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Elder, you're right! Age-group differences in social and political interactions in Africa

by Aaron Erlich and Andrew McCormack | June 2020

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Abstract

Differences in age play an important role in social interaction across the African continent. However, the social effects of these differences remain understudied. Using Afrobarometer data, we investigate how age differences between interviewers and respondents may shape how respondents answer questions across Africa. We explore three mechanisms through which age differences may induce response-pattern variation. The first is social acquiescence, where younger respondents say what they think the socially dominant older interviewer wants to hear because they are socially inferior, but the socially dominant group does not change its response pattern. The second is in-group loyalty, where both younger and older respondents are more likely to present themselves in ways that reinforce their social standing when talking to interviewers whose age differs from their own. The third is social distance, where all respondents, regardless of social status, say what they impute the interviewer wants to hear, which we assume will vary by age group. We find relatively large and statistically significant effects for age differences across a variety of questions. While more research remains to be done, we believe these finding generally support social acquiescence and in-group loyalty, rather than social distance. Additionally, we show preliminary evidence that age differences induce larger response-pattern variation than does coethnicity. Our findings speak to the importance of age in social interaction in Africa and provide important lessons for the survey research community.

Acknowledgements
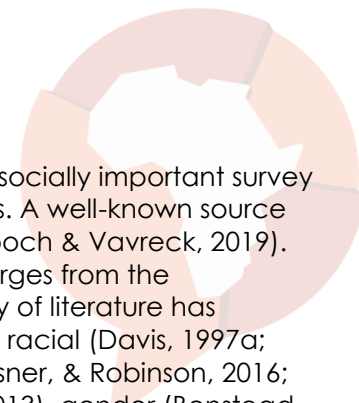
Introduction

Respondents may systematically vary their answers to politically and socially important survey questions based on many aspects of the survey enumeration process. A well-known source of response-pattern variation is mode of interview (Aquilino, 1994; Gooch & Vavreck, 2019). Another important potential source of survey response variation emerges from the interaction between interviewers and respondents. A significant body of literature has investigated how responses to survey questions vary in the context of racial (Davis, 1997a; Hatchett & Schuman, 1975; Williams, 1964), ethnic (Adida, Ferree, Posner, & Robinson, 2016; Weeks & Moore, 1981), religious (Benstead, 2014; Blaydes & Gillum, 2013), gender (Benstead, 2013; Flores-Macias & Lawson, 2008; Huddy et al., 1997), and physical (Eisinga, te Grotenhuis, Larsen, Pelzer, & van Strien, 2011) differences between interviewers and interviewees.[1] Understanding these differences not only has methodological implications for the survey enumeration process but also sheds light on social interactions and on how respondents change the way they express their opinions when faced with different types of interlocutors.

We investigate an understudied element of social interaction: age-group differences.[2] We argue that, in the African context, there are good theoretical reasons to believe that, when two interlocutors are talking and one person poses a question, the respondent may modify his or her responses to economically and politically relevant questions depending on whether or not there is an age-group difference. To preview our argument, we posit that the marginalization of African youth and rapid social change across the African continent mean that age has become an increasingly salient social identity category and may lead respondents to change their responses to questions depending on the age group of the person posing the question.

While there may be many non-mutually exclusive mechanisms at play, we discuss three through which this age-group difference manifests itself. First, *social acquiescence theory* posits that only socially non-dominant interlocutors – in the case of age difference, respondents who are younger – might change their response patterns when being asked questions by older, socially dominant interlocutors. Second, according to *in-group loyalty theory*, both younger and older interlocutors might vary their response patterns when asked questions by people whose age differs from their own in order to reinforce their social position (i.e. to make their own group look more favorable). Third, as laid out by *social distance theory*, those responding to questions might give the answers they think the individual posing the question wants to hear. This last possibility has similar observable implications as *social acquiescence theory* when younger people talk to older interlocutors, but while *social acquiescence theory* suggests that younger people will adapt responses to placate older interviewers because of elders' socially dominant positions, *social distance theory* suggests that all people, when interviewed by someone of another age group, will adapt responses to mirror what they expect their interviewers want to hear, no matter their social position.

To examine age difference, we leverage the Afrobarometer surveys, which provide the age, gender, and ethnic affiliation of all its survey enumerators and respondents in Round 3 (2005/2006) and Round 4 (2008/2009). Since the interview process itself is a social interaction, the Afrobarometer data allow the unparalleled ability to cross-nationally study age-group differences within Africa. Since similar studies have investigated response-pattern variation in the context of ethnicity (Adida et al., 2016), we investigate the effect of age difference in

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[1] For a review of many more studies across the social and behavioral sciences, see West and Blom (2017).

[2] These differences are particularly understudied in political science. Historians and anthropologists have invested more in the study of age differences (see Burgess, 2005).

the interview process on the same variables and for the same years as the study of coethnicity to benchmark the relative importance of age differences and coethnicity.[3]

To preview our findings, we often find statistically significant and substantively relevant effects of age differences between the interviewer and respondent on how the respondents answer questions. While they are certainly not dispositive, we argue that these findings provide the most support for *social acquiescence theory*. We also find support for *in-group loyalty theory*, particularly on questions related to objective economic well-being. However, we find relatively little support for *social distance theory*. Additionally, we find that for many variables the effect of at least one of the covariates measuring interviewer-respondent age difference is substantively larger than the effect of having a non-coethnic interviewer.

1. Why age-group differences?

Youth in Africa often see themselves as socially distinct from their elders, both in rural and urban settings. Indeed, as Jon Abbink writes, "The cognitive dimension of age and generational difference in African societies is underestimated" by social science research (2005, 24).

This high level of social and political distinctiveness between age groups has emerged in Africa as the result of the difficulty of achieving traditionally idealized concepts of adulthood (Dawson, 2014). Adulthood is often related to marriage and employment (Juárez & Gayet, 2014). Un- and under-employment are common across the African continent, particularly for youth (Honwana, 2014), and affording marriage has become more difficult (Masquelier, 2005). The inability to obtain these signs of adulthood has made youth see themselves as increasingly socially and politically distinct from their elders.[4]

Despite their inability to acquire traditional signposts of adulthood, youth maintain high aspirations to achieve upward social and economic mobility through education and internal migration (Kabiru, Mojola, Beguy, & Okigbo, 2013). In addition, youth population bulges and growing inequality have exacerbated inter-generational tensions, as many youth feel rejected by their elders, whom they often see as corrupt and as not providing space for their voices within the political system (Honwana, 2012). These youth often seek out alternative forms of action and participation outside of mainstream politics (Diouf, 2003; Van Gyampo & Anyidoho, 2019).

Youth marginalization in the African context may lead to certain types of response-pattern variation, both in general social interaction and in the survey enumeration process. Because of their marginalized position in society, youth may behave in a systematically different manner when they are asked their opinions by older society members compared to when they are asked their position by someone of the same age group. Older individuals can also reinforce their position of dominance when discussing with younger people and therefore might themselves speak differently than when interacting with people from their own age group.

To study response-pattern variation, we conceive of age difference as an interactive effect, in that it does not depend only on the age of one interlocutor but on the ages of both parties in a conversation. We highlight that this differs from most scholarship in African politics that considers only the age of the respondent (e.g. Resnick & Casale, 2011) or other social science research that looks only at interviewer characteristics (the direct interviewer effect), including age (see Hox, de Leeuw, & Kreft, 1991; West & Blom, 2017).

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[3] The use of the same outcomes also prevents us from hand-selecting outcomes of interest.

[4] We draw on scholarship that argues that age differences in sub-Saharan Africa have become much more socially important in modern times, and that the age and generational differences that have emerged, and that we highlight, are problems associated with modernity (Honwana, 2014, 30).

To interpret these interactive effects, we draw on a large literature in public opinion that suggests that while respondents will always potentially vary their answers depending on whom they are talking to, respondents are generally more comfortable answering questions when the person posing the question has similar demographic features (Johnson, Fendrich, Shaligram, Garcy, & Gillespie, 2000).[5] From a potential outcomes framework, we can think of a survey (or other discussion) assignment process whereby a respondent is assigned an interviewer who is in a group that is either socially close to or far from them.

In our case, we consider an interviewer-respondent dyad as socially close when the two interlocutors come from the same age group. For younger respondents, this means they will be socially close with younger interviewers and socially far from older interviewers. For older respondents, this means they will be socially close with older interviewers and socially far from younger interviewers. Hence, the comparison group for older respondents (older interviewers) is different from the comparison group for younger respondents (younger interviewers).

The psychosocial mechanisms through which respondents situationally vary their answers are complex and often yield observationally equivalent effects. Moreover, these mechanisms may also be non-mutually exclusive such that two mechanisms can be simultaneously driving the results. While there are different manners in which to classify these interactive mechanisms, Benstead (2013, 2014) distinguishes between mechanisms of power relations and those of social desirability

Power relations mechanisms involve respondents first understanding their own social positionality with regard to the interviewers. Because respondents are concerned with social hierarchy, they will be motivated to respond in ways that reinforce that hierarchy. In the case of age differences in surveys in Africa, we assume that older interviewers are socially dominant and younger interviewers are socially non-dominant.

On the other hand, social desirability mechanisms involve respondents seeking to conform to the opinion they expect the interviewers to hold, regardless of the social status of the interviewers. In this paper, we put forward two power relations mechanisms and one social desirability mechanism (social distance) that may be at play with respect to age difference.

We first discuss two different sub-mechanisms of power relations theory about social interaction: *social acquiescence theory* (Carr, 1971; Davis, 1997b; Lenski & Leggett, 1960)[6] and *in-group loyalty theory* (Benstead, 2014; Blaydes & Gillum, 2013).[7] First, the social acquiescence mechanism within power relations theory suggests that respondents who are in socially non-dominant positions will be more likely to vary their response patterns when being interviewed by a socially dominant interviewer. As this theory pertains to the survey enumeration process, if the interviewer comes from a socially dominant group, respondents from socially non-dominant groups might edit their answers to fall in line with what they think socially dominant interviewers want to hear (Williams, 1964). However, according to the social acquiescence mechanism, members of the socially dominant group are unlikely to

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[5] We are careful to avoid the language of bias because opinions are situational. However, we do believe that responses to factual questions are likely to be more factually accurate, and responses to attitudinal questions more predictive of behavior, when the respondent and interviewer are of the same age cohort.

[6] The term *deference* is also used (Davis, 1997b, 309).

[7] Benstead distinguishes between *in-group loyalty* and *in-group esteem*, but Blaydes and Gillum (2013) refer to *in-group loyalty* in a manner similar to Benstead's use of *in-group esteem*. We use the term *in-group loyalty* because we believe that the socially non-dominant groups do not feel esteem when they respond to socially dominant interviewers and vary their response to reinforce their group's societal position. However, the concept is more similar to Benstead's *in-group esteem*.
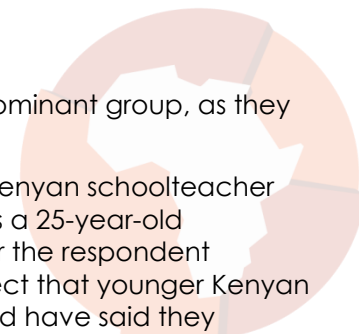
edit their answers when interacting with an interviewer from a non-dominant group, as they do not need to show deference to the non-dominant interlocutor.

For example, we imagine an interview carried out by a 45-year-old Kenyan schoolteacher employed as a survey enumerator. The 45-year-old teacher contacts a 25-year-old schoolteacher to carry out an interview. The interviewer asks whether the respondent supports recent street protests. In situations like these, we might suspect that younger Kenyan respondents (such as our schoolteacher), who counterfactually would have said they supported the street protests if they were talking to interviewers of the same age, might modify their responses to say they do not support the street protests when interviewed by older interviewers because the younger respondents expect the older interviewers posing the question to not support the street protests.[8] However, if the ages of the interviewer and the respondent were reversed and a 45-year-old teacher did not support protest, under the *social acquiescence* mechanism we would not expect that 45-year-old teachers would change their response regardless of the interviewer's age. That is, it would not matter whether they were talking to a 45-year-old teacher (an age peer) or a 25-year-old teacher because their position of social dominance would allow them to state their belief freely.

A second power relations mechanism comes from *in-group loyalty theory*, which posits that respondents will agree with the stereotype of their group when posed a question, since changing their response patterns can help them signal their social position within the social hierarchy (Benstead, 2014).[9] As *in-group loyalty theory* pertains to the survey enumeration process, respondents from a socially dominant (e.g. older) group can signal their position of dominance by changing their response pattern to reinforce their dominant position in the face of a non-dominant interviewer. Socially non-dominant respondents can also reinforce their stereotyped socially inferior position when they are talking to a socially dominant interviewer.

For example, let us imagine again two Kenyan schoolteachers. The 25-year-old interviewer asks the 45-year-old respondent whether she has faced financial hardship in the past year. On average, in situations like this, *in-group loyalty* would predict that older respondents would be less likely to say they suffered financial hardship when questioned by younger interviewers, vis-à-vis if they interacted with an older interviewer. In other words, older (i.e. more socially dominant) individuals would vary responses so as to not reveal they had faced financial hardship to younger interviewers because their stereotyped position is that they are wealthier. If the respondents were younger (25 years old) and the interviewers older (45 years old), in-group loyalty would predict that the younger teachers would reinforce that they are less well off by saying they had faced financial hardship (when they would have not said so to a teacher of the same age).

Within social desirability, we focus on one often-discussed mechanism: *social distance*. The social distance mechanism suggests that regardless of the social hierarchy of the two interlocutors, the respondent who is being questioned will want to conform to the imputed behaviors and attitudes of the interviewer posing the questions when the respondent and interviewer are socially distant. We assume that, when there is an age mismatch between interviewer and respondent, they are more socially far apart from each other than when the respondent and interviewer are of similar ages. Thus, we would expect respondents with an

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[8] Again, we do not believe that when respondents and interviewers are both younger, the answers that respondents give represent an objective truth, since attitudes vary situationally. However, we do make a weaker assumption that the attitudes espoused by the respondent when talking to someone of their same age group would be more in line with behavior associated with the attitude being asked about (in this case, protest).

[9] While Benstead (2014) explains this concept as pertaining to group stereotypes, in her research on religious dress she only investigates the stereotypes of the marginalized religious respondents. We use the term more expansively and expect in-group stereotypes to exist for socially dominant groups as well.

interviewer of a different age to vary their responses compared to when they are being interviewed by someone of the same age to be more in line with views the respondent imputes the interviewer to possess.

These three mechanisms are laid out in Table 1, which highlights that, in some cases, the mechanisms suggest observationally equivalent effects. Social acquiescence and social distance may yield similar predictions for younger respondents. However, they would yield different predictions for older respondents. In-group loyalty, on the other hand, yields different predictions than social acquiescence and social distance.

Table 1: Interactive mechanisms

	Respondent younger-interviewer older (reference respondent and interviewer both younger)	**Respondent older-interviewer younger (reference respondent and interviewer both older)**
Power relations: Social acquiescence	Younger respondent conforms to socially dominant older interviewer's expected view	Older respondent *does not* conform to younger (non-socially dominant) interviewer's expected view
Power relations: In-group loyalty	Younger respondent makes him/herself appear *less* socially dominant	Older respondent makes him/herself appear *more* socially dominant
Social desirability: Social distance	Younger respondent conforms to older interviewer's expected view	Older respondent conforms to younger interviewer's expected view

3. Data and methods

We use the same Afrobarometer data set (from rounds 3 and 4) used by Adida et al. (2016), which contains 38,381 responses from 14 countries.[10] Adida et al. (2016) study coethnic interviewer-respondent dyads, but they do not examine or control for age of the interviewer. Luckily, the Afrobarometer data contain the ages of both the interviewers and respondents across the two waves of data collection.[11]

Our main independent variable is a four-category nominal variable. This variable is created in two steps. First, we divide both interviewers and respondents into two groups: those who are 35 or younger, and those who are older than 35. Second, dyads whose members are in the same age group are placed in one of two categories: both 35 or under, or both over 35. Dyads whose members are in different age groups are placed in one of two categories: respondent 35 or under/interviewer over 35, and respondent over 35/interviewer 35 or under. We choose the cutoff of 35 years old, a typical designation of youth in the African context

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[10] Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

[11] Ages of interviewers and respondents are also recorded in Round 5. However, in order to compare the coefficients with the already estimated coethnic coefficients, we restrict our analysis to rounds 3 and 4.

(Abbink, 2005, 6). However, Appendix A also shows our analyses using 40 as a cutoff, where, as expected, effects are generally larger though more poorly estimated.[12]

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents' and interviewers' ages, and Figure 1 shows the proportions of the sample that fall into our four categories. Not surprisingly, given that the distribution of Afrobarometer interviewers skews much younger than the rest of the population distribution, the two most common categories are the one in which both dyad members are in the younger (35 and under) age group (53%) and the one in which the interviewer is in the younger group (35 and under) and the respondent is in the older (over 35) age group (34%).

Table 2: Age of Afrobarometer interviewers and respondents | 14 countries | 2005-2009

Afrobarometer data	Respondent ages			Interviewer ages			Age difference (respondents minus interviewers)		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Round 3	35.83	14.32	17,850	31.97	23.69	440	7.63	14.97	17,850
Round 4	35.44	13.9	20,003	31.09	21.4	515	6.95	14.96	20,003
All	35.62	14.1	37,853	28.83	8.34	955	7.27	14.97	37,853

Note: The "Age difference" column is the average difference (respondent minus interviewer) across the sample. Positive values mean that the respondents are older on average.

Figure 1: Distribution of sample by age-group category | 14 countries | 2005-2009
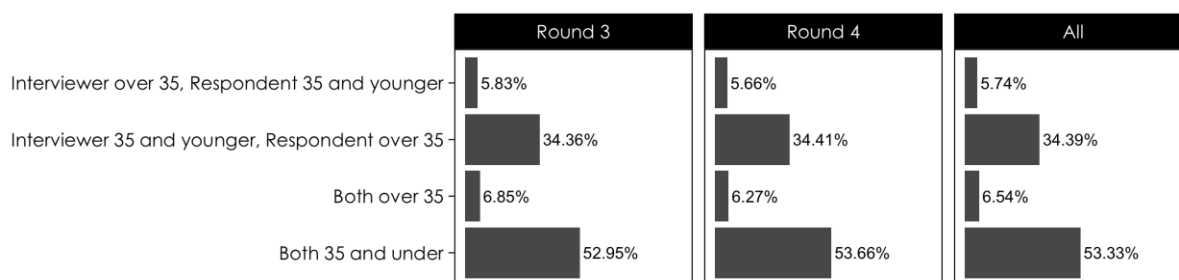
An ideal design might involve randomly assigning respondents to interviewers from same or different age groups. However, for many good reasons, Afrobarometer does not randomly

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[12] We acknowledge that we could examine age differences in a different manner, by subtracting the age of the interviewer from the age of the respondent, yielding a continuous measure of age difference. However, this approach does not align with our theoretical framework. For example, even though a 28-year-old interviewer might be older than an 18-year-old respondent, both are clearly identifiable as youth, and thus as non-socially dominant. We would therefore not expect the mechanisms laid out under *social acquiescence theory* to operate in such an interaction. Similarly, a 68-year-old respondent would likely not perceive himself to be in a socially dominant position vis-à-vis a 58-year-old interviewer, and thus would not feel pressured to present as dominant, as *in-group loyalty theory* would suggest. Nevertheless, as an alternate approach, we divide the continuous age difference variable at three cutpoints where (1) the interviewer is more than 10 years older than the respondent (interviewer older), (2) where the interviewer is more than 10 years younger than the respondent (interviewer younger), and (3) where the interviewer's age is within 10 years of the respondent's (same age). We show these models in Appendix B. As expected, the results vary somewhat from our age-group approach.

assign interviewers to respondents. Adida et al. (2016) document reasons for non-random assignment of coethnic interviewer-respondent dyads, including the need for interviewers who can speak the language the respondents most often speak at home and the desire to minimize contentious interethnic relations.

Unlike coethnic dyads, Afrobarometer's protocols for assigning interviewers to certain localities, selecting households, and selecting respondents within households should not result in similar levels of systematic bias in terms of which respondents are assigned someone from the same age group and which are assigned someone from a different one. Yet there might be some deviations from random assignment. For example, if interviewers are deployed in teams, younger interviewers, who might be more willing to travel, might be sent to more remote settlements that have predominantly higher numbers of older people (because the youth left for jobs in the city). It is also theoretically possible that individuals' potential willingness to open the door and consent to a survey varies on the basis of their age match with the interviewer.

To check for such possible biases, we compare means on several key indicators that are unlikely to be biased by interviewer-respondent age matches. Table 3 shows balance on a range of observables comparing the means for respondents when they were interviewed by someone in the same age group and someone in a difference age group.

**Table 3: Balance on demographic variables** | 14 countries | 2005-2009

Variable	Respondents over 35 (older)			Respondents 35 or under (younger)		
	Both >35	Interviewer <= 35	Difference	Both <= 35	Interviewer > 35	Difference
Age	49.553	49.479	0.07	25.96	26.522	-0.56*
Female	0.472	0.434	0.04*	0.536	0.527	0.01
Less than high school	0.605	0.638	-0.03*	0.424	0.436	-0.01
High school	0.294	0.257	0.04*	0.444	0.475	-0.03*
Post-secondary	0.101	0.105	0	0.131	0.089	0.04*
Urban	0.463	0.334	0.13*	0.404	0.489	-0.08*
Non-coethnic dyad	0.613	0.575	0.04*	0.583	0.595	-0.01
Minority	0.443	0.404	0.04*	0.408	0.425	-0.02
In-home language	0.664	0.519	0.14*	0.437	0.595	-0.16*

* p <.05. For age, a t-test is used for statistical significance. All other variables are binary (0-1), and significance is tested with a Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

There is substantively small but statistically significant imbalance across seven of the nine covariates in at least one of our two paired comparisons.[13] Two respondent covariates, however, stand out in terms of imbalance: *urban* (a dummy variable indicating that the primary sampling unit was urban, as opposed to rural) and *in-home language* (a dummy variable indicating whether the interview was conducted in the language the respondent most often speaks at home).

With respect to home language, among older respondents, a higher proportion of interviews was conducted in the home language of the respondent when the interviewer and respondent were in the same age group, compared to when the interviewer was in the younger group. The opposite pattern emerges with younger respondents – a lower proportion of interviews was conducted in the respondent's home language when the

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[13] While we cannot determine the reason for these differences, we raise them as an avenue of future research, and control for all these differences in our regression specifications.
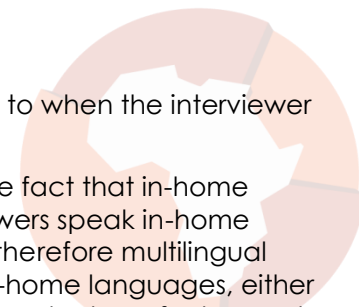
interviewer and respondent were in the same age group, compared to when the interviewer was in the older group.

There are several possible, non-mutually exclusive explanations for the fact that in-home language is not balanced. It could be that multilingual older interviewers speak in-home languages more fluently than multilingual younger interviewers, and therefore multilingual respondents choose to speak with older interviewers more often in in-home languages, either to mimic the interviewers' use of in-home languages or because respondents prefer to speak in-home languages. It could also be that older interviewers, who may have more facility with in-home languages, are deployed systematically at a local level to target respondents who may be more comfortable with in-home languages, leaving younger interviewers, who may have less facility with in-home languages, to conduct relatively more interviews in national languages.

With regard to type of settlement, among older respondents, a higher proportion of interviews were conducted in urban primary sampling units (PSUs) when the interviewer and respondent were in the same age group. Among younger respondents, we see the opposite pattern: Urban settings were more common when the interviewer was older. This pattern suggests that older interviewers may also be deployed more frequently in urban areas, where there is potentially more worry about households opening doors for younger interviewers.[14]

To conduct a comparable analysis and avoid fishing for results, we continue to use the same 28 outcome variables across four question categories used by Adida et al. (2016). These include three sets of questions posed to respondents on political, ethnic, and economic topics. The fourth set of questions focuses on interviewer self-assessments of the interviews. All of these variables are either binary outcomes or variables on Likert scales with between three and eight options.

For all four sets of outcomes, we run linear regression specifications with robust standard errors. Given concerns about lack of balance, in further regression modeling we control for age of respondent, sex, education, urban/rural location, ethnic regional minority,[15] and in-home language. Additionally, we include fixed effects for the Afrobarometer round, respondent ethnic group, enumerator ethnic group, and region.[16] In addition to these control variables, our primary coefficients of interest in all model specifications are those on age-group differences and whether the interviewer and respondent were coethnics.

Unless otherwise noted, when presenting our estimates of the effects of age differences, we present our results as two sets of contrasts. In the first contrast, we compare when a 35-or-under (younger) respondent is interviewed by someone from the same age group to when someone from that younger age group is interviewed by someone from the older age group. In the second contrast, we compare when a respondent over 35 (older) is interviewed by someone from the same group to when an older respondent is interviewed by someone from the younger age group.

To preview our findings, across all 28 questions, we find that 32 out of the 56 coefficients (57%) are statistically significant, and many of these are greater than .1 standard deviation units, which is larger than many other standardized estimates of the effects of interviewer-respondent differences (e.g. gender, ethnicity) on response patterns. Additionally, at least one of the coefficients on age differences is substantively larger than the coethnicity effect in 24 out of 28 cases, and coefficients on age differences are 25 percentage points more

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[14] These issues are outside of the scope of this paper but are clearly an avenue for further research.

[15] This is whether the respondent is a minority within the regions defined by the Afrobarometer *region* variable.

[16] This is the Afrobarometer *region* variable, which identifies large subnational units.
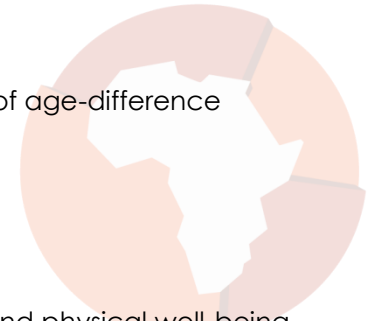
likely to be statistically significant (32% of coethnic estimates vs. 57% of age-difference estimates).

## 4. Age differences: Results

4.1 Economic questions

Afrobarometer poses a series of questions related to the economic and physical well-being of respondents. Do responses vary depending on the interaction between respondent and interviewer age group? A great deal of research in American politics has shown that even when questioned about objective realities, subjects may vary their answers based on a wide variety of factors (Bullock & Lenz, 2019; Prior, Sood, & Khanna, 2015).

In-group loyalty would suggest respondents may indeed vary their response patterns to these objective questions based on age-group differences. Younger respondents might wish to appear less socially dominant in the face of an older interviewer, and thus downplay their economic position. Conversely, older respondents might wish to appear more socially dominant in the face of a younger interviewer, and thus overstate their economic status.

Figure 2 plots our two sets of contrasts of interviewer-respondent dyads along with estimates of the effects of coethnicity. Each of these variables is presented on the same scale of standard deviation units as reported in Adida et al. (2016). The figure, which is scaled such that higher values mean socioeconomically worse off, provides evidence that points in favor of *in-group loyalty theory* on questions about objective economic and physical realities. In four of the six questions, younger respondents' assessments of their economic positions are significantly worse when their interviewer is in an older group than when the interviewer is also in the younger group. When facing an older interviewer, younger respondents are more likely to report they have bad living conditions, have gone without clean water and cash income, and feared crime in their home. These findings are in line with the idea that younger respondents' answers, on average, reinforce their socially inferior position to older interviewers.

Figure 2: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to economic questions | 14 countries | 2005-2009
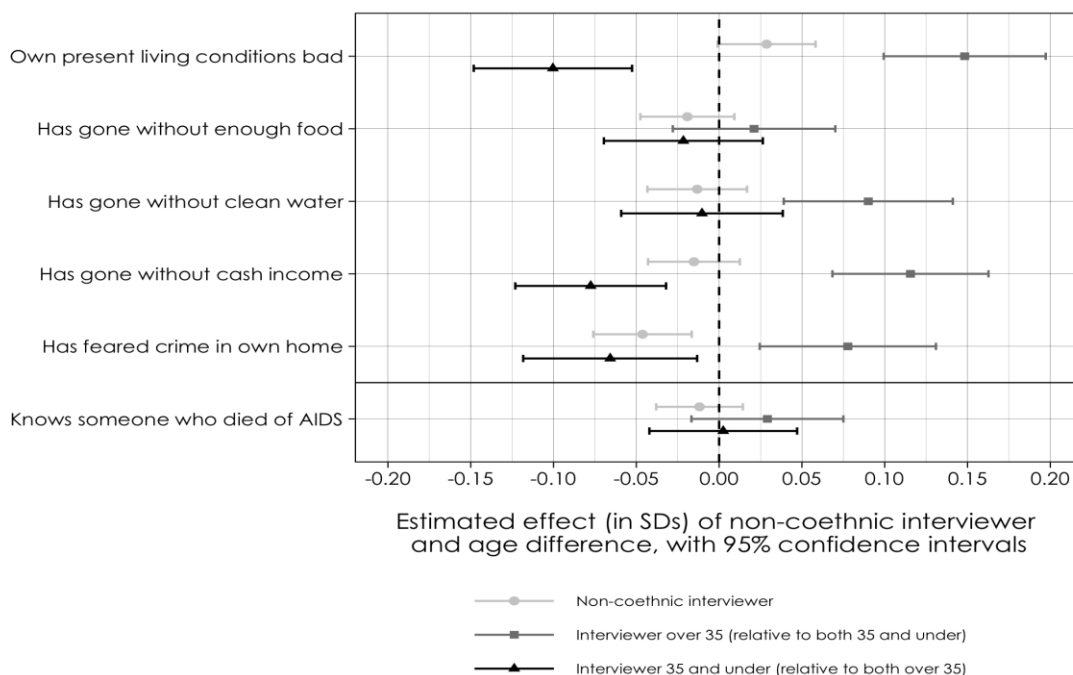
Also in line with *in-group loyalty theory*, older respondents are likely to report a position that reinforces their position in the social hierarchy in three out of six questions. Older respondents have more positive assessments of their own economic conditions and are less likely to report having gone without cash income or feared crime when they are talking to younger interviewers, rather than interviewers in their own age group.

However, we find that age-group match between interviewer and respondent has no effect on another question used by Adida et al. (2016): knowing someone who has died of AIDS. Under *in-group loyalty theory*, there is no reason to expect age-group effects here, because it is not clear that knowing or not knowing someone who has died of AIDS is a mark of one's status in a social hierarchy, in the way that economic security is.

Finally, we also note that in each of the five questions focused on economic status, at least one age-difference effect is larger than the coethnicity effect.

4.2 Politics questions

In this section, we present the results for the same 11 questions analyzed by Adida et al. (2016) related to politics. First, to be able to evaluate whether respondents are adjusting their responses to highlight their dominance (i.e. for older respondents, *in-group loyalty theory*), display their deference (i.e. *social acquiescence* and, for younger respondents, *in-group loyalty theory*), or just conform to the imputed opinions of the interviewers (i.e. *social distance*), we need to identify what survey responses might be seen as more desirable by both younger and older age groups. With regard to politics, we suggest that socially dominant positions – those held by older society members – are generally those that reinforce the institutions of the current political system, which in all the countries in the sample is multiparty electoral democracy, albeit with electoral authoritarian traits in some countries, with many elements of a free market economy. In such cases, regardless of who is interviewing them, we would expect older respondents to trust all political parties and government officials more than younger respondents, because they represent institutions of the current political system. We would also expect older respondents to show relatively higher levels of support for the executive (president) and for democracy. Finally, we would expect older respondents to report higher levels of civic involvement.

In-group loyalty theory would suggest that older respondents will be more likely to offer more pro-status quo answers when they are interviewed by younger interviewers, because they wish to establish their support for the existing hierarchy. *In-group loyalty* would also suggest that younger respondents might report more anti-status quo answers to reinforce that they do not support the current set of political institutions. Such a finding would be contrary to *social distance*, where we would expect that older respondents would try to conform to younger interviewers' imputed attitudes (i.e. anti-status quo) and vice versa. *Social acquiescence* would suggest that younger people will have more pro-status quo answers on these outcomes when facing older interviewers, because they are motivated to express deference. This prediction is observationally equivalent to *social desirability* for younger respondents facing older interviewers, but not for older respondents facing younger interviewers, who would not change their views according to *social acquiescence theory*.

To provide preliminary evidence demonstrating how responses differ by age group and how older respondents offer more pro-status quo opinions, we first show descriptive statistics for political variables such as voting, trusting the ruling party, and preferring democracy over other regime types. Table 4 presents the mean response for older and younger respondents as well as the difference between these two values, where negative numbers demonstrate that the position is more popular with older respondents (over 35). These are the same 11 questions presented by Adida et al. (2016). With the exception of two questions – reported exposure to vote buying and knowing the name of your member of Parliament (MP) – higher scores on these variables are associated with reinforcing the current political system.

Table 4 reinforces the idea that pro-status quo positions are more popular among respondents over 35 compared to respondent 35 or under, regardless of who is interviewing them, providing preliminary evidence that supporting current political institutions and engaging in politics generally constitute the socially dominant position, and one held more firmly by older respondents.

Table 4: Mean differences between younger and older respondents on responses to political questions | 14 countries | 2005-2009

Variable	Mean (resp. <= 35)	Mean (resp. > 35)	Difference	Min.	Max.
Political variables					
Voted in last national election	0.637	0.854	-0.217*	0	1
Trust in ruling party	1.562	1.705	-0.144*	0	3
Trust in opposition parties	1.205	1.320	-0.095*	0	3
Preference for democracy	0.746	0.776	-0.031*	0	1
Interest in public affairs	1.797	1.908	-0.111*	0	3
Attendance at community meetings	1.998	2.368	-0.37*	0	4
Approval of president's performance	0.664	0.693	-0.029*	0	1
Country's economic conditions	1.592	1.516	0.076*	0	4
Govt's handling of the economy	1.324	1.384	-0.06*	0	3
Knows MP's name	0.397	0.416	-0.019*	0	1
Exposure to vote buying	0.413	0.384	0.029*	0	3

* p <.05. For ordinal variables, a t-test is used for statistical significance. All other variables are binary (0-1), and significance is tested with a Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

Next we plot our two sets of dyadic age contrasts and the estimates of interviewer coethnicity for these political questions, shown in Figure 3. Again, each of these variables is presented on the same scale of standard deviation units as reported by Adida et al. (2016).
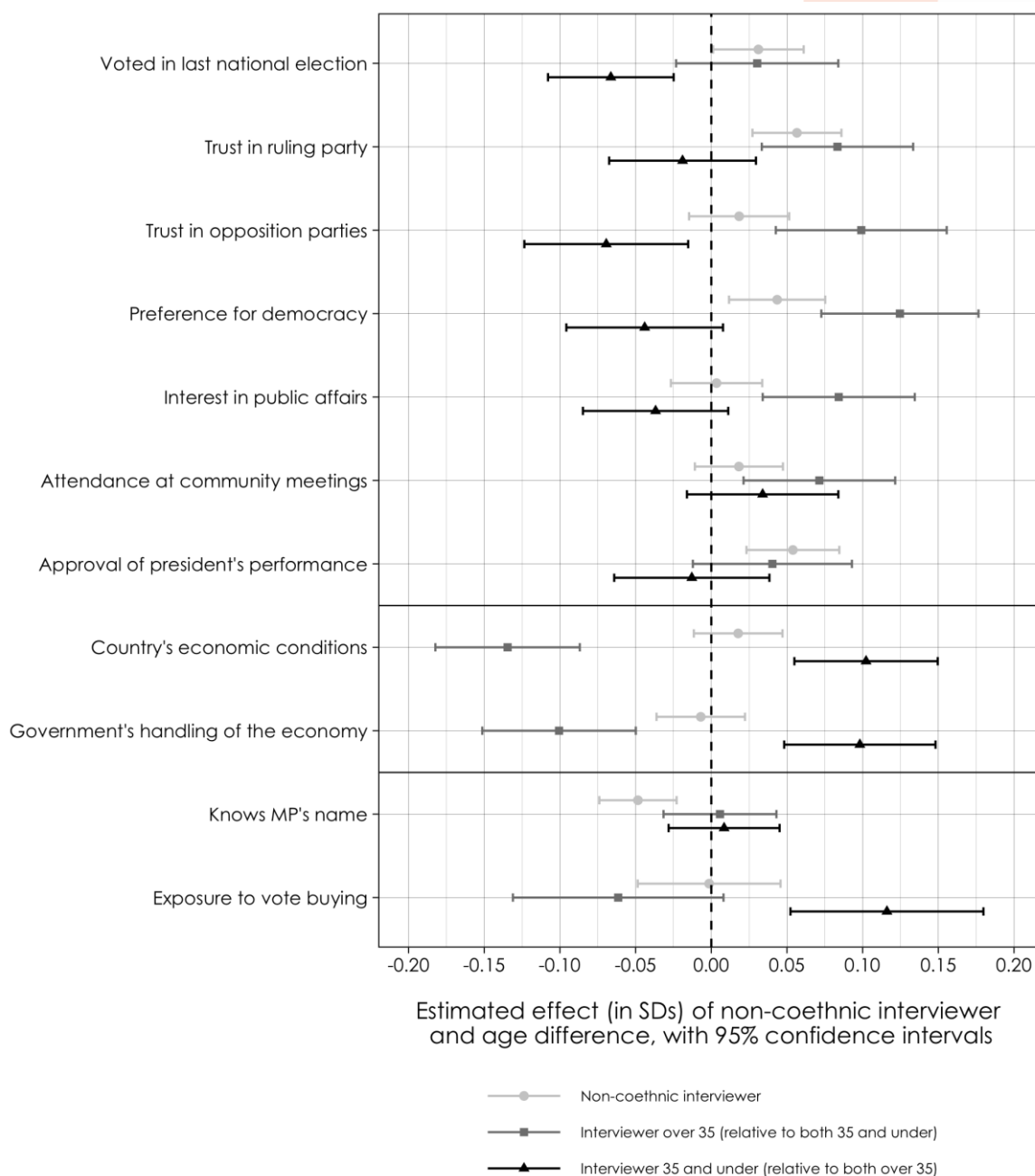
As we see, younger respondents' stated attitudes and behaviors vary depending on the age group of the interviewer. Older respondents also vary their positions depending on the age group of the interviewer, but they do so less frequently.

In seven out of the nine questions where we believe one of our three theories may be at play,[17] younger respondents' attitudes differ significantly depending on whether or not they are interviewed by someone from their own age group.

On five of these questions, younger respondents are more likely to take positions in line with the socially dominant group when their interviewers are in the older group. Indeed, when facing older interviewers, younger respondents are more likely, at statistically significant levels, to express trust in existing institutions (they report higher trust in both the ruling party and opposition parties) and a greater preference for democracy. Younger respondents are also more likely to express a greater interest in public affairs and to report attending community meetings when being interviewed by older interviewers. To put the standard deviation units back on the original scale of two variables (0-1), our models suggest that younger respondents are 5 percentage points more likely to say they prefer democracy and 9 percentage points more likely to report attending a community meeting when talking to over-35 interviewers as opposed to ones of the same age group (i.e. 35 or under).

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[17] We do not have any theoretical expectations for why social distance, social acquiescence, or in-group loyalty will be at play with respect to questions about knowing an MP's name or exposure to vote buying.

Figure 3: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to political questions | 14 countries | 2005-2009

Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

○ Non-coethnic interviewer

■ Interviewer over 35 (relative to both 35 and under)

▲ Interviewer 35 and under (relative to both over 35)

While certainly not dispositive, these findings appear most in line with *social acquiescence theory*, since more often than not, younger respondents vary their responses in line with views held more commonly by respondents over 35. Older respondents, on the other hand, do not vary their responses at statistically significant levels to align with views held more commonly by younger respondents (with the exception of trust in opposition parties).

Two findings are not in line with *social acquiescence theory*. Both of these relate to younger respondents' attitudes toward the government in relation to the economy. If younger respondents were to vary their responses and more often state the socially dominant position, then they should also support the government's handling of the economy more strongly when talking to older interviewers (relative to other younger interviewers). However,
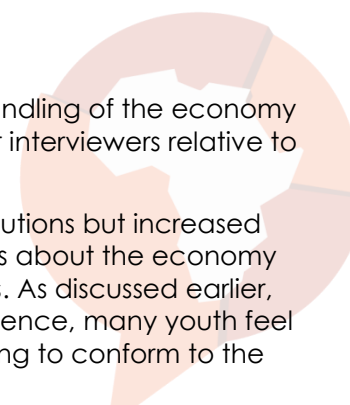
younger respondents are more negative about the government's handling of the economy and the country's current economic conditions when talking to older interviewers relative to interviewers of the same age.

Our finding of youth attitudes displaying social acquiescence to institutions but increased levels of anti-government attitudes when talking to older respondents about the economy may reflect the limits of youth acquiescence across African countries. As discussed earlier, youth are under- and un-employed across many African countries. Hence, many youth feel excluded from economic opportunity and therefore may not be willing to conform to the socially dominant position.

Our estimations yield two additional findings that we do not believe are explained by *social acquiescence, in-group loyalty*, or *social distance theory*. These findings address core issues in political science: voter turnout and exposure to vote buying. Older respondents are less likely to report voting in national elections and more likely to report exposure to vote buying to a younger interviewer (relative to an interviewer of the same age). While we show standard deviation units in Figure 3, on the original binary scale we estimate a 3-percentage-point decrease in reported turnout and a .10 increase in reported vote buying on a 0-3 scale.

Both of these findings have important implications for survey research in Africa and bear further scrutiny. First, recent scholarship has documented that respondents (in at least one African country) systematically over-report turning out to vote (Adida et al., 2019). Our findings suggest that age differences between interviewers and respondents may affect levels of over-reporting. Based on our findings, we hypothesize that older respondents are more honest when speaking to younger interviewers in the case of voting, since it may be that they feel less social pressure to tell younger interviewers they have voted even if they have not. Of course, it also possible that older respondents are under-reporting their turnout when talking to younger interviewers. However, given the social desirability and documented over-reporting of voting, we think this is not a widespread occurrence. Indeed, if we make the strong assumption that voters who turn out to vote never lie by saying they did not turn out (akin to a one-sided lying assumption) (Gingerich et al., 2016), then having younger enumerators interview older respondents could attenuate misreporting of turnout.[18]

Unlike questions related to turnout, which are subject to over-reporting, questions related to vote buying are generally suspected to be subject to under-reporting (Kramon, 2016). Those who engage in vote buying generally know it is socially undesirable and are often aware it is illegal, and therefore may be hesitant to answer a survey question honestly (Erlich, 2019). Our results suggest that reporting of vote buying may vary depending on who is asking the question. Similar to turnout, we hypothesize that older respondents may feel more comfortable divulging socially unacceptable behavior such as vote buying or not voting to younger interviewers rather than interviewers of the same age.

The questions related to vote buying and voting draw specific attention to the potential for response bias in estimates highlighted by other scholars. If older respondents are *more* honest with younger interviewers about these two behaviors, then this provides evidence to generally recruit younger interviewers for the survey enumeration process. We return to this point in our discussion below.

While we focus on the importance of age effects, we also benchmark them against ethnicity. Overall, for these political questions, at least one age effect is larger in magnitude than the coethnicity effect on all but one question (knowledge of MP's name). However, the null effect of our age-group variables on respondents' knowing their MP's name makes sense in our framework, since intuitively age differences between respondent and interviewer

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[18] While most work assumes over-reporting of turnout, there is some work suggesting there may be some reason to assume under-reporting of turnout on surveys in opposition strongholds in semi-authoritarian regimes (Ferree et al., 2018). Therefore, context likely also needs to be taken into consideration.

should not affect such a knowledge-based question where there is no socially dominant position and it is likely socially desirable for everyone to know the MP's name. Beyond the size of the effects, on seven of 11 questions presented in Figure 3, there is a statistically significant effect of the interviewer being older (rather than a similar age); on five questions, there is a statistically significant effect of the interviewer being 35 or under (rather than the same age); and on three questions, there is both a statistically significant impact of the interviewer being 35 or under (rather than a similar age) and being over 35 (rather than the same age). That is, 55% (12/22) of the coefficients are significant on our age variables relative to 4/11 (36%) of the coefficients on coethnicity. This finding suggests that age-group differences may affect social discussions more than coethnicity. At a minimum, it suggests that the age of interviewers may be more important to consider when Afrobarometer chooses interviewers.

4.3 Ethnicity questions

What about questions related to ethnicity itself, where ethnic differences will be most likely to have an effect? On this set of questions, it is unclear what the socially desirable outcomes for older vs. younger individuals are, and the extent of social desirability may vary by context, so our theoretical framework does not yield *ex a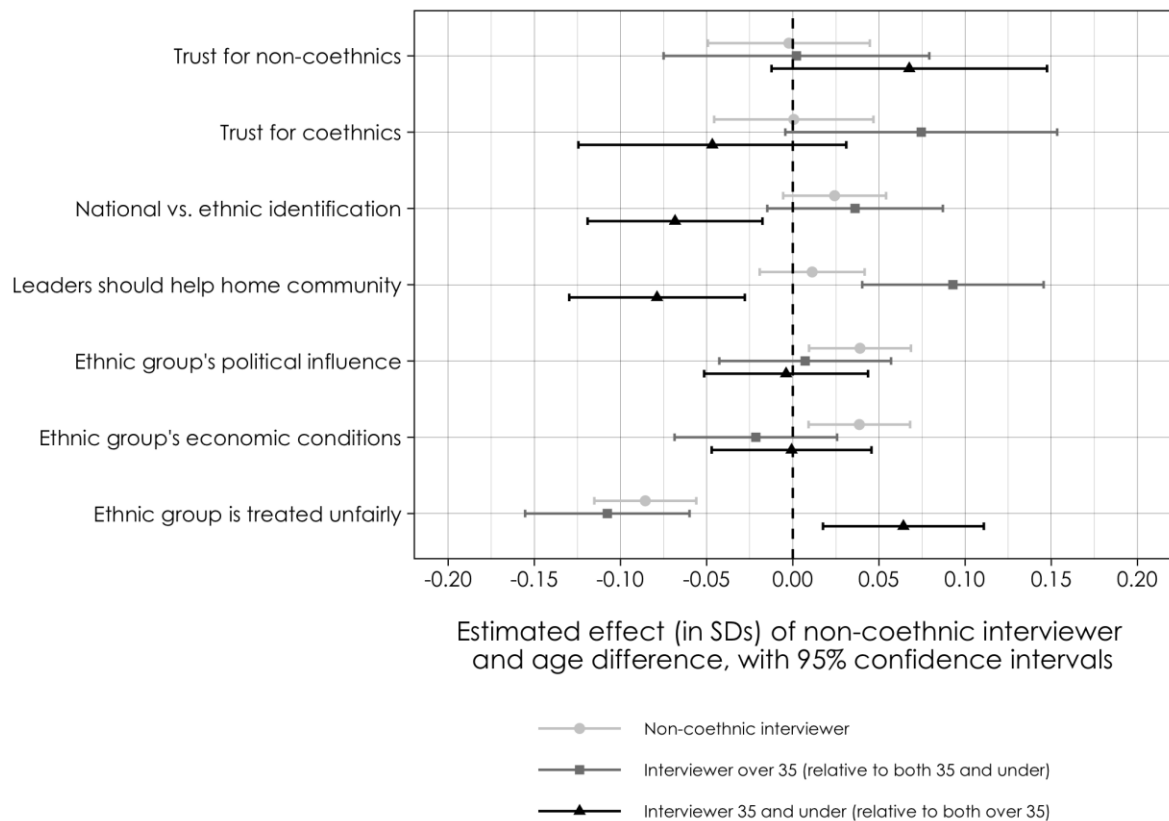nte* predictions. As with coethnicity itself, we find that, for most questions, interviewer-respondent age-group differences do not have a statistically significant effect (Figure 4). Moreover, many of the effects are estimated to be substantively null.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

We do, however, find four statistically significant and substantively large effects on two questions, one about leaders helping their own community and the other about whether an ethnic group is treated unfairly. In both cases, the effects work in the same direction. When interviewers are in the older group and respondents in the younger, respondents are less likely to report that their ethnic group is treated unfairly, but also more likely to state that leaders should help the home community.[19] When interviewers are younger and respondents are older, respondents are less likely to say that leaders should help their home community and more likely to say that their ethnic group is treated unfairly. We suggest that more work needs to be done to understand why this might be the case.

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[19] In terms of this community variable, this effect translates into a 4-percentage-point increase in the binary outcome on the original scale.

Figure 4: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to ethnicity questions | 14 countries | 2005-2009


Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

Non-coethnic interviewer

Interviewer over 35 (relative to both 35 and under)

Interviewer 35 and under (relative to both over 35)

4.4 Interviewer questions

In a final set of analyses, we investigate how interviewer assessments of the interview process vary. These questions do not assess response-pattern variation, but rather investigate how the interviewer perceives the interview. Given that much of our explanation of the response-pattern variation relies on the assumption that respondents see interviewers differently based on their respective ages, our claims should be further strengthened if interviewers also perceive respondents differently if they are in different age groups rather than in the same age group. The fact that interviewers may behave differently would also suggest that some of the response-pattern variation may be induced by interviewer behavior.

Since the questions in this section ask for the interviewers' self-assessments, the relevant comparisons have different interpretations than the ones above. As in previous section, we investigate two contrasts.

First, Table 5 shows that overall, interviewers rate respondents quite positively, and there are only small differences in ratings between younger and older interviewers. However, in line with our argument, as shown in Figure 5, the interviewer assessment data also provide clear evidence that interviewers' self-assessment patterns vary depending on whether the interviewers interacted with respondents in their same age group or a different age group. Younger interviewers tend to report that older respondents treat them less well, compared to respondents of the same age. One reason for this finding, in line with our theoretical framework, is that older respondents are not deferent or respectful toward younger interviewers. On other hand, older interviewers who interview younger respondents tend to rate these younger respondents more positively compared to respondents who are of the
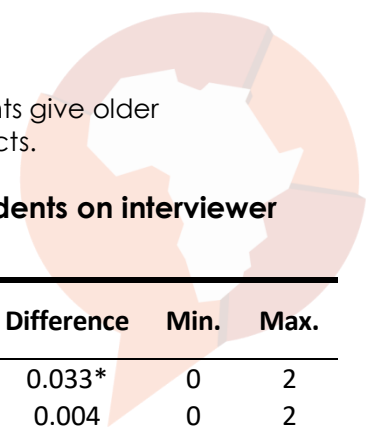
same age. This may speak to the deference that younger respondents give older interviewers. Again, both effects are much larger than coethnic effects.

Table 5: Mean differences between younger and older respondents on interviewer assessment variables | 14 countries | 2005-2009

Variable	Mean interviewer <= 35	Mean interviewer > 35	Difference	Min.	Max.
Respondent was impatient	0.249	0.216	0.033*	0	2
Respondent was hostile	0.126	0.122	0.004	0	2
Respondent was suspicious	0.294	0.263	0.031*	0	2
Respondent was uncooperative	0.175	0.158	0.017*	0	2

* p < .05. For all variables, a t-test was employed.

Figure 5: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to interviewer assessment questions | 14 countries | 2005-2009
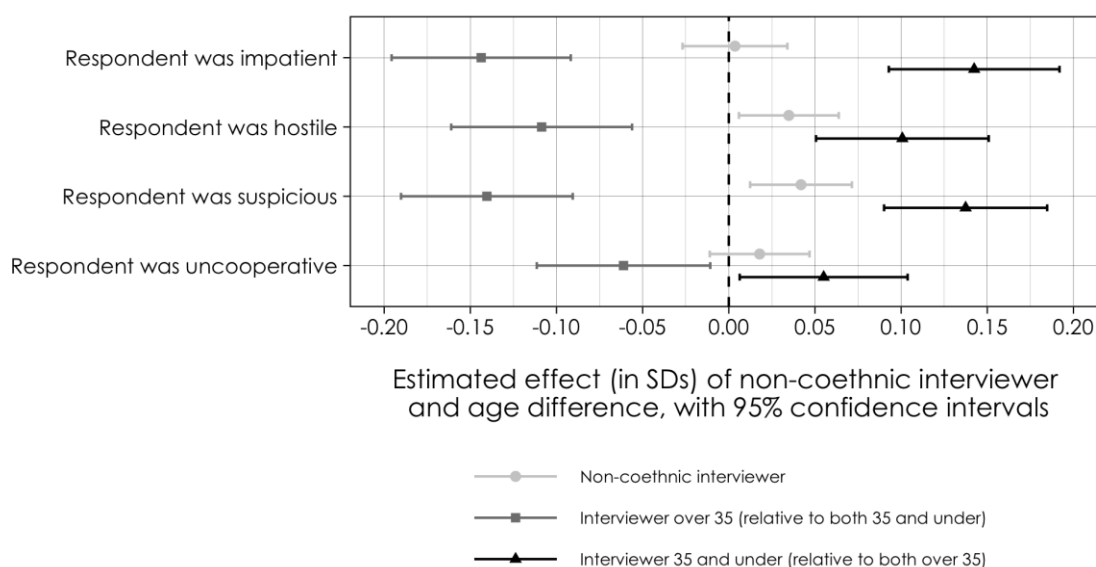

Conclusion

Scholars have long posited that age dynamics are important to the study of African societies. Our study reaffirms this finding by examining personal interaction in face-to-face surveys. Moreover, we theorize about three mechanisms that could generate response-pattern variation in these face-to-face interactions: *in-group loyalty*, *social acquiescence,* and *social distance.* While certainly not dispositive, the data provide more evidence for theories of power relations, rather than social desirability, with a mixture of findings that appear most in line with *social acquiescence theory* and, particularly in the context of economic questions, *in-group loyalty theory.*

The social acquiescence finding of younger respondents deferring to older interviewers on political questions is in line with scholarship that has discussed the marginalization of youth. This finding suggests that survey estimates of youth discontent on issues such as trust in political parties and preference for democracy may be systematically underestimated.

Since response patterns are situational, we caution analysts to think carefully about how age differences may influence response patterns, particularly in situations where age differences

may be important. Finally, our research provides evidence that the effects of age-group differences between interviewers and respondents are substantively larger than the effects of coethnicity. These findings reiterate the importance of age differences benchmarked against another group category (ethnicity) that is often discussed in African studies.

Given our findings, from a practical perspective it appears that employing younger interviewers rather than combining a mixture of older and younger interviewers may induce *less* response-pattern variation. However, given younger interviewers' reports of worse treatment by older respondents, more sensitization and training for younger interviewers in dealing with elders could potentially help improve their work experience.
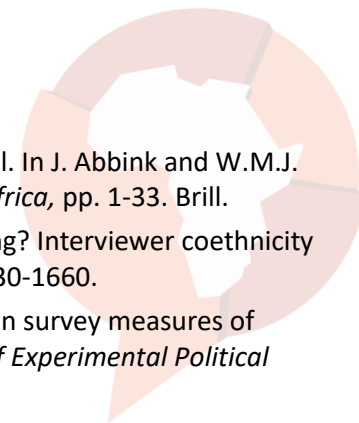
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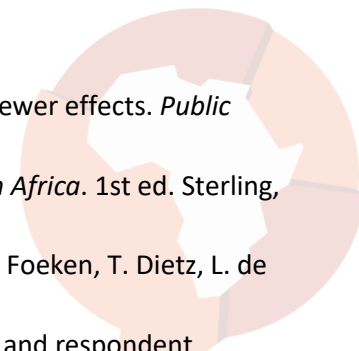
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Appendix A: Interviewer-respondent age-difference effects with 40-year cutoff

Figure A.1: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to economic questions (with 40-year cutoff) | 14 countries | 2005-2009

Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

Non-coethnic interviewer

Interviewer over 40 (relative to both 40 and under)

Interviewer 40 and under (relative to both over 40)

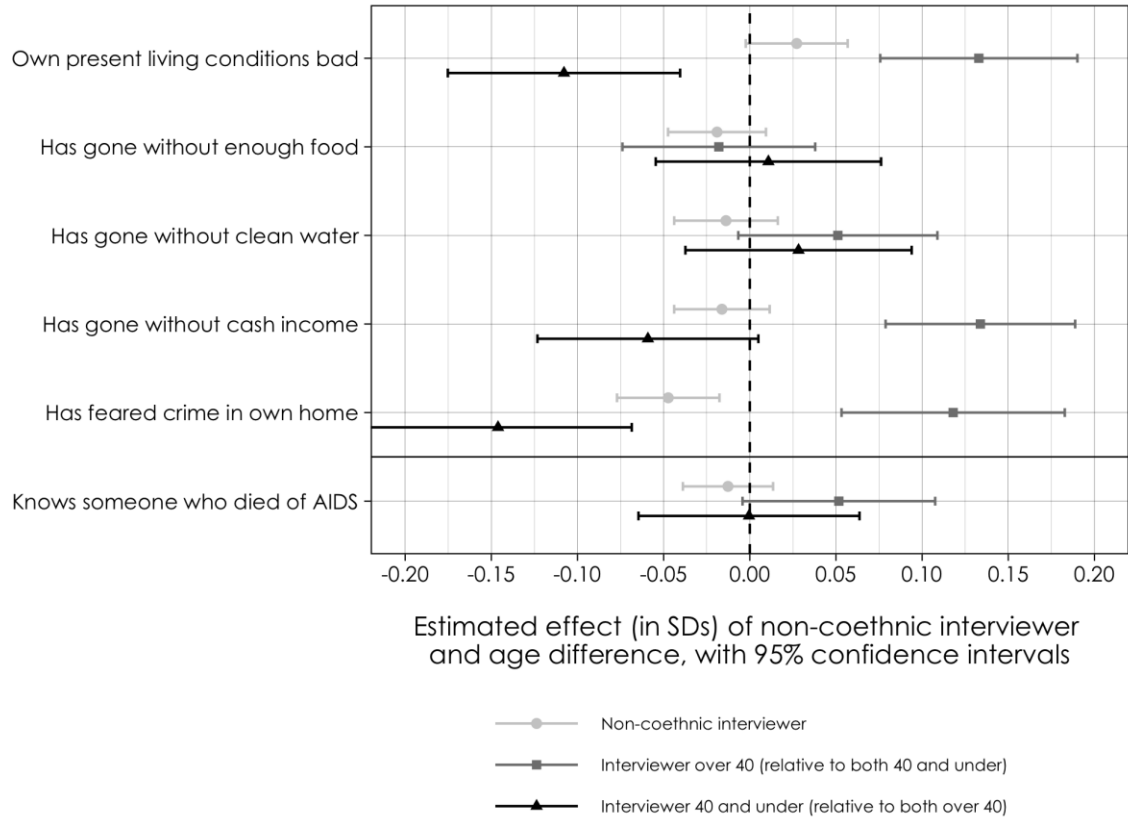**Figure A.2: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to political questions (with 40-year cutoff)** | 14 countries | 2005-2009

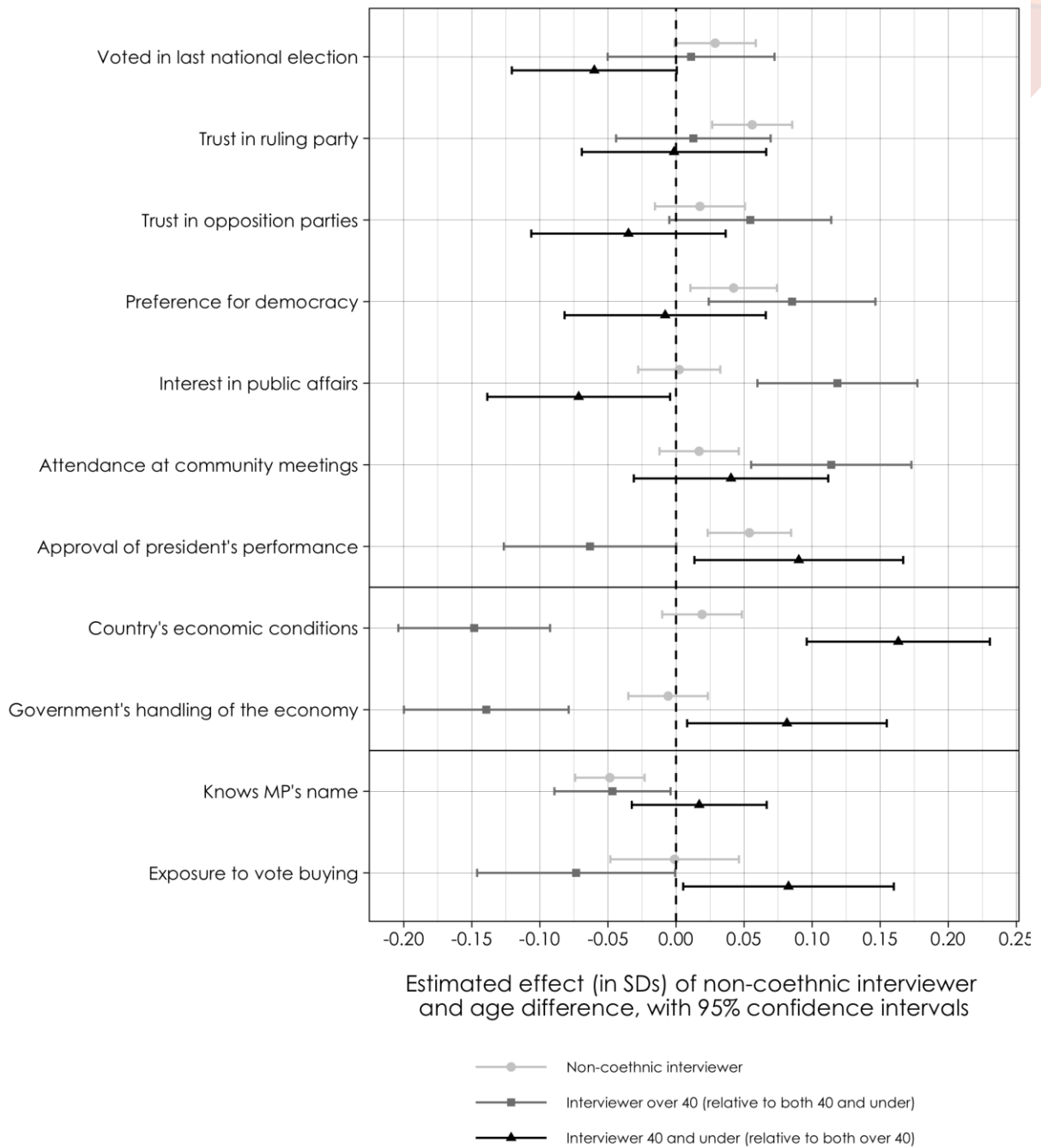Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

Non-coethnic interviewer

Interviewer over 40 (relative to both 40 and under)

Interviewer 40 and under (relative to both over 40)

Figure A.3: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to ethnicity questions (with 40-year cutoff) | 14 countries | 2005-2009
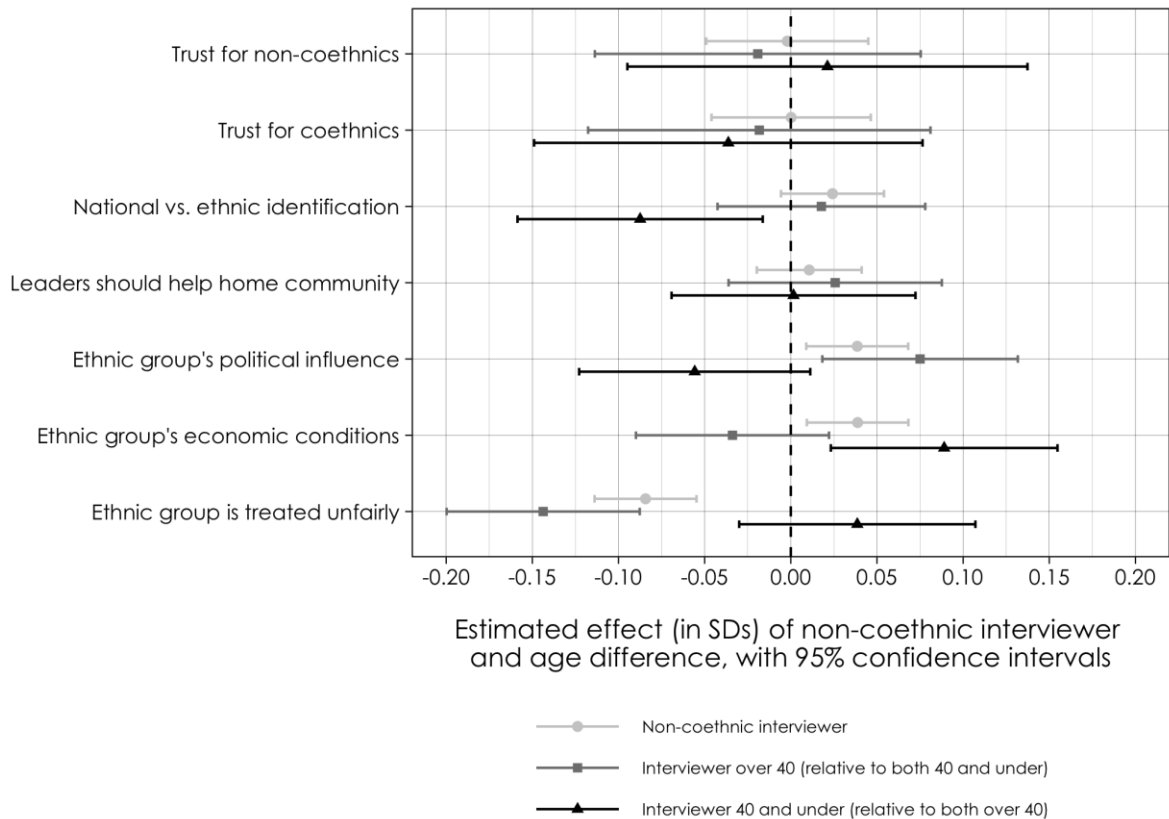

Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

● Non-coethnic interviewer
■ Interviewer over 40 (relative to both 40 and under)
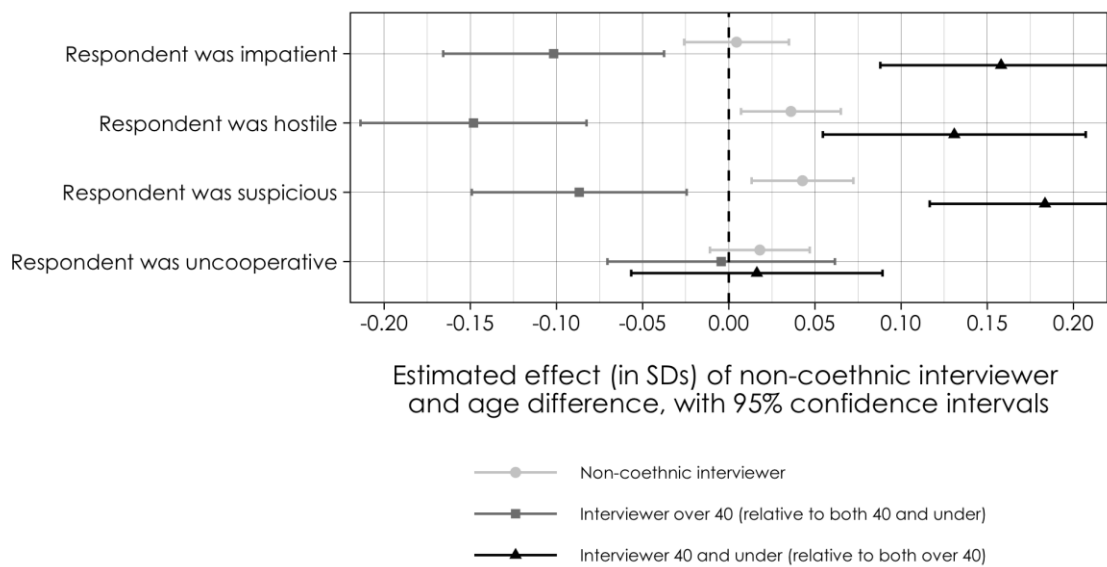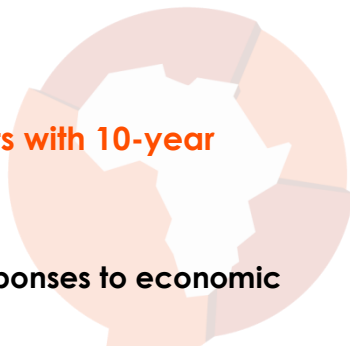▲ Interviewer 40 and under (relative to both over 40)

Figure A.4: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to interviewer assessment questions (with 40-year cutoff) | 14 countries | 2005-2009

Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

● Non-coethnic interviewer
■ Interviewer over 40 (relative to both 40 and under)
▲ Interviewer 40 and under (relative to both over 40)

Appendix B: Interviewer-respondent age-difference effects with 10-year cutoff

Figure B.1: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to economic questions (with 10-year cutoff) | 14 countries | 2005-2009
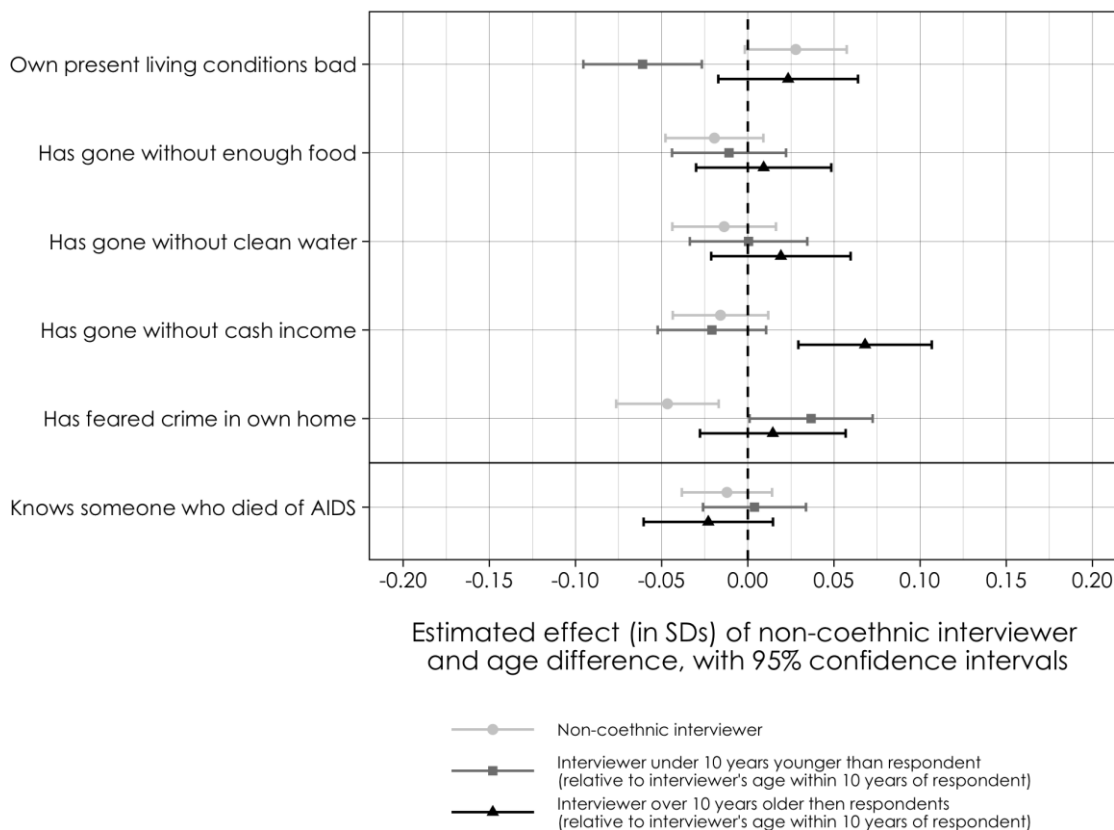

Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

- Non-coethnic interviewer
- Interviewer under 10 years younger than respondent
(relative to interviewer's age within 10 years of respondent)
- Interviewer over 10 years older then respondents
(relative to interviewer's age within 10 years of respondent)

Figure B.2: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to political questions (with 10-year cutoff) | 14 countries | 2005-2009
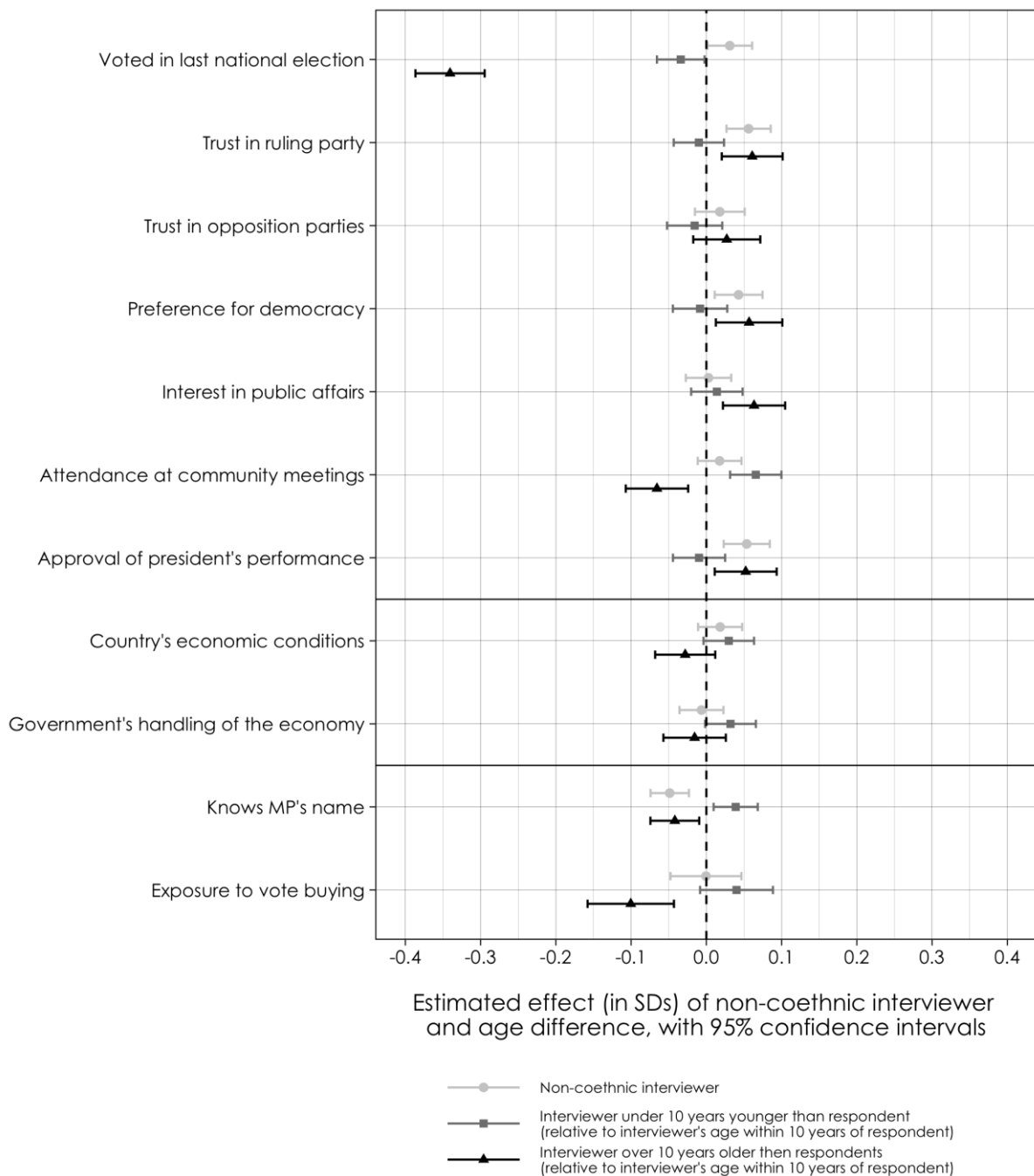

Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

Non-coethnic interviewer

Interviewer under 10 years younger than respondent
(relative to interviewer's age within 10 years of respondent)

Interviewer over 10 years older then respondents
(relative to interviewer's age within 10 years of respondent)

Figure B.3: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to ethnicity questions (with 10-year cutoff) | 14 countries | 2005-2009
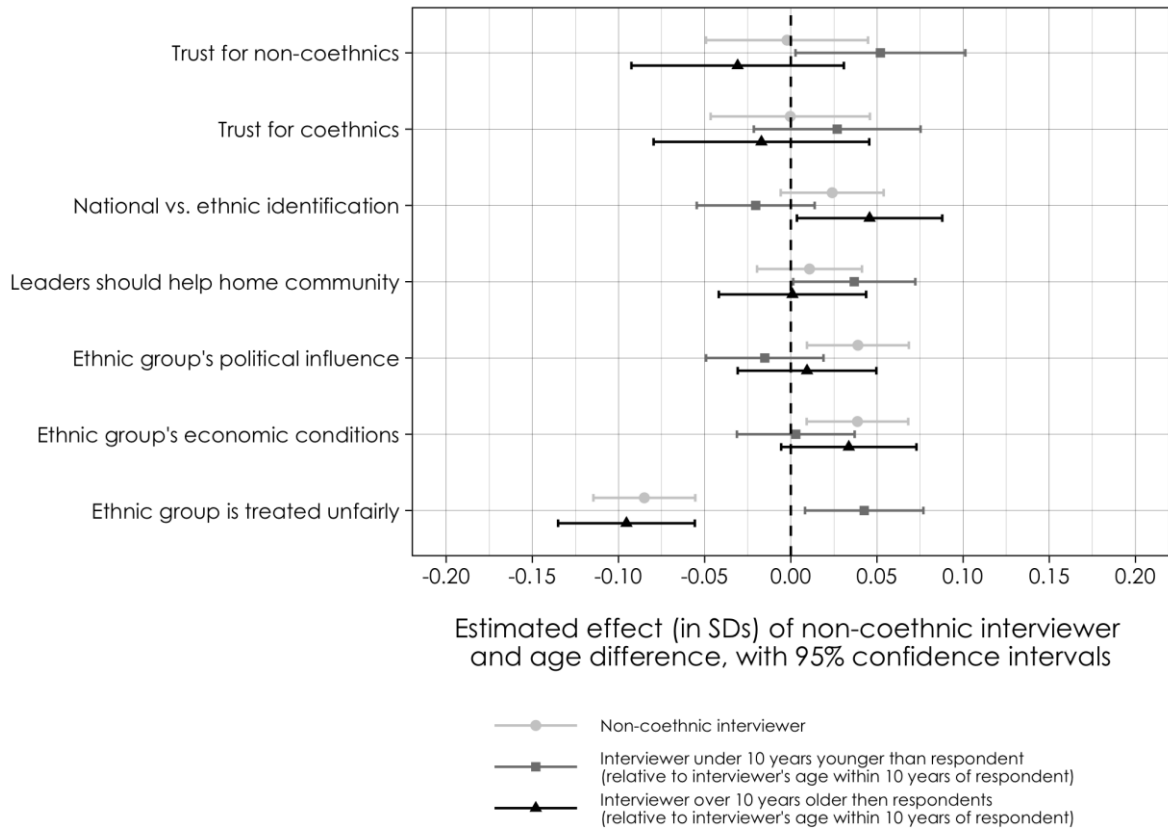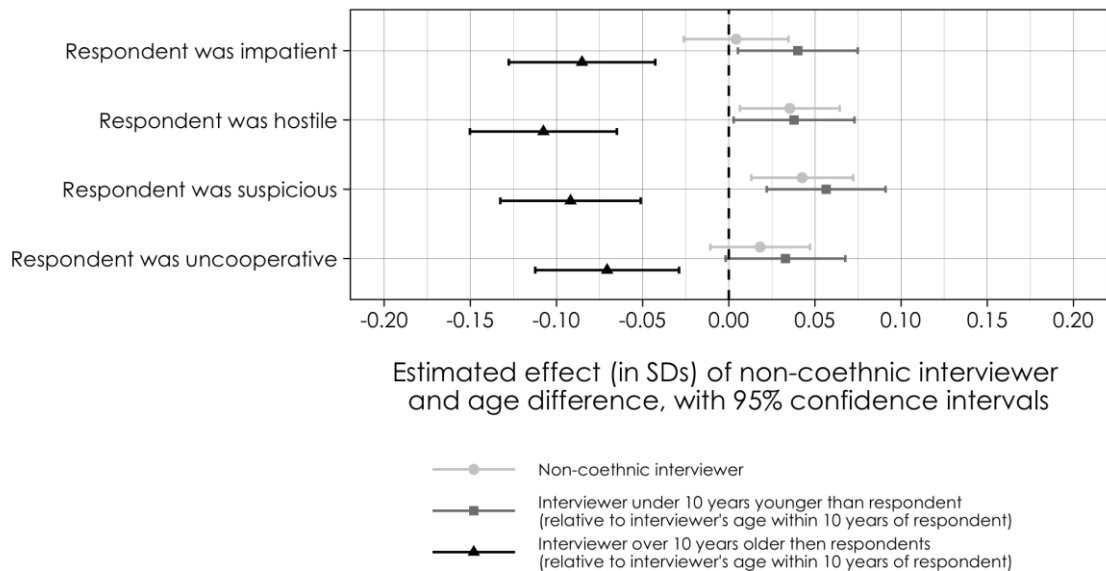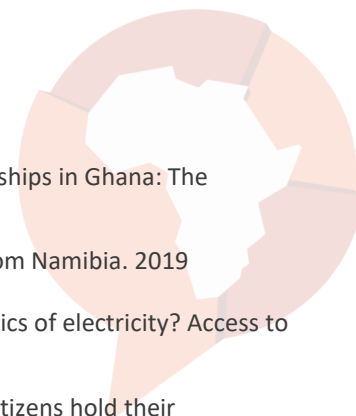

Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

- Non-coethnic interviewer
- Interviewer under 10 years younger than respondent (relative to interviewer's age within 10 years of respondent)
- Interviewer over 10 years older then respondents (relative to interviewer's age within 10 years of respondent)

Figure B.4: Effects of age difference and non-coethnicity on responses to interviewer assessment questions (with 10-year cutoff) | 14 countries | 2005-2009

Estimated effect (in SDs) of non-coethnic interviewer
and age difference, with 95% confidence intervals

- Non-coethnic interviewer
- Interviewer under 10 years younger than respondent (relative to interviewer's age within 10 years of respondent)
- Interviewer over 10 years older then respondents (relative to interviewer's age within 10 years of respondent)

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