)	0.010 (0.010)	0.016 (0.010)
Proportion with Secondary Education				-0.119* (0.072)	
Quality of Land	0.034*** (0.009)		0.037*** (0.009)	0.033*** (0.009)	0.034*** (0.009)
Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment in 1980s	0.032 (0.023)				
Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment		0.046 (0.032)	0.066*** (0.032)	0.057** (0.029)	0.057* (0.029)
N	178	189	152	178	178
Country	18	19	17	18	-
AIC	-151.1	-115.9	-106.7	-151.4	-233.9
Standard errors in parentheses. ***, ** & * indicate significance at the 99, 95 and 90 percent confidence levels respectively.					

Model 8 tests whether the results are robust to controlling for the proportion of the population in each region that has attended secondary school. It is plausible that educated groups are both more politically active and less likely to perceive their chiefs to be powerful, and therefore the result in model 3 could be driven by this variable. However, the coefficient on Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment remains large and statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level even after introducing this control variable. Finally, model 9 shows that the coefficient on Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment remains large and statistically significant at around the 95 percent confidence level ( $p=.054$ ) in a model with only sub-national predictors and country fixed effects; this demonstrates that assumptions about the distribution of the country-level intercepts are not driving the results in model 3.

The results in this section show a robust relationship between chiefs' perceived power over the allocation of land and the importance of regions to political leaders seeking to expand their electoral coalition. Chiefs are likely to play a larger role in the administration of land if they lead large hierarchical groups that are not ethnically aligned with the government or the major opposition party. This suggests that political leaders are not completely captive to historical decisions or geographic constraints. In fact, countries whose national-level geography is "difficult" are actually less likely to devolve power to chiefs. Low population densities and distance from the capital partly determine variation in chiefs' power, but they are not the full story. Politicians also devolve power to groups who are particularly useful political allies.

The cross-sectional analysis shows that traditional leaders are thought to be more powerful in sub-national units where politicians need their support in extending their ethnic coalitions. However, without considering temporal variation, it is not possible to demonstrate that political considerations drive politicians to devolve

power to traditional chiefs, rather than chiefs' power leading to particular political alignments.<sup>26</sup> The next section examines trends in temporal data to show that the devolution of power to traditional chiefs really is an active choice made by politicians facing electoral pressures.

### **The Timing of Changes in Chiefs' Power**

This section demonstrates that many political leaders actively choose to devolve power to traditional leaders in the face of electoral pressures. According to the electoral coalition-building theory, politicians should be particularly likely to try to expand their support base and win over chiefs when they face new electoral pressures. This section begins by comparing the timing of legislation that changed the legal power of traditional leaders over the allocation of land to the timing of political liberalizations in each country. The data demonstrate that political liberalization is close to a necessary condition for the devolution of power to traditional leaders. A closer examination of a number of the laws in the data set provides further evidence that electoral considerations are important in motivating the decision to devolve power to chiefs, and that politicians often adopt laws that devolve power specifically to traditional leaders of politically unaligned ethnic groups.

### ***Trends in Legislation***

This section draws on the data used in figure 2 to depict trends in the devolution of power to traditional leaders over time. I combine this data with information on the periods of political liberalization in each country from the polity data set; I define episodes of political liberalization as periods in which the country's polity score increased by at least three points within two years. The data set covers the period from each country's independence until 2005.<sup>27</sup> In total, there are 832 years in 19 countries in the data set, 85 of which are defined as periods of liberalization. Figure 4 plots the periods of liberalization against the timing of legislation that decreased and increased the power of chiefs over land administration in each country. The figure shows a close association between political liberalization and the devolution of power to traditional leaders. Seven of the nine cases of political devolution were during periods of liberalization, and one additional case (Zambia 1995) closely followed the introduction of multiparty elections. Periods of political liberalization are close to a necessary condition for the introduction of legislation that devolves power to chiefs. In any year outside periods of liberalization, there is close to a 0 percent chance of a devolution of power to chiefs, while in any year during periods of liberalization, there is almost a 10 percent chance of power being devolved; this difference is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level, although the small number of cases where chiefs' power is increased compels caution in extrapolating too broadly from the data. Political liberalization does not necessarily lead to the devolution of power to traditional leaders – figure 4 shows many spells of liberalization in which power was not devolved – but leaders rarely devolve power outside of periods of liberalization.

In contrast, there is no association between periods of liberalization and the introduction of legislation that decreases chiefs' power. This suggests that the correlation between increases in chiefs' power and political liberalization is not driven by the tendency of new governments to write new laws. Laws that decrease chiefs' power are as likely to be introduced in periods without political liberalization as they are during years of liberalization (2.5 percent chance in either period). The introduction of legislation increasing and decreasing the power of chiefs is also subject to clear temporal trends. As discussed earlier, governments were much more likely to introduce legislation decreasing the power of traditional chiefs prior to 1990, while the trends have since reversed.

In addition, it appears that political leaders who belong to large ethnic groups are particularly likely to introduce legislation that decreases the power of traditional leaders, which makes sense given that these politicians are less dependent on the support of groups beyond their own ethnic group. Figure 5 shows the

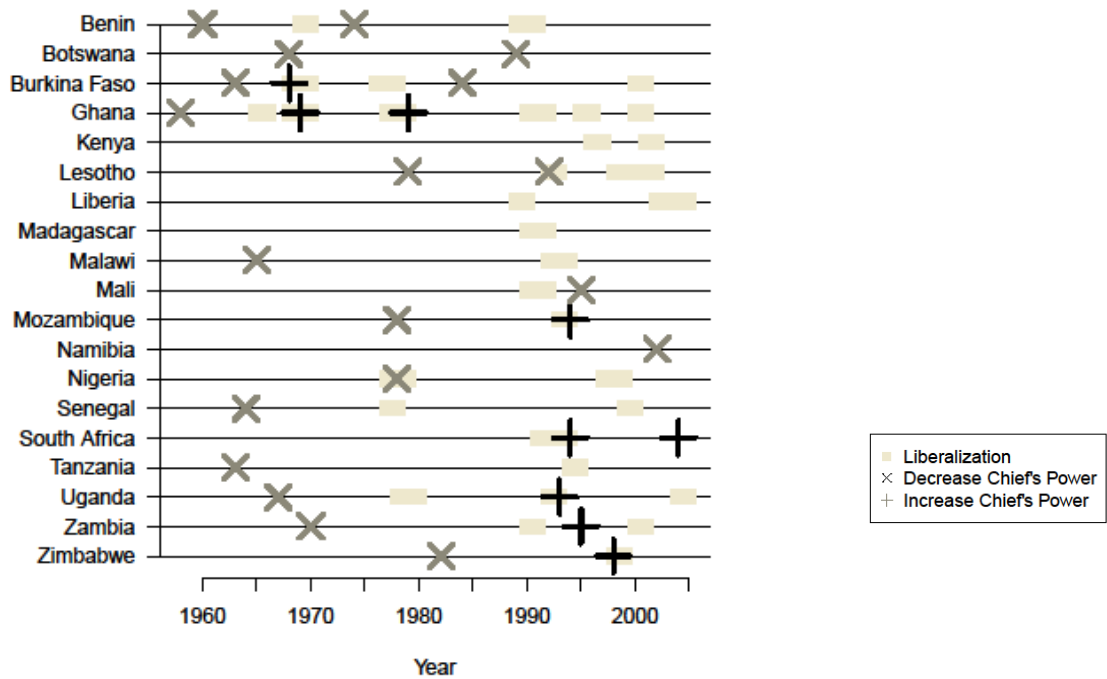
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<sup>26</sup> In particular, one could plausibly argue that hierarchically organized ethnic groups who have a large degree of autonomy over their own affairs do not become politically active because they are satisfied with the status quo.

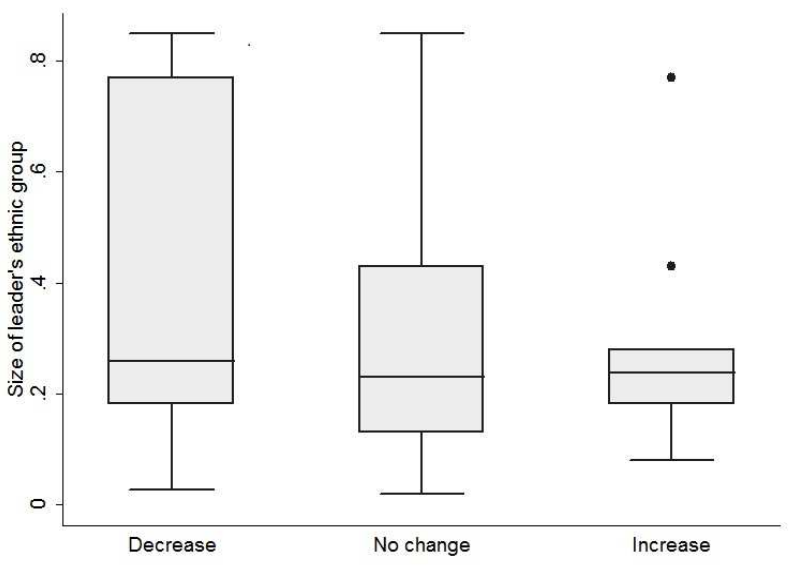
<sup>27</sup> As mentioned earlier, there are two exceptions to this rule. Liberia enters the data set in 1960, and South Africa enters the data set in 1990.

size of the ethnic group of political leaders in years when legislation was introduced decreasing the power of chiefs over land, in years when legislation was introduced increasing the power of chiefs over land, and in years when legislation was not introduced. It was created by combining the legislative data with information on the size of political leaders' ethnic groups compiled by Fearon, Kasara and Laitin (2007). Although the difference in means is not quite statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level, legislation that reduces the power of chiefs is more likely to be introduced by political leaders who belong to large ethnic groups.

**Figure 4: Liberalization and Legal Changes in Chiefs' Power**



**Figure 5: Size of Political Leaders' Ethnic Groups by Changes in Chiefs' Power**



Thus, the data on the timing of legislative changes shows that political leaders almost exclusively introduce legislation that increases chiefs' power during periods of political liberalization. Political leaders may also be more likely to institute decreases in chiefs' legal powers if they belong to larger ethnic groups. Together with the cross-sectional data, this provides strong evidence that political leaders consider the need to build electoral coalitions when deciding how much power to allow traditional leaders over the allocation of land.

### ***Examples of Legislation Increasing Power of Chiefs***

A closer examination of some of the cases in which political leaders introduced legislation that devolved power to traditional leaders demonstrates how the trends in the two data sets fit together. Facing electoral verdicts for the first time, many politicians introduced laws that devolved power specifically to powerful traditional chiefs who led ethnic groups they wanted to bring into their electoral coalitions.

In Uganda, Museveni's decision to restore the traditional kingdom of Buganda in the early 1990s was triggered by the need to broaden his base of support in the run-up to elections for a constituent assembly. Since the beginning of the guerilla war in the 1980s, Museveni's power had pivoted on his ability to bring the Baganda into his coalition. The National Resistance Army (NRA) led by Museveni had its strongest support within his own ethnic group, the Banyankole. The core supporters of the Obote government were northern ethnic groups, such as the Acholi and Lango. Many Baganda also had serious grievances against Obote, who had banished the Bugandan king in the 1960s, but they were initially suspicious of the NRA, instead supporting a Bagandan-grown guerilla group, the Uganda Freedom Movement. Museveni's military victory depended on his ability to rally the Baganda behind the NRA, which was done in part by building good relationships with the exiled Bugandan king and promising to reconsider his constitutional position (Kasfir 2005).

Upon taking office, Museveni initially took no action toward reinstating the Bugandan king. However, as Uganda moved toward elections for a constituent assembly in the early 1990s, Museveni realized he would require a broader coalition of support if he was to maintain control of the assembly. In order to make inroads into the Bagandan vote, his government announced in early 1993 that the kingdom of Buganda would be restored, along with the land and property it owned before 1967. The haste with which the coronation was arranged was viewed by many commentators as confirmation that "by and large, the restoration of the kingdom took place in exchange for the Buganda vote in the 1994 elections for the constituent assembly" (Englebert 2002, 351). Interestingly, three of the other traditional kingdoms in southern Uganda, Bunyoro, Toro and Busoga, have also subsequently been re-established; the only kingdom that had not been restored by 2010 was the Ankole kingdom, which suggests Museveni saw less political utility in restoring a traditional chief from his own ethnic group.

In Ghana, General Acheampong made a similar deal with chiefs from the country's Northern and Upper regions prior to a national referendum in the late 1970s. Under increased pressure to return the country to civilian rule, Acheampong's government proposed the introduction of a no-party Union Government subject to approval by voters in a referendum to be held on March 30, 1978. Acheampong had an even more precarious basis of support than Museveni, as his own ethnic group, the Ashanti, were among the most vocal opponents of the "unigov" proposal; the Ewe and the Ga regions of the country were also hotbeds of anti-government activities (Chazan 1982, 470). Instead, the president made a deal with a group of chiefs from northern Ghana. Unlike land in southern Ghana, which was vested in individual owners and stools after 1969, land in northern Ghana continued to be vested in the state. In late 1977, the Acheampong government agreed in principle to revert ownership of northern lands to traditional owners, hoping this promise would result in a "yes" vote from northern chiefs and their subjects (Konings 1986, 157; Pul 2003, 59). Acheampong himself was forced out of office in mid-1978, before the recommendations of the committee established to oversee the process had been enacted, but the 1979 constitution fulfilled his promise, reverting all lands in northern Ghana to their traditional owners.

Even if politicians cannot hope to win the support of an ethnic group outright, they may devolve power to chiefs in the hope of dividing the group politically. For example, in the run-up to the 1994 elections in South Africa, Mandela sought to make inroads among Zulu voters, the largest ethnic group in South Africa. Many of the senior members of the ANC, including Mandela, were Xhosa, and the leadership of the ANC was anxious to dispel criticisms of the party as a “Xhosa clique.” In order to increase his support from Zulu voters, Mandela decided to reach out to the Zulu king Goodwill Zwelithini.<sup>28</sup> As part of this strategy, Mandela lobbied the National Party government to give the king control of 28 000 square kilometers of land that had previously been administered by the KwaZulu legislature. On the eve of the 1994 elections, Mandela and the ANC convinced de Klerk to sign the Ingonyama Trust Act, which transferred control of the land to the king (Beal and Ngonyama 2009, 13). This decision was particularly striking, given the ANC’s long-stated intention to remove traditional leaders with the introduction of democracy; ideological preferences gave way to electoral imperatives within the ANC.

In Mozambique, the Frelimo government had a similar about-face in its attitude toward traditional leaders with the introduction of multiparty elections. Historically, Frelimo had extremely hostile relationships with the “régulos,” whom they had targeted for assassination during the war of independence and banned upon taking power in the late 1970s. During the civil war, Frelimo’s core support came from urban areas and Mozambique’s southern regions, while Renamo’s core support came from rural areas, particularly in north-central Mozambique. Anxious to make inroads into Renamo’s support, in the run-up to the 1994 elections, President Chissano met with groups of ex-regulos in several provinces as part of an initiative to “charm the régulos” (West and Kloeck-Jenson 1999, 262). More importantly, just weeks before the election, the government passed the Municipalities Law (1994), which stated that local governments would work with traditional authorities in a number of issue areas, including land management. This law was later revoked, but the government continued to consider ways to involve traditional leaders in the governance of rural communities.

The compromise the Frelimo government ultimately developed was Decree 15/2000, a law that called for the selection of one “community authority” in each group of rural villages, with power over land allocation, policing, taxation and other matters. The law indicated that two actors were eligible to be designated as the “community authority” - the régulo or the former local party secretary. In practice, the designated community authority tended to be the Frelimo party secretary in Frelimo strongholds and the former régulo in areas held by Renamo during the war (Kyed and Burr 2006, 852). According to the logic laid out by this article, the law was ingenious in that it allowed the government to keep power in the hands of party members in its areas of core support, while devolving power to traditional leaders in other locations.<sup>29</sup>

These cases show that electoral pressures often motivate political leaders to devolve power to traditional chiefs. In addition, they showcase how politicians often introduce artful laws that allow them to differentially empower traditional chiefs. Political leaders generally gain the most from empowering powerful chiefs of groups that are not ethnically aligned with their party or with the biggest opposition party. The support of traditional leaders is used to complement ethnic voting blocs, rather than to override them, and it provides leaders with a way of extending their political coalition beyond their co-ethnics.

## Conclusion

During the past two decades, a number of governments in sub-Saharan Africa have devolved significant power over the allocation of land to traditional leaders. This article provides an explanation for the

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<sup>28</sup> Mandela discusses both the importance of overcoming the perception of the ANC as a Xhosa-dominated organization and the need to build a good relationship with the Zulu king in his autobiography. See Mandela (1994), 294, 442-3, 576.

<sup>29</sup> However, although there is substantial evidence that the Frelimo government has avoided devolving power to co-ethnic Changana chiefs, there is little evidence that the Mozambique government has shied away from devolving power to chiefs that are co-ethnics of Renamo’s leader Dhlakama. Dhlakama is Ndau, which is the largest ethnic group in only one region of Mozambique, Manica region. Interestingly, all of the community authorities designated in 2002 in Manica region were former régulos. See Kyed (2007), 169.



apparently puzzling decision of governments to give up power over the allocation of resources to community leaders. The answer challenges the existing literature, which views the continued power of chiefs as a historical hangover rather than an active political choice. Although this perspective was largely correct until 1990, after this point, many governments have chosen to devolve power to traditional chiefs. They have introduced legislation and policies that empower powerful chiefs who are not ethnically aligned with the main political cleavages in the country in order to expand their electoral coalitions.

The focus of this article has been on explaining this apparently puzzling choice. Although legislative choices can be reversed, once power has been devolved to traditional leaders, it is costly to change administrative policies and re-concentrate power in the government. Politicians who devolve power to traditional leaders in order to win their electoral support will find it difficult to take back the power immediately after the election. As a result, politicians only make this decision when their political careers are on the line.

How effective is this strategy in mobilizing votes? There are thorny methodological challenges to providing a decisive answer to this question, and this is left for future research. Because the decision to devolve power to traditional leaders is a strategic decision made by leaders concerned that they will not otherwise win the election, it is difficult to identify the effects of these institutional choices on electoral outcomes. In addition, the short-term and long-term effects of the decision to devolve power to traditional chiefs may differ. In the immediate aftermath of their empowerment, chiefs are likely to use their position to the government's advantage, but in the long-run, there is nothing to prevent them from aligning themselves with opposition parties.

This article focuses on a particularly puzzling example of politicians ceding power. In the cases analyzed in this article, governments give up control over land, an extremely valuable resource in sub-Saharan Africa, to traditional leaders, who are community leaders who are particularly challenging to control, given that they fall outside of the state's formal administrative hierarchy and are not explicitly incorporated into party organizations. However, the theory put forward may also help to explain decisions to cede control of other types of resources to community leaders elsewhere in the world. In general, politicians whose group of core supporters do not constitute a majority use redistributive promises to mobilize additional support. But Dixit and Londregan's model of redistributive politics predicts that these tactics may not be effective in winning "swing" voters in instances where the government and political parties have weak institutional capacity (Dixit and Londregan 1996). In these contexts, politicians need to find other ways to extend their coalitions.

A possible solution is to devolve power over the allocation of resources to intermediaries - such as local-level politicians, party officials and customary leaders - who are better embedded in local communities and can therefore better translate resources into electoral support. In this way, the decision of African political leaders to empower traditional leaders may be similar to the decision of the governing party in India to decentralize power to local governments in areas where they have weak party institutions, and the decision of politicians in Russia to put privatized state assets in the hands of potential vote brokers.<sup>30</sup> Although on first glance, these decisions to cede power appear puzzling, they may actually be savvy political decisions by politicians who desperately need to expand their electoral coalitions. In contexts where politicians face losing elections, ceding a piece of their power is a small price to pay to stay in office.

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<sup>30</sup> On the electoral incentives for decentralization in India, see Bohlken (2010). On the privatization of resources in Russia, see Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007), 65.

## Appendix

This appendix describes the construction and sources of each variable in the cross-sectional analysis. The unit of analysis in the data set is generally the first administrative level below the country level. These subnational units were chosen mainly because they are the smallest unit at which the Afrobarometer surveys were designed to be representative. Many of the sub-national variables were constructed in ArcGIS using regional boundary maps that identified the location of each of the regions in the Afrobarometer data. Wherever possible, I used boundary maps available from Map Library (<http://www.maplibrary.org/>), but at times I needed to adjust these boundary maps in order to reflect the regional units included in the Afrobarometer survey. These shape files are available on-line.

### Country-level Variables

*British Colony*: This is a dichotomous measure coded based on Englebert's measure of colonial identity. See Englebert 2000b.

*Difficult Geography*: This variable combines two component variables. The first variable is the log of the area of the country in square kilometers. The second variable measures the country's compactness using a measure proposed by Schwartzberg. This measures compactness as the ratio of the country's perimeter to the length of the perimeter of a circle of equal area. Specifically, this measure is calculated as  $p/(2\sqrt{Ap})$  where  $p$  is a country's perimeter and  $A$  is a country's area. The area and perimeter measures were calculated in ArcGIS. Then both of these component variables were standardized and summed together to construct the variable Difficult Geography.

### Sub-national Variables

*Chief's Power over Land*: This measure was constructed from q58f of the Afrobarometer Survey (Round 4). This question asked respondents, "Who do you think actually has primary responsibility for managing each of the following tasks. Is it the central government, the local government, traditional leaders, or members of your community? Allocating land." Respondents were divided into two categories - those that said that traditional leaders were primarily responsible and those who said the central or local government was primarily responsible. (In Nigeria, respondents could also answer "state government", which was included with the latter category.) Only 7 percent of respondents answered "members of the community" and these observations were dropped. The Afrobarometer data was weighted to ensure representativeness and then aggregated at the sub-national level so that the final measure equals the number of respondents who said traditional leaders have primary responsibility for allocating land over the number of respondents who said traditional leaders or the central government or the local government (or the state government in Nigeria) have primary responsibility for allocating land.

*Chief's Power in Community*: This measure was constructed from q65 of the Afrobarometer, which asked respondents "How much influence do traditional leaders currently have in governing your local community? None. A small amount. Some. A great deal." The variable indicates the proportion of respondents in each sub-national unit who responded "a great deal."

*Population Density*: This measure equals the average population density (in persons per kilometer squared) in the sub-national unit in 1990, as measured by the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN).

*Distance from Capital (log)*: This measure is equal to the logged distance of the centroid of the region from the country's capital (in kilometers).

*Quality of Land*: This measure is based on a metric created by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and IIASA which rates the suitability of land for agriculture on a scale of 1 to 8 (plate 46 of the Agro-Ecological Zone CD-Rom). The measure indicates the average quality of the land on this 8-point scale in each sub-national unit.

*Proportion of Years without Political Alignment*: This variable indicates the proportion of years between 1998 and 2007 in which neither the president/prime minister nor the leader of the major opposition party were from the largest ethnic group in the sub-national unit. The largest ethnic group in the sub-national unit was identified by tabulating q79 of the Afrobarometer by sub-national unit. Question q79 asked respondents "What is your tribe? You know, your ethnic or cultural group?" The number of years in the previous decade

in which the president/prime minister or the leader of the major opposition party was from that ethnic group was coded by determining the ethnicity of the president/prime minister and the leader of the biggest opposition party. The biggest opposition party in a particular year is coded as the party of the opposition candidate that won the second most votes in the previous presidential election (or parliamentary election, in the case of parliamentary systems). This was determined using the African Election Database (<http://africanelections.tripod.com/>). In cases where no opposition candidate won more than 15 percent of the vote (in the first round), there is not considered to be a major opposition party in the country. The ethnicity of the president/prime minister and the leader of the biggest opposition party was coded from a variety of sources indicated in an on-line appendix available at:

[http://plaza.ufl.edu/kabaldwin/Materials\\_explaining\\_coding\\_of\\_co-ethnicity\\_and\\_social\\_hierarchy.zip](http://plaza.ufl.edu/kabaldwin/Materials_explaining_coding_of_co-ethnicity_and_social_hierarchy.zip).

*Hierarchical Group*: This is a binary variable indicating whether or not the largest ethnic group in the sub-national unit traditionally had paramount chiefs. Wherever possible, this is coded based on the “jurisdictional hierarchy” score reported in Murdock’s Ethnographic Atlas. All ethnic groups that scored 1.5 or higher on jurisdictional hierarchy are coded as hierarchical. Where an ethnic group in the Afrobarometer data is composed of more than one group from the Murdock data, the measure reflects the average degree of hierarchy among the sub-groups. A complete list of the data sources used to code this variable is included in an on-line appendix available at: [http://plaza.ufl.edu/kabaldwin/Materials\\_explaining\\_coding\\_of\\_co-ethnicity\\_and\\_social\\_hierarchy.zip](http://plaza.ufl.edu/kabaldwin/Materials_explaining_coding_of_co-ethnicity_and_social_hierarchy.zip).

*5 % Group*: This is a binary variable indicating whether or not the largest ethnic group in the sub-national unit is an ethnic group that makes up 5 percent or more of the country’s total population. The size of the groups was determined by tabulating q79 in the weighted Afrobarometer data at the national level.

*Low Commercial Value or Social Hierarchy (Boone)*: This is a binary variable equal to one if the land in the sub-national unit is lower than average quality (lower than 4.6 out of 8) or if the largest group in the sub-national unit is hierarchical (as coded in Hierarchical Group).

*Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment*: This variable is equal to Proportion of Years without Political Alignment \* Hierarchical Group \* 5 % Group.

*Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment (1980s)*: This variable is equivalent to the variable Large Hierarchy without Political Alignment except that it considers the proportion of years the group was without political alignment between 1980 and 1989. The sources used to code the ethnicity of the president/prime minister and the leader of the biggest opposition group are listed in an on-line appendix available at:

[http://plaza.ufl.edu/kabaldwin/Materials\\_explaining\\_coding\\_of\\_co-ethnicity\\_and\\_social\\_hierarchy.zip](http://plaza.ufl.edu/kabaldwin/Materials_explaining_coding_of_co-ethnicity_and_social_hierarchy.zip).

*Proportion with Secondary Education*: This measure was constructed from q89 of the Afrobarometer, which asked respondents “What is the highest level of education you have completed? No formal schooling. Informal schooling only. Some primary schooling. Primary schooling completed. Some secondary schooling. Secondary schooling completed. Post-secondary qualifications. Some university. University completed. Post-graduate.” The variable indicates the proportion of respondents in each sub-national unit who stated they had received at least some secondary education.

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