**Theoretical Problem**

Sub-optimal allocation of political goods may arise because citizens in a democratic society express preferences for sub-optimal allocation. Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes [-@przeworski_democracy_1999] describe how such sub-optimal allocations can arise when poltiicians pander to voter preferences that are not in the voters' best interests. Within the American politics literature, the theory of symbolic politics can explain why and when voters hold preferences contrary to their objective material self-interests [@sears_whites_1979, @sears_self-interest_1980]. Individuals acquire predispositions toward political objects through socialization at a young age; thse predispositions guide preferences later in life. In particular, symbolic politics theory emphasizes racial prejudice, political ideology, and partisan identification as drivers of policy preferences. As far as we are aware, this theory has not yet been applied in an African context. Especially in light of recent research that demonstrates the limits of ethnic favoritism in the distribution of African political goods [@kasara_tax_2007, @kramon_who_2013, @burgess_value_2015], the question of whether ethnic identity drives distributive preferences rather than material self-interest merits investigation.

This project will make the following contributions to the literature:

- If symbolic politics explains greater variation in distributive preferences than material self-interest, one implication will be that welfare enhancement may not accompany democratization.

- If material self-interest explains greater variation in distributive preference than symbolic predispositions like ethnic identity, we will clarify the debate over the salience of ethnic identity in African politics.

- Our project will expand the literature on political psychology to developing countries, where it has not been extensively applied.

**Methods**

We propose to use individual-level data collected in Afrobarometer's sixth round survey (2014-2015) . We will use two questions to measure our dependent outcome, policy preferences. The first question asked respondents in all 36 countries about willingness to raise taxes if it results in better access to health care (Q65C). The second question asked respondents in Liberia (Q86F-LIB) and Sierra Leone (Q86G-SRL) about their willingness to allocate resources toward combatting Ebola versus toward other prioirites. We will use other Afrobarometer items to develop measure for material self-interest and symbolic predispositions. For example, for the Ebola question, we will gage self-interest using questions that ask whether respondents knew infected individuals and whether Ebola disrupted their access to other medical treatments. We will gage symbolic predispositions with questions on strength of ethnic identity, party affiliation, and political ideology. We will use a logit regression to differentiate the explanatory potential of self-interest and symbolic predispositions, just as Sears and coauthors did in their original analyses.

We expect that, overall, symbolic predispositions will explain greater variation in distributive preferences than material self-interest. However, we expect that symbolic predispositions will explain greater variation in preferences for the generalized healthcare question than the Ebola question, as Ebola had concrete and highly observable impacts on people's lives.