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Coalition-Building and Distributive Politics in Africa

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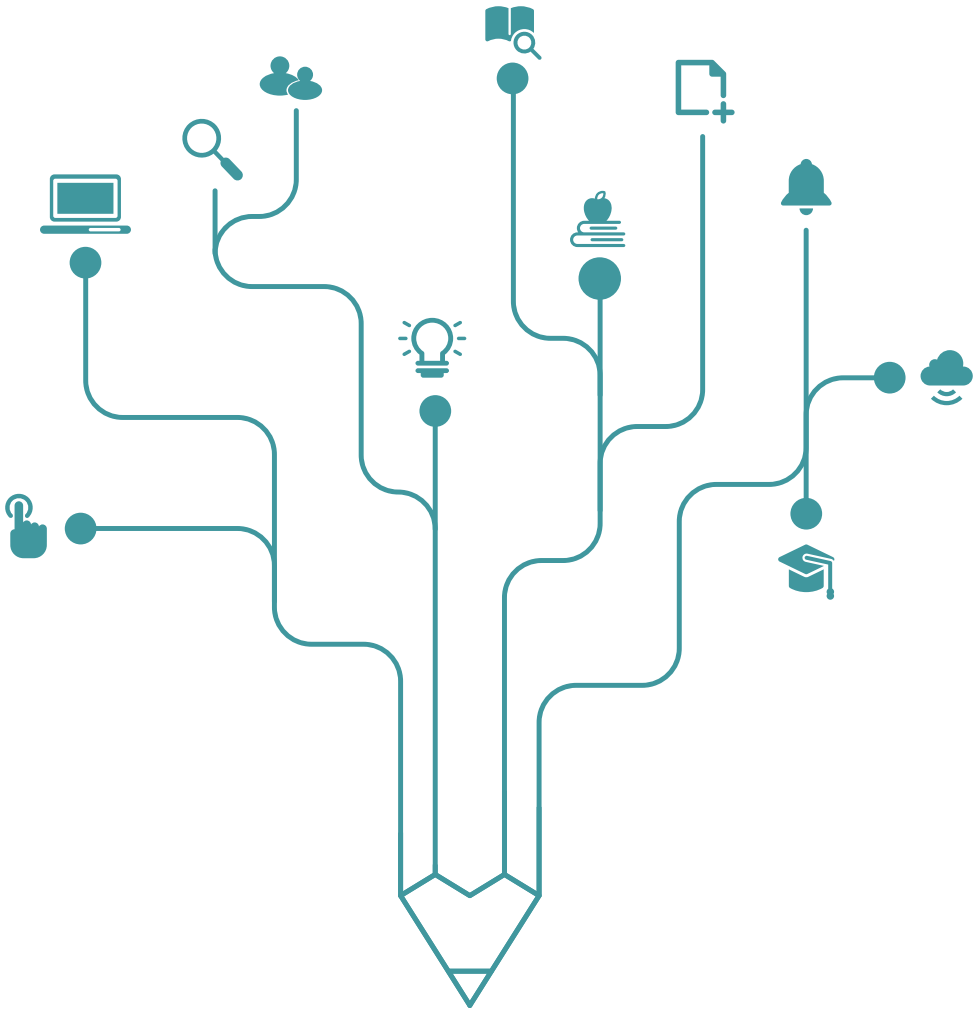

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Abstract

How does ethnicity shape distributive politics in Africa? While previous studies show considerable variation in ethnic favoritism across African countries, it is unclear which factors moderate rulers' resource allocation strategies. In this paper, I propose a game-theoretic account of leaders' coalition-building to explain the conditions under which top leaders choose ethnic favoritism rather than an ethnic balancing strategy. By doing so, I identify four key variables and review past studies in light of the model's predictions. I argue that explaining heterogeneity in ethnic favoritism can be done best by examining leader-level variables and that previous studies yield mixed results due to their focus on country-level factors, such as economic development. This paper calls for more attention to the role of political elites in ethnic politics.

1 Introduction

How does ethnicity shape distributive politics in Africa? There are two competing hypotheses: ethnic *favoritism* and *balancing*. The ethnic favoritism hypothesis–which is more widely accepted among the two–maintains that presidents reward their coethnic constituents in return for their political support (Bates, 1983; Franck and Rainer, 2012; Kramon and Posner, 2016; Posner, 2005). Conversely, the ethnic balancing hypothesis maintains that while acknowledging their preference in favor of coethnic groups, top leaders are forced to divide state resources among a broader set of political elites in their multi-ethnic ruling coalitions (Arriola, 2009; Francois et al., 2015; Joseph, 1987; van de Walle, 2007). Previous studies show considerable variation in ethnic favoritism across African countries (Beiser-Mcgrath et al., 2021; De Luca et al., 2018; Franck and Rainer, 2012; Hodler and Raschky, 2014; Koter, 2013). Yet, it is far from clear which factors moderate rulers' resource allocation strategies.

In this paper, I propose a game-theoretic account of leaders' coalition-building to explain the conditions under which top leaders choose ethnic favoritism rather than ethnic balancing strategies. Building on informal and formal accounts of ethnic politics, I theorize that chief executives must garner support among both coethnic and non-coethnic elites to receive a majority of votes and be reelected. I identify four important variables that moderate the differences in the extent of favoritism that leaders show in their resource allocations: (1) the population share of leaders' coethnic group, (2) the share of other groups in their ruling coalitions, (3) incumbents' capacity to punish defecting elites, and (4) the amount of benefits that challengers offer to elites in the ruling coalitions.

The game-theoretic model suggests that numerous studies disagree on a set of moderators, primarily because they focus on crude country-level characteristics, such as the level of democracy or economic development. In a review of past cross-country analyses, I reinterpret the empirical results in light of the model's predictions and propose investigating factors that directly affect top leaders' strategic choices regarding political coalition-building across a diverse set of elites. My review of past cross-country analyses of ethnic favoritism demonstrates that they are motivated by

inductive reasoning rather than a single coherent theoretical framework. I argue that explaining heterogeneity in ethnic favoritism can be done best by examining leader-level (rather than country-level) factors–many of which have mixed moderating effects on the outcome of interest.

In this paper, I focus on top leaders' elite-centered coalition-building and its implications for government resource allocation in Africa. This research joins a small but growing literature on African political elites, and goes beyond the traditional models of voting calculi. The way these elites return presidents' favors is under-studied, and exploring the political exchanges among elites is a promising avenue for future research.

2 A Model of Coalition-Building Resource Allocation

In this section, I propose a simple model of distributive politics in ethnically diverse countries. The goal of this section is to answer the following question: When does an incumbent president choose the ethnic *favoritism* allocation strategy rather than the ethnic *balancing* allocation strategy? In other words, I examine conditions under which the top leader channels more resources to her coethnic members in the ruling coalition than to non-coethnic members in the same coalition. Though a theory of ethnic favoritism should explain such cross-country or cross-leader variations, my review of the literature indicates that past studies relied on inductive reasoning rather than a coherent theoretical framework. My model shows that the leader's intra-elite power-sharing is an important predictor of their allocation strategies. The model is directly adapted from Boix and Svolik (2013), an application of a global game, (Carlsson and Van Damme, 1993; Morris and Shin, 1998, 2003) and inspired by Francois et al. (2015).

2.1 Description

There exists an incumbent president and a two-party legislature in an ethnically diverse country. In the legislature (the Parliament), there is a ruling party (which I interchangeably refer to as the incumbent president's ruling coalition) and an opposition party (the group excluded from

the coalition). The ruling party is composed of the Members of Parliament (MPs) belonging to two groups: those who share the same ethnicity as the top leader (coethnic) and those who do not (non-coethnic). The president and her coethnic MPs are the members of an ethnic group A; I refer to the other ethnic groups together as A^C.

I normalize the number of the MPs in the Parliament as one and assume that the number of ruling party members in ethnic group A is α, and the number of those who do not belong to A is β. I assume that $\alpha + \beta \in (\frac{1}{2}, 1)$, meaning the number of the MPs in the ruling party is greater than the majority. By definition, the number of MPs in the opposition party is the remainder: $1 - \alpha - \beta$. It is noteworthy that none of the country's ethnic groups alone constitutes the majority. For simplicity, I assume that $\alpha \in (0, \frac{1}{2})$. Each member of the Parliament is denoted by a subscript i. I also normalize the total number of voters in the country as one. For simplicity, I assume that each MP represents an equal share of voters and there exists a perfect correlation between the ethnic identities of the MP and his voters.

An important distinction between the ruling party and the opposition party is that the members of the ruling party form the top leader's ruling coalition. I assume that the party system in the country is weakly institutionalized. Specifically, members in the ruling party can cross the floor (i.e., quit one party and join another) at the risk of some punishment cost if the incumbent leader is reelected. This means that the incumbent president must sustain political support from her members in the ruling party; otherwise, her political base can quickly disintegrate due to defecting MPs.

The top leader receives the total amount of state resources ρ and decides how to allocate state resources ρ within her ruling coalition. b represents how much she distributes to her coethnic members in the party. Naturally, non-coethnic MPs receive the leftover $\rho - b$. I assume that members receive an equal share of resources assigned to their group.

Because she cannot ensure her political survival by relying solely on her coethnic political elites, she must allocate some state resources to the non-coethnic elites (i.e., $b - \rho$ must be greater than zero). However, the only way to enforce the incumbent president's resource-sharing

is the ruling coalition's credible threat to eject her should she fail to deliver her part of the deal. Specifically, the MPs in the ruling party can join the opposition party and support the challenger. I assume that coethnic MPs in the president's party have no incentive to desert their party due to favors from their leader.[1] It is the MPs belonging to the non-coethnic group in the ruling party who must coordinate among themselves to enforce the leader's promise.

It is noteworthy that all information is publicly available except the total amount of government resources ρ. Assuming that the MPs might not have the full information about the amount of resources available to distribute to the incumbent leader is not unrealistic in hybrid regimes–the mixtures of democracy and autocracy where information is scarce. Additionally, detailed information about the government's budget and incoming foreign aid may be publicly available *ex post* but not *ex ante*. Therefore, I assume here that the true amount of accessible resources is information private to the top leader.

Political elites–except for the leader–cannot observe the amount of benefits *ex ante*. Instead, each member i in the Parliament receives an imperfect signal r_i and they should make inferences about the quantity of government benefits (accessible to the president) based on private signals. The signal r_i is distributed uniformly on the interval $[\rho-\varepsilon, \rho+\varepsilon]$ where $\varepsilon > 0$ is a small, idiosyncratic noise. The distribution of signals is independent across all MPs. For simplicity, I assume that ρ has a uniform prior density on the interval $[0,1]$.

There are four possible scenarios for the non-coethnic MPs in the leader's ruling party. They continue to support the leader, and she maintains political support for her survival in the next period. Each member in the non-coethnic group receives $\frac{b-\rho}{\beta}$. Otherwise, they receive 0. Once a "parliamentary" coup is staged, they can defect to the opposition party and support the challenger. A parliamentary coup succeeds only when the incumbent leader fails to secure a majority of MPs in the legislature before the election. If the coup succeeds, they receive some benefit promised by the challenger $\frac{b_c}{\beta}$. Otherwise, they suffer by paying some punishment cost $c > 0$ from the top

[1] It is equivalent to assume that coethnic MPs incur some cost when defecting from their coethnic leader because their voters probably would not appreciate such move.

leader.

The incumbent leader remains in office as long as (1) she secures a majority of MPs in the legislature and then (2) a majority of votes at the time of the election. The probability that voters cast their votes for the incumbent president is determined by the portion of state resources allocated to their constituencies. I assume that non-coethnic elites are less efficient in vote-buying for the incumbent president because some voters may (mistakenly) attribute the receipt of state resources to non-coethnic elites and the challenger due to the ethnicity mismatch. Formally, they can translate resources into a $\tau \in (0,1)$ portion of votes, whereas coethnic MPs do not have such attrition issues.[2] Formally, the incumbent's payoff is determined simply as the following: $R\Pr[\text{reelection}]$ where $R > 0$ is a reelection rent. The challenger has the same payoff function.

The timing of the game is as follows:

1. The incumbent forms the ruling party composed of her coethnic and non-coethnic groups and chooses the share of state resources b and $\rho - b$ for the two groups, respectively.
2. Each member in the ruling coalition receives a signal $r_i \sim U[\rho - \varepsilon, \rho + \varepsilon]$. They decide whether to remain in their current party or defect to another party.
   (a) If the incumbent stays in office, the MPs who defected incur some cost $c > 0$ and are replaced by new MPs from the opposition party.
   (b) Otherwise, the challenger rewards MPs who defected with some benefit b_c and the game ends.
3. Then the election takes place and the winner is decided.

[2] While this assumption does not change the main result in a meaningful way, it allows that the leader's ethnic group does not need to be large to have a biased allocation of resources–which is more consistent with empirical evidence.

2.2 Equilibrium

The key strategic tension here is the conflict between the incumbent leader's electoral concerns and her concerns over a potential "parliamentary" coup. On the one hand, investing in coethnic MPs is more profitable in terms of securing votes in the upcoming election. On the other hand, if the incumbent leader allocates too many resources to her own coethnic group in the coalition, her chance of running for office may drop significantly due to the defections by the non-coethnic group. Upon receiving private signals, members of the non-coethnic groups in the ruling party must coordinate to expel the incumbent leader from office. Therefore, the incumbent must find an optimal division of state resources among her coethnic and non-coethnic elites in order to maximize the probability of her political survival.

To solve the game, I first analyze the conditions under which a "parliamentary" coup succeeds. On the one hand, as described above, I assume that the coethnic members of the ruling party have no incentive to join the coup given the ethnic favoritism they enjoy.[3] On the other hand, the non-coethnic members face a coordination game among themselves because they receive an imperfect, private signal about the benefit they will receive. Suppose there are only two non-coethnic members (denoted by 1 and 2) in the ruling coalition, and the coup succeeds only if both of them defect to the opposition party at the same time. The table shows the payoffs for the two members.

		Non-coethnic MP 2	
		Defect	Stay
Non-coethnic MP 1	Defect	$b_c/2,\ b_c/2$	$-c,\ (\rho-b)/2$
	Stay	$(\rho-b)/2,\ -c$	$(\rho-b)/2,\ (\rho-b)/2$

If the top leader's budget ρ were public information, there would be three different cases to consider depending on the value of ρ:

[3] It is possible that some coethnic members–though a small amount–could find their share of resources to be unfairly modest due to noises. However, I can abstract away from this issue by assuming some additional costs involved with their defection (because of their shared ethnic identity with the president).

1. $\rho < b - 2c$: each player has a dominant strategy to defect.
2. $\rho \in [b - 2c, b + b_c]$: there are two pure strategy Nash equilibria (i.e., both defect and both stay).
3. $\rho > b + b_c$: each player has a dominant strategy to stay.

However, because there is incomplete information about ρ among non-coethnic MPs, they face a collective action problem.

Given the signal r_i, a ruling coalition member i believes that ρ is distributed uniformly on the interval $[r_i - \varepsilon, r_i + \varepsilon]$. In substantive terms, they neither have knowledge about the amount of the top leader's available resources nor have the other non-coethnic MP's perceptions about the leader's budget.

Suppose that MPs use a threshold strategy where if they observe a signal above $r^\star$ they stay in their ruling party and defect to the opposition party otherwise. Then an MP who observes the signal $r^\star$ must be indifferent to staying or defecting. Let π denote the probability of a parliamentary coup's failure. Then the member i's expected payoff from staying in the ruling party is $(1-\pi)0 + \pi\frac{\rho - b}{\beta}$. Her expected payoff from defecting to the opposition party is $(1-\pi)\frac{b_c}{\beta} + \pi(-c)$. Because she should be indifferent between these two choices, it follows that $\pi = \frac{b_c}{\beta c + b_c + (\rho - b)}$.

Then, the following question is: What is the probability π that the coup fails? Assuming the threshold strategy around $r^\star$, the proportion of MPs who support the challenger is the sum of (1) the proportion of the opposition MPs and (2) the proportion of non-coethnic MPs in the ruling party who receive a signal $r_i < r^\star$. A parliamentary coup succeeds only if the proportion of the MPs supporting the challenger exceeds $1/2$. Thus, the probability π is written as $\Pr[p < p^\star | r_i = r^\star]$ where $p^\star = \frac{1}{2}$ and p is the proportion of MPs who support the challenger and it is simply: $(1 - \alpha - \beta) + \beta \Pr[r_i < r^\star]$. Because $\Pr[r_i < r^\star] = \frac{(r^\star - \rho + \varepsilon)}{2\varepsilon}$, the expression can be further simplified as: $(1 - \alpha - \beta) + \frac{\beta(r^\star - \rho + \varepsilon)}{2\varepsilon}$. Thus,

$$\pi = \Pr[p < p^\star | r_i = r^\star] = \Pr\left[(1 - \alpha - \beta) + \frac{\beta(r^\star - \rho + \varepsilon)}{2\varepsilon} < \frac{1}{2} \middle| r_i = r^\star\right] \tag{1}$$

A threshold signal $r^\star$ implies the existence of a threshold government resource $\rho^\star$ such that a parliamentary coup fails if $\rho \geq \rho^\star$ and succeeds if $\rho < \rho^\star$. When the government budget is $\rho^\star$, the coup barely fails. That is,

$$\pi(\rho^\star) = \frac{b_c}{\beta c + b_c + (\rho^\star - b)}. \tag{2}$$

By simplifying Equation 1 and equating it with Equation 2, I can compute $\rho^\star$ and $r^\star$.

Proposition 1. *In a unique equilibrium, the non-coethnic elites' parliamentary coup fails if $\rho \geq \rho^\star$ and succeeds if $\rho < \rho^\star$, and each non-coethnic elite stays in the ruling coalition if $r_i \leq r^\star$ and defects to the opposition party if $r_i > r^\star$, where*

$$\rho^\star = b + \frac{1-2\alpha}{2(\alpha+\beta)-1} b_c - \beta c$$
$$r^\star = b + \frac{1-2\alpha}{2(\alpha+\beta)-1} b_c - \beta c + \frac{\varepsilon}{\beta}[2\alpha + \beta - 1].$$

Proof. In the Supporting Information. □

Given the above result, I can now express the incumbent leader's utility function as a product of her chances of staying in power before the election and her chances of winning the election. The incumbent's problem is defined as below:

$$\max_{b \in (0,\rho)} R \frac{2b(\alpha - \tau\beta)}{1 - 2\tau\beta} \left[1 - \left(b + \frac{1-2\alpha}{2(\alpha+\beta)-1} b_c - \beta c \right) \right]. \tag{3}$$

Proposition 2. *The incumbent's optimal strategy is as follows:*

$$b^\star = \begin{cases} \min\{P/2, \rho\} & \text{if } P \in (0,1), Q > 0 \\ \rho & \text{if } P = 1, Q > 0 \end{cases}$$

where $P = 1 - \frac{1-2\alpha}{2(\alpha+\beta)-1} b_c + \beta c$ and $Q = \frac{2(\alpha-\tau\beta)}{1-2\tau\beta}$ for simplicity. If $P = 0$ or $Q = 0$, the leader is indifferent between any value $b^\star \in [0, \rho]$.

Proof. In the Supporting Information. □

P can be interpreted as the probability of a coup's failure should no resource be allocated to the non-coethnic elites; and Q is the relative importance of coethnic elites in buying votes. The result suggests that if the non-coethnic elites' parliamentary coup is expected to certainly fail ($P = 1$), then the incumbent's best move is to invest all available resources in coethnic elites. A similar case arises if such probability is sufficiently high (i.e., $P > 2\rho$). Otherwise, the incumbent must choose an optimal share for her coethnic elites between 0 and ρ in order to maximize her chances of staying in office.

2.3 Testable hypothesis

In this section, I analyze the comparative statics and their implications for empirical studies on ethnic favoritism in distributive politics across political leaders and countries.[4]

Hypothesis 1. The greater the population share of the incumbent leader's ethnic group (α), the greater the share of state resources for her coethnic group. The degree of ethnic favoritism increases as the size of the leader's coethnic base increases. Assuming a high correlation between the share of a coethnic group's population and the share of coethnic elites, having a large coethnic population is a great advantage for the incumbent president when allocating state resources among ethnic groups. This is because it implies a higher proportion of loyal allies in the legislature–thereby lowering the chances of a parliamentary coup–and also a higher proportion of coethnic voters nationwide at the time of the election–thereby securing votes more efficiently. This is consistent with the idea of a "leadership premium" that the president's coethnic group enjoys when she allocates ministerial posts (Francois et al., 2015).[5]

Hypothesis 2. The greater the population share of the non-coethnic group in the ruling coalition (β), the greater the share of state resources for her coethnic group. This result may seem counterintuitive in light of the view of the ethnic coalition as a minimum winning coalition (Bates,

[4]See the Supporting Information for the formal derivation.

[5]However, their result suggests a larger ethnic group is relatively less well presented than smaller groups in the top echelon of governments.

1983; Posner, 2004; Riker, 1962). The model suggests that from the perspective of individual elites forming the coalition, this is a valid claim. However, from the viewpoint of the incumbent leader, having more non-coethnic elites in her coalition reduces the number of excluded elites and ultimately leads to a lower probability of a parliamentary coup. This is consistent with empirical evidence (e.g., Francois et al. (2015)). For example, van de Walle (2001) documents numerous instances of anecdotal evidence that African leaders ended up with oversized cabinets since they co-opted opposition elites as ministers to protect the elites in their coalitions from austerity measures. Arriola (2009) shows that cabinet expansion reduces the chances of leader removal by a coup.

Hypothesis 3. The greater the punishment cost that defecting non-coethnic elites incur should the coup fail (c), the greater the share of state resources for the president's coethnic group. This result is straightforward, but it is noteworthy that this does not necessarily imply that the transition to democracy or democratization would reduce the degree of ethnic favoritism. Though Burgess et al. (2015) find no ethnic favoritism in road construction projects in democratic Kenya, many other studies (Franck et al., 2017; Kramon and Posner, 2013, 2016) find widespread ethnic favoritism in Kenya and Africa during periods of democracy. Despite the adoption of multi-party elections across many African countries in the 1990s, a consensus among scholars is that African states remain as hybrid regimes where leaders can oppress the opposition and punish defectors in multiple ways. As long as their patronage capacity (either incurring costs or taking away benefits should they defect) remains intact, the transition to multi-party politics would have a large impact on the degree of ethnic favoritism.

Hypothesis 4. The greater the benefit the challenger offers to the non-coethnic elites in the coalition (b_c), the smaller the share of state resources for her coethnic group. The result is clear: The more the challenger can provide to dissenting members of the coalition, the more likely the coordination among them would succeed and the more the incumbent must allocate resources to the non-coethnic elites to prevent them from joining the challenger. For example, Arriola (2012) argues that in contrast to incumbent politicians, opposition figures rely on private resources to

purchase cross-ethnic endorsements. In light of the model, incumbents "losing the capacity to command the political allegiance of business" (p. 19) and opposition politicians tapping private resources correspond to an increase in the expected benefit b_c of intra-elite coordination.

3 Explaining Variations in Ethnic Favoritism

A theory of ethnic favoritism should explain the variation in the level of favoritism in distributive politics. In this section, I systematically review a cross-country analysis of ethnic favoritism across Africa and the world (reported in Table 1). Among eight studies reviewed in Table 1, six of them analyze multi-country observations–two of which do not attempt to analyze cross-country variations. Therefore, I analyze (1) which moderator in the remaining six studies identifies as a source of variation across countries and/or leaders and (2) the direction of the moderating effect of each moderator in those studies. It is noteworthy that–except Dreher et al. (2019), who investigates patterns of Chinese aid allocation–all other studies examine indirect welfare measures, local economic development, and a related measure of favoritism (tax rate). This is likely because subnational, fine-grained public goods data are much harder to collect than indirect outcomes. In light of the model's predictions, I interpret the findings from those six multi-country studies.

First, while my model predicts that the ethnic favoritism strategy is moderated by unique political landscapes that top leaders face during their terms, most studies conduct cross-*country* analysis rather than cross-*leader* analysis. If incumbent presidents' allocation strategies are motivated by their political survival and concerns over political coalition-building around elites, it is important to examine leader-specific variables. Yet, among 26 moderators listed in Table 1, only four (roughly 15%) are leader-specific covariates (denoted by L in the Selected moderators column). These studies report mixed effects on whether country-level covariates have any moderating effect on ethnic favoritism. For example, the level of democracy (mostly measured by the Polity score) sometimes reduced the degree of ethnic favoritism and had no effect at other times. The same holds for the level of economic development. In addition, these studies use different data

sources to measure social and cultural fractionalization at the country level and they do not find any consistent results. It is possible that these mixed results are due to the under-theorization of top leaders' strategic trade-offs in determining which distribution strategy they must implement.

Second, the simple theory of resource allocation presented in this paper suggests that there is much more room for the investigation of cross-leader variation in favoritism. For example, the population share of national leaders' coethnic groups and non-coethnic groups (more specifically, coethnic *elites*) in their ruling coalitions are expected to be major predictors of favoritism but none of them are included in previous studies.[6] Instead, existing studies examine only a handful of leader-specific factors such as the timing of the election, the presence of term limit, and the competitiveness of presidential elections.

Taking my model's predictions into account, I here attempt to reinterpret the finding reported by prior research. Though the model does not consider the time dimension of resource allocation, De Luca et al. (2018) and Dreher et al. (2019) demonstrate the political business cycle of ethnic favoritism.[7] Dreher et al. (2019, 58) find the importance of electoral competition in determining the level of favoritism and argue that incumbent leaders "deliver clientelistic rewards to their core constituencies" when facing competitive elections. Instead, my model implies that it is probably due to increased pressure on vote-buying concerns: Leaders are more likely to turn to coethnic elites due to their higher vote-buying efficiency than non-coethnic elites. The interpretation of the null finding on the moderating effect of a term limit in De Luca et al. (2018, 125) is agnostic. While acknowledging that political leaders may have a "strong preference for a coethnic as a future leader, they also conjecture that leaders might "compensate the decrease in distortions

[6]On the contrary, Francois et al. (2015) evaluate the effect of the population share of leaders' coethnic voters on cabinet allocation across ethnic groups. To the extent that the allocation of top government positions is correlated with the distribution of state resources, it is consistent with the model's prediction.

[7]This strategic behavior can be incorporated into the existing model by converting it to a repetitive game rather than a one-shot game.

with an increase in corruption." My model instead (indirectly) implies that there should be no moderating effect. This is because the term limit itself does not reinforce leaders' needs to buy votes more efficiently nor strengthen the coordination capacity of non-coethnic elites in the ruling coalition.

Last, it is important to note that all these studies examine the degree of the incumbent's favoritism toward coethnic *voter* bases or individual coethnic *voters* rather than the level of their favoritism towards coethnic *elites*. As long as the ethnic identity of elites is a more important measure by which incumbent leaders allocate government public goods (as this paper's empirical results suggest), explaining heterogeneity in the extent of ethnic favoritism across leaders with the reduced form outcomes would be much more demanding because of the noise associated with the dependent variables.

In sum, I unpack strategic incentives that leaders are facing in multi-ethnic countries with a simple model of state resource allocation. My review of past cross-country analyses of ethnic favoritism demonstrates that they are motivated by inductive reasoning rather than a single coherent theoretical framework. In addition, I argue that explaining heterogeneity in ethnic favoritism can be done best by examining leader-level (rather than country-level) factors, such as the level of democracy or economic development–many of which are found to have mixed moderating effects on the outcome of interest.

Table 1: Review of Cross-Country Analysis of Ethnic Favoritism

Paper	Selected moderators	Direction of effect
Kasara (2007)	Electoral competitiveness	Decreases (un)favoritism
	Level of democracy	No effect
Franck and Rainer (2012)	Land area	No effect
	Tax revenue	Increases favoritism
	Public expenditure	Mixed effects
	Level of democracy	Decreases favoritism
	Frequency of coups	No effect
	Cultural fractionalization	No effect
	Dominant religion	Decreases favoritism
Kramon and Posner (2013)	NA	NA
Hodler and Raschkey (2014)	Level of democracy	Decreases favoritism
	Education level	Decreases favoritism
	Economic development	Decreases favoritism
	Linguistic heterogeneity	No effect
	Strength of family ties	No effect
	Foreign aid inflow	Increases favoritism
	Oil rents income	No effect
De Luca et al. (2018)	Economic development	No effect
	Level of democracy	No effect
	Presence of term limits (L)	No effect
	Before leadership election (L)	Increases favoritism
	Presence of ethnic party	Increases favoritism
	Linguistic distance	Decreases favoritism
Dreher et al. (2019)	Before leadership election (L)	Increases favoritism
	Electoral competitiveness (L)	Increases favoritism
Haass and Ottmann (2021)	NA	NA
Beiser-McGrath et al. (2021)	Level of democracy	Decreases favoritism
	Electoral system	No effect

Notes: In the Selected moderators column, L denotes a leader-level covariate. Kramon and Posner (2013) analyze heterogeneity across various welfare outcomes. Haass and Ottmann (2021) that show the number of ethnic groups within grid cells moderates the degree of ethnic favoritism.

4 Discussion

In this article, I introduced a simple model of resource distribution that puts the incumbent's coalition-building around elites at the center of analysis. A review of previous cross-country analyses suggests that mixed results on several country-level variables, especially those measuring political environments, are caused by the under-theorization of ethnic favoritism in hybrid regimes in Africa. Using the model's predictions, I identify a set of factors that would moderate the level of ethnic favoritism across leaders for future research.

By doing so, I contribute to the scholarship on distributive politics in Africa. This study calls for more focus on the role of political elites in ethnic politics. Despite their importance in leaders' coalition-building, scholars paid little attention to MPs, ministers, and mayors until recently. While my research recognizes the primacy of the presidents in distributional conflict, the nature of political exchanges among elites is less well understood compared to voters' vote choices. Exploring the political exchanges among elites is a promising avenue for future research.

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