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URBAN-RURAL DIFFERENCES IN SUPPORT FOR INCUMBENTS ACROSS AFRICA

by Robin Harding

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SUPPORT FOR INCUMBENTS ACROSS
AFRICA**

by Robin Harding

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Urban-Rural Differences in Support for Incumbents Across Africa

Abstract

Across sub-Saharan Africa support for incumbent governments is significantly higher among rural residents than urbanites, although the magnitude of this difference varies across countries. In this paper I use public opinion data from the Afrobarometer Survey Series to provide systematic evidence of this urban-rural difference in incumbent support in 18 African countries. Moreover, I consider a number of different explanations for urban incumbent hostility, and present empirical evidence that provides preliminary support for an account that acknowledges electoral incentives created by the interaction between democracy and demography. Most simply stated, competitive elections make African governments more responsive to rural interests. Because a majority of Africans live in rural areas, democracy creates incentives for governments to favor rural interests at the expense of the urban minority, thereby resulting in dissatisfaction on the part of urban voters.

A unique observable implication of this argument is that urban incumbent hostility should reduce as the urban proportion of a country's population increases. I use individual- and national-level data in a hierarchical setting to show that this is indeed the case - while urbanites are less likely to support incumbents, this effect is mitigated by higher levels of urbanization. Along with data on perceptions of government performance across a range of policy tasks, this finding supports the argument that urban hostility results, at least in part, from the pursuance of pro-rural policies by incumbent governments.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that African political parties mobilize ethnic or regional constituencies, not urban or rural ones. Yet despite these ethnically- or regionally-based cleavages, urban voters across sub-Saharan Africa (hereon just Africa) are significantly less likely than their rural counterparts to support incumbent governments. Moreover, the extent of urban hostility towards incumbents varies across countries. In this paper I provide systematic evidence of this urban-rural difference in incumbent support in 18 African countries, using public opinion data from the Afrobarometer Survey Series. I consider various explanations for this difference, and present empirical evidence offering preliminary support for an account that acknowledges the electoral incentives created by the interaction between democracy and demography. Most simply stated, competitive elections make African governments more responsive to the demands of rural interests. Because in most African countries a majority of the population lives in rural areas, democracy creates political incentives for governments to favor rural interests while ignoring the urban minority, thereby generating dissatisfaction on the part of urban voters.

This account complements other explanations of urban-rural differences in incumbent support that focus on socio-demographic differences between urban and rural residents, and on how differences between urban and rural contexts affect political competition and mobilization. Political behavior is multi-causal; it is likely that numerous factors explain the differences between urban and rural voters. However, a unique implication of the argument offered herein is that urban incumbent hostility should reduce as the urban proportion of a country's population increases. This implication makes it observably distinct from alternative explanations, thereby enabling evaluation of the value added by this account. In this paper I undertake one such evaluation by investigating the relationship between urban incumbent hostility and the urban-rural distribution of the population, using individual- and national-level data in a hierarchical setting.

In the following section I present systematic individual-level evidence of urban incumbent hostility across 18 African countries. In section 3 I review the existing literature on urban-rural electoral cleavages in Africa. In section 4 I present an additional explanation for urban-rural differences in incumbent support that acknowledges the electoral incentives created by democracy. I outline the empirical strategy that will be used to assess the value of this argument in section 5, and present results in section 6.

Evidence of Urban Incumbent Hostility

All else equal, urban residents in Africa are less likely to support incumbents than are their rural counterparts. This pattern has been recognized by Conroy-Krutz (forthcoming), who presents electoral data from twenty-two African countries to show that, in the vast majority of cases, incumbent vote shares are lower in the largest city than they are across the country as a whole. If it were simply the case that parties compete on urban or rural platforms, then this urban hostility might be somewhat intuitive. Given that a majority of Africans live in rural areas, we might expect to see "rural" parties in power across the continent, with urbanites supporting "urban" parties that are perennially in opposition. However, as analysts of African politics have consistently noted, political competition tends to take place predominantly along regional or ethnic lines, with party support traversing both rural and urban areas (see for example: Salih (2003); Kasfir (1979); Mozaffar, Scarritt and Galaich (2003); Omolo (2002); Mozaffar (1995); Glickman (1995); Chazan (1999)).¹ Indeed, for countries across Africa, analyses of patterns in voting behavior at the individual-level, and of the aggregate distributions of party vote shares, have shown that the divisions of political competition tend to be ethnically or regionally based (see for example: Posner (2005); Fox (1996); Throup and Hornsby (1998); Ferree (2004); Oucho (2002); Marae (1993); Norris and Mattes (2003); Ishiyama and Fox (2006)). Yet despite this, there exists a clear tendency for urban voters to be less satisfied with the incumbent party, whichever party this may be.

¹ The one exception of a specifically rural party that the author is aware of is the National Lima Party, which contested the 1996 elections in Zambia on an agricultural platform, and won no seats.

This point is illustrated nicely by data from Ghana. Table 1 presents vote shares from the five presidential elections in Ghana since the return to multiparty competition in 1992, for the two dominant political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP).² The tables compare each parties' vote share nationally to its share in Accra, the capital and largest city. The NDC was the party formed by Jerry Rawlings, who came to power in a coup in 1981, and who then implemented the return to multiparty politics in 1992. It won the 1992 and 1996 elections, before losing power to the NPP in 2000, and then contesting the 2004 elections as the major opposition party. The results shown in Table 1 make two points very clearly. First, neither the NDC nor the NPP can plausibly be labeled an urban or a rural party. Their vote shares are quite evenly balanced in Accra, which would not be so if either one were effectively an urban party representing specifically urban interests. If the parties were divided along urban-rural lines, we would expect to see one party consistently outperforming the other in Accra, but that is certainly not the case. This fits with the recognition that the two dominant political parties in Ghana are cleaved along ethnic lines, with the NPP perceived to be a predominantly Asante party and the NDC an Ewe party (Fridy 2007).

Table 1: Ghanaian Election Results, 1992-2008

NDC Vote Share				
<i>Election</i>	<i>Vote Share in Accra</i>	<i>Vote Share Nationwide</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Incumbent?</i>
1992	53.4%	58.4%	-5%	Yes
1996	54%	57.4%	-3.4%	Yes
2000	40%	43%	-3%	Yes
2004	46.3%	44.6%	+2.3%	No
2008	51.9%	47.9%	+4%	No
NPP Vote Share				
<i>Election</i>	<i>Vote Share in Accra</i>	<i>Vote Share Nationwide</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Incumbent?</i>
1992	37%	30.3%	+6.7%	No
1996	43.3%	39.6%	+3.7%	No
2000	60%	57%	+3%	No
2004	51.9%	52.4%	-0.5%	Yes
2008	45.7%	49.1%	-3.4%	Yes

Note: The 2000 election went to a 2nd round runoff between the NDC and NPP candidates. The results shown here are from the second round. All electoral data comes from the Electoral Commission of Ghana.

The second point that comes out of this data, however, is that Accra votes differently to the rest of the country. Specifically, voters in Accra are less likely to support the incumbent, whichever party is in power. When the NDC was in power, its vote share in Accra was consistently lower than its vote share in the country as a whole. As the opposition party in 2004 and 2008, however, its vote share in the capital actually exceeded its share of the national vote. Likewise, as the major opposition party in 1992, 1996 and 2000, the NPP consistently performed better in Accra than it did nationally. After defeating the NDC in 2000, however, as the incumbent party it then fared worse in the capital than elsewhere in 2004, and again in 2008. This clear reversal in fortunes strongly suggests that neither the NDC nor the NPP is the natural urban party. Rather, it seems that no matter which party is in power, the incumbent party simply does worse in Accra than it does in the rest of the country.

² The 2008 data is taken from the first round of the Presidential election, which was held on 7th December 2008. No candidate won a majority of votes, so a runoff was held on 28th December. Data from the runoff are not yet available.

However, individual-level conclusions based on aggregate data are always susceptible to problems of ecological inference. Moreover, it is not possible to determine from the data presented by Krutz, or from the Ghanaian data above, whether the suggested urban hostility is simply a capital (or largest) city effect, or whether it holds for urbanites throughout each country. Public opinion data allows us to overcome these problems by providing individual-level evidence from nationally-representative surveys. Figure 1 presents data from Round Three of the Afrobarometer Survey Series, which shows the difference in incumbent support between rural and urban voters across eighteen African countries (the percentages are available in the Appendix).³

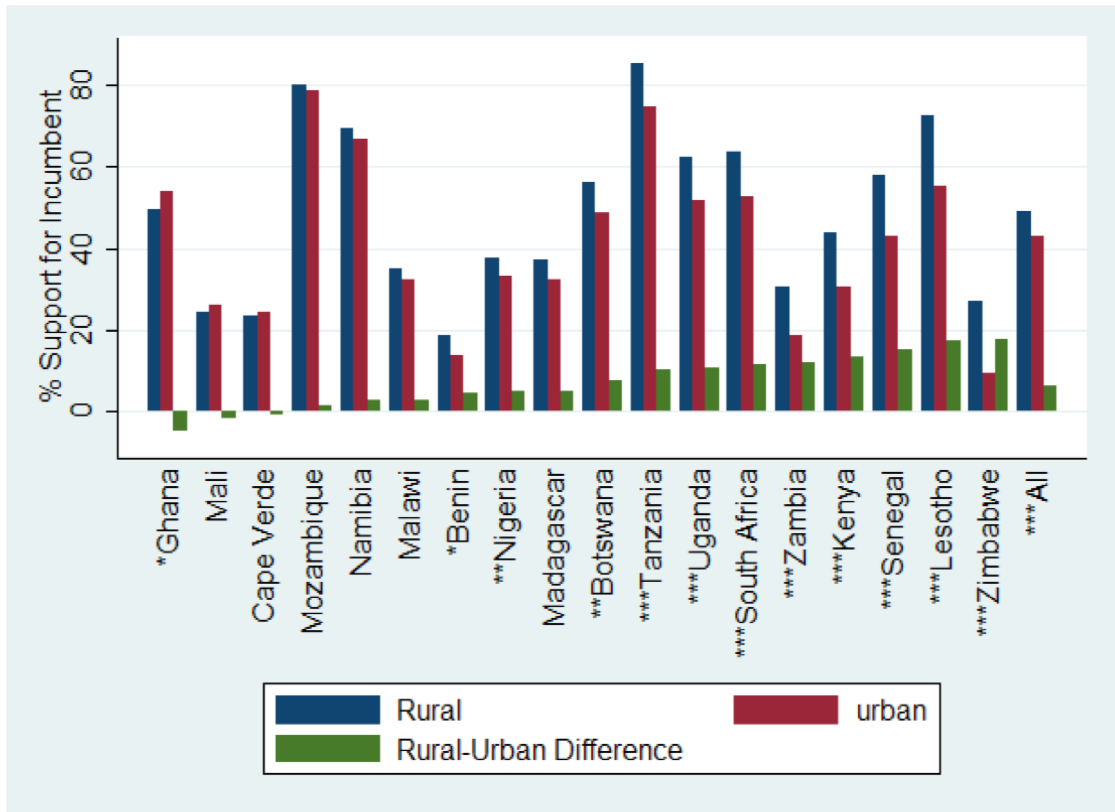


Figure 1: Difference Between Incumbent Support in Rural and Urban Areas in 2005. Differences statistically significant at: *** = $p < .01$; ** = $p < .05$; * = $p < .10$.

As the bar on the far right of Figure 1 shows, when the data is pooled across all 18 countries, urban residents are 6% less likely to support the incumbent. In only three countries were urbanites on average more likely than rural residents to support the governing party (Cape Verde, Ghana and Mali), and apart from Ghana the difference in these cases is not statistically significant. The fact that urbanites in Ghana appear to be more likely to support the incumbent simply serves to illustrate the potential problems with using aggregate data that were highlighted above. However, it should be noted that the difference in Ghana is only significant at the 90% level. More importantly, in all of the fifteen remaining cases the proportion of urbanites expressing support for the incumbent was less than the corresponding rural proportion, and in the vast majority of these the difference is statically significant at the 95% level at least. The results of regression analysis presented in section six show that this urban effect is robust to the inclusion of numerous control variables. But even from

³ Incumbent support is operationalized as expressing an intention to vote for the incumbent party, “if elections were held tomorrow”. The value of interest plotted in Figure 1 is the proportion of rural respondents who would vote for the incumbent less the equivalent proportion of urban respondents, for each country. The data comes from the third round of the Afrobarometer survey series, which carries out nationally-representative household surveys across African democracies. Round Three was carried out in 2005.

this raw data the general pattern is very clear - urbanites across Africa are less likely than rural residents to support the incumbent. Moreover, it is also very clear that there is a significant amount of variation in the extent of this difference across countries. While in cases such as Cape Verde and Mali the difference is insignificant, in Lesotho and Zimbabwe, for example, the proportion of urban residents expressing support for the governing party was fully 17% lower than that of rural respondents.

This raises two important questions: Why are urbanites less likely than rural residents to support incumbents? And, why does the magnitude of this difference vary across countries? In the following section I consider a number of possible explanations for urban incumbent hostility before proposing an additional argument, that given the demographic structure of African populations, electoral competition creates incentives for incumbents to focus resources on pro-rural policies while ignoring the demands of urban voters. I spell out the logic of this argument more thoroughly in Section 4. First though, I review the existing literature on urban-rural voting patterns in Africa.

Explanations in the Literature

Although the vast majority of studies analyzing voting behavior and party competition in Africa have concentrated on ethnic or regional divisions, the urban-rural dimension has not been completely ignored. In a recent study of economic voting in Zambia's 1996 elections, Posner and Simon (2002) include urban-rural location as a control variable, and find that voters in urban areas were actually more likely to support the incumbent than were rural voters. Although contrary to the trend highlighted above, this finding is explicable given the Zambian context, because the ruling MMD party was born out of the urban protest movements of the late 1980s, and because its leader President Chiluba was a former trade unionist with a strong following amongst the urban industrial sector. As Figure 1 shows, this trend has since reversed in Zambia, with the proportion of urban residents supporting the incumbent in 2005 (still the same MMD, but at this time led by the late President Levy Mwanawasa) 13% lower than the equivalent proportion of rural respondents. Kimenyi and Romero (2008) note that urban residents in Kenya were less likely to express incumbent support prior to the 2007 elections, although this relationship appears not to be significant, and they do not discuss it in any detail. In a study of economic voting in Ghana using survey data from 1999, Youde (2005) demonstrates a significant negative relationship between urban location and incumbent support. Again however, the urban-rural variable is simply included as a control in this study, and no attempt is made to explain the relationship. This limited literature therefore provides mixed evidence for the effects of urban-rural location on voting behavior, and offers little by way of explanation.

Somewhat more usefully, the hostility of Ghanaian urbanites towards the incumbent party that Youde highlights had already been noted with regards to the 1992 and 1996 elections by Bawumia (1998) and Nugent (1999), both of whom explain it largely as a reaction to the effects of the economic Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) that had been pursued by President Jerry Rawlings since 1983. While the SAP certainly created winners and losers in both urban and rural areas, both Bawumia and Nugent note that the majority of the negative impact was borne by urban residents, particularly the job losses resulting from public sector retrenchment, but also the more effective system of urban taxation that resulted from the reforms. In contrast, the most visible benefits resulting from the SAP were heavily skewed towards rural areas, where increased investment in basic public services such as pipe-borne water, electricity, and roads had a much more noticeable impact. Furthermore, the removal of price distortions meant that agricultural producers in the countryside, especially cocoa farmers, received vastly improved prices for their crops. In addition, Nugent (1999) argues that the opposition parties were unable to compete effectively in rural areas, due to their limited ability to communicate with rural voters.

Taken together, these arguments begin to offer a reasonable framework for understanding why African urbanites might be less disposed than rural residents to support the incumbent government. This framework is added to by Conroy-Krutz (forthcoming), who claims that in addition to the negative urban impact of SAPs and the relative efficiency of urban as opposed to rural campaigning by opposition parties, incumbent parties across Africa engage in widespread voter bribery in rural areas. Incumbency gives governing parties a significant comparative advantage in the distribution of minor consumption goods during election

campaigns. The electoral impact of such distribution, which Conroy-Krutz terms “petty patronage”, is assumed to be greater in rural areas, where voters can be bought more cheaply and more reliably. Therefore higher levels of voter bribery in rural areas makes rural voters more likely than urbanites to support the incumbent. In addition, it may also be the case that the socio-demographic profile of rural residents makes it easier for incumbents to mobilize them. Rural voters tend to be older, less educated, and more female. These factors, along with the possibility that people in rural areas are more likely to vote on the basis of loyalty to identity groups and dominant governing parties, or to be controlled by influential traditional rulers, may reduce the demands of rural residents, and render them less autonomous in their voting decisions than urbanites.⁴ Moreover, these factors should be expected to further compound the effect of voter bribery noted by Conroy-Krutz.

To summarize the arguments discussed so far, urban-rural variations in incumbent support may result from socio-demographic differences between urban and rural residents, and from differences between urban and rural contexts that affect the nature of political competition and mobilization. More Specifically, rural residents may be more likely to support incumbents because: (1) they have suffered less from SAPs; (2) they are less exposed to opposition party campaigning; (3) they are more likely to have their votes bought by incumbents (and more likely to sell them, and to do so cheaply); and (4) they are less demanding and less autonomous in their voting decisions. These explanations all have value, and taken together they offer a useful foundation for understanding why urbanites are less likely to support incumbents than their rural counterparts. However, they leave open two nagging questions: Why would incumbents risk the development of hostility in major urban centers? And why should the level of urban incumbent hostility vary so widely across countries? As a complement to the accounts recognized above, I suggest that additional insight into this issue can be gained through consideration of the political calculations underlying public policy decisions. Doing so offers answers to these two questions.

Elections and Urban Bias

Most famously expounded by Lipton (1977) and Bates (1981), the Urban Bias argument holds that authoritarian regimes in developing countries have incentives to favor urban over rural interests, because urban groups present a more credible threat of political opposition and unrest that could potentially destabilize the regime. As a result, resources are pumped out of the countryside through distortionary price policies, which reduce the cost of living for urban residents while returning lower profits to rural producers. This model was widely accepted as a powerful explanatory tool for understanding urban-rural relations in authoritarian developing countries, not least because it recognized the political calculations underlying policies that affect the distribution of resources between different sectors of society. Of particular importance to the question at hand, however, is the expectation that this urban bias should dissipate with the onset of democracy. As Robert Bates hypothesized in 1993, in “nations with competitive party systems, political competition for votes leads to a shift in policy in favor of rural interests” (Bates 1993: 225).

This hypothesis about the effect of electoral competition is reflected in the work of Varshney (1998), who argued that elections had precisely this effect in India, where the introduction and persistence of democracy prior to an industrial revolution empowered the countryside, resulting in the pursuance of policies that were beneficial to rural interests. More recently, Stasavage (2005a) has related this logic to Africa, by addressing the link between democracy and public education spending. Recognizing that competitive elections force governments to seek a majority of votes, and that a majority of electors in almost all African countries live in rural areas, Stasavage argued that in democratic systems public policy decisions should reflect a greater responsiveness to the preferences of rural voters. Consequently, electoral competition should lead to increased spending on primary education, on which rural voters place a higher premium than secondary and university education spending. This simple yet powerful idea, that democracy in Africa leads governments to shift their focus towards rural interests in order to secure a majority of votes, offers a complementary and explicitly political account for the puzzle addressed in this paper, of why urbanites are less likely to support incumbents.

⁴ I am grateful to Michael Bratton for highlighting this possibility.

Electoral Incentives

Most simply stated, urban residents are less likely to support incumbents because African governments have an electoral incentive to implement policies that benefit rural more than urban areas. Under authoritarian regimes, urbanites have much greater potential political power than do rural interests, for whom issues such as illiteracy and geographic dispersion exacerbate coordination problems. The more credible threat of urban as opposed to rural opposition and unrest leads regimes to bias resources towards urban interests. With the advent of competitive elections, however, this incentive to discriminate in favor of urban interests dissipates. The equalization of individual political power via the ballot box removes, or at least vastly reduces, the disproportionate influence of what in developing countries tends to be an urban minority, as governments become dependent on the support of an electoral majority. Therefore in countries where a majority of voters live in rural areas, elections generate incentives for governments to implement policies that benefit rural interests, while allowing them to ignore the demands of urban residents.⁵

This is not to say that elections resolve rural collective action problems; lower population densities and obstacles to communication mean that coordination remains more difficult in rural than in urban areas. Rather, elections institutionalize political competition, regularizing conflict over power through periodic battles at the ballot box. By accepting the rules of electoral competition urbanites effectively agree to a reduction of their influence relative to rural voters, because the urban bias that resulted from their comparative advantage in terms of coordination in an authoritarian system is undermined by democratic politics, under which government survival is determined by electoral support rather than by urban protest. The primary threat to an authoritarian government is a coup, which requires coordination, and which is therefore much more likely to generate in urban than rural areas. The point of democracy is that ballots are used as paper stones - elections provide an alternative means to manage conflict without recourse to violence (Przeworski 1999). Thus the primary threat to democratic governments is electoral defeat, which is a priori no more likely to stem from urban than rural areas.

In the presence of a rural majority, incumbents who can win in the countryside can afford to ignore urban voters, and risk generating a certain degree of urban dissatisfaction, so long as doing so does not lead to urban unrest that may destabilize the regime.⁶ Therefore where a majority of the population is rural, incumbents should distribute sufficient resources to buy-off urban unrest, without needing to ensure that they win urban votes. Moreover, where the urban population is smaller, urban unrest should have less potential to destabilize the regime, which will therefore be able to accommodate a higher level of urban dissatisfaction. As the urban population increases, however, the feasibility of winning solely in the countryside decreases, and the potential threat of urban unrest may rise, forcing incumbents to court urban as well as rural voters. Therefore this socio-demographic factor - the distribution of the population between urban and rural areas - should alter the political calculations of the incumbent. Specifically, increasing the urban proportion of the population should induce the government to implement policies that benefit urban as well as rural voters, which in turn should increase the level of support that it receives from urban voters.

Therefore urban hostility results from governments pursuing pro-rural policies in order to ensure electoral support from the rural majority. The logical (and observable) implication of this argument is that this hostility should reduce as the urban proportion of the population increases, because governments have an incentive to more evenly balance pro-rural and pro-urban policies. Before proceeding, it is worth restating

⁵ Such pro-rural policies may also be expected to be more electorally efficient than pro-urban policies, because rural votes may be cheaper per capita. For example, it may be cheaper to supply primary education to 100 rural villagers than to provide university places to the same number of urban residents.

⁶ Stasavage (2005a) captures the logic underlying this argument, but applied specifically to education spending, in a simple game theoretic model. Assuming that the threat of unrest posed by urbanites is constant across authoritarian and democratic regimes, and that a majority of voters are rural, he shows that the advent of democracy should lead incumbents to cater to the demands of rural interests by increasing spending on primary education, while the level of spending on university education desired by urbanites should remain constant. Future formal theoretical work should model this game under different assumptions, specifically about the level of threat posed by urban unrest, and the urban-rural distribution of voters.

that party competition in Africa does not take place primarily along an urban-rural cleavage. Rather, the overriding tendency is for party support to be based on ethnic or regional constituencies, with groups linked to parties through clientelistic ties (van de Walle 2003: 313). This state of the world is consistent with the argument that a predominantly rural population induces incumbents to implement policies that favor rural interests. It is important to be clear that the argument being made here concerns interests, not identities. It is not the intention of this paper to claim that voters identify as either rural or urban, nor is it to deny that they could. Rather, the argument is that rural voters are likely to share a variety of common interests, for example in primary education, rural feeder roads, rural electrification, or agricultural prices, which may differentiate them from urban voters. As a result, politicians can court rural voters not by appealing to a voter's rural identity, but by implementing (or promising) policies that serve these particular rural interests.

Voter choice, like all other political phenomena, is multi-causal. Thus while ethnicity may be a powerful predictor of voting behavior across Africa, nowhere is it likely to be a perfect one. Parties may in general be able to rely on the support of their ethnic groups, especially due to clientelistic links, and to the influence of traditional and religious leaders. But for some of the voters some of the time this may not be enough, because circumstances may make particular interests a more powerful determinant of vote choice than ethnicity. For example, a rural resident may value the public services provided by an out-group incumbent party sufficiently for her to support that party, irrespective of ethnicity. Alternatively, an urban resident might be so frustrated by high food prices that she will vote against an in-group incumbent. Moreover, many voters do not have an in-group party to vote for. As noted above, in Ghana the NPP is perceived to be an Asante party, and the NDC an Ewe party. These are the only two viable parties, and between them tend to win over 95% of the votes. And yet, more than 40% of the population belongs to ethnic groups other than the Asante and the Ewe. Therefore for at least 40% of Ghanaian voters, it is far from clear which one is *their* ethnic party.

Therefore although ethnic or regional identities may impact powerfully on voting behavior, they are not the only determinant factors. Furthermore, although governments may engage in clientelistic distribution along ethnic lines, certain policies may not be amenable to such group-specific targeting. For example, distortionary food prices are likely to affect members of all ethnic groups.⁷ Moreover, certain policies may tend to distinguish between urban and rural interests, rather than between ethnic or regional groups. In setting such policies, it makes sense that with electoral competition and a rural majority, governments should cater primarily to rural interests. It is therefore worth considering some of the policy tools with which governments might distinguish between rural and urban interests in this way.

Distortionary policy tools

African governments have control over a variety of policy tools, whose effects may be felt differentially by urban and rural voters. As Stasavage (2005a) notes, one of these is education spending. Rural dwellers prefer that a greater proportion of the education budget is spent on primary schooling, whereas urbanites prefer increases in secondary and university education spending. Of course, the education budget need not be fixed, and the amount allocated to both sectors could be increased, but the point is that education spending is a policy over which urban and rural voters might be expected to have divergent preferences. Moreover, while the government could subsidize both sectors, if the electoral process allows it to ignore urban demands and accumulate rents instead, this would seem an attractive option.⁸

A nice example of the use of education spending in this way is provided by Stasavage (2005b), who presents evidence that the policy of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda was adopted by President Museveni in order to win rural votes during the 1996 presidential election. Stasavage also notes a similar link between electoral incentives and education policy in Malawi, where UPE was implemented in September 1994, after having been a key policy on the basis of which the new government was elected in May of that

⁷ Kasara (2007) shows that certain agricultural taxes can be used to target specific ethnic groups, and that actually governments in Africa have tended to extract more from their own ethnic groups. This finding is based on data that covers predominantly authoritarian regimes, and therefore it would be interesting to see whether this pattern holds as strongly under democracy.

⁸ It is also worth noting that education spending might be amenable to targeting towards specific regions or groups, in order to appease a party's core constituency, and that this might be even more so for primary than secondary or university spending.

year. The two cases of Uganda and Malawi highlighted by Stasavage are not isolated examples. Just as in Malawi, the provision of free primary education was a key electoral issue on which new governments came to power in Lesotho and Kenya in 1998 and 2002, respectively (Avenstrup, Liang and Nellemann 2004). The evidence presented by Stasavage clearly links Museveni's policy of expanding primary education with electoral incentives; more specifically, it was driven by his need to win the support of Uganda's rural voters. That the same pattern can also be seen across other countries offers further support to the idea that elections create incentives for governments to pursue policies that benefit the rural majority.

That being said, we cannot rule out the possibility that the link with electoral incentives is spurious, and that UPE policies were simply a consequence of prevailing temporal trends, perhaps resulting from donor pressure in the 1990s. One way to address this problem is to look at the case of Botswana, which presents an interesting counterfactual. Somewhat uniquely in Africa, multiparty elections have been held consistently in Botswana since independence in 1966. As a result, if it is correct that electoral incentives result in policies designed to benefit the rural majority, then we should expect primary education to have been expanded much earlier in Botswana than elsewhere. This is exactly what happened; after suffering a drop in rural support in the 1969 elections, the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) set in motion a program of rapid primary school expansion. This was extremely popular with rural voters, and proved key to the BDP's subsequent electoral successes (Al-Samarrai 2005).

In fact, expanded access to primary education was only one of numerous rural development policies implemented by the BDP to garner electoral support from Botswana's rural majority. Having learnt from its electoral failures in rural areas in 1969, the BDP instigated the Accelerated Rural Development Program (ARDP) shortly before the 1974 election, which was designed specifically to win votes from the rural population (Colclough and McCarthy 1980). Most of the ARDP consisted of public works projects such as roads, schools, and village wells. Not only were these goods central to the interests of rural voters, they were also highly visible, and therefore likely to produce the desired short-term electoral payoffs for the incumbent BDP government. That such a significant package of pro-rural policies was implemented just prior to the 1974 election strongly suggests that they were driven by electoral incentives, as competitive elections give rural majorities the political power to demand recognition of their interests.⁹

Agricultural policy is another tool with which incumbents can differentiate between urban and rural interests. As noted above, Urban Bias theory holds that authoritarian regimes benefit urban at the expense of rural interests by introducing discriminatory price and resource flows. In particular, they use agricultural policies as a tool to reduce the cost of living for urban dwellers, primarily by distorting the cost of food (Bates 1981: 33). Just as agricultural policy can be used to discriminate against the rural sector, so it can also be turned to the producers' benefit. Despite the presence of SAPs across Africa, which prescribe the liberalization and deregulation of prices, governments still have a great deal of control over these areas. Nicholas van de Walle has highlighted the fact that implementation of SAPs has been far from complete, and that the degree of implementation of reforms to food markets and export agriculture in particular has been mediocre (Van de Walle 2001: 90). Therefore it seems fair to assume that African governments have retained significant leverage over policies that enable them to appease, or discriminate between, rural and urban interests. Moreover, van de Walle also notes that consumer prices have been liberalized more than producer prices, a fact that lends intuitive support to the argument that democracy gives African governments greater incentives

⁹ Holm (1982) argues that the low level of agricultural investment by the BDP from 1966 to 1980 did not sufficiently match the potential electoral strength of what at that time was an extremely large rural majority - at independence rural dwellers constituted over 85% of Botswana's total population. Yet Holm himself notes that only a small proportion of Botswana's rural population were actually employed in domestic agriculture, with at least a quarter of the working-age population temporarily employed in South Africa, and therefore that agricultural investment was of little interest to them (Holm 1982: 91). Rather, as noted above, key to the interests of Botswanan rural voters was investment in rural infrastructure, and therefore the low level of agricultural investment is not indicative of rural voters failing to demand returns commensurate to their electoral strength. Interestingly though, Holm also argues that the ability of rural voters to claim benefits from the government in proportion to their electoral strength was undermined by obstacles to collective action and political mobilization. Specifically, these included problems of transport and communication, and the traditional hierarchy of Botswanan political culture. These issues should certainly be borne in mind when considering the extent to which contemporary African governments face electoral incentives to pander to the interests of large rural majorities.

to appease rural rather than urban interests. Intervening in producer prices but leaving consumer prices to the vagaries of the market fits perfectly with the aforementioned expectation that incumbents should be happy to ignore urban demands while being more responsive to the rural sector.¹⁰

An interesting example of this is provided by price liberalization policies in Kenya. Market liberalizations implemented by the Kenyan government in 1992 resulted in a dramatic drop in the input/output ratio of prices for producers of maize, Kenya's key food crop. This drop was greatly beneficial to the (rural) maize producers, and coincided nicely with the multiparty elections in December of that year (De Groote et al. (2005). Moreover, despite allusions of liberalization, rather than ceding power over electorally useful policy levers the Kenyan government retained control of maize seed prices through the state-owned Kenya Seed Company (KSC), and continued to manipulate maize prices via the National Cereals and Produce Board (De Groote et al. (2005); Jayne, Myers and Nyoroc (2007). While maize output prices fluctuated somewhat following the significant increase in 1992, they rose dramatically again in 1997, following the introduction of fixed prices and tariffs on imports. This sharp increase again greatly benefitted maize producers just prior to the elections that occurred at the end of that year (Van de Walle (2001). At the same time, however, urban consumers were faced with higher food prices as a result. Although only suggestive, this pattern fits neatly with the idea that electoral incentives motivate policies that benefit rural at the expense of urban interests.

Therefore between agriculture, prices, education, and other aspects of infrastructure, governments in Africa have a variety of policy tools with which they can court rural voters at the expense of the urban minority. As noted above, there is nothing about these policies that makes them necessarily zero-sum, as governments could direct resources to both urban and rural areas. However, under the reasonable assumption of a budget constraint, it is not possible to please all of the voters all of the time. Therefore incumbents must make decisions about how to allocate public funds. Moreover, as noted above, if incumbents can ignore urban voters and accumulate rents instead, they might be expected to do so. The argument I propose in this paper is that electoral competition and the urban-rural distribution of their populations provide governments with incentives to direct benefits towards rural voters. As a result, urbanites should be less supportive of incumbent governments than are rural residents.

This is not to deny the value of the accounts noted in section 3; socio-demographic differences, and differences in political competition and mobilization, across urban and rural areas no doubt affect the voting behavior of urban and rural residents. But in recognizing the political calculations resulting from the interaction between democracy and demography, the account proposed herein offers an answer to why incumbents should risk generating hostility in urban centers. By rendering governments reliant on the support of an electoral majority, democracy reduces the disproportionate influence of urbanites across Africa, where a majority of voters live in rural areas. As a result, incumbents can afford to risk a certain amount of urban hostility, so long as they can win elections in the countryside. This account also offers an explanation for why the magnitude of urban incumbent hostility varies across countries - what matters is the distribution of a country's population between rural and urban areas. As the urban population increases, so the feasibility of winning solely in the countryside decreases, forcing incumbents to seek urban as well as rural support. As a result, the extent of urban hostility should be conditional on the urban proportion of the population.

Fortunately, this conditional relationship is a unique observable implication of the account that I offer, making it possible to assess its validity independent of any other accounts. As noted above, the level of incumbent hostility should be inversely related to the urban proportion of the population, because as the rural majority decreases the government can less comfortably tolerate dissatisfaction on the part of urban voters. Whatever other factors may lead to differences in the voting behavior of urban and rural residents, none account for this hypothesized conditional effect. Therefore evidence for this effect would provide strong

¹⁰ African governments are still prepared to intervene in consumer prices when the political need arises, however, as recent action by President Paul Biya's government in Cameroon illustrates. In March 2008 Biya slashed customs duties on basic foodstuffs in response to urban food riots in which at least 24 people were killed and over 1600 were arrested (see <http://www.bicusa.org/en/Article.3702.aspx>).

support for the account proposed herein. In the following section I outline an empirical strategy that attempts to provide such evidence. Results are presented in section 6.

Empirical Strategy

In the following analysis I make use of data from Round Three of the Afrobarometer Series, which provides individual-level data from eighteen African democracies.¹¹ I combine this individual-level data with national-level population data from the UN. With this data it is possible to rigorously estimate the urban-rural difference in incumbent support across Africa, and to evaluate the various factors that may account for this difference. Specifically, my goal is to evaluate whether the negative effect of being an urban resident on a respondent's propensity to support the incumbent party varies systematically across countries, according to the proportion of the countries' population residing in urban areas. This will be done by estimating a hierarchical model of incumbent support, incorporating both individual- and country-level parameters.

Data

The cross-sectional Afrobarometer survey data provides a powerful tool for addressing this empirical task, because it allows for the effect of variation in the urban proportion of a country's population to be evaluated. Figure 2 displays the proportion of each of the eighteen countries' populations that resides in urban areas, which ranges from 12.5% in Uganda to 59.3% in South Africa.¹² In only three countries was there an urban majority in 2005 (Botswana, Cape Verde, and South Africa). Most importantly though, there is substantial variation across the eighteen countries. If this variation is significantly and inversely related to the degree of urban incumbent hostility, then the argument that electoral incentives lead politicians to deliberately pursue policies of "rural bias" will be strongly supported. On the other hand, finding no systematic effect will suggest that urban incumbent hostility is not related to the deliberate strategic calculations of political actors.

¹¹ Round Three of the Afrobarometer Series covered Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The surveys were carried out during 2005 (with the exception of the South African survey which took place in 2006) using face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice. The samples are representative of the voting-age population in each nation. Random selection is used at every stage of the sampling and the sample is stratified to ensure coverage of all major demographic segments. Sample size varies from 1,048 to 2,400 in each country. The selection of countries is intentionally biased towards liberalizing regimes. <http://www.afrobarometer.org/>

¹² Population data taken from the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision*, <http://esa.un.org/unup>.

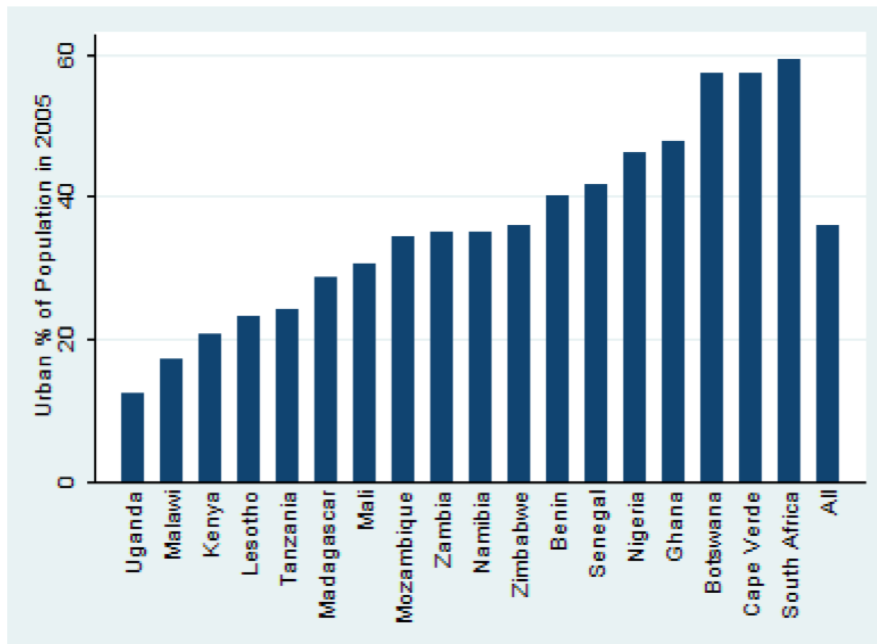


Figure 2: Urban Proportion of Populations in 2005

Independent variables

Estimating a multilevel model of incumbent support requires specifying a model at the individual- as well as the country-level. The dependent variable of interest is support for the incumbent president's party.¹³ This is operationalized using a question from the Afrobarometer surveys that asks, "If a [presidential] election were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?". A dummy variable for incumbent support is therefore coded 1 if the respondent names the incumbent party, and 0 otherwise. The explanatory variable of interest at the individual level is whether the respondent lives in an urban or a rural location. The Afrobarometer data includes a binary urban-rural indicator drawn from each country's official census classification of enumeration areas, which the Afrobarometer uses as primary sampling units. This is used to construct an urban dummy (rural = 0, urban = 1), with the expectation that it will be negatively related to incumbent support.

The hypothesis that results from the theoretical argument suggested in this paper is that urban incumbent hostility should decrease as the proportion of the population living in urban areas increases, because electoral incentives make the government more responsive to the demands of urban voters. In order to evaluate this hypothesis, I include a measure of the urban proportion of each country's population in 2005.

With this data it is also possible to evaluate the explanations for urban incumbent hostility that were discussed in section 3. The first of these is that urbanites have suffered more from economic hardships caused by SAPs. Therefore I include two measures of economic perceptions in an attempt to capture this effect. The first is a subjective measure of the respondent's personal economic situation, using responses to a question that asks, "In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions?".¹⁴ This

¹³ All of the countries included in the analysis have presidential systems except for Lesotho, which is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. For Lesotho incumbent is taken as the Prime Minister's party.

¹⁴ An alternative to this subjective indicator is to include two objective variables aimed at capturing this same effect: a dummy for whether the respondent is unemployed; and an index of poverty. The latter is constructed from a battery of questions asking how often the respondent has had to go without basic commodities such as food and water in the past year. The actual question asks, "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat?; Enough clean water for home use?; Medicines or medical treatment?; Enough fuel to cook your food?; A cash income?; School expenses for your

measure captures what we might think of as “pocketbook voting” effect. Alternatively, a more sociotropic account of economic voting would expect support for the incumbent to be affected by an individual’s evaluation of the country’s economic situation. This is captured with responses to a question that asks respondents to describe the economic condition of the country as a whole, with the expectation being that individuals making positive evaluations will be more likely to support the incumbent.¹⁵

Another factor that has been suggested to account for the divergent levels of incumbent support between urban and rural voters is exposure to campaigning by opposition parties. Accepting that this is a very difficult thing to capture, I attempt to proxy for the degree of exposure by including a measure of media access calculated from questions about how frequently the respondent gets news from various different media, with the expectation being that it should be negatively related to incumbent support.¹⁶ A third suggested explanation is that rural voters are more likely to be involved in voter bribery. For this I include a variable indicating whether or not the respondent was offered a gift in the previous election.¹⁷ Finally, it is also possible that the socio-demographic profile of rural residents makes them less demanding and less autonomous in their voting behavior, which in turn may render them more likely to support the incumbent. To capture this effect, I include measures of age, education, and gender.

One concern with the conclusions about urban incumbent hostility drawn from aggregate data is that this data fails to distinguish between a general urban effect and a more specific capital city effect. As a result, in the analysis I include an indicator for whether the respondent lives in the country’s capital city, in an effort to control for the possibility that any significant urban effect is driven solely by respondents in these locations.¹⁸ As noted above, party competition in Africa tends to take place along ethnic lines. If this is the case, we should expect ethnicity to be a powerful predictor of voting behavior, and a decent model of incumbent support will need to incorporate this (for existing evidence of this, see Norris and Mattes 2003). Specifically, we should expect respondents to be more inclined to support the incumbent president’s party if they share the same ethnicity as the president. Therefore I include a dummy variable for coethnic, coded 1 if the respondent is from the same ethnic group as the president, and 0 otherwise.¹⁹

It is also important to recognize the possible bias in individuals’ responses resulting from their perceptions of who is responsible for the survey. Public opinion surveys are still fairly uncommon in Africa, and many people assume that any such survey is being carried out on behalf of the government, despite assurances to the contrary by the interviewer. Someone who believes that the interviewer is an agent of the state may feel compelled to express support for the governing party, whatever her true vote intention. Fortunately the final question on the Afrobarometer survey asks respondents who they think sent the interviewers out into the field. Therefore I include a dummy variable indicating whether or not the respondent thought that the government was responsible for the survey.

Estimating a multilevel model makes it possible to control for factors at the national level that might affect individual political behavior. I include a dummy for whether or not there has been an alternation of the party in power as a result of democratic elections, because voters may react differently to incumbents that remain in power despite the transition to democracy. I also include a measure of party system fractionalization (an

children (like fees, uniforms or books)?” Never; Just once or twice; Several times; Many times; Always; Don’t Know.” A pocketbook voting account would expect both of these variables to be negatively related to incumbent support. Using these variables instead of the more subjective measure does not affect the results.

¹⁵ The survey includes three questions, asking for past, present, and future economic evaluations. These are in fact all highly correlated, and the choice of which to use does not affect the results.

¹⁶ The survey question asks, “How often do you get news from the following sources? Radio; Television; Newspapers.” Every day; A few times a week; A few times a month; Less than once a month; Never; Don’t Know.

¹⁷ The actual question asks, “During the [last] election, how often (if ever) did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food or a gift, in return for your vote?” Never; Once or twice; A few times; Often; Don’t Know.”

¹⁸ The results are no different if the analysis includes an indicator for largest instead of capital city, which is not always the same thing.

¹⁹ Again, because Lesotho is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy this variable will be based on the Prime Minister’s identity.

index of the number of effective legislative parties), on the basis that greater fractionalization may aid incumbents.²⁰ Finally, I control for per capita GDP, on the basis that objective economic development at the national level may affect incumbent support.

Multilevel analysis

The primary purpose of this analysis is to evaluate the argument that the effect of urban-rural location on an individual's propensity to support the incumbent varies according to the urban-rural distribution of the country's population. The argument therefore expects an interaction effect between individual- and country-level variables, which implies a hierarchical model of incumbent support. Such a model can be specified as

$$\begin{aligned}
 P(y_i = 1 | urban_i, X_i, Z^k) \\
 = \Lambda(\beta_{const}^k + \beta_{urban}^k urban_i + \beta_X X_i + \beta_Z Z^k)
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

for each individual $i = 1, \dots, n$, and each country $k = 1, \dots, N$, where X_i and Z_k are matrices of the various other individual- and country-level control variables specified above, and

$$\beta_{const}^k = \delta_{const} + \gamma_{const} urban\%^k + \epsilon_{const}^k \tag{2}$$

$$\beta_{urban}^k = \delta_{urban} + \gamma_{urban} urban\%^k + \epsilon_{urban}^k \tag{3}$$

Importantly then, the intercept and the coefficient for the individual-level urban variable are specified as functions of the urban proportion of the population ($urban\%$). What this means is that for the individual-level control variables a common coefficient is estimated across all countries, because there is no theoretical reason to expect these effects to vary by country. By contrast, the model estimates the effect of individual urban-rural location conditional on the proportion of the national population living in urban areas. Therefore the model estimates both individual- and country-level coefficients, as well as a coefficient for the interaction effect between urban-rural location and the urban proportion of the national population. This implies the mixed-effects model

$$\begin{aligned}
 P(y_i = 1 | urban_i, X_i, Z^k) \\
 = \Lambda \left[\begin{array}{l} \delta_{const} + \gamma_{const} urban\%^k + \\ (\delta_{urban} + \gamma_{urban} urban\%^k) urban_i + \\ \beta_X X_i + \beta_Z Z^k + \epsilon_{const}^k + \epsilon_{urban}^k urban_i \end{array} \right]
 \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

In terms of evaluating the theoretical argument, the multilevel interaction effect is of primary interest, because this will indicate whether or not the effect of being an urban resident on an individual's propensity to support the incumbent is in fact contingent on the proportion of the urban-rural distribution of the national population. In the specification above, this interaction effect is captured in the $\gamma_{urban} urban\%^k$ term.

Results

The key outcome of interest is the presence of a significant inverse relationship between the urban proportion of the population and the effect of urban location, on an individual's propensity to support the incumbent. Such a relationship would provide strong support for the argument that political calculations, driven by electoral incentives, underlie urban incumbent hostility in Africa. Intuitive results are presented in Figure 3. Estimating the individual-level portion of the model separately for each country gives a coefficient for the effect of the urban dummy on incumbent support. In Figure 3 these coefficients are plotted against the urban

²⁰ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting these possibilities.

proportion of the country's population (Zimbabwe is excluded, because the urban coefficient is far lower than all of the others, and therefore distorts the scale of the graph significantly).²¹

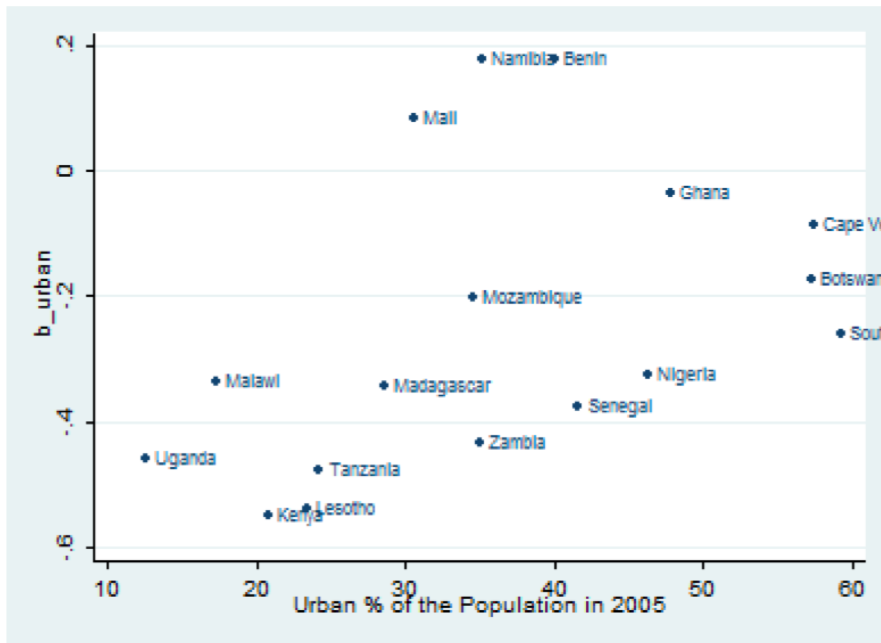


Figure 3: Effect of Urban Location on Incumbent Support, by Urban % of Population

The coefficients for the effect of being an urban resident on the probability of supporting the incumbent from country-specific regressions, plotted against the urban % of the population.

Just eyeballing the data in this way indicates a clear relationship in the expected direction; the negative effect of being an urbanite is largest in countries where the urban proportion of the population is smallest, and reduces steadily towards zero as this proportion increases. This relationship fits perfectly with the argument that in countries where a vast majority of the population lives in rural areas, electoral calculations lead incumbents to tolerate higher levels of urban dissatisfaction. If urban incumbent hostility were unrelated to electoral incentives, we would expect to see no such relationship between hostility and the urban-rural distribution of the population.

Importantly, the standard errors for the three outlying coefficients in Figure 3 (for Mali, Namibia, and Benin) are so large that these coefficients are not statistically significant. In a multilevel estimation, the uncertainty surrounding these coefficients is taken into account in estimating the multilevel interaction effects. Table 2 presents results of such an estimation - Model 1 is a very basic model, including just the individual urban dummy, the urban proportion of the national population, and the interaction between these two variables; Model 2 includes controls for additional individual-level and country-level factors; Model 3 includes the variables intended to capture alternative arguments for the existence of urban incumbent hostility.

²¹ Plotting the country-specific coefficients against the country-level unit of interest in this way is what Andrew Gellman terms the “secret weapon” (see http://www.stat.columbia.edu/cook/movabletype/archives/2005/03/the_secret_weap.html).

Table 2: Multilevel Estimation of Incumbent Support

	1	2	3
<i>Individual-level variables</i>			
Urban	-0.532	-0.476	-0.463
	(0.079)	(0.082)	(0.086)
Pocketbook	–	–	0.059
			(0.016)
Sociotropic	–	–	0.218
			(0.015)
News	–	–	-0.117
			(0.059)
Gift	–	–	-0.082
			(0.039)
Female	–	–	-0.035 ^{ns}
			(0.029)
Age	–	–	-0.001 ^{ns}
			(0.001)
Education	–	–	-0.006 ^{ns}
			(0.009)
Capital City	–	-0.232	-0.237
		(0.054)	(0.055)
Govsent	–	0.373	0.369
		(0.028)	(0.029)
Coethnic	–	0.651	0.658
		(0.038)	(0.039)
Intercept	0.341 ^{ns}	5.272 ^{ns}	4.307 ^{ns}
	(0.599)	(3.665)	(3.446)
<i>Country-level variables</i>			
%Urban	-1.090 ^{ns}	-1.681 ^{ns}	-1.760 ^{ns}
	(1.559)	(1.251)	(1.177)
Turnover	–	-0.702 ^{ns}	0.655 ^{ns}
		(0.442)	(0.416)
ENLP	–	-0.342	-0.287
		(0.155)	(0.146)
Log(GDP per capita)	–	-0.169 ^{ns}	-0.157 ^{ns}
		(0.161)	(0.151)
<i>Multilevel interaction effects</i>			
%Urban*Urban	0.499	0.487	0.460
	(0.193)	(0.197)	(0.203)
<i>Random Effects</i>			
Country: sd(constant)	0.889	0.675	0.634
	(0.149)	(0.114)	(0.107)
Groups	18	18	18
Observations	25,397	25,397	24,093

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. All coefficients are statistically significant at $p < .05$ unless indicated by *ns*.

What is clear from these results is that urban residents are significantly less likely to support incumbents than are their rural counterparts. In addition, and as one might expect, individuals are much more likely to express support for incumbents who come from the same ethnic group as themselves. The results also show a significant positive relationship between economic evaluations and incumbent support. Interestingly, it appears that having been offered a gift in return for one's vote in the previous election is negatively related to incumbent support, a result which merits further attention beyond that which it can be given herein. Most importantly for the argument at hand, however, the interaction term ($\%Urban*Urban$) shows that the negative effect of being an urban resident is indeed conditional on the urban-rural distribution of the population in each respondent's country. This interaction effect remains significant when the numerous individual- and country-level controls are included, and when measures of the various alternative arguments are added to the model.

This conditional effect can be seen much more clearly in Figure 4, which plots the effect of being an urban resident on the probability of expressing support for the incumbent, as the urban proportion of the population increases.²² The solid line represents the marginal effect, and the dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals. As the argument expects, and as Figure 3 suggested, the negative effect of being an urban resident is strongest in countries where the urban population is smallest, and decreases in magnitude steadily as the urban population increases. These results therefore provide strong evidence in favor of the explanation for urban incumbent hostility offered in this paper.

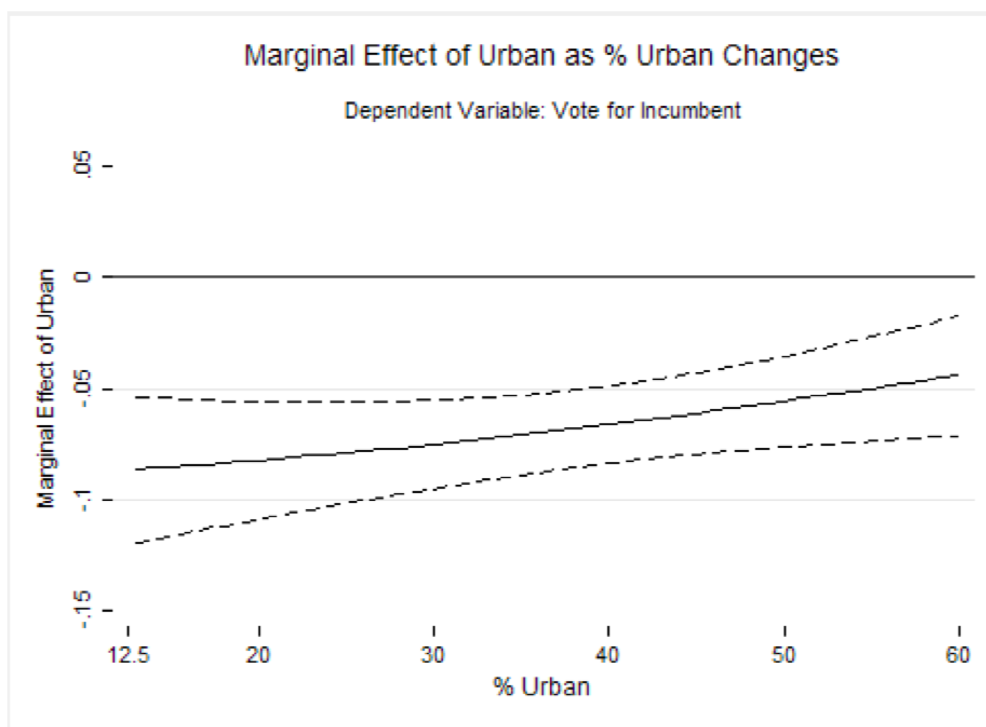


Figure 4: Effect of Urban Location on Incumbent Support, by Urban % of Population

The marginal effect of being an urban resident on the probability of supporting the incumbent, as the urban % of the population increases from 12.5 to 60 (the sample range). The solid line is the marginal effect, the dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals.

In countries with very small urban populations, being an urban rather than a rural dweller has a strong negative effect on the odds of supporting the incumbent. As the urban proportion of the population increases,

²² The estimated effect is for a 37 year old female, with all other variables held at their mean values (or median for binary variables). I am grateful to Brambor, Clark and Golder (2007) for making the Stata code for these graphs available.

however, this negative effect dissipates steadily. In countries with the lowest levels of urbanization, urbanites are about 8.5% less likely to vote for the incumbents than rural residents, irrespective of any other factors that might be expected to influence voter choice. In countries where the population is more evenly spread between urban and rural areas, however, this effect is almost 5% smaller. Notably, it is still negative, which perhaps highlights that a variety of reasons underlie the greater propensity of urbanites to support opposition parties, not all of which are captured by this model. Nevertheless, the trend is clear: urban incumbent hostility is conditional on the proportion of the population living in urban areas. All else equal, where this proportion is higher, urbanites are less likely to reject the incumbent. Such a relationship is only consistent with the explanation offered by this paper, that with a rural majority elections generate incentives for politicians to implement policies that benefit rural interests, while ignoring the demands of the urban minority. Focusing on electoral incentives in this way makes it possible to understand why incumbents would risk generating hostility in urban areas. Moreover, this account complements others by offering a possible explanation for the important question of why the extent of urban incumbent hostility varies across countries.

Perceptions of Policy Performance

If it is correct that incumbents provide incentives for incumbents to favor rural residents, then a further observable implication of the theoretical argument is that urbanites should on average be less satisfied with the government’s performance on different policy issues. The Afrobarometer surveys ask respondents about their perceptions of government performance across a number of policy areas, thereby enabling an investigation of this further implication.²³ Table 3 presents the proportions of rural and urban residents who feel that the government is handling each issue fairly or very well, as well as the proportions who say they would vote for the incumbent, and who are fairly or very satisfied with the way democracy works in their country.

Table 3: Urban-Rural Differences in Public Opinion

	Rural	Urban	Difference
Vote for Incumbent	49%	43%	-6%
Satisfied with Democracy	56%	53%	-3%
<i>Approve of Government’s Handling of:</i>			
Fighting Corruption	50%	45%	-5%
Reducing Crime	57%	50%	-7%
Managing the Economy	51%	50%	-1% ^{ns}
Addressing Educational Needs	70%	67%	-3%
Ensuring Enough to Eat	36%	37%	1% ^{ns}
Improving Basic Health Services	65%	65%	–
Combating HIV/AIDS	75%	74%	1% ^{ns}
Narrowing Income Gaps	26%	23%	-3%
Creating Jobs	29%	25%	-4%
Keeping Prices Stable	29%	29%	–
Delivering Household Water	46%	57%	11%

Note: All differences are statistically significant at $p < .01$ unless indicated by *ns*.

As noted above, urbanites are on average 6% less likely than rural residents to support incumbents. In addition, the data in Table 3 shows that they are also significantly less likely to express satisfaction with

²³ The question asks, “Now let’s speak about the performance of the present government of this country. How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say? Very badly, Fairly badly, Fairly well, Very well, DK/Haven’t heard enough.” The issues asked about are: Managing the economy; Creating jobs; Keeping prices stable; Narrowing gaps between rich and poor; Reducing crime; Improving basic health services; Addressing educational needs; Delivering household water; Ensuring everyone has enough to eat; Fighting corruption in government; Combating HIV/AIDS.

democracy, and to approve of the government’s performance across a variety of different policy issues. Only with regards to household water delivery were urban residents significantly more likely to approve of their government’s performance, a fact that is not altogether surprising given the obstacles to water provision in rural areas. This data is therefore at least suggestive of better policy performance in rural than in urban areas. However, aggregating the data conceals possible differences across countries. Moreover, it is possible that socio-demographic differences make rural residents easier to satisfy than their more demanding urban counterparts. In which case, lower levels of urban satisfaction might not result from differences in government performance, but simply from the fact that people in rural areas are easier to please.

Fortunately, the unique implication of the argument concerning electoral incentives again allows us to differentiate these effects. If governments favor the rural majority then, as with incumbent support, urban-rural differences in satisfaction with democracy and approval of government performance should be conditional on the urban proportion of each country’s population. Figures 5-8 show the marginal effect of being urban on the probability of a respondent expressing satisfaction with democracy, and of expressing approval of the government’s performance across the range of policies. All of these figures are based on multilevel estimations identical to model 3 in Table 2, but with different dependent variables. Therefore in each of these estimations numerous possible determinants of satisfaction and approval are controlled for.

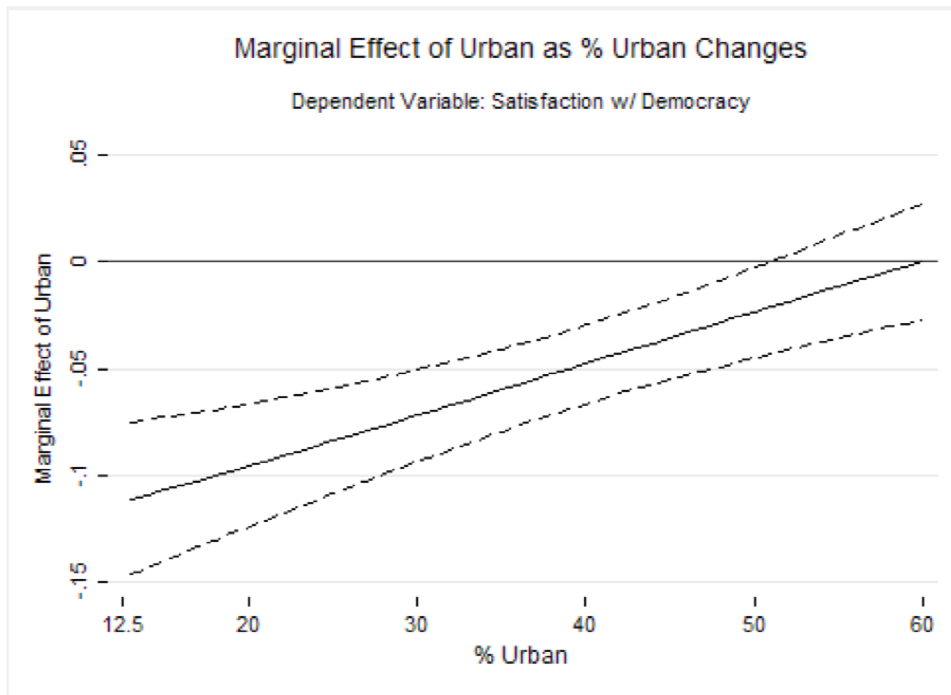


Figure 5: Effect of Urban Location on Satisfaction with Democracy, by Urban % of Population

The marginal effect of being an urban resident on the probability of being satisfied with democracy, as the urban % of the population increases from 12.5 to 60 (the sample range). The solid line is the marginal effect, the dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals.

Even more dramatically than with incumbent support, urban-rural differences in satisfaction with democracy are very clearly conditional on the urban proportion of the population. While in countries with the lowest level of urbanization urbanites are more than 10% less likely than rural residents to express satisfaction with democracy, all else being equal, this negative urban effect steadily reduces as the urban proportion of the population goes up, such that when the population is evenly split between urban and rural areas there is no significant urban-rural difference in democratic satisfaction. This result therefore provides further support for the idea that an increase in the urban population leads incumbents to court urban as well as rural voters. Still

though, this conclusion relies on the assumption that satisfaction with democracy is affected by government policy. While not an unreasonable assumption, it is therefore useful to look at indicators of actual policy performance.

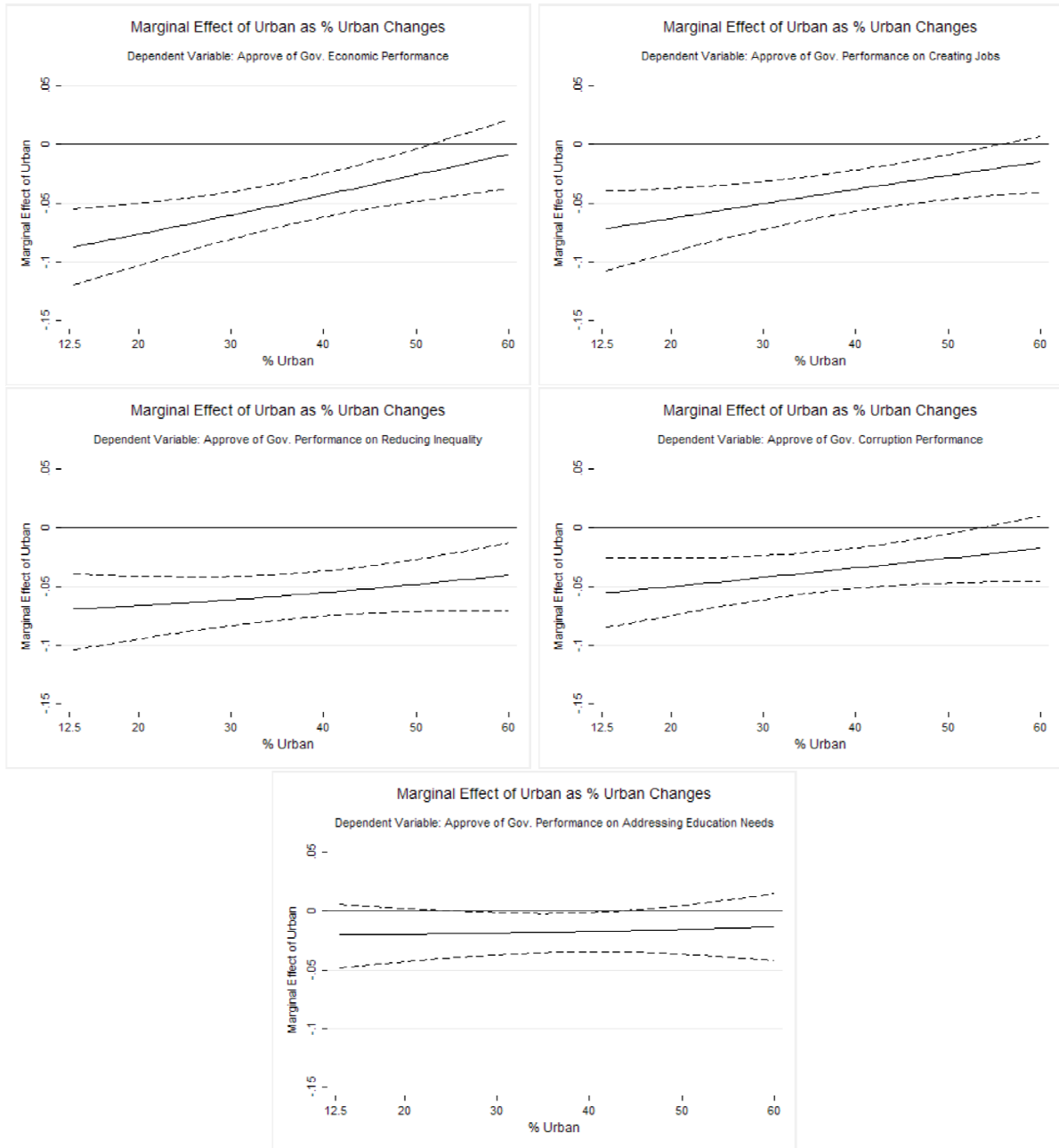


Figure 6: Effect of Urban Location on Approval of Government Policy Performance, by Urban % of Population

The marginal effect of being an urban resident on the probability of approving of the government’s performance on a range of policies, as the urban % of the population increases from 12.5 to 60 (the sample range). The solid line is the marginal effect, the dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals.

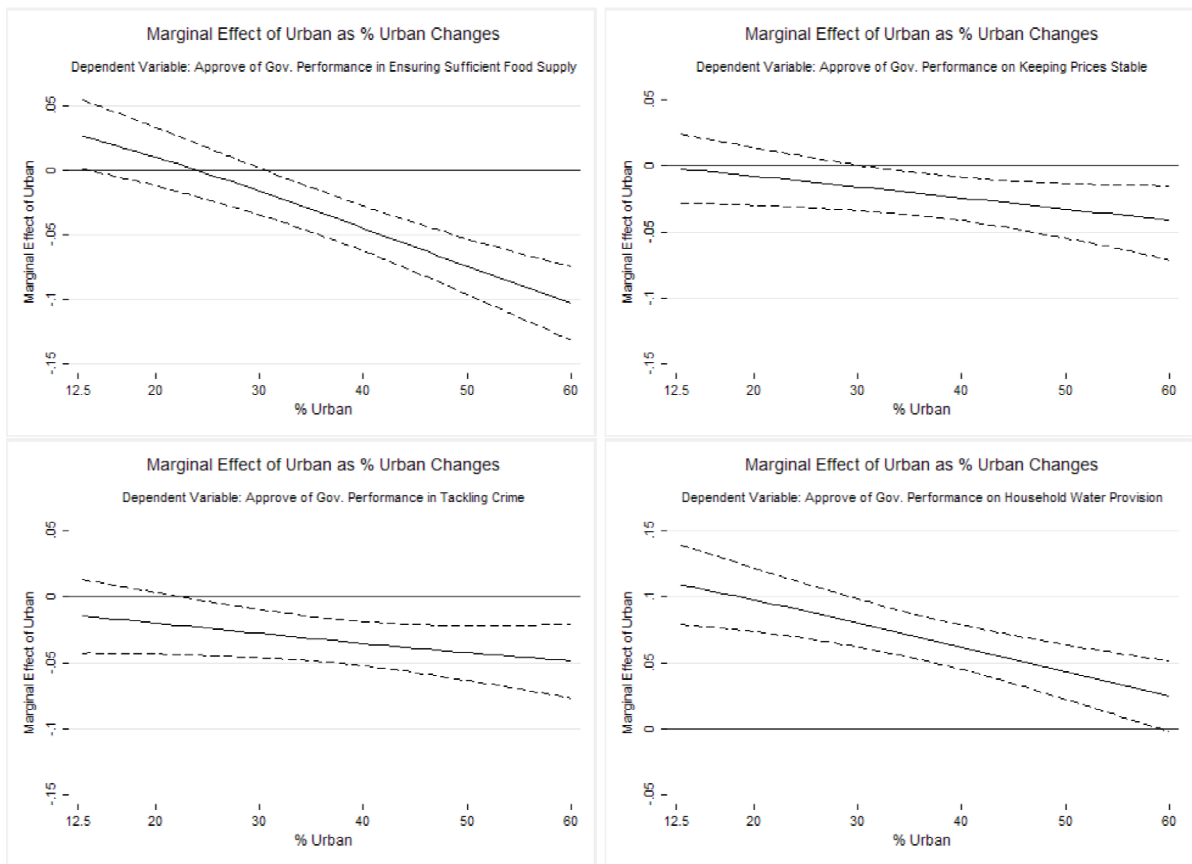


Figure 7: Effect of Urban Location on Approval of Government Policy Performance, by Urban % of Population (Cont.)

The marginal effect of being an urban resident on the probability of approving of the government's performance on a range of policies, as the urban % of the population increases from 12.5 to 60 (the sample range). The solid line is the marginal effect, the dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals.

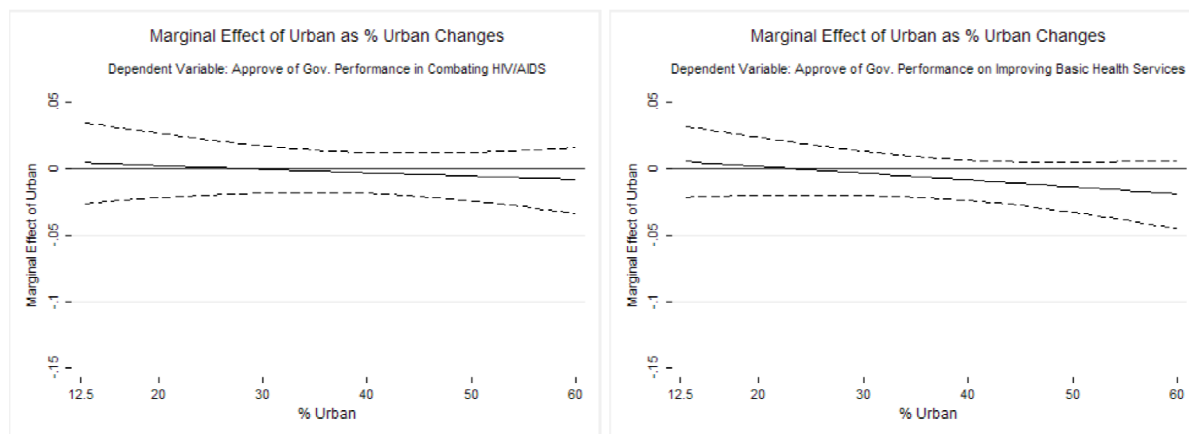


Figure 8: Effect of Urban Location on Approval of Government Policy Performance, by Urban % of Population (Cont.)

The marginal effect of being an urban resident on the probability of approving of the government's performance on a range of policies, as the urban % of the population increases from 12.5 to 60 (the sample range). The solid line is the marginal effect, the dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals.

Figures 6-8 show this same conditional effect on approval of government performance across the different policy issues noted in Table 3. Figure 6 displays the policies for which there is a positive and significant interaction effect, Figure 7 displays those for which the effect is negative and significant, and Figure 8 displays those for which the effect is not significant at any level of urbanization. As the theory concerning electoral incentives would expect, for five of these nine issues (managing the economy, job creation, narrowing income gaps, tackling corruption, and addressing educational needs) the interaction effect is positive. As with incumbent support and satisfaction with democracy, for approval of government performance on these five policy issues the negative effect of living in an urban area reduces as the country's level of urbanization goes up. However, for the other four (reducing crime, keeping prices stable, delivering household water, and ensuring enough food to eat) this interaction effect is negative. That the nature of these interaction effects varies so starkly across different policy issues is extremely interesting, and deserves much deeper consideration than the current discussion allows. However, a few points are worth highlighting here.

First, according to the Afrobarometer surveys, unemployment is by far the most salient issue for African voters - 23% of respondents cited this as the most important problem that their government should address (the next most salient was poverty/destitution, cited by 12%). This is true for rural voters (18% said it was the most important problem), but even more so for urbanites (the corresponding proportion was 30%). Therefore the positive interaction effect for approval of government performance with regards to job creation provides important support for the argument about electoral incentives. This conditional effect suggests that as urbanites become a more important electoral force, governments work harder to satisfy them with regards to the issue that matters to them the most.

Second, and as noted above, providing household water to remote rural areas is a very difficult and costly task. Therefore the fact that rural disapproval of the government's handling of household water provision decreases as the urban proportion of the population increases may make sense if one considers that the size of this task shrinks in line with these demographic changes. Furthermore, only 7% of rural respondents felt that water supply was the most important problem facing their country that the government should address, and less than a third of these respondents felt that the government was unlikely to solve this problem "within the next few years". Consequently, given the costs involved, and the relatively low salience of this issue for rural voters, it may be the case that incumbents simply have little electoral incentive to expend effort providing household water to rural voters.

Third, with regards to reducing crime and ensuring sufficient food supply, it is worth noting that the urban-rural difference only becomes significant after the urban proportion of the population reaches a certain size (around 23% for reducing crime, and just over 30% for ensuring enough food). As with providing household water, the size and difficulty of dealing with these issues is affected by urbanization. Unlike water supply though, urbanites become more disapproving of how the government is handling these issues as urbanization increases. It may be the case that, despite having incentives to do so, keeping up with the demand for action on these issues is beyond the means of incumbents. Furthermore, food supply and price stability are issues over which governments often have little control, and therefore may not be particularly useful indicators for the task at hand. This is less true for the issues for which the interaction effect is positive. Therefore, although these results are mixed, on balance they provide further support for the argument put forward in this paper, that all else being equal incumbents favor rural residents in an attempt to win the support of an electoral majority. If this were not the case, we would not expect to see the conditional effects that these results demonstrate.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that African political parties tend to mobilize ethnic or regional constituencies, not urban or rural ones, urbanites across Africa are significantly less likely to support incumbent governments than are their rural counterparts. In this paper I have proposed an explanation for this puzzle that recognizes the electoral incentives faced by politicians in countries where a majority of the population lives in rural areas. In a reversal of Urban Bias, competitive elections in predominantly rural countries create incentives for governments to pursue policies that benefit the rural majority, resulting in dissatisfaction on the part of urban voters. An implication of this argument is that, as the urban proportion of the population increases (as it is doing very rapidly across Africa), so incentives to bias resources in favor of rural interests should decrease, thereby reducing the level of urban incumbent hostility. As a result, the argument implies an inverse relationship between urban incumbent hostility and the urban proportion of the population, for which an analysis of individual-level survey data from eighteen African countries provides strong evidence.

It is not my intention in this paper to suggest that urban-rural location is the only determinant of vote choice in Africa. Indeed, the analysis demonstrates the significance of numerous other factors that one would expect to matter. Yet still, controlling for other possible determinants of incumbent support, the results show that being an urbanite significantly reduces an individual's propensity to support the incumbent government, and that this effect is contingent on the urban-rural distribution of a country's population. Although this analysis supports the explanation suggested herein, future work is needed to assess the underlying mechanism more rigorously. The essence of the argument is that hostility results from the strategic pursuance of policies that benefit rural rather than urban interests. Therefore in this paper I have provided initial evidence of variation in subjective perceptions of government performance across a range of policies, which on balance supports this argument. However, it is necessary to dig much deeper and more systematically into these policies themselves, in order to firmly establish links between the incentives faced by political elites, and the political behavior displayed by voters.

The findings presented in this paper support the argument that I suggest; if the negative effect of being urban were simply due to urbanites being harder to please, there is no good reason why this effect should be conditional on the urban proportion of the population. However, they also provide much food for thought, and demand further consideration and investigation. What sort of policies do incumbents use to court urban and rural votes? How much do urban and rural voters base their voting decisions on these policies? What sort of policy outcomes do urban and rural voters demand and expect? And, are actual policy outcomes themselves conditioned by demographic factors, as suggested by the argument put forward in this paper? Future work will focus on objective indicators of public policy outcomes, in order to investigate more fully the extent to which government policy is determined by electoral incentives, which are themselves conditioned by demographic factors. But the findings presented in this paper, however preliminary, suggest that urbanization does indeed condition government policy in Africa.

Appendix

Table 4: Urban-Rural Differences in Incumbent Support

	Rural	Urban	Difference
Benin	18%	14%	-4%*
Botswana	56%	49%	-7%**
Cape Verde	23%	24%	1%
Ghana	49%	54%	5%*
Kenya	44%	31%	-13%***
Lesotho	72%	55%	-17%***
Madagascar	37%	32%	-5%
Malawi	35%	32%	-3%
Mali	25%	26%	1%
Mozambique	80%	79%	-1%
Namibia	70%	67%	-3%
Nigeria	38%	33%	-5%**
Senegal	58%	43%	-15%***
South Africa	64%	53%	-11%***
Tanzania	85%	75%	-10%***
Uganda	63%	52%	-11%***
Zambia	31%	19%	-12%***
Zimbabwe	27%	10%	-17%***
All	49%	43%	-6%***

Note: ***statistically significant at $p < .01$, **statistically significant at $p < .05$, *statistically significant at $p < .1$

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