

# LANGUAGE POLICIES AND VOTER TURNOUT

## Evidence from South Africa

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### ABSTRACT

*While many studies have probed the relationship between ethnic diversity and voter turnout, few have examined how voter turnout might be influenced by state policies that afford ethnic groups differing levels of official recognition. This study draws on theories at the intersection of political science and sociolinguistics, to develop and test an argument about the effect that language recognition practices in multilingual democratic societies have on voter turnout. Using data from South Africa, the study finds evidence that inclusive language recognition is linked to higher turnout rates for targeted groups. The study utilises aggregate data collected at ward level, but assesses the results in a preliminary fashion with individual-level data from Afrobarometer.*

**Keywords:** Africa, elections, language, language policy, voting, political participation, turnout.

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## INTRODUCTION

Most of Africa is characterised by a linguistic gulf between government elites and the ordinary citizens they govern. To observe patterns of language use today is to see the scars of colonial rule rendered in sharp relief. Elites – even those elected in free and fair elections – administer the affairs of state predominantly in the European languages of former colonialists, while to most citizens these languages are foreign. The languages of the ‘high politics’ of the capital city rarely match up with the languages used in the ‘low politics’ of the village council and at the kitchen table.

This gulf is present even in a country such as South Africa, arguably the continent’s most heralded democratic ‘experiment’, however imperfect. Members of the governing African National Congress (ANC) and most other parties conduct debates, deliver speeches and manage affairs of state in English. As of 2005, however, sociolinguistic surveys show that only 22% of South Africans fully understand their leaders’ speeches in English and that, on average, a citizen of South Africa has no more than a 30% chance of finding printed information on governmental affairs in his or her mother tongue, even in urban areas (Markdata 2001).

Sociolinguists have written extensively on the social, economic and political consequences of this ‘linguistic gulf’ in Africa. They have emphasised the importance of language in achieving noble goals such as justice, equality, self-determination and freedom (Bamgbose 1991, 2000; Mazrui & Mazrui 1996).

Politically, a linguistic divide between rulers and ruled presents a clear threat to democratic governance (Fishman 1996). One such threat is ‘elite closure’ (Myers-Scotton 1990), a phenomenon in which knowledge and command of a European language becomes a ticket to entry into the elite political class. In this case, language barriers can produce (and reproduce) significant social, political and economic inequalities, especially in the African context (Bamgbose 1991, 2000; Mazrui & Mazrui 1999). Political scientists have developed arguments along similar lines, contending that language barriers between citizens and governments could suppress political participation (Weinstein 1983) and undermine elite accountability (Pool 1992). Many have advocated the importance of language policies that accommodate many languages (Fishman 1996; Webb 2002), while others in the field of education have argued vociferously for the importance of mother-tongue education in Africa (Alexander 1989).

Despite these arguments, few analyses of the language divide have explicitly considered the effect of language barriers and governmental policies (or the lack thereof) in addressing those barriers to mass participation in African elections. In political science, our understanding of democratic participation comes primarily

from evidence collected in older, established democracies in the West, where linguistic heterogeneity is not as pervasive.

This study considers the most readily observable measure of democratic participation, namely voter turnout, in South Africa – a society typically diverse in the context of Africa. It presents evidence to suggest that the choices governments make about which languages to recognise as official are observably important to voter participation in elections.

Using aggregate and survey data, the study presents evidence that voter turnout in South African elections is higher in areas where provincial and local governments recognise and utilise the mother tongue of the local population. By drawing a connection between the politics of language in Africa, until now primarily the concern of sociolinguists, and the politics of elections in Africa, studied primarily by political scientists, it highlights an under-studied component of African elections.

The next section provides a brief discussion of the literature on comparative voter turnout, with particular attention given to existing theory that links linguistic diversity and minority-language recognition to political participation. The paper continues with a brief introduction to the sociolinguistic context in South Africa, and a history of the development of language policy since the country became a democracy in 1994. Next, the results of empirical tests to assess the relationship between language policy and voter turnout are reported. Data from across South Africa were analysed, followed by a more focused analysis of three particularly interesting municipalities. The paper concludes by presenting the results of an analysis of data from the Afrobarometer survey project to compare the aggregate findings with those at individual level. Finally, it presents a discussion of the findings and their implications.

## VOTER TURNOUT IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Studies designed to produce generalisations about the determinants of voter turnout collectively identify many important variables. At the individual level, factors such as socioeconomic status, education, occupation and trust have been repeatedly shown to matter for turnout (Verba, Nie & Kim 1978). More recent studies have even focused their attention on the role of human genetics (Fowler et al. 2008; Fowler & Dawes 2008). At the aggregate level, seminal studies by scholars such as Powell (1986) and Jackman (1987) emphasise contextual and institutional variables such as the competitiveness of electoral districts, multipartyism, electoral disproportionality, unicameralism and the positive effect of compulsory voting laws. Many studies have built on these initial efforts and the result is a large

literature with diverse findings. Recent cross-national studies confirm that many of the usual constructs (competitiveness, multipartyism, compulsory voting) do influence turnout. However, other factors are often also highlighted, for instance aggregate levels of wealth (Blais & Dobrzynska 1998), the age of democratic institutions (Endersby & Kriekhaus 2008) or the characteristics of presidential systems (Dettrey & Schwindt-Bayer 2009). Scholars have recently recognised that this diverse body of findings falls short of producing generalisations. We have yet to sort out, for instance, the complex relationship that appears to exist between aggregate indicators of socioeconomic status and turnout (Blais 2006).

Remmer (2010) highlighted how political scale affects generalised trust levels, the density of networks, and thus voter turnout. Remmer complains that 'the sheer disparity of results among studies points to the failure of macro-level research to generate much cumulative knowledge about turnout' and 'the literature has converged around relatively commonsensical observations' about the effect of, for example, compulsory voter laws (Remmer 2010, p. 277).

The waters become more muddied when one compares the findings of comparative studies from different regions. If this muddiness is yet to occur in the study of turnout in African democracies, it is only because the inquiry is so new. Kuenzi and Lambright (2007) claim to offer the first substantial cross-national analysis of turnout in sub-Saharan Africa. They argue that many broader findings can be generalised to Africa, but that certain individual- and aggregate-level characteristics – age, media exposure, electoral formula and concurrence of elections – make a particularly large difference to turnout in the African context. Young (n.d.) finds that individual-level variables thought to predict turnout in the West 'take on a unique pattern of significance in Africa' (p. 26) and that many generalisations about voter turnout relate imperfectly to Africa.

Because most of the existing work has used data from elections in the West, more studies are needed to understand turnout and political participation generally in Africa's relatively new and often troubled democracies. The historical processes of state formation and institutional development in most African countries are so different from those in countries that generate most of the electoral data that populations in the newer states are bound to encounter different incentives, disincentives, rewards and obstacles to political participation, including voting. This paper has already suggested one such obstacle, language diversity. The rest of the paper is devoted to assessing the contention that language plays a role in facilitating or hindering electoral participation.

Language, clearly, is highly political. It has been a source of major debate in many countries. The Indian struggles over language politics are well documented (Dasgupta 1970, 2003). Europe is no stranger to the challenges of language

diversity, nor, of course, is the European Union (Pool 1996). Language connects to identity in important ways and can trigger often emotional and sometimes even violent responses. For instance, DeVotta (2004) identifies language decisions of the Sinhalese majority as a major cause of Sri Lanka's civil conflict.

There are two routes through which government's recognition or non-recognition of a particular language might affect the propensity for speakers of that language to participate in democratic politics. The first is identity. Language is often considered among the most important ethnic 'markers', and having one's language officially recognised and used (or not) is likely to carry a strong message regarding which groups are important, influential and valued within a given polity (Obeng & Adegbija 1999). The second route is communication and information sharing. Language is critical to the conduct, operation and day-to-day functioning and survival of any representative democracy. To the extent that democracy depends on open communication among citizens, and their collective capacity to monitor their own government and hold it accountable for its actions, democracy also depends on shared linguistic codes (Albaugh 2014). Sociolinguist Moleleki (2003, p. 13) writes that democracy 'is inextricably bound up with language'. He argues that when government functions in a language not well understood by many citizens,

A situation arises where democracy is inverted. Instead of ideologies emanating from the rank and file, and representatives then being mandated to implement them, the contrary becomes true. The elite fashions the ideologies and throws them to the people in a language that is baffling to them. Without a clear understanding of the issues involved, the people, in turn, throw the ideology back at the elite without tinkering with it, in the raw state in which it came to them. Needless to say, it would be incorrect to speak of democracy as inclusive in such an instance (ibid.)

When it is difficult, inconvenient, laborious or frustrating for a citizen to access information about government, communicate to government, or receive and understand communications from it, the vital link between rulers and ruled is severed.

Fishman (1996) developed the concept of 'ethno-linguistic democracy', built on an inherent understanding of the interrelatedness of language and democracy. He writes that 'just as all people should be considered equal before the law, so all languages should somehow be considered equal as well' (p. 8). He acknowledges that language groups are seldom equal in political power, but in a 'moral universe'

members of less powerful language groups 'should be equally entitled to use their own language if they are so inclined, rather than necessarily expected to constantly show deference to some language associated with greater power' (ibid.).

Fishman ultimately defines ethno-linguistic democracy as 'the right of both parties in an interaction to use their own language and receive in their own language in return, regardless of the power or size differentials that distinguish between them' (ibid.). A polity is ethno-linguistically democratic to the extent that the right broadly applies to all citizens. Much of the world, certainly the developing world, is far from meeting this standard. Instead, a pattern of 'elite closure' predominates, as elites who owe advancement and position in part due to their knowledge of an ex-colonial language have every incentive to keep this linguistic passport to privilege out of reach of those they govern (Myers-Scotton 1990).

As far as political participation is concerned, one might expect groups whose mother tongue is not officially recognised or used by the state to have one of two reactions. On the one hand, they might find in their exclusion sufficient cause and motivation for substantial collective action or even ethnic violence. A lack of linguistic recognition by the state could, in other words, drive up levels of political participation for groups seeking more.

When groups' languages are clearly excluded (*de facto* proscribed in public life), as with ethnic Tamils in Sri Lanka under Sinhalese-only language policies, it stands to reason that such a slight could be a mobilising factor (DeVotta 2004). On the other hand, less overt linguistic exclusion might have the opposite effect. As Moleleki (2003) writes, citizens in a representative democracy who are linguistically isolated from government or from other groups of citizens are also politically isolated, and are more likely to be alienated from a system that depends on peaceful contestation and debate through shared languages. Laitin (2001) has argued that for a variety of strategic reasons, language grievances are associated with lower levels of collective action on the part of aggrieved groups.

It was beyond the scope of this research to interrogate the relationship between language grievances and group collective action, protest or rebellion. The study focused on participation at the voting booth – the most direct and routine way for citizens in democracies to enact their citizenship and hold governments accountable. Because the exercise of democracy depends on this voluntary participation, when government functions exclusively in a language that is not a group's mother tongue, individuals from that group may either lack access to the information necessary to perform the task of voting or, due to the sense of alienation from the political system (as described by Moleleki), find themselves lacking the interest or will to vote.

Could language policies adopted by governments ameliorate this isolation

and facilitate voter participation? Much theoretical work suggests that language policy should indeed help to shape political realities. Pool (1990) has written that *language* regimes – formal rules and informal norms that govern the use of language in the public sphere – constrain and influence *political* regimes. Language regimes that, to use Fishman’s term, are relatively ethno-linguistically democratic might produce different outcomes for factors such as democratic participation. However, in political science it has been far more common to look at language regimes or policies as dependent variables (Laitin 1988, 1992, 1998; Liu 2011).

Generally, political science literature on language and politics neglects the role governments play in determining whether the linguistic playing field is level or provides access to some language groups at the expense of others. There is substantial variation globally in types of official language choices (some more inclusive than others) across democratic countries and sometimes within them (in states where subnational governments are empowered to make official language choices). However, there has been no effort to marshal empirical evidence to identify a relationship between official language choice and the process and outcomes of democratic politics in those countries.<sup>1</sup> Why should this be the case?

Comparative empirical research on the consequences of official language policy choices is hindered by the fact that most states in the world (with notable exceptions) make their main language policy decisions at national level. Research seeking to uncover patterns in the consequences of state choices through comparison can be clumsy. Because states’ official language choices are tightly bundled with historical, cultural and economic forces, teasing out the effects of language choices is difficult in a study that uses ‘the state’ as the unit of analysis.

Furthermore, research on the consequences of language policy is slowed by many of the world’s most multilingual states being part of the developing world – in other words, most of the states that are theoretically interesting and empirically important in this field. The developing world is notoriously less democratic than the advanced industrial world, and less-developed countries that have built and sustain democratic rule often lack reliable sources of empirical data. These realities make comparative research on the relationship between official language choice and democratic performance a formidable challenge.

One way to surmount this challenge and make official language policy recognition credible is to look at subnational variation within a single country. South Africa appears to be an ideal candidate for such an analysis.

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1 The work that comes closest to explicitly addressing these questions in political science is arguably David Laitin’s. His *Identity in Formation* (1998) examines how language policies play a role in identity formation, rather than democratic participation, in the post-Soviet world.

## SOUTH AFRICA'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGE REGIME

South Africa is a linguistically diverse country, in which an estimated 31 languages are spoken. Unlike in African states such as Tanzania, which was largely unified by the Swahili language under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, none of these 31 languages serves in practice as a *lingua franca* (Gordon 2004). English might seem a clear choice, but sociolinguistic research reveals that most South Africans might not understand the language well enough to use it for sophisticated purposes (Markdata 2001). The language that has the greatest number of mother-tongue speakers is Zulu (22%), but Zulu is not well understood by many other citizens (*ibid.*).

When South Africa made its lauded transition to democracy in 1994, it began a nearly three-year process of constitutional negotiation that led to the lengthy and progressive document adopted in 1996. The Constitution declared eleven languages – English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, Ndebele, Sotho, Pedi (Northern Sotho), Tswana, Venda and Tsonga – official languages of the new republic.<sup>2</sup> English and Afrikaans were retained as official languages and nine others, previously marginalised, were added. Together, these eleven languages account for the mother tongues of more than 97% of the South African population. Under apartheid, all languages other than English and Afrikaans were marginalised. The new Constitution laid the groundwork for a compensatory policy in which the linguistic human rights of all citizens would be respected and protected.

For many advocates of ethno-linguistic democracy in South Africa, celebration turned to frustration only a few years after 1996, when it became clear that implementing a language policy that acknowledged full and equal rights for eleven different language groups would not be easy (Makoni 2003; Webb 1999, 2000). The South African Languages Bill, legislation to begin the process of requiring local governments throughout the country to take concrete steps to accommodate the needs of non-English speakers, languished before Parliament.

Sociolinguists complained about the 'lack of political will' that kept things from moving forward (Webb 2002, p. 312). The Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB), a constitutional body established in 1995 to monitor language rights and function as a government watchdog on issues of language equality, proved toothless and ineffective (Perry 2004). Some scholars argued that democratic South Africa was, in some respects, even more 'English only' than it had been during apartheid (Maphalala 2000). The decision to name eleven languages as official and mandate their 'promotion' and 'protection' was an encouraging first step,

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2 I have used the English versions of these languages' names, not the indigenous versions.



but a mere decade after the end of apartheid, many people were concerned that this was only cheap talk (PANSALB Act 1995).

In South Africa, the story at national level may be one of general failure to pass laws and policies legally requiring government to take concrete steps to provide information in languages other than English. However, lower levels of government have, in certain regions, taken steps to make government accessible to non-English speakers by providing information in non-English languages and making government itself more multilingual. Each of the nine provinces has chosen a subset of the eleven official languages to serve as provincial languages, although the extent to which these choices are backed by the force of law varies. Likewise, a handful of municipalities have developed language policies, although the vast majority have not (Strydom & Pretorius 1999).

South Africa therefore exhibits rich internal variation that makes it, as sociolinguist Alexander (1989) writes, 'a social laboratory of the utmost importance for the future of Africa and the world.' There is internal variation in terms of the level of actual language diversity, with some areas being fairly homogenous linguistically and others diverse. There is also variation, because of the decentralised manner in which decisions on language policy are taken, in terms of language policy and how broadly or narrowly policies in different parts of the country recognise and utilise first languages.

#### LANGUAGE POLICY AND VOTER TURNOUT IN THE PROVINCES

Despite South Africa's progressive, egalitarian constitutional position on language equality, many scholars have lamented that the principles in the Constitution were not paired with a strong legal framework for implementation (Webb 2002). This is true at national level, while at provincial and local level there is more variation.

Of South Africa's nine provinces, only a few have language policies naming official languages that have been passed as Bills, thus assuming the force of law. By 2005 each province had some form of language policy, Act or Bill at least under consideration, which named a subset of the eleven official languages as 'provincially' official. Those that were not formally considering such a Bill had, somewhere in writing, identified 'provincial languages' or 'languages of the province', even if they were not codified as official in the legal sense (see endnote on p. 159 for references).

There is murky variation across the nine provinces in terms of how well and to what extent principles are translated into practice. It is difficult to determine, for instance, whether the official recognition of a set of languages in a given province necessarily means that clear and decisive steps are taken there to make information and communication accessible to someone who speaks only one of the languages.

Even South Africa's constitutionally established PANSALB, charged with serving as a 'language watchdog' and monitoring implementation of multilingual policies across all levels of government, has limited information about the actual state of language policy development in the provinces. Nevertheless, the fact that all provinces had, by 2005, at least engaged in discussions about official languages gives at least a cursory sense of which languages are privileged and used by the government in each province. This is useful as a starting point for exploring the effect of official language choices on voter behaviour.

Table 1 lists the languages named in each of the nine provinces. Notably, all provinces continue to use the dual colonial languages, English and Afrikaans, as provincial languages. A striking diversity is also evident across the provinces in terms of additional languages chosen. While all provinces may not have formal codified language policies, a multilingual environment basically forces the choice of one or another language. Thus, all governments have at least an informal language policy, even if it manifests only as prevailing patterns of language use by citizens and government.

**Table 1**  
**Official languages in South Africa's nine provinces**

Province	Languages
Eastern Cape	English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Sotho
Free State	English, Afrikaans, Sotho, Xhosa
Gauteng	English, Afrikaans, Pedi, Zulu
Kwazulu-Natal	English, Afrikaans, Zulu
Limpopo	English, Afrikaans, Pedi, Venda, Tsonga, Ndebele
Mpumalanga	English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Swazi
Northern Cape	English, Afrikaans, Tsonga, Xhosa
North West	English, Afrikaans, Tswana
Western Cape	English, Afrikaans, Xhosa

Source: see endnote on p. 159

The smallest geographical unit in South Africa for which data on voter turnout and language diversity are available is the municipal ward. South Africa is divided into 284 municipalities, 237 of which are local or metropolitan municipalities.<sup>3</sup> Each municipality in turn is divided into wards. These wards exist to facilitate

<sup>3</sup> The remaining 47 are 'district' municipalities, each of which contains a number of local ones. District municipalities are therefore higher levels of aggregation than local or metropolitan municipalities.

the mixed-member proportional system used in South African local elections, in which half the members of municipal legislatures are elected using a proportional representation (PR) system and the other half using plurality rules in single-member districts (wards). Using turnout data from the local elections of January 2006 and demographic and social data from the population census of 2001, I compiled a dataset of 3 846 South African wards.<sup>4</sup>

Does a relationship exist between language policies adopted by the nine provinces and voter turnout at ward level? Specifically, do wards where more voters are 'accommodated' by the language choices of their provincial governments show a higher voter turnout? A relatively simple statistical model, specified with important control variables, can test these research questions. An OLS regression model is estimated, in which voter turnout as a percentage is the dependent variable. The independent variable is the percentage of each ward's residents who speak one of the province's official languages as their mother tongue. If language choices that accommodate more citizens encourage and facilitate higher turnout, the mother-tongue variable should positively predict voter turnout.

Several variables are included as controls. Where possible, ward-level data are used. In other instances, data are aggregated at the level of municipality (the 237 geographical units in which several thousand wards are nested).<sup>5</sup> It is necessary to control for factors known generally, in Africa and elsewhere, as influencing turnout. The log of each ward's population is included in the model. The percentage of households in each ward receiving electricity, and the percentage of households in each ward with no source of income, are included to control for socioeconomic status. Ethno-linguistic diversity is controlled for in the model by using the ethno-linguistic fractionalisation index (ELF), defined here as the probability that any two randomly selected individuals in a ward will have different first languages. While the ELF measure is imperfect and controversial (Posner 2004), here it is used as a rough indicator of the degree of mother-tongue diversity in an area.<sup>6</sup> Mother-tongue diversity will likely be negatively related to the percentage of accommodated voters in each ward, since more diverse populations require more official languages to accommodate.

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4 Census data are collected and published by Statistics South Africa. The data that form the basis of following sections were collected in 2005, so although there have been elections since the January 2006 municipal elections, these turnout data were chosen to ensure temporal consistency.

5 A hierarchical random intercept model is estimated, since wards nested in municipalities should not be treated as completely independent observations (Steenbergen & Jones 2002).

6 The measure is controversial mainly because it assumes all ethnic cleavages recorded by the index are equally salient. Posner (2004) notes that this is not so, and proposes another measure that captures the 'political relevance' of groups within the diversity measure. For the current analysis (where the measure is not of great theoretical interest but is used as a control for interest's sake), the simple probability index will suffice.

Any measure of a province's official language choice should not simply reflect the level of pre-existing diversity in that province. A fractionalisation index for race group is included in addition to a fractionalisation index for language group. The race index reports the probability that any two randomly selected individuals in a ward will come from different race groups (using the four race groups reported in the South African census of 2001: 'white,' 'black,' 'coloured' and 'Indian'). While both indexes are measures of diversity, they measure two distinct but important aspects of diversity in South Africa. They have a very low statistical correlation ( $r=.039$ ).

The competitiveness of an election is known to be a factor that influences turnout, with more competitive elections drawing more voters. Hence, a municipal-level variable is included to account for the competitiveness of the proportional representation part of the 2006 local elections. It is relatively easy to quantify competitiveness in plurality elections simply by looking at the percentage of votes captured by the winner (Franklin 2004). Measuring competitiveness is less straightforward for proportional representation. I use the measure 'vote fractionalisation', a number between 0 and 1, defined as the probability that any two randomly selected voters in each municipality will have voted for different parties in the PR portion of the 2006 local elections. Higher scores represent a more dispersed pattern of votes and hence a more 'competitive' or uncertain election. The literature on comparative voter turnout suggests that higher vote fractionalisation scores should be associated with higher turnout.

A second, municipal-level control was educational level, another factor known to be associated with turnout. This municipal-level variable is included to account for the percentage of citizens in each municipality with no formal schooling. Finally, dummy variables for eight of South Africa's nine provinces are included to control for provincial effects that might influence voters to be more or less likely to vote. Local elections are not held concurrently with national and provincial elections in South Africa, but provincial political issues may nevertheless influence turnout rates across regions.

The model is estimated using a hierarchical structure (since the wards are clustered in municipalities), and each municipal grouping of wards is allowed to have a random intercept. For reference, summary statistics for all variables are reported in the Appendix. Coefficients for the hierarchical regression model discussed above are reported in Table 2.

The model provides preliminary evidence that the official language choices made by provincial governments may indeed affect voter turnout. The percentage of voters in a ward accommodated by the provincial language policy is positively related to turnout, at a high level of statistical certainty. Holding other variables' values constant, a ward where no voters have a provincial language as their

**Table 2**  
**Provincial language policy and voter turnout across all wards: Random intercept model**

Independent Variables	Voter Turnout
Population (logged)	.1960 (.3554)
% Homes Electrified	-4.336 *** (.4835)
% Homes w/ No Income	3.151 *** (.8343)
Racial Fractionalisation	-.0353 (.0488)
<i>Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalisation</i>	-8.282 *** (.7285)
<i>% Voters Accommodated by Provincial Language Selections</i>	.0331 *** (.0092)
Vote Fractionalisation (municipal level)	-6.055 * (2.686)
% Municipal Population w/ No Formal Schooling (municipal level)	3.581 (3.115)
[9 Dummy Variables for Provinces Included but Not Reported]	
Constant	52.82 *** (3.995)
N (wards) =	3 828
n (municipalities) =	230
Wald Chi-Squared (16 d.f.) =	660.52 ***

\*\*\* p<.001

\* p<.05

mother tongue would be expected to show a turnout of nearly 4% lower than a ward where all residents' first languages are recognised in the provincial policy. While the magnitude of the effect might not be large and a 4% difference in turnout levels may not seem politically important, the statistical certainty of the effect is of interest.

The electrification variable and the income variable are significant in directions that are predictable for South Africa. Other research has confirmed that wealthier neighbourhoods in South Africa are likely to have *lower* rather than higher turnout (Fauvelle-Aymar 2008). Similarly, the ethno-linguistic fractionalisation index for each ward is, unsurprisingly, negatively related to voter turnout. That is, even when the percentage of linguistically 'recognised' voters is held constant, more diversity results in lower voter turnout.

How governments respond to linguistic diversity is potentially an important part of the picture in understanding turnout, but further analysis is necessary. As noted above, it is difficult to determine the degree to which provinces actually gave 'teeth' to their putative selection of provincial languages when the 2006 local elections happened. Secondly, a simple alternative hypothesis could also explain the current study's results. Provincial governments, in selecting their provincial languages from the eleven national languages, are likely to choose those most commonly spoken in a province. If it is also the case that local majority groups are more likely to vote than local minority groups, then the relationship shown in the regression model can be explained without reference to language at all. I therefore supplemented the above analysis with a finer-grained examination of *local*-level language policy, using a purposive sampling method. I selected places where field research would provide information about the 'on-the-ground' implementation of language policies.

### THREE MUNICIPAL CASES: POLICY AND TURNOUT IN CAPE TOWN, MANGAUNG AND TSHWANE

The countrywide analysis was unable to highlight a clear causal relationship between governments' language choices and electoral turnout. This section addresses the issue by focusing on a small subset of 'outlier' (atypical) municipalities that were actively working on developing their own municipal language policies as early as 2005, when the vast majority of South Africa's often corrupt and ineffectual local governments were paying attention to anything but language issues (Strydom & Pretorius 1999).

The three municipalities shown in the map in Figure 1 were included in the analysis. They are Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality (Cape Town) in Western Cape, Mangaung Local Municipality in Free State, and Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (also called Pretoria) in Gauteng.

**Figure 1**  
**Cape Town, Mangaung, and Tshwane on a map of South African**



Base Map Source: commons.wikimedia.org

Cape Town was among the first municipalities in South Africa to adopt a language policy, and its advantage in this regard stemmed from one important factor. In 2005 the municipality was translating its communications to the public – including newspaper advertisements, some signage and a newspaper ‘municipal page’ – into three languages. These were English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. Cape Town operated in the context of a supportive provincial government and its language policy had been formed by the old National Party government, which had considered the protection of Afrikaans a worthy priority. It was thus arguably easier for Cape Town to implement a multilingual policy than it was for most other cities in South Africa (Western Cape Provincial Language Committee 2004).

Mangaung municipality, home to the city of Bloemfontein in Free State, also proved an exception to the rule in South Africa by forging ahead with its own

municipal language policy. Mangaung benefited in the design and implementation of its language policy from the presence of a large, dedicated research group at the nearby University of Free State, which consulted with members of city government and helped to design surveys of the public to ascertain where the biggest language barriers were; steps were then taken to address and overcome such barriers (Pelser & Botes 2002).

Although Johannesburg and Tshwane, neighbouring cities in Gauteng, are both large and linguistically diverse urban centres, by 2005 only Tshwane was quickly moving toward a formalised policy. Tshwane had dedicated city personnel working on implementing a multilingual language policy. By 2005 it had begun to implement a language policy that used English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Pedi (Northern Sotho) as official languages of the municipality (Fritze 2005).<sup>7</sup> The Tshwane language office and the resources allocated to it were the envy of other municipal language offices countrywide. As of 2005, Tshwane's government was among the best in the country in terms of working to use all four official languages.

In short, Cape Town, Mangaung and Tshwane had each taken significant strides toward functional multilingualism by the time of the 2006 municipal elections. Hence it is possible to use the working languages of each of these municipalities to assess the degree to which citizens in each municipal ward had their home languages accommodated by the municipalities' selection of official or 'working' languages. Table 3 summarises languages in each of the municipalities.

The fact that all three municipalities are urban areas does not create problems for the study. First, the question at hand is whether language regimes influence participation across wards *within* these municipalities. It is the intra-municipal variation that is important, so as far as this analysis is concerned it does not matter if the three municipalities are not fully representative of all municipalities in the country.<sup>8</sup>

What makes these three wards useful for present purposes is not just that they developed and committed resources to making official choices about language, but that they were *outliers* in doing so. It is possible to use municipal-level language policies to address causality in a way that using provincial language policies could not. Specifically, one can compare populations living in municipalities that do have active language policies to similar populations living in municipalities without such policies.

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7 The final policy adopted by Tshwane (Pretoria) included Tsonga and Tswana as well. Because these two languages were not discussed when the 2006 local elections were held, only the four languages discussed in 2005 are used in the models presented here.

8 In terms of the most relevant characteristic – mean percentage of voter turnout – the three municipalities were fairly typical. Countrywide, mean voter turnout in the 2006 municipal elections was 50.81%. Cape Town had a higher turnout, at 56.5%. Mangaung was close to the national mean, at 50.67%. Tshwane was below the national mean, at 45.57%.



**Table 3**  
**Working languages of three 'outlier' municipalities in 2005**

Municipality	Languages
Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality (Cape Town)	English, Afrikaans, Xhosa
Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (Tshwane)	English, Afrikaans, Pedi, Zulu
Mangaung Local Municipality (Bloemfontein)	English, Afrikaans, Sotho

Source: see endnote on p. 159

Table 4 presents the results of two standard OLS regressions with 2006 local voter turnout as the dependent variable. The first of the two models predicts voter turnout only in the 224 constituent wards of Cape Town, Mangaung and Tshwane. It replicates the analysis presented earlier but uses wards only from the three selected municipalities. Since the earlier analysis using all South African wards revealed a relationship between official language choice and turnout, it would be surprising (and damaging for the argument) if this smaller model did not.

Control variables are almost identical to those in earlier models, with a few exceptions. First, no dummy variable for provinces is included. Instead, dummy variables for two of the three municipalities (Mangaung and Cape Town) are included in the model to control for municipal-level effects on voter turnout. Secondly, education data are not available at ward level. However, the three municipalities are all urban areas and education levels across the three are comparable. Electrification and lack of income (both as percentages of ward households) are again included to control for socioeconomic status. To control for competitiveness, the ward elections are used.

Local election voters in South Africa have both a PR party vote and a vote for an individual ward councillor elected by the plurality rule. The model includes the percentage of votes won by the winning candidate in the 2006 ward election (plurality rules). Higher values of this variable represent lower levels of electoral competitiveness. The preponderance of research on comparative voter turnout suggests that higher values of this variable are associated with lower values for turnout. The ethno-linguistic fractionalisation index and racial fractionalisation index remain in the model as controls. The percentage of ward voters accommodated by their municipality's official language choices is, of course, the independent variable of interest.

Table 4  
Language policy and voter turnout in selected municipalities: OLS regression

Independent Variables	Voter Turnout, 2006	Voter Turnout, 2006
	(Using only Wards from Cape Town, Mangaung and Tshwane)	(Using only Wards from Compari- son Municipalities)
Population (logged)	2.791 (1.884)	-3.063 *** (.5422)
Vote % of Winning Ward Candidate	.2641 *** (.0324)	.0551 ** (.0187)
% Homes Electrified	-.3792 (3.383)	-.2913 (1.339)
% Homes w/ No Income	-12.74 ^ (7.233)	-.2110 (1.361)
Racial Fractionalisation	.1271 (3.236)	2.500 * (1.130)
Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalisation	.6323 (2.776)	-6.056 ** (1.951)
% Voters Accommodated by Municipal Official Language Selections	.0699 * (.0281)	-.0132 * (.0183)
Cape Town	7.058 *** (1.669)	-
Mangaung	5.699 ** (1.785)	-
Western Cape	-	6.314 *** (1.333)
Free State	-	.7948 (1.0334)
Constant	-7.337 (21.81)	73.75 *** (5.613)
N =	224	819
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> =	.4193	.2975

\*\*\* p<.001  
 \*\* p<.01  
 \* p<.05  
 ^ p<.10

The results for the three municipalities with well-developed language policies in place by 2006 confirm the results from the larger model. This provides further evidence that the accommodation of linguistic diversity through language policy does have a positive, statistically significant effect on voter turnout. Apart from the dummy variables for some provinces, the only significant control variable is the one included to measure competitiveness; again, as in the previous model where a measure of vote fractionalisation was used, the results contradict common wisdom. In South Africa more competitive elections have the lowest public participation. This result, confirmed in other research (Fauvelle-Aymar 2008), is worth noting in its own right, as it represents an exception to a key principle in the current understanding of voter turnout.<sup>9</sup>

If left at that, the municipal analysis would be nothing more than a replication of the analysis presented in Table 2, but on a smaller scale, with questions of causality still unaddressed. How can one be certain that language policies are the cause of turnout – rather than the high turnout of certain groups leading to language policies that favour them?

One way to address this question would be to extend the analysis longitudinally. That is, one would expect that language policies enacted and implemented at a given point in time would help to predict turnout in subsequent elections, but not in prior elections as well. If a policy enacted at time  $t$  predicts voter turnout at time  $t-1$ , this obviously would undermine the validity of the presumed causal chain. Unfortunately, the young age of South Africa's democracy makes an assessment of this type difficult, since one need not go very far back to when its elections excluded more than 70% of the population.

Ideally, one should examine how turnout in different neighbourhoods increased or decreased over time as provinces or municipalities implemented and committed more resources to equitable linguistic practices. But the data on linguistic practices are too hazy and difficult to verify, especially to an extent that would permit longitudinal analysis. Furthermore, even if one wished to look back to the 2000 or 1995 local elections, the redrawing of municipal and ward boundaries in the interim makes it impossible to compare like geographic units. Thus a longitudinal strategy is unlikely to yield dividends.

It is possible, however, to adopt a cross-sectional approach that still addresses problems of causal inference. One can compare wards in the three selected municipalities with wards in all other municipalities in the same province. Most of those other wards have a similar ethno-linguistic makeup to the sample, but

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9 Fauvelle-Aymar, in her analysis of turnout across Johannesburg, attributes this anomaly to the dominant party system in South Africa and the resultant fact that many voters 'participate in order to demonstrate their right to vote and not really to make a political choice', because 'they do not have to think about the contestational consequences of their vote' (2008, p. 163).

none had well-developed language policies by 2006. If language policy has a causal effect on variation in political participation and not the other way around, the official language selection of municipalities having language policies should not have any effect on turnout in wards outside that municipality.

If this argument is valid, the language choices made by Cape Town should predict voter turnout only in Cape Town and not elsewhere. If the language choices of Cape Town, Mangaung or Pretoria predict voter turnout in other municipalities, even though we know those municipalities had no comparable policies, it would suggest the results so far are spurious.

The second model, shown in Table 4, analyses 819 comparison wards from Western Cape, Free State and Gauteng. These were substituted for the wards of Cape Town, Mangaung and Tshwane.<sup>10</sup> All other aspects of the model remained the same. As expected, the official languages of the three outlier municipalities do not have the same effect on turnout in neighbouring municipalities. A coefficient that was positive and statistically significant in the first model is now negative and statistically close to zero. This empirical exercise helps to address issues of causal primacy and causal direction. The results suggest that the official language selections of Cape Town, Mangaung and Tshwane may have some causal impact and that language recognition does indeed help to shape voter turnout patterns.

One might still argue that the analysis suffers from an endogeneity problem. That is, what if Cape Town, Mangaung and Tshwane have language policies only because the language groups in those areas were active in demanding such policies? If this were the case, it could be that politically involved groups shaped the language policies rather than language policies shaping patterns of group electoral involvement. The reality, however, is different. The push for language policy development in the three selected municipalities was exogenous to the populations meant to benefit from the language policies.

Cape Town benefited from the presence of a well-organised, wealthy and linguistically aggrieved Afrikaans-speaking community, and a provincial government committed to protecting cultural space for Afrikaners. These Afrikaans groups may not have been concerned about the linguistic rights of Xhosa speakers in the area, but their presence no doubt played a key role in ensuring that Cape Town pursued a formal multilingual policy.

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10 In a separate analysis not reported in the text above, the wards of Cape Town, Tshwane and Mangaung were replaced not by wards from other municipalities in the same province, but by wards drawn from adjacent municipalities that had similar profiles in terms of ethno-linguistic groups. In this unreported model, the coefficient for language accommodation in comparison wards was not statistically significant and was negatively signed.

Mangaung, by contrast, benefited from the attention of language activists, most of whom were academic linguists affiliated with the nearby University of Free State. Mangaung municipal officials began to realise the need for a multilingual policy in the early 2000s, but it was ultimately the Unit for Language Facilitation and Empowerment (ULFE) at the university that provided the city with the energy, organisation and drive it needed to move toward making multilingualism a reality (Pelser and Boates 2002). The ULFE was a multidisciplinary centre for academics who conducted research and advocacy on multilingual issues.

Tshwane's multilingual policy was also the result of top-down entrepreneurship rather than expressed citizens' demands. Here, too, academic language activists played a role in pushing the city toward a formal multilingual policy. During fieldwork conducted in 2005 (just before the January 2006 elections), linguists and language activists around the country lauded the innovative and tireless entrepreneurial efforts of the directors and staff at the city's dedicated language office. Many of them were trained linguists with a commitment to multilingualism.

In short, much of the energy behind language policy development, perhaps especially at the municipal level, came from sources other than the populations those language policies were being designed for. Because South Africa's linguistically progressive Constitution was of interest to so many sociolinguists and other language professionals, it is not surprising that much of the impetus and drive toward language policy development came from academic institutions. Although it would be erroneous to suggest that language policy development was an entirely exogenous process, it would also be incorrect to claim that Cape Town, Mangaung and Tshwane were further along in the language policy development process because their citizens were more vociferous in advocating multilingual language policies. Indeed, there is no reason to believe the citizens in these three 'outlier' municipalities were any different from citizens elsewhere in the country in their language attitudes and preferences. In the next section, the aggregate results are compared with findings at the individual level.

#### INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL DATA: AFROBAROMETER RESPONDENTS, MOTHER-TONGUE RECOGNITION AND VOTING

Despite the previous two analyses, a clear picture has not yet emerged of possible causal mechanisms that may underpin a relationship between government language choices and individual voting behaviour. This section presents a straightforward analysis of South African Afrobarometer data collected at around the time of the 2006 local elections. The aim was to determine whether individuals

whose home languages are recognised as official in their province of residence were more likely to vote than their 'unaccommodated' counterparts.

In the third round of the Afrobarometer survey in South Africa, 2 400 people were surveyed. Respondents were asked questions about various social, political and economic attitudes as well as basic demographic and personal information.

One question asks respondents whether they voted in the 2004 provincial and national elections. While the aggregate analysis discussed above relies on dependent variables based on the 2006 municipal elections, the Afrobarometer survey was administered just before the January 2006 municipal voting took place. The 2004 election was therefore the most recent election at the time the survey was administered. Because the survey includes questions identifying respondents' mother tongues and provinces of residence, it is possible to determine whether each respondent lived in a province that upheld his or her mother tongue as an official provincial language. Are these 'accommodated' citizens more likely to have voted?

Because all nine provinces recognise English and Afrikaans, all mother-tongue English and Afrikaans speakers would be considered 'accommodated' in the dataset. This is one reason that the results shown below include only respondents who identified an African (non-Afrikaans) language as their mother tongue. The second reason was that questions about the extent to which minority language recognition can improve voter turnout in South Africa clearly have the greatest resonance for the black population.

Table 5 presents two models, the first of which (A) is a probit model with a dichotomous (yes/no) dependent variable indicating whether a respondent reports voting in 2004. The independent variable is also dichotomous (yes/no), and indicates whether the respondent's mother tongue is accommodated in the province of residence. Several control variables are included. Sex, age, interest in politics (rated on a 4-point scale), and closeness to a political party (yes/no) are included.

Because education is such an important predictor of turnout decisions, three variables are included to capture respondents' education levels. One dichotomous variable indicates whether respondents have no formal schooling (about 5% of respondents) or any schooling. The other educational categories that are included in the model are 'primary education or less' and 'some high school or completed high school'. The category of 'more than high school' (less than 10% of the surveyed population) is excluded.

Dummy variables are included to control for province of residence. These are not reported in the table as they are of no real theoretical interest, and the analysis indicated no statistically significant results. Finally, Afrobarometer data include geographic locators that allow researchers to place respondents in their

**Table 5**  
**Linguistic accommodation and voting among black Afrobarometer**  
**respondents in 2005: logistic regression (odds ratios reported)**

Independent Variables	A	B
Male	.8508 (.1165)	.8439 (.1159)
Age	1.070 *** (.0072)	1.069 *** (.0071)
Linguistic Fractionalisation	1.321 (.4930)	1.335 (.4985)
Interest in Politics	1.277 *** (.0848)	1.287 *** (.0857)
Close to Political Party	2.156 *** (.3161)	2.162 *** (.318)
No Formal Schooling	.2699 *** (.1097)	.0999 *** (.0622)
Completed Primary Only	.4174 *** (.1145)	.4272 ** (.1172)
At Least Some High School	.5570 ** (.1268)	.5622 * (.1279)
Mother Tongue 'Official' in Province of Residence	.8666 (.1737)	.8010 (.1650)
<b>No Formal Schooling</b> x <b>Mother Tongue Official</b>	---	<b>4.197 *</b> <b>(3.017)</b>
Constant	.2049 *** (.1009)	.2189 ** (.1083)
N =	1551	1551
Pseudo R-Squared =	.1414	.1438

\*\*\* p&lt;.001

\*\* p&lt;.01

\* p&lt;.05

Included but Not Reported

Controls for Provinces

respective municipalities. So, as in the aggregate models discussed above, the ethno-linguistic fractionalisation index for each respondent's municipality is included as a contextual variable, to control for the diversity in the respondent's linguistic environment.

Due to the inclusion of this municipal-level variable, the models estimated in Table 5 must account for the hierarchical structure of the data. Since respondents are grouped by municipality, a random intercept model was estimated. Because a likelihood ratio test suggested there was no meaningful difference between a random intercept model and a standard logistic regression, and because the results were the same in both specifications, a standard logistic regression with odds ratios is reported below for ease of interpretation. Odds ratios are an intuitive way to express the effect of an independent variable on the odds of the dichotomous dependent variable – in this case, the decision to vote – occurring.

Model A shows little that is unexpected in the South African context. Older South Africans are more likely to vote, with each additional year of age increasing the odds of voting by about 5%. The same is true for those who are interested in politics or are close to a political party. The results related to education are also not surprising. Consistent with most cross-national research (Blais 2006), South Africans are more likely to vote at higher education levels; the results in model A reflect this trend. The model also shows, however, that being linguistically 'accommodated' by one's provincial government has no discernible effect on voting participation.

While these results seem to contradict the earlier findings, and could be seen as a blow to the hypothesis that governmental language recognition affects political participation, the test in model A neglects the reality of multilingualism in South Africa. Specifically, the model fails to account for the reality of *plurilingualism*. Most South Africans are able to speak and understand more than one language. Knowing a person's 'mother tongue', then, tells us little about the full repertoire of languages he or she can utilise. Because many people, especially educated individuals, speak languages beyond their mother tongue, language recognition policies should have the greatest effect on individuals who have the *least* access to languages beyond their mother tongue. In other words, an educated Zulu speaker who is fluent in several additional languages – including, likely, English – would be less affected by whether or not his or her province recognises Zulu compared with someone for whom Zulu is the primary means of information exchange. For the latter person, language might also perhaps be an important building block of individual identity.

The Afrobarometer survey regrettably lacks questions to probe individual language repertoires beyond a self-reported mother tongue. Hence it is not possible to be sure which respondents could utilise English or other South African



languages. There is no direct way, therefore, to estimate a respondent's personal language repertoire. One variable already in the model, however, is likely to correlate strongly with *smaller* language repertoires. South Africans with no formal schooling and non-English mother tongues are less likely than those who have experienced some formal schooling (even at the lower levels) to have gained meaningful exposure to English – the language of the country's 'high politics'. This is particularly true since public education in South Africa does not switch to 'English only' until the third year of primary school.

Model B differs from model A only in that it includes an interaction term, in which the variable for 'no formal schooling' and the variable for 'accommodation' under the province's language regime are multiplied. Model A shows there is no significant evidence that living in a province that does not use the respondent's mother tongue makes him or her less likely to vote. Model B examines the proposition that such an effect might be found only for individuals who have had little to no formal schooling. Individuals with limited access to English would be most deeply affected by government decisions about which indigenous languages to recognise and/or utilise. A regular logistic regression is estimated and odds ratios reported for ease of interpretation.

After estimating the model, the interaction term in model B is positively signed and statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Overall, individuals with no formal schooling are much less likely to vote than more educated individuals. Indeed, the model suggests South Africans with no formal schooling are only about 10% as likely to vote as South Africans who have received at least some primary education.

While the language choices of provincial governments do not necessarily matter for all South Africans, the odds ratio attached to the interaction term in this model suggests that uneducated individuals living in provinces that recognise their mother tongue are about *four times* as likely to vote as uneducated individuals living in provinces that do not recognise their mother tongues. Even though the rate at which uneducated voters turn out is low across the board, the language effect is significant. In short, the model suggests that provincial language choices do matter for a small class of individuals: those without any formal education and, therefore, those unlikely to have come into extensive contact with English.

Despite this fascinating result, it is important to remember that the test offered in model B relies on an indirect or proxy measure for estimating the language repertoires of respondents. Even so, the finding is consistent with the notion that one's propensity and ability to participate meaningfully in democratic politics may be tied to the ability to comprehend and feel connected to the languages in which those politics unfold.

## CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this analysis of official language choice and voter turnout in South Africa are of interest not only to students of South African politics, but also to scholars interested in understanding political participation more generally. South Africa is a good example of an African country in which language diversity and language barriers are common. Furthermore, this analysis is only the tip of an iceberg that encompasses broader questions about the politics of ethno-linguistic diversity, democracy, and the processes of democratisation and consolidation in the linguistically diverse world.

The study's importance can be summarised in two central statements. First, the results suggest that the choices governments make about language can make a difference to democratic participation. Because the dependent variables here were limited to measures of turnout at formal elections, this finding should be of interest to those who seek to generalise about comparative voter turnout, especially in the hope of developing generalisations applicable to the so-called Third World.

All governments adopt language policies, even if those policies are not formally codified or written down. To use language, which governments must do in order to govern, is to choose language. More voters turn out to vote if their home languages are linguistically accommodated by the official language choices of the provincial or municipal government, regardless of the region's linguistic diversity and many other factors. The evidence suggests that the selection, recognition and use of minority languages matters to turnout in linguistically diverse states.

Secondly, while this paper focuses on the relationship between a particular measure of political participation (voter turnout) and a particular type of language policy (official language choice), the study identified a broader area where the science of comparative politics could benefit from further and more focused inquiry. What is the role of language in facilitating democracy? Democracies depend on open, public and peaceful contestation. In a democratic society such as South Africa – and most of the post-colonial world where citizens have highly variegated language repertoires, many of which do not include the ex-colonial language – it can be hard to imagine this kind of open, inclusive contestation.

Political scientists interested in the democratisation of political regimes should also be interested in the democratisation of language regimes. Political scientists have worked for years to understand the role of structure and process in guiding political transitions from authoritarianism to democracy, but only a handful have considered the process that might influence changes in the rules about language.

As a corollary, we should devote more focused attention to analysing the nuts and bolts of how democracy might work differently under conditions of

linguistic diversity. How does language affect partisanship, voting behaviour, or the behaviour of office-seeking elites during political campaigns? Theorising on subjects such as these is rare in our discipline, but the results presented here suggest the answers could be interesting and important. Given the high level of linguistic diversity in the developing and still democratising world, understanding the political consequences of language barriers will become increasingly important. Even in the United States, where a rapidly growing population of non-English mother-tongue speakers will play an important role in shaping the future, questions about democratic governance and language difference will become increasingly relevant.

Although South Africa is set apart from the rest of the African continent and, indeed, many other developing countries by a number of factors, the linguistic divide between rulers and ruled in South Africa parallels that seen throughout much of the developing world. There is no apparent reason to suspect that core findings about the relationship between language diversity and turnout, or the effect of the intervention of language policy, are not generalisable to other countries. Certainly, a study of this kind has limitations that can and should be addressed in other studies. The first two sections rely on aggregate data and, because of well-known problems of ecological inference, can only hint at individual-level causal mechanisms and cannot claim to directly test them (Robinson 1950).

More detailed individual-level research on these questions would require, at the least, survey instruments with more detailed items to probe an individual's language abilities and habits than are currently available. None the less, the findings from this cross-sectional study are highly suggestive that language, language policy and political participation are intertwined in important and interesting ways.

The contention is certainly not that participating in democratic governance is limited to merely casting a vote, nor that mother-tongue diversity necessarily or always leads to language barriers, nor that 'language policy' is as simple as declaring official languages. More research is needed to explore the multitude of nuances that questions about language and democracy entail, and to address the limitations inherent in a study of this kind. What this study does suggest is that the choices governments make about language recognition and language use may have important consequences for democratic governance, in ways that have not been adequately explored.

We have much to learn about how language regimes and political regimes shape and constrain one another. This study suggests strongly that a research programme of this nature would be worthwhile. In places such as Africa, the use and recognition of multiple non-European languages may help broaden political

participation, enrich citizens' feelings of belonging, and advance – in however small a way – the democratic ideal.

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APPENDIX  
Summary statistics for variables included in the analyses

**Ward level variables (n=3829)**

Variable	Median	Mean	S.D.
Turnout (%) in 2006 Local Elections	50.07	49.67	9.33
Population (natural log)	9.10	9.17	.567
Households Electrified (%)	75.19	65.92	31.25
Households with No Income (%)	25.71	25.31	16.52
Racial Fractionalisation (0-1)	.011	.069	.194
Linguistic Fractionalisation (0-1)	.245	.304	.265
Population Accommodated by Provincial Language Choices	97.6	84.69	25.23

**Municipal level variables (n=232)**

Variable	Median	Mean	S.D.
Vote Fractionalisation (0-1)	.444	.425	.131
Population with No Formal Education (%)	24.36	24.66%	12.19

**Individual level variables for Afrobarometer respondents with mother-tongue other than English or Afrikaans (n=1551)**

Variable	Median	Mean	S.D.
Male (1=yes, 0=no)	.5	.5	.5
Age (in years)	37	39.38	15.33
Interest in Politics (0-3)	2	1.76	1.06
Close to Party? (1=yes, 0=no)	1	.63	.48
No Formal Education (1=yes, 0=no)	0	.05	.22
Primary Education Only (1=yes, 0=no)	0	.21	.41
High School Education (1=yes, 0=no)	1	.57	.49
Province Recognises My Mother Tongue? (1=yes, 0=no)	1	.85	.36