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## Sometimes, voting along ethnic lines can be the 'smartest' thing for an African voter to do

In some African countries, an election can be like a time travel machine. If someone from your own ethnic group wins, your group can get so many rewards that it's like jumping three years into the future.

27 Jan 2015 Christine Mungai

Zambia's new President Edgar Lungu was sworn in on Sunday. In his speech, he talked about the need to move past being **loyal** just to your own tribe or ethnic group. He said a more important thing is **loyalty** to the country. "We need to shape the direction of our country, and together we can shape it," he said. People clapped, but did they really believe him?



<http://www.un.org/africarenewal/sites/www.un.org.africarenewal/files/wind-of-change-2.jpg>

### Ethnic Favoritism

European powers divided Africa without paying attention to traditional tribal boundaries and ethnic groups, so most African countries have an odd mix of ethnic groups. Many Africans feel strong **loyalty** to their ethnic group and not to their country. Many civil wars have happened between different ethnic groups in Africa. And African **voters** often **vote** for someone just because he or she is part of their own ethnic group. This seems foolish to people in strong democratic countries like the United States. But a recent study shows that this way of voting may not be foolish at all. It may actually be a very smart thing to do.

When a member of any specific ethnic group wins an **election**, other members of that group expect to have special **favours** from the leader – “their man” in **power**. The tradition of giving special benefits and **favours** to members of your own ethnic group is called *ethnic favoritism*.

Researchers Raphael Frank and Ilia Rainer studied ethnic **favoritism** in 18 African countries. They looked at how many children were attending school and how many infants did not survive their first year of life (“infant mortality”).

The study looked at the impact of having your “tribesmate” as president on **educational** and **health** outcomes. Here's what the researchers found:

- If you had a baby when someone from your ethnic group was in **power**, your baby had a better chance of surviving.
- Your children were more likely to be in school when someone from your own ethnic group was in **power**.

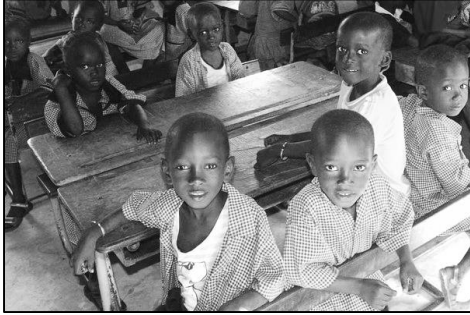
How big was this “bump” in having a better life for your children? In some countries they studied, it didn't make much **difference** at all. But in many, the **difference** was big. The researchers found this: In 1 year, **education** and **health** progress jumped so much that it would be like 3 years of progress for everyone else.

### Quick Improvements

You might think that if a president is building schools or clinics in his “home community,” it would take a couple of years for the improvements to make a big **difference**. But the help to the president's own ethnic group are almost immediate.

This is because African leaders like to appoint people from their own ethnic group to government **jobs**. Those **jobs** include positions in the government and simple **jobs** as janitors or messengers.

Almost immediately, these newly-hired cleaners and messengers have more **money**. This means they can send their children to school. It also means their next baby is likely to be born in a hospital and get their childhood vaccinations.



It's an "instant makeover" for the ordinary people who are lucky enough to be members of the leader's ethnic group.

So basing your **vote** on ethnic **loyalty** is not as "ignorant" as outsiders might think. Instead, it might be the smartest thing for people to do in a country where **favoritism** is typical.

Of course, this is not the best system. When a new government comes into **power**, they too will come in with "their people", so the benefits don't last forever.

Adapted from Mail & Guardian Africa at <http://mgafrika.com/article/2015-01-25-in-africa-an-election-can-be-like-a-time-travel-machine>

**DIRECTIONS:** For each pair of terms, write **one complete ORIGINAL sentence** which includes **both terms**. Your sentence should show that you understand what the terms have to do with each other **based on this article**. Re-read the article to help you understand how the terms are connected to each other.

➔ Example: ethnic / Europe Europeans created some odd ethnic mixes when they drew African borders.

• election / loyalty \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

• difference / education \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

• voters / power \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

• favor / jobs \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

• health / money \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_