

The Politicization of Identity: Ethnic Mobilization in African Opposition Parties

Julie Faller and Noah Nathan

Differences across parties?

“Are opposition parties more likely than incumbents to mobilize support along ethnic lines in African elections?”

Eifler, Miguel, and Posner (2010) use cross-national survey data to show that African voters are more likely to prioritize their ethnic identities as elections approach.

We seek to identify which *types of voters* drive this pattern, exploring differences in ethnic identification between supporters of ruling and opposition parties, which may stem from differences in the strategic value of playing up ethnicity between parties that can rely on access to state resources and those which are resource-starved.

Identity as a choice

In 24 surveys in 14 African countries, Afrobarometer allowed respondents to choose among multiple social identities:

*“Some people describe themselves in terms of their language, religion, race, and others describe themselves in economic terms, such as working class, or a farmer. Besides being a [nationality], which group do you feel you belong to **first and foremost**?”*

“Ethnic” responses vary widely across countries, from 85% in Botswana in 1999 to 3% in Tanzania in 2001, where 80% named an occupation or class instead.

Summary of ethnic responses across countries:

	% Ethnic ID
Botswana	0.56
Ghana	0.39
Kenya	0.14
Malawi	0.29
Namibia	0.46
Nigeria	0.43
Senegal	0.34
South Africa	0.32
Tanzania	0.10
Uganda	0.15
Zambia	0.11
Zimbabwe	0.30

Averaged across survey rounds

Expectations

We believe incumbent parties and challengers face different incentives:

- Ruling parties may seek oversized coalitions – not MWCs
 - Can use state resources as patronage to bring in non-coethnics
 - May not highlight ethnic divisions unless one group is large enough to win permanent majority
 - May fear violent challenges from ethnic minorities
- Weak opposition parties need strong base of support to overcome resource advantages of ruling party
 - No access to state resources
 - May mobilize support through ethnic grievances to gain electoral foothold

Matching Strategy

DV: probability of an ethnic response to the Afrobarometer question on the left.

We measure two relationships, comparing supporters of each type of party to the other respondents:

- Ruling party supporters $\rightarrow P(Ethnic = 1)$
- Opposition party supporters $\rightarrow P(Ethnic = 1)$

We **match** on individual covariates, administrative region, and survey round. This improves balance on variables that may determine both partisanship and identity choice.

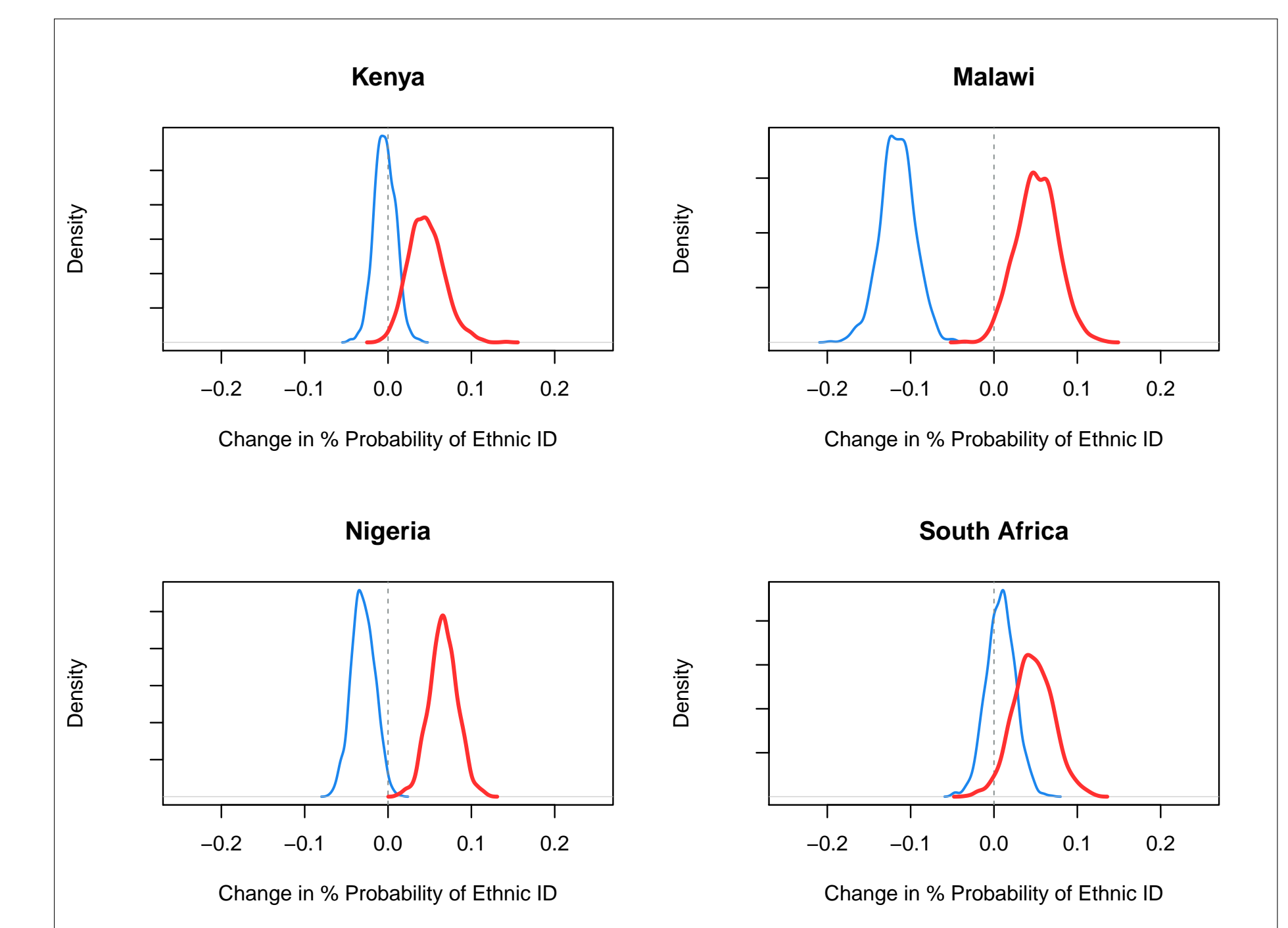
Using the matched data, for each country we run two logistic regressions of ethnic identification on ruling or opposition party support and the covariates.

Preliminary Results

- **Large positive relationship** between **opposition party support** and probability of ethnic identification in 4 countries (South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi). No differences between ruling party supporters and others.
- **No differences** between ruling and opposition parties in countries with some of the most competitive opposition parties (Ghana, Zambia, Zimbabwe)
- **But:** patterns of results not consistent across countries

ATT Estimates in Four Countries

From our model, we simulate 1000 first differences of the “effect” of becoming an opposition or ruling party supporter on the probability of choosing an ethnic identity for each country. The distributions from these simulations are pictured here. “Effects” for ruling parties are in **blue**, opposition parties in **red**:



Going Forward...

This is a first step in what we hope becomes a larger project using additional data and case studies to build better theory of when parties mobilize ethnic identities in elections. Key questions:

- Why do we find clear relationships in some countries with strong incumbents parties, but not others that seem to have similar political environments (such as Uganda or Namibia)?
 - For example, do underlying differences in ethnic demographics, electoral systems, or political institutions explain this variation?
- How do ruling party strategies influence the competitive response of opposition parties?
- What other data can we use to capture the ethnic content of party messaging itself?
 - Can we observe the effects of party mobilization more directly?

We look forward to your suggestions!