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Does the African middle class defend democracy?

Evidence from Kenya

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Abstract: Barrington Moore's famous line 'no bourgeoisie, no democracy' is one of the most quoted claims in political science. But has the rise of the African middle class promoted democratic consolidation? This paper uses the case of Kenya to investigate the attitudes and behaviours of the middle class. Analysis of Afrobarometer survey data reveals that the middle class is more likely to support the opposition and hold pro-democratic attitudes. This suggests Moore's claim holds, at least for some African countries, and that contemporary demographic changes will improve the prospects for democratic consolidation. However, qualitative evidence from the Kenyan 2013 general election raises important questions about the resilience of these attitudes. The middle class may be more inclined to democratic attitudes than their less well-off counterparts, but class continues to intersect with ethnicity and its political salience is likely to wax and wane as a result.

Keywords: middle class, democracy, elections, democratization, Kenya, Africa

JEL classification: D70, D72

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1 Introduction

'No bourgeoisie, no democracy' is one of the best-known one-liners in social science (Moore 1966). It is also one of the most fashionable. A broad range of political scientists and sociologists have long argued that a strong and independent middle class is an important ingredient in the complex process of democratic consolidation (Lipset 1959; Kenny 2011; van de Walle 2012). In these accounts, the middle class acts as the driver of democracy by demanding greater representation and accountability in return for their tax dollars, forcing the ruling elite into a series of concessions that, over time, are extended to the lower classes. Africanists have often argued the same thing, albeit from a different angle. The problem in Africa, commentators have often claimed, is that there is too much ethnicity and not enough class (Ake 2000). As a result, vertical ties of communal identity, sustained through highly personalized patron-client relationships, have prevented the emergence of horizontal ties of solidarity (Lonsdale 1992a). In turn, the salience of ethnic and religious cleavages has empowered governments to play divide and rule politics, undermining the momentum of pro-democracy forces (Mueller 2008).

But mounting evidence of the growth of the middle class in Africa, recorded and disseminated by organizations such as the African Development Bank (2011), has inspired a fresh wave of speculation within both the media and the academy about the potential of wealthier and more educated citizens to push forward reform agendas. A recent *Reuters* headline ran 'Africa's middle class drives growth and democracy' (10 May 2013). For the most optimistic of commentators, the new middle class will become voracious economic and political consumers. Not only will they demand a broader range of higher-end products, stimulating economic growth, they will also demand a greater set of political choices, supporting political liberalization (*The Economist* 2011; *The Guardian* 2011). But there are good reasons to be sceptical. The growth of the middle class in Africa looks less impressive if one uses more demanding criteria than those people living on more than US\$2 a day. Even if the size of the middle class has increased, little hard evidence has been provided to show that its members are more resistant to divide and rule politics than the average citizen.

Although it is often described as a country riven with ethnic tension, Kenya represents an excellent case on which to test these hypotheses because it has an established and self-confident middle class (Spronk 2012; Burbidge 2014). From regional hubs in the former Central, Nyanza, Rift Valley and Coast provinces to the European-style coffee shops of Nairobi, wealthy Kenyans exhibit many of the characteristics that are said to make the middle class distinctive (Kenny 2011). They are well educated – often abroad or privately within the continent, they have access to and typically use new technologies, they are integrated into international networks through which they receive a broad range of news and information about the wider world, and they are politically active. They also comprise a growing proportion of the population. According to the African Development Bank, in 2011 the Kenyan middle class stood at 6.48 million (16.8 per cent) – the fourth largest in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This article uses Afrobarometer survey data to explore whether there is anything distinctive about the political attitudes of the Kenyan middle class. In order to move beyond debates about how to define the middle class, and to reflect the diversity of pathways through which scholars have argued that the middle class promote democracy, I measure class in four ways: education, employment status, poverty, and wealth (assets).¹ I then test whether these variables have a statistically

¹ The Afrobarometer did not record income, in part due to the notorious reliability issues relating to survey responses regarding self-reported income.

significant impact on how people vote and how supportive they are of democracy. While wealth and education play an important role in determining support for the ruling party, living in poverty and having a job do not. Poverty also has no impact on support for democracy, but all three other measures are found to be significant. In both cases, the direction of the effect is as Barrington Moore predicted: more ‘middle class’ Kenyans are more critical of the government and more supportive of democratic rule.

This paper makes three main contributions to the growing literature on the middle class in Africa. First, it suggests a multifaceted way of understanding and measuring class, moving away from the unhelpfully narrow focus on income that has hitherto tended to characterize debate. Second, it provides an empirical test of the impact of class on political attitudes and behaviours in a relevant case study. Finally, it finds evidence that, even in a country marked by high levels of ethnic politics and inter-communal violence, the middle class are more supportive of democracy and are more willing to be critical of the government. ‘No bourgeoisie, no democracy’ may be too strong, but if the evidence from Kenya is anything to go by, demographic change is likely to enhance the prospects of democratic consolidation.

2 Defining and measuring the middle class

The debate about the role of the African middle class has been dominated by disagreements about how big the middle class actually is. Calculated as those people earning more than US\$2 a day and less than US\$10, the size of the African middle class has increased to 310 million in the past 30 years (African Development Bank 2011). This measure defines the middle class in relative terms: those who are not poor and not vastly wealthy *given the average income in their country*. This makes sense if one is interested in understanding the way in which the relative positions of each group give them different vested interests relative to the status quo, whatever their absolute level of wealth. The very rich, for example, have more to lose than the middle class or the poor, even if they are themselves relatively poor by international standards.

But such thresholds also suffer from a number of important limitations. Most obviously, this categorization seems rather arbitrary. The figure of US\$2 a day was selected because it is double the US\$1 a day wage that the World Bank estimates individuals need to survive. But why should it be double, rather than treble, or quadruple? We know that individuals on US\$2 a day are not starving, but we also know that they are living on the edge of poverty and could easily find themselves in dire economic straits as a result of ill health or bad luck. On this basis, it is tempting to argue that the lower threshold should be increased – at least if we are interested in the relationship between class and democracy, because people on US\$2 a day can hardly be said to be sufficiently free from financial concerns to have no qualms about putting democracy ahead of material concerns. Some important aspects of what we commonly think of as a middle class identity – better education, a degree of financial security – may only come into play at higher income levels.

This problem is well illustrated by the work of Banerjee and Duflo (2008: 3), who find that the ‘average’ daily consumption per capita of a member of the middle class in Britain in the 1820s was US\$12.50 a day in today’s money – some six times the threshold that they themselves use to define the middle class in developing countries.² This discrepancy is problematic, because it suggests that the British middle class were wealthier when the UK was democratizing than their Kenyan counterparts, in terms of their accumulated assets. If so, the African middle class is likely to behave

² Based on a typical clerk with a wife and three children.

in a very different way, because an individual's wealth is an important indication of his or her economic security and the extent to which he or she benefits from the status quo. Given this, it makes sense to take into account both wealth and consumption when defining and conceptualizing the middle class.

There is a similar problem with the top of the threshold. Ravallion (2009) argues for an upper limit of US\$13 a day, which he justifies on the basis that this was the 2005 poverty line in the United States. This is problematic because it combines a relative lower threshold with a non-relative upper threshold (US\$13).³ If class is to be measured in relational terms, the upper limit must make sense relative to the income distribution in developing countries, not developed ones. What would make more sense would be to revise both the upper and lower limits in line with global standards – but then the lower threshold would have to be set higher, as discussed above. There are good reasons for trying to accommodate variations in the costs of living between developed and developing countries, but even if this was one's goal, it is not clear why the *upper* limit for the middle class in Africa should be capped at the poverty level (i.e. the *lowest* possible level at which the middle class could conceivably be said to begin) in the United States.

Banerjee and Duflo (2008) suggest a US\$10 threshold, apparently on the basis that this roughly maps onto Easterly's definition of the middle class as those people that can be found between the 20th and 80th percentile in terms of consumption distribution. But they then find out that in fact the US\$6 to US\$10 group is generally above the 90th percentile – which would make them significantly richer than the middle class as understood by Easterly (2001). Despite this, they conclude that 'it seems hard to imagine referring to people living on US\$6 or US\$10 a day as "rich" ... which suggests that it is reasonable to bring them into a more inclusive definition of the middle class. However, it is worth keeping in mind in what follows that they are a substantially richer group, near the top of the income distribution in their countries' (Banerjee and Duflo 2008: 3).

This is an unsatisfying conclusion. Class is either defined in relative terms or it is not. As with Ravallion, Banerjee and Duflo introduce criteria that have nothing to do with the distribution of income or opportunity within a given country – and a sense of what it feels appropriate to say – into what was initially billed as a relational measure. There may be advantages to going down this route, but if more objective cut-off points are to be used, they need to be justified with reference to the theoretical literature on the middle class, not to which labels sit comfortably with Western academics. It would seem to make sense, for example, for the spectrum of the African middle class to reflect the historical use of the term, which would suggest that both the lower and upper thresholds should be increased to reflect the US\$12.50 per day level of consumption historically enjoyed by the middle class in Britain.

These criteria matter, because they determine how large we think the middle class is, and thus whether or not it is a topic worthy of academic attention in a continent like Africa. For example, if – for the purposes of illustration only – we adopt a more historically comparable scale of, say, US\$6 to US\$16, the notion that the African middle class is on the rise becomes hard to sustain. On the basis of this scale, the percentage of people counted as middle class would drop from 48 per cent to 7 per cent in Ivory Coast, 48 per cent to 32 per cent in South Africa, and 28 per cent to just 3 per cent in Tanzania.

³ Ravallion uses two lower thresholds for different types of analysis. One is US\$2 a day, on the basis that this is the poverty line. One is US\$9 a day on the basis that this marks out the developing world's upper middle class in relative terms (2009: 6).

Table 1: Consumption levels by country, 2008

	Percent living with less than US\$ 1, 2, 4, 6 or 10 a day				
	US\$ 1	US\$ 2	US\$ 4	US\$ 6	US\$ 10
Ivory Coast	16	50	84	93	98
South Africa	8	30	57	68	78
Tanzania	34	71	92	97	99

Source: Author's modification of Banerjee and Duflo (2008).

2.1 Theorizing class and democracy

Another major problem with measuring the middle class solely in terms of consumption is that some of the classic analyses of class had as much to say about employment status and education as they did about income and expenditure. In a number of prominent theoretical texts, income is mentioned but is not central to the way that class is either measured or understood. Most notably, Barrington Moore's own argument did not rest on the size of the middle class or the income distribution in society, but on the ability of the middle class to act independently of the state, and thus to undermine its hegemonic ambitions. As van de Walle (2012) has put it, 'Barrington Moore's argument was thus less about the numerical size of the bourgeoisie in countries like Great Britain, than about the ability of urban capitalist interests to forge political coalitions that weakened the hold of the landed elite on national politics' (van de Walle 2012: 4). When this occurred, it became more feasible to transfer power away from the elite and towards the masses.

The sociology literature has pursued class through a different lens altogether, analysing class mobility and the relationship between an individual's class and their position on a left-right ideological spectrum. Prominent scholars such as Goldthorpe (1980) focussed on differentiating class positions in terms of the employment relations they entailed. The class schema that Goldthorpe identified grouped eleven classes into three main clusters: employers, the self-employed, and employees. He then further differentiated the category of employees into eleven further sub-groups. Goldthorpe argued that it was the position of individuals within his class schema, rather than simply their income, that determined what was in their interests, and thus shaped their political behaviour.

This is not to say that income is not important. There have also been lines of research in which wealth and income have taken centre stage. Perhaps the clearest expression of the income hypotheses comes in the work of Inglehart (1990), who has argued that once voters achieve a certain standard of living they become less concerned with their own material well-being and more willing to consider a range of 'post-materialist' values such as environmental concerns. According to Inglehart, the high personal security felt by post-materialist voters frees them to consider other needs, and as a result they are more likely to prioritize freedom of speech over the maintenance of political order.

Income played a similar role for members of the modernization school, who held that rising national income was important because it would give rise to a larger middle class, which would be more educated and hence value toleration and moderation more highly. But it is important to keep in mind that scholars such as Lipset (1959) were interested in income because they assumed that it would be closely associated with changes in education and hence social attitudes, rather than because they expected additional income to drive attitudinal or political change on its own.

Given the breadth of approaches that scholars have taken to the study of the relationship between class and democracy, it is unnecessarily reductionist – and quite possibly misleading – to focus on income (or education, or wealth, or employment status) alone.

2.2 Operationalizing class

Class is a particularly difficult concept to operationalize, both because the definition of class is so politicized and because of the depth of information that is needed to fully judge an individual's class position. Ideally, one would not only have detailed information about an individual's family history and job, but also knowledge of their education (private/public), their assets as well as their wages, and the sort of property that they live in. Little of this data is recorded in surveys of African public opinion, and so operationalizing class requires one to use proxies, some of which are clearly stronger than others. The combination of this lack of data and the variety of different theories that have been put forward to explain the relationship between class and democracy means that adopting a catholic approach to class is both theoretically justified and an operational necessity. Reflecting the different approaches identified in the previous section, I test the impact of four different dimensions of class:

- **Employment**, drawing on the insight of a number of sociologists that class is best captured by the type of work an individual does and their relationship to capital (Goldthorpe 1980; Marx and Engels 1999).
- **Education**, drawing on the argument of modernization theorists that education encourages more critical attitudes towards authoritarian rule (Lipset 1959).
- **Wealth**, drawing on the claim that individuals with higher levels of personal security are more likely to hold 'post-materialist' values and to be willing to defend the human rights and civil liberties of others (Inglehart 1990).
- **Lived poverty**, drawing both on the post-materialist literature and recent Africanist scholarship which has suggested that those in poverty are particularly susceptible to being co-opted into the patronage machine of authoritarian ruling parties (Cheeseman 2014).

The survey data used in this study was collected by the Afrobarometer, which is a public opinion survey run by a collective of universities and think tanks based in Africa and the United States. The survey covers a range of social, political, and economic issues, and interviews are conducted on a face-to-face basis in the language of the respondent's choosing. All samples are nationally representative and for larger countries such as Kenya the sample size is usually 2,100. Data for five rounds of the survey is currently available from www.afrobarometer.org, and the analysis in this paper is based on the round five data for Kenya, which was collected in November 2011.

Unfortunately, the Afrobarometer does not record information about an individual's assets or detailed information about their job. Recently, it has also cut questions related to income, as these have been found to be extremely unreliable. Instead, the Afrobarometer has adopted two batteries of questions to assess wealth and poverty. The first asks respondents whether they own a radio, a television, and a motor vehicle. Based on these questions I create a composite **wealth** scale than runs from 0 to 3 depending on how many of the items a respondent owns. Given the cost of televisions and motor vehicles, any respondent who reports owning any more than one item cannot be considered to be poor, considering the average wage in Kenya is estimated to be around US\$800 a year (World Bank 2012).

A second question assesses whether or not respondents live in poverty by asking: 'How often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without five essentials [in the past year]: food to eat/clean water/medicines or medical treatment/fuel/a cash income?' Following the practice of a number of the scholars who regularly use Afrobarometer data (Mattes 2008), I use these questions to create a **lived poverty index** than runs from 0 to 5 depending on how many of the items the

respondent reports going without ‘many times’, or ‘always’.

Although it may appear that these wealth and poverty scales are both measuring the same thing they are in fact quite different, and it is plausible that one may prove to be more important than the other. Moreover, if we left out either scale, we would be missing a considerable amount of variation. The wealth scale can tell us how well an individual is doing, but says nothing about how much those who do not own any of the three items are suffering. As well as looking at the difference between the wealthy and the rest, we also want to be able to look at the impact of being destitute compared to being comfortable. This is what we get from the lived poverty index. Less obviously, while the wealth scale only looks at some of the assets of the individual, the lived poverty index asks whether individuals or ‘anyone in your family’ has gone without. Given that many wage earners in Africa effectively live in poverty as a result of the high number of dependents they support, data on the position of the family affords us a more contextualized, and potentially more accurate, depiction of an individual’s social position. However, it is worth noting that the lived poverty scale is not without its limitations. Most notably, in some cases it may be shaped as much by government policies and the quality of local service provision as by the resources privately available to the individual.

Employment status is the closest thing that the Afrobarometer offers to the kind of detailed job information conventionally used in European surveys. But although the available data is limited, it is still possible to use the survey to get a sense of the extent to which respondents are engaged in the formal sector. Respondents are asked if they have a job that pays a cash income. If they do, they are prompted to say whether it is full time or part time. I convert the information generated by these questions into an **employment** dummy variable, where 1 = full time employment.

Education is more straightforward and is measured using a question that asks respondents: ‘What is the highest level of education you have completed?’ Most of the sons and daughters of the political and business elite go to university because their parents can afford to send them, and all attend secondary school. By contrast, the children of the poor typically attend primary school (free primary education was introduced in 2003), but are often unable to continue to secondary school. There are therefore two potential educational divisions that may serve to divide the classes: between primary education and all other categories, and between those with primary and secondary education and those with university experience. Given this, I initially test for the effects of **education** using a four point scale (no education, only primary, only secondary, more than secondary).

One problem common to all of these measures is that while they help to separate out those who have more of a stake in the system from those who are economically marginal, they do not mark out a class hierarchy. This is because there is no obvious way of distinguishing the middle class from the upper class – a social grouping that, in Africa, is often referred to simply as the ‘elite’. While this is not a problem when it comes to measuring the impact of wealth or education on democracy in general, it is important to keep in mind that the analysis of middle class Kenyans presented here could be said to more accurately reflect the attitudes and behaviours of the ‘non-poor’. As a result, we cannot tease out the specific interests of the middle class in, say, challenging the privilege of the elite, or of the elite in retaining the status quo in order to protect their interests against the advance of the middle class. To do this we would need better data on the income/consumption, wealth and employment status of African citizens than is currently available.

3 The Kenyan context

At first glance, Kenya appears to be a classic example of a case in which ethnicity should trump class. Ethnic politics has been particularly pronounced over the last 30 years, and political leaders have rarely sought to mobilize support on the basis of horizontal ties of economic solidarity (Lynch 2014). In part, this is due to the combination of relatively low levels of urbanization (around 30 per cent immediately after independence) and the absence of industrialization. The trade unions that emerged during the colonial era played a role in the nationalist movement, but were easily co-opted following the creation of a de facto one party state under the Kenya African National Union (KANU) (Nyangira 1987).

In the absence of strong class cleavages, political leaders have relied on highly personalized patronage networks to effect mass mobilization (Mueller 2008). This tendency was exacerbated following the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s, when Kenya's second president, Daniel arap Moi, employed a particularly oppressive form of divide and rule tactics in a desperate bid to retain power (Lynch 2011). Most notably, state-sponsored clashes between Moi's Kalenjin community and members of the Kikuyu community living in the former Rift Valley province resulted in thousands of deaths and a rapid escalation of mistrust and hostility (Branch and Cheeseman 2009).

KANU was ultimately defeated by the National Rainbow Coalition (NaRC) – led by Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, and Raila Odinga, a Luo – leading to Kenya's first democratic transfer of power (Cheeseman 2008b). But NaRC quickly lost sight of its 'rainbow' ambitions. Following a dispute over constitutional reform, Odinga left NaRC, leading to accusations that Kibaki had intentionally created a 'Kikuyu-centric' government (Cheeseman 2008a). Ethnic relations deteriorated further during the 2007 general elections, when Odinga's ability to knit together a multi-ethnic alliance under the banner of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), combined with the Kikuyu-centric nature of Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU), created the perception that the election was a case of '42 tribes against one' (Branch and Cheeseman 2009). As the political temperature rose, militias that had previously been deployed by the Moi government were reactivated, this time by leaders within the ODM (Mueller 2008).

Following widespread accusations of rigging, the controversial declaration that Kibaki had won the election triggered ethnic clashes across the country. In the first wave of attacks, ODM-aligned groups attacked communities assumed to have voted for Kibaki. Subsequently, PNU-backed militias carried out a series of 'revenge' attacks on communities assumed to have voted for Odinga. Peace was only restored after the formation of a power-sharing government (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010). Given this history, it is hardly surprising that commentators have tended to focus on the political significance of ethnicity and devoted little time to class.

Yet there is some evidence that the middle class has played a significant role in the uneven process of democratization. The leadership of civil society groups such as the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD), which led the opposition to the one-party state, featured lawyers, religious leaders, and businessmen. Civil society organizations, typically led by members of the middle class, also played a central role in efforts to keep constitutional reform on the political agenda throughout the 1990s (Cheeseman et al. 2014). However, the Kenyan middle class has rarely acted with one voice. From the 1930s onwards a sizeable section of the middle class has sided with authoritarian rule. In the 1950s and 1960s the colonial government successfully used land programmes and access to credit to establish a loyal middle class in an attempt to insulate the regime from the *Mau Mau* uprising and radical nationalism (Wasserman 1976). In the late colonial/early post-colonial years this group grew in numbers as President Jomo Kenyatta, who favoured political and economic stability and feared rapid change, repeated the trick (Branch and Cheeseman 2006).

Within this context, class interests at times overrode ethnic concerns, but the consequences for democracy were rarely positive. As Tamarkin (1979) has argued, the succession battle to replace Kenyatta upon his death in 1978 was marked by intense competition and ethnic politicking. But ‘once the succession was decided, the elite, and the bourgeoisie as a whole, had an overriding interest in stabilizing the regime upon which they thrived’ (Tamarkin 1979: 33; see also 1978). The debate that raged in the literature on the Kenyan post-colony was not about whether or not an elite had emerged that acted in concert to maintain the status quo, but whether it was best interpreted as being parasitic on the Kenyan government, or on international capital (Leys 1975; Kitching 1980; Swainson 1980).

However, over the last few years, researchers have begun to identify a more democratic form of class consciousness. Following the 2002 victory of NaRC, scholars such as Klopp (2002) and Orvis (2001) documented the emergence of cross-ethnic alliances to resist the abuse of power around issues such as land grabbing. There is some evidence that this has translated to the electoral arena. Writing after the 2007 polls, Bratton and Kimenyi (2008) found that although ethnicity was the dominant factor shaping party support, Kenyans living in urban areas and with higher levels of education were more likely to behave ‘civically’ than ‘ethnically’. Similarly, Ferree et al. (2014) have argued that scholars have tended to overestimate the extent to which ethnicity determined voting behaviour in Kenya.

Similar signs appeared in the run-up to the 2013 elections, when anger at President Kibaki for manipulating the 2007 polls, and criticism of the Kikuyu leader Uhuru Kenyatta and Kalenjin leader William Ruto for their part in the electoral violence, appeared to cut across ethnic lines. The news that the International Criminal Court (ICC) would prosecute Kenyatta and Ruto for crimes against humanity subsequently transformed the Kenyan political landscape. In a bid to protect themselves against the ICC proceedings, the former rivals formed an ‘anti-reform alliance’ under the protection of President Kibaki (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010). This move led to speculation that some Kenyans, and in particular members of the middle class, would vote across ethnic lines in order to reject the ‘alliance of the accused’ (Burbidge 2014).

The presence of both ethnic and class cleavages makes Kenya an excellent case study in which to test the relationship between class and popular attitudes towards democracy.

4 The impact of class

I assess the impact of the four different measures of class outlined above using two different dependent variables. First, I investigate the relationship between class and partisan identity in order to see whether members of the middle class did turn their back on President Kibaki as many commentators predicted. Respondents are asked whether they feel close to any party and, if so, which party they feel closest to. To avoid merging individuals who say that they do not feel close to any party with strong partisans, I only include respondents who report being close to a party. In order to simplify the analysis, I collapse the responses given by these individuals into a binary based on whether they report feeling close to the party of the president – the PNU – or not. I focus on the PNU rather than the ruling coalition, as when the survey was conducted in 2011 it was not clear exactly what coalitions would contest the 2013 elections and so there is some ambiguity about how support for coalitions should be calculated and interpreted. As the dependent variable only permits two possible outcomes, I employ a probit regression model.

I also assess whether being middle class makes individuals more democratic. Respondents are asked which of three statements is closest to their own opinion: that democracy is ‘preferable to any other form of government’, that ‘in some circumstances a non-democratic government can be

preferable’, and that ‘it doesn’t matter’. I treat this as a scale of commitment to democracy and as a result employ an ordered probit regression as there are three possible outcomes.

In addition to the measures of class outlined above, I include a range of standard controls, including whether individuals are living in an urban or rural setting, their age, gender, and ethnicity. I also control for media access, because it is plausible that those who consume more media – which is generally supportive of the holding of elections in Kenya – will be more supportive of democracy. Media consumption is measured using a scale that runs from 0 to 4 depending on how many different types of media (radio, television, newspapers, Internet) individuals say that they access regularly.

4.1 Party support

Analysis of the Afrobarometer survey data suggests that while ethnicity remains dominant, class also plays a significant role in determining partisan identity. As expected, support for the party of the president breaks down along ethnic lines and ethnicity is consistently more substantively important than even the most influential specification of class. No matter what model is employed, Kikuyus were significantly more likely to support President Kibaki, while the Luo, Luhya, Kamba and Kalenjin were all significantly more likely to support the opposition. This fits both with voting patterns in the 2007 elections and the rough breakdown of support in the 2013 elections, suggesting that the survey is credible. Somalis are the only group that appears to be more divided in its voting patterns – being a Somali is only a weak predictor of support for the PNU, and ceases to be significant at all when the wealth index and education are used in models 3 and 4, respectively. Gender and age prove to be insignificant.

The impact of class on support for the party of the president is complex, but what appears to matter is wealth and education. Employment status is not significant (model 2), which is puzzling because one would expect that those with a formal sector job might look more favourably on the ruling party. Lived poverty is also not significant. In the case of these latter two variables, it may be that the salience of ethnicity in Kenya is so high that it crowds out other factors.

Table 2: Class and support for the Party of National Unity in Kenya

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Employment (FT)	-0.0456			
Lived Poverty		0.0005		
Wealth			-0.1616*	
Education				-0.1173**
Age	-0.0015	-0.0016	-0.0009	-0.0033
Female	0.0606	0.0637	0.0529	0.0503
Urban	-0.0227	-0.2509	-0.0037	-0.0129
Media	0.1170**	0.1138*	0.1649**	0.1646**
Christian	0.3954	0.3874	0.4404	0.4611
Muslim	-0.0576	-0.0667	-0.0100	-0.0166
Kikuyu	1.2981***	1.2871***	1.3323***	1.3172***
Luo	-1.8438***	-1.8433***	-1.8411***	-1.8725***
Luhya	-0.7167***	-0.7168***	-0.7288***	-0.7360***
Kamba	-0.5858***	-0.5811***	-0.5763***	-0.5544***
Kalenjin	-0.6935***	-0.6941***	-0.6979***	0.7189***
Somali	0.5290*	0.5313*	0.4885	0.5070
Pseudo R2	0.2750	0.2747	0.2793	0.2800

Note: *<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001

Source: Afrobarometer (2011).

This makes the findings for wealth all the more surprising. In contrast to lived poverty, the wealth scale is a significant predictor of partisan support. This suggests that that what matters is not so

much the difference between living in poverty and not, but the difference between being wealthy and not. In other words, whether someone earns US\$1 or US\$3 a day is less relevant than whether they earn US\$3 or US\$10, so far as party support is concerned. Those Kenyans who own a higher number of valuable items are more likely to reject the government than other citizens.

This is a particularly interesting finding, because we might normally expect wealthy citizens to favour the status quo – especially in a context in which the ruling party was generally acknowledged to have performed well on the economy and to be committed to preserving the economic status quo,⁴ while Odinga’s ODM openly discussed the redistribution of land and wealth. That wealthier Kenyans are more likely to support the opposition is consistent with the notion that the middle class was less willing to support the PNU following its mismanagement of the 2007 elections. This interpretation is also supported by the findings regarding the relationship between class and support for democracy, presented below.

Education is the measure of class that is most robustly related to party support. In line with the findings on wealth, more educated Kenyans were more likely to support the opposition. It is worth noting that this result holds up while controlling for both media consumption and urban living. This demonstrates that the effects of education cannot simply be reduced to the fact that more educated citizens receive more information about politics because they live in urban areas, which in turn lends support to the argument that the skills and knowledge the middle class gain through higher levels of education facilitate a more critical attitude towards the party of the president.

4.2 Support for democracy

In 2011, Kenya was neither fully democratic nor clearly authoritarian. Since the reintroduction of elections in 1992, opposition parties have been able to compete openly and have regularly performed well in elections (Cheeseman 2008a). But when they have threatened to win, incumbent presidents have deployed a combination of electoral violence (in 1992 and 1997) and blatant electoral manipulation (in 1992 and 2007) to maintain power (Branch and Cheeseman 2009; Mueller 2008). The passage of a new constitution in 2010 went a long way to dealing with some of these problems, but had yet to be fully implemented when the survey was conducted in 2011. At the same time, continued evidence of corruption, police brutality, media intimidation and abuse of office made it clear that the struggle for democracy was not yet over (Cheeseman et al. 2014).

The Afrobarometer data reveals that not only does class play a significant role in determining support for democracy in Kenya, in this respect it is considerably more important than ethnicity. Apart from among Somali voters, who are significantly more likely to favour democratic rule, ethnicity has little effect on respondents’ political beliefs. It is not clear why Somalis are particularly pro-democracy, but it may be that having been one of the most oppressed and marginalized communities in Kenya since independence they recognize that their interests will only be protected in a consolidated democracy that respects civil liberties and political rights.

Of the four measures used here, three – wealth, education and employment status – are statistically significant. That lived poverty has no impact provides further evidence that the effects of class come at the higher end of the income spectrum, calling into question the suitability of a US\$2 a day lower threshold for defining the middle class. That both wealth (model 3) and education (model 1) are both significant is not surprising, as they tend to go hand in hand: even secondary education is out of reach for most of those living on US\$2-3 a day. The significance of wealth is

⁴ Kenya’s economy typically grew at 5-7 per cent under Kibaki. Opinion polls suggest that in the run-up to the 2007 elections the president had positive approval ratings even among rival ethnic groups. See Cheeseman (2008a).

particularly noteworthy though, because it suggests that, on the whole, better off Kenyans are not set on defending the status quo and pulling the ladder up after them. Rather, they are in favour of strengthening the quality of democracy, and hence the ability of the masses to elect the leaders of their choice. The Afrobarometer data thus provides tentative evidence that the Kenyan middle class has the potential to act as a defender of democracy.

Table 3: Impact of class on support for democracy

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Employment (full)	0.2035**			
Lived poverty		-0.0498		
Wealth			0.0947*	
Education				0.1183*
Age	0.0068***	0.0080**	0.0070**	0.0089**
Female	-0.1445*	-0.1539*	-0.1480*	-0.1407*
Urban	-0.0402	-0.0287	-0.0370	-0.0291
Media	0.0714*	0.0736*	0.0497	0.0466
Christian	0.3218	0.7357	0.3067	0.2667
Muslim	-0.0257	0.3158	-0.0234	-0.0739
Kikuyu	-0.0005	-0.0186	0.0034	0.0330
Luo	0.1176	0.1409	0.1418	0.1442
Luhya	0.1119	0.1129	0.1231	0.1386
Kamba	-0.1850	-0.1977	-0.2112	-0.2227*
Kalenjin	0.1869	0.1834	0.1985	0.2126
Somali	0.4248*	0.4057*	0.4153*	0.4387*
Pseudo R2	0.0275	0.0197	0.0201	0.0209

Note: *<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001

Source: Afrobarometer (2011).

The significance of education also appears to confirm the idea that secondary and university education encourage democratic attitudes and socialize individuals into a more inclusive attitude towards decision-making, enabling them to be more critical of their leaders. This interpretation is backed up by the responses of more educated Kenyans to a range of other questions. For example, the proportion of highly educated Kenyans who strongly agree that the president should be free to act without constraints is roughly half (6.4 per cent) the number of uneducated Kenyans who hold the same view (11.7 per cent).⁵ Similarly, highly educated Kenyans are considerably less likely to agree that the government should have a right to ban organizations it dislikes than uneducated Kenyans (23.2 per cent to 31.1 per cent),⁶ and are more likely to support the principle of multiparty politics. This latter point is particularly important: while more than two-thirds of highly educated Kenyans welcome multi-partyism (68 per cent), a majority of uneducated Kenyans see political parties as divisive (51 per cent).⁷ All of these differences are statistically significant, which suggests that middle

⁵ Highly educated = 3, uneducated = 0 on the education scale (0-3). Respondents were given two statements: 'A: Since the President was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong' and 'B: The President must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong'. Respondents were asked whether they strongly agreed with B, agreed with B, agreed with neither, agreed with A or strongly agreed with A. Here I report the proportion of people who strongly agreed with A. The p value for the correlation is 0.0000.

⁶ Respondents were given two statements: 'A: The government should be able to ban any organization that goes against its policies' and 'B: We should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it'. The options for respondents were the same as those detailed in footnote 3. Here I report the proportion of people who strongly agreed with A. The p value for the correlation is 0.0017.

⁷ Respondents were given two statements: 'A: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Kenya.' and 'B: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Kenyans have real choices in who governs them'. The options for respondents were the same as detailed in footnote 3. Here I report the proportion of highly educated people who agreed with option B and the proportion of uneducated Kenyans who agreed with option A. The p value for the correlation is 0.0000.

class support for democracy is not simply a narrow preference in favour of the maintenance of elections, but reflects a wider concern about maintaining a plural and open political landscape.

Media access appears to be highly correlated with wealth and education, but it is the two measures of class that predict democratic attitudes. While media is significant using the employment and lived poverty measures (model 1 and 2), it is not significant when controlling for wealth and education (models 3 and 4). This suggests that in models 1 and 2 the 'media' variable is effectively acting as a proxy for these other measures of class, and does not have an independent effect of its own. The same can be said of 'urban' location, which predicts support for democracy when none of the measures of class are included, but loses significance when any of them is introduced. Those who are wealthy and more educated do overwhelmingly tend to live in urban areas, but the mechanism linking class and democratic attitudes is primarily driven by the individual characteristics of those who are employed, well educated, and wealthy, rather than simply by the fact of living in a town or city. This is an important finding, because it suggests that the effects of being 'middle class' hold beyond the capital city.

Of course, it is always important to be careful when interpreting survey data. It is possible that the wealthy and more educated are simply more aware that supporting democracy is the 'right answer', and are therefore more likely to give this response when asked questions by interviewers they do not know. Moreover, this is a viable alternative explanation of why wealth and education are statistically significant but lived poverty is not. It is not possible to fully reject this counter-hypothesis using survey data alone, because the Afrobarometer does not include embedded experiments or other techniques that would enable us to ascertain respondents' preferences in a less overt way.

However, there is considerable evidence within the survey that the statements of middle class Kenyans reflect their true beliefs. First, the response of middle class respondents to questions about democracy are consistent with their responses to questions about a broader range of rights and liberties, where the 'right' answer is not always as apparent. Second, it is important to keep in mind that wealthier and more educated people consume more, and more diverse media, but it is their wealth and education, rather than their media consumption, that drives their greater commitment to democracy. Given this, it does not make sense to interpret the support of the middle class for democracy as being driven by their greater exposure to 'pro-democracy' media messages.

Of the remaining variables, age and gender are both statistically significant. The finding that older Kenyans are more likely to support democracy contradicts a frequent assumption in the literature that older citizens are more conservative and that younger citizens are likely to be the motor of change. The most likely explanation of this finding is that older Kenyans can remember the dark days of the one-party state and its economic failings and political constraints. As a result, they have a more positive evaluation of the country's multiparty system, and are more willing to be patient while the country makes slow progress towards democratic consolidation. For their part, the young, especially those who remember little of the one-party era (which is likely to be the case for Kenyans aged between 18 and 25), lack an authoritarian yardstick against which to measure multiparty Kenya and may also be more frustrated at the slow trickle down of jobs and economic opportunities under the Kibaki administration.

Women are also less likely to support democracy. It is hard to interpret this finding, but it is often suggested that women are more likely to think about their responsibilities to their children and families, which makes them more risk averse than men (Croson and Gneezy 2009). In Kenya, where political competition has often been accompanied by ethnic violence, this would likely be sufficient to make female respondents less keen about the country's democratic experiment.

5 Conclusion: the resilience of middle class attitudes

Despite a history of pronounced ethnic politics punctuated with disputed elections and violent clashes (Branch and Cheeseman 2009), class matters to Kenyan politics. Middle class Kenyans are more likely to support democracy. By contrast, with the exception of the Somali community, ethnicity has little effect. That this finding holds up even when controlling for media consumption and urban location suggests that class is not acting as a proxy for geographical location or access to information. Moreover, the greater democratic inclinations of the middle class appear to translate into everyday politics. In 2011, members of the middle classes were more likely to support opposition parties, despite the fact that they had more to lose from a change to the status quo. Although ethnicity remained the dominant determinant of party support, class was also significant, with middle class Kenyans more likely to reject the ruling party. That they appear to do so because they are more concerned about defending Kenya's democratic gains is significant, because it means that the findings from the two dependent variables considered here corroborate each other.

But it is important to keep in mind that some of the dimensions of class that scholars have argued play a key role in the promotion of democratic consolidation were not found to be significant. This demonstrates how important it is to break down the concept of 'class' into its constituent parts. Wealth and education proved to be significant predictors of support for the president's party. Employment status, wealth and education were all significant predictors of support for democracy. Lived poverty was not relevant for either dependent variable. This highlights the central role that education plays in creating more critical citizens who are more deeply infused with democratic spirit. It also suggests that the 'class effect' does not kick in at lower income levels, but rather takes hold when individuals have a degree of financial breathing space. The lesson for how we define the middle class appears to be that the adoption of a US\$2 a day lower threshold to define the middle class may be setting the bar too low.

The question of whether these findings are reliable or reflect the greater awareness of middle class citizens that democratic attitudes are more 'acceptable' has already been discussed. I have argued that the fact that middle class voters hold similar attitudes on a number of different issues that correlate with being 'more democratic', but for which the 'correct' answer is less obvious, is evidence that their responses reflect real, rather than concocted, beliefs. But how resilient these beliefs are is a different question. Class is a significant factor in Kenyan politics, but it continues to intersect with other identities. As Eifert et al. have shown (2010), the salience of ethnicity and other forms of identity are not constant over time. One of the factors that appears to result in a spike in 'ethnic' identification – and, by extension, reduces the salience of other types of social bonds such as class ties – is the holding of a national election.

Qualitative research on the Kenyan elections of 2013 provides some support for the argument of Eifert and colleagues. In the 2013 polls, Kenyans faced a difficult choice that brought ethnicity and class into tension like never before. Kenyatta and Ruto formalised their political union and contested the elections as the Jubilee Alliance, with Kenyatta the presidential candidate. In order to overcome the scepticism of their own communities, hostility of domestic human rights organizations, and criticism of the international community, the Jubilee Alliance set out to create a siege mentality within the Kikuyu and Kalenjin ethnic groups (Lynch 2014). This involved a deliberate strategy of demonizing the ICC, foreign donors, and Raila Odinga by depicting them as co-conspirators in an international plot to undermine Kenyan sovereignty (Cheeseman et al. 2014).

This approach, which borrowed heavily from the strategy employed by Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe, was designed to increase the pressure on critics of the UhuRuto alliance (as it quickly became known). Pro-prosecution elements of civil society were branded unpatriotic 'sell-outs' by radical Jubilee activists. Worse was in store for critical Kikuyu and Kalenjin commentators,

who were labelled ethnic traitors, willing to betray their own communities to the enemy (Lynch 2014). As a result, the cost of speaking out against the Jubilee Alliance increased throughout the campaign. Many members of the middle class who found the idea of voting for Kenyatta distasteful became concerned that if they displayed overt opposition to the Jubilee Alliance they would be punished should UhuRuto come to power.⁸

As polling day neared, members of the Kikuyu middle class came under increasing pressure to vote for Kenyatta, no matter what their public position. Burbidge's research, which is based on diary entries from a number of young Kikuyu throughout the campaign, describes 'the key moments at which they felt the need to switch from supporting third-placed presidential hopefuls to supporting one of the two favourites' (Burbidge 2014: 1). Early on in the campaign Burbidge quotes one of diary-writers as saying, 'If I vote for PK [Peter Kenneth], I will effectively express my displeasure at the current system. I will be voting for a proven performer. Everyone knows that [Peter Kenneth's] Gatanga constituency is one of the most developed. So it's not because PK has a distinct Kikuyu accent, notwithstanding his ambiguous name' (Burbidge 2014: 8). Yet as the campaign wore on, the tension over whether to be loyal to one's ethnic group or the public good began to eat away at his informant's confidence, leading to periods of intense soul searching: 'I hate being in the middle class, how I wish I was not in the middle class' (Burbidge 2014: 15).

To what extent this trend can be generalized is hard to judge, in part because the outcome remains contested. The official election results gave Kenyatta an unexpected first round victory with 50.07 per cent of the vote, and detailed remarkably high levels of ethnic bloc voting. But both opposition leaders and academic commentators have called into question these figures, which are out of line with earlier opinion polls. Although no evidence has yet been put forward that would stand up in a court of law, an exit poll conducted by Ferree et al. (2014) found lower levels of ethnic voting and higher levels of support for minor candidates. However, while their analysis hints that class may have played a more significant role in the 2013 election than the official results would suggest, Ferree et al. do not explicitly test for the impact of being middle class on support for the Jubilee Alliance. Thus, while it seems clear that class plays a significant role in shaping Kenyan political attitudes, more research needs to be done into how class identity, like ethnic identity, may wax and wane over time.

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⁸ Personal observation of the author. This topic came up in numerous conversations during fieldwork ahead of the election in the last six months of 2012.

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