

Reducing or Reinforcing In-Group Preferences? An Experiment on Information and Ethnic Voting

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ABSTRACT

Social scientists often characterize identity politics as a threat to democracy and growth, and recent scholarship investigates factors that could exacerbate or alleviate it. A dominant view — that shared social identity acts as a heuristic in low-information contexts — implies that information access could reduce social identity voting. But this view contrasts with evidence that identity often conditions information processing, potentially in ways that amplify in-group preferences. We test these expectations with a field experiment around Benin’s 2015 legislative elections. Behavioral and attitudinal data reveal that voters reward good-performing incumbents only if they are coethnics, and punish bad performers only if they are noncoethnics. Coethnics are also more (less) likely to accurately recall performance information if it is positive (negative). These results are consistent with a theory of motivated reasoning whereby voters act on new information only when it allows them to reaffirm their social identity. These findings improve our understanding of comparative ethnic politics, identity and information processing, and information and accountability.

*We thank EGAP for generous funding. The study is part of a larger Metaketa, a regranting initiative organized and administered by EGAP to accumulate knowledge about the relationship between information and accountability across country contexts. The

Online Appendix available from:

http://dx.doi.org/10.1561/100.00017018_app

Supplementary Material available from:

http://dx.doi.org/10.1561/100.00017018_supp

MS submitted on 25 January 2017; final version received 22 June 2017

ISSN 1554-0626; DOI 10.1561/100.00017018

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Keywords: Elections; voting behavior; ethnicity; African politics; motivated reasoning

Scholars have long been concerned about the political and economic consequences of social identities such as ethnicity, race, and in some cases, partisanship. The normative and empirical literature on democracy warns that politically salient ethnic divisions, for instance, are likely to undermine democratic stability, accountability, and prospects for democratic consolidation (e.g., Dahl, 1973; Horowitz, 1985; Lijphart, 1977; Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972), and a substantial literature in political economy suggests that ethnic and racial diversity is associated with the under-provision of public goods and poor economic growth around the world (Alesina *et al.*, 1999; Easterly and Levine, 1997; Miguel, 2004; Miguel and Gugerty, 2005). In the U.S. context, scholars have argued that partisanship acts as a screen through which individuals evaluate economic and political conditions (Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Gerber and Huber, 2009), a claim that carries important implications for polarization.¹

The growing literature on information and accountability offers a potential solution: increasing voter access to information about politics, or the cultivation of an informed electorate, may help to reduce the salience of social identity divisions in democratic politics. Drawing on research that emphasizes the role of heuristics in guiding voter decision making (Popkin, 1991), this literature highlights that social identity markers such as ethnicity often become important in electoral politics where information is scarce (Birnie, 2007; Chandra, 2004; Conroy-Krutz, 2013; Ferree, 2006; Posner, 2005). In environments where voters lack access to information about competing candidates or parties, ethnic and other social identity labels provide voters with a cheap and relatively accessible source of information about either candidate quality — whether they can be trusted, are competent, and will work hard — or about the extent to which a candidate will pursue a policy or redistributive agenda that is likely

registered preanalysis plan for the Metaketa can be found at: <http://egap.org/registration/736>. The registered preanalysis plan for this particular study can be found at: <http://egap.org/registration/735>. We thank Amanda Pinkston for sharing 2011 legislative election data and Ana Quiroz for excellent research assistance. We thank participants at Cornell University, George Washington University, Georgetown University, Harvard University, MPSA, Princeton University, University of Virginia, WGAPE, and Yale University, as well as Jake Bowers, Thad Dunning, Karen Ferree, Guy Grossman, Nahomi Ichino, Janet Lewis, Dan Nielsen, Ken Opalo, Betsy Paluck, Dan Posner, Leonard Wantchekon, Kadir Yildirim, the Editors of QJPS, and several anonymous reviewers for helpful comments. This research was conducted in collaboration with the Centre de Promotion de la Démocratie et du Développement (CEPRODE), and we thank Adam Chabi Bouko for leading the implementation effort. Our project received ethics approval from UCSD, Texas A&M, GWU, and Harvard University. We also obtained permission to conduct the study from the President of the National Assembly of Benin. In each study village, permission to conduct research was obtained from the chief and consent was obtained from each surveyed participant in the study.

¹But see McGrath (2017).

to benefit specific individuals and groups (Carlson, 2015; Posner, 2005). This set of arguments implies that *increasing voter access to information about candidates should reduce ethnic voting* (Conroy-Krutz, 2013).

But we argue that this expectation contrasts with the implications of research in social and political psychology that finds that social identity often conditions how individuals process and act upon information about politics, potentially in ways that reinforce or exacerbate, rather than reduce, group-based preferences. Social identity theory emphasizes that people often derive self-esteem and other psychological benefits from observing that in-group members do well relative to other groups (e.g., Lieberman, 2009; Tajfel, 1974), and that they are more likely to attach positive attributes to their in-groups to begin with (Dunning and Harrison, 2010; Fiske *et al.*, 2007; Gay, 2002). These benefits from in-group status can provide a “directional goal” (Kunda, 1999) that guides information processing. Indeed, the literature on motivated reasoning in American Politics argues that individuals motivated to affirm their social (usually partisan) identities process information in ways consistent with that goal — that is, in ways that allow them to maintain or enhance their positive view of ingroup members relative to outgroup members (Bolsen *et al.*, 2014; Kunda, 1987, 1990; Taber and Lodge, 2006). We argue that, where ethnicity is a highly salient social identity category, voters may engage in *ethnically motivated reasoning*, updating their beliefs about politicians only when presented with positive information about coethnics and with negative information about noncoethnics, and not otherwise. In other words, *increasing voter access to information may reinforce or amplify ethnic voting*.

The empirical implications of these two theoretical approaches are quite different. According to the first, improved access to information should supplant identity-based politics, lessening voters’ reliance on social identity markers when they make their voting decisions and reducing the salience of social identity in electoral politics. According to the second, voters’ group identities should condition how they process and act upon political information in ways that reinforce or exacerbate social group-based divisions in the electorate. We test these competing expectations in a context in which ethnicity is a highly salient social identity. In this context, *does increasing voter access to information reduce or reinforce ethnic voting?*

We address this question by analyzing data we collected as part of a large-scale field experiment conducted around the 2015 National Assembly elections in Benin.² Benin is a democratic West African country where ethnicity is a

²This article is part of an experimental study on information and accountability in Benin and part of the EGAP Metaketa initiative. In a companion paper, we present other results from the full experimental design, but here we focus on information and ethnic voting. In the online Appendix B.4–B.4.4, we provide full details on all treatment conditions and discuss and provide tables demonstrating the consistency of results across papers. In designing the experiment, we followed the ethical principles agreed upon by the Metaketa initiative, as outlined in the joint metaketa preanalysis plan: that the intervention consist of information that existed

highly salient social identity (Adida, 2015; Koter, 2013; Wantchekon, 2003) and where the political information environment is poor. In the experiment, villages and urban neighborhoods were randomly assigned to receive information about the legislative performance of incumbent politicians running in the election.³ Individuals and villages in our sample vary in their ethnic connection to the incumbents in their area — some are coethnics with the incumbent but others are not — which allowed us to leverage our experimental data to examine how ethnic ties condition the impact of information access, while we controlled for factors that may correlate with coethnicity, such as prior beliefs about candidates.⁴

Using both behavioral data from official village- and neighborhood-level election outcomes and panel survey data, we find results that are most consistent with ethnically motivated reasoning. That is, we find that access to information amplified voter preferences for coethnic politicians and reinforced voter disapproval of noncoethnic candidates. More specifically, voters rewarded the good performance of their coethnics but did not reward the good performance of noncoethnics. By contrast, they punished the poor performance of noncoethnics but did not punish the poor performance of coethnics. We uncovered these patterns in both panel survey data and in official administrative data, alleviating potential concerns about social desirability bias and differential attrition in the survey.

We bolster the motivated reasoning argument with additional evidence that ethnic identity conditioned information processing in a comprehension survey that was conducted immediately following the provision of performance information. The results show that the incumbent's coethnics were more likely than noncoethnics to accurately recall the information provided in the experiment if the information was positive. On the other hand, when the information suggested that the incumbent was a poor performer, coethnics of the incumbent were substantially *less* likely to recall the information accurately. These results are consistent with the notion that voters took up new information when it allowed them to maintain or enhance a positive view of coethnics, and discarded it when it did not.

The study makes a number of contributions. First, we advance theories of ethnic voting in comparative politics by highlighting an additional mechanism that has received less attention: the possible role of ethnic identity in condition-

in the political system, be provided with consent, in a nonpartisan way, without deception, and in cooperation with a local group. For further notes, see the online Appendix B.3.

³The informational intervention focuses specifically on the tasks for which deputies are formally charged. We discuss details of the information treatment in subsequent sections.

⁴The hypothesis about coethnicity as a moderator was specified in our preanalysis plan. Nevertheless, because coethnicity is not randomly assigned, it is possible that it is correlated with other omitted variables that are driving the results. We thus provide evidence that our results are robust when we control for a number of variables that might correlate with coethnicity, such as respondent priors on incumbent performance, partisanship, education, and poverty.

ing how voters process and ultimately act on good and bad information about political performance. Although this mechanism has informed how scholars of American politics understand partisan attachment and information processing, it has been surprisingly absent from the literature on comparative ethnic politics. Our claim is not that alternative theories of ethnic voting are necessarily incorrect in all cases. Rather, we show that ethnically motivated reasoning best explains our results, and conclude that social-identity attachments *can* condition how voters process new political information. This finding raises questions about the extent to which information can reduce social-identity based voting.

Second, our study contributes to the literatures on motivated reasoning and biased information processing in politics. Scholars of American politics have recognized that partisan identities can play a profound role in shaping how individuals respond to political information about politics (e.g., Bartels, 2002; Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Zaller, 1992). We extend this literature by providing evidence that motivated reasoning, driven by ethnic rather than partisan attachments, can have similar effects on information processing in a different context. We thus also advance a nascent comparative politics literature that explores the implications of motivated reasoning outside of the United States (Carlson, 2016; Conroy-Krutz and Moehler, 2015; Horowitz and Long, 2016).⁵ We go beyond these studies by examining more explicitly how ethnic identity shapes information processing.

Finally, we contribute to the literature on information and accountability. Theories of political accountability generally posit that increased access to information about politician performance shapes voting behavior, helping voters to distinguish between strong and weak performers (Fearon, 1999; Pande, 2011). Yet evidence to date suggests that the relationship between access to performance information and voting behavior is not straightforward. Some field and natural experiments have found that providing performance information to voters does indeed result in the punishment of poorly performing politicians (Banerjee *et al.*, 2011; Ferraz and Finan, 2008). But other experimental work has been unable to reject the null hypothesis that increased access to performance information has no effect on citizen behavior (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2012). Some experimental studies have even found that the provision of performance information resulted in the punishment of challengers as well as incumbents (Chong *et al.*, 2015). Our results shed light on these puzzling findings by highlighting a key moderating factor, social identity attachments, that conditions how voters respond to interventions designed to enhance information access.

⁵Conroy-Krutz and Moehler (2015) employ a field experimental approach to test whether partisan media moderates political attitudes in urban Ghana but find little evidence that it does. Carlson (2016) finds evidence of partisan bias in evaluations of government service provision in Uganda. Horowitz and Long (2016) argue that motivated reasoning might explain why Kenyan voters support coethnic presidential candidates that have no chance of winning.

Ethnicity, Information, and Voting

Ethnic voting is prevalent in many democracies.⁶ A significant body of research documents that voters in many parts of the world, including in Benin, are more likely (though not determined) to vote for coethnic candidates than for noncoethnic candidates (e.g., Adida, 2015; Bratton and Kimenyi, 2008; Ferree, 2006; Heath *et al.*, 2015; Horowitz, 1985; Hutchings and Valentino, 2004; Posner, 2005).⁷ However, there is considerable debate about why this is so, with important implications for how new political information might interact with ethnic voting. In what follows, we first discuss the most prominent expectation from the comparative politics literature — that ethnicity acts as a heuristic for other features of the candidate, and how new information should thus condition ethnic voting. We then introduce an alternative expectation generated by insights from the American politics literature — that ethnicity conditions how individuals cognitively process new information, and the distinct predictions this implies for the effect of information on ethnic voting.

One explanation for ethnic voting emphasizes ethnic labels as heuristics used in the face of information scarcity. In low information environments, voters may use ethnicity as a short-cut for evaluating candidates (Birnie, 2007; Chandra, 2004; Conroy-Krutz, 2013; Ferree, 2006; Posner, 2005). In contrast to other candidate attributes about which information gathering might be difficult, coethnicity is often easily observable, thus providing a cheap source of information where other sources are unavailable or difficult to obtain (Chandra, 2004).⁸

The comparative politics literature emphasizes two different factors for which coethnicity can serve as a short-cut. One strand of the ethnicity-as-heuristic literature suggests that ethnic labels convey information about candidate quality: the extent to which the candidate is competent, hardworking, trustworthy, and will not shirk on the job (Conroy-Krutz, 2013; Fiske *et al.*, 2007). In the absence of information to the contrary, people may tend to assume that members of their in-groups are more highly capable (Fiske *et al.*, 2007). Here, coethnicity serves as a means for deciding which candidates are likely to be the most effective. If ethnicity acts as a heuristic for candidate quality, *then the introduction of new information about politician performance that conveys information about candidate quality should reduce the importance of ethnicity in shaping voting decisions overall.*

⁶Ethnicity is understood here to mean a politically and socially constructed group identity, based on real or perceived descent (Chandra, 2006).

⁷Chauchard (2016) points out that ethnic cues may also affect voting when choosing among noncoethnics.

⁸Voters do not always identify coethnics without error (Habyarimana *et al.*, 2009; Harris and Findley, 2014). However, relative to other politician characteristics, coethnicity is more easily surmized. Chandra (2004) points out that highly visible attributes such as name, physical features, speech, and dress signal ethnicity.

A second strand of this literature highlights instead that ethnic labels provide information about which groups of voters are likely to benefit from a candidate's policies or efforts to distribute patronage. This argument, which is dominant among scholars of African politics (e.g., Carlson, 2015; Ferree, 2010; Ichino and Nathan, 2013; Posner, 2005) but has been applied in other regions as well (Chandra, 2004), posits that voters expect coethnic candidates to favor them when delivering goods and services and when deciding which legislative goals to pursue. Several studies have shown evidence of political ethnic favoritism when it comes to constituency service (e.g., Butler and Broockman, 2011; McClendon, 2016), the delivery of local public goods (Burgess *et al.*, 2015; Franck and Rainer, 2012; Kramon and Posner, 2013, 2016) and the pursuit of policies that serve coethnics' interests (Pande, 2003; Preuhs, 2006), so these expectations may not be unreasonable (c.f., Kasara, 2007). In fact, Chandra speaks of an equilibrium whereby the biased distribution of patronage and public goods reinforces voter expectations of coethnic favoritism (Chandra, 2004). In places like sub-Saharan Africa where ethnic groups are regionally concentrated, politicians can use legislation to direct resources to particular areas, and thus groups, within the country (e.g., Bates, 1983; Hodler and Raschky, 2014). Furthermore, national policies or institutional arrangements beyond resource transfers can have disparate impacts on groups with heterogeneous preferences (Kramon and Posner, 2011).⁹

If ethnicity is a heuristic for the favorable distribution of goods by a coethnic politician, then, as Carlson (2015) finds, *increased access to information about candidate quality may matter to voters only when the information is about members of their own ethnic group*. Believing they are unlikely to benefit from the efforts of noncoethnic politicians whether those politicians are competent and hardworking or not, voters may seek to select strong coethnic performers over weak coethnic performers but may care little about the performance records of noncoethnics.¹⁰ In this scenario, increasing access to information

⁹For example, broad-based decentralization reforms in Mali appeased ethnic Tuaregs in the North who have greater preferences for autonomy than groups predominantly residing in the South (Seely, 2001). In Benin, policies about cotton-pricing are more important to the North, where cotton grows, and policies about cashew-growing are more important to the South. In addition, policies about land-tenure and natural resource management are more salient to localities with larger concentrations of Peuls, the traditional pastoral group in the Sahel.

¹⁰Voters living in a rural areas dominated by noncoethnics might be an exception (Ichino and Nathan, 2013). These voters might consider the performance record of a noncoethnic candidate who shares the dominant ethnicity of the local area because they expect that a strong noncoethnic performer would deliver local public goods to their area. Because this argument applies to rural voters and to the delivery of public goods, we largely do not apply it to our empirical case, which is both rural and urban, and which considers legislative performance rather than public goods delivery. However, we test for heterogeneous treatment effects by ethnic minority status in the online Appendix and find no evidence of such heterogeneous treatment effects.

may serve to enhance accountability *within* ethnic groups (Carlson, 2015) but do little to overcome ethnic-based divisions in the electorate as a whole.¹¹

The ethnicity as heuristic arguments contrast with certain psychological approaches to social identity voting that identify two possible, often competing, objectives guiding information processing. Individuals may be motivated by accuracy goals, for example, “to seek out and carefully consider relevant evidence so as to reach a correct or otherwise best conclusion” (Taber and Lodge, 2006, p. 756); individuals may also be motivated by social identity goals, that is, to confirm their prior beliefs about or affirm their membership in social identity groups (Kahan, 2016; Taber and Lodge, 2006). In the context of our study, where ethnicity is a highly salient social and political identity category (Adida, 2015; Wantchekon, 2003), individuals might process information in a way that affirms their ethnic identity, which we term *ethnically motivated reasoning*.¹²

The potential benefits to the individual of ethnically motivated reasoning are twofold. First, as social identity theory emphasizes, people derive positive psychological benefits such as self-esteem from seeing their groups do well relative to other groups (e.g., Lieberman, 2009; Tajfel, 1974). Individuals, who already attribute more positive traits to their in-groups (Dunning and Harrison, 2010; Fiske et al., 2007; Gay, 2002), might therefore be motivated to process information in ways that maintain or enhance this relative positive view in order to reap these psychological benefits (Bolsen et al., 2014; Kunda, 1990; Westen et al., 2006). Second, individuals can derive benefits from affirming their own status *within* their identity group (Kahan, 2016). They might process and act upon information in ways that allow them to show that they are loyal members of their in-group (Kahan, 2016).

In some instances, the goals of accurately processing information and of affirming one’s social identity group will not be in conflict. For example, if a voter receives new, positive information about a member of her ethnic group, updating her beliefs and behavior in light of that information can serve both goals. However, in other instances — when, for example, a voter receives new, negative information about a coethnic — there will be a tension between accuracy and identity group affirmation.

¹¹We note that this line of argument becomes more complicated if information about candidate quality also sends signals about expected targeting or favoritism (good coethnic legislators might be better *or* worse at providing coethnics with informal transfers), but the prediction remains that good information about coethnics should have an effect (whether positive or negative) on voter support, and information about noncoethnics should not affect voters’ decisions.

¹²Research on motivated reasoning often focuses on partisan motivated reasoning in the context of the United States, (e.g., Bolsen et al., 2014; Kunda, 1999; Taber and Lodge, 2006). As far as we are aware, the comparative politics literature has paid some attention to partisan motivated reasoning but less attention to the implications of ethnicity for cognitive processes.

Motivated reasoning may prevail over accuracy in a context where social identity is particularly politically and economically salient: in such a context — as in Benin — voters might simply value the benefits of identity group affirmation over the benefits of accuracy. Alternatively, ethnically motivated reasoning might trump accuracy because of rational cost-benefit calculations (Kahan, 2016). Because an individual voter will rarely if ever be pivotal to an election or policy outcome, the potential benefits to the individual of accurate information processing are minimal. In contrast, the psychic and social benefits of social identity affirmation can be enjoyed regardless of the collective outcome. Thus, the individual voter has incentive to engage in motivated reasoning, even though doing so can in some instances lead to collectively suboptimal outcomes (Kahan, 2016).

A number of mechanisms underlie motivated reasoning: for example, recipients of information are likely “to judge confirming evidence as relevant and reliable but disconfirming evidence as irrelevant and unreliable, and to accept confirming evidence at face value while scrutinizing disconfirming evidence hypercritically” (Lord *et al.*, 1979, p. 2099). A rich scholarship in psychology finds evidence for many mechanisms both in laboratory settings and in the real world (Ross, 2012). Although we cannot fully disentangle the various mechanisms that might underlie motivated reasoning in the present study, we adopt the following view of how and why it occurs (Kahan, 2016): where ethnicity is highly salient (as in Benin) and where the benefits to accuracy are close to zero (as in any election where no individual voter is pivotal), we can expect individuals to engage in ethnically motivated reasoning so long as they receive some greater-than-zero benefit from affirming their ethnic identity. When voters are coethnics with the incumbent and they receive new positive information about him, accuracy and ethnic motivations are not in conflict: we can expect voters to update their beliefs and act upon this information (i.e., they are more likely to vote for the incumbent). By contrast, a conflict between accuracy and ethnic motivations is generated when the incumbent’s coethnics receive new negative information. In this case, ethnically motivated reasoners ultimately discard this information. As a result, the provision of negative information to coethnics has no effect on voting behavior. Finally, ethnically motivated reasoning implies the opposite pattern with the incumbent’s non-coethnics. For these voters, conflict between accuracy and ethnic motivations arises when new positive information about the incumbent is provided, and we expect this information to be more likely to be discarded and thus to have no effect on behavior. On the other hand, when voters receive new negative information about a noncoethnic, there is no conflict between accuracy and ethnicity and so these voters are likely to act upon the new information (i.e., they are less likely to vote for the incumbent). In sum, if ethnically motivated reasoning is at work in places where ethnic identities are highly salient, then *voters process performance information about coethnic politicians and about*

*noncoethnic politicians differently (Bolsen et al., 2014; Taber and Lodge, 2006) and potentially in ways that amplify voter preferences for coethnics and against noncoethnics.*¹³

The above arguments about what drives coethnic favoritism yield different predictions about the impact of information on ethnic politics. If coethnicity functions primarily as a short-cut to evaluate candidate quality, then increased access to information about candidate quality should attenuate the link between ethnicity and vote choice. This is because coethnics and noncoethnics will similarly update beliefs in response to new information — and where some amount of ethnic voting is the status quo, vote choice across ethnicities should converge. If instead ethnic labels serve primarily as a short-cut to evaluate whether or not a voter is likely to benefit from policy or patronage, then voters should be influenced by information about candidate quality only when it is about coethnics, and such information will do little to change status quo ethnic voting behavior overall. Last, if voters engage in ethnically motivated reasoning, then increased access to politician performance information should affect vote choice only when it helps voters affirm their ethnic groups relative to others (e.g., when positive performance information is provided to coethnics or when negative information is provided to noncoethnics). As a result, voters' relative preference for coethnic candidates could be amplified as new information about candidate quality is introduced. In sum, there are at least three alternative explanations with distinct observable implications about the possible interaction between coethnicity, voter choice, and information about candidate quality. Because our experiment, detailed below, manipulates voter access to performance information, we frame these distinct predictions as expectations about how coethnicity, or lack thereof, should condition voter response to new performance information.

Quality heuristic argument. If coethnicity serves primarily as a heuristic to gauge candidate quality in the absence of other information about quality, then access to new information about candidate quality should have an impact on voter behavior, regardless of whether voters are the candidate's coethnics or not.

- If the incumbent has performed well (*positive information*), access to information will make coethnics and noncoethnics more likely to vote for the incumbent.

¹³Alternatively, one could expect motivated reasoning to occur only for the strongest ethnic-identifiers, that is, for those individuals that receive a higher utility from affirming their ethnic identity. Instead, drawing on Kahan's (2016) logic, we argue that motivated reasoning manifests so long as individuals receive a positive benefit from affirming their ethnic identity. We expect to observe motivated reasoning on average in a context where ethnicity is highly politically salient, as in Benin.

- If the incumbent has performed poorly (*negative information*), access to information will make coethnics and noncoethnics less likely to vote for the incumbent.

Favoritism heuristic argument. If coethnicity serves primarily as a heuristic to assess who will be favored by policies or redistribution, then access to new information about candidate quality, good or bad, should have an impact on vote choice only among voters who are coethnics of the candidate.

- If the incumbent has performed well (positive information), access to information will make coethnics more likely to vote for the incumbent.
- If the incumbent has performed well (positive information), access to information will have no effect on the voting behavior of noncoethnics.
- If the incumbent has performed poorly (negative information), access to information will make coethnics less likely to vote for the incumbent.
- If the incumbent has performed poorly (negative information), access to information will have no effect on the voting behavior of noncoethnics.

Motivated reasoning argument. If voters engage in ethnically motivated reasoning, then increased access to new information about candidate quality should influence vote choice only when it is positive news about a coethnic or negative news about a noncoethnic.¹⁴

- If the incumbent has performed well (positive information), access to information will make coethnics more likely to vote for the incumbent.
- If the incumbent has performed well (positive information), access to information will have no effect on the voting behavior of noncoethnics.
- If the incumbent has performed poorly (negative information), access to information will have no effect on the voting behavior of coethnics.
- If the incumbent has performed poorly (negative information), access to information will make noncoethnics less likely to vote for the incumbent.

Table 1 summarizes the distinct observable implications of these competing explanations. The next section details our research design to adjudicate among them.

¹⁴This prediction is consistent with the hypothesis about the conditional effect of ethnicity on information processing registered in our individual project's preanalysis plan.

Table 1: Summary of expectations about the impact of information on electoral support for the incumbent.

	Quality heuristic	Favoritism heuristic	Motivated reasoning
Coethnic/positive information	Positive	Positive	Positive
Noncoethnic/positive information	Positive	No effect	No effect
Coethnic/negative information	Negative	Negative	No effect
Noncoethnic/negative information	Negative	No effect	Negative

Empirical Strategy

We adjudicate between the three alternative arguments about how ethnicity might condition the effect of information on voter behavior with a data collection effort in an African democracy, Benin, where the political salience of ethnicity has already been established (Adida, 2015; Koter, 2013; Wantchekon, 2003) and where ethnic voting is prevalent (Dowd and Driessen, 2008). Benin has been considered a stable democracy since it first transitioned to free and fair elections in 1990. Historical forces delineate three regions that have come to define the country’s political landscape: the Southeast, the South-Center, and the North (Decalo, 1976; Loko, 2007). In its first decade as an independent country, Benin experienced a series of coups that reflected the political competition between these three regions. As a result, although the country is home to close to 60 different ethnic groups (Bio Bigou, 2011), political competition at the national level typically characterizes itself along larger regional lines, and between those ethnic groups that dominate each region, that is, the Yoruba (Southeast), the Fon (South-Center), and the Bariba (North). At the local level, where regional identities are constant, ethnic identities gain political salience. In the North, for example, the Bariba, Peulh and Dendi — all Northerners on the national political scene — compete with each other in local politics. In the South, the same is true of the Fon, the Goun, and the Yoruba. Finally, Benin’s party system is relatively weak, with new parties and coalitions at almost every electoral cycle. Unlike in other African democracies where ethnicity is politically salient and parties are strong (i.e., Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria), voters look to individual leaders rather than political parties for ethnic cues.¹⁵ The country therefore offers a political landscape where the regional identities of political leaders matter at

¹⁵Perhaps as a testament to this, Benin’s current and former presidents have both been independent politicians, unaffiliated with existing political parties. Benin’s former President, Boni Yayi, first ran as an independent. Once he became President, a new coalition was formed in his support — the FCBE.

the national level, and the ethnic identities of legislators matter at the local level.

We focus our analysis on an electoral race about which voters have poor information — legislative elections — and thus where providing information about incumbent quality has potential to cause voters to update their beliefs about the candidates running. Few media outlets report on legislative activity and information about legislative performance is not readily available. Constituency service activities fall largely outside the realm of what legislators are formally tasked with doing — in large part because they are given no budget with which to make policy for, or provide services to, their specific constituency.

In a companion paper (Adida *et al.*, 2016), we discuss the extent to which voters in Benin care about legislative performance compared to other activities in which legislators might informally engage, such as individual- or village-targeted transfers. We find that at baseline voters in Benin clearly valued transfers over legislative performance. But, in many of the treatment conditions in our experiment, voters were moved to care about legislative performance and to consider strong legislative performance to be good news for their own well-being.¹⁶ In this study, we consider whether their response to legislative performance information was further conditioned by coethnicity (or lack thereof) with the incumbent. For the sake of transparency and in order to use all of our data, we show results when we analyze behavior in all treatment conditions combined, compared to control. But we also confirm that our results hold in the subset of treatment conditions in which we can be *sure* that voters viewed legislative performance as a salient legislator activity (see Tables B.2 and B.3 in the online Appendix B).

Deputies in the national assembly are technically elected in multimember districts by proportional representation, but in practice the system operates largely like one with single-member districts. Voters elect an average of 3.5 deputies per constituency, and with 77 total communes distributed among the constituencies, there are 3.2 communes per constituency on average.¹⁷ This distribution makes feasible, as a rule of thumb for voters and legislators,

¹⁶The field experiment consisted of four variants of treatment described in the online Appendix B.4, as well as variation in how many villages within an incumbent's assigned commune were given the information. Voters in each treatment condition received the same relative performance information; what varied was whether the performance information included an additional message about the importance of legislative activity to voters' wellbeing (a civics message), whether the information was provided publicly or privately, and how widely the information was disseminated in the incumbent's constituency. Where a civics message was widely disseminated, we are confident that voters viewed strong legislative performance as important and positive.

¹⁷Administratively, Benin is divided into 12 departments with two legislative constituencies in each, for a total of 24 constituencies. The next administrative level down is the commune, and there are, on average, three communes per constituency. Villages (or their urban equivalent, quarters) then nest within communes.

a one-to-one mapping of communes to legislators. Indeed, in practice, each legislator focuses on and takes care of a particular commune within his constituency, which facilitates a one-to-one correspondence of incumbent legislator to commune.¹⁸ We thus provided voters in treated villages with performance information about one incumbent. In order to be doubly confident that our approach is appropriate, we restricted our experimental sample to 30 communes in which our local partner organization firmly verified a one-to-one correspondence and in which the incumbent legislator stood for reelection. We further verified the one-to-one correspondence in our baseline survey by asking respondents to identify pretreatment the legislative deputy who is most responsible for their village. And in Section 5, we explore whether our interpretation of our results changes when we relax our assumptions about a one-to-one incumbent mapping.

One advantage to the study of ethnic voting in a proportional representation system is that ethnicity cannot fully predict vote choice, even if candidate ethnicity were a voter's only decision criterion. This is because, in all cases, multiple parties represent a single ethnicity (see Figure A.1 in the Online Appendix) and party lists are often comprised of candidates of multiple ethnicities (see Figure A.2). As a result, coethnics of the incumbent have multiple coethnic choices: it is therefore plausible, at baseline, to move coethnic voters toward greater support for the incumbent. And, because party lists are diverse, it is plausible that noncoethnics of the incumbent already support that incumbent's party at baseline because they are coethnics of another party member.

Experimental Design

Scholars face an inference problem when they try to identify the effect of information on voter behavior: certain types of people are more likely to be politically informed than others *and* are likely to vote differently relative to others. To identify the effect of information on vote choice, an experimental manipulation is therefore advantageous. Furthermore, the level of voter information is a relatively simple construct to manipulate externally and nondeceptively, and to do so in a way that avoids spillovers or violations of the independence of treatment assumption. In our case, we cluster treatment assignment within villages, which is the unit within which information is most likely to travel. Cross-village or cross-quarter information transmission is possible but less common, and would bias against our finding a treatment effect.

¹⁸We note that this mapping in practice is consistent with expert evaluations of the party system in Benin as fragmented and weak. Parties are created and dismantled frequently, lack programmatic character, and reflect instead the personality of their founder(s) (Banégas, 2003; Gazibo, 2012). Preexperiment focus groups also confirmed that villagers can name and agree on a single legislator as their incumbent representative.

Our experiment randomly assigned villages either to receive information about the incumbent legislator's performance or not to receive such information. Details of the treatment are described below. Because strong and weak legislative performers are not randomly distributed across space, we conducted a within-legislator design in which villages within each of our 30 communes were randomly assigned to treatment and control conditions. When we evaluated treatment effects, we thus took the across-commune average of within-commune effects. We explain our assignment strategy further below.

Although our conditioning variable, coethnicity, is also not externally manipulated, we argue that the effects we identify are plausibly causal for the following reasons. First, our measure of coethnicity with the incumbent was self-reported prior to the experimental manipulation (pretreatment), meaning that coethnicity cannot be affected by our treatment. Second, our assumption that ethnicity remained fixed during the period of study, for example, that no sorting across ethnicities occurred as a consequence of our treatment, is reasonable: our experimental manipulation occurred over the course of a single month, and ethnic identity in Benin is sticky. Third, we show that our results are robust when we control for a variety of attributes that might be correlated with coethnicity, including prior beliefs about incumbent performance, partisanship, and prior vote choice in the 2011 election (see the online Appendix A.3).¹⁹

Treated villages in the study were given information about the incumbent legislator's relative performance in the National Assembly in the form of a video. This mode of delivery ensured consistency in the wording and tone of the message across the sample; at the same time it made the information accessible to people of all education levels, literate and illiterate.²⁰ The video also approximated how media outlets might deliver information about candidates in a real-world setting.²¹ In the video, a male actor read a script in a neutral tone, as a news caster or radio host might, and graphics illustrated key points. The text was recorded in French and then dubbed in local languages as necessary.²²

The information provided was drawn from official reports of the Office of the President of the National Assembly that, although supposedly public, required extensive time and effort to obtain. From the reports, the authors produced a set of relative performance indices drawn from the following indicators about the incumbent legislator: (1) rate of attendance at legislative sessions, (2) rate of posing questions during legislative sessions, (3) rate of attendance in committees, and (4) productivity of committee work (the number of laws

¹⁹In addition, we prespecified this conditional effect in our preanalysis plan.

²⁰We presented the video to focus groups in rural villages prior to implementation, and confirmed that the information and images were accessible and comprehensible to villagers in Benin.

²¹See Bidwell *et al.* (2015) for the use of video-taped debates for similar reasons.

²²The full text of the video script in English is in the online Appendix B.4.1.

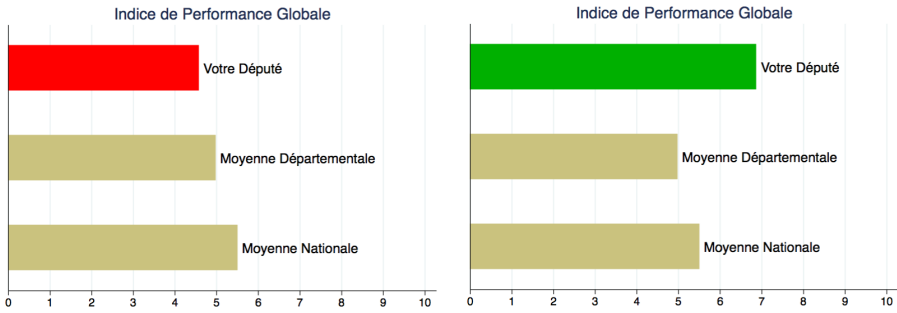


Figure 1: Two examples of intervention bar graphs.
Note: Performance indices are constructed relative to both other legislators in the department (a local average) and the country (national average). The top bar in (a) is red to indicate that the incumbent’s performance falls below the average; the top bar in (b) is green to indicate that the incumbent’s performance is above the average.

considered by the committee). Although the video provided raw data for each of these four indicators, it displayed graphics, like those in Figure 1 (which provides an example of a relatively poorly performing politician in panel (a) and a relatively well-performing politician in panel (b)), of three key performance indices to increase comprehension and recall by participants: an index of plenary performance on a scale of 1–10 that took the average of normalized scores on attendance and participation during full legislative plenary sessions, an index of committee performance also on a scale of 1–10 that took an average of the normalized scores on attendance at committee meetings and productivity, and a global performance index which averages the first two indices.

Treatment was administered directly after a baseline survey. The baseline survey was also conducted (without the intervention) in control villages.²³ Survey respondents were randomly selected in each village through a random-walk procedure (see the online Appendix B.2 for additional details). On average, 47 people per village received treatment. The treatment was conducted over the course of one day sometime within the month prior to the 2015 legislative elections.

After selecting our communes based on the one-to-one mapping confirmations described earlier, we drew our sample of villages (or their urban equivalent, quarters) and assigned them to treatment or control.²⁴ To in-

²³In the control condition, respondents received only a baseline survey. They did not receive any information about legislator performance or legislative responsibilities.

²⁴We additionally vary other aspects of the information dissemination: for example, whether communes receive a high dosage of treatment (have a large number of treated villages) or a low dosage of treatment (have only one village treated). The specific randomization procedure for dosage treatment at the commune level is in the online Appendix B.1, but

crease statistical efficiency, we sampled and randomized while stratifying on urban/rural status and electoral competitiveness of the village in the previous legislative election. Electorally noncompetitive urban areas are rare, so we constructed three blocks: urban, rural-competitive, and rural-noncompetitive. Within communes, we randomly selected five villages/quarters from each of the three blocks to form the sample.²⁵ We then randomly assigned each of the five to an experimental condition.²⁶ In the online Appendix, we provide a CONSORT diagram that illustrates the sampling and randomization process.²⁷

Data and Measurement

We used data from two sources — administrative election results and a panel survey, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. The administrative data allowed us to test the effects of our intervention on actual behavioral outcomes. But for our theory of individual-level behavior, it presented an ecological inference problem. The panel survey data overcame such inference problems because it allowed us to test our argument directly at the individual-level. But, as a panel survey, these data presented important challenges generated by response bias and attrition.²⁸ In this study, we present both sources of data to leverage the advantages of each and to cross-validate our results. We describe each data set in turn and then discuss how we construct our key variables.

To measure the effect of treatment on aggregate outcomes, we collected administrative data on election outcomes at the polling station level. We were able to match 2015 polling station data to all villages in our experimental sample except for one treated village and two surveyed control villages. These villages thus dropped out of our analysis.

To measure the effect of treatment at the individual level, we collected panel survey data through a baseline in-person survey conducted 2 weeks to 1 month prior to the election and an endline phone survey conducted immediately after the election. In this endline survey, we called the phone number provided in the baseline survey and asked for respondents' first names and ages in order

we do not disaggregate results by dosage in this article as it is not directly related to the theory we are testing.

²⁵In low-dosage communes, only one treatment village was selected so blocking at this level does not apply. In some high-dosage communes, there were only five villages/quarters in the block, in which case all five were selected.

²⁶The experimental condition assigned to the single treated village in low-dosage communes was always the Civics/Public treatment to bias against finding an effect of the dosage treatment described in the Online Appendix.

²⁷In a companion paper, we consider explicitly the possibility and implications of bloc voting, and document the conditions under which treatment is transmitted across units. We find that intra-village information transmission is strong.

²⁸In the online Appendix A.9, we discuss the extent to which inferences made from our survey data might be biased. Several tests to mitigate problems of attrition and response bias demonstrate that our conclusions are relatively robust.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and covariate balance: administrative data.

	Mean treatment	Mean control	Difference	<i>p</i> -Value
Registered voters (log)	7.463	7.400	0.063	0.309
Urban	0.076	0.081	0.005	0.847
Competitive (dichotomous)	0.726	0.708	0.018	0.592
Vote margin (continuous)	0.131	0.132	0.001	0.942
Overall performance	4.574	4.574	0.000	.
School in community	1.019	0.981	0.038	0.318
Clinic in community	0.481	0.519	0.038	0.579
Borehole in community	0.509	0.491	0.017	0.704

to reconfirm respondent identities. To discourage attrition, we transferred one-third of total compensation to the respondent as phone credit only after completion of the endline survey. We designed the study to allow for a possible 50% attrition rate between surveys and achieved a lower attrition rate (44%). A total of 3,419 individuals participated in the baseline *and* endline surveys (6,132 in the baseline).

Tables 2 and 3 present descriptive information about the sample of villages in the administrative data and the sample of individuals in the survey data, respectively. Both tables also provide evidence of balance between treatment and control groups on a number of observable pre-treatment characteristics.²⁹

Our key dependent variable is voting for the incumbent. At the aggregate level, we used administrative data to calculate vote share for the incumbent party at the polling station level in our experimental sample and then aggregate it to the village level ($N = 1,499$) in the case of multiple polling stations per village. At the individual level, we used self-reports of voting for the incumbent party in the endline survey. The exact question, asked only of individuals who reported voting, was:

We would now like to know which political party you voted for in the legislative elections. Your response is entirely confidential and it will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team. We would like to know if you voted for the political party of [NAME OF PRINCIPAL DEPUTY]. The name of the party is [PARTY NAME] and its symbol is the [PARTY SYMBOL]. Just answer

²⁹Our measure of ‘School in community’ ranges from 0 to 1 but the averages in Table 2 come from a regression of the school indicator on treatment that accounts for block fixed effects, wherein the control mean for the reference block was high (0.98).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and covariate balance: survey data.

	Mean treatment	Mean control	Difference	p-Value
Coethnic	0.669	0.599	0.070	0.220
Female	0.452	0.485	0.034	0.040
Age	36.42	37.23	0.81	0.42
Urban	0.296	0.288	0.008	0.91
Years of education	3.860	4.014	0.154	0.740
Poverty (housing material)	2.104	2.113	0.009	0.850
Electricity	0.360	0.370	0.010	0.860
Member of Chief’s council	0.065	0.074	0.010	0.560
Member of professional group	0.122	0.149	0.027	0.250
Member of youth group	0.189	0.168	0.021	0.420
Member of women’s group	0.196	0.179	0.017	0.520
Member of political group	0.184	0.175	0.009	0.770
Ballot is secret	0.206	0.223	0.017	0.660
Personal help from incumbent	0.045	0.059	0.014	0.360
Good news (relative to priors)	0.551	0.555	0.003	0.960
Voted for incumbent 2011	0.545	0.563	0.018	0.750
Positive prior	0.474	0.447	0.026	0.660
Prior about incumbent effort	0.311	0.404	0.093	0.100
Prior about incumbent corruption	0.518	0.475	0.042	0.370
School in community	0.922	0.895	0.027	0.580
Clinic in community	0.469	0.535	0.066	0.420
Borehole in community	0.901	0.853	0.048	0.400

YES or NO. Did you vote for the party of [NAME OF PRINCIPAL DEPUTY]?³⁰

Our prespecified measure of coethnicity with the incumbent was self-reported in the baseline survey. The question asked:

Thinking of the [NAME OF PRINCIPAL DEPUTY], would you say that you share the same ethnic group as this candidate?

We used a subjective measure of coethnicity because we believe the voter’s own understanding of whether she has ethnic ties to the incumbent (pretreatment) is the theoretically relevant concept in the alternative explanations we

³⁰We deliberately asked this question in this format to protect respondent privacy and comfort level. The endline survey was conducted over the phone, and we preferred to have respondents answer *yes* or *no* rather than openly voice their vote choice.

propose.³¹ Because individuals often have multiple, sometimes overlapping, group attachments that all qualify as ethnic identities (Chandra, 2004; Posner, 2005), the advantage to this measurement strategy is that it allowed us to measure coethnicity without having to make assumptions about which ethnic categories are most relevant to specific voters or which ethnic divisions are most salient in a specific local context.³²

In all analyses, we separated the effect of learning the incumbent was a good relative performer from the effect of learning the incumbent was a bad relative performer, as we prespecified. We did so because we expected voters to respond differently to information about legislators that is positive versus information that is negative. Because the information provided in the intervention explicitly compared the incumbent legislator's performance to the performance of deputies in the surrounding area (those in the same department), we coded positive and negative information relative to this local benchmark in our analysis of the official election results. More specifically, we defined the information as positive if the incumbent's overall score was better than that of other deputies in the department. Poor legislative performers were those whose overall legislative score was worse than that of other legislators in this local area.³³ However, in our analysis of the survey data, we coded positive and negative information relative to participant priors. In our baseline survey, we asked about the incumbent's relative performance, and used the same scale that was provided in the intervention. We coded the information as positive if the information provided in the intervention was better than the respondent's prior, and negative if it was worse. In instances where the information in the intervention was the same as the respondent's prior, or where the respondent reported that she did not know the incumbent's legislative performance, we

³¹There are 17 subjects in the sample who did not respond to the coethnicity question, and they were treated as missing for the purposes of this analysis.

³²In most communes, 90% or more members of one ethnic group report that they are coethnics with the incumbent, and no (or very few) members of other ethnic groups report that they are coethnics with the incumbent. In a few communes, there are members of multiple ethnic groups — as measured by the categories we included in our survey — who report being coethnics of the incumbent. For example, in Ketou commune, 79% of Nagos and 46% of Yoruba say they are coethnic. However, in the census, Nago are a subgroup of the Yoruba, and both groups speak the same language (Yoruba). Thus, members of both groups could reasonably perceive themselves to be coethnics of the incumbent, who is a Yoruba speaker. In addition, the Nago-Yoruba distinction — which we imposed through the categories we selected for our survey — is not always politically salient at the local level. In a few other communes, members of one objective ethnic group report different subjective perceptions of coethnicity. For example, there are a few northern communes where members of the Bariba ethnic group disagree on whether or not they are coethnic with the incumbent. However, Bariba is a broad census category and there are within-group divisions that are salient in local-level elections; the ethnic categories in our survey were not fine-grained enough to capture these distinctions. Both of these examples highlight the difficulty of objectively coding coethnicity and illustrate the benefits of the subjective measure.

³³This coding rule was prespecified in our preanalysis plan prior to project implementation.

followed the coding rule used with the official results data.³⁴ Findings that rely on the survey data are robust when we employ the same coding rule as the one we used with administrative data that did not account for priors.³⁵

Does Ethnicity Condition the Impact of Information?

How does ethnicity condition the impact of performance information? Figures 2 and 3 graphically summarize our main results using administrative and survey data, respectively. The figures present the average treatment effect in four sub-groups of the sample: coethnic villages (or survey respondents) with good performing incumbents, noncoethnic villages (or survey respondents) with good performing incumbents, coethnic villages (or survey respondents) with poor performing incumbents, and noncoethnic villages (or survey respondents) with poor performing incumbents.³⁶ As prespecified, we estimated treatment effects using OLS with block fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the village level (unless a higher level of clustering is explicitly indicated). As blocks were nested within communes, our treatment effect estimates are driven by differences between treated coethnics (noncoethnics) and control coethnics (noncoethnics) *that share the same incumbent*, which increases the precision of our estimates and controls for potential differences between communes and legislators.³⁷

The results in both figures are substantively equivalent. Positive information increases support for the incumbent among coethnics; but it does nothing for support among noncoethnics. By contrast, negative information

³⁴For those whose priors match the information in the intervention, the logic is that the intervention should make them more confident in their assessment. For example, if their prior is that the incumbent is a bad performer and they receive information that validates that prior, they should become more confident in their beliefs. For those who have no priors (54% of baseline participants), the logic is that the intervention provides them with the only information they have. For both groups, it is thus reasonable to code the information they received as good or bad based on the incumbent's objective performance relative to others in the local area. These coding rules were prespecified in our preanalysis plan prior to project implementation.

³⁵The survey and administrative measures of good and bad news that we produced are highly correlated. For example, of those in the survey that we coded as receiving bad news relative to their priors, 93% live in villages that we coded as bad news in the administrative data. Of those we coded as receiving good news relative to priors, 96% of them live in villages we coded as receiving good news in the administrative data.

³⁶For simplicity, we use three thresholds to classify a village as coethnic or not: 50%, 70%, and 90% of our village sample self-identified as coethnic with the incumbent in a pretreatment survey question. Although these were not prespecified in our preanalysis plan, our analysis is robust to any cutoff above 50% as demonstrated in Figure A.6 in the online Appendix.

³⁷In other words, no commune-level characteristic — whether it be urban/rural status, the level of economic development, the political competitiveness, etc. — is a plausible confounder in this analysis.

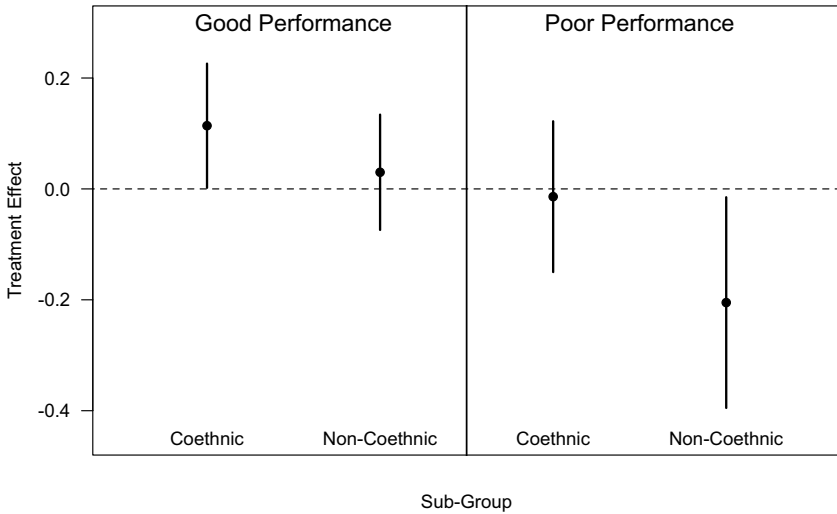


Figure 2: The effect of information on incumbent voteshare, conditional on ethnic connection and level of performance, official results data.

Note: The figure presents the average treatment effect (and two standard errors above and below the estimate) in four subgroups: coethnic villages with good performing incumbents, noncoethnic villages with good performing incumbents, coethnic villages with poor performing incumbents, and noncoethnic villages with poor performing incumbents. In this figure, coethnic villages were coded with the 90% cutoff. Treatment effects were estimated using OLS with block fixed effects.

decreases support for the incumbent among noncoethnics; but it does nothing for support among coethnics.³⁸

Table 4 displays the analysis when we use the official village/quarter-level election data. Columns 1 and 4 in each panel examine the unconditional treatment effect in good performance and poor performance communes, respectively. In good performance information communes, treatment has a positive but not statistically significant effect. In bad performance information communes, treatment has a negative but not statistically significant effect.

However, these null results mask the heterogeneous treatment effects we find when we condition on several village-level measures of politician-respondent coethnicity in columns (2), (3), (5) and (6).

The pattern in each panel is remarkably consistent. In majority coethnic villages/quarters, positive performance information increases the vote share of the incumbent (column 2). The estimated treatment effects in column 2

³⁸Coethnicity was one of several moderators we were interested in testing in this project (and about which we have prespecified hypotheses). We focus on ethnicity here because it is of greatest theoretical interest to us and because it allows us to speak to the ethnic politics literature in addition to the literature on information and accountability. However, in the online Appendix A.8 we show that other moderators are less important empirically.

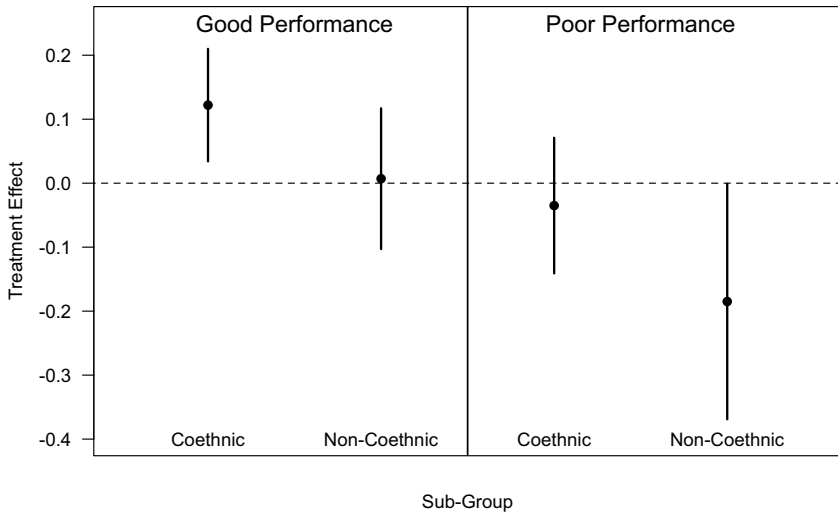


Figure 3: The effect of information on incumbent support, conditional on ethnic connection and level of performance, survey data.

Note: The figure presents the average treatment effect (and two standard errors above and below the estimate) in four subgroups: coethnics with good performing incumbents, noncoethnics with good performing incumbents, coethnics with poor performing incumbents, and noncoethnics with poor performing incumbents. Treatment effects were estimated using OLS with block fixed effects.

are similar in magnitude and are statistically significant in the top and bottom panels. Although the coefficient in the middle panel is not statistically significant at conventional levels, the coefficient is qualitatively similar (and the p -value is 0.14). In noncoethnic villages/quarters, on the other hand, the impact of positive performance information is close to zero in all three panels and the effects are not significant at conventional levels (column 3). In coethnic areas, negative performance information has no impact on incumbent vote share (column 5). The coefficients in column 5 are substantively small and cannot be statistically distinguished from zero. By contrast, negative performance information reduces the vote share of incumbents in noncoethnic areas (column 6). In column 6, each of the coefficients is similar in magnitude, and estimates are statistically significant in the middle and bottom panels. In sum, positive performance information increases the vote share of the incumbent in coethnic areas but has no impact on the incumbent’s vote share in noncoethnic areas. Negative performance information, on the other hand, has no impact on incumbent vote share in coethnic areas and a negative impact on vote share in noncoethnic areas.³⁹

³⁹In some of the analyses of the administrative data, we can report this result only with 90% confidence. We find these results more convincing when paired with the survey results

Table 4: The effect of information on incumbent voteshare, conditional on ethnic connection and level of performance, official results.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Good info full sample	Good info coethnic (50)	Good info Noncoethnic (50)	Bad info full sample	Bad info coethnic (50)	Bad info noncoethnic (50)
Treatment	0.038 (0.034)	0.090 (0.040)	-0.027 (0.051)	-0.093 (0.073)	-0.018 (0.092)	-0.214 (0.170)
Constant	0.476 (0.026)	0.473 (0.033)	0.456 (0.030)	0.566 (0.066)	0.520 (0.085)	0.623 (0.137)
Observations	137	89	48	103	72	31
R-squared	0.593	0.696	0.562	0.603	0.669	0.577
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Good info full sample	Good info coethnic (70)	Good info Noncoethnic (70)	Bad info full sample	Bad info coethnic (70)	Bad info noncoethnic (70)
Treatment	0.038 (0.034)	0.079 (0.053)	-0.015 (0.060)	-0.093 (0.073)	-0.005 (0.069)	-0.219 (0.115)
Constant	0.476 (0.026)	0.428 (0.047)	0.529 (0.044)	0.566 (0.066)	0.528 (0.064)	0.619 (0.099)
Observations	137	66	71	103	58	45
R-squared	0.593	0.720	0.587	0.603	0.757	0.627
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Good info full sample	Good info coethnic (90)	Good info Noncoethnic (90)	Bad info full sample	Bad info coethnic (90)	Bad info noncoethnic (90)
Treatment	0.038 (0.034)	0.114 (0.056)	0.030 (0.052)	-0.093 (0.073)	-0.014 (0.068)	-0.205 (0.095)
Constant	0.476 (0.026)	0.413 (0.046)	0.483 (0.038)	0.566 (0.066)	0.546 (0.060)	0.602 (0.079)
Observations	137	44	93	103	53	50
R-squared	0.593	0.829	0.510	0.603	0.768	0.577

Note: In the top panel, villages are coded as coethnic if over 50% of survey respondents are coethnics of the incumbent. In the middle panel, villages are coded as coethnic if over 70% of survey respondents are coethnics of the incumbent. In the bottom panel, villages are coded as coethnic if over 90% of survey respondents are coethnics of the incumbent. Robust standard errors clustered by commune-treatment are in parentheses. Each model uses block fixed effects.

We also confirm in Tables B.2 and B3 in the online Appendix that these patterns hold when we use only the treatment conditions in which we are confident that voters viewed legislative performance as an important and positive means of improving voter welfare (Adida *et al.*, 2016). Because we consider only a subset of all treatment conditions here, we lose statistical power, but the patterns remain the same.

with which there is remarkable consistency.

Table 5: The effect of information on incumbent voteshare, conditional on ethnic connection and level of performance, survey data.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Good info full sample	Good info coethnic	Good info noncoethnic	Bad info full sample	Bad info coethnic	Bad info noncoethnic
Treatment	0.067 (0.035)	0.122 (0.044)	0.007 (0.055)	-0.086 (0.055)	-0.035 (0.053)	-0.185 (0.092)
Constant	0.448 (0.030)	0.402 (0.039)	0.494 (0.048)	0.572 (0.051)	0.550 (0.049)	0.600 (0.081)
Observations	1,672	1,030	627	1,358	948	408
R-squared	0.181	0.217	0.183	0.243	0.276	0.224
Treatment	0.065 (0.035)	0.121 (0.044)	0.006 (0.055)	-0.091 (0.055)	-0.037 (0.053)	-0.181 (0.091)
Prior — much better	-0.012 (0.073)	-0.009 (0.079)	-0.022 (0.124)	0.024 (0.077)	0.022 (0.089)	0.032 (0.186)
Prior — a little better	0.016 (0.036)	0.035 (0.041)	-0.019 (0.068)	-0.053 (0.043)	-0.014 (0.053)	-0.123 (0.069)
Prior — a little worse	0.043 (0.043)	0.024 (0.053)	0.074 (0.080)	0.026 (0.041)	0.031 (0.048)	-0.023 (0.065)
Prior — much worse	0.018 (0.058)	0.054 (0.070)	-0.036 (0.085)	-0.033 (0.045)	-0.004 (0.050)	-0.059 (0.094)
Constant	0.439 (0.031)	0.388 (0.041)	0.494 (0.052)	0.579 (0.058)	0.548 (0.054)	0.622 (0.090)
Observations	1,664	1,028	626	1,357	948	407
R-squared	0.180	0.217	0.184	0.245	0.277	0.231

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

Table 5 presents results from analyses when we use the survey data. The results are almost identical to those from the analysis of the official election data.⁴⁰ The top panel presents results from specifications that include only block fixed effects. When the incumbent’s coethnics receive positive information about performance, they are about 12 percentage points more likely to report that they voted for the incumbent (column 2). When noncoethnics receive the same positive information, however, they are no more likely to report that they voted for the incumbent (column 3). When coethnics of the incumbent receive negative performance information, they are no more or less likely to report that they supported the incumbent (column 5). Yet when noncoethnics receive negative information, they are about 19 percentage points less likely to

⁴⁰This pattern of results is stronger in rural areas than in urban areas in the survey data, but not in the administrative data. Ethnicity could be more politically salient in rural than in urban areas, especially if ethnic targeting is more prevalent in rural politics; or social desirability bias might be stronger in urban areas leading urban respondents more often to give answers in the survey in line with the information they received.

report that they voted for the incumbent (column 6). Once again, the evidence supports the claim that voters in this context reward good performance only if the incumbent is their coethnic, and they punish bad performance only when the incumbent is from a different ethnic group.⁴¹

The bottom panel of Table 5 presents results from specifications that include controls for each respondent's *prior* evaluation of the incumbent's legislative performance. These analyses allow us to control for the possibility that differences in the prior beliefs of coethnics and noncoethnics could be driving our results. The omitted reference category in each specification is the set of respondents who reported that they did not know about the incumbent's legislative performance (those without a prior). The treatment effect estimates in these specifications are thus driven by comparisons between coethnics (noncoethnics) in treatment versus coethnics (noncoethnics) in control who had *both* the same incumbent *and* the same prior beliefs about the performance of the incumbent. In other words, this test speaks directly to the concern that coethnicity, which cannot be randomly assigned in any field experiment, proxies for different distributions in prior beliefs about the incumbent's legislative performance. Even after we control for the legislator herself and for the respondent's prior beliefs about that legislator's performance, the conditional effects by coethnicity hold: treatment increases support among coethnics who received positive information and has no effect among coethnics who received negative information. Conversely, treatment has no effect on support among noncoethnics who received positive information, and decreases support among noncoethnics who received negative information.

Although the tables presented here show clear patterns across subsamples of individuals by coethnicity, Tables A.2 and A.4 in the online Appendix present interaction models that demonstrate these differences are often statistically different from each other as well.⁴² Because coethnicity with the incumbent is not randomly assigned, we also check that our results are robust to the inclusion of control variables that might be correlated with ethnicity and responsiveness to performance information. The results in the online Appendix A.3 show that our results are robust to the inclusion of controls for age, years of education, and a number of individual and community level measures of poverty and socio-economic development.

⁴¹In the online Appendix A.7, we present similar analyses in which the dependent variable is voter turnout. We find some evidence that negative performance information affects voter turnout, but positive performance information has no effect. We do not find evidence that the impact of information on voter turnout is conditioned by coethnicity.

⁴²Following our preanalysis plan, we first present uncorrected *p* values for these interaction coefficients and then in the online Appendix A.8 run multiple comparison corrections for the related family of hypotheses we preregistered.

Why Does Ethnicity Condition the Impact of Information?

The results presented earlier demonstrate that ethnic identity conditions the impact of information on voting behavior. Coethnics of the incumbent are responsive to performance information only when it is positive, and noncoethnics are responsive to the information only when it is negative. In this section, we consider potential explanations for these results, as well as their implications for theories of ethnic voting.

Ethnicity-as-Heuristic about Politician Quality

Our evidence is not consistent with models that emphasize the primary role of ethnicity as a heuristic for evaluating candidate quality (competence, effort). According to this set of arguments, ethnicity acts as a heuristic about politician effectiveness and capacity under informational constraints and, as a result, increased access to actual performance information should weaken the link between coethnicity and incumbent support. Instead we find that voters respond to information in ways that amplify, rather than diminish, the association between coethnicity and incumbent support.

Ethnicity-as-Heuristic about Politician Favoritism

Likewise, our evidence is not consistent with the claim that ethnicity acts as a heuristic about politician favoritism. That line of argument suggests that voters change their behavior in light of information about candidate quality only when it is about a coethnic candidate, because the quality of noncoethnics should be irrelevant to voters who use coethnicity as a heuristic about favoritism (Carlson, 2015). When they are not coethnics of the incumbent, voters under this argument should not expect to benefit from his efforts in office and so should be indifferent to whether he is a strong or weak performer. Although the coethnic favoritism hypothesis has been developed primarily in reference to public goods provision, we expect these patterns to hold for legislative performance as well. Given the often geographically segregated composition of ethnic group identities in Africa (Bates, 1983; Hodler and Raschky, 2014) and the resulting heterogeneity in preferences over policy, it is entirely plausible that voters might expect that coethnic politicians would be more likely to pursue legislative policy of greater benefit to them. Yet, contrary to the observable implications of this argument, we find that *noncoethnics also* change their behavior when they receive negative information and that coethnics are responsive *only* to positive information about the incumbent.⁴³

⁴³These patterns persist even when we examine only those places where a widely disseminated civics message underscored the potential importance of legislation to voters' individual wellbeing, as can be seen in the online Appendix Table B.2.

Ethnicity-as-Social Identity

Finally, we examine the possibility that voters favor coethnics because they derive benefits such as self-esteem from seeing their group do well relative to other groups, and a sense of wellbeing from confirming already-held positive views of their ingroup: we examine whether our results are consistent with the argument that voters engage in ethnically motivated reasoning when presented with new information about politician performance. Our main experimental findings are consistent with the ethnically motivated reasoning hypothesis, which implies that performance information should influence vote choice only when it is positive news about a coethnic or negative news about a noncoethnic.

To further probe the plausibility of ethnically motivated reasoning, we analyzed data from a comprehension survey conducted *immediately* after the performance treatment was administered (in other words, before participants had any opportunity to deliberate) among a randomly selected sample of 30% of treated participants. In the comprehension survey, we asked respondents to report on the relative performance of their incumbent in plenary and committee work.⁴⁴ That is, we asked respondents to provide us with the information to which they had been exposed just minutes earlier. We leveraged these survey responses to test the psychological mechanism of motivated reasoning.⁴⁵

First, we created a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the respondent provided the correct answer to the plenary and committee performance comprehension questions, respectively, and 0 otherwise. Table 6 examines whether coethnicity with the incumbent is associated with correct answers in both the good and bad performance information communes.⁴⁶ In all models, we controlled for whether or not the respondent's prior belief about the incumbent collected at baseline was correct. This helps mitigate the possibility that our test simply picks up preexisting beliefs rather than an effect of information processing.

The results are consistent with the motivated reasoning explanation. In good performance areas, coethnics of the incumbent are significantly *more* likely to accurately recall the plenary information. They are not significantly

⁴⁴Unfortunately, we did not ask a question about the relative overall performance of the incumbent; this is why we present results specifically on committee and plenary work.

⁴⁵In contrast to the argument about how coethnicity would condition treatment effects on support for the incumbent, these analyses of mechanisms were not prespecified. Although we would have liked to test an additional observable implication — the effect of motivated reasoning on cognitive effort, the best available measure of the effect of identity on information processing, response latency, or time spent on answering the questions (Huckfeldt *et al.*, 1999), was unusable due to a glitch in our survey software.

⁴⁶Again, respondents to the comprehension survey are from the treatment group only and so this table is of a different format than the previous tables of results.

Table 6: The effect of coethnicity on respondent comprehension of our treatment information.

	(1) Good performance plenary	(2) Bad performance plenary	(3) Good performance committee	(4) Bad performance committee
Coethnic with incumbent	0.110 (0.046)	0.073 (0.054)	0.012 (0.043)	-0.188 (0.051)
Correct prior on plenary performance	0.250 (0.059)	0.224 (0.063)		
Correct prior on committee performance			0.423 (0.065)	0.219 (0.061)
Constant	0.357 (0.037)	0.404 (0.047)	0.312 (0.035)	0.455 (0.045)
Observations	474	403	475	401
R-squared	0.046	0.033	0.082	0.072

Note: Dependent variable takes a value of 1 if the respondent accurately reported the incumbent’s performance score in plenary and committee during the comprehension survey immediately following the treatment. The sample includes only those who were randomly selected to participate in the comprehension survey. Standard errors in parentheses.

more likely to do so in the bad information areas. On the committee score, coethnics are not more likely to accurately recall the information if it was positive, but they are significantly and substantially *less* likely to accurately recall the information if it was negative. Thus, coethnics appear more likely to accurately report the performance information if the information is positive and less likely to accurately report it if it is negative. Voters appear to have updated their beliefs only when the information was consistent with being able to view coethnics in a positive light and noncoethnics in a negative light.

Second, we analyzed patterns of “Don’t Know” responses to the same two comprehension questions about incumbent plenary and committee performance. We expect that voters are more likely to process, and thus learn, new information if the information allows them to affirm their social identities (they receive positive information about a coethnic) and less likely to process new information if the information does not allow them to affirm their social identities (they receive negative information about a coethnic).⁴⁷ To test this

⁴⁷We expect this to be true particularly in a context like ours where legislative performance information is scarce: more than 50% of baseline survey respondents said “Don’t Know” when asked about legislative performance.

conjecture, we created a dummy variable for each comprehension question that takes a value of 1 if the respondent provided any substantive response (a sign of learning); 0 if the respondent replied “Don’t Know” (a sign the respondent did not learn). We expect more “Don’t Know” responses when negative information about a coethnic was provided. Similarly, we expect fewer “Don’t Know” responses when positive information about a coethnic is provided.

The results in Table 7 are fairly consistent with the expectations generated by the predictions of the motivated reasoning argument. First, coethnics of the incumbent are more likely to learn when the information is positive, although the associations are not significant (columns 1 and 3). Second, coethnics of the incumbent are significantly *less* likely to learn (and thus more likely to provide a “Don’t Know” response) when the information is negative (columns 2 and 4), and here, the effect achieves statistical significance. The results thus provide some evidence that coethnics and noncoethnics of the incumbent process information differently and in ways that reinforce preferences and beliefs about coethnics.⁴⁸

Table 7: The effect of coethnicity on respondent learning from our treatment information.

	(1) Good performance plenary	(2) Bad performance plenary	(3) Good performance committee	(4) Bad performance committee
Coethnic with incumbent	0.032 (0.039)	-0.061 (0.035)	0.048 (0.039)	-0.065 (0.035)
Correct prior on plenary performance	0.209 (0.050)	0.074 (0.041)		
Correct prior on committee performance			0.262 (0.058)	0.061 (0.042)
Constant	0.714 (0.031)	0.909 (0.031)	0.712 (0.031)	0.919 (0.031)
Observations	474	403	475	401
R-squared	0.037	0.017	0.044	0.016

Note: Dependent variable takes a value of 1 if the respondent provided a response to the questions about the incumbent’s performance score in plenary and committee during the comprehension survey immediately following the treatment. The dependent variable instead takes a value of 0 if the respondent replied “Don’t Know.” The sample only includes those who were randomly selected to participate in the comprehension survey. Standard errors in parentheses.

⁴⁸We cannot rule out the possibility that respondents did process the information but were unwilling to report it. But we note that both mechanisms — not accepting the

Discussion

Taken together, our results are most consistent with the explanation that ethnically motivated reasoning describes how voters respond to information in Benin. This section considers potential challenges to such an interpretation.

First, although access to information in our experiment was randomly assigned, coethnicity with the incumbent was not. Coethnicity with the incumbent might therefore be correlated with omitted variables that are driving the results. For example, if the incumbent's coethnics are more educated or live in more economically developed areas, these differences may be responsible for the conditional treatment effects we identify. However, as Table A.1 in the online Appendix shows, coethnics and noncoethnics in our sample look remarkably similar on a range of socioeconomic indicators, including age, years of education, access to household electricity, and access to schools, clinics, and boreholes in their community. Coethnics and noncoethnics exhibit no statistically significant or substantively important differences on these measures.⁴⁹ In addition, the results in the online Appendix A.3 show that our main results are robust to the inclusion of controls for these covariates in our main regression models. Finally, we note that potential omitted variables would have to account for the asymmetry in the conditional treatment effects we uncover in order to threaten our interpretation. For example, even if it were the case that coethnics were more educated and wealthier than noncoethnics, one would need an explanation for why education or wealth leads voters to reward good performance but *not* to punish poor performance.

We also consider the possibility that our results would obtain if ethnicity were just a proxy for prior partisanship; in other words, voters might use the information to rationalize previous decisions such that prior partisans are more likely to vote for the incumbent when they hear good news and prior nonpartisans are less likely to vote for the incumbent when they hear bad news. Although partisanship and ethnic group membership are highly correlated in many contexts (Casey, 2015; Michelitch, 2015), we do not find that partisan rather than ethnically motivated reasoning accounts for our results. We created a dummy variable that captures whether each survey respondent voted for the political party of the incumbent in the previous legislative elections held in 2011. Table A.3 in the online Appendix shows that our main results are robust when we control for this variable. Table A.2 in the online Appendix further shows that our results are robust when we control for this measure and for an interaction between treatment and voting for the

information, and accepting the information but down-weighting it entirely — are consistent with motivated reasoning.

⁴⁹Where slight differences exist, they run in opposite directions. For example, coethnics are slightly more educated (3.5 vs 3.27 average years of schooling), but live in villages that are slightly less likely to have schools, boreholes, or health clinics.

incumbent in 2011. The results from this analysis also provide no evidence of partisan motivated reasoning. This pattern is consistent with the relatively weak partisan identification and party system fluidity that characterizes Benin, as well as with the results of Conroy-Krutz and Moehler (2015), who find no evidence of partisan motivated reasoning in response to the media in another West African democracy, Ghana.

Another consideration relates to Benin's multimember-district electoral system, in which voters technically cast their ballot for the party list, rather than an individual candidate. However, we do not believe that this aspect of our context threatens our interpretation of the results for two reasons. First, as we noted earlier, voting in legislative elections is quite personalistic in Benin (Hounkpe and Warren, 2012), despite the electoral system, and we conducted significant pre-experiment research to identify the incumbents most associated with the communes in our sample. Second, if it were the case that voters thought more about parties than about candidates, we expect that, if anything, this feature would have made it difficult for us to detect *any* treatment effects, as voters should have been unlikely to act on performance information about one member of a party list. This is even more true given that party lists in our sample are more often than not multiethnic themselves. Additionally, the feature seems unlikely to account for the asymmetrical effects we found.

A third set of concerns relates to the ethnic composition of the other party lists competing in the election. In particular, voter response to performance information about a coethnic or noncoethnic might depend on the availability of other coethnic candidates competing in the election or on the ethnic composition of the incumbent's party list. For example, voters may be willing to punish coethnics for poor performance if there are other coethnics competing in the election, but they might not be willing to do so if there are no other coethnics competing. Although party list leaders are more or less concentrated within a single ethnicity in our sample constituencies, in every case, at least one other party list head is of the same ethnicity as our sample politician.

This line of argument suggests that ethnic demographics in a constituency should condition our treatment effects, as the ethnic composition of party lists is likely to be highly correlated with the ethnic composition of the constituency. To examine this possibility, we test whether treatment effects vary when voters are in the ethnic majority or ethnic minority in their commune.⁵⁰ The results of these analyses, presented in Table A.6 of the online Appendix, provide no evidence that ethnic demography in the commune moderates the impact of treatment. The incumbent's coethnics react similarly to the information when they are in the ethnic majority in the commune, and are thus more likely to have other coethnics competing in the elections, and when they are in the

⁵⁰Recall that we draw inferences within constituencies; we thus hold ethnic composition constant but can assess the relationship between information and ethnicity across different types of political environments.

ethnic minority, and are thus less likely to have other coethnic options. The same patterns hold for noncoethnics, who are indifferent to good performance information and punish poor performance information regardless of whether they are a member of an ethnic majority or minority in the commune. Although these results are inconsistent with the notion that voters respond strategically to performance information in ways that vary with local ethnic demography, they continue to be consistent with ethnically motivated reasoning.

Finally, neither the electoral system nor ethnic demography can explain the results of our comprehension survey, which show that coethnics and noncoethnics of the incumbent process information differently immediately after treatment. Those findings are consistent with the ethnically motivated reasoning mechanism and are unlikely to be explained by these alternative accounts.

Conclusion

We collected attitudinal and behavioral data as part of a large-scale field experiment around Benin's 2015 legislative elections to investigate the relationship between information about candidate quality and ethnic voting. We found that positive information increased support for the incumbent among coethnics but had no impact on the voting behavior of noncoethnics, and that negative information had no impact on the voting behavior of the incumbent's coethnics, while noncoethnics punished incumbents for poor performance. In other words, in this context, voters responded to new information about incumbent performance only if they shared an ethnic tie with the incumbent and the news was positive, or if they were not members of the incumbent's ethnic group and the news was negative. We found remarkably consistent effects both in attitudinal measures of ethnic voting via a panel survey and in official electoral results, and importantly, when we controlled for respondent priors about incumbent performance. We examined three sets of potential explanations for these results. Our evidence is the most consistent with arguments that emphasize how social identity can shape information processing. In particular, the results suggest that many voters engage in ethnically motivated reasoning (Bolsen *et al.*, 2014; Taber and Lodge, 2006). *The overall pattern is that the introduction of information about candidate quality reinforced preferences for coethnic candidates.*

Although we presented field experimental evidence specifically from Benin, we expect our results could extend to other democracies where ethnic identities are salient and where voter access to information about incumbents is limited. These conditions characterize many of the world's democracies, including those in sub-Saharan Africa (Posner, 2005), South Asia (Chandra, 2004), and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Hale, 2008). In addition, we do not believe

that there is anything special about ethnic identity, relative to other social identities, that produced our results. Rather, ethnic identity happens to be the salient social identity in our study context. Thus, to the extent that other types of identities — partisan, class, religious, and so on — are more salient in other contexts and may also impact how voters process information, our findings may extend to contexts where nonethnic differences structure electoral competition. Indeed, as mentioned, our results resonate with a body of research in American politics that investigates how partisan identities shape information processing and knowledge about politics.

That said, ours may not be the strongest test of the ethnicity-as-heuristic for favoritism argument, because we provided information about the incumbent's efforts on legislation and executive oversight rather than about the incumbent's performance in distributing patronage and material transfers. Had we provided information about the latter, performance information might have interacted with ethnicity in ways more consistent with an ethnicity-as-heuristic for favoritism hypothesis. However, deputies can and do favor their coethnics through their activities in the legislature as well, for example, by pursuing policies that favor the interests of particular ethnic groups or working to direct central government spending to coethnic constituents. Moreover, we emphasize that our goal is *not* to rule out the ethnicity-as-heuristic for favoritism completely. Rather, our claim is that this argument cannot account for our experimental results. The comparative politics literature should at the very least pay greater attention to how information might reinforce ethnic voting in some contexts. Indeed our findings raise the possibility that ethnically motivated reasoning might also condition how voters respond to information about patronage and material transfers, and we believe that this is an important area for future research.⁵¹

Our study makes a number of contributions. First, our results have implications for the literature on ethnic voting. We evaluated several theories about the relationship between coethnicity, performance information, and voting, and provided evidence that is most consistent with our argument that ethnic identity can shape information processing. Our results thus emphasize a mechanism that has garnered attention with regard to partisanship in American politics and more recent attention with regard to partisanship in developing democracies. In showing that ethnic identity also shapes how individuals process information about politics, and that it does so in ways that may serve to amplify voter preferences for coethnic candidates, our study shows that ethnic voting may persist in part because identity conditions how voters respond to and process information about the political world. Although the literature

⁵¹Consistent with this idea, Carlson (2016) finds that supporters of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni systematically overestimate the extent to which the government provides resources to them, and supporters of the opposition underestimate what they have received from the government.

on ethnic politics has recently emphasized the rational and instrumental considerations that drive ethnic voting (e.g., Carlson, 2015; Conroy-Krutz, 2013; Ichino and Nathan, 2013; Posner, 2005), our results highlight important psychological dimensions of ethnic politics that reinforce ethnic voting. Larson and Lewis (2017) show that information spreads more widely among coethnics than among noncoethnics. Our findings suggest that voters are more likely to process (and therefore more likely to have the opportunity to pass on) information that is flattering about coethnic incumbents and unflattering about noncoethnic incumbents. Taken together, Larson and Lewis's (2017) study and ours show how information might become polarized in segregated places: voters take up only certain types of political information and then spread that information widely within homogenous networks. Our results also contribute to the literature on information and accountability. This literature has produced mixed results on the effects of information access and political behavior. Our results suggest that ethnic identity is an important moderator that should be investigated in future research.

Finally, there are policy and normative implications of our study. One could reasonably read our findings as being quite troublesome for the prospects of democracy in societies where ethnic or other social identities are salient in politics. Indeed our results show that improving voter access to information actually amplified, rather than diminished, voter preferences for coethnic candidates, echoing concerns about attitude polarization in other contexts (Taber and Lodge, 2006). However, there may be situations in which motivated reasoning is not problematic for democracy (Taber and Lodge, 2006). In addition, to identify solutions, we must truly understand the challenge, and research in political science and related fields suggests a number of ways that ethnically motivated reasoning might be diminished. For example, the cultivation of overarching identities, such as national identities (Miguel and Gugerty, 2005; Robinson, 2016), could serve to mitigate ethnically motivated reasoning. Similarly, the priming of cross-cutting identities, such as cousinage in Mali (Dunning and Harrison, 2010), could pivot politics toward more encompassing social categories. Finally, although the evidence remains nascent, research on discrimination suggests that individuals can overcome their biases when they are made aware of them. In one striking example, racial bias in the calls made by referees in the National Basketball Association seems to have disappeared in the aftermath of the media attention that was garnered by the original study demonstrating discrimination (Pope *et al.*, 2013; Price and Wolfers, 2010). Widespread media attention, including front-page coverage in the *New York Times* and significant coverage in major news networks as well as in the sports media, worked to reduce bias in one context. Future work should investigate the effects of information dissemination that is accompanied by an awareness-raising campaign about the prevalence and implications of ethnic voting.

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