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ETHNICITY, AUTHORITY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: EXPRESSING POLITICAL ATTITUDES IN CONTEXTS OF SHIFTING ETHNIC SALIENCE

BADY, ZACHARIA

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Author

Bady, Z. (1)

Abstract

Since the second half of the twentieth century, ethnicity has come to play an increasingly important role in political phenomena, especially in the justification of armed conflicts. To explain this particular role that ethnic identities seem to play, recent research highlights the strategic mobilization of ethnic identities by elites to obtain and legitimize positions of power. Based on this work, this research aims to answer two main gaps that characterize quantitative studies on the subject and which prevent a better understanding of the role of ethnicity in the acceptance of leaders' authority. First, quantitative research on ethnicity typically fails to take the social constructivist stance seriously as shown by the use of measurements (i.e. "fractionalization" or "polarization" indices) that treat ethnic identity as a descriptive characteristic, regardless of its subjective relevance for individuals. Second, research generally focuses on either the societal (national) level or the individual level when trying to understand the relationship between ethnicity and violence, and therefore confuses dynamics that happen at the national level with those occurring at more local scales. Relying on the spiral of silence theory and the social representation approach, I propose the following hypothesis to explain how strong leadership may become uncontested: local contexts where the importance of ethnic identities substantially changes are characterized by a questioning of the political norms (i.e. what political stances can be publicly enacted) and constitutes therefore places where otherwise censored political views (e.g. authoritarian) may come to dominate the public sphere. To test this hypothesis, I use data from the first two rounds of the Afrobarometer survey collected in 10 African countries. Using multilevel logistic models, I examine whether regional change in the salience of ethnic identities interacts with the political attitude of individuals (authoritarian vs Democrats) to predict their political participation. As hypothesized, results show that regional volatility selectively affects the enactment of political views. However, the pattern is more complex than predicted and suggests that the spiral of silence framework is too simplistic to explain processes occurring in these contexts.

Keywords

Ethnicity | political participation | spiral of silence | social representations

Author's affiliations

(1) Life Course and Inequality Research Centre LINES, University of Lausanne

Correspondence to

Zacharia.bady@unil.ch

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1. Introduction

In recent years, ethnicity has come to play an increasingly important political role on the international scene. The most striking manifestation of this importance lies in the prevalence of ethnic violent conflicts in the modern world: according to the data collected by Wimmer and Min (2006), only 20 percent of the wars around the world involved ethnonationalist aims between 1814 (Congress of Vienna) and 1919 (Versailles Treaty), while this percentage rose to 45 percent between the Versailles treaty and 2001 and even to 75 percent when considering the period between the end of the Cold War and 2001 (see Wimmer, Cederman & Min, 2009).

This state of fact didn't fail to attract the attention of researchers in the field of political violence, who increasingly included the concept of ethnicity in their analysis of violent conflicts (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998). Reviewing this literature, I argue that it is characterized by two broad limitations which impede a better understanding of the political importance of ethnic identities and its consequences. On the one hand, methodological practice often fails to take seriously into account the idea that ethnic categories are socially constructed. As a result, theoretical acceptance of social constructivism has often been insufficient to formulate research questions adapted to the political nature of ethnic identities and deepen our understanding of how people may come to accept the authority of ethnic entrepreneurs. In the present study, I fill this gap in two ways: first, by conceptualizing and operationalizing the role of ethnicity in the constitution of the political climate in a fundamentally constructivist way, that is, by investigating how *changes in the importance of ethnic categories* among the population in a given context affect its pattern of political participation. Second, instead of assuming any simple relationship between ethnic identity and acceptance of political leaders' authority, I examine whether contexts of shifting ethnic salience may favour a climate of submission toward (or rejection of) authority by selectively affecting individuals' political participation depending on their ideological orientation.

On the other hand, research generally focuses on either the societal (national) level or the individual level when trying to understand the relationship between ethnicity and violence, and therefore confuses dynamics that happen at the national level with those occurring at more local scales. In the following, I will argue that it is necessary to study more local levels of analysis in order to understand societal outcomes. More precisely, I suggest that normative upheavals happening in local communities may create a fertile ground for the emergence of otherwise silenced ideologies (e.g. authoritarian) and that changes in the

importance of ethnic categories are a critical factor in this process. These points are addressed in a study based on data collected in eleven African countries.

1.1 Ethnic politics: the case of political violence

As Brubaker and others have noted (Brubaker, 2009; Brubaker and Laitin, 1998; Fearon and Laitin, 2000), it is now a commonplace among social scientists to argue that ethnic categories are socially constructed, meaning that they are not given, fixed and stable. Apart from few exceptions (e.g. Harvey, 2000; Vanhanen, 1999), virtually all scholars working in the field of ethnicity would agree that the relevance ethnic categories are not given by biology, human nature or some unchangeable historical force – views that are called *primordialist* – but are rather conventional and contingent upon social and historical processes. However, this doesn't mean that this theoretical acknowledgment has always led to draw the right implications in terms of research practices and methodologies.

One form of what one could call '*methodological primordialism*' consists in assuming that, rather than asking whether and why, particular 'ethnic' categories are politically relevant, or relevant at all, for the actors in a particular context. This is exemplified by the widespread use of "ethnic fractionalization" (e.g. Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Sambanis, 2001) or "ethnic polarization" (e.g. Reynal-Querol, 2002 ; Reynal-Querol & Montalvo, 2005) indices as measures of a country's ethnic composition in order to predict the likelihood of conflict (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009; Elcheroth & Spini, 2011). What these indices have in common is that they treat individuals' ethnic identity as a given characteristic without any indication about its subjective relevance for individuals, let alone their political importance. This proves problematic, however, since the relevance of ethnic groups for individuals can strongly vary over time (Eifert, Miguel, & Posner, 2010) and regionally (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009) in the same country. It is therefore not surprising that researchers find contradicting results when using this kind of indicators (for a review, see Wimmer, Cederman, & Min, 2009), thus letting the question of the relationship between ethnic diversity and conflict open.

Wimmer and colleagues (Wimmer, 2002; Wimmer et al., 2009) made an important contribution to this field by asking the question differently. They argue that ethnicity matters for conflict – and for politics more generally – not because ethnic identities have some primordial importance in themselves, but because the modern nation-state precisely relies on an ethnonationalist principle of legitimacy (Wimmer, 2002; see also Mann, 2005), meaning that the government is supposed to rule in the name of an ethnically defined people. They

argue that when a state's resources are too scarce for universal inclusions and/or the development civil society institutions enabling clientelist networks along non-ethnic lines is too weak, the self-determination and self-rule principles at the core of nationalist ideology will apply to less inclusive ethnic identities and create a struggle for state power between ethnically defined actors. Based on this reasoning, they identify configurations which are more likely to lead to specific forms of conflict depending on the inclusion or exclusion of ethnically relevant actors (Wimmer et al., 2009). They show, for instance, that states in which a large part of the population belongs to a politically relevant ethnic group excluded from state power are more likely to face a rebellion.

One critical aspect of this model is to emphasize the role of power and leadership in the political relevance of ethnic identities: in a world of nation-states, political leaders have strong incentives to legitimize their authority through an ethnic lens. From this perspective, it seems rather irrelevant to look for a direct relationship between ethnic diversity in general and political conflict, since most conflicts involving access to state power or resources are likely to be framed as ethnic. A more interesting matter in this context is rather to understand why political agendas implying political violence or extreme forms of exclusion would gain acceptance among the population at large. This question, which is essentially about acceptance of leadership, matters greatly for at least two reasons. First, even if we know that particular ethnic boundaries are consensual, politically salient and result in conflict over resources and inequality between ethnic groups in a given context¹, it does not follow that ethnic violence will occur (Elcheroth & Spini, 2011; Brubaker & Latin, 1998). This has for instance been shown by Gurr's (1993) analyses of 227 minority groups in 90 countries: while groups' relative deprivation determined "the issues around which leaders are able to mobilize collective action" (p. 189), it did not explain the use of a violent strategy (i.e. rebellion) to address their grievances, which depended much more on the state's reaction and the group's leadership and organization. In other words, explaining the political salience of ethnic identities – and even conflict between ethnic groups – is not enough to explain the outbreak of violence, we further have to understand how leaders advocating a violent course of action are able to secure their authority and the followership of other group members (who would arguably be reluctant to be drawn into a violent conflict; Brubaker & Laitin, 1998).

Second, while it is undoubtedly true that social (e.g. ethnic) categories constitute powerful tools through which leaders can mobilize a constituency in service of their political agenda (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2013; Simon & Oakes, 2006; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), we should not overestimate ethnic entrepreneurs' ability to successfully impose whatever

political agenda through discourse and persuasion appealing to ethnic sentiments. As Gagnon's (2004) analysis of the wars in the Former Yugoslavia shows, warlike nationalist appeals were met with considerable resistance among the population. Crucially, he argues that military violence – which presupposes access to political power – was a means to crystalize group boundaries and shut down contention. While this analysis obviously suggests that political violence can be a means to secure one's authority, we should not lose sight that in this case authority and power are as much the cause as the consequence of political violence because the very ability to implement such a violent course of action presupposes access to political power.

This suggests that leaders' ability to make their authority sufficiently uncontested not only enables them to transform a political struggle into a violent one, but also gives them the power and resources to impose group boundaries into society; strategies which can in turn be used to further secure their authority. For these reasons, I argue that a crucial step forward is to clarify what processes can create an ideological climate which leads the masses to rally around their leaders. Hence, the present study investigates the following question: *in which situation would the masses uniformly and without contestation accept leaders' authority?*

1.2 Mobilizing followers, demobilizing challengers

At first glance, one could argue that leaders gain authority by arguing that they work for the interest of the ethnic group, even more when they promise to defend their co-ethnics against a discriminatory or even an aggressive and dangerous outgroup. While I readily acknowledge that such narrative may convince some part of the population, this argument neglects two important points. First, people are not just passive receptors of political propaganda but actively construct meaning based on discourses they are exposed to as well as their experienced social reality, which they in turn communicate to others (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011). And because a society will always be characterized by a diversity of social realities and experiences on the ground – e.g. friendships, marriages and acts of solidarity crossing ethnic boundaries –, there are always disagreement with and contestation toward political discourses trying to define ethnic identities in exclusive ways (see Gagnon, 2004).

Following this reasoning, the central matter becomes to identify when challengers to authority are made invisible or reduced to silence. In this regard, the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1984; Noelle-Neumann & Petersen, 2004) offers a conceptual framework to understand why and when self-censorship may happen in parts of the population. This theory considers public opinion as an instrument of social control that indirectly ensures

social cohesion. Public opinion is defined as: “opinions on controversial issues that one *can* express in public without isolating oneself” (Noelle-Neumann, 1993; pp. 62-63, original emphasis). It is assumed that individuals strongly fear isolation and, as a result, constantly monitor their social environment in order to know which opinions can be expressed publicly without being isolated. They refrain from expressing their opinion when they perceive it will attract threats of isolation, whereas those who believe their opinion will be met with approval, on the contrary, tend to easily voice it in public settings. This eventually sets a spiralling process in motion: the ones’ tendency to publicly speak out their opinion reinforces the others’ impression of holding a minority opinion and therefore their willingness to conceal it in public.

Empirical tests of the theory are nevertheless mitigated: in a meta-analysis of 17 studies, Glynn, Hayes and Shanahan (1997) found that perceived support for one’s opinion predicted the willingness to speak out but the effect size was so small that they considered it negligible. Noelle-Neumann and Petersen (2004) argue, however, that such tests abstract one core hypothesis from the theory as if it applied universally, whereas the theory actually assumes that the phenomenon is constraint by a number of factors. An important one is the moral importance of the controversy, its implications for collective values. Further, change in opinion climate is critical in the theory: “Devoid of a heated, morally loaded controversy and an initial shift in the opinion climate that would put pressure on one of the camps, no spiral of silence is expected to occur” (Bodor, 2012; p. 271; see also Matthes, 2015). Finally, the spiral of silence is assumed to be strictly limited in time (Noelle-Neumann & Petersen, 2004). This temporal dimension was clearly illustrated in a study by Bodor (2012): in the context of the U.S. presidential election campaign, he observed that voting intention for Bush (versus Kerry) negatively predicted the self-reported frequency of political discussions at the workplace, but this effect only appeared for the precise week corresponding to a dramatic drop in Bush perceived chances of winning by the public².

Overall, this theoretical framework suggests that there are critical moments during which the norms of a society can be put into question through a selective expression of opinions. This provides us with an interesting explanation of how criticism of authority might be shut down which does not focus on leaders’ strategy and discourses and give an active part to the society as a whole in the process. Further, it points to the critical role of *political participation* in this process of change by emphasizing that individuals’ behaviour shapes the normative context of other people surrounding them; thus constituting a feedback loop in the relationship between collective norms and individual behaviour. As authors taking a social

representation perspective (Elcheroth et al., 2011) have argued, there are nevertheless some conceptual weaknesses behind the notion of fear of isolation. First of all, the theory seems to assume that individuals always strongly desire to be part of, and fear to be isolated from, the national majority as whole, an assumption which is arguably unrealistic. On the one hand, it is quite clear that individuals can use a variety of groups as a reference for comparing their opinion (e.g. their local community) depending on the context and the controversial issue (see Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, 1991). On the other hand, while it may be true that individuals fear isolation, it seems more doubtful that being part of a minority is equivalent to be isolated.

From a social representation perspective (Elcheroth et al., 2011), the critical factor enabling individuals to enact their political opinion is less the perceived majority or minority status of their opinion than the conviction that *some relevant others* happen to share their view (see also Turner, 1991; Wright, 1997). This argument interestingly suggests that we change the focus from the self-censorship of those normally expressive to the expression of those normally silent, thus turning the spiral of silence hypothesis on its head into a complementary hypothesis: periods of upheaval may trigger an ‘*escalation of expression*³’ where otherwise silent parts of the population realize (accurately or not) that their stance is shared by others, which leads them to increasingly express it, which in turn shapes others’ impression that this opinion is widespread.

1.3 Ethnic identities and volatile local contexts

This approach to the transformation of political norms (described in the previous section) postulate an initial shift in the opinion climate – which would have important implications for collective values – for such collective dynamics of change to occur (Bodor, 2012; Noelle-Neumann & Petersen, 2004). A key question is therefore to identify these periods of upheaval during which collective norms are called into question. In this regard, Bodor’s study illustrates the important point that mass-mediated communication can play an important role because it reaches people at the scale of a whole society. This is of course a fact which makes ethnic politics highly relevant by enabling ethnic mobilization at the national scale. It suggests that when the salience of ethnic identities increase or decrease in a whole country, this change occurs in response to an event broadcasted through the channel of mass media.

On the other hand, mass media are obviously not the only source of information about norms and values, and arguably not the most important to individuals. Indeed, what happens

in their close social environment may be far more significant and engaging to them. Besides being part of large-scale ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983), people belong to local communities with their institutions, norms and values forming the context of their everyday social interactions (Elcheroth & Spini, 2014). When such local communities are relatively stable, social categories play an important role in shaping normative expectations because social representations include knowledge about opinions, beliefs and values associated with different social groups (Raudsepp, 2005; Elcheroth et al., 2011). This not only means that people tend to enact the (political) opinions they think normative for the social category they contextually identify with, but also that they predict others’ opinions and behaviour based on how they categorize them. As a result, substantial alterations in the salient social categories should question normative expectations and create a climate of uncertainty. It is (notably) through this process, I argue, that ethnic categories are especially consequential for at least two reasons. First, they are typically represented in an essentialized way (e.g. acquired by birth), as inherently stable and rooted in a long history of shared fate and culture, a fact which should give them a highly structuring role regarding normative expectations. Second and most importantly, nationalist ideology – which dominates the modern world and legitimizes the power of nation-states’ government – makes them highly loaded in political meaning by pushing rulers and leaders to find legitimacy in and mobilize an ethnically defined constituency (Wimmer; 2002; 2013b; Wimmer et al., 2009; Wimmer & Min, 2006; Mann, 2005). Hence, change in the importance of *ethnic* identities in a given local context, regardless whether their significance rise or decline, should imply a *volatile climate*, i.e. a climate of uncertainty regarding political norms which creates a strong potential for altering patterns of political participation.

Hence, I expect that change in the relative salience of ethnic categories (i.e. volatility) in local contexts blurs and changes individuals’ knowledge about which opinions are shared by whom within their community and therefore creates uncertainty regarding which political opinions are normative. This, I argue, constitutes a fertile ground for the emergence of spirals of silence and/or escalations of expression. This, however, does not imply a deterministic process: as I already emphasized, such normative changes occur when a highly morally loaded controversy about collective values is at stake (Bodor ,2012), which in turn depends on how the collective is specifically constructed, i.e. which stances are debated, mobilized or stigmatized by epistemic authorities. Penic, Elcheroth and Reicher (2015; study 2) nicely illustrated this point in a study in which they analysed the rhetorical structure of a Croatian parliamentary debate about media voicing criticisms toward the regime. They notably showed

that the debate constructed certain stances as unspeakable and dissent as unacceptable because of a threatening international context. They argue that this kind of rhetorical demobilization of criticism toward national authorities – because it marginalized such views in the Croatian society – explained why critical patriotism was incompatible with Croatian national identity (as they quantitatively observed in study 1). Besides, the previously emphasized pervasiveness of nationalist ideology as a justification of power in contemporary politics allows us to make a further prediction: because governments and leaders routinely claim to rule “in the name of the people”, it seems compelling to expect more democratic views to be normative, and therefore democrats to be more expressive, in stable contexts.

Based on this reasoning, I formulate the following hypotheses. First (1), I expect local – i.e. regional – volatility (defined as the absolute temporal variation of ethnic salience in a given context, see below) to predict political participation. As the preceding discussion suggested that both a negative (spiral of silence hypothesis) and a positive (escalation of expression hypothesis) relationships are theoretically possible, I don't formulate any prediction regarding the direction of the effect and consider it as an empirical question. Second, I expect this effect of regional volatility on political participation to be moderated by individuals' political opinions toward authority. More specifically, I predict that democrats are more participative than authoritarians in stable contexts (democratic opinions are the ‘normative baseline’) and that this difference is reduced in more volatile ones. Again, for reasons just mentioned, I let the question of the direction of the contextual effect of volatility open: I expect it to either reduce democrats' participation or to increase authoritarians'.

2. Method

2.1 Data and sample

In order to answer my research questions, I rely on data from the Afrobarometer surveys. While I used data from the rounds 1 and 2 and included the eleven countries present in both rounds to explore the variation of ethnic salience (see below, section 3.1.), the models corresponding to my main research questions are tested on data from the round 2 surveys. These data originally include representative samples of 11 countries divided in a total of 104 regions (N=16584; see Table 1) although I exclude Zimbabwe for these analyses because a shorter version of the questionnaire was implemented in this country and some crucial predictor variables are not available as a result. The demographic characteristics of the full sample are shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Sample size by country and region (round 2; $N_{total} = 16584$)

country	region	<i>n</i>	country	region	<i>n</i>	country	region	<i>n</i>	country	region	<i>n</i>
Botswana <i>N</i> = 1016	Central	400	Namibia <i>N</i> = 1198	Caprivi	56	Tanzania <i>N</i> = 1175	Arusha	48	Uganda <i>N</i> = 2400	Central	568
	North East	88		Erongo	95		Dar es Salaam	88		East	608
	South East	208		Hardap	56		Dodoma	51		North	544
	Southern	128		Karas	56		Iringa	47		West	680
	Kgalagadi	32		Kavango	104		Kagera	72	Copperbelt	194	
	Kweneng	160		Khomas	200		Kas. Pemba	16	Luapula	103	
Lesotho <i>N</i> = 1200	Berea	146	Kunene	40	Kas. Unguja	8	Lusaka	163	Zambia <i>N</i> = 1197	Central	117
	Butha-Buthe	72	Ohangwena	127	Kigoma	48	Eastern	132			
	Leribe	199	Omaheke	40	Kilimanjaro	48	North-Western	71			
	Mafeteng	124	Omusati	136	Kusini Pemba	8	Northern	172			
	Maseru	308	Oshana	104	Kusini Unguja	8	Southern	153			
	Mohales Hoek	112	Oshikoto	96	Lindi	24	Western	92			
	Mokhotlong	48	Otjozondjupa	88	Mara	48	Bulawayo	71			
	Qacha's nek	56	Lagos	225	Mbeya	72	Harare	200			
Quthing	64	North Central	313	Mjini	24	Manicaland	160				
Thaba-Tseka	71	North East	296	Magharibi	64	Mashonaland	8				
Malawi <i>N</i> = 1200	Central	487	North West	500	Morogoro	64	Cenral	8	Zimbabwe <i>N</i> = 1101	Mashonaland East	118
	Northern	152	South East	268	Mtwara	40	Mashonaland	128			
	Southern	561	South South	528	Mwanza	104	West	128			
Gao	54	South West	293	Pwani	32	Masvingo	128				
Mali <i>N</i> = 1279	Kayes	160	Eastern Cape	319	Rukwa	38	Matabeland North	72			
	Kidal	45	Free State	162	Ruvuma	40	Matabeland South	72			
	Koulikoro	325	Gauteng	432	Shinyanga	95	Midland	144			
	Mopti	177	KwaZulu Natal	451	Singida	40					
	Segou	220	Limpopo	244	Tabora	56					
	Sikasso	235	Mpumalanga	180	Tanga	56					
	Tombouctou	63	Northern Cape	116							
			North West	207							
		Western Cape	284								

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the sample.

country	Rural (%)	Women (%)	Mean (SD) education level	Mean (SD) household income
<i>Botswana</i>	55.12	49.90	6.49 (0.85)	5.17 (2.50)
<i>Lesotho</i>	83.08	50.00	6.04 (1.16)	4.92 (2.83)
<i>Malawi</i>	87.33	50.67	5.80 (1.06)	7.05 (3.03)
<i>Mali</i>	69.43	49.34	7.52 (1.08)	3.37 (2.30)
<i>Namibia</i>	60.02	49.67	4.93 (0.43)	4.60 (2.77)
<i>Nigeria</i>	48.95	50.10	6.03 (0.94)	5.72 (2.50)
<i>South Africa</i>	40.79	48.85	5.31 (0.99)	5.69 (2.42)
<i>Tanzania</i>	69.11	50.13	7.89 (0.71)	3.68 (1.91)
<i>Uganda</i>	79.83	51.00	7.64 (0.86)	4.59 (2.64)
<i>Zambia</i>	62.57	48.79	6.50 (0.90)	3.09 (2.06)
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	60.85	49.68	6.64 (0.86)	-
<i>Pooled</i>	63.45	49.86	6.41 (1.30)	4.82 (2.70)

Note. Household income was not asked in the survey in Zimbabwe.

2.2 Outcome variables

Political participation. In order to approximate the degree to which respondents publicly disclose their political opinions, I relied on the following items assessing two alternative ways of political participation:

Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had a chance? (0=No, would never do this, 1=No, but would do if had the chance, 2=Yes, once or twice, 3=Yes, several times, 4=Yes, often)

1) *Discussed politics with friends or neighbours?*

2) *Joined others to raise an issue*

While the first item is similar to traditional measures of political expression used in the spiral of silence research (e.g. Matthes, 2015; Bodor, 2012), the second one assesses a quite different behaviour that is not traditionally used in this field; so it provides us with an interesting opportunity to observe whether these two items will be predicted in a similar way.

It should be noted that the original response categories make a distinction between respondents who did not implement the behaviour in question and never would from those who did not implement it but would do if they had the chance. This distinction makes it problematic to treat the different points of the scale as measuring the same constructs for the present study because I am precisely interested in factors that affect the actual implementation of the behaviour. In this perspective, it is clearly not appropriate to consider the interval between the first two points of the scale (0-1) as measuring the same construct as the following ones, let alone to consider them as equivalent intervals.

Furthermore, there are at least two reasons why the response “Yes, once or twice” may be problematic in this context. First, while it is true that it indicates an actual behaviour, it can nevertheless be interpreted as an exceptional event especially when considering the time interval to which the question refers, which is one year. In this sense, respondents who answered in this way may well participate only in exceptional circumstances. Second, our research question makes quite clear that the threshold separating silence from expression is important to the extent that it contributes to the transformation of the normative climate at the aggregated level. The fact that I model political participation as an outcome should not lead us to forget that it is theoretically interesting precisely because it is likely to feedback at the aggregated level and not because I am interested in an effect on the willingness to participate per se. Hence, it is theoretically meaningful to code this variable in a way that emphasizes the boundary between participation and non- (or exceptional) participation. Following this reasoning, my analysis strategy is to dichotomize these variables in order to distinguish respondents who unequivocally implemented the behaviour (i.e. who answered “Yes, several times” or “Yes, often”) from the others, and then to check whether the results are robust to the use of these items as continuous.

2.3 Individual-level predictors

The individual-level predictors used in this study are of two kinds. The first one concerns concrete examples of authoritarian regimes, asking respondents whether they would approve them or not. The second type of measure covers different attitudes toward leadership.

Acceptance of authoritarian rule. The first set of political attitudes used as predictors assesses the acceptance (or rejection) of different kinds of authoritarian regimes, which are measured with the following items:

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve the following alternatives (1=strongly disapprove – 5=strongly approve)?

- 1) *Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office*
- 2) *All decisions are made by a council of chiefs and elders*
- 3) *The army comes in to govern the country*
- 4) *Elections and parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything*

Although a principal component analysis shows that all items load on a single factor in each country, reliability indices (ranging from 0.431 to 0.689) are too weak in some countries (especially in Uganda and Zambia). As the deletion of none item improves the scale's reliability, it is better not to treat these items as a coherent scale. Besides, since the response to each of these items may have a different meaning depending on the actual regime of the respondents' country and its history, it seems theoretically meaningful to treat them as distinct variables.

Moreover, since belonging to the majority or the minority is an important aspect in the spiral of silence theory, it seems also appropriate to dichotomize each of these items in order to differentiate those who accept these types of regime from those who reject them. Therefore, I recoded each item response as “reject” for those who explicitly rejected the proposed political regime (i.e. who answered “strongly disapprove” or “disapprove”), and “accept” for the others (i.e. who answered “Neither Approve Nor Disapprove”, “Approve” or “Strongly Approve”).

*Support for leaders' ingroup favouritism.*⁴ This measure taps into the ideological justification of discrimination by distinguishing those who believe that leaders should favour their ingroup at the expense of outgroup members, from those who think that they should work for the interest of everyone without distinction. This measure is interesting because it enables us to see whether volatile contexts are associated with the expression of a typical justification of ethnonationalist leaders, i.e. that they should and will defend the interest of their co-ethnics. It is formulated as follows:

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B. (Agree very strongly with A - agree with A - agree with neither - agree with B - agree very strongly with B)

A: Since everyone is equal under the law, leaders should not favour their own family or group.

B: Once in office, leaders are obliged to help their own family or group.

Since this measure (and the two following) implies a choice between two affirmations before rating the strength of the agreement, it seems natural – in addition to be theoretically meaningful – to dichotomize the items as a function of the affirmation chosen. Hence, I dichotomized the responses in order to differentiate those who explicitly reject leaders' ingroup favouritism (i.e. who agree very strongly or agree with A) from others.

(Un)critical followership. The following item measures directly whether respondents think that they should criticize their leaders and question their actions or believe that they should follow them without criticism.

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B. (Agree Very Strongly with A - Agree with A - Agree with Neither - Agree with B - Agree Very Strongly with B)

A: As citizens, we should be more active in questioning the actions of our leaders.

B: In our country these days, there is not enough respect for authority.

I also dichotomized this item in order to distinguish critical followers (i.e. those who “Agree Very Strongly with A” or “Agree with A”) from uncritical ones.

Affirmation of people rule. Finally, I included a measure of the conception of the relationship between the people and the government, which oppose a paternalistic view of the population to an affirmation that the power belongs to the people:

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B. (Agree Very Strongly with A - Agree with A - Agree with Neither - Agree with B - Agree Very Strongly with B)

A: People are like children; the government should take care of them like a parent.

B: Government is an employee; the people should be the bosses who control the government.

I also dichotomized this item in order to distinguish those who affirm people rule (i.e. those who “Agree Very Strongly with B” or “Agree with B”) from those who don't.

2.4 Contextual-level predictors

Ethnic salience, ethnic salience increase and volatility. A critical aspect of my methodology is to measure the importance of ethnic identities for individuals instead of assuming it in order to construct contextual indicators of ethnic salience. To do so, I rely on the following open question, which was asked in Afrobarometer surveys of the two first rounds:

We have spoken to many [citizens of country name] and they have all described themselves in different ways. Some people describe themselves in terms of their language, ethnic group, religion, or gender, and others describe themselves in economic terms, such as working class, middle class, or a farmer. Besides being [nationality], which specific group do you feel you belong to first and foremost?

The respondents' verbatim answers were then recoded as a function of the type of group chosen (gender, profession, tribe, etc.). Based on these categories, I coded an individual-level variable – *ethnic identification* – differentiating those who define themselves in ethnic terms from those who don't by coding respondents who fell in categories "Language/tribe/ethnic group", "Race" and "religion" as ethnic identifiers. This choice to include racial and religious categories under the construct of ethnic identity reflects a constructivist definition of ethnicity, as religion and 'race' can both constitute the basis for a mythical narrative of common ancestry and culture (see Wimmer et al., 2009, Wimmer, 2013a, 2013b), and therefore symbolize boundaries between essentialized groups (Barth, 1969).

Then, this individual-level variable was used to create *contextual indicators of ethnic salience* for each country and region present in the sample by computing the proportion of ethnic identifiers among the respondents living in the region/country. This was done separately for round 1 and round 2. I computed two additional contextual indicators based on the salience of ethnic identities for each region and country: (1) I computed *the increase in ethnic salience* by subtracting the proportion of ethnic identifiers at round1 from the proportion at round2 ($\text{proportion}_{\text{round2}} - \text{proportion}_{\text{round1}}$) and (2) I did exactly the same computation except that I took the absolute value of the result ($|\text{proportion}_{\text{round2}} - \text{proportion}_{\text{round1}}|$). This allowed me to construct an indicator of *volatility*, defined as the change in the normative importance of ethnic categories regardless of the direction of this change.

3. Results

3.1 Preliminary analyses

To start with, an important thing to know is whether there has been a variation in the salience of ethnic identities through time (i.e. between rounds) in the countries composing the sample, the extent of this variation and its direction. As can be seen in Figure 1 (see also Table 3), there is on average a decrease in the salience of ethnic identities ($M = -0.10$, $SD = 0.22$) and the average absolute variation (i.e. volatility) amounts to one fifth of the population ($M = 0.20$, $SD = 0.13$).

Table 3: Ethnic salience, ethnic salience increase and volatility by country.

Country	ethnic salience (time 1)	ethnic salience (time 2)	ethnic salience increase (ES 2 – ES 1)	Volatility (ES 2 – ES 1)
<i>Botswana</i>	0.37	0.33	-0.11	0.11
<i>Lesotho</i>	0.30	0.61	0.28	0.28
<i>Malawi</i>	0.69	0.28	-0.45	0.45
<i>Mali</i>	0.62	0.60	0.07	0.07
<i>Namibia</i>	0.63	0.27	-0.28	0.28
<i>Nigeria</i>	0.69	0.67	-0.05	0.05
<i>South Africa</i>	0.62	0.28	-0.34	0.34
<i>Tanzania</i>	0.08	0.23	0.13	0.13
<i>Uganda</i>	0.21	0.27	0.06	0.06
<i>Zambia</i>	0.48	0.28	-0.20	0.20
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	0.58	0.32	-0.23	0.23
Mean	0.48	0.37	-0.10	0.20
SD	0.21	0.16	0.22	0.13

As a second step, I computed ethnic salience and its variation between the two rounds at the regional level. Figure 2 helps to get an idea of the homogeneity of this variation among regions of the same country.

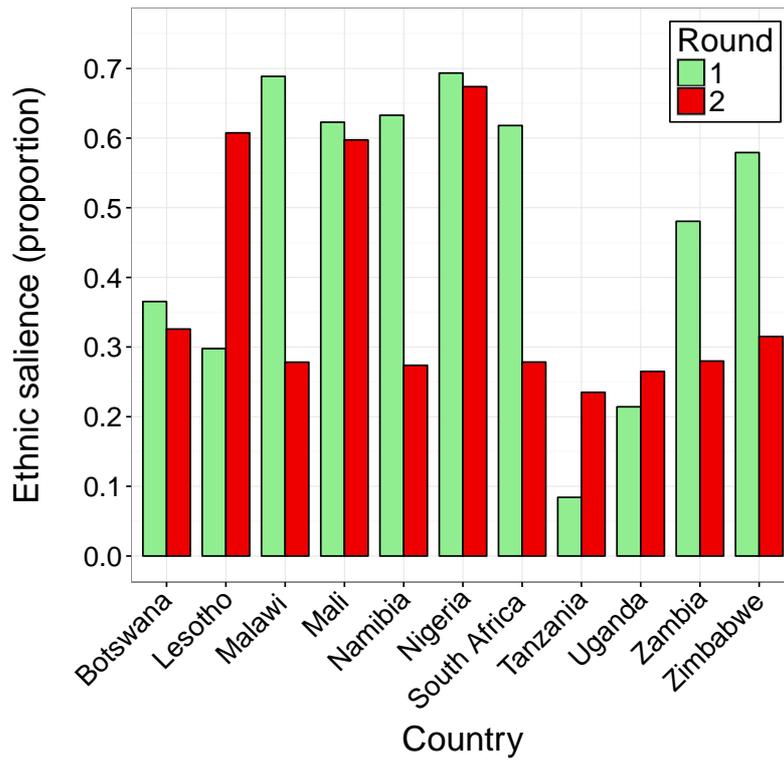


Figure 1: Proportion of respondent identifying first and foremost with their ethnic group, religion or race (i.e. ethnic salience) for each country at round 1 and 2.

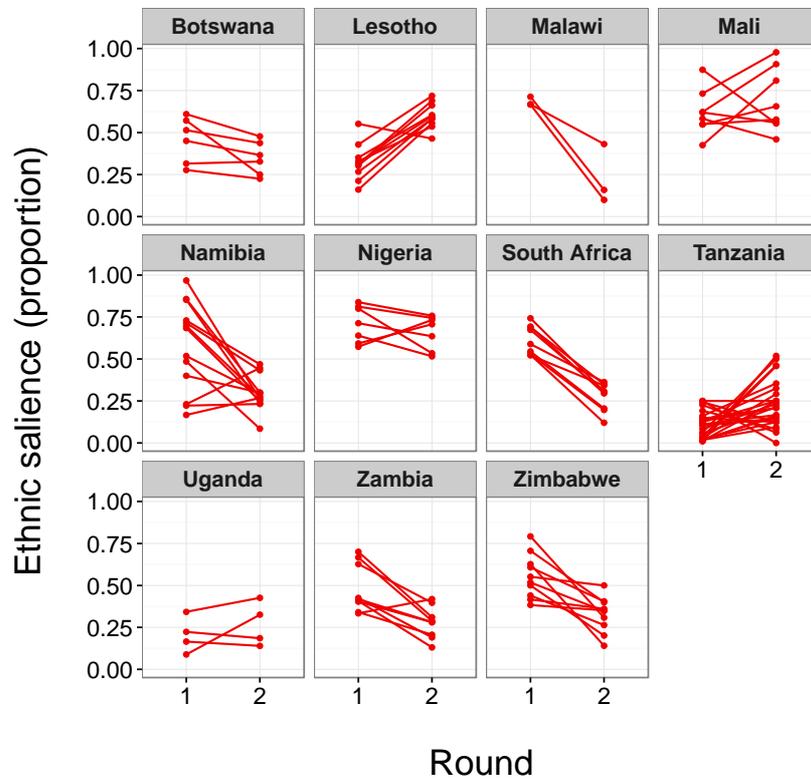


Figure 2: Regional ethnic salience as a function of time (round) in each country

As can be seen from Figure 2, considering the regional level shows that variations of ethnic salience are not homogenous within countries. This is consistent with my assumption that distinct collective dynamics occur at the regional level that would not be captured by analysing country level variations only.

Table 4: Percentage of respondents holding each political opinion.

country	Accept one party rule	Accept military rule	Accept one-man rule	Accept traditional rule	Uncritical followership	Support leaders ingroup favoritism	Affirm people rule
<i>Botswana</i>	28.87	19.46	13.25	46.18	34.87	20.58	45.48
<i>Lesotho</i>	37.45	13.09	15.43	48.92	23.83	15.00	42.33
<i>Malawi</i>	32.97	13.14	18.91	50.00	17.55	10.73	28.15
<i>Mali</i>	26.49	32.69	28.67	65.05	26.62	33.91	35.08
<i>Namibia</i>	44.65	48.15	41.08	51.88	63.35	27.36	32.80
<i>Nigeria</i>	18.92	30.61	26.18	37.66	32.50	21.53	29.63
<i>S. Africa</i>	29.19	19.66	23.02	33.17	29.50	19.77	38.89
<i>Tanzania</i>	36.29	11.07	11.69	22.86	24.59	24.72	35.75
<i>Uganda</i>	44.82	14.18	8.79	49.83	17.46	30.37	39.69
<i>Zambia</i>	26.05	4.38	7.99	23.39	26.28	12.25	37.67
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	39.22	15.71	15.79	36.24	-	-	48.57
<i>Pooled</i>	32.68	20.62	19.27	42.07	28.80	22.23	37.12

When looking at the distribution of political attitudes in each country (see Table 4), we can see that authoritarian opinions are generally held by a minority, some being nevertheless more accepted than others, such as the opinion regarding traditional rule which is accepted by a majority of the sample in Mali and Namibia, and by half of the sample in Malawi. A surprising exception to this rule, however, is the affirmation of people rule: in all countries the majority of the sample endorses a paternalistic view of the relationship between government and governed and only a minority considers that “Government is an employee; the people should be the bosses who control the government”. Surprising as it may be, the advantage of this for our purpose is that it may enable us to disentangle the effect of the opinion’s minority/majority status from its democratic/authoritarian nature, since it is the only item for which the democratic opinion is not endorsed by the majority in most countries.

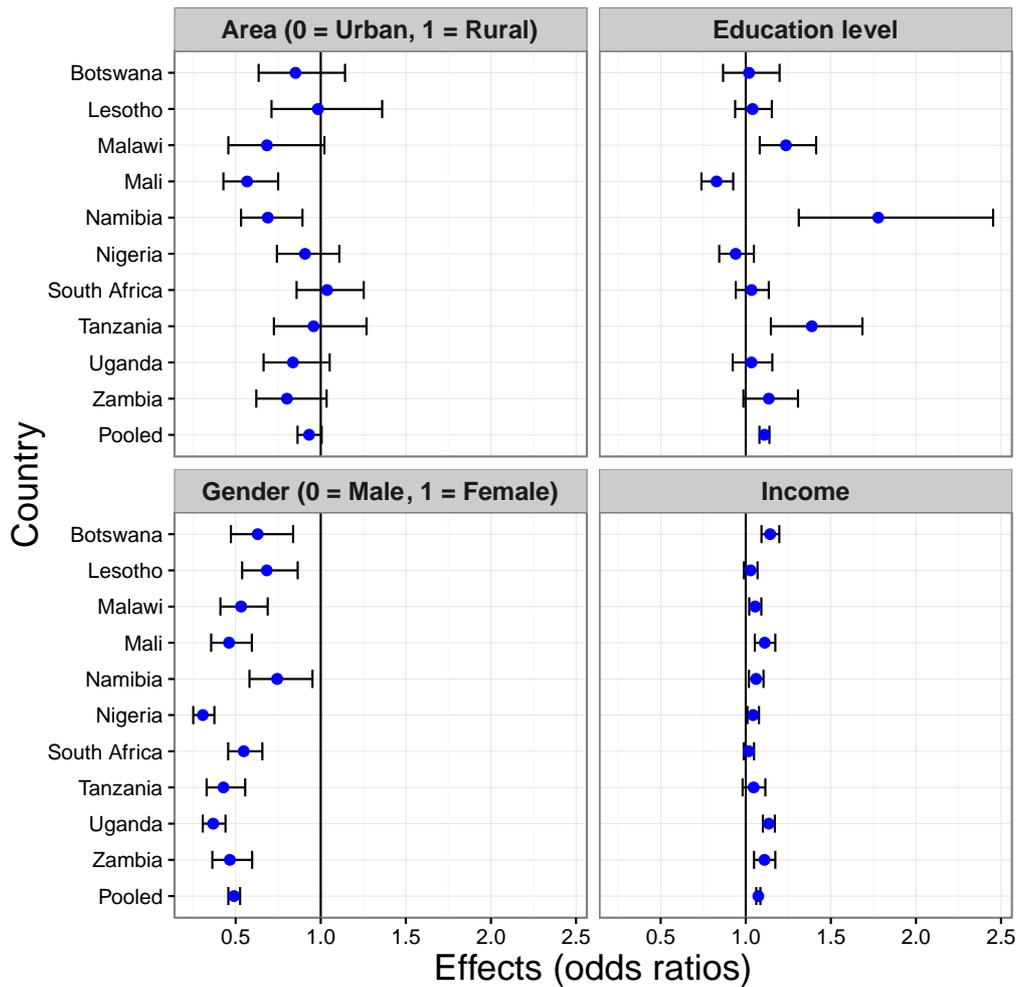


Figure 3: Effect of the area of residence (urban versus rural), level of education, gender and household income on the likelihood of political discussions during the last year.

Note. Odds ratios were computed through separate logistic regression models (one for each country and one with the full sample) including the four variables. Zimbabwe is excluded because household income was not measured.

Let us now examine the effect of demographic characteristics on political participation. When considering the characteristics of respondents who discussed politics - as shown Figure 3 (see appendix 1 and 2 for distributions of participants depending on their political participation and demographics) –, one finds that political expression (i.e. discussion) seems to be linked to a higher social status: there are more men, a tendency to live in an urban area (not significant, though), they have a higher household income and they tend to be more educated in some countries (as the overall trend indicates, though the opposite is true in Mali).

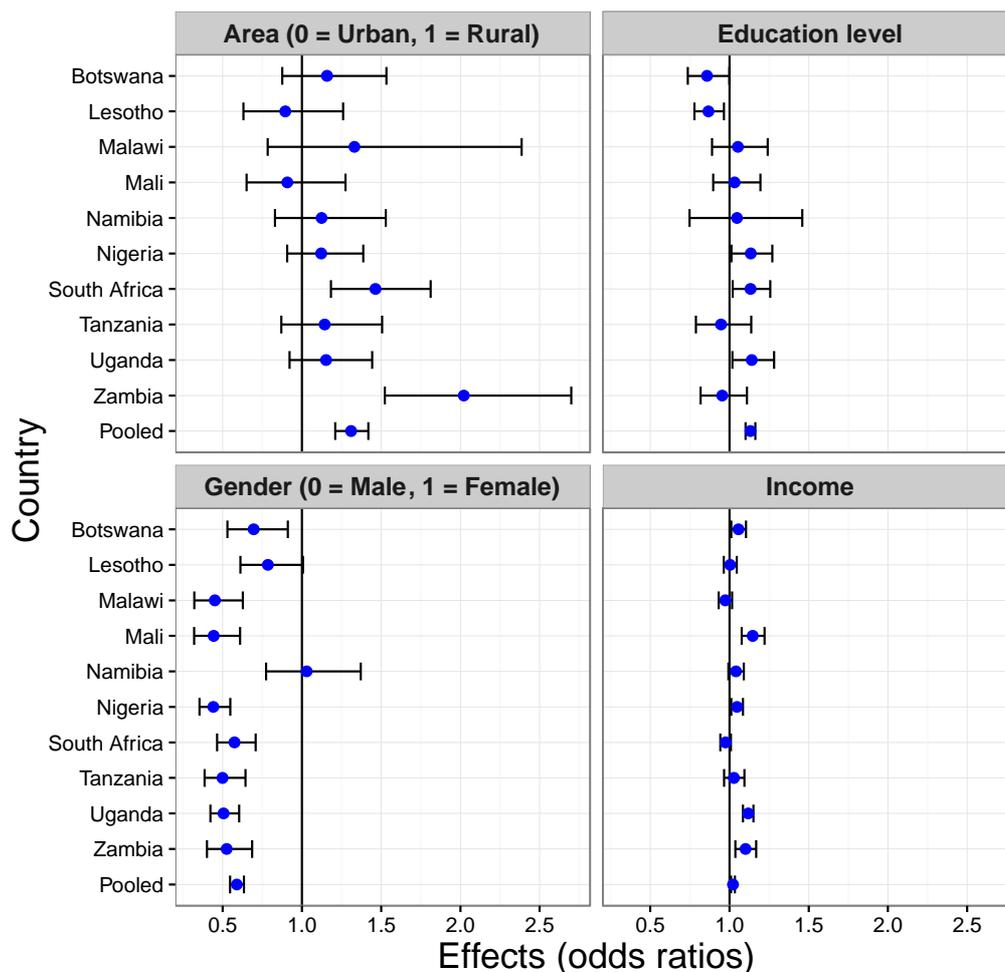


Figure 4: Effect of the area of residence (urban versus rural), level of education, gender and household income on the likelihood of having joined others to raise an issue during the last year.

Note. Odds ratios were computed through separate logistic regression models (one for each country and one with the full sample) including the four variables. Zimbabwe is excluded because household income was not measured.

The profile is less clear when we consider the characteristics of respondents who joined others to raise an issue (see Figure 4 and appendix 2). While there are typically more men, the pooled model indicates more participation in urban areas, the effect of the level of education is heterogeneous across countries and, while they tend to have a higher household income, the effect is tiny and clearly smaller than in the case of respondents who discussed politics.

3.2 Does volatility predict political participation?

My first hypothesis suggests that regional-level volatility predicts political participation. In order to test it, the first step is to check whether there is a significant variation of political participation at the regional level that volatility could explain⁵. For this purpose, I fitted a null model for both outcome variables (with region- and country-level

random intercepts but no group-level predictors) while controlling for gender, area (urban versus rural), level of education and political opinion dummies (see Table 5, models (1))⁶. From here on, I didn't include household income as a control because of its very high number of missing values ($n = 2301$). Then I computed 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals around the random intercepts' standard deviation to check if they included zero. For the political discussion model as well as for the joining others', the standard deviation's confidence intervals of the regional level random intercept does not include zero ($SD = 0.280$, $CI = 0.214 - 0.347$ and $SD = 0.360$, $CI = 0.284 - 0.439$, respectively). This confirms that the intercept significantly varies across regions in both models, even though the intraclass correlations are quite low at the regional level for the political discussion model ($ICC_{region} = 0.023$; $ICC_{country} = 0.019$) as well as for the joining others' ($ICC_{region} = 0.034$; $ICC_{country} = 0.104$).

As a second step, I added volatility as a regional-level predictor and ethnic salience (round 2) as a regional-level control. Contrary to my expectations, Table 5 (left part, model (2)) shows that regional volatility does not significantly predict the likelihood of political discussions, although the odds ratio indicates a positive relationship ($OR = 1.426$, $p = 0.203$). As can be seen from the right part of Table 5 (model (2)), however, regional volatility does positively predict the likelihood of joining others to raise an issue ($OR = 2.322$, $p = 0.014$). These data therefore suggests that volatility is indeed a political process since it is related to at least one form of political participation.

Table 5: Multilevel logistic regression models predicting the likelihood of political discussions (left part, N=13905, 94 regions) and joining others to raise an issue (right part, N=13896, 94 regions) during the last year (unstandardized odds ratios).

		<i>Discussed politics</i>				<i>Joined others to raise an issue</i>			
		<i>(1)</i>		<i>(2)</i>		<i>(1)</i>		<i>(2)</i>	
		<i>Odds ratio</i>	<i>St. error</i>	<i>Odds ratio</i>	<i>St. error</i>	<i>Odds ratio</i>	<i>St. error</i>	<i>Odds ratio</i>	<i>St. error</i>
<i>Individual level</i>	Intercept	1.262	0.208	1.146	0.242	0.620 [†]	0.160	0.391 ^{**}	0.120
	Gender	0.466 ^{***}	0.017	0.467 ^{***}	0.017	0.542 ^{***}	0.021	0.542 ^{***}	0.021
	Area	0.788 ^{***}	0.033	0.785 ^{***}	0.033	1.120 [*]	0.052	1.115 [*]	0.051
	Education level	1.047 [*]	0.021	1.049 [*]	0.021	1.008	0.023	1.009	0.023
	Accept one party rule	0.859 ^{***}	0.036	0.858 ^{***}	0.036	1.035	0.047	1.033	0.046
	Accept military rule	0.897 [*]	0.046	0.895 [*]	0.046	0.883 [*]	0.049	0.881 [*]	0.049
	Accept dictatorship	1.029	0.054	1.029	0.054	0.887 [*]	0.051	0.888 [*]	0.051
	Accept traditional rule	0.808 ^{***}	0.033	0.808 ^{***}	0.033	1.032	0.044	1.031	0.044
	Uncritical followership	0.810 ^{***}	0.034	0.809 ^{***}	0.034	1.007	0.045	1.006	0.045
	Accept leaders' ingroup bias	0.950	0.043	0.950	0.043	0.949	0.045	0.946	0.045
	Affirm people rule	1.132 ^{**}	0.043	1.131 ^{**}	0.043	1.047	0.042	1.045	0.042
<i>Contextual-Level</i>	Ethnic salience	-	-	1.018	0.309	-	-	1.963 [†]	0.742
	Volatility	-	-	1.426	0.398	-	-	2.322 [*]	0.799
<i>Fit²</i>	Marginal R ² (%)	6.013		5.992		2.693		3.285	
	Conditional R ² (%)	9.930		9.886		16.319		17.391	

Note. [†] $p < .1$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. The significant effect of volatility holds when testing the model with the outcome as continuous.

3.3 Testing the moderating effect of political opinions (1): discussing politics

My second main hypothesis predicts that regional volatility interacts with individuals' political opinion toward authority. Because I expect democratic opinions to be the normative 'baseline', I predict that authoritarians participate less than democrats in stable (i.e. low volatility) regions and that this gap is reduced or inverted in more volatile regions. However, I am especially interested in the *kind* of selective effect of regional volatility, that is: does regional volatility necessarily implies a decrease of one part of the sample's participation (spiral of silence) or – as a social representation approach suggests – does it create some kind of 'escalation of participation'?

In this section, I test whether regional volatility interacts with each political opinion to predict political discussions. But before testing cross-level interactions, one first needs to check whether slopes significantly vary across contextual units. To do so I followed the same strategy as in the previous section: for each political opinions I fitted a null model (controlling for demographic and every political opinion dummies) in which I allowed the individual-level coefficient involved in the hypothesized interaction (in addition to the intercept) to vary across regions, but also across countries (i.e. I specified them as region and country level random effects) in order to ensure that the variance of the regional-level random coefficient (and the observed interactions in the following models) cannot be explained by country-level variation. Then I computed bootstrapped confidence intervals around the random slopes' standard deviation. As none of them includes zero, we can conclude that each political opinion's coefficient significantly varies across regions.

I therefore turned to the main tests, by adding the interaction of each political opinion with regional volatility in separated models; these are shown in Table 6. We can see that model (4) indicates a significant interaction between acceptance of traditional rule and volatility ($OR = 2.259$, $p = 0.048$). In order to decompose the interaction, I fitted successively model (4) after transforming the regional volatility variable such that regions with the lowest volatility have a value of zero (i.e. its original, not mean-centered, form) and then again such that regions with highest volatility have a value of zero. This allows me to assess the simple effects of acceptance of traditional rule at these respective values of regional volatility.

As expected, in less volatile regions (when volatility equals its lowest value, which is zero) those who accept the rule of chiefs and elders discussed less politics than those who reject it ($OR = 0.700$, $p = 0.010$) which is not the case when volatility is at its highest value – the odds ratio even indicates a positive trend, though not significant ($OR = 1.246$, $p = 0.315$;

see Figure 5) – or at its mean value (as in Table 6) in which case the effect is only marginally significant ($OR = 0.844$, $p = 0.089$).

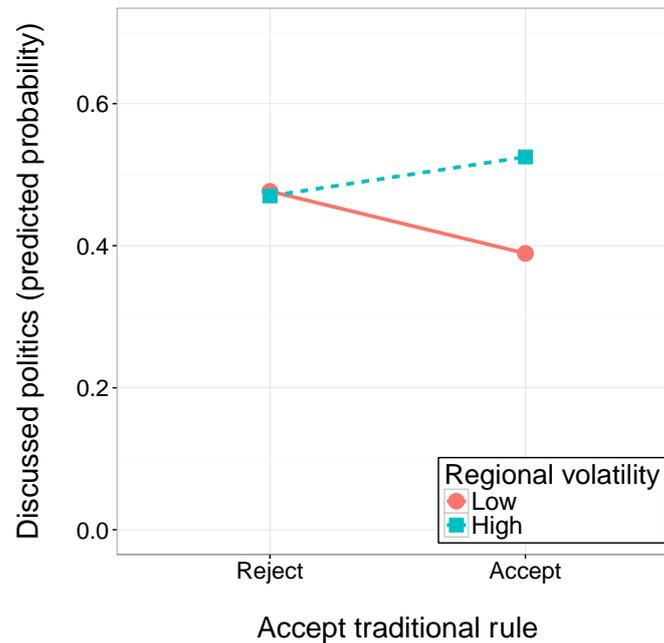


Figure 5: Representations of the simple effects involved in the cross-level interaction in model (4) from Table 6.

Note. Low = lowest value; High = highest value.

More relevant to my research question, however, are the simple effects of regional volatility itself. I fitted model (4) while coding individuals who reject traditional rule as zero and those who accept it as one (as in Table 6) and then I reversed the coding in order to examine the effect of volatility on those who accept and those who reject traditional rule, respectively. As Figure 5 clearly shows, volatility does not predict the likelihood of political discussions for individuals rejecting traditional rule ($OR = 0.964$, $p = 0.918$) whereas it does for those who accept it: they discussed *more* politics in highly volatile regions than in stable ones ($OR = 2.178$, $p = 0.025$).

The only other significant interaction from Table 6 is in model (7), which indicates that regional volatility interacts with the affirmation of people rule to predict political discussions ($OR = 0.496$, $p = 0.034$). When examining the simple effects of political opinion (represented in Figure 6), we can see that those who affirm people rule discussed *more* politics than those who support a paternalistic position of the rulers toward the ruled in the least volatile regions ($OR = 1.302$, $p = 0.004$), whereas there is an opposite trend in the most volatile regions,

though not significant ($OR = 0.794, p = 0.165$). Again, this is consistent with our expectation that democrats participates more in stable contexts and that this gap is reduced when the local environment becomes volatile.

Turning to the simple effects of regional volatility, the odds ratio indicates a positive effect of regional volatility for individuals holding a paternalistic view of the people but the p-value is just above the threshold of significance ($OR = 1.851, p = 0.050$) and there is no effect for those who affirm people rule ($OR = 0.919, p = 0.800$).

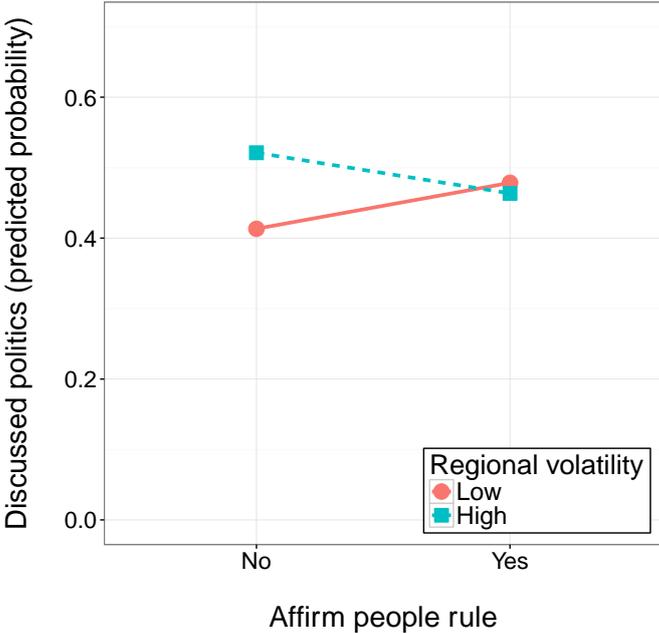


Figure 6: Representations of the simple effects involved in the cross-level interaction in model (7) from Table 6.

Note. Low = lowest value; High = highest value.

Table 6: Multilevel logistic regression models predicting the probability of political discussions during the last year (unstandardized odds ratios, $N=13905$, 94 regions, 10 countries).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<i>Individual-level</i>	Intercept	1.179	1.193	1.188	1.269	1.228	1.272
	Accept oneparty rule	0.912	0.857***	0.854***	0.856***	0.859***	0.853***
	Accept military rule	0.885*	0.872	0.889*	0.891*	0.891*	0.899*
	Accept dictatorship	1.013	1.023	1.055	1.007	1.023	1.022
	Accept traditionnal rule	0.803***	0.812***	0.805***	0.844†	0.810***	0.807***
	Uncritical followership	0.815***	0.810***	0.812***	0.807***	0.814*	0.805***
	Support leaders ingroup favouritism	0.955	0.955	0.954	0.952	0.952	0.938
	Affirm people rule	1.127**	1.124**	1.133***	1.132**	1.130**	1.109†
<i>Contextual (region)</i>	Ethnic salience	0.992	1.049	1.047	1.020	0.979	1.016
	Volatility (centered)	1.130	1.423	1.318	0.964	1.574	1.851†
	Accept oneparty rule * volatility	1.918	-	-	-	-	-
	Accept military rule * volatility	-	0.861	-	-	-	-
	Accept dictatorship * volatility	-	-	1.279	-	-	-
	Accept tradit. rule * volatility	-	-	-	2.259*	-	-
	Uncrit. followership * volatility	-	-	-	-	0.782	-
	Support leaders ingroup favouritism * volatility	-	-	-	-	-	0.995
	Affirm people rule* volatility	-	-	-	-	-	0.496*
<i>Fit</i>	Marginal R^2 (%)	5.820	6.022	5.957	5.963	5.998	6.033
	Conditional R^2 (%)	11.096	10.078	10.343	10.937	10.457	10.502

Note. † $p < .1$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Gender, area, level of education (not shown) and regional ethnic salience are controlled for. Interaction effects are robust to models with a continuous outcome

Summary. To summarize the results so far, we have observed that regional volatility interacts with two political opinions to predict political discussions: acceptance of traditional rule and affirmation of people rule. Analyzing these interactions leads to two important observations regarding my hypotheses. First, in both cases simple effects of political opinions indicates that less volatile (i.e. more stable) contexts are characterized by a greater political expression of democrats (those who reject the rule of chiefs and elders in model (4) and those who affirm that the government is people’s employee in model (7)) and that this difference disappears in more volatile contexts. This is consistent with the assumption that democratic opinions are the normative standard in stable regions and that volatility can be a contextual impetus to question this state of affairs. Second – and most importantly – the reduction of the expression gap between democrats and authoritarians in volatile regions did not arise as a result of a reduced expression of democrats (as the spiral of silence theory suggests). Rather, it reflected a higher expression of authoritarians in highly volatile regions compared to stable ones.

3.4 Testing the moderating effect of political opinions (2): joining others

I now turn to the second measure of political participation – i.e. joining others to raise an issue – by following the exact same procedure as in the previous section. I therefore start by testing whether political opinions’ slopes significantly vary across regions by fitting a null model for each one and computing bootstrapped confidence intervals around the random slopes’ standard deviation. Again, none of them includes zero – even though for acceptance of traditional rule the lowest bound is very close ($SD = 0.126$, $CI = 0.002 - 0.230$) – so we can conclude that all political opinions’ random slopes significantly vary across regions.

I therefore added the interactions to the models which are shown in Table 7. We can see that model (2) indicates an interaction between acceptance of military rule and volatility ($OR = 0.459$, $p = 0.047$). This time, the analysis of political opinion’s simple effects (see Figure 7) shows that there is no difference in probability of joining others depending on the acceptance of military rule in the least volatile regions ($OR = 1.021$, $p = 0.874$) but that, in the most volatile regions, individuals who reject military rule (i.e. democrats) did it *more* than those who accept it ($OR = 0.589$, $p = 0.013$). So here we observe an opposite effect of political opinion than in the previous section. Turning to the simple effects of volatility, the analysis reveals a *positive* effects for individuals who reject military rule such that they joined others

more in the most volatile regions than in the least ones ($OR = 2.936, p = 0.003$) while there is no effect for those who accept military rule ($OR = 1.348, p = 0.488$).

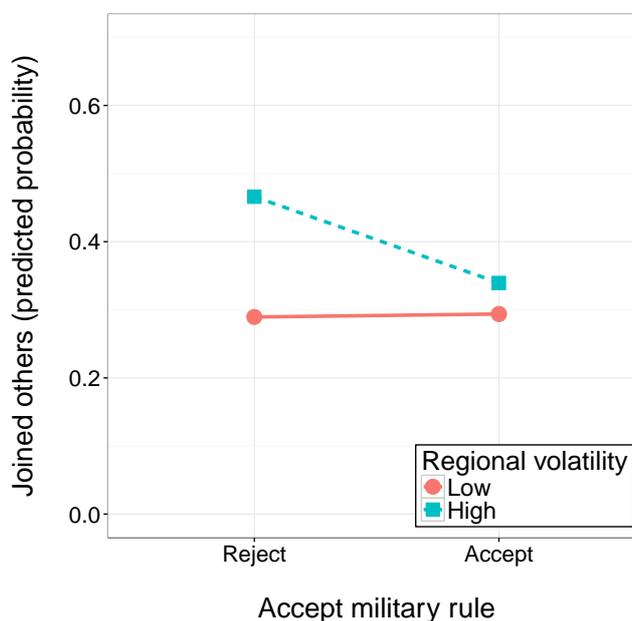


Figure 7: Representations of the simple effects involved in the cross-level interactions in model (2) from Table 7.

Note. Low = lowest value; High = highest value.

Finally, the only remaining significant interactions is in model (4) and indicates a significant interaction between acceptance of traditional rule and volatility ($OR = 0.471, p = 0.048$). The analysis of acceptance of traditional rule's simple effects (shown in Figure 8) indicates that none is significant, even though the interaction suggests a difference between them – and the odds ratios indeed reflect opposite trends: a trend toward more participation by individuals who accept traditional rule in the least volatile regions and the reverse in the most volatile regions ($OR = 1.235, p = 0.131$ and $OR = 0.725, p = 0.128$ for the least and most volatile regions, respectively).

Concerning volatility's simple effects, it predicts *positively* the likelihood of joining others to raise an issue for individuals who reject the rule of chiefs and elders ($OR = 3.178, p = 0.004$) but not for those who accept it ($OR = 1.497, p = 0.269$).

Table 7: Multilevel logistic regression models predicting the probability of joining others to raise an issue during the last year (unstandardized odds ratios, $N=13896$, 94 regions, 10 countries).

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<i>Individual-level</i>	Intercept	0.464*	0.489*	0.490*	0.496*	0.477*	0.463*	0.455**
	Accept oneparty rule	1.014	1.031	1.028	1.036	1.041	1.023	1.030
	Accept military rule	0.885*	0.854	0.873*	0.874*	0.868*	0.883*	0.874*
	Accept dictatorship	0.886*	0.880*	0.819†	0.884*	0.883*	0.885*	0.886*
	Accept traditionnal rule	1.031	1.035	1.026	1.039	1.041	1.033	1.023
	Uncritical followership	1.008	1.004	1.007	0.999	0.985	1.008	1.009
	Support leaders ingroup favouritism	0.948	0.944	0.954	0.942	0.942	0.970	0.933
	Affirm people rule	1.042	1.044	1.042	1.044	1.040	1.058	1.090
<i>Contextual-level (region)</i>	Ethnic salience	1.972†	1.816†	1.861	1.900†	1.945†	1.952†	2.263*
	Volatility (centered)	2.178*	2.936**	2.192*	3.178**	2.493*	2.467*	2.338*
	Accept one-party rule * volatility	1.236	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Accept military rule * volatility	-	0.459*	-	-	-	-	-
	Accept dictatorship * volatility	-	-	1.207	-	-	-	-
	Accept tradit. rule * volatility	-	-	-	0.471*	-	-	-
	Uncrit. followership * volatility	-	-	-	-	0.968	-	-
	Support leaders ingroup favouritism * volatility	-	-	-	-	-	0.854	-
Affirm people rule* volatility	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.777	
<i>Fit</i>	Marginal R^2 (%)	3.333	3.374	3.312	3.364	3.313	3.300	3.473
	Conditional R^2 (%)	18.127	17.732	18.270	17.725	18.718	17.769	18.060

Note. † $p < .1$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Gender, area, level of education (not shown) and regional ethnic salience are controlled for. Interaction from model (4) becomes marginally significant when tested with a continuous outcome.

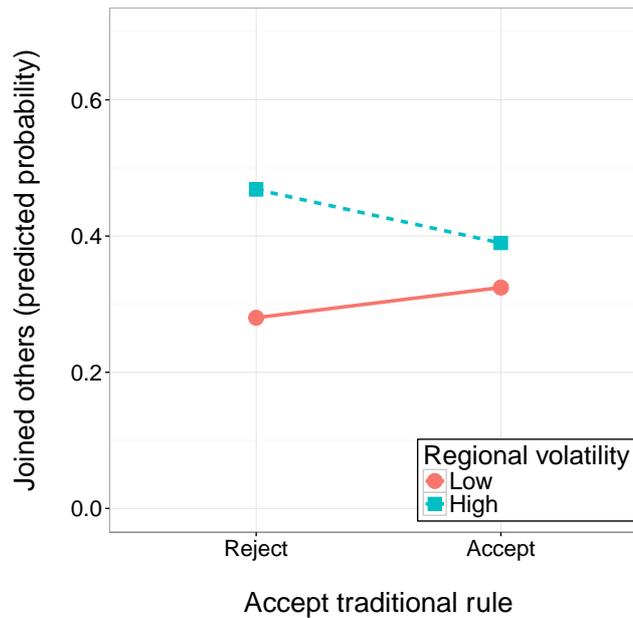


Figure 8: Representations of the simple effects involved in the cross-level interactions in model (4) from Table 7.

Note. Low = lowest value; High = highest value.

Summary. When we compare these results with those of the previous sections, several points should be emphasized. First, the political opinions which interacted with volatility were not exactly the same as in the previous section: when joining others is the outcome, regional volatility interacts with acceptance of traditional rule (as when political discussion is the outcome) and acceptance of military rule. Second, both interactions involved a positive effect of regional volatility on political participation – similarly to the results of the previous sections – but this time *this effect concerned those who hold a democratic opinion*. Third, the only significant simple effect of political opinion (acceptance of military rule) was in the most volatile regions and indicated a higher participation of democrats (those rejecting military rule) compared to authoritarians. This contrasts with the results of models predicting political discussions – which showed a stronger participation of democrats than authoritarians in the most *stable* regions but not in the most volatile ones – and also with my hypothesis.

4. Discussion

The main purposes which motivated this study were to bring the political and socially constructed nature of ethnic categories at the center of the stage by investigating their role in the constitution of political norms regarding authority and leadership. At the roots of my argument is the following question, the answer of which can be – so I argued – more closely approached if we take the constructivist view of ethnicity seriously: *in which situations do the masses accept leaders' authority without contestation?* Relying on the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1984; Noelle-Neumann & Petersen, 2004) and the criticisms and insights of the social representation approach (Elcheroth et al., 2011), I argued that political participation is a crucial element of answer in the sense that individuals' political behaviour creates the normative political context of those surrounding them, thus constituting a feedback loop between the individual and collective levels. My main argument was that changes in ethnic salience (i.e. volatility) can trigger changes in political norms through this feedback loop, by altering individuals' expectations or creating uncertainty regarding what political views are normative for whom and therefore modifying patterns of political participation. And because this argument assumes a process occurring through the interaction of individuals with their local social environment, a methodological implication is to focus on local (as opposed to societal) levels of analysis. Based on this reasoning, I formulated the following hypotheses. First, I expected regional volatility to predict political participation. I didn't have rigid expectations regarding the direction of this effect since a case could theoretically be made for both a negative (a 'spiral of silence') and a positive effect ('an escalation of expression'). Second, I predicted that this effect of volatility would interact with individuals' political opinions, creating a selective political participation. Here too I didn't have too specific predictions since the precise political opinions to be interacting with volatility would depend on which norms are debated, marginalized or mobilized (e.g. Penic, Elcheroth, & Reicher, 2015) in the public sphere.

To begin with, there are several limitations to the present study, which are worth noticing directly before discussing the results. First of all, the dependent variables were not ideal to test my hypotheses. On the one hand, the political discussion measure (which asks for discussion with "friends and neighbours") makes it unclear whether it captures expression in public or private settings and therefore complicates the interpretation. On the other hand, the second dependent variable – i.e. joining others to raise an issue – is not very precise about its meaning, such as the type of issue implied, and is therefore particularly vulnerable to

differences of interpretation depending on the respondent's region or country, among other things⁸.

A second important limitation concerns the time interval which separates the two moments at which ethnic salience was measured, which ranges from 1 year (Mali) to 4 years (Botswana, Malawi, Namibia and Zambia). This important difference of time intervals depending on the country makes it possible that my volatility index didn't measure the same kind of processes in every country. More generally, one cannot be sure that the time laps between the two surveys is not too long, such that the process that I expected to observe occurred before the round 2 survey and was therefore not detectable with the present data.

Finally, the fact that we included different countries in our sample may create the problem that processes occurring at the regional level are moderated by country level factors, which is a plausible scenario since measures of political opinions may have different meanings associated with a country history or political regime⁹.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides several methodological innovations as well as theoretically important results. The first important and most basic result lies in the important variation of ethnic salience in both space and time within countries, which has already been observed in previous research in the African context (Bhavnani & Miodownik, 2009; Eifert et al., 2010). At the theoretical level, the fact that the proportion of a society's population considering ethnic belonging as its most important group identity varied substantially (20 percent on average) in such a short period of time strongly supports a social constructivist understanding of ethnic categories. Besides, it is interesting to note that this proportion *decreased* in most countries. While it is tempting to interpret this as a sign of a global decrease of the importance of ethnic identities in African politics at the beginning of the century, I would argue that there is an important contextual element that we should take into account. The 1990s have seen a wave of political liberalization in sub-Saharan Africa with the emergence of multi-party legislative elections as a norm; and indeed all countries included in the sample started to have 'partly regular' elections involving at least one opposition party between 1992 and 1995 (at the exception of Uganda ; Van de Walle, 2003). Importantly, Van de Walle (2003) argues that the party structure has overwhelmingly followed ethno-linguistic divisions rather than ideological ones, which suggests that first elections have made ethnic identities highly salient. The results reported by Cederman, Gleditsch and Hug (2013) are consistent with this interpretation as they found that a country's first two competitive elections predicts the onset of ethnic civil wars, which suggest that this

kind of context is prone to the politicization of ethnic identities. I therefore suggest that the average decrease in ethnic salience we observed is due to a high level of ethnic salience at the round 1 survey reflecting the relative proximity of the first competitive elections (all countries were surveyed between 1999 and 2001 at round 1) compared to the round 2 survey (between 2002 and 2004).

In terms of research practices, this observed fluidity of ethnic salience also points to the problems of what I have called *methodological primordialism*, which consists in effectively assuming that ethnic categories are constantly important for actors in a particular context, notably through the use of ethnic fractionalization indices. Our results clearly show that this descriptive approach to measure a country's ethnic composition in order to predict collective outcomes is misleading. To take the example of Malawi – which is the most extreme case in our sample –, it would hardly make sense to use the same value to describe this country's ethnic diversity in 1999 and 2003 to predict some collective outcome, since our data suggest that ethnic salience dropped by nearly half of the population (i.e. 45 percent) between the two surveys.

One more original aspect of the present study is to illustrate the relevance of considering more local levels of analysis (regional rather than national). We indeed observed that temporal variation of ethnic salience was not always homogenous across regions in a given country, indicating that distinct social processes occur at the regional scale. A point which leads us to my main research questions (i.e. the relationship between regional volatility and political participation).

My first hypothesis stated that regional volatility would have an effect on political participation. Although our analysis didn't reveal an effect of volatility on political discussions, it did show one on the other form of political participation, i.e. joining others to raise an issue. This is in itself an important finding since it quantitatively demonstrates that fluctuations of ethnic salience are not politically neutral and play some part in the normative climate of a society. Besides, it is theoretically important that volatility *positively* predicted the likelihood of joining others (and that, although not significant, the trend of the effect on political discussion was also positive). This fact seems at odds with predictions derived from the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1984), as it would suggest that when the norms are called into question, one part of the population (those who perceive that their opinion becomes a minority opinion) will increasingly fall silent.

I now discuss the results relevant to my second hypothesis, which predicted that the effect of volatility would interact with political opinions. Interestingly, the analyses revealed unexpected differences for the two outcome variables. First, while both were predicted by interactions between regional volatility and two political opinions, the specific opinions involved were not exactly the same. Second, the simple effects involved showed contrasting patterns depending on the outcome. For political discussions, it was consistent with my expectations: democrats were more expressive than authoritarians in stable regions and this gap disappeared in highly volatile contexts; a pattern which I would interpret as sign that democratic values are generally normative because in a world of nation-states, governments legitimize their power by arguing that they rule in the name of the ‘people’ (Wimmer; 2002; 2013b; Wimmer et al., 2009; Wimmer and Min, 2006; Mann, 2005). However, when political participation is measured through the likelihood of joining others to raise an issue, the only significant simple effect of political opinion shows that authoritarians (i.e. accepting military rule) participated *less* in volatile contexts while there was no difference in stable ones. While this result seems to contradict my assumption that democratic values are generally normative, it may also be that the behaviour of joining others has a different relationship with the normative context compared to “discussing politics with friends and neighbours”. Indeed, one could argue that joining others clearly implies a more active process of selection of people than political discussions and therefore, is not straightforwardly affected by the perception that one’s opinion is normative. Rather, the effect of the normative context could be more indirect and strategic, such that when a person perceives his opinion to become anti-normative or is uncertain about it, she will react by selecting people from her network which she knows to share the same point of view in order to make sense of and act upon the situation.

The other way to analyze these interactions – looking at the simple effects of volatility – is directly relevant to the demarcation between the ‘spiral of silence’ and the ‘escalation of expression’ hypotheses. Again, the analyses showed that volatility’s simple effects were different for the two forms of participation: volatility positively predicts *authoritarians’* political discussions but it positively predicts *democrats’* joining of others. As I suggested in the previous paragraph, this difference can be interpreted as reflecting a greater possibility of strategic selection of people share one’s opinion when it comes to joining others to raise an issue: if democratic opinions are generally normative, contexts in which norms seem to vanish or change are likely to foster the expression of authoritarians (normally silent) and make democrats (normally expressive) more prone to turn to people they know to be

democrats, and hence to actively join others. But independently of the interpretations we can advance to explain them, these results suggest that the mechanism postulated by the spiral of silence theory – which essentially implies pressure towards conformity – seems to be simplistic and restrictive to account for the processes that occur in such volatile contexts. The pattern we observed is much more coherent with Moscovici's (1961) notion of cognitive polyphasia, which recognizes the possibility that several representations may coexist within the same group and be actively contested and debated. It is consistent with a scenario where the change in the relative importance of ethnic categories in local contexts – and therefore the questioning of their normative climate – gave an impetus for political participation to a part of the population less participative in more stable contexts. As we saw in the introduction, a social representation perspective (Elcherath et al., 2011) can provide the following interpretation to this escalation of expression: volatile contexts – in which the change in ethnic salience blurs the organization of social reality – changes expectations regarding others' political opinions and gives (otherwise isolated) individuals the impression that others may share their view, especially if their stance is mobilized in the public sphere through communication channels like the mass-media. This leads them to express their opinions, a behaviour that in turn reinforces others' impression that this opinion is shared. It is nevertheless worth keeping in mind that our failure to observe a pattern consistent with a spiral of silence may be a matter of timing: it is for instance possible that the competition of different modes of expression by holders of different views may reach a point where one side takes advantage over the other and that this triggers a spiral of silence.

Another interesting way to look at these results is to pay attention to the demographic characteristics of respondents who implemented each type of political participation. We indeed saw that the profile of those who discussed politics tended toward a high social status: they were more likely to be men, from urban areas, relatively more educated and with higher income (see Figure 3 and appendix 1). This profile was less clear for those who joined others to raise an issue (Figure 4 and appendix 2), which suggests that this kind of political participation was not tied to a particular social position and included more diverse profiles. Considering the fact that in volatile contexts political discussions constituted a vector for the expression of authoritarian views, the higher social status of those who discussed politics may indicate their willingness to prevent change of the status quo and strengthen the social order protecting their high status. In this scenario, these actors would have perceived volatile contexts as opportunities to spread political opinions which would serve their agenda. Hence,

it would be interesting to conduct further analyses to investigate this possibility, notably by testing whether expressive authoritarians tended to have a higher social status.

Conclusion

Overall, the results are consistent with the idea that regional changes of ethnic salience alter the patterns of political participation in the corresponding region. However, the pattern we observed is more complex than expected, notably because different actors seem to have used different strategies of political expression in volatile contexts, depending on their political opinion. This pattern contradicts the predictions derived from the spiral of silence theory, as volatility never implied self-censorship, but rather suggest a battle between holders of different political conceptions, each using their own weapon to impose (or restore) their view as normative and hegemonic.

5. Notes

¹ The conditions participating in the political salience of and consensus about particular ethnic boundaries in a society are elaborated by Wimmer (2008; 2013a). In a nutshell, his theoretical framework predicts that individuals try to maximize their access to political, symbolic and material resources through boundary making strategies (*i.e.* strategies aimed at emphasizing particular group boundaries), which are shaped by three main factors: the society's institutional framework, its power structure and the pattern of political networks. The type of group boundaries (class, gender, ethnic, etc.) that is likely to be emphasized depends on the society's political institutions. In the modern world, the hegemonic political institution is the nation-state, which creates incentives to focus on *ethnic* rather than other types of boundaries. The power hierarchy created by the institutional order influences the type of strategy enacted by actors in two ways. First, individuals' boundary making strategies will depend on their own position in the power structure, as they try to maximize their access to resources. This is for instance the case when members of an ethnic minority cross group boundaries, trying to assimilate into the national majority, in order to access citizenship rights and avoid discrimination. Second, power differences imply inequality in individuals' ability to make their boundary making strategies influential, consequential and constraining for others. This is obvious when members of one ethnic group control the state's institutions and exclude minorities as aliens to the nation. Finally, the reach of already existing networks of political alliances will determine the precise location of group boundaries, that is who will be included within the boundary. The result is a picture of multiple strategies of boundary making enacted by actors according to their resources and social position; how does political salience of particular group boundaries emerge in this field of diverging strategies? According to Wimmer (2013a), "a consensus between individuals and groups endowed with different resources is more likely to emerge if their interests at least partially overlap and their strategies of classification can, therefore, concur on a shared view" (p. 98). An interesting aspect of this theory is that, although it clearly recognizes that power differentials between actors imply differences in their ability to make their boundary making strategies consequential and constraining for others, it does not assume that the population will just accept elites' boundary making strategies. It rather conceptualizes consensus about group boundaries as a political exchange or a

compromise “between actors who are mutually interested in an exchange of resources” (Wimmer, 2013a; pp. 98-99).

² This change in opinion climate followed a television debate between Bush and Kerry and corresponded to a shift in media coverage in favour of Kerry (Bodor, 2012).

³ The use of the term “expression” here is not meant to restrict the phenomenon to the act of speaking per se, but rather to emphasize the communicative consequences of political participation in general for political norms, *i.e.* the fact that it contributes to shape the normative context of those who witness the behaviour.

⁴ This item and the next one were not asked in the round 2 survey in Zimbabwe, which was a shorter version of the survey compared to other countries.

⁵ The adequate procedure for testing for the significance of random effects is a debated issue in the literature on multilevel modelling. Indeed, classical tests using a chi-squared statistic for the likelihood ratio test yield highly conservative results because the value of the null hypothesis is located at the edge of the parameter space (*e.g.* Bates, 2010). In this paper, I use bootstrapped confidence intervals as suggested by Crainiceanu and Ruppert (2004).

⁶ All models were tested using Maximum Likelihood Estimation with Laplace Approximation.

⁷ Fit indices are pseudo *R-squared* adapted to multilevel models based on Nakagawa and Schielzeth (2013) and Johnson (2014). *Marginal R-squared* should be interpreted as the percentage of variance explained by fixed effects only, whereas conditional R-squared should be interpreted as the variance explained by both fixed and random effects.

⁸ When computing the proportion of respondents who joined others to raise an issue by country (shown in appendix 3), one can see that there is far more between-country variation than for political discussions. A different interpretation of the former measure across countries could explain why there were such relatively strong between-country differences.

⁹ I tried to deal with this issue by exploring how the effects of regional volatility (and its interaction with political opinions) varied across countries but in addition to substantially complexify the models and the analyses, a sample as small as ten countries makes it difficult to test for country-level moderation in a systematic way. However, descriptive analyses of country-level random effects generally suggested that, when they substantially varied, they did so as a function of the country rate of positive responses to the outcome predicted by the model (*i.e.* country-level random slopes correlated with country-level random intercepts) and that countries with higher positive response rates to the outcome tended to show patterns similar to those obtained when not considering country-level moderation. The details of these analyses are available by sending a request to the author at zacharia.bady@unil.ch.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1: Respondents demographic characteristics as function of their answer to the political discussion measure.

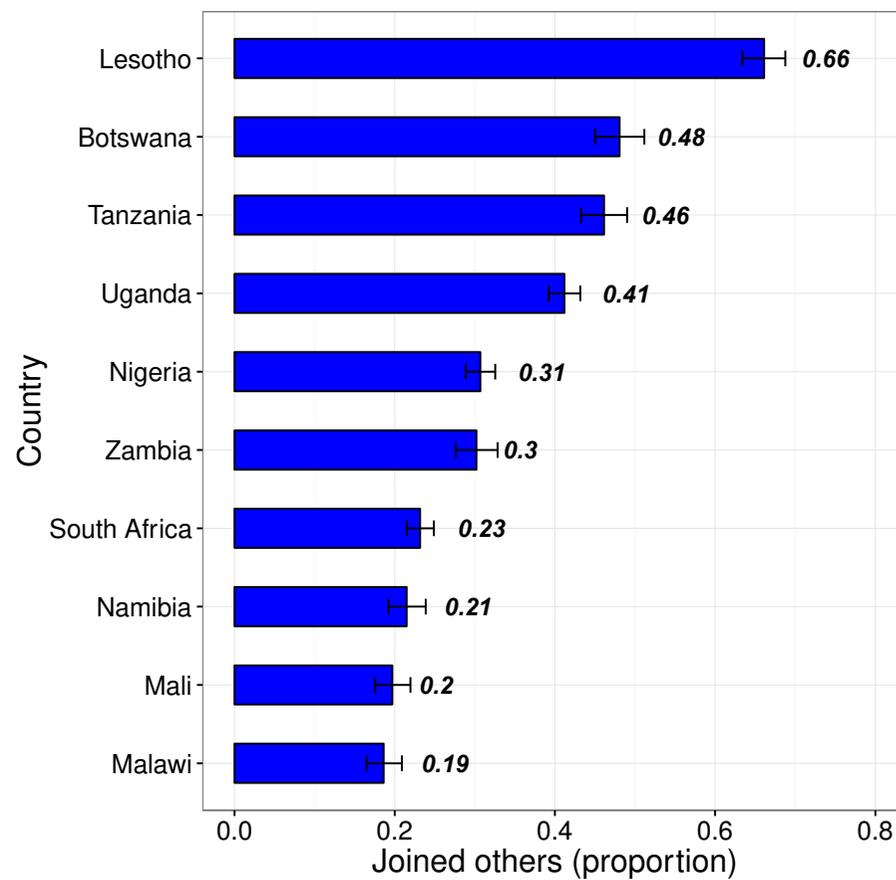
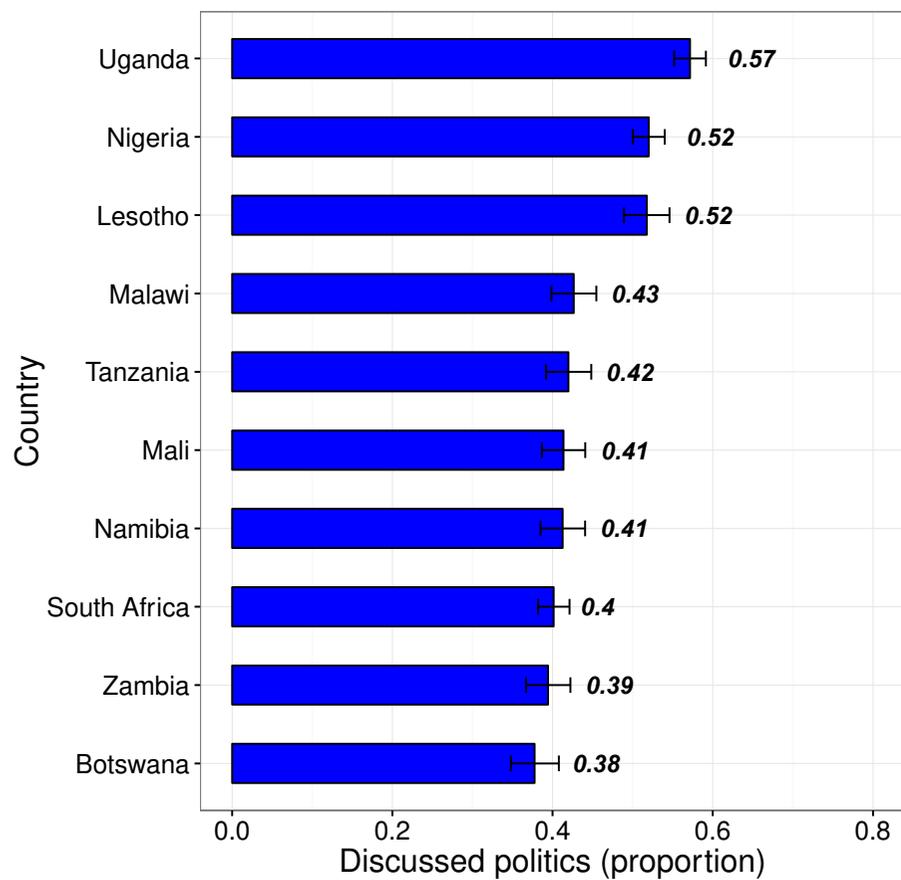
Country	<i>Discussed politics ?</i>	Women (%)		Rural (%)		Income		Education level	
		<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Botswana		55.41	41.21	58.44	49.08	4.60 (2.35)	5.97 (2.47)	6.49 (0.85)	6.50 (0.86)
Lesotho		54.17	46.12	83.51	82.85	4.84 (2.76)	5.01 (2.89)	6.01 (1.23)	6.06 (1.09)
Malawi		57.73	41.18	90.38	83.33	7.11 (3.00)	6.98 (3.07)	5.68 (1.01)	5.96 (1.11)
Mali		57.33	37.40	74.43	62.02	3.09 (2.31)	3.70 (2.25)	7.59 (1.00)	7.42 (1.17)
Namibia		53.56	43.81	64.53	53.55	4.23 (2.69)	5.08 (2.82)	4.89 (0.44)	5.00 (0.42)
Nigeria		65.06	36.30	50.86	47.10	5.38 (2.55)	6.01 (2.41)	6.04 (0.95)	6.02 (0.94)
South Africa		54.24	40.86	41.28	49.60	5.63 (2.37)	5.80 (2.47)	5.28 (1.04)	5.35 (0.91)
Tanzania		58.99	38.19	69.54	67.56	3.55 (1.93)	3.87 (1.86)	7.82 (0.71)	8.00 (0.70)
Uganda		66.41	39.42	82.28	77.96	4.00 (2.48)	4.95 (2.67)	7.62 (0.89)	7.67 (0.83)
Zambia		55.86	37.92	64.97	58.90	2.83 (1.90)	3.44 (2.23)	6.46 (0.89)	6.56 (0.92)
Zimbabwe		55.68	44.27	57.39	64.20	-	-	6.62 (0.85)	6.66 (0.87)

Note. Household income was not asked in the survey in Zimbabwe.

Appendix 2: Respondents demographic characteristics as function of their answer to the 'joining others' measure.

Country	Joined others?	Women (%)		Rural (%)		Income		Education level	
		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Botswana		55.13	44.15	54.37	55.85	5.10 (3.10)	5.23 (3.23)	6.55 (0.82)	6.44 (0.89)
Lesotho		54.07	48.10	83.46	83.04	4.31 (2.98)	5.32 (3.23)	6.14 (1.17)	5.98 (1.15)
Malawi		54.15	34.98	86.87	89.24	7.01 (4.11)	7.19 (4.16)	5.80 (1.07)	5.79 (1.03)
Mali		53.61	31.05	70.23	65.32	3.17 (2.39)	4.11 (2.59)	7.51 (1.10)	7.59 (0.93)
Namibia		49.52	49.81	59.64	61.48	4.55 (3.12)	4.75 (3.07)	4.94 (0.46)	4.93 (0.33)
Nigeria		56.21	36.30	48.21	50.34	5.54 (3.09)	6.12 (3.07)	6.02 (0.93)	6.06 (0.99)
South Africa		51.67	39.20	37.60	51.00	5.77 (3.17)	5.42 (3.11)	5.27 (0.99)	5.41 (1.00)
Tanzania		58.40	40.19	68.32	69.53	3.57 (2.10)	3.80 (2.05)	7.91 (0.71)	7.88 (0.71)
Uganda		58.88	39.76	79.69	80.12	4.18 (2.83)	5.10 (3.19)	7.60 (0.91)	7.71 (0.78)
Zambia		53.61	38.16	58.07	72.70	2.94 (2.07)	3.44 (2.41)	6.50 (0.93)	6.49 (0.82)
Zimbabwe		55.14	44.90	49.41	70.75	-	-	6.53 (0.92)	6.73 (0.80)

Note. Household income was not asked in the survey in Zimbabwe.



Appendix 3. Proportion of respondents who discussed politics (left panel) and joined others to raise an issue (right panel) during the last year by country