

Understanding African Societies

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African History through the Lens of Economics

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Introduction

Insights from yesterday's lecture:

- Western societies today are “*WEIRD*” : **W**estern, **E**ducated, **I**ndustrialized, **R**ich and **D**emocratic;
- Historically, they are kin-based and patrilineal → homogeneous
- The social structure of the “West” is just an example of how groups can be organized, not the dominant form of organization across the world
- Focus on two examples: matrilineal kinship and brideprice

Western bias in economic academic literature

We can think about “Western bias” in two ways:

- ① Existence of the literature: the number of economic studies focusing on an African country is substantially lower than the number of economic studies focusing on Europe or the United States.
- ② Interpretation of concepts and setting: when we study the economics of African countries and societies, we risk to do so by the standpoint of Western countries, interpreting concepts and findings as Westerners would do.

It is important to realize and acknowledge this because:

- **At the research stage**: doing qualitative research is as important (if not more) as nailing the quantitative side of the analysis when working in an unknown context;
- **At the policy design stage**: a society’s cultural traits will inevitably influence the effect of an economic or social policy.

The interaction between policy and culture

Cultural traits can change the effects of policy and policy may change cultural traits

① Culture \Rightarrow Impact of policy

- The social structure of ethnic groups is heterogeneous and depends on their cultural traits
- Different practices such as matrilocality, patrilocality, kinship, age-sets all might shape social and economic interactions today
- This in turn might affect the impact of the policies that are implemented

② Policy \Rightarrow Persistence of culture

- Cultural practices might regulate people's economic incentives in particular spheres of life
- A policy that changes those incentives might affect the persistence of the cultural practice
- In this sense, a policy might “crowd-out” a cultural trait.

Focus of today!

Age Set vs. Kin: Culture and Financial Ties in East Africa

- Moscona and Seck (2022)

Does the pre-colonial social structure of an ethnic group shape contemporary financial redistribution? If so, how does this affect policy?

- This paper's focus: **age-based organizations vs kin-based organizations**
- Most important example of an alternative to kinship-based organization (Lowie, 1920)

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- Primary social group is the "age-set," a group of individuals who are of approximately the same age and "initiated" at the same time and take priority over kin relations:

*The relations between age mates [involve] **general and permanent obligations of cooperation, solidarity, [and] mutual help, closely resembling, in this respect, the family and kinship.** –Eisenstadt (1954)*

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- Prevalent throughout sub-Saharan Africa (over **200 million** people members of societies in which age sets are the dominant form of organization)

[More on definition](#)

[More qualitative evidence](#)

This Paper: The Role of Social Structure

Research Question

Do age set organizations have **stronger within-cohort** financial ties? And if so, how does this interact with **within-kin** redistribution?

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- ① ↑ within-age-cohort spillovers in age set societies (vs. kin based societies)
- ② ↓ inter-generational within family spillovers in age set societies (vs. kin based societies)

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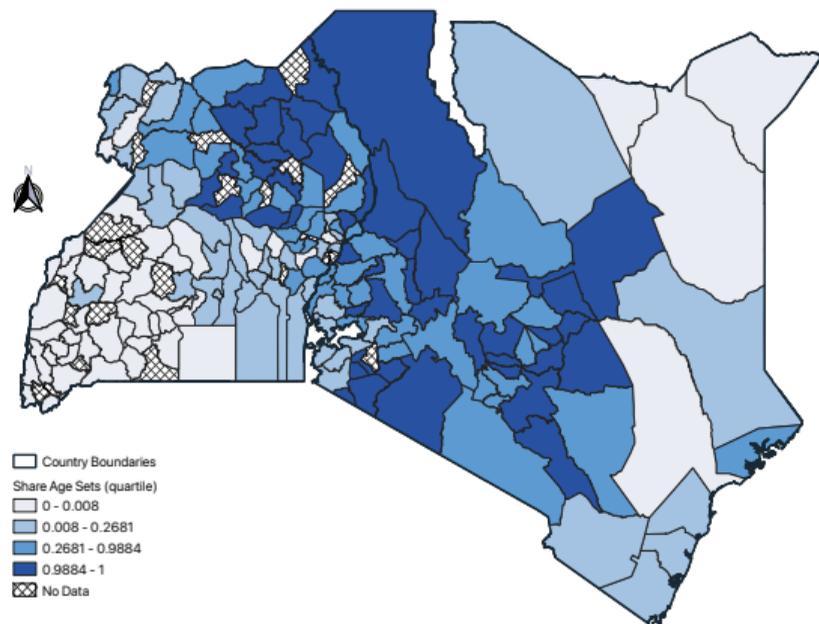
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Part 2: Evaluation of **Uganda Social Citizen Grant**. Social Pension introduced in 2011

- ① ↓ inter-generational within family spillovers in age set societies (vs. kin based societies)
- ② Policy relevance and children outcomes

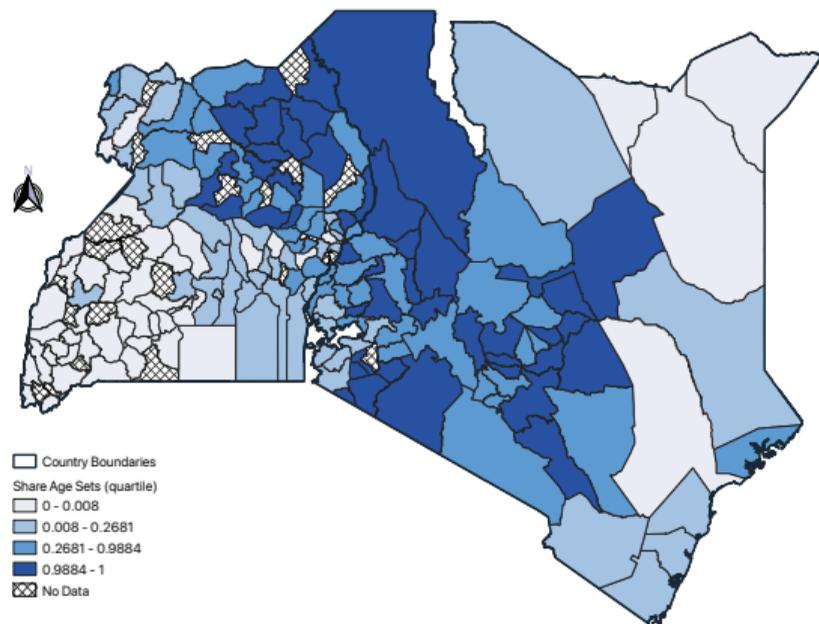
Defining Age Sets Organizations in the Data

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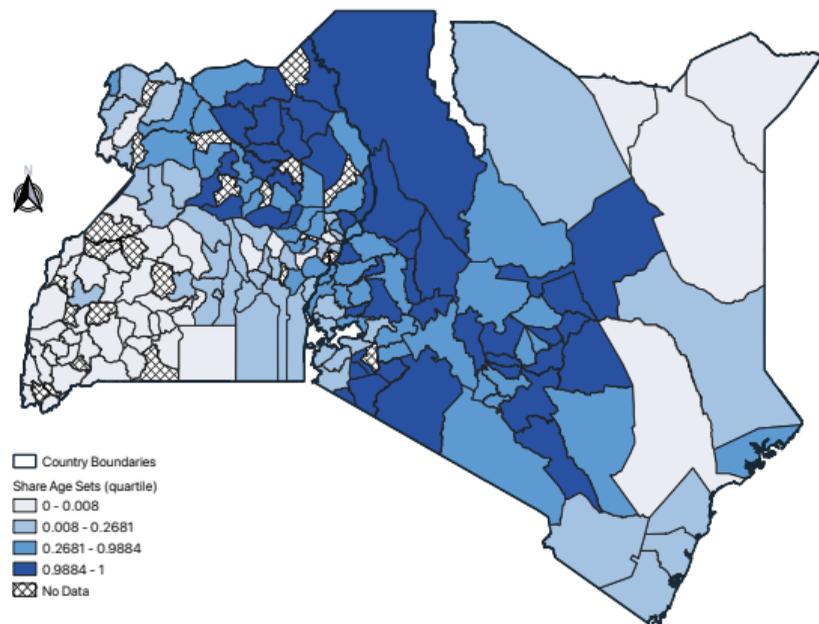


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- Focus: Uganda and Kenya
- No systematic ethnographic data on ageset presence
- Use ethnographic sources to code ethnic groups of the DHS
- We code 85% of the DHS sample in Uganda and 99% of the sample in Kenya
- Age set societies make up **29% HH in Uganda** and **72% HH in Kenya**

Summary statistics and balance

Validation with circumcision data



Social Structure and Redistribution: Experimental Evidence

Context

- Hunger safety net program: large-scale cash transfer program
- RCT in Northern Kenya: Baseline survey in 2009, follow-up in 2010/2011
- Large transfers ($\sim 25\%$ of average income)

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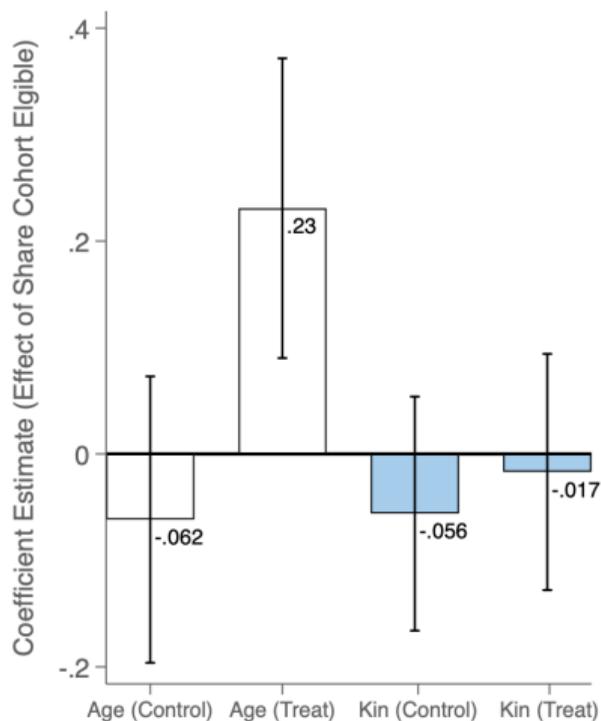
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Structure:

- Sub-locations randomly assigned to treatment or control
- Eligibility status of households determined within both treatment and control
- Eligible household heads received transfers but only in treatment sub-locations

Hypothesis: Within-Cohort Ties. Higher share of eligible cohort members should increase consumption in age set societies but not in only in kin-based societies (or any control locations).

Within-Cohort Spillovers Only in age-set Societies: Total Spending



- 1 s.d. increase in age cohort treatment \Rightarrow 0.3 s.d. increase in consumption spending
- for an individual in the spillover group in an age set society, every additional cohort member treated by the cash transfer program leads on average to a \$16 USD increase in yearly consumption spending
- corresponds to roughly 8% of the median in-sample income at baseline

Social Structure and National Policy: Uganda's National Pension Program

Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development reads:

“Although the Senior Citizen Grants [pension program] target older people, the grants benefit more than only the senior citizen beneficiaries. The SCGs have significant impact on development outcomes as older people tend to invest a portion of their grant money in meeting their grandchildren's nutritional, health, education needs.”

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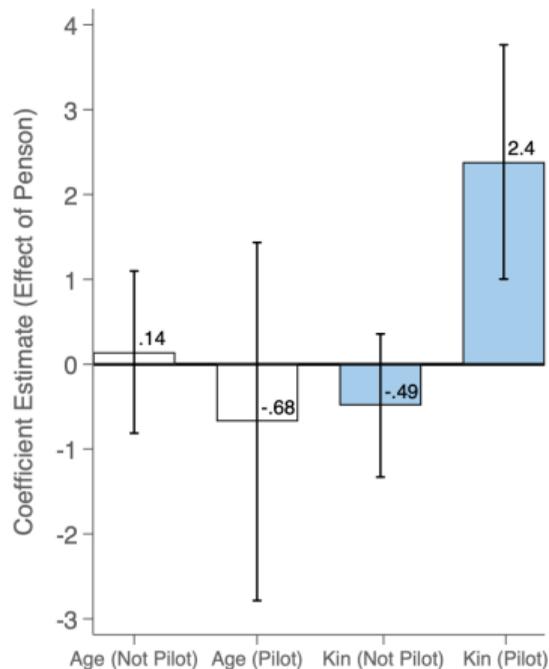
Estimate effects on children in detail using:

- **Data:** Demographic and Health Survey (2016) measures household composition, ethnicity, member ages, and child anthropometric outcomes
- **Identification:** Exploit staggered pension roll-out across pilot districts in 2011 and variation in ethnic group structure + hh composition; ages 65+ qualify for transfer

Hypothesis: Inter-generational ties. Higher household pension exposure should increase child health in kin-based societies and not in age set societies (or any non-pilot districts)

SCG details and measure of exposure

Pensions and Child Nutrition in Societies With and Without age-sets



An additional year of pension receipt in a household without age sets, compared to one with age sets,:

- Increases child weight by roughly 0.15 standard deviations
- Reduces the likelihood that a child is malnourished by roughly 5.5%
- Significant effect of pension exposure on school attendance of boys in societies without age sets, and zero effect in age set societies

Inequality and vulnerable populations in the cross-section

- In **age-set societies**, individuals rely disproportionately on their own cohort
- Low-earning parts of the lifecycle (i.e. young and old) could be left worse off
- Evidence from the HSNP baseline data
- In **kin-based societies**, inequality may be starker across *sub-clans*, some of which accumulate more than others
- The standard deviation of average expenditure across clans is *60% larger in kin-based societies* (1741 vs. 1249 KSh)

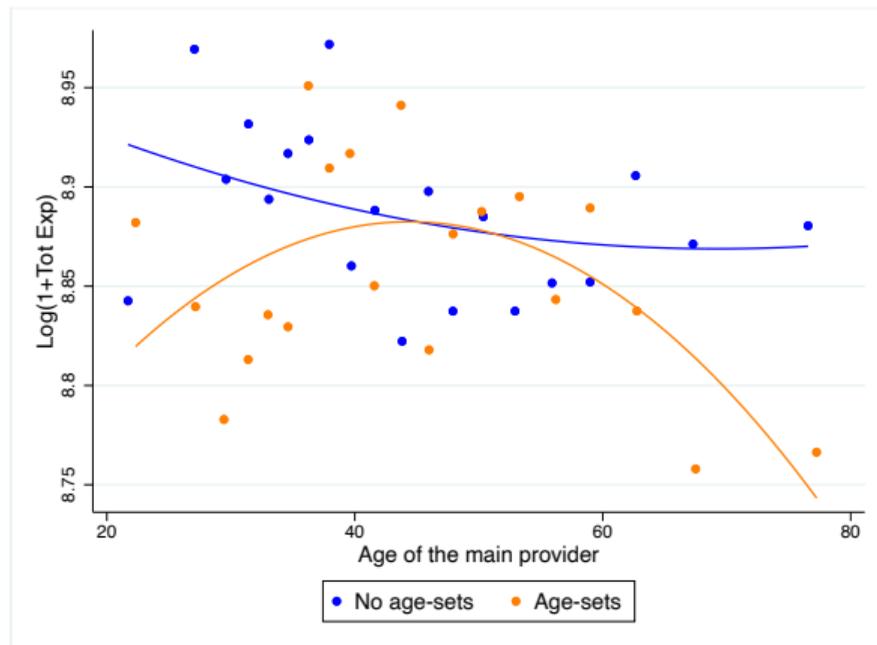


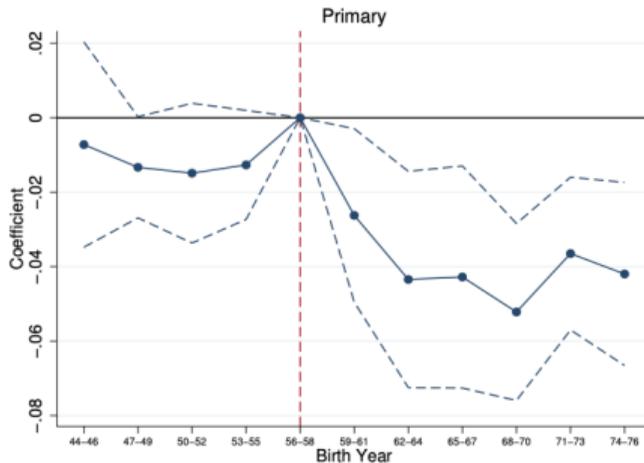
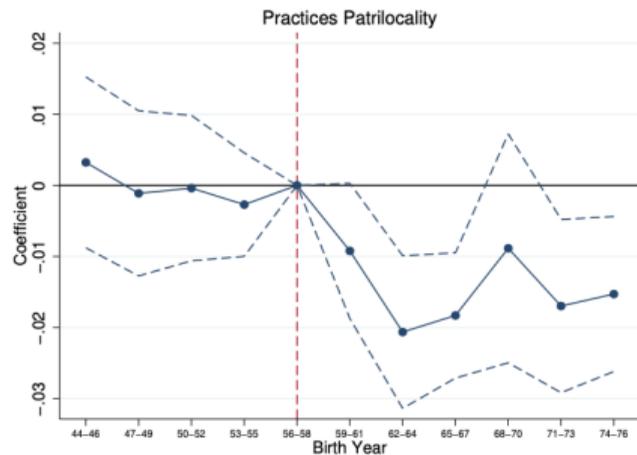
Figure: Lifecycle Expenditure: Age vs. Kin

Can Policy Change Culture? Government Pension Plans and Traditional Kinship Practices- Bau (2021)

Can policy “crowd-out” culture? If so, how does this affect the cultural persistence of a practice?

- This paper focuses on: **the interaction between co-residence patterns and the introduction of pension programs**
- Matrilocality and patrilocality have two important effects
 - They regulate who will take care of the elderly
 - They provide parents with an additional incentive to invest in children human capital
- They exploit the staggered roll out of two pension programs in Ghana and Indonesia, to explore whether social pension weaken the incentives to practice matrilocality and patrilocality

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- The introduction of pension reduces the practice of patrilocality and matrilocality
- This impacts educational investment of co-residing children

Conclusion

- Vast differences in social organization around the world
- Social structure predictably shapes patterns of economic interaction and redistribution
- This can change the effects of policy and can be changed by policy
- Hence, understanding differences in cultural traits and social structure is crucial when we think about how to achieve economic development and how to design policies

One final personal thought on “Western Bias”. People often study what they are acquainted with. A *simple* way to

- Increase the number of studies on the African continent
- Reduce possible mis-interpretation of contexts and concepts due to bias

is to have more Africans contributing to the economic literature and policy making.

⇒ Some resources in the next slide.

Resources for Economists wannabe

- **Research in Color Foundation:** matches students at the pre-PhD level with professionals who will mentor them in the PhD application process
- **Sadie Collective:** addresses the pipeline problem of black women in economics through research, mentoring and fellowship programs
- **AEA Summer Program:** 2 months of technical training pre-PhD application
- **Graduate Application International Network (GAIN):** supports students from African countries in the PhD application process through mentoring
- **Research Assistant Position at (and not at) NBER:** get pre-doc experience in research.

Thank you!