

# **PSC 160**

## Campaigns and Elections: A Global Perspective

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Lecture 7: Ethnic Voting II  
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# Class Outline

1. Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity
2. Measuring Ethnicity
3. In-class reading: Posner
4. Ethnic Voting

# Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity

## What is Ethnicity? I

Definition (i): an ethnicity is an identity shared by individuals with a common ancestry

- ▶ Must stipulate the nearness of the connection required to call a group an ethnic group – otherwise?
- ▶ Chandra (2006) suggests: individuals in the same ethnic group share a more proximate ancestor than individuals in different ethnic groups
- ▶ However, a problem when classifying individuals as e.g. black or white
- ▶ Individuals often assigned to different ethnic groups despite 'common ancestry'

## What is Ethnicity? II

Definition (ii): an ethnicity is an identity shared by individuals with a *myth* of common ancestry

- ▶ Commonly claimed as a defining characteristic for ethnic groups in Africa
  - ▶ E.g. the Yoruba in Nigeria claim descent from the mythical Oduduwa
- ▶ Cannot be used as a membership rule for 'new' ethnic groups, e.g. Pakistani

## What is Ethnicity? III

Definition (iii): an ethnicity is an identity shared by individuals with a common region of origin, or myth of common origin

- ▶ However, “the perception of a common homeland presupposes the existence of a group; it does not define it” (Chandra 2006, 406)
- ▶ E.g. blacks and whites in the United States; Sinhallas and Tamils in Sri Lanka

## What is Ethnicity? IV

Definition (iv): “[i]n deciding a person’s ethnicity, we do not need to know anything about his or her cultural habits, mother tongue, religion or beliefs of any sort. Rather, we simply need to know about *parentage*. In ordinary usage, to ask ‘What is her ethnicity?’ is to ask about what ethnic group her parents (or other close ancestors) were assigned to. . . **All that is necessary to be counted as a member of an ethnic group is to be able to have accepted the claim to be immediately descended from other members of the group.**”

— Fearon and Laitin (2000, 13)

## What is Ethnicity? V

Suggests two possible criteria:

- ▶ Descent Rule 1: a group is ethnic if the parents of all members are coded as members of the same group, *whether or not that group was also considered ethnic*
- ▶ Descent Rule 2: a group is ethnic if the parents of all members are coded as members of the same group, and *that group was also considered ethnic*



## What is Ethnicity? VI

Definition (v): an ethnicity is an identity shared by individuals with a common culture

- ▶ Here, culture is defined broadly as a shared set of symbols, values, codes, and norms. But which aspects of culture?
- ▶ What if we instead require that individuals share more 'symbols, values, codes, and norms' with each other than they do with non-group members?
- ▶ Or that individuals 'inhabit the same framework of meaning' (Geertz 1973, Wedeen 2002)?
- ▶ Or that group members share some key symbols, values, codes, and norms that distinguish them from members of other groups (Barth 1969)?
- ▶ Or a common language?

## What is Ethnicity? VII

Definition (v): an ethnicity is an identity shared by individuals with a common history

But, “[s]haring a common group history cannot be a criterion for being members of the same group, for we would have to be able to identify the group in order to identify its history” (Appiah 1992)

## What is Ethnicity? VIII

Definition (vi): an ethnicity is identity in which membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent

- ▶ Definition favored by Chandra (2006)
- ▶ Then, ethnicity, like descent-based attributes, is **visible** and **sticky**
- ▶ However, may still be changeable in the long-term

# The Primordialist–Constructivist Debate I

Primordialism is the view that:

- ▶ Individuals have a single ethnic identity
- ▶ This identity is immutable – fixed in the present and future
- ▶ Proponents disagree on the following:
  - ▶ Must ethnic identities must be biologically determined?
  - ▶ Can they have been initially constructed through human intervention (e.g. ‘ancient hatreds’)?
- ▶ Key proponent: Geertz (1973)

## The Primordialist–Constructivist Debate II

Constructivism is the view that:

- ▶ Individuals have multiple, not single, ethnic identities
- ▶ The identity with which they identify is contextually contingent

## Variants of Constructivism I: Anderson (1983)

Anderson sees ethnic identity as being fixed during a period of modernization

- ▶ During the 17th and 18th centuries, several factors coincided that facilitated the development of “imagined communities”
  - ▶ Print capitalism
  - ▶ Decline of the religious community (reformation)
  - ▶ Decline of the dynastic realm (republicanism)
- ▶ Facilitated the spread of vernacular languages

The resulting “communities” were linguistically unified – formed the basis for later nationalist claims

## Variants of Constructivism II: Laitin (1986)

Laitin sees ethnic identity as being fixed by institutional context – in particular, by the nature of the colonial state

- ▶ Concerned to explain why the salient political cleavage in Yorubaland (Nigeria) is an individual's ancestral city, not religion
  - ▶ Ancestral city identity viewed by the Yoruba as 'primordial', not religion
  - ▶ Therefore, Yoruba variously identify as Ife, Egba, Ijebu, and Oyo
  - ▶ Conflict between the Oyo and the Ijebu was key in lead-up to democratic breakdown in post-colonial Nigeria (1966)
- ▶ Explained as a result of British colonial policy: awarding authority over particular tribal areas to defunct ancestral city kings

## Variants of Constructivism III: Bates (1974)

Bates sees ethnic identity as being fixed by particular economic incentives, through competition for 'components of modernity'

- ▶ Groups seeking to gain access to scarce goods and resources (e.g. land, education) benefit from mobilizing individuals along ethnic lines
- ▶ *Which* ethnic lines may result from otherwise arbitrary administrative decisions
- ▶ A function of the control local administrators have over access and regulation
- ▶ Thus, ethnic cleavages that coincide with administrative divisions may become salient rather than others



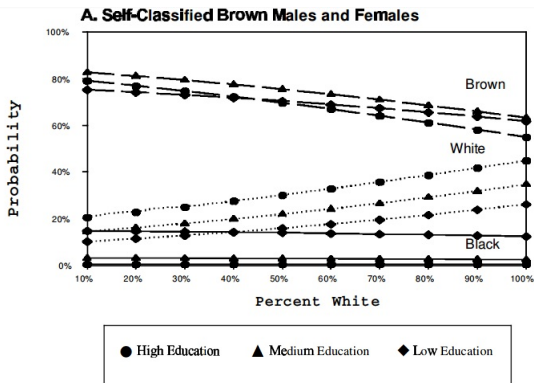
## A Primordialist's Response: Van Evera (2001)

Van Evera: “ethnic identities, while constructed, are hard to reconstruct once they form”

- ▶ Identities of groups with mass literacy ‘quite firmly fixed’
- ▶ Identities also hardened by violent conflict
- ▶ Thus, should retain assumption of fixed ethnicity for most analyses

But – does not address primordialist assumption that *ethnic* identities are singular

## Some Evidence for Multiple Ethnic Identities



**Figure 2.** Predicted Probability of Being Classified as White, Brown or Black among Brown Persons by Type of Classification, Sex, Education and Percent White in Urban Area

Source: Telles (2002) – ‘Racial Ambiguity Among the Brazilian Population’

## Why Does This Debate Matter?

Well, it matters for:

- ▶ Measuring ethnicity
- ▶ Which ethnic parties form
- ▶ How ethnicity influences vote choice

# Measuring Ethnicity

## Measuring Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalization I

Ethno-linguistic fractionalization is an important independent variable in many poli sci analyses

- ▶ E.g. Neto and Cox (1997) – argued to influence the number of parties
- ▶ A measure of the likelihood, in a country, that two people will be from different ethnic groups
- ▶ Based on the Soviet 'Atlas Narodov Mira' (1964) – a database of ethnic groups, based on a linguistic survey

## Measuring Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalization II

Concerns raised by constructivist critics:

- ▶ Assumed to be fixed in a country over time
  - ▶ But – e.g. multiplication of clan divisions following Somalian civil war
- ▶ Does not allow for multiple dimensions of ethnic identity – e.g. religion and caste in addition to language in India
  - ▶ Divisions may be cross-cutting or nested

Then, how can we measure an outcome like ethno-linguistic fractionalization?

# Posner: Institutions & Ethnic Politics in Africa

# Ethnic Parties and Ethnic Voting



## What is Ethnic Voting?

- ▶ Voting for co-ethnics
- ▶ Voting for the same party as co-ethnics
- ▶ (Which co-ethnics?)

## Why Ethnic Voting? I

Ethnic voting serves an **expressive** function: members of a group vote along ethnic lines in order to express allegiance to that group

- ▶ Key proponent: Horowitz, studying the emergence of ethnic parties in Africa (1986)
- ▶ Horowitz argued that in ethnically divided countries, voting is a means of affirming one's identity
- ▶ An individual may then vote against one's own rational self-interest
- ▶ In societies where ethnic cleavages are politically salient, elections serve as censuses of the population
- ▶ Is this rooted in a primordialist or constructivist understanding of ethnicity?

## Why Ethnic Voting? II

Ethnic voting serves an **instrumental** function: members of a group vote along ethnic lines as this is aligned with their policy preferences and rational self-interest

- ▶ View upheld by Bates (1974) in his analysis of ethnic politics
- ▶ Also upheld by Hechter (1975) – proponent of ‘internal colonialism’ as an explanation for the political salience of particular ethnic cleavages
  - ▶ Proposed as an explanation for Irish, Welsh and Scottish nationalism in the United Kingdom

## Why Ethnic Voting? III

In *low information environments*, ethnicity serves as an **heuristic** (informational cue) for voters

- ▶ Ferree (2006) argues that this explains the strength of ethnic voting in South Africa
  - ▶ The South African population is 90% white or African
  - ▶ Expressive voting not credible as independents are about half the S. Afr. electorate
  - ▶ On issues salient to voters, ethnic differences in policy preferences are not overwhelming
  - ▶ White and African voters do not differ hugely in their assessment of how well the ANC government manages the economy
  - ▶ However, voters do have highly **racialized** images of party labels

## When Do Ethnic Parties Emerge? I

An ethnic party is defined as “a party that overwhelmingly derives its support from an ethnic group and serves its interests.”  
(Horowitz 1986)

- ▶ Horowitz: in “ethnically divided” societies
- ▶ Or, ethnic parties are the result of conscious and strategic decisions by political actors
  - ▶ Then, emergence of ethnic parties influenced by the presence of institutional or social barriers – the “political opportunity structure”

## When Do Ethnic Parties Emerge? II

The “political opportunity structure” is influenced by:

- ▶ The proportionality of the electoral system – a function of district magnitude, electoral formula and electoral threshold
- ▶ Under plurality rule or federalism, whether ethnic minorities are geographically concentrated is important
- ▶ The presence of “cross-cutting cleavages”
  - ▶ For example, Dunning and Harrison (2010) show using a survey experiment that the low political salience of ethnicity in Mali may be explained by the existence of a cross-cutting cleavage, ‘cousinage’
  - ▶ An individual’s surname contains information about their ethnicity and their cousinage
  - ▶ Exploited by politicians to attract non-coethnic voters

## Which Ethnic Parties?

Constructivists recognize the possibility of multiple ethnic identities, increasing the number of 'ethnic parties' that are possible in a country

- ▶ Posner (2004): the size of an ethnic group relative to the political unit matters
  - ▶ Explains why Chewas and Tumbukas are political opponents in Malawi but included in the same political coalition in Zambia
- ▶ Chandra (2003): the size of the ethnic group relative to the threshold of winning imposed by the electoral system is key
  - ▶ Used to explain the success of the Bahujan Samaj Party—a party that primarily targets the support of individuals from Scheduled Castes—in some states of India rather than others
  - ▶ Specifically, success in Uttar Pradesh and failure in Karnataka

## Next Class: Midterm Exam

To read before class next Tuesday: Clarke et al., 'Theories and Models of Party Support'