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DOI
10.17645/si.7687

Publication date
2024

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Social Inclusion

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Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Kuppens, L., Leopold, L., & Langer, A. (2024). Group Self-Interest vs. Equity: Explaining Support for Horizontal Redistribution in (Former) Competitive Clientelist States. *Social Inclusion*, *12*, Article 7687. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7687

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Download date:15 Oct 2026

Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7687
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7687

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Group Self-Interest vs. Equity: Explaining Support for Horizontal Redistribution in (Former) Competitive Clientelist States

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Submitted: 18 October 2023 **Accepted:** 5 February 2024 **Published:** 21 March 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants to Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

Extant literature links intergroup disparities, or horizontal inequalities, in Sub-Saharan Africa to the unequal representation of ethnic groups in central power, who accumulate wealth at the expense of politically marginalized groups. Over time, these politically-induced inequalities have trapped some ethnic groups in positions of relative disadvantage. Group-based, or horizontal, redistribution can help redress these inequalities yet require popular support if they are not to contribute to intergroup tensions. In this article, we examine how people's experiences of political exclusion, on the one hand, and their attributional beliefs about the causes of political exclusion, on the other, condition support for government policies aimed at eradicating economic inequalities between different ethnic groups. We argue that people are more likely to be supportive of horizontal redistribution either when (H1a) they belong to ethnic groups that have not had access to central power, and/or (H1b) feel that their ethnic group is politically marginalized (and thus stands to gain); or when (H2) they attribute the political exclusion of the politically marginalized group(s) that stand(s) to benefit from these policies to the legacies of colonialism and clientelism (thus seeking to foster equity). To test our hypotheses, we examine these issues in the context of Kenya, a society with politically salient ethnic cleavages and a history of clientelism. Based on a unique online survey involving 2,286 Kenyans, we show that, notwithstanding group self-interest being at play, there is strong support for horizontal redistribution across groups.

Keywords

clientelism; ethnic favoritism; horizontal inequality; horizontal redistribution; Kenya

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1. Introduction

In contrast to a recent decrease in intergroup inequality elsewhere, the gap between various ethno-regions, or geo-ethnicities, has increased in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bormann et al., 2021). A large and growing literature on the politics of ethnic favoritism links intergroup disparities, or horizontal inequalities (HIs), on the continent to the unequal representation of groups in central power: African elites would use political power to gain economic advantages and channel state resources toward their co-ethnics and home regions, thereby widening HIs created and shaped by geography and early colonial economic institutions (Kimenyi, 2013; van de Walle, 2009). Illustratively, Theisen et al. (2020) use data on maternal healthcare across Sub-Saharan African states to demonstrate that having a co-ethnic in power, whether in the cabinet or presidency, increases women's probability of receiving maternal healthcare services, especially in periods around (competitive) elections. Franck and Rainer (2012) provide evidence of co-ethnic targeting affecting primary education and infant mortality of ethnic groups, and Hodler and Raschky (2014) find evidence of regional favoritism (within and beyond Africa) using satellite data on nighttime light intensity and information about the birthplaces of the countries' political leaders.

Notwithstanding the suggestive evidence, the degree of ethnic favoritism appears to vary by public goods (Kramon & Posner, 2013) and by the spatial distribution of ethnic groups (Ejdemyr et al., 2018). Over time, moreover, clientelist practices would have decreased with the advent of democracy. While co-ethnic districts of Kenya's president received twice as much expenditure on roads and had five times the length of paved roads built in the post-dependence era, for instance, these favors were no longer apparent during periods of democracy (Burgess et al., 2015). Certainly, most African states have diversified the composition of group representation in formal offices in recent decades (François et al., 2015), and newly introduced formal institutional rules increasingly shape possibilities for transactions between patrons and clients (on the role of non-co-ethnic brokers see, for instance, Carlson, 2021; on the shrinking space for local patronage in Kenya see Harris & Posner, 2019, 2022). Other scholars, such as Kendhammer (2015), nonetheless argue that the introduction of power-sharing institutions in contexts of neopatrimonialism has entrenched the centrality of identity-based networks and provides "formal cover for rent-seeking demands on state resources" (p. 144) by defining state access in terms of ethno-regional identities (see also Wanyama & McCord, 2017).

Notwithstanding continuing debates on the persistence of ethnic favoritism and its effects on HIs between ethnic groups in current-day Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a clear imperative to address intergroup inequality. Besides improving the life conditions of marginalized groups, it contributes to reducing the likelihood of violent conflict emerging—a condition societies with consistent political and socio-economic inequalities are particularly prone to (Langer & Mikami, 2013). HI-correcting policies, or horizontal redistribution (from now on referred to as HR), can be either direct or indirect (Stewart et al., 2008). Direct approaches aim to reduce HIs by specifically targeting deprived groups, such as affirmative action programs aimed at increasing representation of ethnic minorities in employment, education, and business, or targeted transfers of public resources. Intriguingly, the literature on ethnic favoritism generally dismisses the latter because it is equated to clientelism. While targeted transfers can indeed create perceptions of favoritism when receivers are co-ethnics of political elites, HR is motivated by equity instead of ethnic considerations (see also Gisselquist, 2014; Langer & Mikami, 2013). We further agree with van de Walle (2009) that clientelist benefits rarely trickle down to entire communities to redistribute wealth, in contrast to equitable transfers

(on diversion vs. local goods provision see also Carlson, 2021). Where direct approaches can increase the saliency of ethnic identities, indirect approaches do not specify group affiliation. Instead, these approaches seek to reduce HI through general policies, such as universal antipoverty programs, progressive taxation, and anti-discrimination policies. Regional tax policies are another example of indirect correction policies, which are particularly useful in societies where group identities overlap with regional disparities (Stewart et al., 2008).

The question remains to what extent HR finds support in (formerly) clientelist African states—an issue that is widely underresearched in the current literature. We argue in this article that the widespread experience with and perception of ethnic favoritism reduces resistance to socio-economic HI-correcting reforms, not only of formerly and currently marginalized groups (i.e., group self-interest) but also of members of ethnic groups with a history of economic and political dominance who acknowledge the structural causes of ethnic disparities and favor social cohesion (i.e., equity concerns). On the other hand, people might feel that group-based redistribution only further entrenches ethnic identities or that promises of HR will not be realized as long as groups with a history of economic or political dominance are in power. To understand how clientelism shapes support for HR across historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups, we turn to the case of Kenya, a society with politically salient ethnic cleavages where political and socio-economic inequalities have historically been manifest in government representation and access to public services and infrastructure respectively (see, e.g., Kanyinga, 2016; Langer & Mikami, 2013; Stewart, 2010). Although ethno-regional tensions and inequalities have been addressed to some extent in the aftermath of the 2007–2008 post-electoral violence, inequalities persist, and clientelist practices have been brought down to the local level (D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016; Hassan, 2020; for similar observations in the case of Nigeria see Kendhammer, 2015).

In what follows, we will start by giving a brief overview of political exclusion, ethnic favoritism, and HIs in Kenya. Next, we will theorize about the relation between ethnic favoritism and support for HR before outlining our empirical approach. Section 5 presents the results of the study. We conclude by outlining some directions for future research in this area.

2. Political Exclusion, Ethnic Favoritism, and HIs in Kenya

Kenya is ethnically diverse, with over 40 distinct ethnic groups. The major ethnic groups include the Kikuyu (22%), Luhya (14%), Luo (13%), and Kalenjin (12%; 2010 data; see Kimenyi, 2013). While all regions have become increasingly ethnically diverse, ethnicity is historically closely tied to the country's geographical regions. To accommodate this diversity and mitigate tensions between geo-ethnicities, the original constitution extolled *majimboism*, or federalism, granting different groups a degree of self-governance and autonomy in managing their local affairs (Kanyinga, 2016). Yet, the first president, Jomo Kenyatta, soon dismantled the constitution, which negatively affected his Kikuyu community, and concentrated power in the executive branch (Hassan, 2020). In doing so, he widened discretionary powers to direct resources to the Kikuyu and disproportionally appointed co-ethnics in the districts, provinces, and central ministries (Hassan, 2020; Kimenyi, 2013). He also politicized land allocation by disproportionately allocating state-owned Rift Valley land (formerly occupied by the British) to his cronies rather than giving it back to the original Kalenjin inhabitants (Boone, 2012; Kanyinga, 2016; Stewart, 2010). After Jomo Kenyatta's death in 1978, Daniel Arap Moi, an ethnic Kalenjin, assumed the presidency, turning Kenya from a de facto into a

de jure one-party state. Following this, the number of Kikuyu in the cabinet fell significantly, while Kalenjin's and Luhya's representation increased (Kimenyi, 2013). Concomitantly, there was a shift in the bias of government resource allocation towards Moi's political base (Hassan, 2020). This was the case for project aid and local funds (Briggs, 2014), road infrastructure (Burgess et al., 2015; see also Kanyinga, 2016), and educational expenditure, resulting in higher primary and secondary completion rates among co-ethnics of Moi, and before that, of Kenyatta (Kramon & Posner, 2016).

The advent of multi-party democracy in 1991, however, pushed political leaders to pursue non-co-ethnic voters too. Yet, ethnicity remained the main axis of political mobilization (e.g., Kanyinga, 2016; Kimenyi, 2013; Kramon & Posner, 2016). Because the emerging political parties continued to have an ethnic base and thus remained divided, Moi initially remained in power. In 2002, however, the opposition united under the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). Under the leadership of Mwai Kibaki (an ethnic Kikuyu), the party managed to secure the support of the Luo community, led by Raila Odinga, and that of other historically disenfranchised groups with a promise of employing decentralization to address a range of issues, including both geographical and political exclusion (Cheeseman, 2008). In the spirit of *majimboism*, decentralization was believed to guarantee resources that the historically disadvantaged groups had been unable to access through a centralized system (D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016). Upon winning the elections, the NARC-led government initiated an agenda aimed at redistributing resources more equitably, which included experimentation with local cash transfer programs (see Wanyama & McCord, 2017) and the creation of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). The latter institutionalized the clientelist Harambee Movement, an informal fiscal and redistributive institution of aspiring politicians and incumbents sponsoring local development projects with private funds. Replacing the rising Harambee costs, from then onwards, a total of 2.5% of all ordinary government revenues was distributed over the country's 210 electoral constituencies—75% of the monies was divided equally, while the remaining 25% was allocated based on constituency need (Opalo, 2022a; see also Hassan, 2020). Although these programs served the poverty reduction agenda, they also ushered in competitive clientelism at the local level (Wanyama & McCord, 2017)—the grafting of democratic competition onto existing patterns of patron–client politics (see also Lavers & Hickey, 2016). However, beyond the CDF, Kibaki failed to deliver the promise to devolve powers, opting instead to endorse a set of constitutional reforms that largely preserved presidential powers. This led to Odinga defecting from NARC to create the Orange Democratic Movement with a renewed campaign focusing on *majimboism* and land reform ahead of the 2007 presidential elections. Yet, Odinga lost to Kibaki, who ran on the ticket of the newly established Party of National Unity that, despite its name, was largely perceived to have a pro-Kikuyu bias. Highly contested allegations of electoral fraud and irregularities in the vote counting process subsequently turned violent, with hotbeds in Nairobi, Nyanza Province, the Rift Valley, and the Coast.

Various agreements and reports concluded in the wake of the violence, such as Agenda Item 4 (for a discussion see Kanyinga & Long, 2012) or the Waki Report, asserted that the causes of conflict could be traced back to "a feeling among certain ethnic groups of historical marginalization, arising from perceived inequities concerning the allocation of land and other national resources, as well as access to public goods and services" (Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence, 2008, p. 23). Survey data from 2010 confirmed that there was a collective sense of deprivation across nearly all groups compared to the Kikuyu (the baseline group) (Langer & Mikami, 2013; for a discussion of perceptions of unfair treatment in securing a government position, or contract, and land ownership see Kimenyi, 2013). To address these concerns, a

new constitution was adopted in 2010 with the devolution of political, fiscal, and administrative powers to 47 ethnically mixed counties at its heart (D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016; Kimenyi, 2013). Since then, counties have annually received at least 15% of the national revenue to implement their own policies and development programs, in addition to the creation of an "equalization fund" assisting previously disadvantaged groups (for a discussion of Article 203[2] see Kanyinga, 2016; for a general discussion of the 2010 constitution see Murunga et al., 2014). While devolution thus effectively limited the space for center-led patronage, new opportunities for local-led patronage emerged beside the CDF (Hassan, 2020; see also D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016; Harris & Posner, 2019; Kanyinga, 2016; Kramon, 2019; Opalo, 2022a; Wanyama & McCord, 2017; note that CDF rules were further tightened in 2015, but also included the omission of the redistributive allocation key of 75–25%). Moreover, because there are still clear ethnic majorities and minorities in many counties (Bosire, 2014), some minority groups have found themselves out of power both nationally and locally (D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016). Besides devolution, complementary direct and indirect HI-correcting policies were drafted and put in place. The 2008 National Cohesion and Integration Act, for instance, prohibits public establishments from hiring more than 30% of their employees from a single ethnic community, while the 2016 Diversity Policy for the Public Service explicitly recommends the use of affirmative action—note that affirmative action measures had already been in place prior to the crisis in the education sector. These direct policies have, in effect, contributed to creating comparatively inclusive public services, even though job access remains somewhat unequal because of historical ethnic disparities in educational attainment (see Simson, 2019). Indirect policies include the continuation and expansion of social programs targeting those living in extreme poverty. As most poor Kenyans live concentrated in the former North Eastern province and, to a lesser extent, the Rift Valley and Coastal provinces (Kimenyi, 2013), these transfers may nonetheless create perceptions of direct redistribution (Opalo, 2021).

In 2013, Uhuru Kenyatta, son of the country's first Kikuyu president, took over power from the power-sharing coalition government of Kibaki and Odinga, with William Ruto, a Kalenjin, as his running mate. They were re-elected in 2017, notwithstanding an earlier annulment of the results. Whereas the outcomes of both elections were still split largely along ethnic lines—although not all ethnic groups voted as predictable blocs—class-based wedge issues dominated the 2022 elections. Deputy President William Ruto's "hustler" politics, which denounced the political "dynasties" and instead championed the working classes, garnered significant support in the strongholds of his main Luo opponent, Raila Odinga, and those of former President Uhuru Kenyatta, who no longer backed his former running mate (Opalo, 2022b).

3. Theorizing Support for Redistribution

In this section, we theorize the determinants of people's attitudes towards HR in an ethnically diverse context of competitive clientelism. Building on the existing literature concerning attitudes toward redistribution, we are interested in how ethnic group membership and political status affect individual support. We test and compare two mechanisms in particular.

In line with explanations on ethnic voting in Kenya (Opalo, 2022b), the first mechanism posits that in contrast to more advantaged group members, members of historically disadvantaged groups are more likely to approve of HR to offset their discrimination and catch up with those groups that had co-ethnic presidents in the postcolonial era, i.e., the Kikuyu (Presidents Kenyatta and Kibaki) and the Kalenjin (President Moi and current President Ruto). Thus, because of the strong overlap between political and economic marginalization, we

expect that support for HR coincides with ethnic exclusion. Rather than applying any primordial logic, we assume in this respect that ethnic identities continue to derive their importance from the organization of political and economic power within the state and from fears of the costs of not having one of their "own" in office (see also Kimenyi, 2013; Opalo, 2022b). Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

> H1a. Kenyan citizens who belong to politically excluded ethnic groups, i.e., groups who have not occupied the highest office in recent decades, are likely to be more supportive of HR compared to Kenyans who have had a co-ethnic in power (i.e., Kikuyu and Kalenjin).

Perceptions of political exclusion and disfavoring might be more significant in explaining support for HR, however, than actual histories of in- and exclusion and ethnic favoritism, as was the case in Nigeria and Uganda (Langer et al., 2016). Notably, while past research has shown that there is consistency between objective and subjective inequalities among both the most frustrated (Somali) and the most privileged (Kikuyu) groups in Kenya, this was not the case for larger groups without a history in power (2010 data; Langer & Mikami, 2013). The Luo, for instance, appeared rather satisfied with their influence in politics, and across the surveyed population, they were perceived to be the second most favored group after the Kikuyu (Kimenyi, 2013). Not surprisingly, their mobilization for electoral competition—and that of other numerically larger groups, for that matter—puts them in a better position to "claim" socio-economic benefits and resources from the state (see Kanyinga, 2016). Moreover, with the introduction of devolution, these perceptions may have changed. Local representation, for instance, might compensate for any perceived lack of political clout nationally. Research suggests that legislative candidates' constituency service matters greatly in determining Kenyans' votes (Opalo, 2022a). Also, Ruto's election may have affected Kikuyu's perceptions of their relative advantage—like those of the Kalenjin (in the opposite direction). We thus formulate the following alternative hypothesis:

> H1b. Kenyan citizens who are under the perception that their ethnic group is politically excluded, notwithstanding actual exclusion, are more likely to be more supportive of HR.

Our second main mechanism turns to equity considerations. In parallel with our argument for the introduction of HR, we examine whether Kenyans who acknowledge that state power has been used to accumulate wealth among the "winners" are more supportive of HR towards the "losers," irrespective of their own group membership and status. We thus depart from traditional political economy applications that assume that ethnic groups share a "taste for discrimination" (Becker, 1971) or have a commonality of tastes for which ethnic group members may only be willing to bear the cost of providing public goods if their co-ethnics are the primary recipients (see, for instance, Sambanis & Shayo, 2013; Schmidt-Catran, 2016; while Miguel & Gugerty, 2005, also examine this mechanism, their evidence does not support it). Since past studies could not establish ethnic discrimination to occur in experimental games unless threatened with social sanctions (for the Ugandan context see Habyarimana et al., 2007) and support for economic redistribution to poorer ethnic groups seems high across a number of sub-Saharan contexts (Langer & Mikami, 2013; Langer et al., 2016), we expect that equity considerations are common across groups:

> H2. Kenyan citizens who attribute the relative disadvantage of the poorest ethnic groups to past political exclusion and historical discrimination are likely to be more supportive of HR.

Although equity concerns are, in principle, diametrically opposed to group self-interest (unless one belongs to deprived groups), we argue that they are not necessarily incongruent in contexts marked by clientelism. After all, previous research in Kenya has shown that even Kenyans who do not care much for their ethnic group identity tend to vote for their co-ethnic MPs in anticipation of other groups' voting behavior (Kramon, 2019).

4. Empirical Strategy

4.1. Survey Methodology and Data

How do experiences of political exclusion, on the one hand, and public opinion on the causes of group poverty, on the other, condition support for government-led HR towards marginalized ethnic groups? To answer this question, we invited Kenyan citizens aged 18 years and above (via Facebook advertisements) to participate in an online panel survey on their perceptions of inequalities and redistribution. In total, 1,241.854 Kenyan Facebook users were shown an ad banner at least once (an average of 3.89 views per user). The ad consisted of a small introductory text ("How do you feel about inequalities in Kenya? Register now to take part in our survey") and a visual of four pictures representing Kenyans from different walks of life (see Figure 1 in Supplementary File). To ensure the inclusion of respondents from different strata of society, we targeted our ads based on potential participants' self-reported gender, age, and level of education on their profiles, as well as using people's location at a total cost of 1,785.76 EUR. In total, 61,049 users clicked on the banner and were subsequently redirected to our survey registration page, where 6,246 registered by sharing their mobile phone numbers. Among all who registered, 4,875 used WhatsApp. Among those, we invited 3,410 respondents to participate after stratified random sampling based on background demographics. Over the course of eight weeks, this sample was invited via the messaging service to complete four short surveys on the Qualtrics platform. After completing each round (median completion time of 10.5 min with 75% of the respondents completing in less than 15 minutes), respondents received 140 Kenyan shillings (equivalent to 0.88 EUR at the time when the first round was launched) worth of mobile phone credit to compensate their internet data use and express our appreciation for participation.

In total, 2,286 Kenyans completed all four rounds—only 215 respondents dropped out throughout the various rounds (overall attrition rate of 9.4%). Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of our sample in each round. The ethnic composition of our sample deviates somewhat from the country's ethnic distribution (according to weighted Afrobarometer data): In contrast to the overrepresentation of Luhya and Luo, there is an underrepresentation of the smaller ethnic groups. This could indicate a larger interest in the topic among members of the larger ethnic groups that have been excluded from the highest office. Regionally (current residence expressed by former province), biases are less pronounced, notwithstanding greater numbers from Nairobi and fewer participants from the former North Eastern province, the most destitute region of the country. Further, there are more men (≈57%) than women. Regarding age, respondents are, on average, 32 years old (the youngest respondent is 18; the oldest respondent is 72). Finally, and most notably, our sample has a strong bias toward higher-educated Kenyans. While only one-fourth of Kenyans have a post-secondary degree, according to the latest Afrobarometer data, about 77% of our respondents have completed some tertiary education. Whereas our results will largely be statistically representative of highly educated, rather young WhatsApp users with presumably some interest in the topic (for they registered to participate in the survey), we argue that this populace is key in informing political action. Our results, therefore, have important implications for Kenyan society more generally.

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Reference[1]
Surveys					
# invitations	3410	2501	2423	2358	–
# completed surveys	2501	2423	2366	2286	–
Completion rate (%)	73.3	96.9	97.6	96.9	–
Gender				Not asked	
Male (%)	57.4	56.4	56.6	–	50.0
Female (%)	42.6	43.6	43.3	–	50.0
Age					
18–25 years (%)	31.2	29.9	32.4	32.7	29.1
26–35 years (%)	34.3	34.5	34.1	34.4	26.7
36–45 years (%)	23.5	23.4	23.0	22.3	16.4
46–55 years (%)	8.4	9.6	8.2	8.5	13.0
56–65 years (%)	2.2	2.3	2.1	2.0	8.9
Over 65 years (%)	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.1	5.8
Ethnic identification				Not asked	
Kalenjin (%)	14.5	14.4	14.4	–	12.9
Kamba (%)	10.3	10.3	10.3	–	9.9
Kikuyu (%)	17.6	17.8	17.8	–	17.7
Kisii (%)	8.5	8.5	8.5	–	6.5
Luhya (%)	20.1	20.5	20.8	–	14.8
Luo (%)	14.8	15.1	15.0	–	11.9
Meru (%)	4.5	4.3	4.2	–	5.9
Mijikenda (%)	2.4	2.3	2.3	–	3.0
Somali (%)	1.7	1.6	1.5	–	3.4
Other ethnicities (%)	5.7	5.2	5.3	–	14.0
Education		Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	
No formal education (%)	0.1	–	–	–	4.0
Primary education (%)	2.1	–	–	–	36.0
Secondary education (%)	20.5	–	-	–	35.0
Postsecondary education (%)	77.3	–	–	–	24.0
Residence (by former province)		Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	
Central	12.1	–	–	–	13.7
Coast	8.0	-	–	–	9.7
Eastern	11.9	–	–	–	14.9
Nairobi	14.6	–	–	–	11.0
North Eastern	2.4	–	–	-	3.6
Nyanza	14.3	–	–	–	12.3
Rift Valley	24.7	–	–	–	25.4
Western	12.0	–	–	–	9.4
Residence (urban--rural)		Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	
Large city	28.6	–	–	–	35.0
Small city	43.3	–	–	–	
Rural village	28.2	–	–	–	65.0

Notes: [1] Results from weighted Afrobarometer Round 9 sample (Afrobarometer, 2023); Afrobarometer makes no distinction between large and small cities, but rather between urban and rural residences, which is reflected here.

4.2. Operationalization

We use the Perceptions of Inequalities and Redistribution Survey (PIRS), designed by our research team, to capture Kenyans' attitudes towards HIs and group-based redistribution. In the current article, we build on a small subset of questions related to political and socio-economic HIs between ethnic groups and their causes to assess our hypotheses.

Our main dependent variable is a general measure of support for government-led HR. Respondents were asked to indicate, on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from *not support at all* (0) to *fully support* (10), to what extent they would support government policies aimed at eradicating economic inequalities between different ethnic groups. The item did not specify through which policy this objective would be achieved nor whether it would benefit one or more specific ethnic groups. Respondents may, therefore, have had either direct or indirect policy approaches in mind, and so to measure support for direct approaches in particular, we include a second dependent variable, which asked respondents to what extent they (dis)agreed with the following statement: "The government should give extra economic assistance to disadvantaged ethnic groups," using a 7-point scale.

To evaluate whether political exclusion from the highest office affects support for HR (H1a), we composed the independent variable 'political exclusion' based on group identification. While checking the robustness of results by controlling for each group individually, we constructed three categories: (a) advantaged groups, i.e., groups that have had a co-ethnic president (i.e., Kikuyu and Kalenjin) irrespective of population share; (b) groups that are numerically larger (>10% of the Kenyan population; Luo, Luhya, Kamba); and (c) smaller groups (<10% of the population) that have never accessed the highest echelons of central power. We assume in this respect that larger groups have more political clout even when not in power because of their electoral weight. The advantaged group (a) serves as the reference category.

To test whether subjective perceptions matter (more) when it comes to support for HR (H1b), the second predictor (perceived political exclusion) measures respondents' perception of their group's relative political position. It is a composite score based on their responses to the following three questions (see also Figure 2 in the Supplementary File for the distribution by item):

1. "According to you, how well is your ethnic group represented in the national government compared to your group's demographic size in the total population?" (responses provided via a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *very overrepresented* to 5 = *very underrepresented*)
2. "How much political influence does your ethnic group have in the national government compared to other ethnic groups in Kenya?" (responses provided via a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *much more* to 5 = *much less*)
3. "How often is your ethnic group treated unfairly by the national government?" (responses provided via a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 4 = *always*)

After recoding the scores on these items to a range between 0 and 1 and summing the recoded values, we obtain an index that ranges from 0 (corresponding to low perceived political exclusion) to 3 (high perceived political exclusion), which allows us to examine the impact of perceived ethnic group marginalization on support for HR (H1b).

The third predictor measures how important the following factors are, according to our respondents, in explaining why some ethnic groups are doing worse economically:

1. Because their economic development was more severely affected or harmed by the colonial period than other ethnic groups;
2. Because they have been discriminated against by past Kenyan governments; or
3. Because they have less access to political power than other ethnic groups.

All three items were measured on the same 11-point scale (0 = *not important at all* to 10 = *very important*; see Figure 3 in the Supplementary File for the distribution by item). As for the second predictor, we used these scores to calculate an index (acknowledgement of political exclusion), which will enable us to test our second hypothesis. Like the above composite index, this ranges from 0 (corresponding to the perception that political exclusion is not important in explaining the current situation of the poorest ethnic groups) to 3 (which attributes a high importance to political exclusion).

Finally, the models also include a range of control variables, including gender, age, urban–rural residence, perceived severity of ethnic disparities, perceived level of group poverty, and ethnic identification. Notably, past research has shown that Kenyans who consider their ethnic identity very important and think that their group's economic situation is worse than that of other ethnic groups are more likely to support economic group-based redistribution (Langer et al., 2016).

4.3. Statistical Model

After presenting some descriptive statistics, we rely on an OLS and logistic regression model to test the hypotheses using support for general and direct HI-correcting policies as dependent variables. While 11-point scales are usually treated as continuous, we also conduct a logistic regression (proportional odds model) using the former as a robustness check since the scale is actually ordinal in nature.

We enter the covariates following a stepwise procedure. First, we test for the main effects of our three independent variables (political exclusion, perceived political exclusion, and acknowledgment of political exclusion). Second, we include interaction effects between perceived political exclusion and acknowledgment of political exclusion on the one hand, and the objective measure of political exclusion on the other. As discussed above (Section 3), there are important differences between ethnic groups regarding their subjective experiences of exclusion compared to their objective representation in government (which we attributed, among others, to their electoral weight). The final model includes all independent variables, interactions, and control variables, as presented in the previous section.

5. Results and Findings

Generally, there is very strong support among our respondents for government policies aimed at eradicating economic inequalities between different ethnic groups. Markedly, 55.2% of the respondents "fully supported" (ticked value of 10) general policies ($M = 9.4$, $SD = 2.4$). Relatedly, 81.9% (strongly) agreed that the government should give extra economic assistance to disadvantaged ethnic groups.

In what follows, we examine whether remaining differences in levels of support for HR can be understood by turning to objective (H1a) and subjective (H1b) measures of political exclusion of respondents' own ethnic group and/or equity considerations, as expressed through the recognition of the importance of past and current clientelist practices in explaining the relative disadvantage of the poorest ethnic groups (H2). Before evaluating our hypotheses, it is interesting to note that perceptions do matter. Table 2 shows that not all members of groups that have never had a co-ethnic in power feel that their group is politically marginalized to the same extent.

Table 2. Perceptions of perceived political exclusion by ethnic group.

	(0, 1]---Lowest	(1, 2]	(2, 3]---Highest	Differences
Kalenjin	110 (39.4%)	166 (59.5%)	3 (1.1%)	(ref.)
Kamba	18 (8.6%)	151 (72.2%)	40 (19.1%)	$p < .001$
Kikuyu	137 (39.8%)	199 (57.8%)	8 (2.3%)	n.s.
Kisii	11 (6.2%)	125 (70.6%)	41 (23.2%)	$p < .001$
Luhya	39 (9.1%)	310 (72.4%)	79 (18.5%)	$p < .001$
Luo	25 (8.0%)	196 (62.6%)	92 (29.4%)	$p < .001$
Meru	12 (14.1%)	63 (74.1%)	10 (11.8%)	$p < .001$
Mijikenda	1 (2.1%)	26 (54.2%)	21 (43.8%)	$p < .001$
Somali	4 (12.1%)	22 (66.7%)	7 (21.1%)	$p < .001$

Note: Significance levels of groupwise comparisons obtained from pairwise Wilcoxon tests with Holm-adjustment.

Turning to our first hypothesis, we find that neither objective nor subjective measures of political exclusion directly impact support for HR (see OLS 1 in Table 3). Thus, at first sight, it neither seems to matter whether someone has (had) a co-ethnic president or feels that their ethnic group is fairly represented within national politics. Yet, as hypothesized, group effects may cancel out the effect of perceived exclusion in particular, which the second model (OLS 2) demonstrates. Notably, among Kenyans who do not perceive any political inequality, support is highest among the Kikuyu and Kalenjin (reference group). However, whenever political exclusion is experienced, support among the latter group significantly decreases, whereas support increases among the other groups, and the smaller groups in particular. This is well visualized by the predicted probability plot in Figure 1. We thus reject hypothesis 1a and partially accept the alternative hypothesis (1b). Accordingly, we conclude that perceptions of political exclusion are positively related to support for HR among historically excluded groups, i.e., those who stand to benefit, rather than lose out, from the policies.

Second, we test whether equity considerations affect support for HR (H2). The data show that Kenyan respondents, who think that structural causes are important in explaining why some ethnic groups are doing worse economically, are more likely to support group-based redistributive policies controlling for political

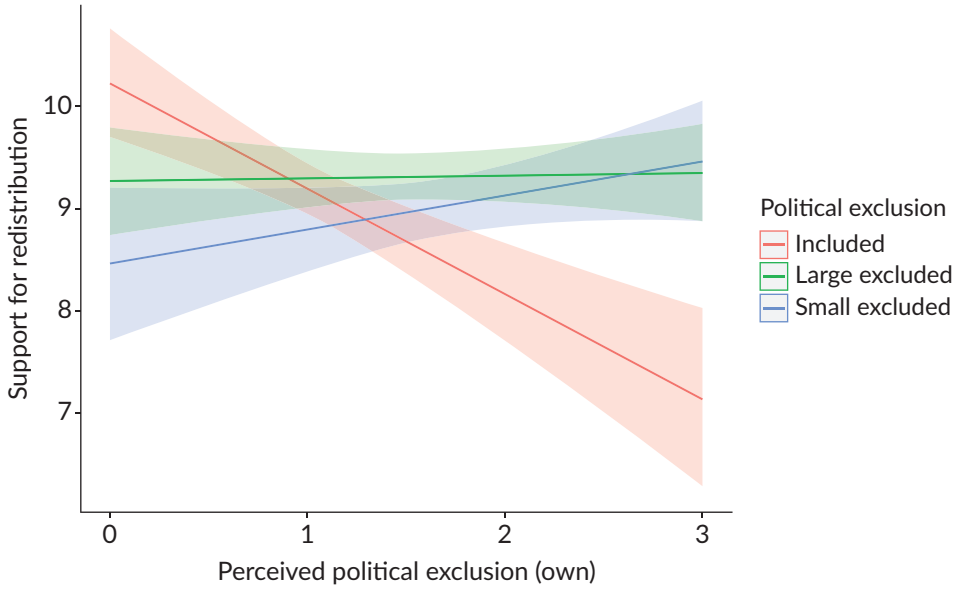

Figure 1. Predicted probability plot of support for redistribution. Note: Redistribution by level of perceived political exclusion in Kenya plotted separately for (a) groups that have had a co-ethnic president, (b) numerically larger groups, and (c) smaller groups that didn't have a co-ethnic president.

exclusion (OLS 3). However, it is particularly among the larger and, to a lesser extent, the smaller groups who have historically been out of power that attributing the relative disadvantage of the poorest ethnic groups to structural causes results in increased support for HR (OLS 4). This provides partial support for H2. Rather than equity considerations, however, this measure might represent another dimension of group self-interest, i.e., past unfair treatment may have greater explanatory power regarding their disadvantage than current exclusion (which is alleviated by their potential for electoral mobilization).

Third, we control for gender, age, urban–rural residence, perceived severity of ethnic and economic disparities, perceived level of group poverty, and closeness to the Kenyan nationality (OLS 5). Whereas there are no significant differences between men and women, there is a very minor yet significant effect of age, with older respondents being more supportive. Remarkably, respondents living in smaller cities are also more in favor of HR than those living in large cities. Perceptions of group poverty and the severity of ethnic disparities also matter. As expected, a positive association exists between the perceived severity of ethnic inequalities and support for government-led HR. Counter-intuitively, however, there is a negative effect of perceived group poverty. Although puzzling initially, its significance appears to be a statistical artifact of treating the variable as numeric rather than ordinal. Finally, there is a minor effect of national identification, with Kenyans who feel closer to their nationality being slightly more supportive.

Using a logistic regression model instead yields similar results (see Table 1 in the Supplementary File). We also reran the reported analyses using the various ethnic groups instead of the three categories of political exclusion (see Table 2 in the Supplementary File). It follows that the effect of perceptions of political exclusion on support for HR among smaller groups is driven particularly by the Somali, which aligns with the findings we presented from previous research. Compared to the Kalenjin, second, equity considerations only positively impacted support among the Luyha, but not the Luo and the Kamba (i.e., other larger groups with a history of political exclusion) respondents.

Table 3. Explaining attitudes toward HR.

	OLS 1 (general)	OLS 2 (general)	OLS 3 (general)	OLS 4 (general)	OLS 5 (general)	PO1 (direct) policy)
(Intercept)	9.142***	10.471***	8.669***	9.139***	8.166***	
	(0.150)	(0.271)	(0.148)	(0.220)	(0.440)	
Pol. exclusion (ref.: avantaged groups)						
Large excluded groups	0.228	−1.578***	0.132	−0.734*	−1.546***	−0.585
	(0.135)	(0.372)	(0.118)	(0.309)	(0.450)	(0.391)
Small excluded groups	−0.090	−2.072***	−0.131	−0.649	−2.072***	−1.079*
	(0.162)	(0.455)	(0.141)	(0.373)	(0.532)	(0.463)
Perceived pol. exclusion (own)	0.120	−1.102***			−1.028***	−0.564**
	(0.108)	(0.234)			(0.227)	(0.199)
X Large excl. groups		1.512***			1.055***	0.587*
		(0.277)			(0.272)	(0.239)
X Small excl. groups		1.602***			1.364***	0.701**
		(0.309)			(0.308)	(0.270)
Acknowledgment pol. Exclusion			0.401***	0.086	0.009	0.273*
			(0.079)	(0.135)	(0.137)	(0.117)
X Large excl. groups				0.545**	0.354	0.010
				(0.179)	(0.182)	(0.157)
X Small excl. groups				0.344	0.181	0.122
				(0.217)	(0.221)	(0.192)
Perceived HI severity					0.169***	0.037
					(0.022)	(0.019)
National identification					0.035*	0.022
					(0.018)	(0.016)
Group poverty					−0.121*	0.117*
					(0.055)	(0.048)
Age					0.035***	0.016**
					(0.005)	(0.005)
Gender (ref.: male)						
Female					0.059	−0.206*
					(0.104)	(0.089)
Residence (ref.: Large city)						
Small city					0.391**	0.126
					(0.122)	(0.105)
Village					0.148	0.060
					(0.137)	(0.117)
Num.Obs.	2010	2010	2196	2196	1913	2010
R2	0.005	0.022	0.014	0.019	0.095	
R2 Adj.	0.003	0.019	0.013	0.016	0.088	

Using our alternative dependent variable instead (economic assistance targeted to the most deprived ethnic groups), we find similar effects of the interaction between perceptions of political exclusion and group history in power (see proportional odds model in Table 3, column PO1). Thus, perceptions of political exclusion only

result in increased support for direct assistance to the most destitute groups for politically marginalized groups. Where the general measure, however, exposed increased support among members of larger excluded groups who attribute ethnic group poverty to structural exclusion; in this model, particularly Kikuyu and Kalenjin respondents who acknowledge unfair treatment show increased support for HR. More generally, support for HR is highest among these groups when controlled for all other predictors. These results, in our opinion, do grasp equity considerations. In terms of control variables, it is striking that perceived severity, national identification, and urban–rural residence no longer have significant effects. In contrast, the effect of group poverty now is positive as we would have originally expected—the effect is only marginal in size, however, when we include the variable as ordinal. Further striking is that support for direct economic assistance is lower among women.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Scholars have recently started exploring the politics of group-based redistribution to redress politically induced disparities between ethnic groups. This article extends this new line of research to the study of ethnic favoritism and its impact on popular support for HR with a unique online survey conducted in Kenya. We put two main hypotheses to the test. First, we hypothesized that members of ethnic groups historically excluded from political power are more likely to support government-led HR towards disadvantaged ethnic groups because of the strong overlap between political exclusion and economic marginalization of ethnic groups in Kenya (H1a). Redistributive policies would, in other words, be in their groups' self-interest, enabling them to offset their exclusion. While having a co-ethnic president in power is usually associated with having "your turn to eat" in Kenya, it is likely that not all Kenyans who have not had a co-ethnic president in power feel politically excluded. Hence, our alternative hypothesis read that Kenyans would support HR to a greater extent when they *perceived* their ethnic group to be politically excluded (H1b). Instead of self-interest, our second hypothesis put forward equity considerations. Thus, we argued that Kenyans who attribute the relative disadvantage of politically marginalized groups to colonial legacies and historical exclusion from the highest office would be more in favor of redistribution towards these very groups, even if their group does not stand to win.

Our results show that there is generally strong demand for redistributive policies that tackle economic inequalities between different ethnic groups in Kenya, including when economic assistance is explicitly targeted to the poorest ethnic groups only. Among Kenyans who do not feel that their ethnic group is excluded from power, support for HR is even highest among the historically privileged groups of the Kikuyu and Kalenjin. However, their support decreased when members felt that their group was disadvantaged. In contrast, support increased among all other groups whose members felt disadvantaged, particularly for the numerically smallest groups such as the Somali. H1b thus only holds for politically marginalized groups and is indicative of the role of group self-interest. Indeed, subjectively deprived Kikuyu and Kalenjin respondents seemingly realize that their group does not stand to benefit from these policies. In contrast, respondents with similar feelings of political deprivation among smaller excluded groups would be the "winners." It is important to deal carefully with these "losers" to avoid that further perceived loss in relative advantage could cause resentment and social tensions (see also Langer & Mikami, 2013). To a lesser degree, group self-interest was also apparent regarding respondents' attributional beliefs on the causes of ethnic disparities. Whereas we expected that equity considerations would cut across groups (H2), only among the larger groups excluded from power did acknowledging past exclusion result in increased support for HR.

Yet, we have to be careful to conclude that Kenyans are more supportive of group-based redistribution *only* when they and their fellow group members are likely to benefit from it. First, there was overwhelming general support for government policies aimed at eradicating economic inequalities between ethnic groups. This clearly shows that our respondents are concerned with the welfare of all groups, particularly disadvantaged groups. And, while there are significant differences between groups according to individual members' perceptions of political exclusion and attributional beliefs, there is actually strong support among historically advantaged group members, even when they feel deprived. Third, when using the alternative dependent variable that measured direct HI-correcting policies (i.e., economic assistance targeted to the most deprived ethnic groups), Kikuyu and Kalenjin respondents who acknowledged unfair treatment even showed more support for HR than members of larger excluded groups. Hence, we suggest viewing Kenyan politics less through the prism of "our turn to eat" and more through one of "everyone's turn to eat."

To end, in terms of future research, we believe it would be interesting to replicate this study among a more representative sample of Kenyans and in other (formerly) clientelist societies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Such studies could help to understand to what extent our findings are generalizable beyond (mainly) tertiary-educated Kenyans with regular access to the internet, and similar to insights from societies with slightly different histories of clientelism and/or different ethnic compositions. Researchers could also look at other variables that affect the relationship, such as religion. At the macro level, Franck and Rainer (2012) found that ethnic favoritism is less prevalent in African states with one dominant religion, while Nel (2021) used individual-level data to show that more devoted Africans are more tolerant of income (vertical) inequality. Future research could also include political partisanship. Opalo (2021) found that opinions on financing cash transfer programs in Kenya strongly correlate with party affiliation. He argues that varying levels of trust and perceived legitimacy of the government explain why co-partisans are more likely to support tax increases. Similarly, these factors could influence whether promises of HR to marginalized ethnic groups are actually seen as credible. Exploring how finance modalities affect support for HR is also a promising future path for research.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the Kenyans who participated in our research and the three anonymous reviewers who provided constructive and insightful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this manuscript.

Funding

We are grateful for the generous project funding (G068320N) from the Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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