Abstract. This paper examines why supporters of the ruling party in South Africa’s dominant party systems come to support the opposition. I argue that opposition parties earn support from ruling party partisans by cultivating a reputation for good governance at the local level. Specifically, this paper focuses on the role of party credibility as a determinant of voter support for the Democratic Alliance (DA) party, the largest opposition party in South Africa. Using data from an original survey collected in the cities of Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay, I find that partisans of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party who perceive that the DA has a more credible reputation for good governance than any other party are more likely to intend to vote for the party in the future. This finding contributes to our understanding of how dominant party rule erodes in sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: African elections; opposition parties; local government; South Africa; democratic development
Under what condition do partisans of a ruling dominant party regime support the opposition? A dominant party system is an electoral system in which a single party receives an absolute majority of votes in at least three consecutive elections. One explanation for the resilience of dominant parties (and opposition party weakness) is that because ruling parties have the advantage of controlling the state and its bureaucratic apparatus, they marshal these resources to deliver desired public goods to voters (Greene 2007; Magaloni 2006; Scheiner 2006). The successful delivery of economic growth by the ruling party creates a credibility gap - voters are convinced that the ruling party is more competent and credible at governing than the opposition (Morse 2018; Ong & Tim 2014). This results in repeated electoral victories for the ruling party, and opposition parties fail to grow. While this explanation is more relevant in countries with political and economic systems that are highly centralized (Scheiner 2006; Oliver & Ostwald 2018), in federal systems such as South Africa, opposition parties have more presence at the local level. Yet, regardless of the state’s political configuration, the reality remains that to grow, opposition parties must convince voters that they represent a credible alternative to the ruling party. At the subnational level, they can use their tenure in local government to demonstrate competence at governing by delivering services effectively and managing local government well.

This paper focuses on the role of party credibility as a determinant of opposition support. Party credibility refers to voter perceptions of a party as competent and trustworthy at delivering good governance. I use data from an original survey of ANC partisans in the cities of Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay (NMB) to examine whether perceptions of opposition party credibility contribute to support for the Democratic Alliance (DA) party, which is the largest opposition party in South Africa. The DA’s political base consists of white, middle and upper-class voters, and voters from minority racial groups such as Indians and coloureds. Given
the polarizing nature of race in South Africa, a party’s association with particular racial groups matters to voters. The ruling party instrumentally evokes its legacy of resistance against the Apartheid regime to brand itself as the party best positioned to address black people’s interests, and it has been successful at framing the DA as a “white party”. I argue that the DA tries to overcome this image problem by developing credibility in delivering services in local government and positioning itself as an anti-corruption party.

I find that ANC partisans who view the DA as having a more credible reputation for good governance than other parties are more likely to express intentions to vote for the party. As an alternative hypothesis, I also test the role of ethnic cueing on vote choice, which holds that ANC partisans are more likely to vote for the DA when the leadership of the party is a co-ethnic. Although I do not find support for this hypothesis in the sample of survey respondents in Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay, ethnic cueing is a strong predictor of DA support among ANC partisans in a nationally representative survey. I offer potential reasons for these divergent findings by focusing on how ethnic cueing may operate differently at the local and national levels.

The findings from this paper provide evidence in favor of the largely untested assumption that opposition parties have to gain credibility with voters to draw support away from the ruling party. And because South Africa is a case of dominant party rule where racial (and ethnic) identity play a central role in politics, this paper also sheds light on the importance of candidate characteristics on opposition party support.

The paper is organized as follows. Section Two provides an overview of the concept of party credibility in the context of a dominant party system. In addition, in this section I argue why party credibility explains increased support for the DA among black South Africans, and I
discuss ethnic cueing as an alternative explanation. In Section Three I discuss the reason for selecting the cities of Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay to examine opposition support. In Section Four I discuss the survey data that I collected. Next, I present the results of the analysis in Section Five, and Section Six concludes with a discussion of the implications of my findings for the broader field of electoral politics in Africa.

2 Voters and Party Credibility in Comparative Perspective

A party has a credible reputation if voters perceive it as trustworthy and competent, and if they are convinced that the party represents, protects, and advances their material interests. One of the main advantages that dominant parties have over rivals is their control over the state apparatus, which they use to deliver material benefits to voters. As a result, a central explanation in the literature on how dominant parties are maintained is that the ruling party’s ability to deliver goods and services on a regular basis convinces voters that they have a credible reputation for good governance (Morse 2018; Greene 2007; Magaloni 2006; Scheiner 2006). And because opposition parties lack experience in government, voters have little information to evaluate their competence, and thus view the opposition as suffering from a credibility gap. While many dominant party regimes use the state to perpetuate their rule, this strategy manifests in different ways depending on whether the dominant party is in charge of a high or low capacity state. In high capacity states such as Singapore, the ruling party’s central role in leading Singapore’s economic development and its record of consistently delivering highly visible public goods allows it to convince voters that it alone has the capability to govern well (Oliver & Ostwald 2018). Lacking a comparable opportunity to use state resources to maintain voters’ loyalty, voters in Singapore are unconfident that the opposition could match the ruling party’s record. This, in turn, leads to less electoral support for the opposition. In low capacity states such
as Mexico and Egypt, the dominant party still marshals state resources for political ends; however, the material benefits they distribute are less visible (Blaydes 2006) and more targeted (Magaloni 2006).

So long as voters are convinced that the ruling party is more credible, dominant party rule endures, and many voters remain hesitant to support opposition parties. This is especially more so in contexts where voter support for the opposition can lead to reprisals from the ruling party (Magaloni 2006; Scheiner 2006). How, then, does the opposition bridge the credibility gap? One way that opposition parties earn more credibility with voters is to earn experience governing. The underlying reason why voters are convinced that the dominant party is credible is because it is the only party they are used to seeing in power. Voters in such a party system do not know how opposition parties would perform if they were to enter office. This is particularly a problem in authoritarian dominant party systems, where opposition parties have a harder time winning office in the first place due to repressive tactics that penalize opposition activities. However, in less repressive dominant party regimes, where opposition parties are freer to compete and are able to win first elections in areas where core supporters live, the key to expanding their initial foothold is to develop a record for good governance. In Mexico, Lucardi (2016) shows that opposition parties who are successful at capturing seats in major cities are more likely to experience successive wins in smaller electoral units within that city. Keefer (2007) shows that as young democracies mature over time, they become more politically credible, meaning that they provide universal public goods (as opposed to targeted, clientelistic ones). Although countries are the unit of observation in the Keefer (2007) study, a similar logic can apply to political parties. More experience in government leads to voters being convinced that opposition parties are credible. Where opposition parties win seats also matters for closing the credibility
gap. Voters are more convinced about the opposition’s credibility if they win elections in major towns and cities. Since larger cities tend to receive more media coverage, news about the opposition’s governance in these places will be more likely to receive more media attention.

2.1 Reputation Credibility and Opposition Support in South Africa

Unlike the commonly studied examples of dominant party rule in the literature, in South Africa, racial identity is an organizing principle of politics. Ferree (2010) argues that the ANC uses racial appeals during election campaigns to convince black voters that the DA is a “white party” that does not care about the interests of black people. The ruling party’s objective is to raise questions about the DA’s credibility in the minds of the pivotal black electorate. While Ferree extends her negative framing argument to explain other cases of opposition weakness, she also shows that the main opposition party in El Salvador was able to bridge the credibility gap with voters (and eventually win the presidency) by winning elections at the local level and showing that it is competent at delivering services. Other studies on party politics in Africa also find that performance in government matters for opposition growth. Weghorst and Lindberg (2011) show that in Ghana opposition parties are more likely to win over swing voters by delivering public goods than targeted private goods.

In this paper, I argue that ANC partisans are more likely to support the DA when they are convinced that the DA has a more credible reputation for good governance than the ruling party. I argue that the development of the DA’s reputation credibility arises as a result of two factors. First, the party’s successful governance of major cities and its expansion throughout Western Cape province gives voters information that the DA is competent at governing. Unlike other opposition parties, the DA has steadily made progress expanding beyond its core areas of support. The second factor is the building of a party brand that emphasizes the DA’s past
achievements in delivering services at the local level. Issues of good governance are a central feature of the DA’s party platform. The party’s association with anti-corruption and the delivery of basic services reinforces voters’ perceptions that the party cares about good governance.

The reputation credibility hypothesis that I test is the following:

\[ H_1: \text{ANC partisans who view the DA as having a credible reputation for good governance will be more likely to vote for the party in the future.} \]

2.2 Alternative Explanation: Ethnic Cueing

A common explanation of opposition failure in dominant party systems is their inability to field quality candidates during elections. Candidate quality refers to candidates who have experience in government and have name recognition with local communities. Quality can also mean candidates who possess ethnic, racial, or ideological characteristics that are compatible with the local population. The candidate nomination decision that parties make sends a clear signal to voters about whether or not they are credible.

Ethnic cueing, or the solidarity felt by a voter for a co-ethnic politician (or one of the same race), plays a major role in voting behavior. A politician’s background or identity is a simple source of information for voters to use when judging how credible they are. Candidate traits are particularly central to voting behavior in developing countries, where parties are less ideological, and voters with lower education levels are less able to access information about political parties. There is a well-established literature in African politics that shows that voters tend to support co-ethnic candidates and parties. In an interesting experiment on voters in Benin, where the president has mixed ethnicity, Adida (2015) found that cueing ethnicity to each of the co-ethnic groups that the president belongs to led to more support for the president by each group.

In South Africa, the ANC has a clear advantage when it comes to fielding experienced black politicians (especially in national elections). Both white and African opposition parties
struggle with recruiting and retaining quality candidates, and as a result, the electorate is unconvinced of their credibility. However, (Farole 2019) shows that the DA has steadily increased the number of black candidates in its candidate pool for local government elections. While the majority of candidates the party fielded in the first local government election were white, by the 2016 local election black candidates made up the majority of the party’s nominees. In addition to local candidates, in 2015 the party also elected Mmusi Maimane as its first black party leader. By appointing a black politician to such a prominent role in the party, the DA sent a credible signal to voters that the party is racially inclusive (Ferree 2010). And in case voters saw Maimane’s appointment as a one-off occasion, the party nominated black mayors in Johannesburg and Tshwane, two cities where it won the mayorship after the 2016 election.

Why is ethnic cueing important for explaining DA support? As models of voting behavior in South Africa show, the racial associations that voters make about parties play a major role in determining party support. Firstly, the placement of black politicians in positions of leadership allows the DA to more credibly push back against the ANC’s negative framing strategies, and to signal a shift in the party’s image. Second, black voters may be more likely to support the DA if the leadership is black because they may feel more convinced that a black DA politician would have their interests at heart more than a white one. And from the vantage point of the black DA politician, even if they are a lifelong supporter of the DA, the experience of being black in South Africa makes it easier for them to form a bond with black voters over issues such as discrimination and racism. Third, black politicians may be more attuned to the concern of black constituents. There is a wealth of literature from the United States showing that black representatives are more responsive to the needs of black constituents (Broockman 2013). In South Africa, McClendon (2016) uses an experimental design to show that there is a racial gap in
who local government councilors respond to, finding that black councilors are more likely to respond to messages from black constituents and that white councilors are more responsive to constituents from their own group. Based on these theoretical expectations, the ethnic cueing hypothesis is the following:

\( H_2 \): ANC partisans living in a city run by a black DA mayor and who view the mayor favorably will be more likely to vote for the party in future

In addition, I argue that ethnic cueing will play less of a role in determining support for the DA among ANC partisan’s living in a city run by a white DA mayor. Given the radicalized nature of party labels in South Africa, some ANC partisans may be particularly dissuaded from supporting the DA if the candidate representing the party is white. In such a scenario, these voters may be more likely to base their vote on the party’s reputation in office instead of candidate characteristics. I expect to find that the DA’s party reputation will be a stronger determinant of vote choice in Nelson Mandela Bay than in Johannesburg.

\( H_3 \): Party credibility will be a stronger determinant of vote choice for ANC partisans in Nelson Mandela Bay city than in Johannesburg

3 Case Selection: Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay Municipalities

Since the introduction of local government elections in 2000, party competition has been most intense in South Africa’s metropolitan cities. The fact that opposition parties earn more electoral support in cities is part of a broader trend in Africa (Resnick 2012; Harding 2012) and beyond. This paper tests the party credibility and ethnic cueing hypotheses using data from an original survey conducted in two cities: Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay. These cities were selected for two reasons. First, both cities are located outside of Western Cape province, which is the DA’s political base. To determine whether the party credibility hypothesis explains support for the DA in other parts of the country, it makes sense to test the hypothesis in areas
where the DA is new to governing. Following the 2016 election, the DA won the largest number of seats in Nelson Mandela Bay and won the second largest number of seats in Johannesburg. The second criteria for case selection was to select cities where there is a DA mayor. If the ethnic cueing argument explains ANC partisan’s decision to support the DA, the survey sample needs to consist of respondents living in cities run by both a black and white DA mayor. Currently, there are three DA mayors in the country; two of them are Black (Herman Mashaba in Johannesburg and Solly Msimanga in Tshwane), and the other is white (Athol Trollip in NMB). The cities of Johannesburg and NMB fit all of these criteria.

3.1 Demographics, Service Delivery, and Party Competition

City of Johannesburg

The city of Johannesburg in Gauteng province, with a population of 4.4 million, is the most populous city in South Africa and a major economic hub. 63 percent of the city’s residents are black, followed by whites at 16 percent, coloureds at 6 percent, and Asians at 4 percent. As is a common reality in many South African cities, Johannesburg is highly economically unequal. 44.4 percent of households in the city earn less than ZAR2,114 a month (USD144), while 42.2 percent are in the high income category, earning over ZAR70,875 a month (USD4,852.74) (City Report 2009). Despite rampant poverty and inequality, especially for black residents, access to municipal services in Johannesburg is high. According to Census 2011 numbers, 91 percent of households have access to piped water inside of their home, 90 percent have access to hygienic toilets, and 90.8 percent use electricity (HSRC 2015: 44-50). Yet high levels of access to basic services does not necessarily mean those services are high quality. Service delivery disruptions and corruption, especially in the poor parts of the city, are a common occurrence and serve as the catalyst for many protests.
Voting patterns in Johannesburg indicate that support for the ANC has slowly declined over time. In the 2004 national election, the party earned 69 percent of the vote share. The party’s vote share slipped slightly to 63.2 percent in the 2009 election, and in the latest national election in 2014 54 percent of registered voters supported the ANC. The party’s gradual downward trajectory in Johannesburg has been more pronounced in municipal elections. Starting from a high of 58.9 percent in 2000, the ANC’s vote share withered to below 50 percent in 2016 (at 44.5 percent). On the other hand, support for the DA in the city has steadily increased in both national and local elections. The party started with a 19.2 percent vote share in the 2004 national election, and by the 2014 election, it earned a third of the vote share. The trend in support for the DA in municipal elections in Johannesburg is more erratic. The party earned a vote share of 33.5 percent in 2000, which declined to 27 percent in 2006, and reversed upward by 7 points in 2011 (to 34 percent). In the latest local government election in 2016, the DA’s vote share increased to 38 percent. With the exception of the 2006 election, the general trend in support has been in an upward direction.

**Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality**

Nelson Mandela Bay city (NMB), formerly called Port Elizabeth, is located in Eastern Cape province and has a population of 1.2 million. 60 percent of the population is black, 15 percent are white, 24 percent coloured, and 1 percent Asian. Unlike Johannesburg, Xhosa is the dominant ethnic group in this city. Xhosa speakers make up 57 percent of the population (Stats SA 2016). In terms of household income, the annual per capita income in 2016 in NMB was ZAR58,800 (USD3,977), which is higher than both the national and provincial and per capita income levels (ZAR53,800 and ZAR37,800 respectively) (ECSECC 2017: 55). This statistic, however, masks a lot of inequality. White households have a per capita income of ZAR206,000.
(USD13,933), while the average for black households was ZAR30,900 (USD2,090) - well below the city average (ibid).

Coverage of basic services is also high in NMB city. 98 percent of households have access to piped water inside of their dwelling, 84 percent have access to electricity, 94.2 percent have access to proper sanitation, and 90.8 percent of households regularly have their garbage collected (Stats SA 2011). With regard to economic well-being, unemployment is a major problem in the city. The Census 2011 finds that only 36 percent of the city’s population are employed, while the remaining 63.2 percent are either underemployed or unemployed.

Eastern Cape Province has traditionally been the ANC’s heartland, given the large size of the Xhosa ethnic group, which is the largest ethnic group in the party. However, support for the ANC in Eastern Cape has declined dramatically over the years. The ANC’s vote share in national elections in the province went from a high of 84.4 percent in 1994 to 49.2 percent in 2014 (IEC 2014). This is a 35 percent drop in the party’s vote share over a twenty-year period. Similar to Johannesburg, support for the DA in the 2014 election started at 21 percent of the vote share. However, in the last national election, the DA’s vote share in NMB was substantially higher than in Johannesburg (40 percent compared to 30 percent). In municipal elections, the trend in support for the DA has also been in the upward direction. In the 2016 election, the gap between the ANC and DA was the narrowest ever in the city’s history. In this election, 47 percent of registered voters supported the ANC, and 41 percent supported the DA. Compared to Johannesburg, the fact that the DA has more electoral support in NMB municipality may have to do with the large size of the coloured community in the city (24 percent compared to 6 percent in Johannesburg). The coloured community is considered a swing vote in many cities in South Africa, and the DA heavily courts this community for votes in NMB (Prevost et al. 2014).
3.2 Coalition Politics and Mayoral Elections

Given the ANC’s decades-long electoral dominance at multiple levels of government, political coalitions are a rare phenomenon in South Africa. However, following the August 2016 election, three of the eight largest cities in the country ended up with a hung council - no party was able to earn a clear majority of seats in the council. This new political reality left many parties feeling uneasy. One option was for the DA to form a coalition with the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party, a relatively new party led by Julius Malema. Formed after Malema broke away from the ANC in 2013, the EFF is a populist political party. Both the DA and EFF found it unacceptable to broach an alliance with the ANC, as they had sought to distance themselves as much as possible from the ruling party during the campaign. However, neither the DA nor EFF were eager to form coalitions with one another, as the two parties are ideologically incompatible. The EFF’s populist economic policies and undisciplined approach to politics is a turnoff for large segments of the DA’s base. And the EFF leadership was concerned that if it entered into a formal coalition with the DA its supporters would view the merger as an endorsement of the DA’s leadership or policies. However, given its position in several cities as the party with the third largest number of seats, the EFF was in a position to enter into a coalition with either the ANC or DA. The party ended up adopting a policy ofaligning with the DA (and other small parties) on a case-by-case basis. The rationale for entering into selective coalitions with the DA was that compared to the ANC, the EFF considered the DA as the “better devil” (Siddle 2016). However, without a binding agreement to be a permanent coalition partner, the EFF’s decision created the foundations for an unstable alliance, where the party could change its mind at any time and it could vote against a mayor, budget decisions, or key motions put forth by the DA in the council.
Despite the tenuous nature of the alliance between the DA and EFF, the EFF’s willingness to enter into coalitions in select cities contributed to further loosening the ANC’s grip in the metros. In Nelson Mandela Bay, 116 seats were contested during the 2016 election, and the DA won the plurality with 57 seats. In the city of Johannesburg there were 265 seats open, and the DA came in second place, winning 104 seats. In South Africa, mayors are the representatives of large cities, and the party that earns the majority of seats in an election gets to appoint the mayor. If there is no party with a majority of seats, the party with the plurality of seats must form a coalition with smaller parties to earn a majority. Within the coalition, the party with the largest number of seats typically appoints the mayor.

In Johannesburg city, the DA formed a coalition with the EFF, and with their combined vote, their coalition became the majority. In this coalition, the DA’s candidate, Herman Mashaba, was elected mayor. Prior to his involvement in politics, Mashaba, who is from the Tsonga ethnic group, grew up in poverty during the Apartheid regime (Madondo 2012). He eventually climbed his way to success by founding the most popular hair care line in the country, Black Like Me, which is a multi-million dollar enterprise. He joined the DA in 2014 and accepted the party’s nomination as a mayoral candidate in December 2015.

In Nelson Mandela Bay the DA created a coalition with a number of smaller parties, as it did not need to rely on the EFF to earn a majority, and after the August 2016 election, Athol Trollip was elected mayor. Unlike Mashaba, Trollip is a longtime DA member. He has occupied various positions in the party, serving in both Parliament and the Eastern Cape Provincial legislature. Trollip was the DA’s leader in the Eastern Cape legislature from 2002 to 2017. In 2015, the party nominated him as its candidate in Nelson Mandela Bay city. But, after serving as mayor for only two years, the EFF (supported by the ANC and the United Democratic
Movement party) launched a series of no confidence votes that eventually led to Trollip’s ouster as mayor in August 2018.

4 Data

In this paper, I use data collected from a mobile phone survey fielded in Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay metros during August – September 2018. The survey was administered by the marketing company GeoPoll, which specializes in conducting mobile phone surveys in the developing world. The surveys that GeoPoll conducts are opt-in surveys, in which survey participants in the company’s database voluntarily opt-in to take surveys in exchange for free mobile airtime. Through joint agreements with some of the major telecommunications companies in South Africa, GeoPoll has 10 million mobile phone subscribers in its database. One of the modes in which surveys are conducted is the SMS text message survey. The advantage of this mode is that any respondent can take the survey, regardless of the type of phone they own (a basic mobile phone or smart phone). A recent Pew report found that 91 percent of South African citizens have access to a cellular phone, and that half of the country uses smart phones (Silver & Johnson 2018). 82 percent of mobile phone users in South Africa send text messages. This means that most people in the country are comfortable with text messaging as a means of communication. The use of the SMS survey mode also means that the survey will pick up respondents from a lower socio-economic background, who are more likely to own inexpensive mobile phones.

Despite the promising potential of social media as a tool for recruiting survey participants, there are several limitations to using convenience samples collected in this manner. The first concern is that survey respondents will not be representative of the population they are drawn from. Studies using data collected from similar convenience samples, however, find that their
survey samples closely represent the demographics of the general population (Samules & Zucco 2014). In the case of GeoPoll, the company randomly samples its database of subscribers to receive survey invitations. While the outcome of this method is not a nationally representative survey, it does reflect the population of users in GeoPoll’s database.

The survey conducted in this study was in the field from August 2nd - August 27th 2018. The total number of respondents in the survey was 700. Although the initial plan was to have 350 survey respondents in both cities, the final survey contains 517 respondents from Johannesburg and 183 surveys from Nelson Mandela Bay. The smaller sample in NMB metro is because the mayor, Athol Trollip, was ousted in a vote of no confidence on August 27th 2018. Since the survey asks respondents in the city about the mayor, data collection was terminated on the day he was removed from office. Although the sample from NMB is smaller than originally planned, it is still large enough to conduct statistical analysis.

Because I am mainly interested in support for opposition parties by black South Africans, the survey only consists of black respondents. GeoPoll was able to obtain a black-only sample by creating screening questions at the beginning of the survey. Respondents who opted-in to take the survey were asked several demographic questions, including race. Based on their response to the race question, they were either permitted to take the rest of the survey, or notified that they had reached the end of the survey. While there is a concern that the question on race may prime respondents’ racial identity, it was not the first question they were asked in the screening questionnaire, as the question was embedded with other demographic items.

Besides race, there are other important demographic features of the sample. The sample contains a roughly equal proportion of male and female respondents. In terms of age, only respondents over 18 were permitted to take the survey, and the average age is 31. The other
demographic variable collected in this survey is annual income. Respondents were asked to identify which income group they fall into: low (less than ZAR20,000), middle (ZAR20,000 - ZAR300,000), or high (above ZAR300,000). 70 percent of respondents in the sample are low income, 25 percent are middle income, and 4 percent are high income. The fact that most respondents in the sample are from the lower end of the income distribution may be due to the fact that poorer people are probably more likely to want to take mobile phone surveys in exchange for free airtime. While poor constituents are not part of the DA’s traditional base, this sample of black and overwhelmingly low-income respondents supports my research design. For the DA to expand beyond its base of white, Indian and colored voters, it has to win support from not just middle class black voters, but also poor blacks, who make up a significant portion of the urban population. This sample provides an opportunity to test whether poor voters are responding to the DA’s attempt to brand itself as a party of good governance. Finally, the survey includes a question about which language respondents use at home. This language question was included to serve as a proxy for the respondent’s ethnic group, since language and ethnicity are closely related in South Africa.

I limit the data analysis to ANC partisans only. I define an ANC partisan as an individual who identifies closely with the ruling party. From the perspective of the DA, I refer to these individuals as non-core supporters. The survey item used to measure ANC partisanship is a question that asks respondents: “what party do you feel closest to?”

The main dependent variable in this study is a question on vote choice in the next local government election: “What party would you vote for in the next local government election?” Since this study is focused on support for the DA, the responses to this question are transformed into a dichotomous variable, with 1 indicating that the respondent would vote for the DA and 0
indicating a vote for another party. Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses to this question in both metros. Most respondents indicate that they would support the ruling party. The second most popular party is the EFF, and the DA is the third. While this sample contains more prospective ANC and EFF voters, it is important to keep in mind that the DA earned the plurality of the vote share in Nelson Mandela Bay (46.71 percent), and was the party that second place party in Johannesburg (earning 38.4 percent of the vote share). The results from the 2016 election indicate that the party does have real support among a significant portion of voters in these two cities. The reasons that the survey may not reflect this popularity is that there are only black respondents in the survey. Without exit poll data, it is not possible to disaggregate party support based on race from the election returns. However, data from Citizen Survey, which is a nationally representative survey that has been conducted monthly since 2015, contains questions
Figure 2. Vote Choice in the 2016 Election [Citizen Survey]

about vote choice in the 2016 election. As Figure 2 shows, in the 2016 election, the DA was the second most popular party, followed by the EFF. This nationally representative sample accurately reflects the results of the election. I will also use this nationally representative sample to test the generalizability of some key hypotheses.

To examine the party credibility hypothesis, I operationalize party credibility using a survey item that asks respondents to state which political party they believe is the best at fighting corruption in local government. This question is open-ended, and respondents had to type the name of the political party they think does the best job fighting corruption. I use the responses to this question to create a dichotomous variable that takes on the value 1 if the respondent thinks the DA is best at fighting corruption and 0 for other parties. Figure 3 shows the distribution of responses to this question. Most respondents view the EFF as the party with the best reputation
Figure 3. Which Party is the Best at Fighting Corruption?

for fighting corruption. This finding is most likely a reflection of the EFF’s image as a populist party that is anti-status quo and critical of the ANC establishment. The EFF, however, is a new party. It was founded in 2013, and although it won some seats in Johannesburg and NMB, the party does not have a record of time served in local government. The fact that the EFF is viewed by most respondents as having the best reputation despite its recent entry into politics reinforces the relevance of party credibility as a driver of voting behavior. The way voters perceive a party’s reputation is independent of the actual time it has spent in government. This trend allows us to compare whether party credibility functions similarly or differently for established parties like the DA and newcomers such as the EFF.
The other explanatory variable in this analysis is ethnic cueing, which is I operational using two survey items. The first question is an open-ended question in which respondents were asked to write the name of the mayor of in their city. In the Johannesburg sample, 64 percent of the respondents answered Herman Mashaba correctly. In the NMB sample, 89 percent answered Athol Trollip correctly. The fact that the majority of respondents know the name of the mayor shows that they are aware of who is leading their cities. The next survey item asked respondents: “how much do you like/dislike the mayor of Johannesburg [NMB]?” The responses to this question are measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Figure 4 shows the distribution of responses to this question for both mayor Mashaba and Trollip. The distributions of both histograms are clearly skewed toward the higher values on the scale, indicating that both of these mayors are popular. It is also important to state that a significant bloc of respondents don’t have a strong attitude about the mayor. In Johannesburg 22 percent have neutral feelings toward the mayor,
while 41 percent feel the same about the mayor in NMB. While there are many reasons why respondents would feel indifferent toward any political figure, the existence of respondents in this category should not impact the overall analysis.

I also include in the regression models several demographic variables that scholars have previously found to be associated with opposition support. Younger voters are more likely to oppose support for dominant party regimes in parts of Africa (MacDonald 2018), so I include age as a control variable. The next demographic factor I control for is income. Wealthier voters are a less stable constituency for dominant parties (Magaloni 2006; Weitz-Shapiro 2012). These voters tend to be less reliant on patronage from the ruling party and will suffer less material consequences if they support the opposition. Wealthier voters also tend to be more educated, meaning that they have access to more sources of information about political party platforms. Finally, while there are no theoretical reasons to expect gender differences in opposition support, I still include gender as a covariate, which takes on the value of 1 if the respondent is female, and 0 if they are male.

One concern with analyzing the relationship between party performance and vote choice in general is that these two factors may be closely correlated. To examine the extent to which reverse causality may interfere with the interruption of the results (i.e. partisanship impacting perceptions of performance) I take several steps. First, I present a breakdown of the two relevant variables in my data - party reputation and vote choice, based on partisan affiliation. Are there a substantial number of ANC partisans in the data who view other parties as having a stronger reputation for good governance? If so, this would be evidence that partisanship does not strictly shape how respondents view their party’s reputation. Table 1 shows that 46% of ANC partisans believe that another party has a better reputation for fighting corruption. The fact that close to
Table 1. Partisanship and Party Credibility

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<th>Partisanship</th>
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<th>EFF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFF</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

half of ANC supporters say that either the DA or EFF has a better reputation for fighting corruption than their own party supports the claim that partisanship does not necessarily shape individual’s perceptions about party credibility. Table 2 also shows that 45% of DA partisans view the ANC or EFF as the party with the better reputation. This finding may reflect the smaller sample of DA partisans in the data compared to ANC or EFF partisans, however, it also supports the argument that the relationship between partisanship and evaluations of party credibility are not tightly linked. The EFF is the only party where the overwhelming majority of partisans view the EFF as having the best reputation. Only 28% of EFF partisans view either the ANC or DA as having a better reputation fighting corruption. This result reflects the fact that compared to the other parties the EFF is a relatively new party. The 2016 election was the first local government election the EFF participated in, thus voters have not had an extensive period of time to observe the EFF’s track record in government.

Table 2 shows that although partisan identification and vote choice are strongly correlated for supporters of each party, there are a significant number of partisans who are open to voting for other parties. 29% of both ANC and EFF partisans consider voting for other parties in the future election. The DA has the largest number of partisans (37% combined) who would support the ANC or EFF in a future election. The fact that more DA partisans would vote for the ANC (28%) than the EFF (8%) suggests that even though some black voters may be attached to
Table 2. Partisanship and Vote Choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partisanship</th>
<th>ANC</th>
<th>DA</th>
<th>EFF</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFF</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the DA, they are still ambivalent about the party, and that there exists a possibility that they could support another party. While white, coloured, or Indian respondents are not included in this sample, it is likely that this results would not hold for DA partisans from these racial groups, which are more strongly incorporated in the DA’s base.

Given the somewhat loose connection between partisanship, perceptions of party credibility, and vote choice, I restrict the analysis of the data to ANC partisans. From a theoretical standpoint it also makes sense to restrict the analysis to ANC partisans since they represent the largest voting bloc in the country, and opposition parties have to persuade them if they are to expand their support.

5 Results

The analysis consists of three parts. In the first part, I test the party credibility hypothesis on the sub-set of ANC partisans in the survey. The second part of the analysis disaggregates the data by city and examines the relationship between party credibility, ethnic cueing, and vote choice. I estimate separate logistic models for each city. Finally, to examine whether the results reported from this sample can be generalized to the broader population, I use data from the Citizen Survey to test the ethnic cueing hypothesis. The Citizen Survey is a nationally representative probability-sample survey that is administered monthly.
Table 3 shows the results for the party credibility model. Overall, the results indicate that among ANC partisans the perception of the DA as an anti-corruption party are positively and strongly associated with the intention to vote for the party in the next election. The results in column 1 show that among ANC partisans, perceptions of the DA’s party credibility are positively associated with the decision to vote for the party in the future. The predicted probability from this model in column indicates that ANC partisans who view the DA as the party with the best reputation for fighting corruption are 53 percent more likely to vote for the DA. On the other hand ANC partisans who view the ruling party or the EFF as having the best anti-corruption reputation have a 0.1 probability of supporting the DA.

Table 4 presents the results of the analysis for respondents in Johannesburg. The models for the party credibility hypothesis and ethnic cueing hypothesis are presented separately in
Table 4. Johannesburg Vote Choice Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vote for the DA</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Credibility</td>
<td>2.515***</td>
<td>(0.475)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ethnic Cueing</td>
<td>-0.100</td>
<td>(0.220)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.053**</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-1.001**</td>
<td>-1.161**</td>
<td>(0.494)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.153</td>
<td>-0.453</td>
<td>(0.478)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-3.588***</td>
<td>-2.576**</td>
<td>(1.045)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>206</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-66.353</td>
<td>-75.381</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akaike Inf. Crit.</td>
<td>142.706</td>
<td>160.762</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

columns 1 and 2. The results from column 1 show strong support for the hypothesis that the DA’s reputation for good governance is a strong predictor of support for the party among ANC partisans. The coefficient on the party credibility variable is again positive and strong. The predicted probability that an ANC partisan living in Johannesburg would vote for the DA is 0.47 if they think the DA has the best reputation for fighting corruption. In column 2, ethnic cueing does not appear to play a role in voting behavior, as indicated by the statistically insignificance of the coefficient. Another finding is that the sign on the coefficient is negative, meaning that ANC partisans who view mayor Mashaba favorably are less likely to vote for the DA. This finding runs counter to the expectation of the ethnic cueing hypothesis, which holds that ANC partisans who hold favorable views toward a black DA mayor should be more likely to vote for
the party in the future. It is possible that this result may be due to the sample size of the ANC partisans in Johannesburg who answered the ethnic cueing survey question (a sample of 206 respondents). In the next section I test the ethnic cueing hypothesis using a larger, nationally representative sample of ANC partisans to further probe whether this result holds for the general population.

To summarize, the results from the survey of respondents living in Johannesburg shows a strong relationship between party credibility and vote choice, and a minimal role played by the presence of a black DA mayor on vote choice. The significance of this result is that the model of voting behavior in local elections in South Africa is meaningfully different from national elections. While many studies show that vote choice in national elections is strongly shaped by black voters’ perception of parties as racially inclusive or exclusive (Ferree 2010), at the local level, perceptions about a party’s competence in governance matter greatly.

The results from respondents living in Nelson Mandela Bay municipality are presented in Table 5. Column 1 shows that the relationship between perceptions of party credibility and the decision to vote for the DA remains positive and large in this city. The coefficient on the ethnic cueing variable is larger in NMB than in Johannesburg. This result is in line with $H_3$, which predicted that party credibility should be a stronger driver of vote choice in NMB than in Johannesburg. The argument stated that the presence of a white DA mayor in NMB, which reinforces the image of the DA as a white party, should mean that the party’s reputation (and not ethnic cueing) should be a stronger predictor of DA support. As in the Johannesburg sample, column 2 shows that the ethnic cueing variable is not statistically significant. However, the coefficient is in the positive direction, meaning that ANC partisans who view mayor Trollip favorably are more likely to vote for the DA. It is a surprising result that ethnic cueing are a
Table 5. Nelson Mandela Bay Vote Choice Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote for the DA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Credibility</td>
<td>3.082***</td>
<td>0.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.747)</td>
<td>(0.280)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ethnic Cueing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.280)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.034</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.045)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.436</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.761)</td>
<td>(0.628)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.471</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.740)</td>
<td>(0.687)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.367</td>
<td>-1.684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.571)</td>
<td>(1.499)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-29.852</td>
<td>-34.289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akaike Inf. Crit.</td>
<td>69.704</td>
<td>78.578</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

stronger determinant of vote choice in NMB than in Johannesburg, given that Trollip is a white DA mayor. A possible explanation is that there are some personal characteristics about mayor Mashaba in Johannesburg that ANC partisans find repellant. A possible way to address this in the future would be to extend the survey to other cities run by another black DA mayor and to compare those results with the ones reported here.

5.1 Generalizability of the Ethnic Cueing Result using Nationally Representative Sample

Although ethnic cueing is not a strong predictor of vote choice for ANC partisans in the results from Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay, does this trend hold for the entire country? As Farole (2019) shows, the DA has largely managed to diversify the candidates it nominates to local office over time. This effort culminated with the 2016 local government election, in which
the DA nominated more black local government councilors than white candidates. Clearly, the party sees a strategic benefit to using the nomination (and sometimes eventual election) of black candidates as a way to persuade black voters that the DA is racially inclusive. Nowhere is this strategy more visible than with the party’s nomination of Mmusi Maimane, who is the party’s first black leader. If leadership ethnic cueing shape vote choice, ANC partisans who view Maimane favorably should be more likely to support the DA than those who do not, controlling for relevant factors.

In addition to the DA, I also extend the analysis to whether the EFF benefits electorally from ethnic cueing also. Julius Malema is a former member of the ANC Youth League, who defected from the party in 2014 and formed the EFF. His populist rhetoric has earned the EFF a popular following among Blacks in parts of the country. Although my data did not contain favorability ratings for Malema, many public opinion surveys in South Africa track mass opinion on political leaders.

To assess the generalizability of the ethnic cueing hypothesis I use data from the Citizen Survey, which is a nationally representative survey. The wave of the Citizen Survey that I use was fielded May - July 2016, which preceded the August local government election. There are 3,897 respondents in this wave of the data. Although the survey includes respondents from all racial backgrounds, in this study the analysis is limited to black respondents who are ANC partisans. ANC partisanship is based on the same criteria used in the first part of the analysis.

The dependent variable in this analysis is the respondent’s stated intention to vote for the DA in the upcoming 2016 election. One limitation of the The Citizen Survey does not contain a question that is comparable to the party credibility variable. Thus, this analysis will be limited to the co-ethnic cues hypothesis.
The main explanatory variable is ethnic cueing, which is measured slightly differently from the original survey in Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay. The Citizen Survey does not contain questions that ask respondents to rate their favorability toward mayoral leadership. Instead, the survey consistently tracks respondents’ favorability toward different party leaders, such as Mmusi Maimane, Jacob Zuma, Cyril Ramaphosa, and Julius Malema. Herman Mashaba and Athol Trollip were not mayors during the time this survey was fielded, thus there are no favorability rating questions about them in the survey. Instead, I only analyze the responses to the questions about Maimane and Malema. Unlike Mashaba and Trollip, Maimane is a national political figure. Analyzing black respondent’s attitudes toward Maimane as the party leader is useful for understanding to what degree ethnic cueing impacts support for the DA among black voters at the national level. To examine whether ethnic cueing also applies to the EFF, I also analyze responses to the favorability rating for Julius Malema. The leadership ethnic cueing variable is measured using a question from the survey that asks respondents how much they like or dislike various political leaders. Responses are measured on a 10-point Likert scale.

Using the survey items from the Citizen Survey data, I estimate a logistic regression to estimate the ethnic cueing hypothesis for both Maimane and Malema, and I include control variables for respondent age, gender, and income.

Table 6 shows the results from the logistic regression for both the Maimane ethnic cueing model (Model 1) and the Malema ethnic cueing model (Model 2). While the logit coefficients on both variables are positive and statistically significant, the logit coefficient for the Maimane favorability rating is stronger. This means that favorability toward the EFF leadership plays a stronger role in the decision by ANC partisans to support the EFF than it does for the DA. Predicted probabilities of the leadership variable for both Model 1 and 2 are plotted in Figures 5.
Table 6. Candidate Cues Hypothesis [Citizen Survey]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vote DA (1)</th>
<th>Vote EFF (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maimane Co-ethnic Cueing</td>
<td>0.546*** (0.099)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malema Co-ethnic Cueing</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.869*** (0.206)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.020 (0.017)</td>
<td>0.011 (0.035)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.467 (0.539)</td>
<td>-0.033 (1.032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>-0.082 (0.539)</td>
<td>-1.025 (1.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.098 (0.086)</td>
<td>0.067 (0.167)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-3.679*** (1.145)</td>
<td>-6.336** (2.742)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 109 112
Log Likelihood: -47.860 -16.701
Akaike Inf. Crit.: 107.720 45.402

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; *** p<0.01

and 6. The slope on the Malema favorability plot is flatter at lower levels of favorability, meaning that respondents who do not like Malema very much (0 – 3 ratings) are less likely to vote for the EFF. On the other hand the slope on the Maimane plot grows steeper more quickly. The overall meaning is that while those who disapprove of Maimane are less likely to support the DA than those who like the DA leader, their probability of voting for the DA is still higher than those who view Malema as unfavorably. ANC partisans who view both leaders very favorably (8+ rating) are more likely to vote for each party.

For ANC partisans who view Maimane unfavorably (rating of 0), the predicted probability of voting for DA is 7.5 percent. For those who view Maimane favorably (a rating of 8), the predicted probability of supporting the party is 86 percent. The trend is similar for Malema. Negative evaluations of the EFF leader (rating of 0) are associated with a 0.23 percent predicted probability of voting for the EFF, while the predicted probability of support for ANC partisans who view Malema favorably (rating of 8) is 71 percent.
Figure 5. Predicted Probability Plot of Maimane Co-ethnic Cueing

Figure 6. Predicted Probability Plot of Malema Co-ethnic Cueing
The result from this analysis of nationally representative data indicates that ethnic cueing does play an important part in determining the vote choice of ANC partisans. Voters who identify with the ruling party are persuaded to vote for opposition parties if they view the leadership favorably. While ethnic cueing did not play a significant role in determining vote choice in the Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay samples, the results from the analysis of the Citizen Survey indicates that ethnic cueing from national party leaders are important in persuading ANC partisans. This result may reflect the fact that national party leaders have a larger presence on the national media scene. Their greater visibility on the national political scene means that voters more readily identify them with the party than they would with junior party leaders, such as mayors.

6. Conclusion

Why are some partisans of the ruling party willing to support the opposition in a dominant party system? Given the huge resource imbalance that exists between the ruling party and the opposition, opposition parties in a dominant party system have few tools at their disposal to attract voters away from the incumbent. One of the major obstacles that impede opposition party growth is that because they govern so few parts of the country, voters lack information about how these parties would perform if they were to gain power. Studies show that the opposition can overcome this information asymmetry by gaining entry into subnational office and spreading their victories (Lucardi 2016). While studies on opposition expansion in subnational political office only indirectly link this outcome to the role of growing voter awareness about the competence of opposition parties in local government, this assumption is not directly tested. In this paper, I find that partisans of the ruling party are willing to vote for the opposition when they are convinced that the opposition is more credible on issues of good governance than other
parties (including the incumbent). Previous studies focus on the role of opposition party campaign promises to provide collective goods as a determinant of vote choice (Weghorst & Lindberg 2011). However, I show that perceptions of party credibility are a key factor in the decision by ruling party supporters to vote for the opposition. An underlying assumption in my argument is that voter’s perceptions about the DA’s competence form in the first place because the DA has actually spent time in office developing a positive reputation for service delivery and good governance. The longer time an opposition party has served in office, the more likely voters are to develop a perception of party credibility. In addition to confirming this hypothesis, I also find that ANC partisans view the EFF as has having the best reputation for fighting corruption. The EFF is a new party and has not participated in as many elections as the DA, nor does it govern as many municipalities or wards. However, this finding does not necessarily contradict the argument that perceptions matter for parties being able to build a credible reputation. In fact, studies show that opposition parties in other parts of Africa rely on populist rhetoric to convince poor urban voters that they are a viable party (Resnick 2012; Cheeseman & Larmer 2015). The formation of party credibility on the basis of rhetoric or actual time spent in office may be co-existing explanations for opposition support.

One critical scope condition or assumption to the theory of party credibility is that it applies to cases of dominant party rule where opposition parties have the chance of entering into local government. This argument does not carry well to countries where there are institutional barriers to political decentralization. For instance, in Singapore, the ruling party has in place a deliberate strategy of limiting political and fiscal decentralization. As a result, opposition parties have a difficult time gaining entry into local office because there are fewer electoral seats to contest. The inability to enter local government makes it difficult for the opposition to create a
base of support where they can expand out from. Consequently, voters in these cases of dominant party rule face an even greater information barrier. This lack of awareness of alternative models of governance in tandem with the ruling party’s impressive track record on delivering development makes it especially costly to support the opposition. However, my analysis of voters in South Africa indicates that the DA’s governance of municipalities in Western Cape province has helped convince some voters that they have a credible reputation. Future growth of the party rests on its ability to convince more voters in the ruling party coalition that their governance model is a credible alternative to the ANC.

While the party credibility argument can be extended to explain other cases of opposition party growth in instances of dominant party decline such as Malaysia (Abdullah 2017) and Mexico (Lucardi 2016), this paper also addressed the racial dynamics of party politics that are specific to the South Africa case. Race is an important mobilizing tool for political parties in South Africa, and in this paper I tested the alternative hypothesis that ANC supporters are more likely to vote for the DA if the leadership of the DA is black. Although I did not find support for this hypothesis in my survey sample, ethnic cueing is an important determinant of DA support in a nationally representative sample. This finding suggests that opposition parties cannot simply rely on building a track record for good governance at the local level - the decisions made in who represents the face of the party also matters for growth.

Another interesting insight from this paper is the fluidity of partisanship in South Africa. Up until recently, scholars considered that partisanship does not play a central role in models of voting behavior in Africa. It is thought that partisan voting in Africa is either very weak or that partisanship acts through other meaningful explanations of voting behavior, such as ethnic identity. In a recent study, Carlson (2015) compares objective indicators of local public goods
quality in Uganda to voter perceptions of these services and finds that ruling party partisans in Uganda are more likely to overestimate the quality of public goods provided by the government, while opposition supporters are likely to underestimate it. While the findings from that study suggest that partisan allegiances in Africa are stubborn, the results from this paper show that partisanship and voter perceptions of good governance in South Africa are fluid. A substantial portion of ANC partisans view the DA or EFF as more credible at good governance. Although most partisans view their party as the best performer, this finding suggests that there is room for parties to persuade voters and that voters are not blind loyal partisans. Future studies should investigate the relationship between partisanship and perceptions of party credibility in other contexts.
References


