

## Parties or Portfolio? The Economic Consequences of Africa's Big Cabinets

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**Abstract:** Does cabinet size impact economic policy in Africa? The average number of ministers has increased steadily for four decades, yet we know little about the economic effects of new portfolios, despite popular complaints about costly cabinets. Comparative studies generate conflicting expectations, either blaming coalition governments for patronage or crediting them with economic restraint. Using data on 45 Sub-Saharan African countries between 1971 and 2006 our empirical analysis links parties and portfolios to budgetary policy performance. We show that cabinets with more ministries are associated with budget surpluses, but they are also slightly more likely to engage in patronage spending. Next, we find that cabinets governing through multiparty coalitions have no consistent impact on budget surpluses. However they are strongly associated with less extractive government and lower rates patronage spending compared to single party cabinets. These results hold after controlling for the type of colonial legacy, economic conditions, population size, constraints on executives, level of democracy, oil income, type of party system, and ethnic and religious fractionalization. We conclude that parties and portfolios are both important but they have different effects: adding portfolios to the cabinet may improve economic outcomes by enhancing specialization, but governance through multiparty cabinets generates incentives to both limit extraction and restrain patronage spending.

DOES CABINET SIZE IN AFRICA ADVERSELY IMPACT ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE? SEVERAL STUDIES note that Africa has the largest cabinets in the world (Mwenda 2011; van de Walle 2001), and a large literature links institutional incentives for good policy choices to economic outcomes (Alence 2004; Ndulu *et al.* 2008; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). Yet few studies consider the economic consequences of cabinets even though institutional research identifies them as a critical source of variation among executives. Africans are often quite willing to create new ministries if they appear necessary to address complex problems. Nigeria created a Niger Delta portfolio in 2008 to coordinate the severe developmental challenges in its oil southern producing region, which had inspired militant rebellions. The idea of a new ministry devoted entirely to development of the northern region quickly garnered public support a few years later when a different (and even more militant rebellion) confronted the northeast (Adibe 2014). At the same time, citizens across the continent often complain about the financial costs of ministries. Uganda's political parties called the cabinet formed in 2006 'too big' and a 'waste of taxpayers' money' (Namutebi *et al.* 2006). Watchdog groups echoed these complaints in 2011 when the number of ministers grew, along with their salaries (Kaiza 2011). In Kenya, when competing political parties increased the number of cabinet seats in 2008, former Member of Parliament and Nobel Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai complained that the government was 'very expensive' (Ogotu and Machuka 2008). Civil society groups and editorials in the press widely condemned the coalition for its costs (Bosire 2008). Which one of these economic narratives is more representative of the economic effects of African cabinets?

Using time-series cross-sectional data on 45 Sub-Saharan African countries between 1971 and 2006, we test the impact of two different measures of cabinet size on budgetary policy performance. When measuring cabinet size in terms of the number of ministries, statistical tests

show that big cabinets are strongly associated with federal budget surpluses, and weakly correlated with increases in patronage spending. When considering cabinet size in terms of single or multiple parties, tests show that coalition governments have no systematic impact on budget surpluses, but they consistently extract less revenue and spend less on patronage. This is important since patronage is deeply entrenched in Africa's neo-patrimonial states with strong executives (van de Walle 2003), and the idea of political appointments as patronage is very much within the mainstream of the comparative literature in Africa and beyond (Kopecký 2011; Arriola 2009). We attribute these results to the differing effects of parties and portfolios: multi-party cabinets in Africa enhance economic policy accountability by promoting horizontal monitoring across the government. Under these conditions, powerful executives have less latitude to dispense patronage and individual ministers have less leverage to demand it. Our empirical findings offer support for institutional research that highlights the benefits of coalition governments (Reynolds 2011; Lijphart 2012). We attribute the effects of portfolios to their role in policy specialization. The results do not mean that citizen concerns about inflated ministerial salaries are misplaced, but they do suggest that egregious examples such as Kenya's and Uganda's are not representative of the broader economic effects of coalition governments.

The dearth of research on African cabinets is surprising for several reasons. Cabinets are an important means of gauging how well the executive branch represents political and social diversity. Proponents of power sharing, 'consociationalism,' and 'consensus government' maintain that enhancing political representation does not adversely affect economic outcomes (Norris 2008; Lijphart 2012). This is questioned by research on post-conflict policy making (Rothschild and Roeder 2005; Jarstad and Sisk 2008), by evidence from wealthy countries about the effects of multi-party coalition governments (Alesina *et al.* 1997; Balassone and Giordano 2001), and by costly power sharing agreements in cases such as Kenya and Zimbabwe

(Cheeseman and Tendi 2010). Studying the consequences of cabinet size in Africa is important because it addresses these conflicting empirical findings. Moreover, as we detail below, the average number ministries and the frequency of multiparty coalitions have increased steadily in Africa, yet it is not clear if these trends have affected economic performance.

We first review literature that identifies cabinet size as a source of critical variation among executives. Though we are interested in the consequences of cabinet size, we review existing research which attributes the growth of Africa's cabinets to population growth, democratization, post-conflict power-sharing agreements, and cultural norms of inclusion. Second, we point to conflicting evidence – mostly from wealthy countries – about the economic consequences of cabinets. Several features of African politics suggest that large cabinets will be linked to inferior economic performance, including the high transaction costs of bargaining by undisciplined parties, weak collective cabinet responsibility, and strong presidential patronage systems. Third, we adopt two different measures of cabinet size and formulate predictions about how they should theoretically affect economic performance. A 'portfolio' hypothesis states that additional ministers will improve economic outcomes through increased policy specialization. A 'parties' hypothesis states that multi-party coalition governments improve economic performance through intra-governmental monitoring. Fourth, empirical tests of these hypotheses under different statistical specifications show that cabinets with more ministries are more likely to run federal budget surpluses, but they also tend to spend more on patronage. Multiparty coalition governments tell a different story: they consistently extract less revenue from citizens *and* they spend less money on patronage. These results remain significant even after controlling for a country's wealth, colonial history, population size, constraints on the executive, level of democracy, oil wealth, type of party system, and ethnic and religious fractionalization. Based on these results, we suggest that the numbers of parties and portfolios both influence the economic

consequences of African cabinets. But since multiparty coalitions have to contend with competing interests to make policy, this increase opportunities and incentives for economic policy accountability. The conclusion points out that the results have important implications for democratization because enhancing horizontal accountability through coalition governments might chip away at the discretionary authority of dominant executives.

## **EXECUTIVE CABINETS AND AFRICAN POLITICS**

In this section we document the dramatic increase in the number of ministers in African cabinets over the last four decades, and then draw upon the comparative literature to explain why parties are essential part of understanding cabinets. Next, even though this study is focused on the *effects* of Africa's growing cabinet size, we briefly review the literature examining its causes including population growth, institutional reforms related to democratization, cultural norms of inclusion, and post-conflict power-sharing agreements. All of these factors underscore the need to understand the consequences of Africa's large cabinets.

In a 1989 essay, written just before Africa's era of dramatic democratization, a leading Nigerian political scientist noted 'a phenomenal increase in the size of the modern cabinet' (Osaghae 1989: 129). Africa's cabinets have in fact grown from an average of 16.5 ministries in 1971 to nearly 26.2 in 2006. Figure 1, which includes 1,561 observations from the Arthur Banks data set, illustrates this steady growth. Uganda provides one of many examples of this trend: when Yoweri Museveni took power in 1986 there were 33 ministers in his cabinet. Two decades later this number had grown to 69 ministers as he adapted to pressures to include a broader range of regional interests and ethnic groups (Tripp 2010: 49). 'The cabinet is not only large but virtually useless,' said one Ugandan scholar. 'The intention of the cabinet is to appease the head of state. It is based on the idea that when you have a huge cabinet, it is incapable of making serious decisions' (Kiapi 2010). The chair of Uganda's parliamentary budget committee called

the cabinet ‘too big for the economy’ (Osike and Olupot 2002), and shrinking the cabinet has been a top priority for the opposition. ‘The size of this cabinet is too big. We think it should be smaller,’ said the head of the leading opposition party. ‘They have come to waste taxpayers’ money yet we do not have the money’ (Namutebi *et al.* 2006).

**[Figure 1 goes about here]**

One reason why scholars analyze the number of parties alongside the number of ministers is because the two are closely related. Comparative research finds that the number of ministries tends to increase with the number of parties, at least when parties seek policy change (Laver and Schofield 1998). According to Lijphart’s seminal study, the number of parties and ministries in a cabinet is the most important indicator of how representative the government is of society, and a central distinction between his two contrasting models of democracy, consensus and majoritarianism, which fundamentally differ in terms of the breadth of representative participation in the executive branch (Lijphart 2012). In Africa, cabinets are especially important because the composition of ministries is a common gauge of the inclusiveness of government. For example, in Nigeria, the representative quality of the ministries is a ‘cardinal principle’ of government: ‘For practical politics and peaceful coexistence of diverse elements, the composition of the cabinet should reflect the diversities in a polity’ (Osaghae 1989: 131). Posner’s study of Zambia claims that the ethnic background of cabinet ministers informs voter choice and politicians’ electoral strategies, reflecting an ethic of inclusion (Posner 2005). Some cross-national research goes so far as to use cabinet size as a proxy variable for inclusiveness, since cabinet size correlates closely with level of ethnic diversity (Arriola 2009). Cabinet composition is also often used to estimate the political salience of ethnic groups or their relative access to power (Posner 2004; Wimmer *et al.* 2009).

At least four demonstrable factors have driven the growth of Africa's cabinets. First, a demographic connection follows from a strong correlation between cabinet size and population size. Africa's cabinets have apparently grown in part because the continent has experienced rapid population growth (Arriola 2009). This makes sense if one considers the division of labor in government expanding alongside increasing social complexity. Second, democratization in the 1990s influenced cabinet size because the return of multi-party politics ushered in a new wave of coalition governments (Oyugi 2006). This is empirically reflected by the growth of multiparty coalition governments during this period: Out of the 74 percent of governments for which we have data, in 1971 less than 3 percent were coalition governments and less than a quarter were civilian. By 2006, 55 percent of the governments across 44 African countries governed through multiparty coalitions, and 98 percent of all cases had civilian rulers.

Conflict resolution strategies are a third factor contributing to the size of African cabinets. The African Union formally recommends proportional representation for conflict mitigation (Murray 2005), an electoral arrangement which increases the number of parties and the number of ministries in government. Pacts to protect the rights of sectarian interests in order to prevent backsliding into war have increased cabinet size through post-conflict power sharing agreements in Sierra Leone (1996), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2002 and 2003), Côte d'Ivoire (2003), and Sudan (2004). As part of its interim government, in 2006 Somalia formed a hugely oversized cabinet (Menkhaus 2008). In 2007, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire both formed governments of national unity designed to bring in former militants. In the year following each of these power sharing agreements, the number of cabinet ministries increased. In nations tired of violence, demand for peace creates compelling incentives to form broadly inclusive governments, even if they impose financial burdens (Jarstad and Sisk 2008).

Norms of inclusion stand out as a fourth factor arguably shaping African cabinets. In *Sundiata*, the epic story telling the rise of Mali's empire in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, the scheming half-brother of the story's hero is ridiculed because he selfishly declares 'power cannot be shared' (Sundiata 1965). Africa's nationalists later embraced this sort of rhetoric. Tanzania's Julius Nyerere believed his 'inclusive, participatory' model of governance with consensus building would both deepen democracy and facilitate economic growth (Baregu 1994). In pre-independence Nigeria, several constitutions enshrined political inclusion through ethnic balancing of the bureaucracy and the legislature's top positions (Ekeh and Osaghae 1989). For over half a century, dictators and democrats alike have implemented such practices. Senegal provides another example, where the discourse of democracy emphasizes the Wolof idea of *demokaraasi*. In this tradition, voters value conformity because it brings social security and they seek consensus because it brings stability. Including different opinions and 'harmonizing' them is therefore more important than *alternance* – alternating political power between parties (Schaffer 1998; Gellar 2005).

In sum, the number of ministers and the frequency of coalition governments have grown dramatically since the 1970s for a variety of reasons according to the existing literature, including population growth and post-conflict power-sharing agreements. There is also some evidence that large cabinets reflect African cultural traditions of inclusiveness. But many citizens value majoritarian qualities that promote alternating power rather than sharing it; African satisfaction with democracy in fact increases substantially after the electoral defeat of the incumbent party leads to alternation (Bratton 2008). Anecdotal evidence reinforces such cynicism about large cabinets. For example in Zimbabwe, lawyers called the national unity government unconstitutional (Dube 2009), while a spokesperson of a major party which joined the coalition said, 'We have serious misgivings with the size of the cabinet particularly at a time



when the economy is in such a bad state' (Nyathi 2009). As noted in the introduction, similar criticism erupted following Kenya's formation of a unity government in 2008 (LeVan 2011). Moreover, the constitutional referendum in 2010 essentially rejected that power-sharing agreement, endorsing a largely presidential, majoritarian model of government.

All of this suggests that the literature would benefit from an empirical examination of the impact of cabinet size, and that African citizens are demanding answers. The next section clarifies our definitions and describes some comparative findings about the economic impact of cabinet size.

### **ARE AFRICA'S CABINETS CUMBERSOME?**

Complaints about big cabinets appear to be common in Africa. Yet we have few empirical studies which examine the economic effects of cabinet size outside of developed countries. In this section we state our definitions of who constitutes a minister and what counts as a coalition government, drawing on the comparative literature. Next, we discuss research that comes to conflicting conclusions about the economic impact of large cabinets. On the one hand, large cabinets should undermine budgetary responsibility because policy logrolls become expensive in the aggregate. On the other hand, large cabinets could improve economic performance by making the policy process more specialized, and creating new incentives for intra-governmental accountability. Finally, we identify common institutional features in Africa that make portfolio allocation especially important – and individual ministers unusually weak.

Who counts as a minister? This is important not only for operational purposes, but because it sets a threshold for determining who actually has the ability to impact spending decisions. One recent study suggests that relying on function to operationalize a definition can present more complications than departing from a legal, institutional understanding (Barbieri and Vercesi 2013). A standard approach is to count only officials with full ministerial rank, thus

excluding deputy ministers, secretaries of state, regional ministers, or other officials who would add even more to these numbers (van de Walle 2001). To the best of our knowledge, the Banks dataset follows this definition closely. As for a multi-party coalition government, the classic understanding stems from parliamentary politics, where a coalition is a set of political parties who: (1) agree to pursue common goals; (2) pool their resources in order to achieve these goals; (3) communicate and form binding commitments concerning their goals; and (4) agree on the distribution of payoffs to be received after the coalition meets its objectives (Browne and Dreijmanis 1982). Thus the size of the coalition derives from a direct measure of the number of political parties in the cabinet rather than from a proxy. Popular accommodation rather than elite bargaining drives coalition size. On average, this means that multiparty coalitions produce cabinets with more portfolios (Laver and Schofield 1998).

Arguing in favor of coalition governments in general, Lijphart argues that increasing representation in government does not require sacrificing economic performance. He stops short of definitely affirming that ‘consensus governments,’ which he associates with multi-party cabinets (and other features such as federalism), perform better in terms of budget deficits and other measures of economic performance. Thus his influential study of 36 countries explicitly leaves open the door for additional empirical testing, though his results tend to support multiparty governments (Lijphart 2012). South Africa provides one example of how the creation of ministries as tools of inclusion need not force a ‘tradeoff’, in Friedman’s words, between good government performance and democratic quality (Friedman 2004). Jacob Zuma created a slew of new ministries shortly after his election to the presidency in 2009, when the economy was contracting slightly; over the next three years macroeconomy improved, growing at 3 per cent on average and deficits dropped by about one percentage point. This might seem puzzling to those familiar with the towering (though arguably declining) presence of the African National

Congress. But each new ministry was ‘shadowed’ by a corresponding oversight committee in a parliament that demonstrated autonomy by challenging the executive, and that gave opposition parties a disproportional share of committee seats (Barkan 2009).

Zimbabwe provides an example of how multiparty cabinets (rather than simply the number of ministers) might impact the economy. Though there is ample evidence that the coalition government formed in 2008 did little to advance democratization or to limit political violence in the long run (Lebas 2011), it did halt the country’s economic slide. Within two years, Gross Domestic Product went from a 12.5 per cent contraction to 3.5 per cent growth; government revenues increased and inflation stabilized (Africa Confidential 2010). By joining the cabinet the opposition party, with strong roots in labor and civil society, successfully advanced some constructive economic policies despite the authoritarian practices of its coalition partner. In particular, the government’s most controversial policy, seizing white-owned farms, largely stopped after the opposition party joined the government.

By contrast, other studies find that large cabinets undermine economic performance. Van de Walle (2001) for example points to Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire, where big cabinets engaged in reckless levels of spending during the 1990s. One classic study reports that multi-party coalition governments are much more likely to run budget deficits (Alesina *et al.* 1997). The World Bank explains that since coalition governments require so many compromises and payoffs, ‘fiscal outcomes are often worse than when majority governments are in power’ (World Bank 2002). Consistent with these findings, Persson and Tabellini (2003) report that majoritarian (ie, single party) governments produce smaller deficits, regardless of whether the system is parliamentary or presidential. Wehner more modestly reports that single party cabinets can mitigate but not necessarily prevent deficit spending by reducing the conditions of partisan fragmentation (Wehner 2010). Other studies focused specifically on the number of ministries, rather than the

number of parties, clearly link additional portfolios to larger budget deficits (Volkerink and De Haan 2001b; Woo 2003). Almost all of the cross-national research is limited to wealthy countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The existing literature thus arrives at conflicting conclusions, and we know very little about the economic effects of cabinets in Africa. Cabinets could indirectly impact the economy in a variety of ways, shaping the political conditions for economic growth or the ability to discipline monetary policy. But cabinets have more direct effects on public finance since they debate and shape spending priorities. For this reason it makes sense to focus on budgetary policy, particularly the impacts on revenue, spending, and the joint interaction of the two.

A causal link between cabinet size and budgetary policy could manifest itself in two ways: First, an increase in cabinet size could mean more political actors demanding resources or receiving side payments. In such situations policy making becomes a ‘logroll’ that supplies payoffs to everyone (Strøm 2003). This becomes financially costly in the aggregate and appears as a strain on national budgets. Popular political parlance in Africa characterizes logrolls as sharing ‘the national cake’: politicians dividing up the spoils of the state among themselves (Gana and Egwu 2004; Kiapi 2010). Second, large cabinets could actually limit such patronage and reduce the incentives to extract resources from citizens. ‘Public welfare is enhanced when leaders depend on a large coalition to keep them in office’, argue Bueno de Mesquita et al. ‘Under these conditions, those motivated to stay in power have no choice but to promote the public’s welfare’ (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 2001: 71). Like Lijphart, the composition and size of the cabinet is an important component of their ‘selectorate’ theory, which focuses on the size of the eligible pool of potential rulers. Small coalitions, they say, ‘promote corruption, black marketeering, and cronyism’ (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 2003: 214). Comparative institutional

literature claims that such inclusive policy processes are conducive to long term economic development (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

However, the number of ministers and the number of parties in the cabinet could affect these two potential outcomes quite differently. Additional ministers could increase costly demands for patronage leading to suboptimal policy performance, or it could enhance policy specialization and technocratic capacity leading to improvements in budgetary policy performance. Additional parties could actually be the condition driving patronage demands, along the lines of the World Bank's comments. After all, individual ministers have less leverage to make patronage demands, and they face collective action problems that parties can resolve by lowering the costs of information and coordination (Lupia and Strøm 2008). Alternatively, additional parties, governing in coalitions might increase horizontal monitoring, creating a government in which executives face multiple political actors with sufficient leverage to hold them accountable for economic policy. It is therefore important to test for the impact of both ministries and parties on budgetary policy.

Before doing so though, it is important to point out common characteristics of the institutional environment in Africa. First, executives enjoy a variety of advantages over parties. Nearly every African executive is classified as a presidential republic in which the head of state is also the head of government, or a mixed republic with a president and a prime minister; a few countries are actually monarchies or pure military states.<sup>2</sup> This is significant because, as Africa's post-independence leaders noted, the collective responsibility of parliamentary government creates incentives for restraint (Hatchard *et al.* 2004: 69). Second, even in presidential systems, African executives often appoint sitting members of the legislature to the cabinet, giving them the ability to exercise tremendous power over individual ministers' behavior (Lindberg and Zhou 2009). Some constitutional scholars in fact argue that the level of executive discretion over

cabinets corresponds with the number of ministries (Hatchard *et al.* 2004). Third, modern African political parties have very few ideological differences (Bleck and van de Walle 2011). This makes standard approaches from the American or European literature, such as the use of a left/right continuum and median voter models, less useful for understanding cabinet behavior (and nearly impossible to estimate). In sum, given the absence of collective responsibility, the fusion of legislative and executive authority through the appointment of sitting members of the legislature, and weak ideological cleavages, African executives enjoy great latitude.

### **OPERATIONALIZATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION**

Whether one measures cabinet size in terms of parties or ministries, there are compelling reasons to expect either good or bad economic performance, and existing comparative research points to conflicting findings. We formulate two hypotheses to test the impact of both measures on budgetary policy performance. A ‘portfolio’ hypothesis tests to see if cabinets with more ministers improve budgetary policy performance. Confirmation of this hypothesis would suggest that additional ministries increase specialization, much like the narrative of Nigeria in the introduction suggested, whereas rejection would imply that the new portfolios are merely patronage payoffs that undermine the economy overall. A ‘parties’ hypothesis tests the record of coalitions. Support for this hypothesis would imply that multi-party governments improve budgetary policy through horizontal monitoring, as the cases from South Africa and Zimbabwe suggested. Alternatively, multi-party governments might simply engage in costly policy logrolls, similar to wealthy democracies (Alesina *et al.* 1997; Persson and Tabellini 2003). Using both measures of cabinet size is important since frustrations about cabinets in Uganda, Kenya and elsewhere are directed towards the number of ministries as a driver of economic wastefulness, while the broader comparative literature largely focused on the impact of the number of parties.

Our theory predicts that specialization through additional ministries contributes to good budgetary policy, but that cabinets also need horizontal accountability provided by multiparty coalitions to moderate the power of strong executives. Individual ministers face high transaction costs of coordination and few incentives to make demands of the executive. In coalition governments, parties help internally coordinate and articulate distinct interests. By doing so, they increase the opportunities for horizontal monitoring across government. All else equal, multiparty coalitions should therefore have better budgetary performance overall compared to governments that simply increase the number of ministries. The capacity to conduct this monitoring though could be disrupted by strong executives or the absence of opposition parties. Gabon offers an example of this, where Omar Bongo ruled from 1967 to 2009. There was virtually no political party competition, and the country displayed the greatest variation in the number of ministers in our dataset (fluctuating between 20 and 53 over 35 years), as portfolios served patronage tools. In this context, neither parties nor portfolios should have much of an impact on accountability (which will control for below). In sum, we argue that African ministers possess weak incentives and little individual capacity to demand patronage, while parties in coalition governments use their political leverage to increase accountability across government.

We measure budgetary policy performance with three different dependent variables. First, the variable *budget* is the federal budget surplus or deficit, expressed as a share of GDP in local currency units, similar to operationalizations adopted by Roubini and Sachs (1989a; Roubini and Sachs 1989b). Second, we separately test for the impact of cabinet size on revenue extraction by the central government with the variable *revenue*. This is also important because low government revenues could bias our variable measuring budget surpluses, and because the rate of taxation has been used in studies of Africa to link weak government capacity to state failure (Bates 2008) or economic collapse (van de Walle 2001). In a more conventional

economic sense, *revenue* provides a test of the relationship between taxation and representation to see if more inclusive governments actually extract less revenue. Third, the variable *expenditure* measures government consumption as a share of GDP, which is common proxy for patronage in cross-national studies in the developing world (Arriola 2013). Directly measuring different categories of disaggregated spending (health, defence, etc.) would be ideal but such data are scarce in Africa, especially during the 1970s. Regardless, if cabinets allocate patronage to reward allies or buyoff potential critics, this will appear in higher overall levels of spending. These three variables are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (2012).

### **Control Variables**

To control for different historical conditions, we include a standard dummy variable for whether a country is former British colony. This is important because these countries tend to be associated with other political characteristics, including more majoritarian models of democracy, Single Member District-plurality electoral systems, and looser controls on civil society (Widner 1994). Colonial history thus serves as an important source of variation among African political regimes (Jensen and Wantchekon 2004). Moreover, governments molded after the British have traditions of weaker central banks, which often impacts economic planning through inflationary policies. A value of 1 on the *Britcol* variable indicates a former British colony.

Since a variety of studies document linkages between societal heterogeneity and suboptimal economic performance (Easterly and Levine 1997; Habyarimana *et al.* 2009), we include the variables *EthnicF* and *ReligiousF* for the level of ethnic and religious fractionalization, respectively, from Norris's (2008) data set. Population size could also impact economic policy bargaining. Populations in smaller countries face lower costs of 'exit,' thus generating incentives to compromise (Teorell 2010). We therefore include the natural log of the population as the variable *Logpop*.



We also include the variable *GrowthGDP* measuring the rate of economic growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, from the World Development Indicators. This control is important because economic outcomes could be endogenous to the level of development. Outside of Africa, poor economic conditions also tend to impact the number of ministries, increasing them (Verzichelli 2008). This variable also reflects the tremendous variation in African countries: larger economies might require a more complex division of labor managed through additional ministries or broader debates among different economic interests represented by various parties. Perhaps most importantly, we include *GrowthGDP* because a large literature linking economic cycles to political institutions departs from the notion that the short term nature of politicians' self-interest interferes with the extended time horizon conducive to formulating sound macroeconomic policies – notably balanced budgets (Franzese 2002). Policy analyses of Europe's recent financial crisis however are challenging this view, arguing that institutional constraints (such as balanced budget rules) as well as polarized political conditions that inspire ideological commitments to fiscal discipline, often create incentives for politicians to invest in the future rather than their short term interests (Posner and Blondal 2012). For our purposes, patronage could be plentiful, and revenue collection might increase, under favourable economic conditions captured by this variable. We also include the variable *oil rent* from Jensen and Wantchekon (2004) to incorporate economies that benefit from natural resources; where government consumption may rise during commodity price booms, government typically taxes citizens at lower rates. Agriculturally-based economies in Africa generally have greater revenue extraction (Englebert and Dunn 2013).

We also include variables to control for various political conditions. The variable *xconstrain*, from the Database of Political Institutions, measures checks on executive authority (Keefer and Stasavage 2003). A value of 1 indicates that the chief executive has virtually

unlimited authority, while a value of 5 signals significant limitations and constraints on unilateral action. This variable controls for the possibility that non-democratic regimes with small cabinets contaminate the results by making a false case for coalition governments: dictatorships with large cabinets might perform well. This is especially relevant since some of our sample precedes the democratization of the 1990s. Recent research claims that consolidation of executive authority had unclear implications for economic performance in Africa between 1960 and 2000. Whereas authoritarianism improved economic performance in some Southeast Asian cases, precisely the opposite was the case in Africa, where checks on executive authority and high levels of democracy corresponded with high rates of economic growth (Ndulu and O'Connell 2008). The variable also accounts for the possibility of cabinets operating without effective legislatures, as well as non-democratic regimes that operate without parties. To more explicitly control for democracy, *LiberalDemocracy* is based on the Freedom House one hundred point scale, with a higher value indicating greater democracy. We further include a *civilian* dummy variable to control for the possibility that it is not simply dictatorship, but military dictatorships specifically that matter with regard to the executive (Gandhi 2008; Koonings and Kruijt 2002). Finally, to accommodate for the possibility outlined earlier in the example from Gabon, where weak parties have little bargaining power and the ruler can arbitrarily create or abolish ministries, a positive value on the variable *SingleParty* indicates one-party rule and minimal fragmentation in the party system.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hypotheses Testing Portfolios and Parties**

Our 'portfolio' hypothesis states that additional ministries contribute to economic performance by increasing policy specialization. If so, we would expect to see federal budget surpluses (or lower deficits) indicated by positive coefficients on the *budget* variable, lower rates of extraction indicated by negative coefficients on *revenue*, and less government consumption

indicated by negative coefficients on *expenditure*<sup>4</sup>. Alternatively, if governments with more portfolios engage in policy logrolls to share the national cake then we expect to observe budget deficits as ministers collude with each other. This is essentially what the European literature suggests. Bjørn Volkerink and Jakob De Haan (2001a) for example found that across 22 OECD countries between 1971 and 1996, one additional minister increased the budget deficit by 0.08%-point. Fiscal indiscipline that borrows from the future would contribute to inflationary policies and higher rates of extraction (indicated by positive values on the *revenue* variable). This pattern of results would further imply that individual ministers have some leverage to demand patronage, which would correspond with positive coefficients on *expenditure*. We measure the number of portfolios using the *ministries* variable, illustrated earlier in Figure 1.

Our ‘parties’ hypothesis states that coalition governments enhance budgetary policy performance. These multiparty governments increase the inclusiveness of policy making and promote horizontal accountability. This inter-governmental monitoring should enable governments to restrain spending, yielding budget surpluses without necessarily increasing extractive tax policies. Most importantly, horizontal accountability should reduce logrolled patronage spending, visible as negative coefficients on *expenditure*. We test this hypothesis with *coalition*, a dummy variable created from the Arthur Banks data set, recoded so that 1 indicates a multiparty coalition cabinet and 0 indicates a one party government. From a research design point of view, a continuous variable directly measuring the exact number of parties would be ideal, and would also enable us to interact it with the *ministries* variable. Unfortunately African data on parties is limited: the best available data set has no information prior to 1989 (Lindberg 2006), and our construction of a new variable using *Elections in Africa* (Nohlen *et al.* 1999) yielded too many gaps and fewer data points than Banks. Until African countries have experienced more electoral democracy, and such sources have been updated, we believe a

dummy variable is a reasonable alternative; majoritarian democracies (‘power concentrating’ in Lijphart’s terms) tend to govern through a single party anyway, and our current approach enabled us to include authoritarian governments in the 1970s and 1980s that included parties.

Coalition governments on average have five more ministries (25.4) than single-party governments (20.5),<sup>5</sup> and the *t*-test shows there is a statistically significant difference. This suggests an implicit interaction between the *cabinet* and *ministries* variables. Our sample includes 45 African countries between 1971 and 2006 for a total of 1,560 observations. This includes 335 instances of coalition governments. Correlation analysis (not shown) implies that cabinets with more ministries tend to run budget surpluses, extract less revenue, and engage in lower levels of government consumption. Bivariate association tests for coalition governments suggest that they run smaller budget deficits, collect less revenue, and spend less on government consumption compared to single party governments.

## EMPIRICAL TESTS FOR PORTFOLIOS AND PARTIES

We perform regression analysis to obtain OLS coefficient estimates with panel corrected standard errors for each of our dependent variables (*budget*, *revenue* and *expenditure*).<sup>6</sup> This is an appropriate technique since the data contains fewer years than cases cross-sectionally.

Consistent results across different models is a standard econometric check for robustness (Greene 2008). We first test our hypotheses on *budget* as the dependent variable as specified in Equation 1:

$$Budget_{it} = a_i + \beta_1 Ministries_{it} + \beta_2 Coalition_{it} + \beta_3 LiberalDemocracy + \beta_4 Xconstrain_{it} + \beta_5 Britcol_{it} + \beta_6 GrowthGDP_{it} + \beta_7 Oilrent_{it} + \beta_8 LogPop_{it} + \beta_9 EthnicF_{it} + \beta_{10} ReligiousF_{it} + \beta_{11} Civilian_{it} + \beta_{12} Singleparty + e_{it}$$

The regression results of the different specifications of our base model represented equation of equation 1 are reported in Table 1. The positive coefficients on the *ministries*

variable across all models indicate that cabinets with more portfolios are more likely to run a budget surplus. One additional cabinet member implies a 0.2 to 0.3 percent larger surplus (or a smaller deficit). The *coalition* variable has a significant effect on *budget* in one of the models, where coalition governments run deficits of about 2.2 percent. The presence of electoral democracy in Africa reduces the budget deficit by 0.1 percent, at a statistically significant level according to all models. Executive constraints do not have a statistically significant effect on *budget*. Governments in former British colonies are more likely to run a larger surplus (or smaller deficits) on average between 2 and 3.4 percentage points. The effect of overall economic conditions on the budget is positive and significant in models 3 and 4: each percentage of GDP growth reduces the budget deficit by 0.1 percent. In models 2, 3, and 4, countries with oil revenue appears to run a budget surplus of about 0.1 percent for each additional percent of oil rent per GDP increase. The significance of *SingleParty* suggests that party polarization has an adverse impact on budget surpluses; the same goes for ethnic but interestingly not religious fractionalization. Civilian government has no statistically significant impact. The results thus far point to statistically significant support for the portfolio hypothesis, suggesting that additional ministries enhance budgetary specialization, but they neither support nor refute the parties hypothesis, since coalition governments have a very weak effect on the *budget* variable.

**[Table 1 goes about here]**

The second test of our hypotheses considers the effects of cabinet size on revenues, to see if large cabinets are more extractive. These tests also allow us to ensure that the results with the *budget* variable were not biased by lower revenue collection. In equation 2,  $revenue_{it}$  is the government revenue of the  $i^{th}$  country collected at the  $t^{th}$  year:

$$Revenue_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_1 Ministries_{it} + \beta_2 Coalition_{it} + \beta_3 LiberalDemocracy + \beta_4 Xconstrain_{it} + \beta_5 Britcol_{it} + \beta_6 GrowthGDP_{it} + \beta_7 LogPop_{it} + \beta_8 Oilrent + \beta_9 EthnicF_{it} + \beta_{10} ReligiousF_{it} + \beta_{11} Civilian_{it} + \beta_{12} Singleparty + e_{it}$$

The estimation results of equation 2 are displayed in Table 2. The statistically insignificant values on *ministries* mean that cabinets with more portfolios do not extract more revenue through higher tax rates or more zealous collection. In relation to the previous tests, this means that the good performance on the *budget* variable is actually being underwritten by fiscal discipline, rather than extractive policies. At the same time, coalition governments systematically extract less: specifically, they collect on average 6.2 to 7.7 percent less revenue as a share of the GDP in models 2, 3, and 4. In terms of our controls, democracies collect on average 0.1 percent more revenues. Stronger executive constraints are also associated with higher tax rates or better tax collection, ranging between one and 1.1 percentage points on *revenue*. These two control variables suggest an implicit relationship between democracy and taxation in Africa, whether it is measured in terms of horizontal accountability (captured by the *Xconstrain* variable) or electoral democracy. The control for British colonies is significant, indicating that these countries extract 1.8 to 2.6 additional percentage points more in models 1 and 2. Countries with oil revenue appear to collect on average more budget revenues by about 0.3 and 0.4 percent extra revenues for each additional percent of oil rent per GDP. Increased ethnic fractionalization unsurprisingly reduces the revenues collected by around 15 percent, according to models 3 and 4. But as in the tests with equation 1, religious fractionalization is an insignificant factor. Civilian governments – whether dictatorships or democracies – extract on average 3.1 percent more revenue. This time, single party governments have no significant impact, most likely because rulers who want to avoid open multi-party competition see political risks in extracting too much from citizens. In sum, since coalition governments systematically extract less from citizens, this supports the idea that parties rather than simply portfolio promote good budgetary policy.

**[Table 2 goes about here]**

The third test of our hypotheses considers the effects of cabinet size on government consumption as a share of GDP, which we use as a proxy for patronage. If additional ministers or parties increase the overall level of patronage, this will be visible as positive coefficients on the *expenditure* variable, suggesting these governments engage in policy logrolls to satisfy everyone. However, if new ministries increase specialization, or if coalition governments increase horizontal accountability as parties monitor each other, then government consumption will decline. In equation 3,  $expenditure_{it}$  is government expenditure of the  $i^{th}$  country during the  $t^{th}$  year:

$$Expenditure_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_1 Ministries_{it} + \beta_2 Coalition_{it} + \beta_3 LiberalDemocracy + \beta_4 Xconstrain_{it} + \beta_5 Britcol_{it} + \beta_6 GrowthGDP_{it} + \beta_7 LogPop_{it} + \beta_8 Oilrent + \beta_8 EthnicF_{it} + \beta_9 ReligiousF_{it} + \beta_{10} Civilian_{it} + \beta_{12} Singleparty + e_{it}$$

The estimation results of equation 3 are displayed in Table 3. There is weak evidence in model 3 that each additional ministry results in 0.2 percent point more government expenditure as a percent of the GDP. The insignificant coefficients of *ministries* in the other models offer no support for the portfolio hypothesis. By contrast, multi-party coalition governments systematically have lower rates of government consumption at a statistically significant level. Specifically, coalition governments on average spent 5.4 to 6.2 percent less as a share of the GDP in models 2, 3, and 4. The level of democracy is not statistically significant in any of the models. Stronger executive constraints are associated with increases in patronage spending, ranging between 0.9 and 1.4 percentage points across all four models at a statistically significant level. Taken together, the results with these two controls suggest that it is specifically parties in government, rather than other mechanisms of horizontal accountability (or electoral democracy) that restrains patronage spending. The population control in model 2 suggests that a one percent

population increase may increase the government spending by 0.9 additional percentage points. Ethnic fractionalization appears to reduce government consumption spending between 6.9 and 8.2 percent, as suggested by estimates from model 3 and 4. On its face, this seems odd. However this may suggest that in Africa's highly heterogeneous nations, there are significant transaction costs involved in *colluding* across ethnic groups in order to distribute patronage. British colonial history, religious fractionalization, civilian and single party governance have no statistically significant impact in any of the models. In sum, rather than engaging in policy logrolls through collusion, coalition governments reduce the level of patronage spending through horizontal monitoring, offering strong support for our parties hypothesis.

**[Table 3 goes about here]**

These three sets of tests show that cabinet size impacts budgetary policy in Africa, but that it is important to analyze parties alongside ministries. There is evidence that additional ministries increase policy specialization, along the lines of the example from Nigeria mentioned in the introduction, since these governments are associated with budget surpluses. But significantly, the absence of a strong relationship with the *expenditure* variable suggests that ministers possess neither the leverage to demand patronage for themselves, nor the resources to dispense it on a significant level. Coalition governments though, extract less *and* spend less, suggesting that multiparty cabinets are both less predatory towards citizens and less likely to indulge in patronage spending. The results hold across a broad range of controls.

Based on these results, we argue that the impact of Africa's cabinets on budgetary policy depends more on parties than portfolio. We have no trouble accepting the idea that cabinet appointments serve as important patronage tools *for executives*, as others claim (van de Walle



2001; Arriola 2009). But our results show that ministers acting as individuals face significant collective action problems, and the mere presence of a multi-party system, measured by the *SingleParty* variable, does little to overcome these barriers. Africa's executives seek an efficient coalition that affords them political latitude, and multiparty coalition governments can limit executive discretion by lowering the transaction costs of horizontal accountability across the government. In this way, they may serve as useful stepping stones – until political competition is more robust – to improved economic outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

African cabinet size has been increasing since the early 1970s due to factors such as democratization, post-conflict power-sharing, and population growth. Yet we have virtually no comparative research about the economic consequences of this striking empirical trend. Looking at both the number of parties and portfolios in cabinets, we found that creating new ministries improved budgetary discipline, a relationship that we attributed to increased governmental specialization. There is weak evidence that multiparty coalition cabinets contribute to budget deficits, rather than surpluses. However, these cabinets do systematically extract less *and* spend less. These results hold even after controlling for colonial history, economic conditions, checks on executive authority, level of democracy, population size, civilian government, oil income, type of party system, and ethnic and religious divisions.

One possible implication of our findings is that until electoral competition increases in Africa, multi-party governments just might contribute to democratization by restraining executive authority in the interim. We hope to directly test this in future research with additional data on alternation of power, and perhaps the internal dynamics of parties. Our findings also inform classic debates about the benefits of 'consensus' models of democracy associated with multi-party coalition governments and power-sharing through portfolio allocations. Skeptics

have reported correlations between coalition governments and weak fiscal discipline, including budget deficits (Voigt 2011; Persson and Tabellini 2003). By contrast, proponents of consensus democracy have argued there is no tradeoff between broad based governments that enhance political inclusion and economic performance (Norris 2008; Reynolds 2011; Lijphart 2012). Hardly any of this cross-national research has focused on Africa though, and we find very little support for skeptics of coalition governments who associate them with deficits in OECD countries. Instead, our analysis of a complex set of 45 cases over four decades suggests that the proponents of consensus government may be right.

At least three important caveats are in order though. First, anecdotal evidence suggests that cabinets with a large number of ministries are wasteful, and there is no denying this in egregious cases such as Uganda, Kenya, and Gabon. Our results are hardly an endorsement for big salaries or new unnecessary ministries and instead make a subtle case for a combination of expertise and horizontal accountability. In addition, though cases such as Zimbabwe and Gabon illustrate provide some details about *how* cabinet size impacts bargaining, we appreciate that much richer qualitative research is needed to clarify the causal mechanisms we identified inductively. As the Third Wave of democratization turns 25 years old in Africa, new cohorts of former politicians are waiting to tell their stories to field researchers. Third, though government consumption is a valid – and common – measure of patronage, we hope to have access to different categories of government spending for future research. This would enable a study of how competing preferences within cabinets impact budgetary policy priorities, for example by shifting spending from sectors such as defense to social sector programs that are more popular to aspiring political candidates. In conclusion, given the importance of parties for understanding the impact of portfolio, we hope our findings contribute to new research about these critical African

institutions: their internal dynamics, their potential to either promote or restrain patronage, and their bargaining behavior across a broad range of regimes.

**Table 1: Dependent variable *budget* (budget surplus/deficit as share of GDP)**

Variables\ Models	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ministries	0.003*** (0.00)	0.002*** (0.00)	0.002** (0.00)	0.002* (0.00)
Coalition	0.000 (0.01)	-0.003 (0.01)	-0.003 (0.01)	-0.022* (0.01)
Liberal Democracy	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)
XConstrain		0.002 (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)
Britcol	0.034*** (0.01)	0.033*** (0.01)	0.025*** (0.01)	0.020** (0.01)
GrowthGDP	0.001 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.001* (0.00)	0.001* (0.00)
Oil Rent		0.001*** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001* (0.00)
LogPop			0.001* (0.00)	0.002 (0.00)
EthnicF			-0.043* (0.01)	-0.042* (0.01)
ReligiousF				0.034* (0.01)
Civilian		0.011 (0.01)		0.002 (0.01)
Single party				-0.04* (0.01)
Constant	-0.201*** (0.02)	-0.208*** (0.02)	-0.326*** (0.06)	-0.245*** (0.06)
Chi <sup>2</sup>	77***	90***	95***	106***
N	817	731	731	731
n	39	39	39	39

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* denote significance at the 5%, 1%, 0.1% level, respectively.

**Table 2: Dependent variable *revenue* (govt revenue, excluding grants, as a share of GDP)**

Variables\ Models	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ministries	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)
Coalition		-0.062*** (0.01)	-0.074*** (0.01)	-0.077*** (0.01)
LiberalDemocracy	0.001* (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)
Xconstrain	0.004 (0.00)	0.012*** (0.00)	0.012*** (0.00)	0.010*** (0.00)
Britcol	0.026*** (0.01)	0.029*** (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)	-0.006 (0.01)
Logpop		-0.012*** (0.00)	-0.006 (0.00)	-0.007 (0.00)
GrowthGDP				0.001 (0.00)
Oil rent		0.003*** (0.00)	0.004*** (0.00)	0.003*** (0.00)
EthnicF			-0.148*** (0.02)	-0.152*** (0.02)
ReligiousF				0.031 (0.02)
Civilian				0.031** (0.01)
Single party				-0.004 (0.01)
Constant	0.154*** (0.02)	0.300*** (0.05)	0.174*** (0.05)	0.158*** (0.04)
Chi <sup>2</sup>	55***	322***	228***	462***
N	765	765	765	761
n	39	39	39	39

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* denote significance at the 5%, 1%, 0.1% level, respectively.

**Table 3: Dependent variable *expenditure* (government expenditure, as a share of GDP)**

Variables\ Models	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ministries	-0.001 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.002* (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)
Coalition		-0.054*** (0.01)	-0.062*** (0.01)	-0.059*** (0.01)
LiberalDemocracy	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)	-0.000 (0.00)
Xconstrain	0.009*** (0.00)	0.014*** (0.00)	0.014*** (0.00)	0.012*** (0.00)
Britcol	0.011 (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)	-0.006 (0.01)	-0.000 (0.01)
Logpop		-0.009** (0.00)	-0.002 (0.00)	-0.003 (0.00)
GrowthGDP				-0.002** (0.00)
EthnicF			-0.082*** (0.02)	-0.069*** (0.02)
ReligiousF				0.017 (0.02)
Civilian				0.013 (0.01)
Single party				-0.006 (0.01)
Constant	0.188*** (0.02)	0.281*** (0.05)	0.213*** (0.06)	0.222*** (0.05)
Chi <sup>2</sup>	37***	99***	110***	117***
N	775	775	775	763

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* denote significance at the 5%, 1%, 0.1% level, respectively.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Cross-Polity Time-Series Database. State University of New York-Binghamton.  
[www.databanks.sitehosting.net](http://www.databanks.sitehosting.net).

<sup>3</sup> A table displaying summary statistics will be made available on the authors' website.

<sup>4</sup> More nuanced measures of expenditure, such as military spending or public investment, are not available consistently across countries and years.

<sup>5</sup> This is consistent with comparative Laver and Schofield's (1998) research in European that demonstrates a growth in ministries as the number of parties in government increases.

<sup>6</sup> Our data has more cross-unit (countries) relative to the time periods and panel generalized least square (GLS) estimates are not feasible ( $N < T$  is required for feasibility of GLS estimates). See Beck and Katz Beck, N. & Katz, J. N. (1995) What to do (and not to do) with Time-Series Cross-Sectional Data. *American Political Science Review*, 89, pp. 634-647. We used Stata *xtpcse* command to produce robust estimates with standard errors that are robust to disturbances being correcting for heteroscedasticity, contemporaneously cross-sectionally correlated, and autocorrelated of type AR(1). In addition, in order to eliminate the impact of outliers, we eliminated the extreme values of the dependent variables. In particular, we excluded observations with the values of expenditure or revenue share of GDP higher than 0.7 and observation with the annual inflation rate higher than 100%.

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