

Diaspora Voting and Ethnic Politics in Kenya

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To cite this article: Beth Elise Whitaker, Salma Inyanji, "Vote de la diaspora et ethnicité au Kenya," *Afrique contemporaine* 4/2015 (n° 256), p. 73-89.

URL : www.cairn.info/revue-afrique-contemporaine-2015-4-page-73.htm.

ABSTRACT: Many African governments have extended voting rights to nationals living abroad, but little is known about the political behavior of diaspora populations. In the context of Kenya, where the 2010 constitution authorized diaspora voting, we ask whether nationals living abroad are as likely to vote along ethnic lines as their counterparts at home. Using data from public opinion polls prior to the March 2013 presidential election, we compare levels of support for presumed ethnic candidates among Kenyans surveyed in the diaspora and those surveyed in the country. Overall, diaspora respondents were significantly less likely than in-country respondents to support the presumed ethnic candidate from their home province. The results provide preliminary support for our hypothesis that diaspora Africans are less likely to vote along ethnic lines than their in-country counterparts, and thus are less reliable for the construction of ethnic coalitions. More survey data are needed from Kenyans and other Africans living abroad to further examine the relationship between diaspora voting and ethnicity in African politics.

As migration patterns have become increasingly global, African diaspora populations have emerged as an important political consideration (Akyeampong 2000). The African Union has held a series of conferences to engage the diaspora with a view toward recognizing it as the continent's "sixth region." African governments have been reaching out to nationals living abroad to seek their economic and political participation at home. Many African countries have ministerial-level diaspora offices, and more than half now allow dual citizenship for nationals who naturalize elsewhere (Manby 2009; Whitaker 2011).

One outreach strategy advocated by diaspora groups is overseas voting, which allows citizens living abroad to participate in elections without making a costly trip home. More than 25 African countries have facilitated diaspora voting to varying degrees (Navarro Fierro, Morales, and Gratschew 2007; Moyo 2013). While there has been significant scholarly attention to the economic involvement of overseas Africans in their home countries, particularly with regard to remittances, less is known about their political behavior. As more governments allow external voting, more research is needed about the involvement of African diaspora populations in multiparty politics in their home countries.

The current article asks whether Kenyans living in the diaspora are as likely as their counterparts at home to vote along ethnic lines. While ethnicity is not the only factor influencing electoral outcomes in Kenya, it plays a strong role. The question is whether ethnicity has as much influence on diaspora voters as it does on Kenyans living at home. The next section of the article brings together literature on ethnic voting and diaspora politics to develop a hypothesis about the likelihood of ethnic voting among nationals living abroad. We subsequently turn to Kenya, where ethnic voting patterns are well-established and diaspora voting rights were granted recently. Using data from in-country and diaspora polls prior to the 2013 presidential election,

we find that diaspora respondents were significantly less likely than in-country respondents to support the presumed ethnic candidate from their home province. This provides preliminary support for our hypothesis that diaspora Kenyans are less reliable “ethnic voters” than their in-country counterparts. The conclusion explores the theoretical and practical implications.

Ethnic voting and diaspora politics

The literature provides three main explanations for why citizens who identify with each other culturally tend to vote in blocs (Ferree 2006). The first stresses voting as an expressive undertaking, with members asserting their group identity when they go to the polls, even when doing so contradicts their material interests (Corstange 2013). In this view, elections are essentially an “ethnic census” in which demographics predict party support (Horowitz 1985). The second explanation is that voting is driven by self-interest, especially economic factors; because people in the same ethnic group often have similar interests (and face similar threats to those interests), they vote similarly. Interests instead of identity thus determine voting behavior, even if results are largely along ethnic lines (Mattes and Piombo 2001; Lynch 2014). A third explanation is that the lack of perfect information causes voters to rely on cues to identify desirable candidates (Downs 1957; Popkin 1995; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). In Africa, ethnicity often provides this shortcut (Posner 2005; Ferree 2006), particularly when people lack additional information about a candidate (Conroy-Krutz 2013).

Even so, ethnicity is just one of many factors that affect voting behavior (Chandra 2000; Ferree, Gibson, and Long 2014) and is more influential in some countries than others (Dunning and Harrison 2010). Analysis of survey data from 16 African countries shows that “Africans engage in *both* ethnic *and* economic voting” (Bratton, Bhavnani, and Chen 2012, 27) with

potential voters considering policy performance and partisan affiliations in addition to identity. While ethnicity remains the strongest determinant of voting intentions in Kenya, the explanatory power of quantitative models improves significantly by adding policy considerations and appraisals of job performance; ethnic voting also varies by group and by level of ethnic identification, with some Kenyans identifying in “non-ethnic” terms (Bratton and Kimenyi 2008). Thus, an exclusive focus on ethnicity overlooks other factors influencing voting behavior.

Another relevant body of literature examines how living in a diverse environment affects attitudes toward other social groups. Contact theory suggests that living in proximity to people from another social group allows for frequent interactions, thus diminishing prejudice (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998). Group threat theory, on the other hand, asserts that living in proximity to another group results in more prejudice as people perceive economic and political threats (Blumer 1958; Blalock 1967). Recent research from Kenya supports contact theory: “people living in ethnically diverse areas report higher levels of interethnic trust, while residentially segregated people are less trusting of members of other ethnic groups” (Kasara 2013, 921).

If living in a diverse environment builds trust for other groups, we might also expect it to weaken individuals’ attachment to their own ethnic identities. Drawing on survey data from Kenya, Bratton and Kimenyi (2008) find that simply residing in a diverse area has no impact on ethnic identification. However, people who reside outside of the province in which they were born are significantly less likely to identify in ethnic terms than those living in their home province. The authors reason that “people escape their cultural identities and adopt broader horizons when they travel to any location away from their places of birth” (Bratton and Kimenyi 2008, 287). An alternative explanation not explored by these authors is that people who are less attached to their ethnic identities may be more likely to travel in the first place. Regardless of

whether their finding is driven by migration or self-selection, ethnic identity is a fluid social construct whose salience varies across individuals and geographic locations.

Turning to diaspora politics, existing research yields contradictory conclusions about whether diaspora groups help resolve home country conflicts by facilitating reconstruction or exacerbate them by sustaining military factions that would otherwise settle (Smith and Stares 2007). In some situations, diaspora populations take extreme political positions. After a flawed election in Ethiopia in 2005, for example, diaspora representatives called for international sanctions and even violence (Lyons 2007). Studies show that African diaspora organizations often reproduce home-country ethnic boundaries, as with Nigerian hometown associations that “rehearse well-worn narratives” about their ethnic group’s access to the “national cake” (Lampert 2009, 170). However, such organizations also at times transcend these divisions to foster inter-ethnic collaboration (Geschiere and Gugler 1998; Lyons 2007; Lampert 2009).

The political views of diaspora populations are influenced by the contexts in which individuals operate. Malkki (1995) found that Burundian refugees living in a refugee camp in Tanzania created their own “mythico-history” about the struggles of the Hutu people. This history was standardized, in part through elite control of information, and fueled a focus on a military solution to the problem at home. Refugees living in Kigoma town, on the other hand, had more “cosmopolitan” views and were often accused by camp-based refugees of not being sufficiently Hutu. Even within a given diaspora, therefore, people who are surrounded by members of their own ethnic group may have stronger ties and more extreme views than those who live in more diverse settings. Thus, to the extent that past research has focused mainly on people involved in diaspora organizations that are often ethnically-based, it may give a biased view of politics among African nationals living abroad.

Drawing on these bodies of literature, we hypothesize that diaspora Kenyans are less likely than their counterparts at home to vote along ethnic lines for several reasons. First, ethnic identification may be weaker among Kenyans living overseas, whether initially or as a result of migrating to diverse areas, undermining the emotional rationale for supporting a co-ethnic candidate and increasing openness to candidates from other groups. Second, Kenyans living abroad are less likely to benefit personally from patronage that may come from voting for co-ethnic leaders, or to suffer losses from ethnic “others” gaining control over resources, reducing interest-based incentives for voting along ethnic lines. Finally, diaspora Kenyans may still rely on ethnicity as a cue in the absence of more information about a candidate, but are less likely to be exposed to biased messages that spread by word-of-mouth during election campaigns.

Kenyan political context

Kenya is an ideal case in which to examine the intersection of ethnic voting and diaspora politics. Since the return to multiparty competition in 1991, elections often have involved the construction of minimal winning ethnic coalitions. Kenya also has a significant diaspora population, estimated at 3 million people (7 percent of the country’s total) (Republic of Kenya 2013). Diaspora Kenyans lobbied for years for dual citizenship and diaspora voting, both of which were granted in the 2010 constitution.

There is no doubt that “ethnicity is a fundamental force in Kenyan politics” (Ndegwa 1997, 612). Politicians have long appealed to ethnic solidarity to generate support among their constituents; in turn, people expect ethnic candidates to deliver public goods (Throup and Hornsby 1998; Klopp 2002). Political mobilization along ethnic lines is perpetuated both from above and below (Lonsdale 1994), even as ethnic identities themselves are renegotiated (Posner

2005; Lynch 2006). However, the power of ethnicity in Kenyan politics should not be exaggerated and elections are not as simple as an ethnic tally. Election results also are shaped by voters' evaluations of past performance, economic considerations, and policy proposals (Bratton and Kimenyi 2008; Whitaker and Giersch 2009). While there is substantial pressure to vote along ethnic lines (Burbidge 2014), thus guaranteeing politicians a reliable voting bloc for building coalitions, individual Kenyan voters are motivated by a wide variety of concerns.

The fluidity of political coalitions in Kenya has generated considerable uncertainty about election results. After the legalization of opposition parties in 1991, a divided opposition and violent intimidation by ruling party supporters allowed President Daniel Arap Moi to retain the presidency in 1992 and 1997. In 2002, Moi's decision to step down (in accordance with term limits) paved the way for a democratic transition. The ruling party imploded and the opposition united behind a single candidate, allowing Mwai Kibaki to become president. It did not take long for his coalition to unravel. Raila Odinga, a Luo politician whose support was crucial to Kibaki's victory, accused the new president of denying Odinga's faction promised cabinet positions while elevating instead members of Kibaki's own inner circle of Kikuyu elites.

When Kibaki announced that he would seek another term in 2007, Odinga was his main rival. The election itself went smoothly, but tensions escalated due to delays in vote counting. After initial returns showed a lead for Odinga, the electoral commission stopped announcing results from individual polling sites; suddenly, on 30 December, Kibaki was declared the winner and sworn in for a second term. Frustration over the results sparked violence, fueled by underlying political and economic causes (Mueller 2008). More than 1,300 Kenyans were killed and 600,000 displaced (Lynch 2009). Mediation efforts led to a power-sharing government in which Kibaki retained the presidency and Odinga assumed a new post of prime minister.

When a divided Kenyan government proved unable to hold leaders accountable for the violence, former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan turned evidence over to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Among the six people indicted for their involvement in the violence were two politicians with presidential ambitions: William Ruto was accused of mobilizing fellow Kalenjin to attack Kikuyu, while Uhuru Kenyatta (son of Kenya's first president) allegedly funded reprisals by Kikuyu militias. Meanwhile, politicians got busy writing a new constitution, another condition of the power-sharing agreement. Among various provisions promised for years, including parliamentary checks on executive power, the constitution approved in a 2010 referendum granted dual citizenship and voting rights to Kenyans living abroad.

Months before the March 2013 election, the list of presidential contenders included Odinga, Kenyatta, and Ruto. Other candidates were long-time politicians Kalonzo Musyoka (a Kamba) and Musalia Mudavadi (a Luhya), businessman Peter Kenneth, perennial opposition figure Paul Muite, and a high-profile woman, Martha Karua. Just before the December 2012 deadline, several coalitions formed. Most notably, the Jubilee Alliance strategically brought together two candidates facing ICC charges (Lynch 2014; Mueller 2014), with Kenyatta running for president and Ruto for vice president. Musyoka became Odinga's running mate on the Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) ticket. After a tight race between these two coalitions, carefully constructed to account for ethnic representation (Carrier and Kochore 2014; Lynch 2014), Kenyatta won just enough of the first-round vote (50.07 percent) to avoid a run-off against Odinga (43.31 percent) under the majority system laid out in the new constitution.

Although Kenyans in the diaspora expected to vote in these elections, only those living in East Africa were allowed to cast ballots. Justice Minister Eugene Wamalwa explained that the decision to exclude Kenyans outside East Africa was due to logistical, financial, and time

constraints, but many diaspora Kenyans saw it as indicative of a lack of respect and some sued the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) (Mutambo and Karanja 2012; Moyo 2013; Sulaiman 2013). According to official results, 88 percent of 2,637 registered diaspora Kenyans voted, even higher than the 86 percent turnout at home.¹ In contrast to the overall results, Odinga received the largest share of diaspora votes (52.6 percent vs. Kenyatta's 40.9 percent), suggesting that greater diaspora participation could have narrowed the final margin. But even if those percentages held across the entire diaspora, which is a major assumption, it would have taken the implementation of external voting on a *much* larger scale (94,857 diaspora voters) to have prevented Kenyatta from winning in the first round.

Although most diaspora Kenyans were not allowed to vote, the potential political value of the diaspora did not go unnoticed by the candidates. Kenneth conducted a whirlwind campaign tour across the United States, and Odinga made several trips abroad. Foreign Affairs assistant minister Richard Onyonka stated that it would be an oversight for any politician to overlook the power of the diaspora, and the Head of the Diaspora Department, Maurice Okoth, said Kenyans in the diaspora had the “potential to tilt [the] election” if all of them voted (Ng'etich 2011). With 12.3 million votes cast in the election, and a final margin of less than 833,000, diaspora Kenyans numbering as many as 3 million represented a potential swing vote. Kenyan politicians thus are well aware of the electoral potential of this group, although it remains unclear whether the voting behavior of those in the diaspora is shaped by the same factors as voters at home.

¹ Although atypical, higher diaspora turnout in this case may be due to the fact that these voters were living elsewhere in East Africa, where there was extensive media coverage of the Kenyan election.

Diaspora and in-country polls

To examine the likelihood of diaspora Kenyans voting along ethnic lines, we use data from two polls conducted by Infotrak Research and Consulting in Nairobi.² In its inaugural poll of diaspora Kenyans, Infotrak used internet-based Survey Monkey to solicit opinions from Kenyans living in the United States. The poll was conducted from 23 September to 1 October 2012 and was distributed via email to a list of Kenyans whose contact information was obtained from several sources, including the Kenyan Embassy in Washington, DC. The survey included questions about diaspora Kenyans' priorities, as well as the following: "If the elections were to be held today, who would you vote for as President?" Cross-tabulated data on county of origin and presidential preference were available for 999 of the 1,104 poll respondents.

Although this was a convenience sample and selection was not random, diaspora respondents came from nearly all (44) of Kenya's 47 counties. Comparisons to population figures in Kenya show that counties in the former provinces of Central, Nyanza, and Nairobi were over-represented in the diaspora sample by about 10 percent each (i.e., 18.5 percent of diaspora respondents came from Nairobi, which is home to 8.1 percent of the country's population). Despite the lack of data about the Kenyan diaspora, it is commonly accepted that people from these three former provinces have been more likely to emigrate; thus, their over-representation in the diaspora poll may be a result of higher actual numbers in the diaspora population and not of sampling bias. Unfortunately, we were not able to obtain additional individual-level data to do a more detailed analysis of the full range of factors influencing voting intentions among diaspora Kenyans. On average, the estimated 106,484 Kenyans in the U.S. are

² We are grateful to Infotrak for providing cross-tabulated data from the diaspora survey with respect to respondents' county of origin. Infotrak was later criticized for incorrectly predicting an Odinga election victory, but we have no reason to believe that the results of the polls used here were inaccurate.

highly educated (46.3 percent have at least a bachelor's degree), majority female (51.8 percent), and their median household income is \$58,547 (U.S. Census 2013).

To our knowledge, Infotrak is the only polling firm that surveyed diaspora Kenyans prior to the 2013 election. With this poll as our starting point, therefore, we sought to compare it to an in-country poll around the same time. Given the events that took place in the six months between the poll and the election (including the formation of coalitions), it does not make sense to compare the diaspora poll to actual election results. Instead, it is more appropriate to compare to an in-country poll conducted when the political landscape was similar. As it turns out, the same polling firm (Infotrak) conducted an in-country poll just four weeks later, from 29 October to 1 November 2012. Using systematic sampling techniques, face-to-face interviews were held with 1,500 respondents in half of Kenya's counties. In addition to questions about the direction of the country and various political parties, people were asked, "Apart from President Kibaki, whom would you vote for as your President if presidential elections were to be held today?" By comparing the results of this in-country poll to the results of the diaspora poll, therefore, we can explore whether ethnic voting patterns differed between the two groups.

In order to test our hypothesis, we need to understand whether candidate preferences expressed in these two polls reflect a tendency to vote along ethnic lines. This requires an indicator of the respondents' ethnicities. Despite the prevalence of ethnic politics in Kenya, polls rarely ask respondents about their ethnic identity. Instead, given the geographic concentration of most ethnic groups in Kenya, analysts frequently use respondents' county of origin as a proxy for ethnicity. Most of Kenya's 47 counties have a predominant ethnic group³ and county-level election results often reflect overwhelming support for co-ethnic candidates.

³ On the Kenya Elections Database website <<http://kenyaelectiondatabase.co.ke/>>, just four of 47 counties are identified as "cosmopolitan." All other counties have a predominant ethnic group.

Because of data limitations, we rely on regional aggregates instead of county-level survey results. The two Infotrak polls included respondents from all eight provinces but not from all 47 counties. In addition, the number of respondents from some counties was small. We therefore group counties by province.⁴ Although this level of aggregation combines counties with different ethnic groups, there remains wide variation in the regional level of ethnic diversity. The former Coast, Eastern, Nairobi, and Rift Valley provinces each have three or more predominant ethnic groups, Nyanza includes two, and Central, Northeastern, and Western are each dominated by a single ethnic group. We thus expect ethnic voting blocs to be larger in less diverse provinces.

Finally, to determine the extent to which respondents' candidate preferences are in line with expectations, we identify for each province the presidential candidate at the time of the polls who was expected to receive the largest share of support based on ethnic groupings within the province. In September/October 2012, the presumed ethnic candidates for each province were as follows: Raila Odinga (Luo) for Nyanza, Uhuru Kenyatta (Kikuyu) for Central, William Ruto (Kalenjin) for Rift Valley, Musalia Mudavadi (Luhya) for Western, and Kalonzo Musyoka (Kamba) for Eastern. Given the greater ethnic diversity of Rift Valley and Eastern provinces, Ruto and Musyoka would be expected to have plurality support instead of majority support in their respective provinces. The other three provinces—Nairobi, Northeastern, and Coast—did not have an obvious ethnic candidate, making it harder to determine the extent to which poll respondents' preferences reflected ethnic dynamics. Drawing on these data, we seek to determine whether diaspora Kenyan poll respondents are more or less likely than in-country respondents to express support for the presumed ethnic candidate from their province of origin.

⁴ Kenya's 47 new counties emerge out of a previous system that divided the country into eight provinces, and those dynamics remain relevant in Kenyan politics today.

Comparing the poll results

To examine differences between the results of the in-country poll and the diaspora poll prior to the March 2013 elections, we start by comparing overall levels of support for each candidate. Table 1 shows the percent of respondents in each survey that expressed support for each of seven leading presidential candidates at the time the polls were conducted. The most obvious finding from this comparison is that Raila Odinga enjoyed a comfortable lead among respondents in both polls.⁵ These results are consistent with other polls conducted in Kenya around this time. Odinga was seen as having been denied a victory in the controversial 2007 election, but his high levels of support early on also were due to the weaknesses of other candidates and concerns about having another Kikuyu president. It was only later that Kenyatta saw an increase in support.

Beyond their common support for Odinga, however, the differences between the U.S.-based diaspora and in-country polls are noteworthy. First, Kenyatta and Ruto enjoyed significantly more support in Kenya than they did in the diaspora sample. This gap may reflect different attitudes toward the pending ICC cases. Keenly aware that the international community viewed these men as having blood on their hands, diaspora Kenyans may have been reluctant to express support for either one. In contrast, people in Kenya were getting a different message about the ICC charges. On the campaign trail, Kenyatta and Ruto both accused the ICC of meddling in internal affairs, and of rigging evidence against them. They presented it as an issue of sovereignty and portrayed themselves as opponents of neo-colonialism (Mueller 2014).

Two other candidates received significantly *more* support in the U.S.-based diaspora. Peter Kenneth is a businessman who is seen by many Kenyans as being above ethnicity. He was selected by nearly 11 percent of the diaspora Kenyans surveyed, but was never much more than a

⁵ Although we are reluctant to use statistical methods to compare the results of two polls with different sampling techniques, the differences for all of the candidates in Table 1 except Raila Odinga are statistically significant.

fringe candidate within Kenya. He ultimately received 3.4 percent of the East Africa-based diaspora vote, but just 0.59 percent of the total vote. Another Kikuyu, Martha Karua, was the most viable female candidate in the race. She finished with 1.3 percent of the diaspora vote, but just 0.36 percent of the total vote. With Kenneth appealing especially to educated middle-class Kenyans and Karua to women, we are not surprised by the higher level of support for these candidates among U.S.-based Kenyans, who are well-educated and predominantly female.

The last finding to discuss from Table 1 is the level of indecision in the diaspora. Just 1.9 percent of in-country respondents were undecided, whereas 24.8 percent of diaspora respondents had not yet chosen a candidate. Many U.S.-based diaspora Kenyans follow politics at home very closely, but they were probably not as immersed in it as people in country. The diaspora poll was conducted online while the in-country poll was administered through face-to-face interviews, where respondents may have felt more pressure to make a choice. In addition, although a final decision had not yet been made about diaspora voting at the time of the poll, many Kenyans in the United States may have doubted it would really happen, reducing the pressure to decide.

Turning to the question of whether U.S.-based diaspora Kenyans are more or less likely than in-country Kenyans to vote along ethnic lines, Table 2 compares the percentage of survey respondents from each province who expressed support for the presumed ethnic presidential candidate from that province. Because of the lack of an obvious ethnic candidate for Nairobi, Coast, or Northeastern provinces, and the small size of the diaspora samples from the latter two, we examine just five provinces in our analysis. As expected even within Kenya, the level of support for the presumed ethnic candidate was lower in more diverse provinces (Rift Valley, Eastern) and higher in more homogenous provinces (Central, Nyanza). Even so, we are less

concerned with the specific level of support for each candidate than with how the levels of support in country compare to those in the diaspora.

For every province but one, U.S.-based diaspora Kenyans were significantly less likely than their counterparts within Kenya to support the presumed ethnic candidate from their home province. This is consistent with our logic that diaspora Kenyans may be less attached to their ethnic identities and more open to candidates from other groups, and that they are not exposed to the same pressure to vote as an ethnic bloc. They also have less incentive to support a co-ethnic candidate because they will not benefit from patronage provided by that person if elected, or suffer losses from an ethnic “other” being elected. Given that people are not randomly selected to emigrate overseas, diaspora Kenyans may have started out with weaker attachment to their ethnic identities and/or more openness to other groups, whether as a result of education, income, or other factors. There is no way to control for this with available data. Whether their views came from the process of migrating to more diverse areas or were present before they left (self selection), the finding that diaspora Kenyans are less likely to support their presumed ethnic candidate has implications for their participation in home country elections.

The key exception to this pattern is for people from the former Nyanza province, where support for Odinga was identical (66 percent) among in-country and diaspora respondents. This finding should not be assumed to mean that Luo in the diaspora are just as likely to vote along ethnic lines as co-ethnics at home. As discussed earlier, many people thought Odinga had been denied a legitimate victory in 2007. While Luo may have felt slighted, Odinga also received a plurality of support among diaspora Kenyans from several other provinces, including Coast (38.5 percent), Nairobi (21 percent), Eastern (24 percent), Rift Valley (19.4 percent), and Western

(52.4 percent). Support for Odinga among diaspora respondents from Nyanza is less an indicator of ethnic voting than a reflection of the overall popularity of Odinga in that poll.

Before concluding that U.S.-based diaspora Kenyans are less likely to vote along ethnic lines than Kenyans at home, we checked the robustness of our results. Given that there were three Kikuyu presidential candidates in the race and two of them (Karua and Kenneth) received much higher levels of support among diaspora respondents, we explored the possibility that Kikuyus in the diaspora were simply dividing their support among these three co-ethnic candidates. If we combine levels of support for Kenyatta, Kenneth, and Karua, however, diaspora respondents from the former Central Province still were significantly less likely to support a Kikuyu candidate (50.9 percent) than their counterparts at home (74 percent).

Due to concerns about the vast discrepancy between the polls in the proportion of undecided respondents, we also recalculated each candidate's level of support as a percentage of decided respondents. The results were the same for the former Eastern, Central, Rift Valley, and Western provinces, with U.S.-based diaspora respondents significantly less likely than in-country respondents to support the presumed ethnic candidate from their province. The only difference was for people from Nyanza, where diaspora respondents were significantly *more* likely to support Odinga than those at home. Again, instead of demonstrating particularly strong ethnic identity among Luo, this is likely a reflection of the large number of undecided respondents among diaspora Kenyans overall and from Nyanza province specifically.

These results provide preliminary support for our hypothesis that voters in the diaspora are less likely than those at home to vote along ethnic lines, but there are clear limitations to our analysis due to data availability. As with many studies of voting patterns in Africa, we rely on public opinion polls that measure voting intent, not vote choice. Knowing they would be unlikely

to actually vote, Kenyans living in the U.S. may have been more willing to take chances in their survey selection or to support internationally-acceptable candidates who had little chance of winning. If they ultimately had been able to vote in the election, they may have shifted to co-ethnic candidates as so many Kenyan voters did (Burbidge 2014). We also do not have individual-level data to control for education, income, and other factors that may affect the willingness of diaspora Kenyans to vote along ethnic lines. Similarly, we do not know how representative the respondents in the U.S.-based diaspora poll are of the Kenyan diaspora more broadly. We hope to develop strategies to survey a representative sample of diaspora Kenyans about their voting behavior prior to the next election. With many African countries moving toward diaspora voting, this line of research has implications throughout the continent.

Conclusion

In this article, we have asked whether Kenyans in the diaspora are as likely as Kenyans at home to vote along ethnic lines. By comparing the results of two opinion polls prior to the 2013 election, we find that U.S.-based diaspora respondents were significantly less likely to support the presumed ethnic candidate from their home province. We reason that diaspora Kenyans have more cosmopolitan views—whether because they were less attached to their ethnic identities originally or because their views changed as a result of migrating to a diverse area—and are less likely to perceive politics through an ethnic lens. Because they are living outside of the country, they will not benefit personally from any patronage rewards that may come from electing one of their own. Diaspora Kenyans also are one step removed from the constant barrage of campaign messages pressuring people to vote as an ethnic bloc. As a result, ethnicity appears to be less of a factor in the candidate preferences expressed by diaspora Kenyans in the United States.

These findings would seem to contradict existing research showing that African diaspora populations reproduce home-country ethnic divisions. There are several possible explanations. Diaspora Kenyans did not flee a conflict; most left to pursue economic opportunities. In contrast, “conflict-generated diasporas” often are sustained by traumatic memories that shape perceptions of homeland politics and reduce their willingness to compromise (Lyons 2007).⁶ Diaspora Kenyans also are scattered throughout the United States, with 24 different states each hosting at least 1,000 Kenyan-born residents (U.S. Census 2013). As with Burundian refugees in Tanzania (Malkki 1995), this dispersion may increase exposure to diverse viewpoints and decrease the chances of socializing only with members of their own ethnic group. Finally, previous research has focused primarily on formal diaspora organizations, some of which are constituted along ethnic lines; it thus privileges the views of people who have chosen to be involved in such organizations. Our study draws instead on a survey of individual diaspora Kenyans, some of whom may be involved in diaspora organizations while others have different social circles.

Although our findings are preliminary, they have several implications. First, diaspora voters may not be as reliable from the perspective of Kenyan politicians because their votes are less predictable. In a country where political coalitions are formed based on ethnicity, politicians have long put pressure on their constituents to vote as a bloc to demonstrate that they are a reliable coalition partner. If people are less likely to vote along ethnic lines, their presumed ethnic candidate cannot guarantee votes and becomes a less desirable partner. Although not all politicians buy into this game, those with the most power do (and have gained power by doing so). In this context, if diaspora voters are less likely to vote along ethnic lines, they are less

⁶ When Kenya’s multiparty politics turned violent after the 2007 elections, diaspora Kenyans were among those participating in social media discussions about the situation. With tensions high both at home and abroad, some diaspora members called for calm, while others fueled the flames of ethnic division (Ochudho 2015).

useful to politicians. Moreover, if diaspora Kenyans influence the voting patterns of family and friends at home, they could threaten ethnic voting more broadly.

Second, our findings support the idea that ethnic voting is contextual and instrumental. In Kenya, there is significant peer pressure to vote as an ethnic bloc. Once people are removed from that setting, however, these pressures decline. Although we have focused in this article on international migration, where the differences are particularly stark, the findings raise questions about the impact of internal migration within Kenya (or other African countries). Is a Kikuyu living in the diverse city of Nairobi just as likely as one living in Kikuyu-dominated Nyandarua County to vote for the presumed Kikuyu presidential candidate? And what about a Kikuyu living in a Luo-dominated county? Does the influence of geographic place on voting behavior vary by ethnic group? Such questions warrant research with more refined data.

Finally, this research has implications for election outcomes. With as many as three million Kenyans living overseas, they could theoretically sway the results of a close election. However, this potential is dependent upon both the widespread implementation of external voting and the formation of voting blocs in the diaspora. Despite court rulings in favor of the diaspora, there is serious doubt as to whether external voting will be implemented on a wider scale for the 2017 Kenyan election. Even if the IEBC accelerates the process and opens overseas polling stations, the ethnic and political diversity of the Kenyan diaspora and its comparatively small numbers make it unlikely to change an election outcome anytime soon. In the end, diaspora voters may be less likely than in-country voters to vote along ethnic lines, but their potential impact on electoral outcomes is unclear.⁷ This may be reassuring for African politicians debating the implementation of diaspora voting in their countries.

⁷ There is evidence that diaspora votes tipped the outcome in favor of the incumbent in Cape Verde's 2006 presidential election (Turcu and Urbatsch 2015).

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**Table 1:
Overall Level of Support for Presidential Candidates**

Candidate (Ethnic identification)	Diaspora respondents Infotrak Poll Sept 2012	In-country respondents Infotrak Poll Oct 2012
Raila Odinga (Luo)	32.1%	35.4%
Uhuru Kenyatta (Kikuyu)	10.7%	24.0%
William Ruto (Kalenjin)	1.7%	10.3%
Musalia Mudavadi (Luhya)	4.5%	10.0%
Kalonzo Musyoka (Kamba)	2.2%	8.8%
Martha Karua (Kikuyu)	6.8%	4.3%
Peter Kenneth (Kikuyu)	10.6%	2.0%
Other	6.5%	3.3%
Undecided	24.8%	1.9%

**Table 2:
Level of Support for Presumed Ethnic Candidate by Kenyan Province**

Province (Presumed ethnic candidate)	Diaspora respondents Infotrak Poll Sept 2012	In-country respondents Infotrak Poll Oct 2012
Eastern (Kalonzo Musyoka)	13%	33%
Central (Uhuru Kenyatta)	24%	66%
Rift Valley (William Ruto)	8%	29%
Nyanza (Raila Odinga)	66%	66%
Western (Musalia Mudavadi)	12%	44%

NOTE: The former Coast, Northeastern, and Nairobi provinces are excluded because there was no clear presumed ethnic candidate.