

# AFRO BAROMETER

*Working Paper No. 66*

**ETHNIC FRACTIONALIZATION,  
ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS, AND  
AFRICANS' POLITICAL ATTITUDES**

by Wonbin Cho

**A comparative series of national public  
attitude surveys on democracy, markets  
and civil society in Africa.**



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## AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS

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# *Idasa*



## **Ethnic Fractionalization, Electoral Institutions, and Africans' Political Attitudes**

### *Abstract*

How do electoral institutions interact with the ethnic fractionalization in shaping citizens' attitudes towards their political systems? Using Afrobarometer survey data collected from 15 sub-Saharan African countries, along with contextual variables, this study demonstrates that electoral systems have differential effects on citizens' attitudes about regime performance in various social contexts. Majoritarian electoral systems are likely to exacerbate the negative effect of ethnic fractionalization on popular trust in political institutions, satisfaction with democracy, and perception of government responsiveness. By contrast, proportional representative (PR) electoral systems tend to mitigate these negative effects. While majoritarian electoral systems emphasize the directness and clarity of the connection between voters and policy-makers, PR systems facilitate the representation of all factions in society. At lower levels of ethnic fractionalization, therefore, majoritarian electoral systems are better for boosting popular support for the political system, whereas at higher levels of ethnic fractionalization, PR systems enjoy an advantage.

## Introduction

Similar institutions in different social contexts produce different outcomes. An extensive literature documents the role of ethnic cleavages and electoral laws in determining economic growth, political stability, and political party systems. However, little is known about how ethnic fractionalization affects citizens' attitudes towards their political systems and, moreover, how electoral institutions interact with ethnic fractionalization in shaping these attitudes.

Popular regime support is critical to democratic legitimacy and stability in emerging democracies (Easton 1965). Citizens' evaluations of new political regimes are usually based on performance considerations. Citizens build their own evaluations of regime performance based on whether or not a new regime provides what people want and whether it offers a reasonably fair chance for every individual and group in society to influence government decision-making processes. A group of people feeling politically and economically alienated is likely to express lower levels of support for the political system. Lower levels of support undermine democratic legitimacy, and may result in the collapse of fledgling democratic regimes.

Is there any effect of ethnic fractionalization on citizens' attitudes toward regime performance? What is the role of electoral systems in this process of attitude formation? Do electoral systems have differential impacts on people's attitudes toward their political systems in various social contexts? How do electoral systems interact with the influence of ethnic heterogeneity on citizens' levels of institutional trust, satisfaction with democracy, and perceptions of government efficacy? I address these questions using Afrobarometer Round 2 survey data<sup>1</sup> collected from 15 sub-Saharan Africa countries along with national-level data on ethnic fractionalization and electoral systems.

Ethno-linguistic cleavage is one of the most significant factors influencing African politics (Horowitz 1985; Joseph 1999; Posner 2005). While a few countries like Botswana and Lesotho are linguistically homogeneous, a majority of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa have multiple linguistic groups. A number of studies argue that ethnic cleavages are significantly associated with voting behavior and the structure of party systems in Africa (Horowitz 1991, 1993; Mozaffar et al. 2003; Norris and Mattes 2003; Posner 2005). The conventional wisdom is that ethnic voting and ethnic parties exacerbate adversarial and confrontational divisions rather than accommodating and mitigating conflicts between ethnic groups. However, this is not always true. There is evidence of trans-ethnic party support, for example, in elections in Ghana in 1992 (Oquaye 1995) and Mali in 1992 (Vengroff 1993, 1994). Senegal has also experienced trans-ethnic party competition in a series of elections (Vengroff and Creevey 1997; Villalon 1994).

Between 1990 and 2003, forty-four of the forty-eight sub-Saharan African countries introduced multiparty electoral competition (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Lindberg 2006). Majoritarian electoral systems are more common in the region than proportional representative (PR) systems.<sup>2</sup> While most Africans and outside observers agree that free and fair multiparty elections are the only way to create legitimate governments and a necessary step for installing and consolidating democracy in Africa, there has been no consensus on what kind of electoral system is better for political accommodation and stability in ethnically divided societies.

Different electoral systems give political elites distinctive incentives for mobilizing their own supporters and offer voters different strategies for choosing their representatives. Moreover, diverse

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<sup>1</sup> The Afrobarometer is a collaborative effort of research partners in various African countries, numbering 12 in Round 1 and 16 in Round 2. The sample size in each country is from 1200 to 2400 with respondents selected randomly to represent the country's adult population. All interviews were conducted by trained fieldworkers in face-to-face settings in the language of the respondent's choice. The project is coordinated by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, the Centre for Democratic Development (Ghana), and the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University. For access to data and information on sampling, see [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

<sup>2</sup> No more than one quarter of the countries of the region – including Angola, Benin, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, and South Africa – have adopted various forms of PR system.

social contexts force party leaders and supporters to adopt different strategies to win an election under similar electoral institutions. Under a majoritarian electoral system, the interest of a geographically dispersed minority is likely to be under-represented throughout government decision-making processes. A party based on ethnic cleavage is more likely to win seats in the national legislature than a party based on cross-cutting cleavages, that relies on policy or ideology to attract followers. A majoritarian electoral system in an ethnically fractionalized society tends to encourage political movements to organize around ethnic identities and is likely to marginalize minority parties from parliamentary representation. This outcome may destabilize a young democracy.

By contrast, proportional representative (PR) electoral systems emphasize the representation of all points of view in the legislature. It is much easier for minority ethnic parties to receive seats in the legislature under PR and this system also motivates parties to create cross-ethnic or cross-regional lists in election campaigns. In order to maximize their share of national votes, parties would like to demonstrate their appeal across a wide spectrum of society. Under PR, political elites have fewer incentives to make ethnically exclusive appeals for political support. While PR systems tend to allow the representation of extremist groups, it is more critical for an emerging democracy in a divided society that the new political system permits minority parties to gain parliamentary representation and gives them an incentive to express their interest through the ballot. Including minority parties in the governance of new democratic systems can help to stabilize ethnically diverse states.

This paper explores the effects of ethnic fractionalization on regime evaluations, and the interaction of these effects with the type of electoral system in place. I find that ethnic fractionalization is negatively associated with ordinary Africans' attitudes toward their political systems. People living in ethnically heterogeneous societies express lower levels of trust in political institutions and satisfaction with democracy, and claim that their governments are less responsive to their needs than those living in more homogeneous societies in this region. I also find that electoral systems are likely to interact with the negative effects of ethnic diversity on citizen evaluations of regime performance. Majoritarian electoral systems tend to exacerbate the negative impacts of ethnic fractionalization on citizen evaluations of regime performance, while proportional electoral systems tend to mitigate these negative effects. In contrast, at lower levels of ethnic fractionalization, majoritarian electoral systems are better for boosting public support for a regime.

### **Ethnic Fractionalization and Political Attitudes**

The effects of ethnic fractionalization<sup>3</sup> have been broadly studied. Most studies find it has negative socioeconomic impacts (Alesina and La Ferrara 2005; Collier 1998; Easterly and Levine 1997; Posner 2004). Easterly and Levine (1997) argue that ethnic fractionalization significantly undermines Africa's rate of economic growth. Highly fractionalized societies face higher levels of competitive rent-seeking among competing groups, resulting in higher transactions costs to reach an agreement on public goods like health service, education, and infrastructure (Alesina and Tabellini 1989; Collier 1998). Additionally, societies with high levels of ethnic fractionalization need deeper government intervention with more regulations (La Porta et al. 1999), possibly favoring the ethnic group(s) in power. Governments wind up delivering patronage to favored groups rather than to the general public. This leads to more corruption and a reduced quality of public goods delivery, producing higher infant mortality, the persistence of illiteracy, and lower levels of educational attainment.

Another body of literature argues that ethnic diversity tends to produce ethnic conflicts and political instability. Some analyses stress that long-standing cultural differences between ethnic groups make democratic stability difficult (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972; Horowitz 1985; Huntington 1996). Others focus on the recent mobilization and politicization of ethnic differences by enterprising politicians (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983). However, Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue that in the period since 1945 there is no evidence demonstrating that ethnic diversity increases the likelihood of the onset of civil violence. They find that geographic and economic variables are better predictors of the onset of

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<sup>3</sup> Ethnic fractionalization is defined as the probability that two individuals randomly drawn from a society are from the same ethnic group.

civil war than cultural ones. When the state or society marginalizes ethnic minority groups that enjoy access to a base of resources, these groups are more likely to mobilize members to try to exit the system.

Most of these studies about the effects of ethnic fractionalization on economic growth and political instability focus on macro (or national) level analysis. By contrast, this study turns attention to the individual level, asking in particular how ethnic fractionalization shapes ordinary Africans' political attitudes towards new multiparty political regimes.

Ethnically heterogeneous societies are composed of a diversity of tightly bound groups that have different preferences about what kinds of public goods should be provided. Each ethnic group prefers targeted goods from which they get primary benefit, rather than public goods whose gains are shared with other groups. Voters count on politicians from their own group to deliver these targeted goods. And politicians seek votes from the narrow groups of voters who stand to gain the most if they win. In ethnically fractionalized societies, voters and politicians find it efficient to make political contacts and build electoral support among those who share the same ethnicity. As a result, a number of studies show that ethnic cleavages play a prominent role in determining vote choice in Africa (Mattes and Gouws 1999; Mattes and Piombo 2001; Norris and Mattes 2003). Ethnic diversity is more likely to lead to a political system that "benefits a few citizens at the expense of many" (Keefer and Khemani 2005: 1). As a result, compared with the residents of socially homogenous societies, people who live in ethnically fractionalized settings are less likely to express confidence in political institutions or to be satisfied with democracy, and less likely to believe that governments are responsive to their demands.

### **The Mediating Effects of Electoral Institutions**

The effects of ethnic fractionalization on citizen attitudes towards political systems can be expected to vary across countries with different electoral systems. Electoral institutions can either mitigate or reinforce the negative effects of ethnic diversity on public attitudes towards democratic systems. Many African elites and some scholars argue that multiparty elections exacerbate ethnic conflicts and polarize societies in the region (Sisk and Reynolds 1998; LeBas, 2006). Yet electoral systems are the means for connecting ordinary voters with political elites. In emerging democracies, voting might be the only peaceful way for citizens to express their preference and to have an influence on decision-making at the national level. Therefore, it is critical for voters to understand how the electoral system counts their votes and whether their votes are fairly represented by the rules of their country's electoral system.

A number of scholars have studied the interactions between ethnic cleavage and electoral institutions. Horowitz (1991) emphasizes that alternative electoral systems mediate the influence of ethnic heterogeneity on democratic stability, an insight helpful in designing constitutions for new democracies. Others explore the interaction between ethnic fractionalization and electoral institutions on the structure of party systems (Ordeshook and Shivetrova 1994; Neto and Cox 1997; Mozaffar, Scarritt, and Galaich 2003). Party structure can play an important role in stabilizing new democracies. It is a product of the strategic choices of both voters and candidates, which in turn are shaped by the interplay between ethnic cleavages and electoral institutions. Popular support for the new regime (or democratic system) is also a necessary condition for stability in fledging democracies (Easton 1965; Norris 1999). In the present study, I propose that newly adopted electoral institutions interact with ethnic fractionalization in shaping citizen attitudes towards their political systems, which in turn has powerful implications for the consolidation of democracy.

Several studies empirically demonstrate that political institutions systematically affect citizens' political support in both established and emerging democracies (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Norris 1999; Cho and Bratton 2006). However, they reach different conclusions. While Anderson and Guillory (1997) show that more "consensual" democratic institutions increase citizens' satisfaction with democracy, Norris (1999) demonstrates that people who live under majoritarian political institutions express higher levels of institutional confidence. Cho and Bratton argue that these

differences arise from the two different measures of political support used in the analyses: satisfaction with democracy and institutional confidence. The studies, however, did not consider the possibility that similar institutions in different social structures will have different effects on citizens' political attitudes.

At a fundamental level, most analysts distinguish two types of electoral system: plurality (or majority) vs. proportional representation (PR).<sup>4</sup> FPTP (first past the post) is the quintessential example of a plurality system. It employs the rule of winner-take-all in which the candidate receiving the most votes wins the election. FPTP emphasizes the directness and clarity of the connection between voters and policy-makers, but is less concerned about minority representation and can even be exclusionary. On the contrary, a PR system emphasizes the representation of all the factions in society and hence is more inclusive, though sometimes at the expense of a strong government that is clearly accountable to voters. The former stresses citizens' "tight control" on policymakers, while the latter stresses citizens' "dispersed influence" on policymakers (Powell 2000).

While political scientists interested in electoral engineering agree that the function of electoral systems varies with social context, they have come to no consensus about which kind of electoral system works better for democratization in ethnically divided societies. Some argue that proportional electoral systems are better for reducing conflict in divided societies because they provide politically marginalized groups with a voice in decision-making (Lijphart 1999 and 2004; Reynolds 1998 and 1999; Powell 2000). Reynolds (1998) argues that it is critical for Africa's emerging, ethnically diverse democracies that newly adopted electoral systems allow small minority parties to be represented in parliament. However, the list-PR system in South Africa reveals the absence of a strong link between constituents and representatives, which threatens the legitimacy of the regime.

On the other hand, Horowitz (1991 and 2003) asserts that PR systems can increase ethnic tension and lead to polarized politics by allowing parties with extreme positions to gain representation. He argues that majoritarian electoral system can instead motivate candidates or parties with moderate position in ethnically divided societies by decreasing the possibility that extreme candidates can win seats. Moreover, Barkan (1998) argues that majoritarian systems are better for ethnically diverse African societies, because they directly link voters with their representatives, and they tend to promote integrative bonds across ethnic group lines by offering incentives for moderation. In addition, Barkan demonstrates that PR often does not produce more fair or inclusive electoral results than majoritarian rules in agrarian societies.

## **Two Cases**

The cases of Malawi and Namibia illustrate well how different electoral systems interact with ethnic fractionalization. Malawi, which possesses an FPTP electoral system, is a country of great ethnic fractionalization. There are at least eleven major ethnic groups, of which the Chewa, Nyanja, and Tumbuka language blocs are the largest, but no one group is seen to dominate the others. Ethnically-based regional polarization is a dominant feature of Malawian politics (Englund 2002, Posner 1995, Reynolds 1999), with three major parties each dominating its own region: the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) in Northern region, the Malawian Congress Party (MCP) in the Central region, and the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the Southern region. All parties regularly fail to attract votes outside their home base. In the 1994 parliamentary elections, for example, MCP won 5 seats (7 percent) out of 76 with 16.5 percent of votes from the Southern region. Bakili Muluzi of UDF won the 1999 presidential election with 51.4 percent of the votes cast (defeating AFORD and MCP coalition candidate Gwanda Chakuamba). 75 percent of these votes were from his native Southern region.

Under the FPTP system, both Northern and Central regions face a reality of permanent exclusion from the power. The ruling UDF has little incentive to provide resource to these regions, where it neither expects nor needs much support. The resulting marginalization of the North and Centre could

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<sup>4</sup> There are additional important distinctions, i.e., semiproportional and mixed member proportional (Lijphart 1999).



destabilize the Malawian state as a whole. Indeed, the country's score of the Freedom House index, which measures political rights and civil liberties, has been worsened from 2.5 in 1994 to 4 in 2004.

While the use of a PR system in Malawi would not bring a significant change into the seat allocation across major parties, it would allow all three parties to have more even distribution of seats with the votes that currently appear to be "wasted" under the FPTP system. All three parties would have incentives to try to gain votes in all regions, since every vote counts toward determining the overall number of seats won at the national level under a PR system. Such incentives motivate parties to approach voters outside of their traditional ethnic or regional boundaries. The dominance of different parties in each of the three regions would be mitigated. With the degree of ethnic fractionalization and geographical concentration, a PR system would improve representation and lead to political stabilization in this emerging democracy.

In contrast to the experience in Malawi, the national list-PR system has allowed the Namibian National Assembly to be fairly reflective of Namibian society as a whole. Ethnicity is a salient factor in Namibian politics. Ovambo speakers, who make up 51 percent of the population, largely support the ruling South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). Because SWAPO continues to attract the votes of a significant number of non-Ovambo speakers, its vote share in parliamentary elections has increased from 57.3 percent of the vote cast in 1989 to 75.1 percent in 2004. In the 2004 National Assembly election, the Congress of Democrats (COD) polled 7.2 percent of the vote (for 5 seats), the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance of Namibia (DTA) gained 5.0 percent (for 4 seats), and the National Unity Democratic Organization (NUDO) received 4.1 percent (for 3 seats). The United Democratic Front (UDF) won 3 seats with 3.5 percent, while the Republican Party (RP) and the Monitor Action Group (MAG) each won one seat in the Assembly. Under a FPTP system, most of those small parties would have little chance of winning seats in the National Assembly. Using the 1989 Namibian parliamentary election results, Reynolds (1999: 227) predicts changes in seat distribution under a FPTP system and finds that all of the small parties would have lost their seats except the DTA. Under a majoritarian electoral system, the votes for opposition parties would have no influence on seat distribution and supporters of these parties would be marginalized from the democratic systems. While it has a one-party dominant system (van Cranenburgh, 2006), Namibia has consistently secured relatively high scores in the Freedom House Index of political rights (2) and civil liberties (3) since 1990.

### **Data and Measurement**

The literature thus proposes that higher levels of ethnic fractionalization should decrease popular attachments to government and political institutions. It also suggests, however, that proportional electoral systems can help to mitigate these negative impacts of ethnic fractionalization. To test these hypotheses, this study uses survey data from Round 2 of the Afrobarometer, conducted in 15 countries between June 2002 and November 2003.<sup>5</sup>

I utilize several survey measurements to tap three key dimensions of attitudes about the performance of an elected regime: (1) trust in political institutions, (2) satisfaction with democracy, and (3) perceptions of government responsiveness. Exact question wording and response categories for all items are given in Appendix 1. I assume that these measurements reflect citizen evaluations of democratic regime performance. The first measure, *Trust in Political Institutions*, is an index that sums popular trust in eight political institutions: the president, parliament, the national electoral commission, the ruling party, opposition parties, the army, courts of law, and the police. The second, *Satisfaction with Democracy*, is a single survey item that measures how satisfied citizens are "with the way democracy works in (this country)." Finally, *Responsiveness*, is an index constructed from questions that asked respondents how much of the time they think elected leaders try their best: "To look after the interests of people like you?" and "To listen to what people like you have to say?"

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about the Afrobarometer Round 2, see (Afrobarometer Network 2004). Zimbabwe is excluded since key questions for this study were not asked in the 2004 survey there.

As for independent variables, I represent ethnic fractionalization with the *Politically Relevant Ethnic Groups (PREG)* measure developed by Daniel N. Posner (2004). I expect ethnic fractionalization to have a negative effect on trust in political institutions, satisfaction with democracy, and perceived government responsiveness.

I also add a dummy variable for majoritarian electoral systems (1 for FPTP or Two-Round system and 0 for the others). Table 1 gives information on ethnic fractionalization and electoral systems across 15 sub-Saharan African countries in this study. Nine out of 15 countries have majoritarian electoral systems.

**Table 1. Ethnic fractionalization and electoral systems in 15 sub-Saharan Africa countries**

Country	PREG	Electoral system <sup>a</sup>
Botswana	0	FPTP
Cape Verde	0	List-PR
Ghana	0.44	FPTP
Kenya	0.57	FPTP
Lesotho	0	MMP
Malawi	0.55	FPTP
Mali	0.13	TRS
Mozambique	0.36	List-PR
Namibia	0.55	List-PR
Nigeria	0.66	FPTP
Senegal	0.14	Parallel-PB
South Africa	0.49	List-PR
Tanzania	0.59	FPTP
Uganda	0.63	FPTP
Zambia	0.71	FPTP
<i>Mean</i>	0.41	

a. Source: International IDEA [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

Key: FPTP=First Past the Post, MMP=Mixed Member Proportional, TRS=Two-Round System, PB=Party Block, List PR=List Proportional Representation.

I am specifically interested in whether electoral systems alleviate or exacerbate the impacts of ethnic fractionalization on citizens' attitudes toward their political systems. To test this hypothesis, I add an interaction term – *PREG x Majoritarian system* – into the models. I expect that the interaction term will have negative coefficients for all three dependent variables. In other words, the majoritarian electoral systems are expected to reinforce the negative effects of ethnic diversity on citizens' attitudes toward regime performance.

A number of individual level variables are used to control for demographic and attitudinal factors. Because numerous studies find that perceptions of the economy influence attitudes about regime performance (Weatherford 1987; Clark, Dutt, and Kornberg 1993; Listhaug and Wiberg 1995; Anderson and Guillory 1997), two measures of economic performance evaluation are included, one based on personal (egocentric) economic conditions, and a second based on perceived national (sociotropic) economic conditions. In addition, studies of political support demonstrate that an individual's cognitive orientation of *interest in politics* has a positive effect on attitudes toward the political systems (Almond and Verba 1965; Weatherford 1991). Further, to control for organizational and other affiliations, this study includes individual's memberships in voluntary associations, their identification with political parties, and their contacts with public officials (Bratton et al. 2005: 250-68). I also control for age, education, gender, and urban or rural habitation. Appendix 2 gives descriptive statistics for all of these variables.

## Findings

This study finds that electoral systems have differential impacts on people's attitudes toward their political systems in various social contexts. Table 2 presents the coefficients for the models for each of the three dependent variables: *Trust in political institutions*; *Satisfaction with democracy*; and *Responsiveness*. Each model was run twice, once with the interaction term between ethnic fractionalization and electoral system (Model 2), but first without (Model 1). The dependent variables are all coded so that higher scores are associated with more positive attitudes towards the political system.

**Table 2. Impact of ethnic fractionalization and electoral systems on attitudes about trust in political institutions, satisfaction with democracy, and government responsiveness**

	Trust in Political Institutions		Satisfaction with Democracy		Responsiveness	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<b>National level</b>						
PREG	-3.299** (0.165)	-1.376** (0.263)	-0.239** (0.031)	0.080 (0.049)	-0.759** (0.028)	-0.025** (0.044)
Majoritarian system	0.471** (0.083)	1.163** (0.147)	0.128** (0.016)	0.319** (0.028)	0.176** (0.014)	0.610** (0.025)
PREG x Majoritarian system		-3.121** (0.332)		-0.515** (0.062)		-1.179** (0.056)
<b>Individual level</b>						
National economic condition	-0.021 (0.036)	-0.008 (0.036)	0.054** (0.007)	0.056** (0.007)	0.032** (0.006)	0.037** (0.006)
Personal economic condition	0.702** (0.034)	0.658** (0.034)	0.146** (0.006)	0.138** (0.006)	0.047** (0.006)	0.030** (0.006)
Interest in politics	0.067* (0.029)	0.077** (0.029)	0.001 (0.006)	0.003 (0.006)	0.003 (0.005)	0.007 (0.005)
Contact	0.204** (0.017)	0.219** (0.017)	0.012** (0.003)	0.014** (0.003)	0.029** (0.003)	0.035** (0.003)
Memberships	0.141** (0.018)	0.142** (0.018)	0.012** (0.003)	0.012** (0.003)	0.019** (0.003)	0.019** (0.003)
Winner	2.218** (0.072)	2.183** (0.072)	0.323** (0.013)	0.317** (0.013)	0.077** (0.012)	0.065** (0.012)
Age	0.002 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	0.002** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Education	-0.389** (0.019)	-0.394** (0.019)	-0.034** (0.004)	-0.035** (0.004)	-0.025** (0.003)	-0.028** (0.003)
Female	-0.470** (0.070)	-0.459** (0.069)	-0.01** (0.013)	-0.008** (0.013)	-0.019 (0.012)	-0.015 (0.012)
Urban	-0.626** (0.075)	-0.689** (0.075)	-0.077** (0.014)	-0.086** (0.014)	0.051** (0.013)	0.028** (0.013)
Constant	9.800** (0.180)	9.397** (0.185)	2.002** (0.034)	1.935** (0.035)	0.915** (0.031)	0.759** (0.031)
Adj. R-squared	0.140	0.143	0.104	0.107	0.059	0.079
N	21986	21986	19951	19951	20907	20907

Note: OLS estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses. \* Significant at  $p < 0.05$  (two-tail); \*\* Significant at  $p < 0.01$  (two-tail). Model 2 has an interaction term – PREG x Majoritarian system.

I find strong evidence that ethnic fractionalization has a negative effect on citizens' attitudes towards their political system. Citizens living in a context of ethnic diversity are likely to express lower levels of institutional trust and satisfaction with democracy, and are less likely to claim that government is responsive to their needs. Moreover, the results demonstrate that electoral systems interact with the effects of ethnic fractionalization on citizens' attitudes towards regime performance. The coefficients for the interaction term between PREG and majoritarian electoral system are negative and statistically significant across all three models. Electoral systems therefore have different effects in different social contexts. Majoritarian electoral systems reinforce the negative impacts of ethnic fractionalization on citizens' attitudes toward regime performance. Conversely, proportional electoral systems mitigate the negative effects of ethnic diversity.

This important point can be reinforced with country examples. Malawi and Namibia have similar levels of ethnic fractionalization (PREG = 0.55), but have different electoral system: the former has FPTP and the latter a List-PR system. The political attitudes of their citizens also diverge and in expected directions. 49 percent of Malawian respondents say that they are either "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the way democracy works, a below-average means score. But 69 percent of Namibians are satisfied, thus placing themselves among the most satisfied publics in Afrobarometer Round 2 (2003).<sup>6</sup> Over the course of three surveys, satisfaction with democracy has declined in Malawi, from 57 percent in 1999 to 26 percent in 2005, while it has marginally increased in Namibia, from 64 percent in 1999 to 69 percent in 2006 (Afrobarometer Network 2006).

We also observed big differences in public confidence in the president between the two countries from 1999 to 2006: 50 percent of respondents trust the president in Malawi and 73 percent in Namibia in 1999; 48 percent in Malawi and 76 percent in Namibia in 2002; 60 percent in Malawi and 80 percent in Namibia in 2005 (Afrobarometer Network 2006). While the Afrobarometer mean value of trust in the president is at least 55 percent in this period, the levels of Malawian trust are always below the mean value and those of Namibian trust are always high above the mean. Importantly, the high levels of Namibian confidence in the president show trans-ethnic party support. Since 1994 elections, the number of votes for the SWAPO (more than 75 percent of votes cast) has been far beyond the size of the largest ethnic group, Ovambo speakers. Afrobarometer survey data shows that the size of non-Ovambo speaker supporting for the SWAPO has increased by 8 percentage points from 31 percent of the SWAPO supporters in 1999 to 39 percent in 2005. People's perception of government responsiveness is consistent with this pattern. The mean value for this variable is statistically different between the two countries: 0.53 for Malawi and 0.87 for Namibia.<sup>7</sup> Namibians are more likely to claim that government is responsive to people's requests than are Malawians in Round 2. To be sure, electoral arrangements are not the only formative factor. Among individual-level predictors, citizens' perceptions of personal economic conditions have significant, positive effects across all three models. Consistent with findings from a previous analysis, organizational affiliations also have significant effects (Bratton et al. 2005). People who make more frequent contact with public officials and who are more involved in voluntary associations are more likely to show positive attitudes towards democratic political systems. Other factors being equal, people who feel close to the governing party (winners) are more likely than opposition supporters (losers) to show higher levels of institutional trust and satisfaction with democracy, and to claim that government is more responsive to their requests, findings that are also consistent with previous research (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Norris 1999). Interest in politics has a significant, positive effect on institutional trust, but not on satisfaction with democracy or evaluations of responsiveness.

Higher levels of education are consistently associated with negative attitudes towards political systems across all three models. People who live in urban areas are likely to express lower levels of institutional trust and satisfaction with democracy, but show better perceptions of government responsiveness than those in rural areas. There is also a significant difference in institutional trust and satisfaction with democracy between men and women. Women are likely to express lower levels of

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<sup>6</sup> Mean difference test:  $t = -10.84$ .

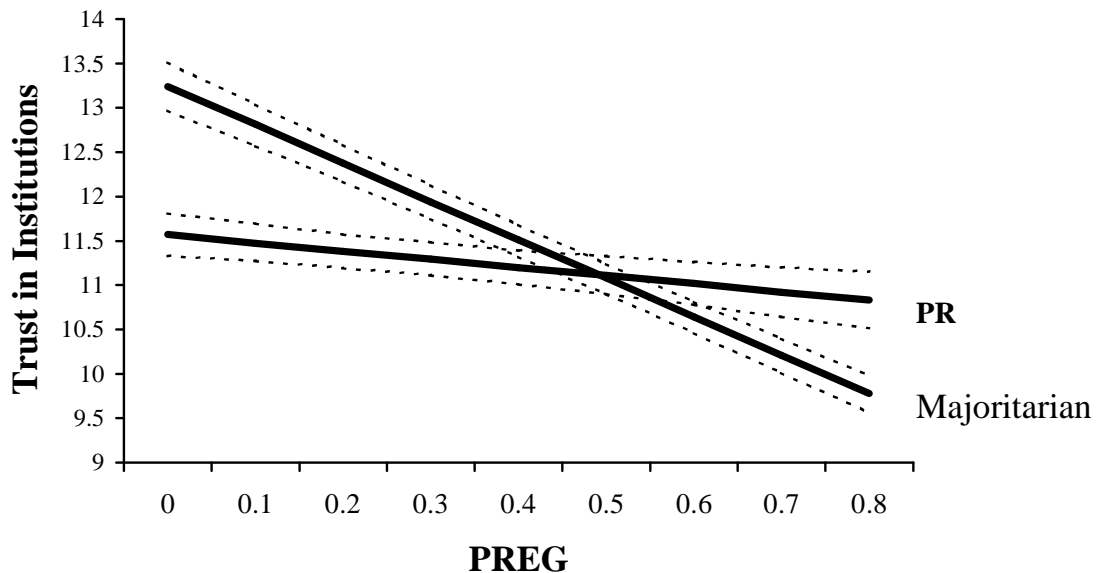
<sup>7</sup>  $t = -11.25$ .

trust in political institutions and less satisfaction with democracy than men after controlling for other factors, which may be explained by the fact that men tend to be more attentive to politics than women.<sup>8</sup>

**Substantive interpretation**

Interaction effects are often difficult to explain by looking at regression results. While the sign of coefficients can lead to a quick understanding, often the substantive message is more complicated. Certainly that is the case with the above results, as indicated by Figures 1, 2, and 3.<sup>9</sup> Figure 1 demonstrates the results of the interaction effects in the second regression model for trust in political institutions, fixing all other variables at their mean and assuming that the respondent in question is an urban female who feels close to the ruling party. As can be seen, at low levels of ethnic fractionalization, citizens living in majoritarian electoral systems are likely to show higher levels of institutional trust than those living in PR systems. However, as ethnic fractionalization increases, the difference diminishes, until at a PREG of 0.5 there is no difference between the two. Above this level of ethnic fractionalization, those living in PR systems are likely to express higher levels of institutional trust than those living in majoritarian systems. It is evident that majoritarian electoral systems are highly sensitive to ethnic fractionalization. While there is no significant change in popular trust in political institutions among people living in PR systems, the level of institutional trust among people living in majoritarian systems decreases significantly as ethnic fractionalization increases.

**Figure 1. Expected value of trust in political institutions in majoritarian and PR systems at different levels of ethnic fractionalization<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>8</sup> Bratton et al. (2005) find that men are more likely to report attending community meetings and contacting government officials than women.

<sup>9</sup> Expected values are the mean of the 1000 simulated expected values generated by Clarify 2.1 (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).

<sup>a</sup> Dotted lines present 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2, which refers to Satisfaction with democracy, indicates a similar pattern, again fixing other variables at their mean and assuming a female ruling party supporter living in an urban area. At low levels of ethnic fractionalization, people in majoritarian electoral systems have higher levels of satisfaction with democracy than in PR systems. As PREG increases, however, the gap in satisfaction with democracy between the two systems diminishes, until it reaches zero at the PREG of 0.6. Above this point, PR systems are likely to produce higher levels of popular satisfaction with democracy than majoritarian ones. PR systems actually invert the negative effects of ethnic fractionalization even though the slope of the PR systems is only marginally positive. Because every vote is counted to distribute seats in parliament, PR systems do a better job of improving representation for ethnic minorities. With less than 5 percent of votes, small parties such as NUDO, UDF, RP, and MAG, have at least one seat in the Namibian National Assembly. PR systems also motivate political parties to go beyond their traditional ethnic or regional boundaries to get support. In Namibia, for example, the ruling SWAPO has recruited many political leaders and ordinary members from its opponents such as the DTA.

**Figure 2. Expected value of satisfaction with democracy in majoritarian and PR systems at different levels of ethnic fractionalization**

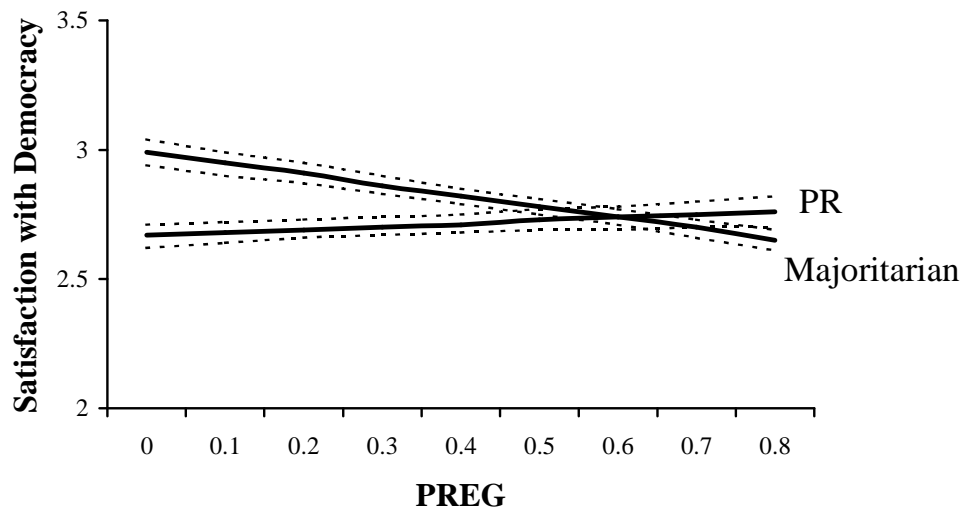
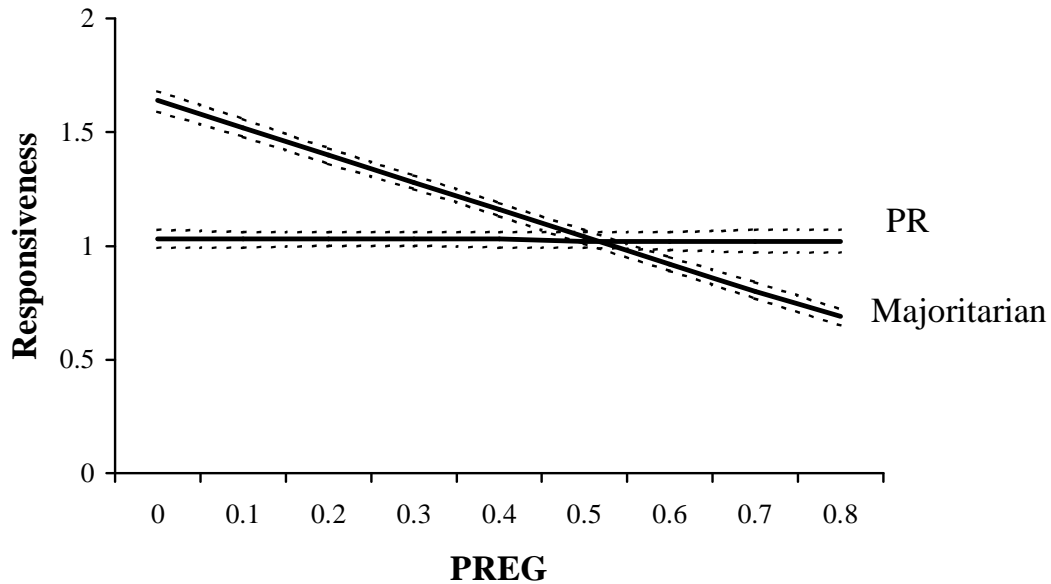


Figure 3 reveals a similar pattern with respect to evaluations of responsiveness. Below a PREG of 0.5, majoritarian systems produce more positive evaluations, while above this level PR systems produce more positive results.

**Figure 3. Expected Value of Responsiveness in majoritarian and PR systems at different levels of ethnic fractionalization**



These figures clearly demonstrate the interaction between ethnic fractionalization and electoral systems in the formation of citizens’ attitudes toward their political systems. Majoritarian electoral systems tend to exacerbate the negative effects of ethnic fractionalization on people’s attitudes about regime performance. Among people living in majoritarian electoral system, as ethnic fractionalization increases, their levels of trust in political institutions, satisfaction with democracy, and perception of government responsiveness consistently decrease. By contrast, PR systems are likely to minimize the negative effects of high levels of ethnic fractionalization. These results are consistent with Lijphart’s (1999) argument about how electoral systems work in societies with ethnic diversity.

These findings suggest that when people in relatively homogeneous society evaluate regime performance they are more likely to place emphasis on accountability. It is important for them whether voters have a chance to directly reward or punish their representatives. At high levels of ethnic fractionalization, on the contrary, people are more likely to focus on achieving representation as a basis for their evaluation of regime performance. For them it is critical that a political system allows every ethnic group to have a fair opportunity to elect their own representatives.

Three Rounds of Afrobarometer surveys (Afrobarometer Network 2006: 19) clearly present the large differences in trends in popular satisfaction with democracy between Malawi and Namibia. While both countries have similar levels of ethnic fractionalization, the different electoral systems they have adopted have created the opposite directional trends in citizens’ attitudes toward the political system. The FPTP electoral system in Malawi has marginalized minority groups and excluded them from the power, increasing their dissatisfaction with the democratic system. The PR system in Namibia minimizes “wasted votes” and maximizes representation of all factions of society, on the other hand, increasing levels of popular satisfaction with democracy works in Namibia over the last 8 years.

**Conclusion**

This study has considered the combinatory effects of ethnic cleavages and electoral systems on attitudes towards political systems in 15 sub-Saharan African countries. I find evidence to indicate ethnic fractionalization is likely to decrease popular trust in political institutions, satisfaction with

democracy, and perceptions that citizens can influence governments. The evidence also demonstrates that majoritarian electoral systems exacerbate the negative effects of high levels of ethnic fractionalization on citizens' attitudes towards regime performance. Majoritarian electoral systems offer less opportunity for ethnically marginalized groups to elect representatives from their own ethnic group and to provoke alienation from the political system. As levels of ethnic fractionalization increase, people living in the majoritarian electoral systems – as in Malawi – are likely to become increasingly dissatisfied. Conversely, PR systems – as in Namibia – seem to help to mitigate the negative effects of high levels of ethnic fractionalization, sometimes actually inverting these negative effects to positive ones.

These findings have implications for public policy. After democratic transition, many new democracies have sought to develop new constitutions appropriate for their own social structure. Electoral institutions represent intermediary mechanisms linking voters' preferences with the performance of the government. In this regard, electoral systems are not neutral. They may consistently include some groups in decision-making processes, while excluding others. Moreover, similar electoral institutions in countries with different levels of ethnic fractionalization tend to produce different levels of public support for the political system. If we can design political institutions to generate higher levels of support for the regime in a given social context, this may offer significant benefit to the process of democratization.



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## Appendix 1

Satisfaction with democracy: “Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country? Are you” (1 = “not at all satisfied”; 2 = “not very satisfied”; 3 = “fairly satisfied”; 4 = “very satisfied.”)

Trust in institutions: “How much do you trust each of the following institutions: the President, the National Assembly, the National Electoral Commission, the ruling party, opposition political parties, the army, the police, and courts of law?” (0 = “not at all”; 1 = “a little bit”; 2 = “a lot”; 3 = “a very great deal.”)

Responsiveness: “How much of the time do you think elected leaders, like parliamentarians or local councilors, try their best: A. To look after the interests of people like you?; B. To listen to what people like you have to say?” (0 = “never”; 1 = “some of the time”; 2 = “most of the time”; 3 = “always.”)

Economic performances: “In general, how would you describe: A. The present economic condition of this country?; B. Your own present living conditions?” (1 = “very bad”; 2 = “fairly bad”; 3 = “neither good nor bad; 4 = “fairly good”; 5 = “very good.”)

Interest in politics: “How interested are you in public affairs?” (0 = “not interested”; 1 = “somewhat interested”; 2 = “very interested.”)

Voluntary association memberships: “Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member: A. a religious group, B. a trade union or farmers association, C. a professional or business association, D. a community development or self-help association?” (0 = “not a member”; 1 = “inactive member”; 2 = “active member”; 3 = “official leader.”)

Contacting officials: “During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons for help to solve a problem or to give them your views: A. a local government councilor, B. a National Assembly representative, C. an official of a government ministry, D. a political party official?” (0 = “never”; 1 = “only once”; 2 = “a few times”; 3 = “often.”)

Winner: “Do you feel close to any particular party? If so, which party is that?” (1 = if respondent chooses the party that won the most recent election; 0 = otherwise.)

Education: “What is the highest level of education you have completed?” (0 = “no formal schooling”; 1 = “informal schooling only”; 2 = “some primary school completed”; 3 = “primary school completed”; 4 = “some secondary school/high school”; 5 = “secondary school/high school completed”; 6 = “post-secondary qualifications, other than university”; 7 = “some university”; 8 = “university completed”; 9 = “post-graduate.”)

Age: “How old were you at your last birthday?” (range from 18 to 100 years old)

Gender: (0 = male; 1 = female)

Urban: (0 = rural; 1 = urban)

## Appendix 2. Descriptive statistics of variables

<i>Variable</i>	<b>Obs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Trust in Political Institutions	24301	10.48	5.50	0	24
Satisfaction with Democracy	21650	2.61	0.96	1	4
Responsiveness	23007	0.97	0.86	0	3
National economic condition	23736	2.68	1.23	1	5
Personal economic condition	24197	2.68	1.17	1	5
Interest in politics	23840	1.22	0.74	0	2
Contact	24301	1.31	2.24	0	12
Memberships	23197	2.42	2.09	0	12
Winner	24301	0.04	0.49	0	1
Age	23665	36.30	14.77	18	105
Education	24229	3.15	2.00	0	9
Female	24301	0.50	0.50	0	1
Urban	24301	0.38	0.48	0	1

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