The Death of Distance: Mobile Internet and Political Trust in Africa

Tables

January 31, 2025

Table 1: Effect of distance from the capital on political trust

	OLS			
	Political trust			
	Base sample		Border sample	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Distance from the capital	0.300***	0.298***	0.618***	0.341**
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.15)	(0.16)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country controls	Yes	No	Yes	No
Round FE	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country X Round FE	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ethnic homeland FE	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	107,117	111,570	10,790	11,924
Adjusted-R^2	0.105	0.156	0.140	0.172

Notes: The border sample includes individuals residing within a 40-kilometer buffer around a country border that overlaps with a historical ethnic homeland, as defined by Murdock (1959). Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level for the base sample and ethnic homeland x region x round level for the border sample are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, interest in politics, TV news consumption, radio news consumption, newspaper consumption. (3) and (4) also include a measure of ethnic discrimination. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. The set of country controls includes: log(GDP.p.c.), log(area), V-Dem Polyarchy index, World Bank corruption index, political regime type, colonial origin. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 2: Effect of internet coverage on political trust by distance

	Base sample			
	OLS	First Stage		2SLS
	Political trust	Internet coverage	Distance × Internet coverage	Political trust
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Distance from the capital	0.453***			1.523***
	(0.05)			(0.56)
Internet coverage	-0.015			1.770**
	(0.06)			(0.69)
Distance from the capital × Internet coverage	-0.466***			-2.950**
	(0.10)			(1.45)
Lightning strikes		-0.002***	-0.000	
		(0.00)	(0.00)	
Distance from the capital city × Lightning strikes		-0.000	-0.001***	
		(0.00)	(0.00)	
SW F - Lightning strikes	-	-	13.74	-
SW F - Distance × Lightning strikes	-	-	8.62	-
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country X Round FE	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Observations	111,570	113,243	113,243	111,570
Adjusted-R^2	0.158	-	-	-

Notes: Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, ethnic discrimination, interest in politics, TV news consumption, newspaper consumption, radio consumption. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 3: Political accountability

	2SLS	
	Vote against ruling party	Country performance
	Base sample	Base sample
	(1)	(2)
Distance from the capital	-0.932***	1.874***
	(0.28)	(0.65)
Internet coverage	-1.163***	2.089***
	(0.41)	(0.77)
Distance from the capital × Internet coverage	2.104***	-4.200**
	(0.74)	(1.69)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes
Country X Round FE	Yes	Yes
Observations	74,959	111,696

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, ethnic discrimination, interest in politics, TV news consumption, newspaper consumption, radio consumption. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 4: Media and institutions freedom

	2SLS: Political trust			
	Base sample			
	Media		Institutions	
	Free	Captured	Free	Captured
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Distance from the capital	-8.382	1.083**	2.367	0.938***
	(24.71)	(0.42)	(1.50)	(0.32)
Internet coverage	-5.260	1.004	2.653*	0.762
	(19.11)	(0.74)	(1.49)	(0.69)
Distance from the capital × Internet coverage	18.335	-2.149*	-5.132	-1.524**
	(52.59)	(1.25)	(3.92)	(0.77)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country X Round FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	50,288	61,282	51,737	59,833

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, ethnic discrimination, interest in politics, TV news consumption, newspaper consumption, radio consumption. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 5: Individual heterogeneity

	2SLS: Political trust			
	Base sample			
	Education		Urban/Rural	
	< Secondary	≥ Secondary	Urban	Rural
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Distance from the capital	1.467***	1.440	1.074**	2.666***
	(0.45)	(1.44)	(0.54)	(0.89)
Internet coverage	1.613**	1.632	0.525	4.471***
	(0.63)	(1.34)	(0.62)	(1.48)
Distance from the capital × Internet coverage	-2.901**	-2.688	-1.787	-5.898**
	(1.24)	(3.22)	(1.12)	(2.55)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country X Round FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	79,394	32,176	42,509	69,061

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, ethnic discrimination, interest in politics, TV news consumption, newspaper consumption, radio consumption. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. Education, rural/urban, and age controls are omitted from columns (1-2), (3-4), and (5-8), respectively.*** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

APPENDIX

Table 6: Effect of internet coverage on internet news consumption and internet use

	OLS			
	Internet news		Internet use	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Internet coverage	0.900***	1.127***	0.948***	1.217***
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country controls	Yes	No	Yes	No
Round FE	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country X Round FE	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ethnic homeland FE	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	120,988	120,988	120,859	120,859
Adjusted-R^2	0.092	0.148	0.100	0.158

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the capital normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, interest in politics, TV news consumption, radio news consumption, newspaper consumption. Border samples regressions also include a measure of ethnic discrimination. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. The set of country controls includes: log(GDP.p.c.), log(area), V-Dem Polyarchy index, World Bank corruption index, political regime type, colonial origin. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 7: Effect of distance from the capital on trust in president and parliament

	OLS							
	Trust in president				Trust in parliament			
	Base sample		Border sample		Base sample		Border sample	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Distance from the capital	0.316***	0.292***	0.733***	0.259	0.285***	0.305***	0.531***	0.470***
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country controls	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Round FE	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country X Round FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ethnic homeland FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	105,993	110,439	10,642	11,772	104,535	108,982	10,534	11,667
Adjusted-R^2	0.084	0.138	0.173	0.200	0.095	0.134	0.086	0.120

Notes: The border sample includes individuals residing within a 40-kilometer buffer around a country border that overlaps with a historical ethnic homeland, as defined by Murdock (1959). Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level for the base sample and ethnic homeland x region x round level for the border sample are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, interest in politics, TV news consumption, radio news consumption, newspaper consumption. Border samples regressions also include a measure of ethnic discrimination. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. The set of country controls includes: log(GDP.p.c.), log(area), V-Dem Polyarchy index, World Bank corruption index, political regime type, colonial origin. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 8: Effect of distance from the capital on political trust - Different distance measures

	OLS											
	Political trust											
	Base sample		Border sample		Base sample		Border sample		Base sample		Border sample	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Distance from the capital (in 10km)	0.004*** (0.00)	0.003*** (0.00)	0.009*** (0.00)	0.003 (0.00)								
log(Distance from the capital)					0.039*** (0.01)	0.042*** (0.01)	0.158*** (0.04)	0.088** (0.04)				
Distance from the capital (mean normalization)									0.107*** (0.02)	0.101*** (0.01)	0.234*** (0.05)	0.107** (0.05)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country controls	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Round FE	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country X Round FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ethnic homeland FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	107,117	111,570	10,790	11,924	107,117	111,570	10,790	11,924	107,117	111,570	10,790	11,924
Adjusted-R^2	0.107	0.156	0.142	0.172	0.103	0.154	0.139	0.173	0.105	0.156	0.141	0.172

Notes: The border sample includes individuals residing within a 40-kilometer buffer around a country border that overlaps with a historical ethnic homeland, as defined by Murdock (1959). Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level for the base sample and ethnic homeland x region x round level for the border sample are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, interest in politics, TV news consumption, radio news consumption, newspaper consumption. Border samples regressions also include a measure of ethnic discrimination. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. The set of country controls includes: log(GDP.p.c.), log(area), V-Dem Polyarchy index, World Bank corruption index, political regime type, colonial origin. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 9: Effect of distance from the capital on political trust - Non-linearities

	OLS											
	Political trust											
	Base sample		Border sample		Base sample		Border sample		Base sample		Border sample	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Distance from the capital (Q2)	-0.005 (0.03)	-0.005 (0.02)	0.132 (0.11)	0.156* (0.09)								
Distance from the capital (Q3)	-0.026 (0.04)	-0.021 (0.03)	0.269** (0.13)	0.193* (0.10)								
Distance from the capital (Q4)	0.102*** (0.03)	0.102*** (0.02)	0.371*** (0.14)	0.214** (0.11)								
Distance from the capital (Q5)	0.170*** (0.04)	0.165*** (0.03)	0.379*** (0.14)	0.169 (0.11)								
Distance from the capital					-0.438*** (0.15)	-0.252** (0.11)	1.250*** (0.48)	1.019** (0.40)	-0.981*** (0.38)	-0.537** (0.26)	1.923** (0.89)	2.642*** (0.76)
Distance from the capital^2					0.832*** (0.16)	0.621*** (0.12)	-0.619 (0.41)	-0.669** (0.34)	2.320** (0.91)	1.404** (0.64)	-2.227 (1.78)	-4.725*** (1.65)
Distance from the capital^3									-1.077* (0.61)	-0.567 (0.45)	1.043 (1.11)	2.658** (1.05)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country controls	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Round FE	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country X Round FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ethnic homeland FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	107,117	111,570	10,790	11,924	107,117	111,570	10,790	11,924	107,117	111,570	10,790	11,924
Adjusted-R^2	0.106	0.157	0.138	0.173	0.107	0.157	0.141	0.173	0.108	0.157	0.141	0.174

Notes: The border sample includes individuals residing within a 40-kilometer buffer around a country border that overlaps with a historical ethnic homeland, as defined by Murdock (1959). Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level for the base sample and ethnic homeland x region x round level for the border sample are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, interest in politics, TV news consumption, radio news consumption, newspaper consumption. Border samples regressions also include a measure of ethnic discrimination. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. The set of country controls includes: log(GDP.p.c.), log(area), V-Dem Polyarchy index, World Bank corruption index, political regime type, colonial origin. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 10: Effect of distance from the capital on political trust - Different border samples

	OLS			
	Political trust			
	30-km buffer		50-km buffer	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Distance from the capital	0.629***	0.147	0.561***	0.274*
	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country controls	Yes	No	Yes	No
Round FE	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country X Round FE	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ethnic homeland FE	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	7,568	8,543	13,352	14,729
Adjusted-R^2	0.135	0.173	0.138	0.167

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the ethnic homeland x region x round level for the border samples are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, interest in politics, TV news consumption, radio news consumption, newspaper consumption. Border samples regressions also include a measure of ethnic discrimination. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. The set of country controls includes: log(GDP.p.c.), log(area), V-Dem Polyarchy index, World Bank corruption index, political regime type, colonial origin. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 11: Effect of distance from the capital on political trust - Media consumption

	OLS											
	TV news				Radio news				Newspaper			
	Base sample		Border sample		Base sample		Border sample		Base sample		Border sample	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Distance from the capital	-0.536***	-0.531***	-0.371**	-0.361**	0.057	0.007	-0.221	-0.306	-0.113***	-0.081***	-0.079	0.075
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.15)	(0.18)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.16)	(0.20)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.12)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country controls	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Round FE	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country X Round FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ethnic homeland FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	108,766	113,243	10,976	121,15	108,766	113,243	10,976	12,115	108,766	113,243	10,976	12,115
Adjusted-R^2	0.458	0.469	0.436	0.445	0.151	0.181	0.178	0.196	0.360	0.378	0.342	0.349

Notes: The border sample includes individuals residing within a 40-kilometer buffer around a country border that overlaps with a historical ethnic homeland, as defined by Murdock (1959). Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level for the base sample and ethnic homeland x region x round level for the border sample are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, interest in politics. Each media consumption measure (TV, radio, newspaper) is excluded from controls when it is the dependent variable. Border samples regressions also include a measure of ethnic discrimination. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. The set of country controls includes: log(GDP.p.c.), log(area), V-Dem Polyarchy index, World Bank corruption index, political regime type, colonial origin. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.

Table 12: Effect of distance from the capital on internet news

	OLS			
	Internet news			
	Base sample		Border sample	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Distance from the capital	-0.080***	-0.065**	0.049	0.074
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Individual & regional controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country controls	Yes	No	Yes	No
Round FE	Yes	No	Yes	No
Country X Round FE	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ethnic homeland FE	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	107,592	112,051	108,86	12,019
Adjusted-R^2	0.422	0.432	0.387	0.386

Notes: The border sample includes individuals residing within a 40-kilometer buffer around a country border that overlaps with a historical ethnic homeland, as defined by Murdock (1959). Robust standard errors clustered at the region x round level for the base sample and ethnic homeland x region x round level for the border sample are in parentheses. The set of individual controls includes measures of: normalized distance from the largest non-capital city, age, age squared, sex, education, employment status, rural/urban situation, personal economic conditions perception, interest in politics, TV news consumption, radio news consumption, newspaper consumption. Border samples regressions also include a measure of ethnic discrimination. The set of regional controls includes measures of: nighttime light, population density, region area, president birthplace dummy. The set of country controls includes: log(GDP.p.c.), log(area), V-Dem Polyarchy index, World Bank corruption index, political regime type, colonial origin. *** / ** / * represent significance at the 0.01 / 0.05 / 0.10 levels, respectively.