In 1984, Cherry Gertzel and her colleagues from the University of Zambia published a book called *The Dynamics of the One-Party State in Zambia*, whose purpose was to describe the origins and workings of the country’s new single-party political system. Much of the book’s analysis drew on a detailed study of the general election of 1973, the first contest held after the country suspended multi-party competition and moved to one-party rule. In the course of describing the campaign and interpreting the voting patterns that emerged in the 1973 race, the authors observed, almost in passing, that politicians seemed to be emphasizing, and voters seemed to be embracing, different kinds of ethnic identities than they had in 1968, the last election held under the old multi-party system. They noted that, whereas campaigning during the 1968 general election had revolved around the competition among broad, linguistically-defined voting blocks, campaigning in 1973 seemed to revolve around the conflicts between local tribal groups. Whereas voters had overwhelmingly supported representatives of their language groups in the multi-party contest, they seemed to be ignoring language group distinctions and lining up behind members of their tribes in the one-party race. It was not that ethnicity was more or less central in either election, for, as the authors made clear, it was highly salient in both. But the specific kinds of ethnic identities that served as bases of electoral competition and motivations for political support were different.

The observation that the shift from the multi-party system to the one-party system had altered the relative political salience of linguistic and tribal identities was given little sustained attention by the contributors to the Gertzel et al volume. Although the authors presented a number of anecdotes to suggest that the shift had taken place, they offered no systematic evidence to support the claim and articulated no clear mechanism to account for it. Despite this, their
observation was a potentially important one. For if the change in institutional rules had led to a shift in the relevant axis of ethnic cleavage, then it suggested the possibility of a general proposition about the conditions under which individuals with multiple ethnic identities might choose one identity instead of another. Clearly, something about the incentives generated by the one-party or multi-party nature of the country’s political institutions had led to different kinds of ethnic identity choices. But what was the link? Why did Zambian politicians and voters focus on language group differences during multi-party elections and tribal differences during one-party contests? How was the institutional change causing the change in identity choices? This chapter suggests a mechanism. Chapters Seven and Eight, which test a number of this mechanism’s observable implications, provide additional empirical support for the connection between the party system type and the cleavage outcome.

I develop my account in four stages. First, I introduce a simple model of ethnic identity choice. This general model shows how, given a set of simple (and, in light of the discussion in Chapter Four, empirically justifiable) assumptions, we can predict the identities that individuals will choose, and thus the cleavage dimension that will emerge as the axis of competition and conflict in the political system. Then I show how changing the boundaries of the arena in which political competition takes place can change the outcome that emerges. Next, I show how shifting from multi-party to one-party rule brings about a de facto alteration in the boundaries of the political arena and, with it, a change in both the choices individuals will make and, through those choices, the ethnic cleavage that emerges as salient. I then apply the model to the Zambian case. The chapter concludes by revisiting some of the model’s key assumptions to assess its portability to other cases.
A SIMPLE MODEL OF ETHNIC IDENTITY CHOICE

Start with a political arena with a very simple ethnic cleavage structure (A, B), where A ∈ {a₁, a₂, a₃,…aₙ} and B ∈ {b₁, b₂, b₃,…bₘ} and where a₁ > a₂ > a₃ > … > aₙ and b₁ > b₂ > b₃ > … > bₘ.¹ Recall from Chapter One that A and B are the cleavages (e.g., race and language, religion and tribe, language and region) and a₁, b₁, a₂, b₂, …, aₙ, bₘ are the ethnic groups located on each cleavage dimension (e.g., black, white, English-speaker, Portuguese-speaker, Christian, Muslim). Every individual i has an identity repertoire ((aᵢ, bᵢ)) that contains a single A identity and a single B identity. Each individual can thus be placed in one of the cells in the nxm ethnic identity matrix depicted in Figure 5.1.² If individuals can identify themselves in terms of only one identity at a time – that is, either as a column (an aₙ) or as a row (a bₙ) but not as both simultaneously – then which one will they choose?

First, assume that individuals will choose the ethnic identity that will maximize their access to resources. Second, assume that resources are made available through a distributive process in which a single power-holder shares resources only with, but equally among, members of his own ethnic group. Assume further that the power-holder is elected under plurality rules.

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¹ Although I define this as an ethnic cleavage structure, the logic extends to non-ethnic cleavages like class. Also, while the example contains only two cleavages, the logic of the model extends to cleavage structures with three or more.

² Note that some of the cells may be empty.
Finally, assume that all individuals have perfect information about the sizes of all groups (that is, they know the row and column totals of the matrix, though not necessarily the values in each cell).

These assumptions have a number of important implications. First, they imply that coalitions across group lines (that is, across rows or across columns) will not be formed, since individuals will only be willing to support leaders that will share resources with them, and only leaders from their own groups will do so. In addition, the condition that resources will be shared equally among group members means that sub-divisions of the group will not take place after power has been won. For the purposes of the model, ethnic groups are taken to be unitary blocks: uncombinable and internally undifferentiatiable. Instances where two or more groups might be combined under a single umbrella label – for example, Irish and Italians in New York as “immigrants,” Dinka and Nuer in Sudan as “southerners,” Episcopalians and Presbyterians in Ireland as “Protestants” – can be accommodated in the model not by allowing them to form a coalition but by adding another cleavage dimension (immigrant/native, northerner/southerner, Protestant/Catholic). These assumptions are crucial to generating determinative outcomes; I will return at the end of the chapter to the implications of relaxing them.

Four different categories of people can be identified, each with a different optimal strategy. I depict them in Figure 5.2 as $w$, $x$, $y$, and $z$.

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![Figure 5.2: Four Categories of Actors](image-url)
Individuals located in the dark shaded cell, \( w \), are members of both the largest A group \((a_1)\) and the largest B group \((b_1)\). They will therefore be included in the winning coalition irrespective of whether power is held by the \( a_1 \)s or the \( b_1 \)s (the set-up of the matrix is such that, given plurality rules, it has to be held by one of them). They are the pivot. Their choice will determine which coalition wins. If they choose to identify themselves and to vote as \( a_1 \)s, then \( a_1 \)s will win power; if they choose to identify themselves and to vote as \( b_1 \)s, then \( b_1 \)s will hold power.

Individuals located in the unshaded cells, \( x \) and \( y \), are the possible co-power-holders with \( w \). They stand to be either part of the winning coalition or not depending on what \( w \) chooses. Individuals located in the light-shaded cells, marked \( z \), are members of neither \( a_1 \) nor \( b_1 \), so they will never be part of the winning coalition. In many situations they will outnumber \( w \), \( x \), and \( y \) combined. But because of their inherent internal divisions – the people in \( z \) are a collection of discrete and uncombinable communities grouped together only for analytical purposes – they will never be able to band together to wrest power from the \( a_1 \)s or \( b_1 \)s.

Which identity will individuals in each of these categories choose? Individuals in \( w \) stand to win either way. But because they seek to maximize the resources they will receive, they will prefer the identity that puts them in the smaller of the two possible winning coalitions, since this will require them to share the spoils of power with fewer other people. Their choice will therefore depend on the relative sizes of \( x \) and \( y \). When \( x > y \), they will prefer to ally with \( y \) by identifying themselves as \( a_1 \)s. When \( y > x \), they will prefer to build a coalition with \( x \) by identifying themselves as \( b_1 \)s. Only when \( x > w + y \) or \( y > w + x \) (that is, when \( x \) or \( y \) are so large that they beat the minimum winning coalition of \( w + y \) or \( w + x \)) will \( w \) not necessarily choose the identity that defines them as members of the smaller winning ethnic group. In such a situation, whether the winning coalition is made up of \( a_1 \)s or \( b_1 \)s will be out of \( w \)'s control. Individuals in \( w \) will be members of the winning group either way, but they will be powerless to impose one
coalition over the other, so choosing membership in the smaller group is not necessarily advantageous.³

Individuals in x and y will always choose the identities $b_1$ and $a_1$, respectively, since these are the only identities that give them a possibility of being members of the winning coalition. However, since their ultimate ability to win power will depend on $w$’s choice rather than their own, they will devote most of their political energy to trying to lobby $w$. People in y will insist that politics is really about cleavage A and that $a_j$s need to stick together against the $a_2$s, $a_3$s, etc. People in x, meanwhile, will counter that the more important axis of political division is B and that the ethnic cleavage that really matters is the one that separates $b_1$s from the other $b_n$s.

Individuals in z are in a lose-lose situation, since neither their A nor B identities will put them in the winning group. Their only viable strategy will be to try to change the game by pushing for the introduction of a new cleavage dimension.⁴ Their plea will be that politics is not about either A or B but about some different cleavage C. In theory, they should try to invoke a cleavage that defines them as members of a new minimum winning coalition. But they cannot choose – and expect people to mobilize in terms of – just any principle of social division. For the strategy to be effective, the cleavage they propose must be an axis of social difference that others recognize as at least potentially politically salient. Some bases of social division will fit this bill, but many others do not. This is why identifying the roster of potentially relevant cleavages in the society in question is a prerequisite for employing the ethnic identity matrix.

³ Note that the rule that resources will be shared equally among members of the winning group means that members of $w$ can not be penalized by the other members of the winning group for not publicly defining themselves in the same way. Since $w$ is as much a part of $a_j$ as y and as much a part of $b_j$ as x, $w$ will be entitled to its share of the spoils of power irrespective of whether it publicly allies itself with x or y.

⁴ Strictly speaking, this is not their only option: they could also try to join the winning coalition by acquiring the attributes that would allow them to pass as a member of $a_j$ or $b_j$. This is often quite difficult, however.
Only in one special situation can people in \( z \) affect \( w \)’s choice. This is when there exists within \( z \) a sub-coalition of \( a_n \)s or \( b_n \)s that is greater than \( w \) plus the smaller of \( x \) and \( y \) – that is, greater than the winning coalition that would otherwise form. This possibility is illustrated in Figure 5.3.

**Figure 5.3:**
How a Sub-Coalition within \( z \) Might Affect \( w \)’s Choice

Suppose that \( x < y \). If this is the case, then the general rule should apply that \( w \) will ally with \( x \) and choose to identify itself as \( b_1 \). But if there exists within \( z \) a sub-coalition \( x \cap x_n > w + x \) (where \( x_n \) is the subset of \( a_n \) that is in \( x \)), then \( w \) will have no choice but to identify itself as \( a_1 \) and ally with \( y \) (recall that since, by definition, \( a_j > a_2 \), an alliance between \( w \) and \( y \) will beat any other \( a_n \)).

Note that the existence of the sub-coalition \( x \cap x_n > w + x \) will not affect the fate of anyone in \( z \): as soon as \( w \) joins with \( y \), everyone in \( z \) will still be shut out of power. But the existence of the sub-coalition will have forced \( w \) to make an identity choice that it otherwise would not have made.

Situations of this sort often occur when the A and B cleavages are organized such that groups from one cleavage dimension nest inside groups from another (as, for instance, when the regions of a country each contain distinct sets of region-specific tribes, when a tribe is divided into clans, or when a linguistic community is divided into speakers of multiple dialects). Figure 5.4 provides an illustration of what an ethnic identity matrix might look like in such a situation. Because
ethnic cleavages in Africa are often nested, this special case turns out to be very important for understanding how ethnic coalition formation often works in this region.

The ethnic identity matrix helps to account for the choices of individuals. Yet the outcome this book seeks to explain is not just why individuals make the ethnic choices they do but also why particular ethnic cleavages emerge as salient in the political system as a whole. How do the individual choices aggregate up to determine the cleavage that becomes the axis of competition and conflict in the larger political system? The answer lies in the fact that, once \( w \) chooses \( y \) or \( x \) as its coalition partner (and thus \( a_1 \) or \( b_1 \) as its identity), the social landscape is transformed. As soon as \( w \) makes its choice (or as soon as other players figure out what choice \( w \) will make), the distinctions among members of \( a_1, a_2, \) and \( a_3 \) or among members of \( b_1, b_2, \) and \( b_3 \) disappear and a new division emerges between those that are in power (the “ins”) and those that are not (the “outs”). The particular dimension of cleavage that defines the difference between the “ins” and “outs” then becomes the axis of conflict in the political system. If \( w \) chooses \( y \) then politics comes to be about cleavage A – that is, about the struggle between \( a_j \)s and the other \( a_k \)s. If \( w \) chooses \( x \) then it becomes about cleavage B – that is, about the conflict between \( b_j \)s and the other \( b_k \)s. Note that the “outs” will still not be able to do anything to overturn the situation, since
multi-ethnic coalitions are not feasible. But they will come to share the perception that political conflict is about what makes the “ins” different from everybody else. This is how individual-level choices determine which ethnic cleavage becomes politically salient. Figures 5.5a and 5.5b show the two possible outcomes:

An Illustration

To show how this abstract model might be applied to a more concrete example, let us return to the hypothetical Los Angeles community described in Chapter One. Recall that this community was divided by three different ethnic cleavages: language, race, and religion. The linguistic cleavage divided the community into English-speakers, Spanish-speakers, and Korean-speakers. The racial cleavage divided it into Latinos, Asians, Blacks, and Whites. And the religious cleavage partitioned it into Protestants and Catholics. Leaving the religious divisions aside to keep things simpler, we can represent the community’s ethnic cleavage structure in the matrix depicted in Figure 5.6. As in the general set-up, I have shaded the \( w \) and \( z \) coalitions and ordered the groups on each cleavage dimension from largest to smallest. To make the incentives facing people clear, I have also provided the share of the population contained in each cell, as well as the totals for each row and column.
Figure 5.6: An Ethnic Identity Matrix for a Hypothetical Los Angeles Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English-speaking</th>
<th>Spanish-speaking</th>
<th>Korean-speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English-speaking Latinos are the pivot.\(^5\) They will be in the winning coalition irrespective of whether it is formed on the basis of race or language. The question is: which will they choose? Will they choose fellow Latinos as their coalition partners or fellow English-speakers? It is helpful to imagine one politician in the community urging them to mobilize as Latinos and another campaigning equally vigorously for them to mobilize as English-speakers. Indeed, we can imagine politicians standing at the end of each row and at the top of each column urging their fellow row- and column-members to mobilize in terms of the particular identity that they share: as Spanish-speakers, Asians, Whites, etc. Which politician will they follow? Which ethnic appeals will resonate and which will go unheeded?

Traditional accounts of ethnic politics approach such questions by assuming that individuals will select the identity to which they have the deepest emotional commitment. The origins of this commitment is explained in a variety of ways: as a product of the inherently deeper attachment that people have to some kinds of identities than others – an argument sometimes made about race (Mendelberg 2001); in terms of the hegemonic status that has been bestowed on a particular identity by history (Laitin 1986); or as an outcome of the work of some political entrepreneur who has succeeded in convincing people that one identity matters more than others (Cohen 1974; Bates 1983; Brass 1991). Irrespective of the explanation provided, all
such approaches seek to account for the identity choice by providing a rationale for why one identity is more deeply felt than the other. The identity choice is then explained as a direct outcome of this greater depth of feeling.

This book takes an entirely different approach. Rather than assume that one identity is somehow innately stronger than another, I assume that all of the identities in a person’s repertoire are equally important components of who they understand themselves to be. The decision of English-speaking Latinos to identify themselves in racial rather than linguistic terms (or vice versa) thus cannot be attributed to something inherent in racial or linguistic identities themselves. Instead, I argue that the choice is made purely instrumentally – for what the person gets for choosing one identity over the other, not for what it means for them to choose it. I argue that people will make their choice by weighing which identity will secure them access to the greatest share of political and economic resources, and that this, in turn, will lead them to choose the identity that puts them in the group that, by virtue of its size vis-à-vis other groups, puts them in a minimum winning political coalition. As I stressed in Chapter One, what is new in my account is neither the idea that people choose their ethnic identities instrumentally nor the idea that ethnic groups can be thought of as political coalitions mobilized to capture scarce resources. The innovation is to apply this logic to the question of when and why, given identity repertoires that contain multiple identities, individuals will choose to mobilize in terms of one identity rather than another.

If forming a minimum winning coalition is their goal, then English-speaking Latinos should ally with the smaller of the two groups in which they might claim membership. Since non-Latino English-speakers make up 40 percent of the population and non-English-speaking (i.e., Spanish-speaking) Latinos comprise just 30 percent, we should see English-speaking Latinos choosing their racial identity and building a coalition with fellow Latinos. Asian, Black,  

Note that they are the pivot even though more English-speakers are Black and Asian than Latino and even though more Latinos are Spanish-speaking than English-speaking. What makes them the pivot is that they
and White English-speakers will do their utmost to convince them otherwise, but if all the pivot cares about is controlling the greatest share of resources that it can, then the lobbying of fellow English-speakers will go unheeded. And, once English-speaking Latinos choose to identity themselves in terms of their race, we should see the politics of the community polarized along racial lines. The elected representative will be a Latino, and whether he is English-speaking or Spanish-speaking will be immaterial to non-Latinos. In their eyes, all that will matter is that he is a Latino, that he played the race card to get elected, that he owes his position to the Latino vote, and that he can be expected to be beholden to Latino interests. Grievances about how resources are distributed within the community will thus be framed in terms of why Latinos are getting more than their fair share.

The critical point is that race emerges as the central axis of social identification and political division in this example not because racial identities are inherently or historically stronger than linguistic identities and not because politicians playing the racial card are somehow more skillful than those attempting to mobilize the population along linguistic lines. Race emerges as politically salient because of the relative sizes of the community’s racial and linguistic groups, and, in this particular case, because the coalition of Latinos is smaller (and thus more useful from the perspective of the pivot) than the coalition of English-speakers. Group size, not depth of attachment, is what drives the individual-level choice, and thus the society-level cleavage outcome.

**CHANGING BOUNDARIES, CHANGING OUTCOMES**

The ethnic identity matrix helps to clarify why individuals make the identity choices that they do. It also helps make it clear how these choices are sensitive to changes in the boundaries of the political arena. To see why this is so, imagine that Los Angeles is redistricted and that our hypothetical community is divided into two separate districts: “north” and “south.” If racial and

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are members of both the most numerous racial and linguistic communities.

Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*  
Chapter Five
linguistic groups were evenly distributed across the original community, then this division would have no effect on people’s ethnic coalition-building strategies. In both new districts, English-speaking Latinos would again be the pivot, and they would again seek to put themselves in a minimum winning coalition by allying with fellow Latinos. But suppose that ethnic groups were not distributed evenly within the original community. Suppose that, due to patterns of residential segregation, the redistricting created, as one of the two new districts, a district that was homogeneously Latino. With no other racial group in the new district (that is, with \( y = 0 \)), the only cleavage that would matter would be the one that divides English-speakers from Spanish-speakers. Language would thus become the axis of social division, and political coalition-building and conflict would take place along language group lines.

But suppose that the redistricting exercise did not divide the original community quite so neatly. Suppose that most of the Latino population from the original district wound up in the new “north” district and that all of the Asian population wound up in the new “south.” The population distributions for each new community might look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 5.7a: Ethnic Identity Matrix for the “North” District</th>
<th>Figure 5.7b: Ethnic Identity Matrix for the “South” District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Figures 5.7a and 5.7b make clear, the partition of the original community leads to changes in the relative sizes of the linguistic and racial groups in each new political arena. Whereas Latinos outnumbered Asians in the pre-redistricting community, the opposite is the case in the post-redistricting “south.” And whereas English-speakers were dominant in the original district, they are outnumbered by Spanish-speakers in the new “north.” These changes in the
sizes of the groups bring corresponding changes in the coalition-building strategies that both politicians and voters will find it useful to employ. Strategies that made sense in the pre-redistricting setting will, for some groups, no longer be optimal in one or the other of the new contexts.

Take the case of the new “north” district. The shift in status between English-speakers and Spanish-speakers changes the pivot. Whereas English-speaking Latinos were the pivot in the original community, Spanish-speaking Latinos play this role in new one. English-speaking Latinos still do best by identifying themselves in racial terms, but this time whether or not they will share power will be out of their hands. Meanwhile, whereas Spanish-speaking Latinos did best in the pre-redistricting era by identifying themselves in racial terms and lobbying fellow Latinos to join them in a coalition along racial lines, they do best in the post-redistricting context by identifying themselves in linguistic terms and turning their backs on their English-speaking Latino brothers and sisters. Since English-speaking Latinos can be expected to respond to this situation by simply claiming that they speak Spanish too, much of the political action in the district will revolve around policing the border between the English- and Spanish-speaking components of the broader Latino community.

Individuals in the new “south” will experience similar changes in their optimal strategies. English-speaking Asians still do best by identifying themselves in linguistic terms. This time, however, they are the pivot and actually wind up in the winning coalition. Meanwhile English-speaking Latinos, who in the original community were best served by presenting themselves in racial terms, now do best by presenting themselves as English-speakers. For both of these groups, as for both the English- and Spanish-speaking Latinos in the new “north,” changing the boundaries of the political arena either changes their incentives for identifying themselves in terms of a particular identity or, because of the altered behavior of others, changes the payoffs
they will receive for having done so. Horowitz (1985: 75) writes that, “one of the most powerful influences on the scope and shape of ‘we’ and ‘they’ has been the scope and shape of political boundaries.” This example, and the ethnic identity matrix heuristic on which it is based, shows why.

Of course, I deliberately designed this illustration to show how changes in the boundaries of the political arena can alter the incentives for people to identify themselves in different ways. Lest readers think this illustration has no real world parallels, consider the following examples:

Today, Telugu-speaking Andhra Pradesh, is one of India’s 28 states. Before 1953, however, it was part of Tamil-speaking Madras. During the period when the two states were united, the principal axis of social conflict was linguistic and the central political divide was between Telugu-speakers, who demanded a separate state, and Tamil-speakers, who actively resisted these demands. Yet, after Andhra Pradesh was broken off from Madras in 1953, the language-based conflict was superseded in Andhra by a competition for control the state between the Kamma and Reddi castes (both Telugu-speaking), and by a regional conflict between people living in the Telangana and Coastal regions of the state (Horowitz, 1985: 613-14). The altered boundaries of the arena of competition led to the emergence of a completely different set of salient cleavages.

The broader partition of India in 1947 offers another example. Before the partition, ethnic politics in the territory that was to become Pakistan revolved around the conflict between Hindus and Muslims. After Pakistan became an independent state, however, the paramount Hindu-Muslim cleavage was replaced by distinctions, varying from community to community, based on language, tribe, or region. Horowitz (1975: 135) writes that “hardly had the Indio-Pakistani subcontinent been partitioned along what were thought to be hard-and-fast Hindu-Muslim lines when, in 1948, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who had done so much to foster subnational

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6 In addition to altering the choices individuals make about which identities to emphasize, some people will have powerful incentives to try to change the contents of their identity repertoires. Korean-speaking Asians
identities in undivided India, ironically found it necessary to warn against the ‘curse of
provincialism’ in undivided Pakistan.” The separation of Pakistan from India led to the
replacement of one basis of ethnic division by another.

The experience of decolonization provides yet another illustration. In colony after
colony, political conflict during the pre-independence era was between colonizers (British,
French, Belgian, etc.) and colonized (Sri Lankans, Fijians, Ivoirians, Congoolese, etc.), as the latter
sought to wrest political control from the former. Since the political arena included both the non-
white colony and the white metropole, the relevant axis of political cleavage during this period
was race. But as soon as independence was won and the relevant arena of political competition
shrank to the new nation itself, the once unified non-white community fractured into rival camps
and the racial cleavage was superceded by cleavages based on language, religion, region, or tribe.

In all of these examples, changes in the boundaries of the political arena generated
changes in the dimensions of ethnic identity that were mobilized. Although I do not provide them
here, one could easily construct ethnic identity matrices for each case to show how the change in
the boundaries of the political arena produced the changes in people’s choices. As in the Los
Angeles example, these boundary changes in all of these cases involved alterations in the physical
boundaries of the political system. However, the physical boundaries of the political units need
not change for the boundaries of the effective political arena to be altered and for individuals’
incentives to emphasize one cleavage dimension rather than another to shift. One way this can
happen is when a change in political institutions shifts the locus of political competition from one
domain to another. Such a change can bring about a shift in the effective arena of political
competition (and, with it, a shift in individuals’ identity choices) even when the physical
boundaries of the political system remain unaltered. The transitions in Zambia from multi-party
to one-party rule (and back) did precisely this.

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and Spanish-speaking Latinos, for example, will have incentives to invest in learning English.
MULTI-PARTY POLITICS, ONE-PARTY POLITICS, AND IDENTITY CHOICE

How are multi-party and one-party political systems different, and how do these differences generate different ethnic choice outcomes? Although real world multi-party and one-party political systems differ in a great many ways, the central institutional differences between the two can be reduced to two key issues. The first is whether multiple parties are legally permitted to compete for political power. In multi-party systems, where multiple parties are permitted, every parliamentary and presidential candidate runs on the ticket of a different party. In one-party systems, by contrast, political competition takes place under the auspices of a single ruling party and every candidate must run on the ticket of that party. The second key difference lies in whether or not the executive is chosen by the electorate. In one-party states, the norm is for the president to be chosen by the central committee of the ruling party and then ratified by voters through a simple up-or-down vote in the general election. In multi-party states, multiple presidential candidates compete for support in the election itself. Thus while presidential elections are held in both systems, only in multi-party contexts do voters have a real choice among distinct alternatives. These seemingly minor differences turn out to have important effects. For our purposes, the most important effect is on the scope of the effective arena in which political competition takes place.

In one-party systems, where the outcome of the presidential election is determined in advance, the only electoral contest of consequence is the one over who will represent each parliamentary constituency. The parliamentary election thus becomes the central locus of competition in the political system. This has the effect of shrinking the effective arena of political conflict from the nation as a whole to the level of the electoral constituency. In multi-party elections, by contrast, when control over the executive is at issue, electoral competition takes place at two levels simultaneously: at the national level (for the presidency) and at the constituency level (for parliamentary representation). In practice, however, the effective arena of political competition for both the presidential and parliamentary contests is the national arena.
This is because party labels transform parliamentary candidates into representatives of national coalitions, and the constituency-level conflicts in which they are engaged into contests for national power.

Party labels do not matter in one-party parliamentary elections because they do not vary across candidates: all candidates must, by law, run on the ticket of the ruling party. But in multi-party parliamentary elections, where each candidate runs on the ticket of a different party, voters will have two different sources of information to consider when they try to predict each candidate’s future behavior: the candidate’s personal attributes and reputation, and their party affiliation. The relative importance that voters attach to these two sources of information will depend on the particular characteristics of the electoral system, including the degree of control that party leaders exercise over access to the party label, whether or not votes are pooled across parties, whether voters cast one vote or many, and the magnitude of electoral districts (Carey and Shugart 1995). It will also depend on whether or not presidential and parliamentary elections are held concurrently (Shugart and Carey 1992; Shugart 1995). In political systems with single member plurality electoral rules, party endorsements, and concurrent presidential and parliamentary elections (such as in Zambia and most former British colonies), party labels will be much more important to voters than the personal attributes of the candidates (Carey and Shugart 1995). In such situations, voters will make their choices not based on the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates themselves but on the affinity they feel for the political parties the candidates each represent. Voters in such a context will cast their parliamentary election ballots for individual candidates competing at the level of the constituency, but in deciding which candidate to support, they will look beyond the candidates and focus their attention on what their

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7 Perhaps the most famous example of a candidate’s individual attributes being trumped by his party affiliation in an SMP system is Franklin D. Roosevelt, who never succeeded in carrying his home area, the traditionally Republican Duchess County, New York. Duchess County was a WASP bastion and Roosevelt, though a WASP himself, was the Democratic candidate and was thus seen by the county’s voters as representing the interests of the non-WASP coalition: Italians, Irish, and Jews (Key 1949: 38).
vote means for the battle among the political parties. And since political parties are competing for power at the national level, the effective arena of political competition becomes the nation as a whole.\(^8\)

Thus even if the physical boundaries of a country’s political system remain unchanged, altering its political institutions to prohibit or allow for competition among multiple political parties will change the boundaries of the effective arena of political competition. A shift from multi-party to one-party competition will shrink that arena from the nation as a whole to the level of the electoral constituency, and a shift from one-party to multi-party competition will expand it from the electoral constituency to the nation as a whole. These changes, in turn, affect the kinds of ethnic cleavages that will emerge as axes of political competition and conflict in each context.

In one-party settings, political conflict will revolve around constituency-level ethnic cleavages. In multi-party elections, where the arena of political competition is the entire country, broader cleavages that define national-scale groups will become salient. In both settings, politicians will seek to build and voters will cast their votes so as to secure membership in minimum winning coalitions. But because the arenas of competition are different, the social material out of which these coalitions will be crafted will be different as well. In one-party settings, political

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provide evidence to substantiate link between Zambia’s electoral rules and voters’ focus on candidates’ party affiliations in Chapter Eight.

\(^8\) Bates (1989: 92) provides a slightly different argument that leads to the same result. He argues that national issues, and the national frame, will be salient in multi-party elections because voters will view candidates as potential members of coalitions that might conceivably form the government and shape national policy. In single-party elections, however, voters know that each candidate will have only a negligible impact on national policy since, even if they are successful, they will be one of more than 100 members of parliament. This calculation, Bates argues, shifts voters’ attention from national policy issues to patronage concerns and from the question of “who has the best policy?” to the question of “which candidate will best deliver patronage to the constituency?” This, in turn, shifts the locus of political competition from “national rivalries between organized teams” to “individual rivalries at the constituency level.” Thus, national issues and cleavages will animate multi-party politics and local-level rivalries will structure one-party politics. The problem with this argument is that, at least in the Zambian case (though I suspect in other developing country settings as well), it overestimates the extent to which voters ever view candidates as shapers of national policy agendas and it underestimates the role of patronage concerns in competitive party settings. The account that I provide reaches the same conclusion without making any assumptions about either the extent to which voters see candidates as policymakers or the relative salience of patronage in one-party and multi-party regimes.
competition and conflict will revolve around the ethnic groups that divide the constituency; in multi-party settings, it will revolve around the ethnic groups that divide the nation.

This logic, combined with the model of identity choice presented earlier, illustrates how institutional change can cause identity change. It also put us in a position to explain why tribal and linguistic identities each emerged in Zambia as bases for political coalition-building in the periods in which they did.

**APPLYING THE MODEL TO THE ZAMBIAN CASE**

Recall from Chapters Two and Three that Zambians identify themselves ethnically either as members of one of the country’s four language groups or as one of the country’s roughly seventy tribes. Figure 5.8 provides an ethnic identity matrix for the country. As in the general example, the linguistic and tribal groups are ordered from largest to smallest. In addition, I have indicated the coalitions \( w, x, y \) and \( z \).

![Figure 5.8: An Ethnic Identity Matrix for Zambia](image)

Bemba-speaking Bembas are the pivot; non-Bemba-speaking Bembas (an empty set) are \( x \); and non-Bemba Bemba-speakers (for example, members of the Bisa, Aushi, Kabende, and other Bemba-speaking tribes) are \( y \). Since \( y > x \), we would expect \( w \) to choose \( x \) and to transform national-level conflict in Zambia into a struggle among the country’s tribes. However, since the coalitions of Nyanja-speakers, Tonga-speakers and Lozi-speakers are all larger than the coalition
of Bemba tribespeople (that is, for all \( n, \text{Lang}_n^{w,x}\text{Lang}_n^{>w+x} \), \( w \) will be forced into a coalition with \( y \).\(^9\) Bemba-speaking Bembas will thus identify themselves in language group terms and unite with fellow Bemba-speakers to win power, and national-level political conflict in Zambia will revolve around language group differences.

A different outcome emerges when political competition is restricted to the constituency level. The spatial distribution of tribal and linguistic groups in Zambia guarantees that constituency-level ethnic landscapes (and identity matrices) will be quite different from the one depicted in Figure 5.8 for the nation as a whole.\(^10\) Rural constituencies, which comprise more than 80 percent of the total, are almost all homogeneous with respect to language and heterogeneous with respect to tribe (though a few are homogeneous with respect to both). Ethnic identity matrices for most rural constituencies thus look like the one provided in Figure 5.9a. Urban constituencies, on the other hand, contain migrants from multiple tribes and, while one language group is usually dominant, one or more smaller language groups are usually also present. In terms of their ethnic composition, urban constituencies thus look more like the national political arena. An ethnic identity matrix for a typical urban constituency is provided in Figure 5.9b.

\[\text{Figure 5.9a: An Ethnic Identity Matrix for a Rural Constituency}\]

\[
\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{Tribe}_1 & \text{Lang}_{\text{only}}^w \\
\text{Tribe}_2 & y \\
\text{Tribe}_3 & \\
\vdots & \\
\text{Tribe}_m & \\
\end{array}
\]

\[\text{Figure 5.9b: An Ethnic Identity Matrix for an Urban Constituency}\]

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{Tribe}_1 & \text{Lang}_{\text{dominant}}^w & \text{Lang}_2 \\
\text{Tribe}_2 & y & x \\
\text{Tribe}_3 & & j \\
\vdots & y & z \\
\text{Tribe}_m & & \\
\end{array}
\]

---

\(^9\) Since \( y>^{w+x}w \), \( w \) would have no reason, in any case, to hold fast to its coalition with \( x \).

\(^{10}\) For a discussion of the origins of these spatial distributions, see Chapters Two and Three.
In rural constituencies like the one depicted in Figure 5.9a, the coalition-building outcome is clear: since $x=0$, $y>x$ and the pivot will choose to build its coalition along tribal lines. Tribal divisions will thus emerge as the axis of competition and conflict in rural constituencies. The particular tribal group that will play the role of pivot (and hold power) will vary from constituency to constituency, but political conflict will be played out in terms of the struggle between members of the dominant tribe and other tribes.

In urban constituencies, it will almost always be the case either that $y>\omega+x$ or that $Lang_n^x\geq \omega+x$. Thus, as at the national level, the pivot will choose to identify itself in linguistic terms and to build a winning coalition by allying with fellow members of its language group. The only difference with the national-level outcome will be that the particular $\omega+y$ coalition will differ from urban location to urban location, depending on which language group happens to predominate in the town in which the constituency is located. The important point, however, is that the pivot will choose its linguistic, rather than its tribal, identity and that the linguistic cleavage will therefore emerge as the salient axis of political division.

The link between institutional change and changes in the ethnic cleavages that emerge as politically salient during different periods of Zambia’s post-independence history should now be clear. Since the locus of political conflict in multi-party elections is at the national level, and since national-level conflict in Zambia revolves around language group differences, we will observe political competition and coalition-building taking place along language group lines during periods when Zambia is under multi-party rule. We will observe politicians in such settings couching their appeals in language group terms and voters supporting candidates who, by virtue of their party affiliations, are perceived to represent the interests of their language groups. Of course, politicians who stand to lose from such an outcome – for instance, candidates who are running on the tickets of parties perceived to be affiliated with outsider language groups – can be
expected to do what they can to combat the tendency for politics to be reduced to a struggle among language groups. To the extent that they try to break the hegemony of linguistic distinctions by emphasizing tribal differences, some non-linguistic ethnic campaigning may emerge. But every tribal appeal by such a politician will be met by a counter-claim that this person is simply trying to divert peoples’ focus from the cleavage that matters: the one that divides the country along language group lines. So long as voters view the political process as a means of gaining control over resources controlled by the center, and so long as they view having a member of their own group in a position of political power at the center as the surest way to serve that end, the conflict between members of the dominant language group and others will emerge as the central axis of political competition. Political conflict in multi-party settings will be language group conflict.

During periods when the country is under one-party rule, a different axis of ethnic political conflict will emerge in most areas. In the one-party context, the locus of political conflict contracts to the electoral constituency and constituency-level cleavages emerge as the central basis of political coalition-building. In rural areas this means that tribal divisions emerge as salient, while in urban areas it means that political conflict is organized (as it is in multi-party settings) along linguistic lines. Note that while the language cleavage is salient in urban contexts in both one-party and multi-party elections, it is salient for different reasons. In the multi-party context, language group differences matter because of the centrality of language group divisions in national affairs; in the one-party context, they matter because of the polyglot nature of urban electoral constituencies, and because language communities always include members of multiple tribes.

As in the multi-party context, politicians who are disadvantaged by the salience of constituency-level ethnic cleavages – for example, members of non-dominant tribes running in rural constituencies or members of non-dominant language groups running in urban constituencies – can be expected to try to improve their lot by playing the other ethnic card. But
this will not prevent either the candidate from the dominant group from winning or the struggle between members of the dominant group and others from emerging as the central axis of political conflict. The predominant outcome in rural areas will thus be politicians making appeals and voters casting their ballots along tribal lines, whereas in urban areas we will find them mobilizing along language group lines. Since the vast majority of electoral constituencies in Zambia are rural, however, we should find the general tendency in one-party settings to be for tribal campaigning and tribal voting to predominate.

REVISITING THE ASSUMPTIONS OF THE MODEL

The model I have presented offers a simple account of identity and coalition-building choices that can account for why some ethnic cleavages become the axis of political competition rather than others. Yet, while powerful, the explanation rests on a number of important assumptions. How robust is the model to relaxing them? Are the assumptions reasonable for the Zambian case whose patterns of ethnic politics we seek to explain?

Single Member Plurality Rules

The first key assumption is that the winner of the political contest will be the single candidate who wins the plurality of the votes. Single member plurality rules (along with the inability of politicians to form multi-ethnic coalitions) are necessary for there to be a unique equilibrium cleavage outcome. If more than one candidate is selected in the constituency (i.e., if district magnitude is greater than one) then some voters will be able to allocate their support in terms of one dimension of identity to capture one of the available seats while other voters will be able to mobilize along the lines of a different identity dimension to capture one of the others. The identity choices of individual voters, and the cleavage outcome more generally, will cease to be predictable in advance. Note that the requirement that district magnitude be equal to one rules out proportional representation systems, which have multi-member districts.
The restriction to single member plurality rule is clearly appropriate for Zambia, since these are the electoral rules that have been in operation in that country since Independence. But it does limit the strict applicability of the model to some other cases.

*Resources Shared Equally Among the Winners*

The model assumes that, once an ethnic group has won, resources will be shared equally with all group members. This would seem to be a critical assumption since, without it, it would be possible for a subset of the winning ethnic group (for example, those who are not just members of the dominant language or tribe but those who come from the President’s province or the MP’s village) to keep most of the spoils of power for themselves. If this were the case, the columns and rows in the ethnic identity matrix could no longer be thought of as unified coalitions. Yet the results should still hold even if this were true. Even if a winning coalition member believes that she will receive less than a proportionate share of the benefits of power, this should not dissuade her from choosing as the model assumes *so long as she also believes that she will get zero if she is not in the winning coalition*. The likelihood that a fellow group member will give everyone in the winning coalition their fair share is less important than the likelihood that a non-group member would share the resources they control with outsiders. And while a voter may believe that some members of her group will benefit more than she will if her group wins, she will almost certainly still believe that she will benefit more than if another group does. As long as this is the case, it is not strictly speaking necessary that she assumes that she will receive an equal share of the spoils of victory. It is only necessary that she believes that she will receive a greater amount than she would if the victor came from a group in which she could not claim membership.

*Territoriality of the Potentially Salient Cleavages*

A third, unstated, assumption that is necessary for the model’s predictions about the effects of institutional change on identity choice is that the ethnic cleavages are based on
identities that have a strong territorial component. Territoriality insures that the map of ethnic divisions at the national level is different from the map of social cleavages in each individual constituency. To see why this is important, consider what would happen to the logic of the model if, instead of drawing upon territorially-linked identities like language group affiliation or tribal loyalty, politicians sought to build coalitions along gender lines. Gender identity creates problems for the model because the groups that it defines are evenly distributed and thus produce identical constituency-level and national-level demographics: men and women each constitute roughly 50 percent of the population in each constituency and 50 percent of the population in the country as a whole. Politicians seeking to invoke gender cleavages would therefore face identical coalition-building incentives at both the national and constituency levels. Since the model’s predictions rest on an expectation that political parties competing at the national level will face different incentives from individual candidates competing at the constituency level, the fact that gender identities produce identical incentives in each arena undermines the model’s predictive capacity. To be sure, gender identities constitute an extreme, even unique, identity type: most social identities are more like regional or tribal affiliation than like gender. But if we imagine a continuum of identity types, with gender at one end and regional identity at the other, the model will work best when the social cleavages that the political actors are choosing from are closer to the regional than to the gender end of the spectrum. The assumption of territoriality certainly holds in Zambia (and, for similar historical reasons, throughout Africa). But making the assumption clear is necessary to understand the contexts to which the model will, and will not, travel.

Perfect Information

The model also assumes that, in choosing which contestant to support, voters have perfect information about the sizes of each tribal and language group in the political arena. If, as I assume is the case, individuals make their identity choices based on the size of the coalition to
which their chosen identity gives them entry, knowing the sizes of the respective coalitions that
they might choose (as well as the sizes of the coalitions against which they will be competing) is
clearly important. But for practical purposes all that is necessary for such choices to be made is
that people have a rough idea of the relative sizes of their groups vis-à-vis the other major groups
in the political system.

The model also (implicitly) assumes that voters will also have perfect information about
the tribal background of each candidate and the language group affiliation of each party. It might
seem unlikely that voters would be unable to identify contestants’ tribal backgrounds – after all,
most candidates are residents of the constituency in which they are running. However, the
frequency of inter-tribal marriages in Zambia means that a significant number of candidates have
parents who belong to different tribes, and this makes the candidate’s own tribal affiliation
ambiguous. In addition, in urban constituencies, where populations tend to be extremely
heterogeneous and where the tendency in most social interactions is to identify people in terms of
their broader regional or linguistic backgrounds, it is possible that at least some voters will be
unable to put candidates into their correct tribal pigeonholes.

In multi-party elections, where the presumed language group orientations of political
parties replace candidates’ ethnic affiliations as the basis for predicting future patronage flows,
even greater opportunities emerge for the misinterpretation of candidates’ ethnic group loyalties.
As we saw in Chapter Four, parties’ language group affiliations are usually signaled by the
language group memberships of their presidents. Sometimes, however, a president’s language
group affiliation is ambiguous. Take the case of President Kaunda, whose parents came from
Nyanja-speaking Malawi but who grew up in Bemba-speaking Northern Province (and who,
himself, spoke Bemba far better than Nyanja). Should he be coded as a Bemba-speaker or a
Nyanja-speaker? At other times, a party’s language group orientation may be made unclear by
the party’s conscious effort to present itself in pan-ethnic terms.
To the extent that such efforts, or the other factors described above, cause some voters either to misconstrue the tribal backgrounds of candidates or to misinterpret the language group orientations of political parties, the model’s expectations about voting behavior will not be borne out precisely. But while voters’ uncertainty about candidates’ and parties’ ethnic affiliations may generate outcomes that deviate from the strict predictions of the model, the imperfect information that voters possess about these and other issues paradoxically serves at the same time to strengthen the model’s predictions in four ways.

First, it reinforces the importance of ethnic considerations in the voting calculus. In the absence of reliable information about either the policies that the competing candidates will pursue or the ability of each contestant to secure development resources for the constituency from the central government, voters will focus their attention on what little information that they do have that will allow them to predict the candidates’ future behavior: their ethnic affiliations. In fact, the less information that voters have about the contestants in the race, the more they will turn to ethnicity as a decision-making shorthand (Ferree 2003). Paraphrasing Downs’ observation about the role of ideology (1957: 98), we might say that information about candidates’ ethnic affiliations is useful to voters because it removes the necessity of relating the candidates’ or parties’ stand on every issue to their own. In the absence of other information that might allow them to forecast future behavior, it can be used as a predictor of the candidate’s or party’s stand on a variety of issues and behavior in a variety of situations.

For Downs, the tendency for voters to focus on ideology is a rational response to the high cost of being fully informed about politics. In developed countries, voters usually have a choice in this matter: should they choose to invest the time and energy to do so, it is possible for them to learn about the agendas, records and policy positions of the parties and candidates competing in the race. In developing countries like Zambia, however, communication infrastructures are often so poorly developed and campaign organizations are often so weak that most voters, even if they want to, have little ability to obtain reliable information about what separates one candidate’s or...
party’s position on the issues from another’s. In the 1973 campaign, for example, “many candidates remained unknown [because] there was an almost total lack of publicity concerning most aspects of the elections” (Chikulo, 1979: 210). In the 1983 election, “party-organized election campaign meetings [did not do] much in the way of introducing the candidates, as attendance at most meetings [was] poor, largely because of the short notice given and the bad timing” (Daily Mail, 21 October 1983). Even when information about candidates and parties is available to voters, that information is often imbalanced in its coverage (usually focused on one candidate or party at the expense of others) and obtainable only in some parts of the country. In 1968, for example, while UNIP spent considerable sums on campaign materials and was generally able to get its message out to most voters, ANC had few funds for transport or publicity, received little coverage from the mass media and was largely unable to contact voters outside of its Southern Province base (Molteno and Scott, 1974: 179). With nine days to go before election day, “not a single [ANC] poster has been displayed” (Times of Zambia, 10 December 1968). Access to campaign resources and to the media was similarly skewed in favor of the ruling party during the 1996 election (Bratton and Posner 1998). In such a context of incomplete, uneven or unreliable information about parties’ and candidates’ platforms and policy positions, voters’ emphasis on ethnicity is a rational response.

Yet even if Zambian voters did have perfect information about candidates’ and parties’ platforms, our discussion in Chapter Four suggests that such information probably would not have played a particularly central role in shaping many voters’ decisions. As we have seen, most Zambian voters make their choices based less on candidates’ or parties’ policy positions than on their perceptions of the likelihood that each candidate or party will deliver patronage to them. This, in turn, is a function of two factors: the ability of the candidate to secure development resources for their constituency from the central government, and the candidate’s willingness to channel those resources to them personally. In weighing these issues, problems of imperfect
information also serve to reinforce the salience of ethnic considerations. A school teacher in Chipata pointed out that, in weighing a candidate’s ability to “deliver the goods”

the problem is that people do not know his capability in that position...You find that most of the people are ignorant about this...Sometimes they will not know how capable that person is, so you find most of the people just support [the candidate] for the reason that he comes from that area...There isn’t much education or there is not much awareness [and this] makes people land into wrong choices (CPTA-T).

A former parliamentary candidate agreed that voters “didn’t know us. They didn’t know what our qualifications were or what we could do for them. All that was abridged.”11 To the extent that voters are unable to gauge the abilities of the various candidates to bargain successfully on their behalf to win development resources from the central government, they will be forced to make their choice based on other factors. In one-party elections, they will respond to the lack of reliable information about candidates’ abilities by focusing on the likelihood that each candidate, if he is able to secure resources from the center, will distribute those resources to them personally rather than to other residents of the constituency. This will cause them to focus their attention on the candidates’ respective local tribal identities. In multi-party contests, before thinking about whether each candidate will be likely to channel the resources that he is able to secure from the center to them personally, voters must first focus their attention on the likelihood that the party on whose ticket each of the candidates is standing will allocate development resources to their region of the country rather than to other regions. This will encourage them to emphasize the presumed language group loyalties of the respective political parties. In each case, the inability of voters to ascertain reliably the abilities of the candidates forces them to look to other issues, and this reinforces their tendency to behave in ways that accord with the expectations of the model.

11 Interview with Hosea Soko, 17 October 1995.
Imperfect information also encourages voters to behave in accordance with the expectations of the model in a third way by reducing the likelihood of strategic voting. If voters are in a position to gauge accurately the degree of support enjoyed by each candidate or party in the race, and if the candidate or party that is affiliated with their tribe or language group clearly has no chance of capturing power, then voters will have strong incentives to shift their support to second choice alternatives. However, if a lack of information makes voters unable to predict whether or not their preferred candidate or party has a chance to capture power, then they will be unlikely to vote in such a strategic manner. This effect is particularly important in multi-party elections, where a candidate’s ability to deliver patronage depends not only on his getting elected in the constituency but also on his party being able to capture power at the national level. Even if voters are able to assess each candidate’s prospects within the relatively narrow arena of their own constituency, they may not have enough information to judge the relative strength of the parties with which each of the candidates is affiliated in the country as a whole.\footnote{In one-party elections, where assessing the viability of a candidate from one’s own tribe requires only knowing the relative sizes of the various tribes that populate the constituency, most voters will be able to predict whether or not a vote for a candidate from their tribe will be wasted, providing that people vote exclusively for their fellow tribesmen.}

As one focus group respondent pointed out,

> the question of whether MMD or UNIP is strong [throughout the country] may be difficult to answer. This is because some of us are only in Mongu. We don’t go to other places. Therefore you can’t tell unless you listen on the radio, though sometimes [even then] you [still] can’t understand. MMD is the ruling party so it is known to all. But opposition parties may be known in the area where you stay and when you go to other places you find that party is not popular or not there”

(MON-MS-M).

In terms of being in a position to secure development resources through their MP from the state, Western Province residents would, in retrospect, have been better off had they not shifted their
support from the ruling MMD to NP, AZ and UNIP in the by-elections held after 1991 and then again in the 1996 general elections. Eastern Province voters would probably also have been better off had they supported MMD candidates rather than UNIP candidates in 1991. But the lack of information about whether the local enthusiasm felt for these parties was shared by people in the rest of the country (many voters assumed, incorrectly, that it was) prevented Western and Eastern Province voters from strategically backing the winning horse.

A final way in which the lack of reliable information available to Zambian voters reinforces the importance of ethnic identities in the electoral process is by enhancing the ability of politicians to mobilize electoral support by exploiting rumors of ethnic group favoritism. As we saw in Chapter Four, one of the principal mobilizational tools used by non-Bemba-speaking politicians since independence has been the charge that Bembas enjoy more than their fair share of government jobs and development resources. But, as we also saw, analyses of the ethnic backgrounds of state officeholders and the regions of the country that have benefited from government spending reveal that such allegations, despite their wide acceptance as fact, are only weakly supported by the evidence. The reason that perceptions of governmental favoritism can be so out of line with reality is not only because non-Bemba politicians have an interest in promoting the misperception. A critical contributing element is the fact that the voters that the politicians hope to sway by making such allegations lack the information with which to validate or disprove the politicians’ claims.

The incomplete information that prevents voters from double-checking claims about governmental favoritism also prevents them from disconfirming inflammatory allegations about slights made by rival group leaders or threats posed by other groups to their livelihood or security.\textsuperscript{13} Recall, for example, that one of the key pieces of ammunition used by Luapula Province politicians in the 1969 Kawambwa East by-election campaign (described in Chapter
Four) was the charge that outsider candidate John Mwanakatwe had referred to Luapulans as *batubula* (stupid fishermen). Had voters been able to confirm whether Mwanakatwe had ever, in fact, said this – and evidence suggests he probably did not (Bates, 1976: 229) – the allegation might have been much less effective in generating ethnic polarization. Similarly, charges made during the 1973 election in Livingstone by Tonga- and Lozi-speaking politicians that members of the rival groups were mobilizing against them became a self-fulfilling prophecy precisely because the charges could not be disconfirmed (Baylies and Szefelt, 1984: 37). In similar fashion, the claim by NP campaigners during the run-up to the 1993 Western Province by-elections that they possessed a letter written by President Chiluba to the Lozi Paramount Chief in which the President criticized the Lozi Royal Establishment for stirring up trouble between the Nkoyas and Lozis in Kaoma district would have been far less effective in turning Lozi-speaking voters against the MMD had it been possible to confirm that the letter was, in fact, a fabrication – which it ultimately turned out to be (*Daily Mail*, 10 November 1993). The success of all of these efforts depended on the fact that voters were unable to confirm the veracity of the allegations that were being made. Had reliable information about the events or patterns of behavior on which these inflammatory allegations were based been available, these charges either would never have been made or would have had far less impact than they ultimately did. In this way, as in the others described above, the imperfect information available to Zambian voters served to reinforce the model’s expectations about ethnic voting.

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13 For precisely this reason, improving the quality and quantity of such information is a key component of confidence building measures aimed at conflict resolution. For a general discussion of the role of imperfect information in generating ethnic insecurity and ethnic conflict, see Posen (1993).