

# ETHNICALLY BIASED? EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM KENYA

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## Abstract

Ethnicity has been shown to shape political, social, and economic behavior in Africa, but the underlying mechanisms remain contested. We utilize lab experiments to isolate one mechanism—an individual's bias in favor of coethnics and against non-coethnics—that has been central in both theory and in the conventional wisdom about the impact of ethnicity. We employ an unusually rich research design involving a large sample of 1,300 participants from Nairobi, Kenya; the collection of multiple rounds of experimental data with varying proximity to national elections; within-lab priming conditions; both standard and novel experimental measures of coethnic bias; and an implicit association test (IAT). We find very little evidence of an ethnic bias in the behavioral games, which runs against the common presumption of extensive coethnic bias among ordinary Africans and suggests that mechanisms other than a coethnic bias in preferences must account for the associations we see in the region between ethnicity and political, social and economic outcomes. (JEL: D71, O15)

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