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**A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE: RETROSPECTIVE
VOTING IN AFRICA**

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ABSTRACT

The literature on African voting motivations has largely emphasized factors such as ethnic similarity, patron-client loyalty and urban dwellers' affinity for change. Retrospective voting is either overlooked or understood as a response to purely economic conditions. I argue that retrospective voting—operationalized in a broad, social and economic sense—is a powerful explanation for recurring incumbent support in light of macroeconomic booms occurring throughout the region since the mid-1990s. Drawing on Afrobarometer survey data, a logistic regression model explores the voting motivations of more than 22,000 respondents from thirteen Sub-Saharan African countries. The results show statistically and substantively significant evidence that African voters are retrospective: as perceptions of the government's general performance or handling of particular social and economic issues improves, so does the likelihood of incumbent support, and vice versa. The findings produce three key takeaways. First, micro-level voting behavior is linked to macro-level economic performance. Second, performance assessments are as much social as they are economic. Third, high incumbent reelection rates suggest a more optimistic forecast of African leadership and accountability.

INTRODUCTION

Where democracy goes, the retrospective voting literature follows. A tradition penned in the West fifty years ago (Key 1964; Fiorina 1981; Kramer 1971) has now spread to Latin America (Remmer 1991; Benton 2005; Stokes 2011; Levitsky and Roberts 2011), Asia (Meyer and Malcolm 1991; Besley and Burgess 2002) and the Middle East (Fidrmuc 2000; Hamaza 2006). Curiously, this literature has mostly ignored African democracies. A quarter-century after the Third Wave of democratizations in the region, few Africanists have tested (Posner and Simon 2002; Young 2009), let alone assumed, the paradigmatic concept that voters retrospectively reward good performance and "throw the rascals out" (Staffan and Morrison 2008, 96). Studies tend to fixate on ethnic coalition-building (Lindberg and Morrison 2008; Posner and Simon 2002), vote-buying (Weghorst and Lindblom 2013; Cheeseman 2010; Marcus and Ratsimbaharison 2005) and urban-rural political differences (Resnick 2012). Meanwhile, these democracies have witnessed a concurrence of macroeconomic booms and high incumbent reelection rates. Rather than writing them off as mere coincidence, these trends arguably indicate that voters are retrospective, offering positive reinforcement for good presidential behavior.

While African countries suffer from a myriad of ailments, they also inhabit an "emerging" region demonstrating strong macroeconomic growth accompanied by social improvements (Radelet 2011, 28). According to Radelet, at least seventeen Sub-Saharan African nations have achieved at least 2% growth per annum since the mid-1990s. Perhaps not coincidentally, African presidential reelection rates double the global average (Arriola 2012, 7). Since democratization swept the region in the early 1990s, only sixteen out of more than two hundred elections have resulted in presidential turnover (Bleck and van de Walle 2013b, 2).[1] Among the forty African countries that have held multiparty elections at some point, only thirteen have experienced incumbent losses (Bleck and van de Walle 2013b). Even within this select subgroup, executive turnover is exceptional, occurring only once or twice in a two-decade span of democratic governance.[2] I argue that these electoral fortunes denote a vote of confidence, and test that contention by regressing vote intention against performance evaluations.

An anticipated criticism of this study is that vote choice is an irrelevant lens of analysis because authoritarian leaders of fledgling African democracies fix election outcomes. However, incumbents clutch power in free and restricted African democracies alike. Democracy is "free" in Botswana and only "partly free" in Uganda (Freedom House 2014), yet neither has experienced incumbent turnover. Figure 1 illustrates that incumbents are re-elected only slightly more often in less democratic nations.

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[1] This statistic represents elections in which the sitting president himself competes and loses. It does not include elections in which the president does not or cannot run again, but when his party successor loses.

[2] Madagascar is the exception, with three cases of incumbent turnover since its first democratic election was held in 1993. These occurred in 1992, 1996, and 2002.

Figure 1. Election Outcomes in SSA by Quality of Democracy, 1990-2013
(n = 177)
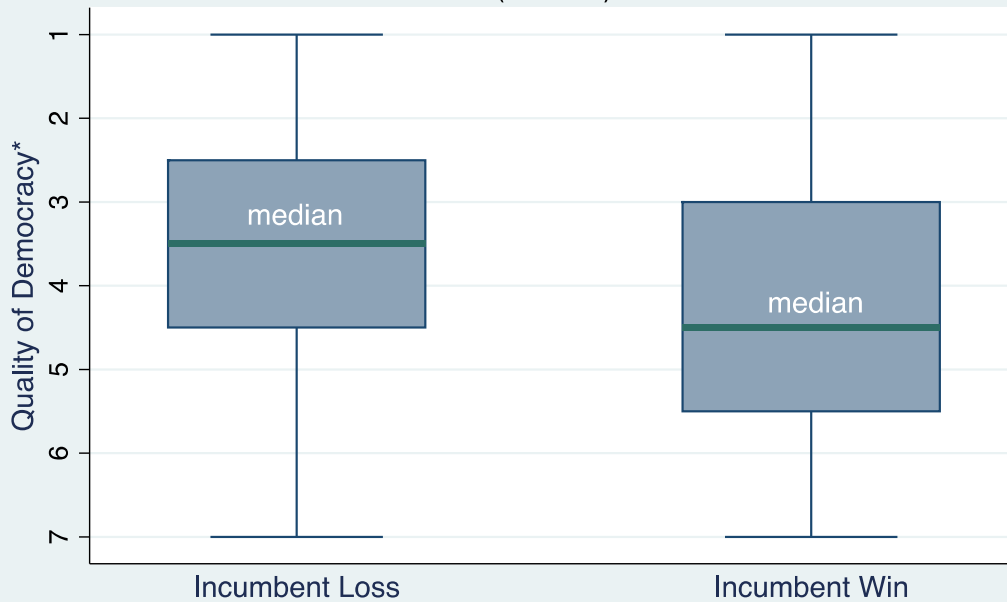
* Poles reversed. FH scores closer to 1 indicate freer democracies
Sources: Data from Freedom House 1990-2013; Bleck and van de Walle 2013c

LITERATURE REVIEW

Operationalized in the late 1970s (Kramer 1971; Fiorina 1981), the carrot-and-stick retrospective voting theory conceives that voters reward or punish leaders based on how well they perceivably handled "events, outcomes, and policy actions" (Healy and Malhotra 2013, 289). In so doing, voters minimize risk at the ballot box and instill democratic accountability (Duch and Stevenson 2008, 10).

Empirical studies conducted in the U.S. (Fiorina 1981, 38) and Western Europe (Kousser 2004, 18) demonstrate strong relationships between voters' evaluations of the incumbent's performance in office and his or her performance on election day.

The meaning of "performance" is often debated. Are voters motivated by perceptions of sociotropic or egotropic delivery? Are judgments weighted toward economic performance? By and large, the empirical evidence maintains that in the U.S., performance judgments are evaluations of sociotropic economic factors (Hibbs et al. 1982; Lewis-Beck 1982; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; Duch and Stevenson 2008, 20). Still, non-economic factors are relevant: Fiorina finds an "extremely strong" relationship between summary evaluations of presidential performance and vote choice (Fiorina 1981, 34).

Rather than emphasizing performance, studies of African voting behavior focus on ethnic biases (Lindberg and Morrison 2008; Posner and Simon 2002), patron-client loyalties (Weghorst and Lindblom 2013; Cheeseman 2010; Marcus and Ratsimbaharison 2005) and urban populism (Resnick 2012). Far from implying a mere "primordial shortcut," Africanists see ethnic voting as a socially constructed phenomenon: candidates running in ethnically fractionalized electorates build and rely on coalitions that cut across ethnic lines (Posner and Simon 2002). Ethnic voting also implies instrumental benefits: by voting in ethnic blocs, constituents "gain collective representation" (Bratton et al. 2012, 29). Ethnic voting theories are empirically founded in certain contexts—Daniel Posner and D.J. Simon find a

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significant correlation between co-ethnicity and vote choice in Zambia (2002, 319)—but has yet to be substantiated in cross-national studies (Young 2009).

The dominance of ethnic voting theory in the African elections literature is rivaled by a theory of clientelist voting. In this scenario, party systems are less a means of democratic discourse and more a "tool to build loyalties, extract rents, and proffer title, power and gifts in the name of ensuring [longevity in office]" (Marcus and Ratsimbaharison 2005, 509). Given that patron-client networks are often a "pragmatic means to find solutions to everyday concerns [when voters have] limited access to formal sources of assistance" (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002, 2), they are assumed to flourish in Africa's developing democracies. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that some African election outcomes are anchored in clientelism (Cheeseman 2010, 145); in many cases, however, patrimony is not the primary driver of vote choice (Weghorst and Lindberg 2013, 2).

Concomitant with pronounced urban-rural migration and urbanization throughout the region, studies of African democratic elections are increasingly focusing on urban citizens. Facing high prices and living in underserviced slums, urbanites are arguably acquiescent to political turnover (Resnick 2012, 1359). Moreover, due to greater media access, urban Africans consume foreign media portrayals of "political alternatives" (Resnick 2012, 12). Media, coupled with physical proximity to voters, also enables opposition parties to mobilize the urban masses in support of issue-based campaigns touting a message of change (Bleck and van de Walle 2013b, 7). By and large, urban voting arguments are not incompatible with a retrospective voting framework, but they have so far been grounded in qualitative case studies rather than empirical analyses of actual voters' motivations (Resnick 2012; Larmer and Fraser 2007, 612-627). To sum up, the Africanist theories of voting catalogued above are simultaneously supported by putative evidence and weakened by evidentiary gaps; the latter are understandable given the recent rise of African democracies and data deficiencies.

Do African voters reward incumbent presidents for good performance? If so, are their choices primarily dictated by judgments of economic performance, or are Africans, in line with Fiorina's conception of retrospective voting (Fiorina 1981), reactive to a broad spectrum of considerations? To date, the scant studies on retrospective voting in Africa emphasize economic—particularly sociotropic—performance assessments. Posner and Simon demonstrate that Zambians who are satisfied with the economy are ten to fifteen percentage points more likely to vote for the incumbent president than economically distressed voters "regardless of background" (Posner and Simon 2002, 319). Aggregating survey data across sixteen African countries, Michael Bratton, Ravi Bhavnani and Tse-Hsin Chen demonstrate that "rational assessment of actual government performance at macroeconomic policy management is the principal economic influence on intended vote choice (2012, 47). Voters react positively to incumbents who handle inflation, unemployment and income inequality well, but are less likely to rescind support when the economy is mismanaged. Despite the enduring emphasis on material retrospective voting, the evidence is mixed: in his cross-national analysis, Daniel Young finds that perceptions of "how the economy has changed" are tangential to incumbent support (2009, 10). These inconsistencies call for a reimagining of performance criteria in the African retrospective voting literature. The present study the operationalization of "performance" criteria to include perceptions of social policy performance aligning with voters' self-professed issue priorities.

EMPIRICAL DESIGN
Survey Data
Retrospective voting is explored using survey data from the Afrobarometer project, a biannual cross-national survey now conducted in thirty-five African democracies. The surveys produce "representative cross-sections of all citizens of voting age" through geographic stratification, multi-stage procedures, random selection, probability proportional to population size (PPPS) methodology and clustering (Afrobarometer). With a vast database and standardized survey questionnaires—including on vote

intention, ethnicity, urban-versus-rural habitation, and presidential performance—the Afrobarometer is a reliable tool for this study.

Unless otherwise noted, data are drawn from Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 2005-6 and 2008-9— Rounds Three and Four, respectively—as prior surveys did not query vote intention. The final model covers data from 22,127 citizens of thirteen countries: Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, all of which are designated as "free" or "partly free" democracies in Freedom House's *Freedom in the World Report* (2014). Each country is analyzed twice, in 2005-2006 and 2008-2009.

Six countries that meet Freedom House's "partly free" threshold are nonetheless excluded from this analysis. Cases from Botswana, Lesotho and South Africa—parliamentary democracies—are dropped.[3] Despite its average "partly free" rating, Burkina Faso is omitted for having *de facto* restrictive political freedoms (Freedom House 2014). Surveys in Cape Verde and Liberia produce too few observations from which to draw precise estimates.

The Dependent Variable
Vote intention is logistically regressed against three performance variables, controlling for the dominant Africanist vote choice determinants enumerated above, among others. The dependent variable is derived from an Afrobarometer question that reads: "If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?" Responses are dichotomous, where 1 indicates an intended vote for the incumbent's party and 0 indicates an intended vote for an opposition party.[4]

Ideally, this research would correlate individuals' presidential performance evaluations with actual vote choice. The Afrobarometer asks respondents which party they would hypothetically vote for, but does not follow-up with them after an election to corroborate that intention. Although vote intention itself is not a direct measure of incumbent support, it is a moderately good approximation of incumbent support both within and across elections. On average, six percentage-points differentiate intended and actual support for incumbents across all twenty-six of the election periods studied (Table 1). To be sure, that six-point difference masks major gaps between intended and actual support in particular country cases, thus calling into question whether voting intention data offers a viable proxy for vote choice.

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[3] As voters in parliamentary systems cast ballots for MPs, vote intention for the national executive is indirect.
[4] Unless otherwise noted, all responses recorded as "refused to answer," "would not vote," "don't know," and missing responses are all deleted. These answers imply the voter is either ambivalent toward, or dislikes, both the incumbent and opposition party.

	AB survey year	% Support for incumbent, **intended**[5]	Election year[6]	% Support for incumbent, **actual**[7]
Table 1. Intended vs. Actual Support for Incumbents				
Benin	2006	33%	2006	<1%
	2008	66%	2011	53%
Ghana	2005	66%	2008	50%[8]
	2008	59%	2012	51%
Kenya	2005	52%	2007	46%[9]
	2008	16%	2013	51%[10]
Madagascar	2005	71%	2006	55%
	2008	74%	2013	47%[11]
Malawi	2005	44%	2009	66%
	2008	74%	2009	66%
Mali	2005	34%	2007	71%
	2008	34%	2013	10%
Mozambique	2005	90%	2009	75%
	2008	90%	2009	75%
Namibia	2006	80%	2009	76%
	2008	61%	2009	76%
Nigeria	2005	56%	2007	70%
	2008	36%	2011	59%
Senegal	2005	73%	2007	56%
	2008	47%	2012	34%
Tanzania	2005	93%	2005	80%
	2008	88%	2010	63%
Uganda	2005	77%	2006	59%
	2008	49%	2011	81%
Zambia	2005	39%	2006	43%[13]
	2009	31%	2011	36%
Avg. Incumbent Vote Share within an Election (%)		**59%**		**53%**
Incumbent Re-election Rate Across Elections[12]		**62%**		**81%**

Note: **red= incumbent wins**; **green = incumbent losses**.
Source: adapted from Afrobarometer (2005-6; 2008-9); African Elections Database.

[5] Incumbent refers to the president or party in office during the Afrobarometer survey (Afrobarometer 2005-6; 2008-9).

[6] Refers to the presidential election held subsequent to the Afrobarometer survey on citizens' vote intention.

[7] Corresponds to election year. Data comes from the African Elections Database.

[8] Ghana has a two-round majority electoral system. Despite earning 49.7% of the vote, the ruling New Patriotic Party lost to John Atta Mills of the National Democratic Congress (50.2%).

[9] In 2007, Mwai Kibaki, representing the Party for African Unity (PNU), was reelected with a *plurality* of 46%.

[10] PNU did not field its own candidate in 2013 but formally supported the National Alliance party, or TNA (Mosoku 2012). This pact was announced in October 2012—long enough before the election held in March 2013 to assume that voters associated TNA with the incumbent party. Moreover, TNA was originally founded as the National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK) in 2000, which merged with President Kibaki's PNU party in the 2007 election. The result is therefore coded as an incumbent win.

[11] The former president, Marc Ravalomanana, was removed by a coup in 2009 and banned from running in the 2013 election. He publicly proclaimed that Richard Jean-Louis Robinson—who lost by a slim margin—stood as his successor (BBC 2013). Robinson's loss is therefore considered an incumbent turnover.

[12] Total number of wins (indicated by green text) / Total number of election cases.

[13] Incumbent President Rupiah Banda was reelected in a first-past-the-post election with a 43% plurality win.

The Independent Variable: Measuring Performance Evaluations
Evaluations of government performance are operationalized as three separate independent variables: general, corruption and issue performance. To date, the few cross-national studies of retrospective voting in Africa either measure perceptions of general (Young 2009) or economic (Bratton et al. 2012) performance. Yet the only hard piece of data suggesting that Africans and Americans evaluate performance differently points to disparities in issue priorities. Whereas Americans prioritize economic issues, African voters reportedly emphasize a multitude of issues. According to Afrobarometer survey data, unemployment is the most important problem that governments should address. However, responses for second priorities are nearly equally dispersed along a range of issues, including poverty, food security, agriculture policy, infrastructure, water supply, electricity, education and health (Afrobarometer 2005-6). Compared to these items, "management of the economy" and "wages, incomes and salaries" are less of a concern. I therefore hypothesize that retrospective voting is a mechanism in which Africans *subjectively* evaluate *a range* of *sociotropic* considerations, attribute those evaluations to incumbent officials and vote accordingly. The issue performance and corruption performance variables are more precise proxies for retrospective voting; however, general performance measures may capture voting considerations—personality traits of a candidate, for instance—that issue performance does not.

General Performance
The *General Performance* variable represents the degree to which a respondent "approve[s] or disapprove[s] of the way the [president] ha[s] performed [his] job over the past twelve months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?" Possible responses to this broad proxy of performance include "strongly disapprove", "disapprove", "approve" and "strongly approve."[14] The question specifically asks voters to reflect on the past year and primes them to attribute sociotropic factors to the president, thus tapping into retrospective evaluations. Cross-tabulation of intended incumbent support and general performance evaluations indicate a positive association, as expected (Table 2). The proportion of Africans who express support for their sitting president is highest among those who "strongly approve" of his performance, and lowest among those who "strongly disapprove," indicating that performance evaluations shape incumbency advantage.

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[14] The data is coded so that higher numbers on the 4-point scale represent more positive responses: "strongly disapprove" =4, "disapprove" =3, "approve" =2, and "strongly approve" =1.

Table 2. **Rate of Incumbent Support by General Performance Evaluation**					
	Strongly Disapprove	**Disapprove**	**Approve**	**Strongly Approve**	Proportion of Sample Supporting vs. Opposing
Intended Support for Incumbent (%)	24.2%	29.7%	61.4%	83.7%	59.7% (N=15,468)
Intended Support for Opposition (%)	75.7%	70.3%	38.6%	16.3%	40.3% (N= 10,456)
Proportion of Sample with Given Evaluation	11% (N=2,837)	15% (N=3,992)	41%% (N=10,751)	32% (N=8,344)	**100% (N=25,924)**

Source: Data adapted from Afrobarometer (2005-6; 2008-9).
Note: Includes only the thirteen countries included in the dataset.

To be sure, *General Performance* is an imperfect proxy for retrospective voting. While its generality enables it to summarize any number of factors that influence African voters' evaluations of incumbent performance its vagueness begs the question: what does "general performance" capture?

Issue Performance
This study breaks new ground in the African voting literature by addressing the basis for performance evaluations, which is relevant given that the average African cares about a battery of issues: crime, unemployment, health, education, famine, water supply, corruption and infrastructure (Afrobarometer).

Opinions of how the government has addressed "reducing crime," "improving basic health services", "creating jobs", "addressing educational needs", "ensuring everyone has enough food to eat" and "providing water and sanitation services" are coded along on a 4-point scale on which higher scores indicate more positive evaluations.[15] For each individual, these data are averaged into a single *Issue Performance* index score. Factor analysis finds that the index explains 52% of variance and yields and a Cronbach's alpha value of .81, confirming the validity and reliability of the index.

Curruption Performance
Recalling that corruption is among the most widely reported "problems" that governments should address, evaluations of corruption handling are relevant to retrospective voting theory. Corruption handling seems to tap a concept of incumbent performance that *Issue Performance* does not, evidenced by its high uniqueness (.76) tabulated through factor analysis. However, both arguably relate to performance and thus warrant inclusion as proxies for retrospective voting variables. *General Performance, Issue Performance* and *Corruption Performance* are not highly correlated, as all three yield small VIFs.

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[15] While infrastructure is cited as an important problem facing respondents' countries (Figure 5), the 2005-6 survey did not ask respondents to gauge the executive's performance on infrastructural issues. Infrastructure handling is thus not a component of the *Issue Performance* index.

The Control Variables
The model of vote intention also controls for a number of other variables that could shape vote choice: urban residence, co-ethnicity and level of education. As individuals' choices are also affected by country-level factors in a given year, the model controls for democratic freedoms, the number of candidates running in the corresponding election and GDP growth.

Basic Necessities (BNI)
Objective measures of wellbeing could reinforce incumbency advantage. Rich and poor American voters, for instance, hold distinct policy preferences and cultural priorities (Niemi et al. 2011, 174).[16] To entertain that possibility, the model includes a proxy for Africans' objective wellbeing. The "basic necessities index" (BNI), drawn from a series of Afrobarometer questions, measures each respondent's reported access to food, clean water, cooking fuel and cash income.[17] Higher BNI scores indicate greater access to basic necessities.[18]

Ethnicity
Ethnicity is coded as a binary variable: respondents sharing the incumbent's ethnicity (co-ethnics) are coded as 1, and non-co-ethnics are 0.[19]

The ethnic voting literature suggests that ethnicity often impacts vote choice directly. Could ethnicity also condition performance evaluations? Both Fiorina (1981) and Larry Bartels (2002, 137) find that voters are only partially rational because they "inject biases, loyalties, and other predispositions into evaluations" of the incumbent's performance (Fiorina 1981, 106). Accordingly, this model of retrospective voting acknowledges the possibility of biased performance evaluations. Partisan biases identified in American elections are theoretically absent in Africa, where parties are either new or in flux; however, ethnic biases could condition Africans' performance evaluations.[20] Specifically, co-ethnics are theoretically more likely than non co-ethnics to exaggerate good performance and diminish poor performance.

Urban (versus rural) Residence
Recalling that intellectuals have historically been "at the center of opposition politics" (Puryear 1994, *x*), a voter's highest level of education may influence his or her attitude toward the incumbent. The African vote choice literature has not emphasized an inverse relationship between education levels and support for incumbents, yet it is implied from Devra Moehler and Naunihal Singh's 2011 study, which finds that African citizens who are more trusting of public than private media tend to be less educated and deferent to authority (Moehler and Singh 2011, 285). The ten-point education variable captures the voter's "highest level of education [...] completed," ranging from "no formal schooling" to "post-graduate."

Quality of Democracy
Variations in democratic freedoms—the default explanation for African presidential durability—are controlled for. The democracy variable reflects a country's political rights score, per the *Freedom in the World* database (2014), which evaluates the "electoral process", "political pluralism and participation"

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[16] Value differences are also theoretically consistent Ronald Inglehart's "post-materialism theory" (Inglehart 1981, 884). Voters with more resources are expected to value political competition and turnover.

[17] BNI is distinct from Robert Mattes' Lived Poverty Index (LPI) in that is the former measures wellbeing, not poverty (Mattes 2008, 7).

[18] When responded are asked how often, in the past year, a voter has gone without these necessities, responses range from: Always (= 0) ; Many times (=1); Several times (=2); Just once or twice (=3); and Never (= 4).

[19] Afrobarometer respondents are asked: "What is your tribe? You know, your ethnic or cultural group?"

[20] Clientelist loyalties could also condition performance evaluations. In theory (Lindberg and Morrison 2008), voters who receive favors from politicians should be inclined to judge them more positively.

and the "functioning of government" (Freedom House 2013a). The score ranges from 1 to 7, where countries earning scores of 1 to 2.5 are "free;" those earning scores from 3 to 5 are "partly free;" and those with scores of 5.5 to 7 are "not free" (ibid). For ease of interpretation, the scale is inverted such that higher scores indicate freer systems.

Number of Candidates
The number of presidential candidates likely affects incumbent support. With more choices, the likelihood of backing the incumbent is expected to decline. To address the uncertainty of candidate choice—Afrobarometer surveys are sometimes conducted several years before the next presidential election—the *Candidates* variable averages of the number of presidential contenders in the election before and after the corresponding survey. All data pertaining to election timing and candidates are derived from the African Elections Database, a comprehensive archive of information pertaining to all Sub-Saharan African elections.

GDP Growth
To test the extent to which objective macroeconomic performance impacts presidential election outcomes, the model—consistent with most retrospective voting analyses—controls for the GDP growth rate a respondent's country achieved during the year he or she was surveyed, as reported by the World Bank. *GDP Growth* is distinct from *BNI* in that the latter captures both the social and economic wellbeing of individuals.

The Interaction Variables
Interaction variables are included to test for "motivated reasoning," (Bartels 2002, 120) or whether voters exaggerate achievements and overlook shortcomings of co-ethnic incumbents. The purpose of this test is to develop an appreciation for retrospective voting and its limitations.

The interaction variables and their main effects are centered, thus enabling interpretation of the coefficients and odds ratios of interactive and main effects, and reducing collinearity. The interaction terms are added to the logistic regression, facilitating estimation of both the interactive and the main effects of *General Performance*, *Issue Performance* and *Ethnicity* on incumbent support.

MODELING RETROSPECTIVE VOTING
A logistic regression model is used to estimate the effects of the three streams of retrospective voting—general, issue and corruption—on incumbent support, as well as how those effects are moderated by ethnicity. To recap, *General Performance, Issue Performance, Corruption Performance, Ethnicity, GDP Growth* and the interaction terms are expected to yield positive effects on incumbent support. *BNI, Urban, Education, Democracy,* and *Candidates* are expected to be inversely associated with incumbent support.

The logistic regression is calculated as follows:

Incumbent support (vote intention = 1):

$L = ln$(odds of *Incumbent Support*) $= \beta_0 + \beta_1 GeneralPerformance + \beta_2 IssuePerformance + \beta_3 CorruptionPerformance + \beta_4 BNI + \beta_5 Ethnicity + \beta_6 Urban + \beta_7 Education + \beta_8 Democracy + \beta_9 Candidates + \beta_{10} GDPgrowth\ \beta_{1x5}(GeneralPerformance$ x $Ethnicity) + \beta_{2x5}(IssuePerformance$ x $Ethnicity) + \epsilon$,

Where

GeneralPerformance is an interval variable ranging from 1 to 4;
IssuePerformance is an index ranging from 1 to 4;
CorruptionPerformance is an interval variable ranging from 1 to 4;
BNI is an index ranging from 0 and 4;
Ethnicity is a binary variable where 1 = co-ethnicity;
Urban is a binary variable where 1 = urban residency;
Education is a 10-level ordinal variable (0 = no formal schooling, 9 = graduate school completed);
Democracy is an interval ranging from 1 to 7 (1 = fewer political rights, 7 = more political rights);[21]
Candidates is a continuous variable;
GDP Growth is a continuous variable;
GeneralPerformance X Ethnicity is an interaction variable; and
IssuePerformance X Ethnicity is an interaction variable.

RESULTS
So far, this study has made a theoretical case for retrospective voting and shown that in the aggregate, 59.7% of Africans say they support their incumbent and 73% hold positive opinions of incumbent performance (Table 2). The logistic model finds that *ceteris paribus,* the likelihood of incumbent support increases in tandem with performance evaluations.

The model correctly predicts incumbent support almost three-quarters of the time (71.4%). Fortunately, having tens of thousands of data points facilitates precise estimations, evidenced in the narrow confidence intervals reported in Table 3. With small VIFs (mean = 1.4) the model also passes a multicollinearity test.

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[21] Freedom House's rating is a 7-point scale, yet no country included in the sample exceeded a score of 5 in the Freedom in the World Report (Freedom House 2013a).

Table 3. Support for Incumbents Across 13 SSA Countries

		Coefficient (Std. error)	Odds ratio[22] (95% CI)[23]
Retrospective/ Performance variables	General Performance	1.10*** (0.13)	2.97*** (2.31, 3.83)
	Issue Performance	.45*** (0.17)	1.57*** (1.13, 2.19)
	Corruption Performance	.17*** (0.02)	1.16*** (1.10, 1.19)
Demographic variables	BNI	-0.10*** (0.02)	0.91*** (0.87, 0.95)
	Ethnicity	0.53*** (0.04)	1.69*** (1.57, 1.83)
	Urban	-0.18*** (0.03)	0.83*** (0.77, 0.88)
	Education	-0.02 (0.01)	0.98 (0.97, 1.00)
Country variables	Democratic Freedoms	0.04* (0.01)	1.04* (1.01, 1.07)
	Candidates	-0.08*** (0.01)	.92*** (.91, .94)
	GDP Growth	.14*** (0.01)	1.15*** (1.13, 1.17)
General Performance X Ethnicity		0.10** (0.05)	1.11** (1.01, 1.21)
Issue Performance X Ethnicity		0.03 (0.06)	1.03 (0.91, 1.17)
Constant		1.18*** (0.15)	3.26*** (2.41, 4.11)
% Correctly Predicted[24]		71.4%	
N		22,137	
LR χ^2 Test (df)		5,103 (11)	

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, *** p ≤.001.

Notes: Dependent variable = vote intention. Takes a value of 1 if a respondent intends to vote for the incumbent.
Sources: Results original; data adapted from Afrobarometer (2005-6; 2008-9); Freedom House (2014); African Elections Database.

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[22] Odds ratio = e$^{\text{log-odds}}$ = eβ.

[23] 95% confidence interval for odds ratio is calculated as e$^{(\beta \pm [1.96(\text{standard error})]}$.

[24] Represents Expected Percent Correctly Predicted (ePCP), which evaluates the model's predictive performance. Stata's "epcp" command calculates the percentage of observations that the model correctly predicts as follows:

$$ePCP = \frac{1}{N}\left(\sum_{y_i=1}\hat{p}_i + \sum_{y_i=0}(1-\hat{p}_i)\right)$$

Where intention for incumbent, $y_i = 0$ indicates vote intention for opposition. Assumes $y_i=1$ if $\hat{p} \geq 5$, and $y_i = 0$ otherwise (Herron 2000, 91).
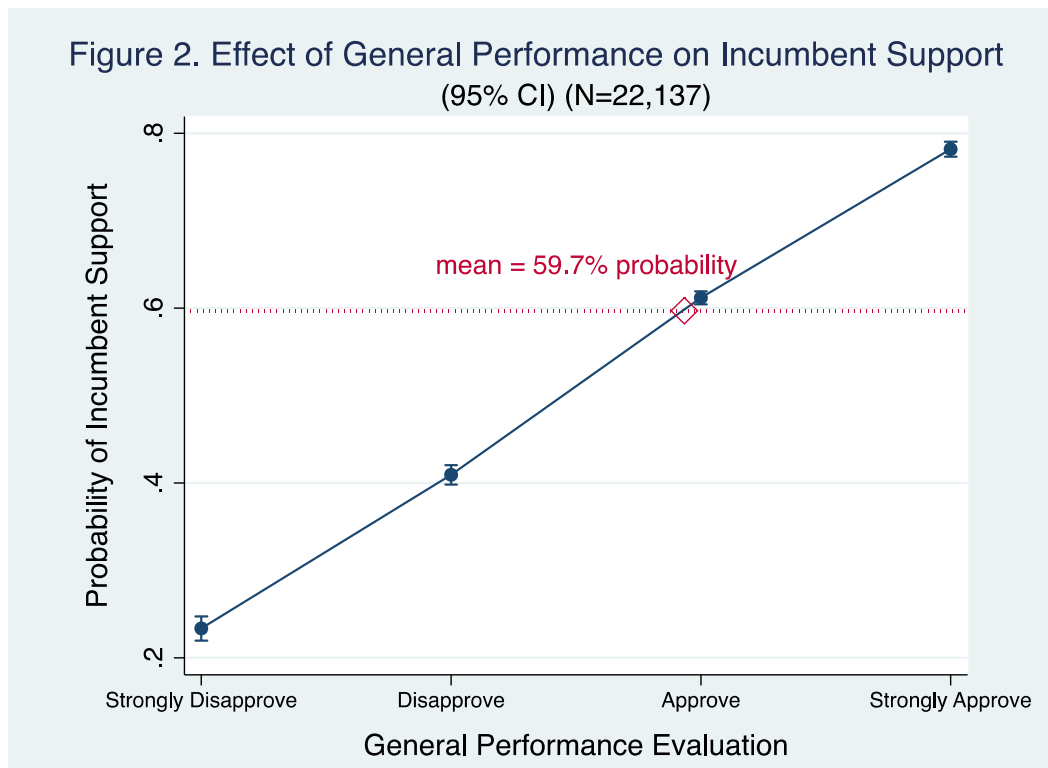
Retrospective Voting Effects

Holding all other variables at their means—that is, considering the typical voter—general and issue performance evaluations exert positive, strong and statistically significant (p<.001) effects on incumbent support. Odds ratio statistics illustrate that corruption performance also yields a more moderate effect (OR$_{GeneralPerformance}$ = 2.97; 95% CI = 2.31, 3.83; OR$_{IssuePerformance}$ = 1.57; 95% CI = 1.13, 2.19; OR$_{CorruptionPerformance}$ = 1.18; 95% CI = 1.14, 1.23).   The impact of *General Performance* and *Issue Performance* is substantive and stronger than all other variables, which yield weak-to-moderate effects in the direction expected. Importantly, *Quality of Democracy* is the only non-significant variable, calling into question assumptions that, at least in this sample of countries, incumbent durability reflects low-quality democracy. To be sure, however, variation is smaller in the dataset—which excludes politically restrictive democracies—than in Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

In the analysis that follows, retrospective voting effects are demonstrated through predicted probabilities, which are calculated after setting all variables—including *Ethnicity*—at their means. This seems acceptable because the pattern of predicted probabilities does not differ between co-ethnics and non co-ethnics (Figure 5).

General Performance Effects

Holding all variables at their means, the average African voter is 59.7% likely to favor presidential reelection (Figure 2). Positive perceptions of general performance powerfully increase that probability. For every unit improvement in perceived performance, the estimated probability of incumbent support increases by about twenty percentage points. Those who "strongly approve" of the incumbent's general performance have an estimated 79% probability of supporting reelection; strongly disapproving voters are only 22% likely to be supportive, or 78% likely to favor the opposition.

Figure 2. Effect of General Performance on Incumbent Support
(95% CI) (N=22,137)

These findings elicit three conclusions. First, they lend credence to the hypothesis that retrospective voting—in its classical reward-punishment conception (Fiorina 1981)—occurs in Africa. Second, the scant existing literature on performance-based voting in Africa underestimates the effect of general performance on incumbent support. Strong approvers are nearly 60%—not 39%—more likely to support the incumbent than strong disapprovers (Young 2009, 10). Finally, retrospective voting in this general conception appears to be a compelling explanation for incumbent durability in the region, as nearly three-quarters of surveyed constituents reported positive views of their incumbent (Table 2).

Issue Performance Effects

Africans not only recompense generally good performance, but also expressly reward perceived issue-based competence. Setting all variables to their means,[25] voters who on average report that their government handles issues related to crime, food, water, health, jobs, and education "very well" are 73% likely to endorse a reelection bid (Figure 3). This equates to more than a 14 percentage-point boost compared to voters with typical views of issue performance, who support reelection 59.7% of the time. In contrast to the Western stream of retrospective voting, however, issue-handling carrots are stronger than sticks. Respondents who think their government handles *all* six issues in the index "very badly" are still 46% likely to support reelection. Small confidence intervals on predicted probabilities strengthen these findings.

Figure 3. Effect of Issue Performance Eval. on Incumbent Support (95% CI) (N=22,137)
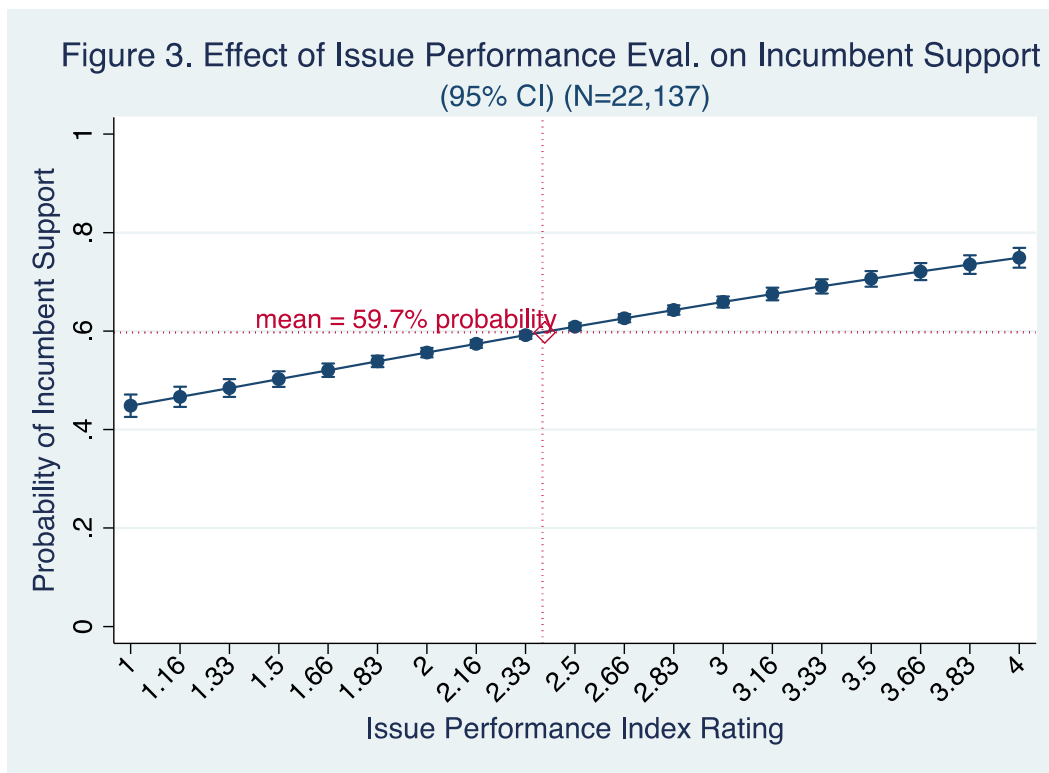
In summary, electoral support is largely grounded in perceptions that the government competently fights crime, makes food and water accessible, improves health services, addresses educational needs and creates jobs. The stakes for programmatic competence far outweigh the penalties of incompetence.

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[25] Again, *Ethnicity* is held at its mean after having been centered, which is justifiable given the forthcoming analysis that shows no important interaction with ethnicity (Figure 6). The associations described here apply whether ethnicity is held at is mean or at 0 (non co-ethnics) and 1 (co-ethnics).

These results could be symptomatic of (non-ethnic) biases.[26] For instance, citizens who receive handouts from the government might overemphasize good performance compared with those excluded from patron-client safety nets.

As extant retrospective voting studies note, macroeconomic performance also plays a central role in the voting equation. *GDP Growth* registers a statistically and substantively significant effect, with every percentage-point increase in GDP growth rate increasing the odds of incumbent support by 15% (OR = 1.15; 95% CI = 1.13, 1.17). To be sure, general and issue performance evaluations more strongly impact voting behavior than macroeconomic growth, which ultimately calls into question the standard view voting is a chiefly material response (Lewis-Beck 1990; Duch and Stevenson 2008; Bratton et al. 2012).

Corruption Performance Effects
Although corruption performance registers a positive, highly significant association with incumbent support, its impact is more moderate than that of general and issue performance. The small range of predicted probabilities depicted in Figure 4—54% to 66%—indicates that, holding all variables at their means, corruption performance is neither a deal maker nor a deal breaker. These tepid effects are somewhat expected, as most Africans view corruption as comparatively less problematic than other issues. Endogeneity is an alternative explanation: according to the "winner effect" corruption theory, pro-incumbent Africans are less critical of corrupt leaders because they have a "stake in the existing political regime" (Anderson and Tverdova 2003, 94). Indeed, endogeneity may also infect associations between general and issue performance and incumbent support insofar as voters might report positive performance evaluations to rationalize preexisting affinities for the incumbent.


Figure 4. Effect of Corruption Performance on Incumbent Support (95% CI) (N=22,137)

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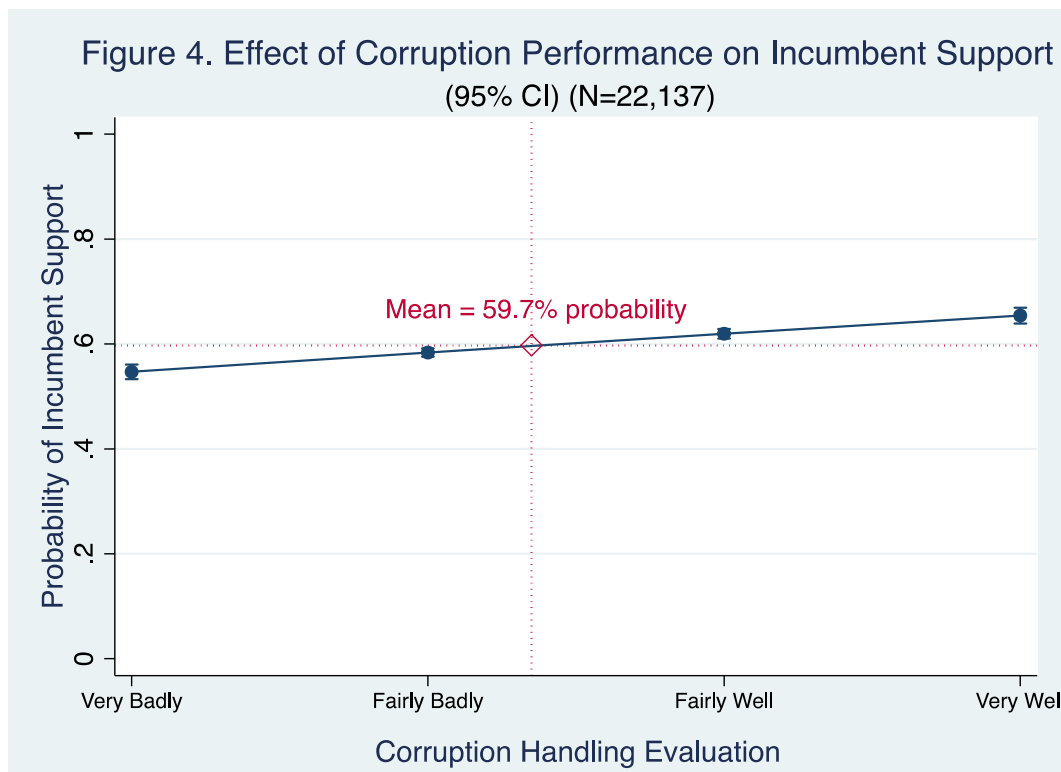
[26] The forthcoming findings suggest that the ethnicity does not substantively moderate issue performance effects.

The corruption performance findings enable us to draw boundaries between meaningful and superfluous "performance" dimensions. This helps refine a working definition of retrospective voting: *vote choice motivated by perceptions of the incumbent's past performance across a multitude of*—but not necessarily all—*issues.* As far as we can tell, voters primarily respond to performance vis-à-vis employment, food and water availability, crime, medical services and education, or some combination thereof, as well as GDP growth.

Moderating Effect of Ethnicity on Retrospective Voting
Strong relationships between performance evaluations and incumbent support are virtually unaffected by ethnicity, a factor that theoretically could "skew voters' perceptions" of performance (Bartels 2008, 2).

The interactive effect of ethnicity and general performance is statistically discernable (p<.05) but substantively trivial (OR=1.11; 95% CI=1.01, 1.21). Non co-ethnics who strongly approve are 80% likely to support the incumbent, and co-ethnics who strongly disapprove are still 70% likely to oppose the incumbent (Figure 5).


Figure 5. Interactive Effect of General Performance x Ethnicity on Support (95% CI) (N=22,137)
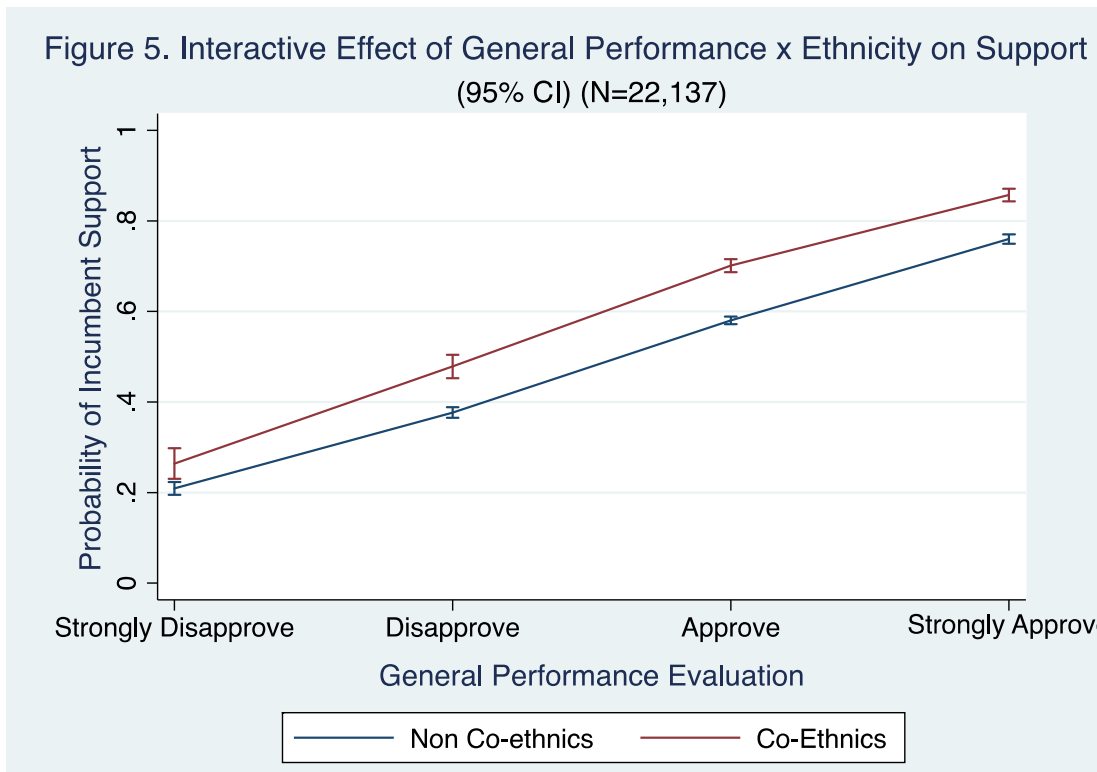
The moderating effect of ethnicity on issue performance is neither statistically significant (p>.05), nor substantively meaningful (OR = 1.03; 95% CI = 0.91, 1.17). The two groups evaluate issue performance similarly, evidenced in the nearly identical curves displayed in Figure 6.

Although the powerful effects of general and issue performance on incumbent support are not substantively conditioned by ethnicity,[27] the results corroborate putative evidence of simple ethnic voting (Lindberg and Morrison 2008; Posner and Simon 2002). The curves in Figures 5 and 6 illustrate that co-

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[27] A test of the combined effect of *General Performance X Ethnicity* and *Issue Performance X Ethnicity* finds that they are statistically, but not substantively, significant (Chi-square = 7.90; p < 0.05).

ethnic voters—regardless of perceived executive performance—are consistently twelve percentage points more likely to support the incumbent's reelection.


Figure 6. Interactive Effect of Issue Performance and Ethnicity on Support (95% CI) (N=22,137)
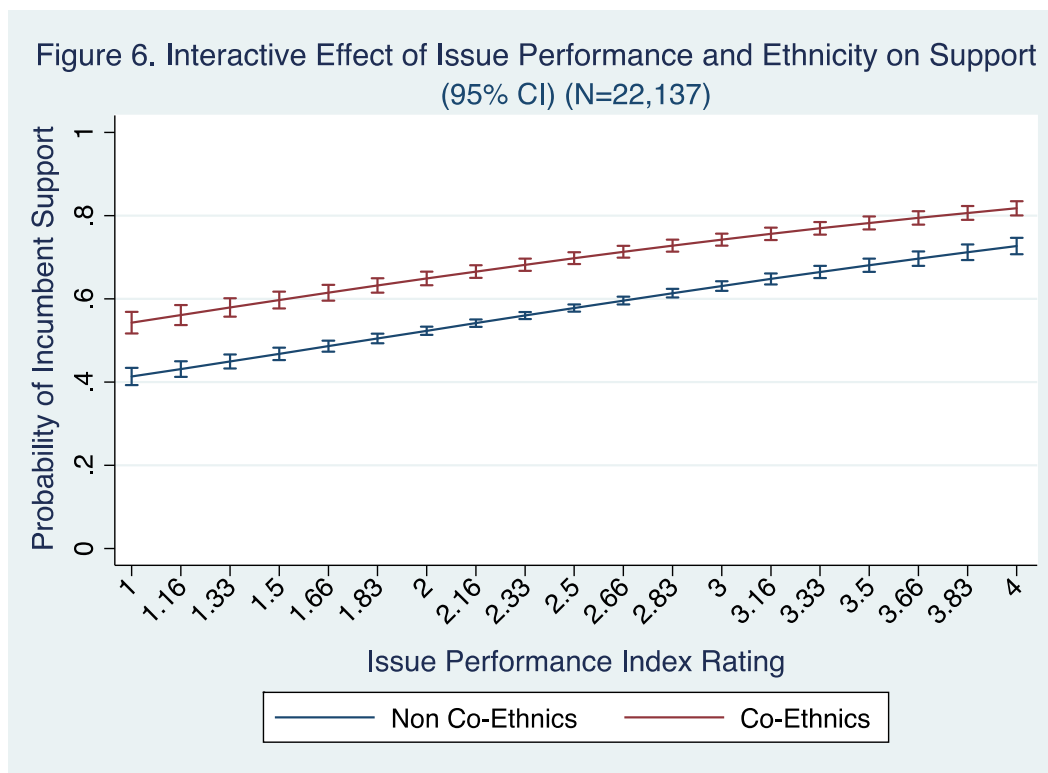
MAPPING THE MODEL ONTO CASES

To sum up, the retrospective voting model offers strong empirical support for the contention that retrospective voting is the principal individual-level determinant of incumbent support. In light of macroeconomic growth (mean *GDPGrowth* = 5.87%) and voters' overwhelmingly positive performance evaluations in the aggregate (Table 2), these findings offer some evidence that retrospective voting is a compelling lens for examining why African incumbents are so frequently reelected. Where does retrospective voting behavior most plausibly explain incumbent endurance?

After replicating the logistic model in each of the country cases, it appears that the most durable incumbent regimes have not only championed economic growth since the mid-1990s, but also govern electorates that express mostly positive performance evaluations and that vote based on retrospective performance. Evading the trappings of ecological fallacy, these case analyses concern how voters' rationale differ among countries, not how country-level voting mechanisms differ.

In the country cases, retrospective voting effects are always positive and typically strong (Figure 7). Three cases—Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda—exhibit a convergence of retrospective voting, good macroeconomic performance, positive evaluations of government performance, and durable incumbent regimes.[28] These overlapping factors represent a cyclical tendency to keep executives who maximize public welfare in office, thus "incentiviz[ing] good behavior on the part of politicians" (Healy and Malhotra 2013, 288).

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[28] Madagascar's strong retrospective effect is not discussed because political strife is common and tends to result in the incumbent's exile.

Figure 7. Effect of Retrospective Voting by Country
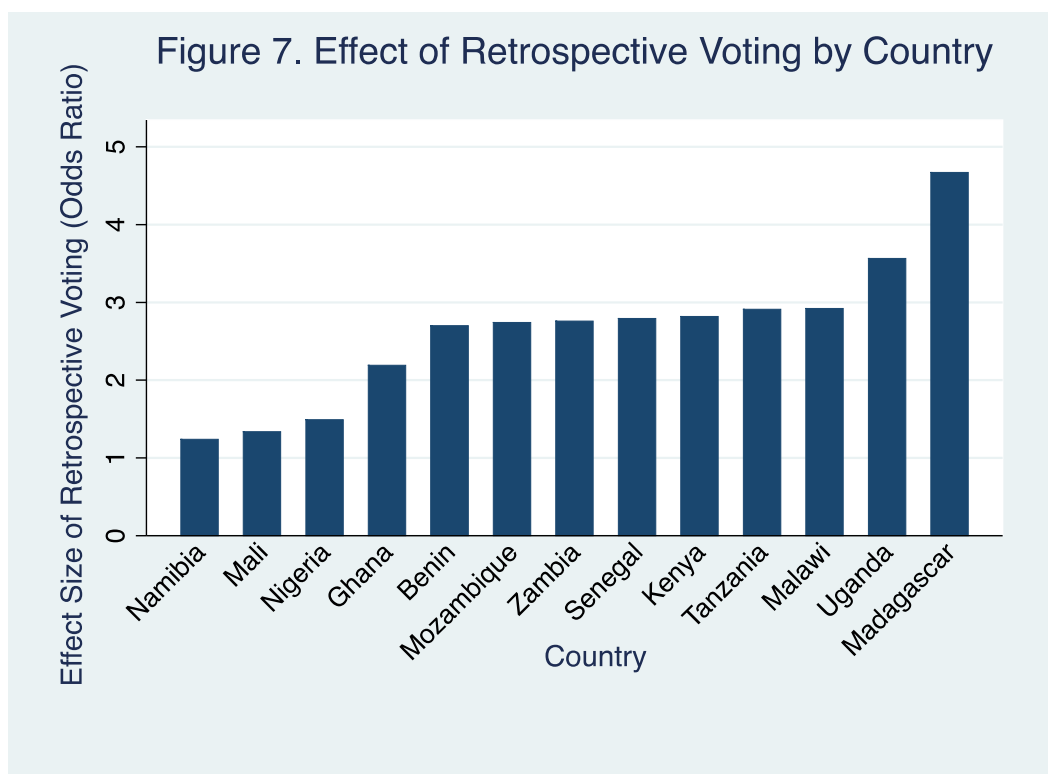
The election data displayed in Table 1 captured a slice of decades-long traditions of incumbent support in these three countries. In Malawi's twenty-year history of multiparty democratic governance, the United Democratic Front (UDF) has never ceded executive power (African Elections Database). Similarly, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) has ruled Tanzania since its premiere multiparty presidential election in 1995. One political leader—President Yoweri Museveni—has maintained a firm grip on the Ugandan presidency since the 1980s. As all three incumbents were founding executives of their respective democracies, their reelection is arguably less fragile or contingent on performance than counterparts in other countries. The cases are selected to illustrate retrospective voting where it is least expected.[29]

Since the mid-1990s, UDF, CCM and President Museveni have also delivered economic growth, which by and large has sequentially risen between pre-election years (Bleck and van de Walle dataset). Focusing the analysis on elections following the 2005-6 and 2008-9 Afrobarometer surveys, the performance-reelection nexus is even stronger. In 2008, Malawi's GDP grew by 8.7%; the following year, UDF won with a 66% vote share (World Bank 2013b). When Tanzania's ruling party delivered 8% growth in 2004, it captured 80% of the vote in 2005. When CCM's performance slightly dipped prior to the 2010 elections, so did its candidate's vote share. For his part, Museveni won the 2006 and 2011 multiparty elections, both of which occurred while achieving a 6% growth rate. In the interim, Uganda had achieved 11% growth (in 2006), which could partially explain why Museveni's margin of victory spiked (World Bank 2013b). Among the elections corresponding to this study,[30] no incumbent achieved

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[29] Namibia has not experienced executive turnover, either, and this case also supports the link between macroeconomic performance and retrospective voting. Although GDP growth in the period before the 2008 election was below average, at 3.8%, it did not undermine reelection, which is consistent with observed small retrospective voting effects in Namibia (Figure 7).

[30] Refer to Table 1 for full list of elections that correspond to Afrobarometer survey rounds.

greater pre-election year economic growth than Malawi's ruling party in 2008 (Bleck and van de Walle 2013c).

Table 4. **Bivariate Correlations between GDP Growth and Incumbent Support**			
Country (incumbent)	**Election year**	**Vote share**	**GDP growth in year prior to election[31]**
Malawi (UDF)	2009	66%	8.7%
Tanzania (CCM)	2005	80%	7.8%
Tanzania (CCM)	2010	63%	6%
Uganda (Museveni)	2006	59%	6.3% (11% in 2006)
Uganda (Museveni)	2011	81%	5.9%

Sources: African Elections Database; *World Development Indicators*, World Bank, 2013.

Figure 8. Effect of Performance on Incumbent Support in Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda
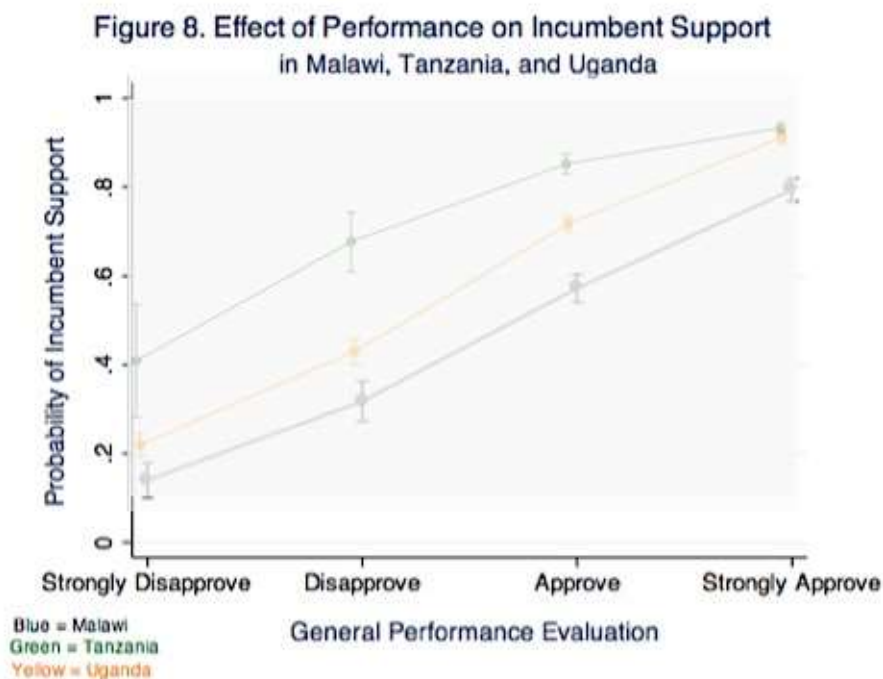
Constituents in Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda offer support when executives perform well. Specifically, strong approval of performance translates into at least 80% probability of incumbent support (Figure 12). The effect peaks in Tanzania, where constituents who "strongly approve" are 95% likely to reelect their presiding leader. CCM's popularity in the 2005 election—and its contracted vote share in the subsequent race—appears in large part an evaluative response to the government's handling of economic issues (Table 4). In each case, retrospective voting effects have forceful implications considering that at least 74% of respondents "approve" or "strongly approve" of their incumbent's general performance (Table 5).

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[31] Strong economic growth preceding elections is expected, according to political business cycle theory. In his seminal piece, William Nordhaus shows that "the optimal partisan policy will lead to a political business cycle, with unemployment and deflation in the early years followed by an inflationary boom as elections approach" (Nordhaus 1975, 185).

Table 5. **% of Respondents with Positive Views of Executive Performance in Malawi, Uganda, and Tanzania**	
Country	**% Sample that Approve or Strongly Approve of General Performance**
Malawi	75.12% (N=1,661)
Tanzania	93.97% (N=2,300)
Uganda	74.26% (N=3,492)

Source: Afrobarometer (2005-6, 2008-9).

Indeed, the concurrence of macroeconomic growth, positive performance evaluations and strong retrospective voting appear to be plausible explanations for incumbent stronghold. The relationships also hold true in cases of executive turnover. During Mathieu Kérékou's second term as president, Benin's economic growth rate more than halved, from 6.2% in 2001 to 2.9% in 2005. In 2001, he swept the race with 83.6% of the vote; the following election, his party—the Action Front for Renewal and Development (FARD)—secured less than 1% of votes. These trends are consistent with evidence of strong retrospective voting effects in Benin (Figure 7).

Finally, to preempt an expected counterexample, I will briefly explore retrospective voting in Zambia's 2011 election. The fact that Frederick Chiluba presided over a 7.6% GDP growth rate in 2010—a 1.6% boost from the previous year—yet only captured 36% of the vote might indicate that performance and voting are unrelated. To the contrary, 60.75% of Zambians surveyed in 2009 either disapproved or strongly disapproved of Chiluba's performance, which suggests that Zambians responded to non-economic performance at the polls. Rather than undermining the argument put forth in this paper, this strengthens shift away from a purely economic conception of retrospective voting.

The relationships described above do not prove that performance-based voting seals an incumbent's fate. First, the foregoing analysis assumes that voters are aware of macroeconomic improvements and attribute them to the incumbent. Second, a constellation of particularistic factors—cultural differences, historical events, personality traits, voter turnout, and campaign strategies—impact vote choice. Future research calls for multilevel modeling to gain a more precise understanding of vote choice and electoral outcomes.

CAVEATS AND LIMITATIONS
Several caveats temper the significant evidence of retrospective voting found in this study. One obvious problem is that the data are drawn from surveys; if voters feel that negativity toward the incumbent regime is dangerous, then the performance evaluations and incumbent support data reported in this section are high estimates. Second, the typical voter is 59.7% likely to support the incumbent, regardless of executive performance. At this elevated baseline, the impact of strong approval shrinks by 10 percentage points, and the effect of strong disapproval increases by the same amount. Third, the relationship between performance evaluations and incumbent support could also indicate a reverse correlation wherein preexisting political support shapes performance evaluations.

Data paucity constrains the scope of this project and thus limits conclusions. Reliance on survey data calls the reliability of the results into question. Especially where democracy—either political rights or civil liberties—is restricted, respondents likely exaggerate their performance assessments and dishonestly pledge support for the incumbent.

Arbitrary and possibly subjective macroeconomic statistics resulting from "a general lack of transparency in sources and methods" restrict the ability to map retrospective evaluations onto objective performance

(Jerven 2013, 117). Given the size of African informal economies, the data proffered in this paper could underestimate growth by fifty to one hundred percent (Jerven 32).

Another caveat of this study is endogeneity. The empirical findings could simultaneously indicate that voters have preexisting political preferences, which they rationalize through performance evaluations. The likelihood of the latter is somewhat tempered given that Afrobarometer respondents report performance evaluations before they declare whether they would support the incumbent if an election were held. Until an instrumental variable is identified, we can conclude that performance evaluations are strongly correlated with—but do not cause—political support.

The focus on individuals leaves country variation unexplained. While I stand by my results, I urge future research to incorporate multilevel models to account for these idiosyncrasies.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS
This paper advanced the argument that African voters are "retrospective," grounding their political support in evaluations of presidential performance. This avenue of inquiry was theoretically logical given improving macroeconomic conditions across the region, coupled with extensive evidence of retrospective voting in older democracies. The foregoing analysis largely validated that hypothesis. Retrospective voting is the principal individual-level explanation for incumbent support. These results not only quell assumptions that incumbents are reelected because they lead undemocratically and benefit from an "uneven playing field," but also establish that retrospective voting deserves a place in the Africanist literature.

To be sure, the African strand of retrospective voting is not a replica of its Western counterpart. Most notably, African voters react to six sociotropic dimensions of performance, five of which are non-economic. Moreover, voters reciprocally reward and punish the incumbent for "general performance" but are less likely to withdraw support based on programmatic incompetence. These statistically supported distinctions caution political scientists—Africanists and otherwise—from slapping a Western concept onto investigations of voting in new contexts. This paper has begun to carve out a version of retrospective voting that accounts for the political, social and cultural characteristics of Sub-Saharan Africans. Despite these differences, there is no reason to doubt that the conceptual framework can travel well to Africa.

The evidence proffered in this paper defangs two related conceptions of Africa's incumbency advantage. First, the dominant Africanist literature either underestimates the effect of performance evaluations on election outcomes or overemphasizes the electoral importance of economic performance (Bratton et al. 2012). However, the empirical results presented above indicate that voters with positive perceptions of performance constitute an incumbent's most reliable support base. The average voter who strongly approves of presidential performance in general is 80% likely to support his reelection; one that strongly disapproves is 80% likely to vote for the opposition. Furthermore, African voters care less about expressly rewarding various issue competencies, offering support to incumbents who appear to address problems related to food security, water availability, job creation, crime handling, educational access and medical care. By contrast, co-ethnic voters are only twelve percentage points more likely to support incumbents than non co-ethnics. The purpose of emphasizing these findings is not to supplant extant paradigms, but rather to supplement them with a more comprehensive understanding of incumbent support. While the evidence suggests that retrospective voting is the strongest predictor of incumbent support at the individual level, an amalgam of factors influence voting behavior.

Second, the empirical findings challenge the mainstream assumption that African incumbents ensure reelection by restricting democracy. Among the countries surveyed, differences in the quality of

democracy have no statistically discernable impact on incumbent support. However, we would probably see different results if this analysis had included "not free" democracies.

The implications of this study are three-fold. First, the findings call for a reimagining of the standard profile of the African voter and African democracies. While their analyses should not shed ethnic, urban, educational, and systemic variables altogether, these factors should be considered alongside retrospective voting. In a similar vein, I urge observers of incumbent reelection rates to refrain from assuming that incumbent strongholds and political freedoms are mutually exclusive. Some of the most durable presidential regimes are also the freest. Namibia is considered a "free" democracy by Freedom House standards (Freedom House 2014), yet the ruling party has never ceded power. By the same token, authoritarian practices can promulgate incumbent losses: Madagascar's 2013 presidential election resulted in turnover because a coup removed the incumbent from power and unconstitutionally banned him from participating in the election (BBC 2013). African democracies should not necessarily be cast as the redheaded stepchild of their Western counterparts.

Second, retrospective voting in Africa are not strictly responsive to economic performance; instead, they care about a general vision of economic growth and social indicators. High scores on the Issue Performance Index—reflecting confidence in an incumbent's ability to manage food, water, crime, economic, educational, and health issues—produce a high likelihood of incumbent support. These estimations suggest that future studies of retrospective voting in Africa should shed an economic focus in favor of operationalizing retrospective voting as responsiveness to performance evaluations across these six issues dimensions.

Third, the findings not only dispute the assumption that high reelection rates in Africa are attributable to authoritarianism, but also imply that incumbents persevere because voters hold them accountable. According to Fiorina, retrospective voting produces responsive governance (Fiorina 1981, 201); a similar yet distinct mechanism appears in Africa. In the regional aggregate, as well as in the cases of Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda, powerful retrospective voting effects coincide with improving societal conditions, satisfaction with the incumbent's performance and high reelection rates. Their simultaneity is no coincidence: the threat of being voted out of office creates strong incentives for good performance. By reacting to performance at the ballot box, voters incentivize better outcomes, thus creating a cyclical system of demand for, and supply of, presidential performance.

However, voters only hold leaders accountable to an extent. Voters with negative opinions of their leaders' issue performance are not very likely to withdraw support. The former effect suggests that different electoral outcomes will occur when African economies end their current boom and performance declines. In concert, the responses to poor performance imply that politicians only have strong inducements to maintain the general state of affairs—"social harmony" (Fiorina 1981, 201)—but not to deliver programmatic performance. Without electorates that punish subpar issue performance, African governments have little incentive to craft programs that tackle unemployment, educational quality and school dropouts, medical services, food shortages, and unsanitary conditions. Indeed, this paper has shown that governments can get away with ignoring the very issues their electorates think should be addressed. Piecemeal institutional responsibility results in limited democratic accountability.

While this study has drawn a number of conclusions about retrospective voting in Africa, there is much to discover. How do retrospective voting effects vary between countries and across time? To what extent does income inequality affect perceptions of macroeconomic performance? What objective indicators of country-level social wellbeing, such as HDI, are most linked to voting behavior? While much intellectual territory remains unexplored, retrospective voting has now begun its Continental drift.

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