

Do Elections Manipulate Citizens' Everyday Economic Decisions?
Field Experiments in Ghana
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How does *elite-level* party competition influence patterns of behavior at the *citizen-level* in Africa? Is citizen-level behavior unaffected by elections, unable to be manipulated by campaigning political elites? Alternatively, do elections exacerbate *interpartisan* or *interethnic* discrimination? Though some scholarship and much popular media implicitly assumes that individuals fixedly approach political and economic processes through a purely ethnic lens (especially regarding tribe in Africa), the argument put forth in my dissertation suggests that individuals have much more complex and nuanced patterns of behavior with response to elections. Namely, elections act to increase the salience of partisanship as a social group identity and *these fluctuations cause behavioral changes in citizens' essential everyday economic transactions and attitudes towards each other*. In this dissertation, I put forth a theoretical argument as to why these fluctuations occur in African democracies, and I empirically investigate the argument by conducting field experiments, implementing a large-n survey, and conducting qualitative interviews in Ghana with regards to the December 2008 National Elections. I find that citizens increasingly exhibit discriminatory behavior in economic decision making and attitudes on the basis of partisanship as the election approaches and in response to campaign rhetoric. In this memo, I will describe just one of the field experiments and its results.

This project contributes to three main strands of political science literature. First, there are a few seminal theories of partisanship formation in advanced democracies and a budding literature on partisanship formation in new democracies.² However, regardless as to how

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²See Campbell (1986), cite Fiorina (1981), Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002), Settle, Dawes and

partisan affiliations are formed, I argue it thereafter becomes a group identity and it varies in its salience with response to political impulses such as elections. I argue this is especially true in developing economies. If partisanship is a group identity, what are the implications for behavior? We should see partisanship shape behavior between Copartisans and non-Copartisans in similar ways as other group identities have been found to do, namely, we should observe discrimination between individuals based on partisan affiliation during competition.³ This study builds upon this recent work by (1) theoretically and empirically examining how partisan affiliation exhibits signs of a group identity in a developing democracy and (2) exploring the meaning and consequences of party identification in sub-Saharan Africa, where we know surprisingly little about partisanship.⁴

The second strand of literature seeks to explain the relationship between political competition and ethnic identity. This scholarship has generally found that ethnic identity is fluid and endogenous to political competition in the very long-run, ethnic voting and ethnic appeals made by (ethnic) political parties are largely self-reinforcing in the medium-run, and that group identity priming can manipulate citizen-level ethnic identity salience in the very short-run.⁵ Indeed, parties are said to use ethnicity in particular as a “cheap” way to garner political support. Though the fluidity of identities according to the constructivist theory has become the leader in the ethnic politics literature, we have much to discover as to how, why, and at what speed identity change takes place (or does not) and what the behavioral consequences of these changes are. This study contributes by going beyond identity change and

Fowler (forthcoming 2009), Huber, Kernell and Leoni (2005) for classic literature and Norris and Mattes (N.d.), Lupu and Stokes (N.d.), Rose (1998), Brader and Tucker (N.d.), Brader and Tucker (2007), Dalton and Weldon (2007), Samuels (2004), Fridy (2007), and Ishiyama (2006) for partisanship formation in new democracies.

³Indeed, this is found in Kam, Cranmer and Fowler (N.d.) between Democrats and Republicans in the USA, though the study suffers from methodological issues.

⁴For cross-national work see Ishiyama (2006) and Norris and Mattes (N.d.), and for Ghana see Fridy (2007).

⁵See Laitin (1986), Chandra (2008); Posner (2004), Posner (2004), Birnir (2007), Horowitz (1985), Dickson and Scheve (2009 forthcoming); Eifert, Miguel and Posner (2007), Brass (1997), Wilkinson (2004), Varshney (2002); Shih, Pittinsky and Ambady (1999)

investigating its implications for observable behaviors that matter significantly in citizens' everyday lives.

Third, scholars in economics, social psychology, and political science have focused attention on the role of group membership in economic decision-making between ordinary individuals. A plethora of literature in social psychology and behavioral economics has found consistent evidence for in-group favoritism in resource allocation between individuals with regards to a variety of group types, including ethnic groups, and a variety of resource allocation decisions.⁶ This study is the first of its kind to look at the effect of *elections* on citizen-level economic decision making. Moreover, much of the empirical work has used non-naturally-occurring groups and/or has sought to manipulate the group-based discrimination using hypothetical or simulated treatments.⁷ This present study sheds new light onto this interdisciplinary scholarship by conducting an empirical analysis using naturally-occurring identities and treatments.

How Elections Manipulate Everyday Behaviors of Ordinary Citizens

While groups (such as ethnic groups) may be the most prominent networks facilitating access to scarce resources in off-election times, elite-level party competition elevates partisanship as a relevant network through which to obtain scarce resources during elections. Party competition can change both the costs and benefits of partisan affiliation. Political parties undertake all sorts of mobilization activities to activate partisan groups through campaign tactics such as rallies, political speeches appealing directly to the groups, neighborhood meetings, information dissemination, etc.⁸ Through these efforts, parties sink the cost of active partisan affiliation. Furthermore, they promise jobs and hand out cash, t-shirts and other benefits

⁶See e.g. Eckel and Grossman (2005) for a review.

⁷Though see Whitt and Wilson (2007) for an exception.

⁸Indeed, it is hard to get music on the radio in Ghana leading up to the election for all the commentary on the election.

to increase the benefit of participating in partisan activities. In many developing democracies, citizens legitimately believe they will get increased access to state resources if they are Copartisans with office holders. Thus, electoral competition becomes high-stakes for both elites and citizens.⁹

Research Design

One way I investigate whether there are changing patterns of behavior in everyday economic activity based on ethnicity and/or partisanship induced by an election, is by examining price bargaining. Bargaining over goods and services is typical in sub-Saharan Africa. The theory (described elsewhere) predicts that a seller of a good or service will sell the good at:

H1: A consistently lower price for Coethnics versus non-Coethnics.

H2: A lower price for Copartisans versus non-Copartisans only around the time of the election.

Alternatively, elections could simply act to exacerbate discrimination between ethnic groups, as often reported in the media. Or yet another contrary result would be that citizens' behavior is relatively fixed and immutable to party competition.

The 2008 National Elections in Ghana were a wonderful opportunity to conduct this research, given Ghana's political institutions, level of democratic consolidation, and party system. In Ghana, access to government-provided resources is often personalized and granted on the basis of shared group membership with office holders. Thus, partisans of the winning party will enjoy enhanced access to material resources (such as government jobs).¹⁰ Ghana has a presidential system where the president is elected by majority with a "one person, one vote"

⁹Chandra (2004) and Wantchekon (2005) find that politicians trade votes for patronage in a self-reinforcing relationship.

¹⁰Ghana is a conservative test because this is even more so in the majority of African countries.

rule. If no party wins 50% + 1 vote in the first round, the leading two parties participate in a runoff. Since elected officials serve fixed terms, election timing is exogenous, as opposed to a parliamentary system in which elections may be called endogenously to anything, most worryingly, something which would directly or indirectly affect price bargaining, thus contaminating the “election treatment”.

Though explicitly ethnic parties are actually banned in Ghana, tribes are largely nested by political parties. At the time of the experiment, Ghanaians believe that Akan tribes (e.g. Ashanti, Fanti, Achim, Akuapim, Kwowu) are generally in the NPP camp and the non-Akan tribes (e.g. Ewe, Ga, some Northerners) are generally in the NDC camp.¹¹ These beliefs derive from historical patterns of ethnic voting and party composition leading up to the 2008 election.¹² Because I do not want to leave citizens’ beliefs about the partisanship of the average Ashanti, Ewe and so forth as an assumption, I confirm that these beliefs are true in a large-n survey which is representative of the Accra population. In my price bargaining experiment, I use individuals from the four numerically largest ethnic groups. The nesting of these groups into the two major parties is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Political Parties Nesting Ethnic Groups in Ghana



Lastly, since the major tribes are distinguishable by language, ethnic identity and partisan identity of a partner with whom a subject is interacting can be subtly rather than overtly

¹¹Though post-election, we see that the nesting has somewhat broken down. I hypothesize why elsewhere.

¹²See Frempong (2006) and also according to the author’s own data analysis using data from the Electoral Commission of Ghana for the 2004 election. Though see Anebo (2006) for an opposing opinion.

communicated through language and accent such that the study's subjects are not aware of the study's purpose.

To assess the effect of electoral competition on ordinary citizen-level behaviors, my strategy was to collect data 6 months prior to a national election before campaigning began, and directly before the election.¹³ The first round of data collection occurred between July 29th and 30th, 2008 and the second round from December 3-5, 2008. The election was held on December 7, 2008. In each round of data collection, which is conducted identically, I measure the behaviors of randomly matched buyer-seller pairings of ordinary male citizens in a market for a product with no central market clearing mechanism, and thus negotiable prices. The product I chose was taxi fare. Subjects who are Ashanti, Ewe, Fanti, or Ga hail a taxi cab from Location 1, bargain a price, and ride to Location 2. Then these "riders" repeat the exercise back to Location 1. Besides being negotiable, I picked taxi cab fare because I did not want a seasonal product or a product where I could not control the size or quality. Essentially, I want the only variable aspects of the interaction to be (1) the type of pairing, and (2) whether it is in the off-election or election time. This assures that differences in price outcomes are due to these variables alone. Possible pairing types will be Co-Ethnic/Co-partisan, Non-Co-ethnic/Co-partisan, or Non-Co-ethnic/Non-Co-partisan.¹⁴

The specific proceedings were as follows. First, I recruited male Ghanaians by hand-distributing flyers around the major market in Accra "Circle". This area is where all sorts of goods and services are sold and includes the biggest transportation hub in the city. I used males only because there are gender effects in bargaining and I did not want to have to increase the n.

¹³If I am selected for the APSA Africa conference, I will receive funding to conduct another round of data collection after the conference as well. I see this as obligatory step in the dissertation to minimize any contamination by unobservables.

¹⁴Co-ethnic/Non-Co-partisan does not exist where political parties nest ethnic groups.

Next, the subjects were read the instructions and took a quiz to check for comprehension. Members of each tribe memorized a script in their native language to start the taxi fare bargaining, which would be a typical thing to say in the situation. The script translated into English would be something like: “Good Afternoon. I am going to the [Location]. What is your price?”. This opener indicates the tribe of the rider to the driver. After that, the rider and driver could negotiate how they pleased. The rider also knows the ethnicity and partisanship (by proxy) of the driver due to his accent. However, each subject was only allowed to speak their native language and if the driver could not communicate in that particular language, the subject could use English. They were not allowed to speak any other Ghanaian language. Additionally, they had to accept the lowest price they were able to bargain - they could not switch to a different cab.

Each round, a rider was given a data slip to mark the information, and 3.5 Ghana cedis. The riders went one at a time to hail the third taxi which came down the road. This selection procedure ensures that the tribe of the taxi driver is random, and thus, driver-rider pairings are randomly Co-Ethnic/Co-partisan, Non-Co-ethnic/Co-partisan, or Non-Co-ethnic/Non-Co-partisan. In Ghana, negotiation takes place outside the vehicle, then, once the price is agreed, the rider enters the cab. Thus, the bargaining cannot be influenced by other buyers and sellers. In most African countries, bargaining for goods and services is typical for most products. The delivery of the opening script and the adherence to the rules of the experiment were monitored by myself or a research assistant, whereby we pretended not to know the riders and not to pay attention behind sunglasses. The locations chosen were on busy major roads so that there would be enough people coming and going so as not to attract attention. Moreover, the locations were picked so that there were no convenient public transportation in between and indeed no common single route or de facto price.

Once in the car, the rider was instructed to confirm the ethnic identity of the driver and rate

the quality of the taxicab.¹⁵ The rider then pulled up in front of either the Researcher or the Research Assistant. Then the process was repeated. The rider paid the cab driver and kept any money left over from the 3.5 Ghana cedis. Profit maximizing riders will want to bargain the price down so as to earn more money, while for the same reason, drivers will want to charge a higher price. By analyzing the data, I can determine whether riders are able to bargain better prices when they share ethnicity or partisanship with the driver. Further, I can identify whether prices by pairing type change due to the election.

Results and Conclusions

The results confirm the hypotheses. Table 1 reveals the determinants of taxi fare price in an “off election” time (late July) and at “election” time (early December) using OLS. The dependent variable is taxi fare paid. The group left out of the right hand side are Non-Coethnic/Non-Copartisan pairings. Sharing Coethnicity (and thus Copartisanship) is significantly different from Non-Coethnic/Non-Copartisan pairings at both times. Non-Coethnic pairings which are Copartisan do not achieve significantly different prices than those which are Non-Copartisans in the off-election season. However, prices in Non-Coethnic pairings which are Copartisan *are significantly different* than those which are Non-Copartisans at election time. Non-Coethnic/Copartisans pay less than Non-Coethnic/Non-Copartisans.

Other determinants of taxi fare price matter less. In the last couple of rounds on one of the dates in December it rained heavily (although oddly it is considered the dry season at this time), and rain significantly raised the price of the taxifare. This may reflect the unwillingness of the riders to bargain down the price due to the discomfort of the rain. In these regressions the rider’s age does not seem to have a meaningful effect on price though

¹⁵In the post-experiment debriefing, I confirmed that there was only 2 cases of misidentification amongst drivers from the four groups used in the experiment. Results are robust when I drop these cases.

Table 1: “Off-election” and “Election” determinants of taxi fare price

	<i>Off-election (July)</i>	<i>Election (December)</i>
Coethnic	-0.10 (0.06)**	-0.32 (0.04)***
Non-Coethnic/Co-partisan	0.06 (0.07)	-0.19 (0.04)***
Rider’s Age	0.01 (0.00)**	0.00 (0.00)
Taxi Quality	0.00 (0.00)	0.03 (0.02)
Ride Number	-0.01 (0.01)**	-0.01 (0.01)
Rain	no rain	0.21 (0.06)***
Constant	2.00 (0.12)***	2.34 (0.11)***
Observations	257	580

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

80% of the riders were between 18 and 30. The riders were asked to rate the quality of the vehicle. However, this was not significant in determining taxifare, perhaps because negotiation takes place outside the car and quality is unobservable or because it does not matter in the price. I also control for the ride number because the subjects could become better at bargaining over time. Ride number was not a substantively significant determinant of taxifare. This may be because learning is taking place by the riders, but at the same time, traffic is becoming heavier as the afternoon progresses, canceling out the learning effect.

Exploring the data further and getting to the heart of the analysis, what effect does the election have on prices? Observe OLS results in Table 2. The data in Column 1 reveal that, though coethnicity is a large determinant of taxi fare price regardless of political impulses, Coethnics still pay less around the election versus in the off-election season. Further, Column 2 shows that non-Coethnicity in pairings does not cause significantly different prices around the election versus in the off-election period. Thus, we can reject the idea that the election simply exacerbates interethnic price discrimination.

However, if we disaggregate non-Coethnics into Copartisans and non-Copartisans in Column 3 and 4, a very distinctive difference in price along the partisan cleavage occurs at election

Table 2: The effect of the election on taxi fare prices of rider-driver pairings by type

	<i>Coethnic Pairings</i>	<i>All Non-Coethnic Pairings</i>	<i>Non-Coethnic/Copartisan Pairings</i>	<i>Non-Coethnic/Non-Copartisan Pairings</i>
Election	-0.09 (0.05)*	0.05 (0.04)	-0.14 (0.07)**	0.10 (0.04)***
Constant	2.07 (0.04)***	2.19 (0.03)***	2.2 (0.06)***	2.18 (0.04)***
Observations	212	636	156	480

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

versus off-election time. In Non-Coethnic pairings, sharing partisanship significantly *decreases* the price while *not* sharing the same partisanship significantly *increases* the price. These findings confirm the hypothesis that an election does not merely act to exacerbate interethnic discrimination, but rather, citizens show much more nuanced behavioral changes in response to election campaigning that reflects partisan cleavages.

Can elite party competition manipulate non-cooperative behavior between citizens? This study provides a “yes”. Elite-level party competition *does* manipulate patterns of ordinary price bargaining behavior at the citizen-level around an election, and in a more complex way than many would initially think. Citizen-level group-based behavior is not merely fixed and primordial, but fluid to politics.