

Name_____

Hour_____

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 favors from the leader – “their man” in power. The tradition of giving special benefits and favors 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.

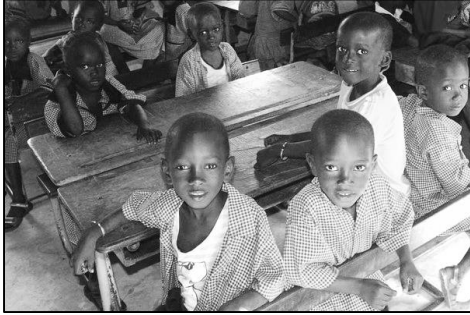
How big was this “bump” in having a better life for your children? In some countries they studied, it didn't make much difference at all. But in many, the difference was big. The researchers found this: In 1 year, education and health progress jumped so much that it would be like 3 years of progress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