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## The Russian–Ukrainian Political Divide

**ABSTRACT:** *The Orange Revolution unveiled significant political and economic tensions between ethnic Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine. Whether this divide was caused by purely ethnic differences or by ethnically segregated reform preferences is unknown. Analysis using unique micro data collected prior to the revolution finds that voting preferences for the forces of the forthcoming Orange Revolution were strongly driven by preferences for political and economic reforms but were also independently significantly affected by ethnicity, specifically, language and nationality. Russian speakers, as opposed to Ukrainian speakers, were significantly less likely to vote for the Orange Revolution, and nationality had similar effects.*

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine<sup>1</sup> revealed a significant voting divide between ethnic Ukrainians, who typically supported the reformist “Orange” opposition, and ethnic Russians, who usually were in favor of the more conservative pro-Russian wing of the political spectrum. While this political cleavage was evident on the surface, it is not properly understood whether it was genuinely driven by ethnicity or caused by other factors, such as different reform intentions between the ethnic groups.

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For example, geographic proximity to Russia and the resulting social and economic ties could have led people living in the eastern parts of Ukraine to support pro-Russian forces. Because ethnic Russians are concentrated in the eastern parts of Ukraine, the overall impression could have been that it was ethnicity rather than geographical distribution that was driving political preferences and unrest. Similarly, individual preferences for political and economic reforms clustered along ethnicity lines could have misled observers to conclude that it was ethnicity and not reform preferences that drove the Russian–Ukrainian political divide.

However, there is empirical evidence that predicts the existence of a significant ethnicity-related political divide. As we have shown elsewhere (Constant et al. 2012), there has been a rising ethnicity-related earnings divide in favor of ethnic Russians in Ukraine’s transformation period. Consequently, there has been an increasing potential for an ethnicity-based political divide with a tendency to foster political groups that might be able to reverse this trend. We therefore expect to find strong and stable ethnicity-based preferences for the reform process linked to the Orange Revolution independent of the individual preferences for democracy and a market-oriented system.

According to the literature on voting behavior in the tradition of Lipset (1963), ethnic division often turns elections into a referendum in which the relative sizes of ethnic groups consistently drive election results. An alternative view is that voting behavior is driven by perceptions about personal gains or losses inflicted upon the particular individuals or groups if certain election results transpire. In this vein, Brainerd (1998), who studies support for transformation in Russia, found that predicted wage losses had little impact on voting behavior in the 1993 elections. Similarly, Fidrmuc (2000), studying support for reforms in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, revealed a number of distinct voting patterns that are driven by individual characteristics and career prospects. That individual prospects play an important role in determining voting behavior was corroborated by Kapstein and Milanovic (2000), who found that younger, better-educated, and richer individuals supported Boris Yeltsin in the 1996 Russian elections.

Several researchers have analyzed the political processes driving the Orange Revolution. Arel (2005) stressed the geographic polarization of election results. Oksamytna and Khmelko (2006) and Khmelko (2006) discussed the effects of age, gender, education, geographic location, language, ethnic self-identification, and other factors on aggregate election results during the Orange Revolution.

This paper investigates whether one can trace a stable independent ethnicity factor that can help to explain the turbulent election results of 2004–2005. We are also interested in the potential role that different measures of ethnicity, such as language and nationality, might have had in driving the political watershed and the seriously diverging voting preferences. In particular, we are interested in whether these two salient measures of ethnicity have had independent effects on the voting behavior of the people of Ukraine.

## Ethnicity and Politics in Ukraine

The ethnic identity of the inhabitants of present-day Ukraine is a result of turbulent past developments. The two largest ethnicities, Russian and Ukrainian, originated in the same ancient state of Kievan Rus.<sup>2</sup> After the fall of Kievan Rus, Russians and Ukrainians emerged as distinct ethnic groups during the centuries of foreign rulers, including the Russian empire, Poland, the Cossack state, and Austria-Hungary, that governed large parts of present-day Ukraine. Ukrainian identity developed in spite of russification by imperial Russia. After the Russian Revolution in 1917 and Ukraine's brief independence<sup>3</sup> until 1922, Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. As a Soviet republic, Ukraine was stamped by Russian dominance in social, economic, and political life. Yet the Ukrainian identity and language have survived and persisted.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the declaration of Ukrainian independence in 1991, the Ukrainian language was reinstated as the official language of Ukraine, and ethnic Ukrainians comprise the largest ethnic group in the new state. To wit, in the 2001 Ukrainian census 67.5 percent of the country's population named Ukrainian and 29.6 percent named Russian as their native language. With independence, ethnic Ukrainians gained a platform for a better Russian-Ukrainian ethnic relations in Ukraine. It must be also noted that the government in its nation-building effort has tried to curtail regionalism and mitigate ethnic identity issues while pledging allegiance to territorial citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Today, it is primarily language and nationality that distinguish ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. The Russian and Ukrainian languages are similar but distinct. We take these two salient features of ethnicity as exogenous measures with respect to individual voting preferences.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning political institutions, Ukraine is a semirepresentative democratic republic with a multiparty system. Executive power is exercised by the Cabinet, and legislative power is vested in the parliament. Ukraine has a large number of political parties. Since some of these parties have minuscule electorates, they often form electoral coalitions for the purpose of participating in national elections.

In the period preceding the Orange Revolution, political parties offered two main alternatives to the Ukrainian electorate. The main opposition parties, who would later become the key proponents of the Orange Revolution, aimed at disempowering the incumbent political elites in favor of more liberal policies and policies aimed at Ukrainian integration in transatlantic structures. In contrast, the incumbent parties proposed more conservative policies and privileged relations with Russia.

The Orange Revolution was a series of mass protests in Ukraine in response to allegations of electoral fraud in the 2004 presidential elections. The protests were fueled by a number of alleged cases of voter intimidation and the perception of massive corruption in Ukraine. Two key figures led the protests, Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko. They represented the alternative to the incumbent regime of Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yanukovich.

Nationalist sentiments during the Orange Revolution were ignited by alleged Russian and Western involvement in the events. Russian president Vladimir Putin did not conceal his political support for Viktor Yanukovich, and a number of Western agencies provided material and logistical support to the revolutionary movement. These sentiments peaked when rumors that the Russian secret service was involved in the poisoning of Viktor Yushchenko prior to the revolution spread among protesters.

The parties that orchestrated the Orange Revolution had several objectives that had some ethnic or nationalistic content and were generally considered, in ethnic terms, pro-Ukrainian. Some of their most important political objectives were intensified economic and political relations with the West, including membership in the European Union (EU) and NATO, an end to Ukrainian economic and political dependence on Russia, and disempowerment of the largely pro-Russian oligarch structures. For example, Yushchenko often criticized the fact that the Russian Federation was too involved in the electoral campaign and appreciated the help of the West in counterbalancing Russia's involvement. In contrast, Yanukovich regularly appealed to historical ties with Russia and extensively addressed the language issue, pledging to promote Russian to a second official state language. In addition, he supported the discussion on the issue of the so-called South-Eastern [Ukrainian] Autonomous Republic in predominantly Russian areas.<sup>6</sup>

## Data and Variables

The Ukrainian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (ULMS) is a nationally representative microdataset and the primary source of information for this study.<sup>7</sup> It was started in 2003, covering 8,621 individuals from 4,056 households. Besides a number of standard demographic variables at the individual and household level, it also contains information on individual voting preferences. For this study we use data from 2003 and 2004.

We study ethnic groups as identified by self-reported nationality<sup>8</sup> and primary language spoken at home in the 2003 wave of the ULMS. Respondents were asked to indicate their nationality (Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian, Jewish, or other) and their primary language spoken at home (Ukrainian, Russian, mixed Ukrainian and Russian, Belarusian, Polish, Hungarian, or other). The mix of Ukrainian and Russian languages is commonly called *Surzhyk* in Ukraine, and we use this term somewhat vaguely to denote the language of those people that reported mixed Ukrainian and Russian as their primary language spoken at home.<sup>9</sup>

From the total of 8,621 individual observations for each of the years included in the survey, we selected those who were older than eighteen in the survey year and thus eligible to vote at the time of the survey. Furthermore, we eliminated observations with missing data in key variables, including voting, economic and political preferences, gender, age, marital status, number of children, education and health, labor market status, and settlement size and region. These restrictions

Table 1. **Proportions of Individuals by Nationality and Language** (percent)

Nationality	Language			Total
	Ukrainian	Surzhyk	Russian	
Ukrainian	51.90	12.02	19.35	83.27
Russian	0.69	0.91	15.13	16.73
Total	52.59	12.93	34.48	100

*Note:* Ukrainian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey, based on 4,925 observations.

leave us with 4,925 observations in the baseline sample. Table 1 summarizes the frequencies of individuals by nationality and language. The table indicates that the number of people who identify themselves as Russian and speak Ukrainian or Surzhyk as their primary language spoken at home is relatively small, totaling 79 observations. Table 1 reveals that ethnic Russians and Ukrainians are represented in our sample fairly proportionately, as compared to their respective shares in the Ukrainian population documented by the 2001 census.<sup>10</sup>

### Estimation Framework and Results

Voting preferences are shaped by individual attitudes toward the values that different parties represent as well as individual characteristics such as age, gender, and political and economic preferences that drive these attitudes. Whether ethnicity directly drives differentials in voting preferences or these are mainly driven by other characteristics that vary across ethnic groups, such as political or economic preferences, religious affiliation, or other individual characteristics, is the key issue investigated in this section.

We employ an econometric framework to assess the role of ethnicity, that is, language and nationality, in driving voting preferences. Given the binary choice character of voting preferences in the context of the Orange Revolution, the binary probit model is a natural starting point of such an analysis. To isolate the effects of ethnicity on voting preferences from those of other demographic, social, and economic variables, we control for these other variables in the regressions. Given the uneven distribution of ethnicities across Ukraine, particularly important is controlling for regional dummies, since these may capture social and economic ties to Russia and the West that may be driven by geographic proximity to the respective societies. The independent variables of particular interest are the two measures of ethnicity, nationality and language (Zimmermann 2007), and the two sets of variables covering reform preferences, economic and political. As reference categories we use the Ukrainian language, Ukrainian nationality, and pre-perestroika economic and political systems.

In Table 2 we present the probit regression results. Column 1 is the baseline model, with ethnicity as the main determinant of pro-Orange choice and additional controls for age, gender, and the year 2004. The year dummy captures other general factors happening in that year. Columns 2 to 4 contain the results of augmented estimations as we control for a number of additional individual, economic, and demographic characteristics that have an impact on the probability to vote pro-Orange. These include political and economic preferences, religion, number of children, marital status, whether a person has self-reported health problems, settlement size dummies (village, urban settlement, small town up to 20,000 inhabitants, medium-size town with 20,000–99,000 inhabitants, city with 100,000–500,000 inhabitants, and large city with more than 500,000 inhabitants), geographic region (*oblast*), highest attained educational level, employment status (employee, entrepreneur, farmer, family helper), and a range of nonemployment status variables (including unemployed, retiree, student, disabled, and maternity leave).

Column 1 reveals that both nationality and language have significant negative effects on voting preferences. This finding suggests that the Russian-Ukrainian voting divide has a substantial ethnic component. In particular, the coefficient of Russian nationality is significantly negative, meaning that people of Russian nationality are less likely to vote pro-Orange than the benchmark group of Ukrainian speakers with Ukrainian nationality. The coefficients of Russian and Surzhyk language are also significantly negative, verifying the ethnic divide. But are these findings sufficiently stable if more control variables are included in the model?

The rest of the columns in Table 2 verify that the findings are fairly stable. The negative impact of Russian nationality on the likelihood of voting pro-Orange remains about the same size. The negative effect of speaking the Russian language decreases somewhat in absolute value with the inclusion of demographic and labor market variables in column 3 and regional variables in column 4, but remains highly significant. While the coefficient of Surzhyk language is still negative in column 3, as we control for regional and settlement size dummies, this variable loses significance, indicating that the correlation between Surzhyk language and voting preferences is explained by the regional distribution of linguistic groups. These findings imply that it is Russian nationality or speaking Russian that negatively affects pro-Orange voting relative to Ukrainian speakers of Ukrainian nationality.

Furthermore, Table 2 explores the contribution of revealed preferences concerning the political and economic systems to the pro-Orange voting behavior. We have covered the indicators of these preferences by two sets of dummy variables: (1) for the options for the political system preferences, we have reformed Soviet system, current system, Western-type democracy, and other systems, with the pre-perestroika Soviet system as the reference case; and (2) for the economic system preferences, we have the options of reformed centrally planned system, current system, strongly regulated market system, weakly regulated market system, free market economy, and other systems, with the pre-perestroika centrally planned economy as the reference case. Our estimates confirm that more liberal and pro-

Table 2. **Probability of Voting Pro-Orange**

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Russian nationality	−0.351** (0.070)	−0.330** (0.075)	−0.309** (0.075)	−0.278** (0.080)
Surzhyk language	−0.732** (0.061)	−0.465** (0.065)	−0.374** (0.066)	−0.020 (0.077)
Russian language	−0.958** (0.051)	−0.939** (0.055)	−0.796** (0.059)	−0.281** (0.077)
Age	−0.017** (0.001)	−0.004** (0.001)	−0.002 (0.003)	−0.002 (0.003)
Female	0.034 (0.039)	0.140** (0.042)	0.085 (0.047)	0.091 (0.049)
Year 2004	0.073 (0.039)	0.027 (0.042)	0.049 (0.053)	0.074 (0.056)
<b>Political preferences</b>				
Reformed Soviet		0.368** (0.073)	0.334** (0.074)	0.307** (0.078)
Current system		0.776** (0.110)	0.719** (0.112)	0.708** (0.120)
Western-type democracy		1.006** (0.080)	0.894** (0.083)	0.706** (0.088)
Other		0.627** (0.194)	0.455* (0.198)	0.311 (0.223)
<b>Economic preferences</b>				
Reformed centrally planned		0.190* (0.076)	0.178* (0.076)	0.102 (0.079)
Current system		0.322* (0.137)	0.297* (0.142)	0.150 (0.150)
Strongly regulated market		0.366** (0.083)	0.336** (0.084)	0.243** (0.090)
Weakly regulated market		0.563** (0.093)	0.496** (0.096)	0.431** (0.101)
Free market economy		0.610** (0.104)	0.535** (0.106)	0.431** (0.113)
Other		0.352 (0.298)	0.418 (0.311)	0.395 (0.347)
<b>Other controls</b>				
Education level			Yes	Yes
Religion			Yes	Yes
Children			Yes	Yes
Marital status			Yes	Yes

*(continues)*

Table 2 (continued)

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Health status			Yes	Yes
Labor market status			Yes	Yes
Settlement size				Yes
Geographic region				Yes
Constant	0.842** (0.071)	-0.535** (0.096)	-0.613** (0.171)	-1.402** (0.260)
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.142	0.264	0.288	0.347
Log likelihood	-2,795.1	-2,397.6	-2,319.0	-2,125.1
Number of observations	4,925	4,925	4,925	4,925

*Notes:* Binary probit model with 1 = pro-Orange and 0 otherwise. The benchmark is a Ukrainian-speaking male of Ukrainian nationality preferring a pre-perestroika Soviet-type political and centrally planned economic system. The benchmark year is 2003. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \* Significant at 5 percent; \*\* significant at 1 percent.

Western political and economic preferences imply a higher likelihood that an individual votes pro-Orange. While the effects of political and economic preferences are partly explained by economic, social, and settlement and regional control variables (see columns 3 and 4), the fairly stable and highly significant parameter estimates across the estimated models confirm the strong role of the economic and political preferences on voting preferences.

Hence, the pro-Orange voting preferences are significantly explained by both ethnicity and preferences for particular political and economic systems. What relative roles do both alternatives exhibit on the voting preferences? To answer this question, we treat the estimates in column 4 of Table 2 as the reference case with a pseudo- $R^2$  of 0.347. A reduced model excluding the ethnicity variables led to a pseudo- $R^2$  of 0.341 and a likelihood ratio test statistic of 41.48 with 3 degrees of freedom. A reduced model excluding the variables measuring the preferences concerning the political and economic system led to a pseudo- $R^2$  of 0.306 and a likelihood ratio test statistic of 266.30 with 10 degrees of freedom. From these results we confirm that both ethnicity and systems preferences are important, although the latter are somewhat more relevant than the former.

To understand the magnitude of the estimated ethnicity effects, we compute the marginal effects of changing Russian nationality and Russian language dummy variables from 0 to 1 on the probability of being pro-Orange. Taking the structural estimates from column 4, it turns out that speaking the Russian language decreases the likelihood of voting pro-Orange by 9.5 percentage points, compared to being a Ukrainian speaker; being of Russian nationality decreases this likelihood by 9.9 percentage points, compared to being of Ukrainian nationality.



As concerns the control variables, we observe that age and gender do not have a significant independent effect on voting preferences. The effects of age vanish with the inclusion of demographic and labor market controls. It is interesting that the gender effect becomes significant with inclusion of political and economic preferences, but loses its explanatory power as we control for demographic and labor market variables. Concerning the other control variables, several distinct patterns arise (coefficients not reported). Compared to the benchmark Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchy) denomination, people of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchy) and Orthodox Church (with no partition) are significantly less likely to vote pro-Orange. However, people of the Greek Orthodox denomination are significantly more likely to prefer pro-Orange parties than the benchmark group. These findings signify yet another component of ethnicity in voting preferences.

Given that we control for economic and political preferences, marital status, number of children, education, and employment status do not seem to play any significant role in shaping voting preferences.<sup>11</sup> While employment status is for the most part insignificant, people with disabilities (and marginally also those that report general health problems) show significant preferences against the Orange parties, perhaps because of their limited capacity to respond to the potential challenges inherent in the regime changes supported by the pro-Orange parties. Furthermore, people in the military service are somewhat less likely to vote pro-Orange. Another distinct pattern is that people who live in the western regions of Ukraine are significantly more likely to vote pro-Orange. Finally, inhabitants of small and medium towns are significantly less likely to vote pro-Orange than villagers and inhabitants of cities.

### **Decomposition of the Voting Divide**

The technique of including ethnic dummy variables in a binary choice model is a very useful tool to measure the effects of ethnicity on voting preferences, but it assumes that different ethnic groups behave in a similar way, except for a shift factor driven by ethnicity. This assumption may be somewhat too restrictive, since for different ethnic groups different variables may have different effects. The most conspicuous is the example of the effects of region where the respondent lives. In particular, respondents of Russian ethnicity living in regions close to the Russian border may have, given the relatively intense economic and social ties to Russia, good incentives to vote against pro-Orange parties for fear that these parties would restrain these ties. However, people with Ukrainian ethnicity in such regions may well respond quite differently: they might be concerned about the intense relations with Russia that often favor ethnic Russians and therefore vote for pro-Orange parties, hoping that they will curtail these, from their perspective unfavorable, relations with Russia. In particular, ethnic Ukrainians may, in contrast to ethnic Russians, perceive such ties to Russia as a threat to their social and economic interests.

Table 3. **Decomposition Results on the Probability of Voting Pro-Orange**

Nationality	Language		Ukrainian		
			Ukrainian	Surzhyk	Russian
Ukrainian	Surzhyk	Difference	0.286		
		Explained	0.283		
		Unexplained	0.003		
	Russian	Difference	0.332	0.046	
		Explained	0.230	-0.017	
		Unexplained	0.102	0.063	
Russian	Russian	Difference	0.437	0.151	0.105
		Explained	0.265	0.046	0.069
		Unexplained	0.172	0.105	0.036

*Note:* A positive number implies that the column group is more pro-Orange than the respective row group.

For these reasons we consider a method that decomposes ethnic differentials in voting preferences as developed by Fairlie (1999, 2003, 2005). This method computes the difference in the probability of voting Orange between different ethnic groups and quantifies the contribution of group differences in explanatory variables to the outcome differential. In particular, we apply the decomposition technique on the model specification corresponding to column 4 in Table 2, obviously omitting the nationality and language indicators.

The results are presented in Table 3. We observe that significant parts of the differentials in voting preferences between ethnic groups are explained by observable characteristics. Consistent with the results presented previously, the “less Russian” the ethnic group is, the higher is its propensity to indicate pro-Orange voting preferences. To illustrate, at one extreme, we can ascribe less than one percentage point of the voting differential between Surzhyk and Ukrainian speakers of Ukrainian nationality to their belonging to different linguistic groups. In contrast, more than seventeen percentage points can be attributed to ethnic differences between Ukrainian speakers of Ukrainian nationality and Russian speakers of Russian nationality.

## Conclusions

While the Russian-Ukrainian political cleavage gained worldwide attention during the Orange Revolution, the role of the different dimensions of ethnicity on this divide has not been properly understood. Using rich information on voting preferences before the Orange Revolution, this paper provides an understanding of the 2005 events. Reform preferences reported among individuals in 2003 and 2004 are

shown to have had a strong impact on the willingness to vote for the parties of the Orange Revolution. Undoubtedly, we also find that ethnic Russians were less likely to vote pro-Orange than ethnic Ukrainians just prior to the Orange Revolution, and this is independent of their preferences for a Western-type market economy and a Western-type democracy.

What is a potential explanation for the independent effects of ethnicity? As we have established elsewhere (see Constant et al. 2012), there was a rising ethnic economic divide *in favor* of ethnic Russians during Ukraine's transformation in the years before the Orange Revolution that suggested a rising ethnic political divide. Ethnic Russians probably had the desire to preserve the incumbent elite in power in hopes of retaining the benefits and the profitable positions they enjoyed during the Soviet era or later. Ethnic Ukrainians had strong economic incentives for supporting a political change. In fact, in our analysis in this paper, we find that being of Russian nationality or speaking the Russian or Surzhyk language had a negative effect on voting for the pro-Orange parties in comparison to possessing Ukrainian ethnicity, which is in line with our hypothesis. These findings confirm that language and nationality are distinct dimensions of ethnicity that exercised a catalytic role on the voting preferences and election outcomes in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution.

## Notes

1. The Orange Revolution was a defining moment in Ukraine's recent history. It occurred during the period from late November 2004 to January 2005, when a series of protests and political events were in the daily forefront in Ukraine. The protests began right after the 2004 presidential election, which was admittedly the result of direct electoral fraud. This period demonstrated an amazing active participation of Ukrainians in politics. The Orange Revolution came to a peaceful finale after the "fair and free" second runoff election.

2. Also known as Kievan Ruthenia, it was an important state with Kiev as its capital; it lasted from about 880 until the middle of the twelfth century.

3. In two states, Ukrainian People's Republic and West Ukrainian People's Republic.

4. Some researchers have even found that the Ukrainian electorate was on a depolarizing path and close to national integration (Hesli et al. 1998).

5. Constant et al. (2012) found that these two factors of ethnicity also play a crucial role in the earnings divide between ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. An economic ethnic premium was also found by Rendon (2007).

6. See Salnykova (2006).

7. For a more detailed description of the ULMS see Ganguli and Terrell (2006), Gorodnichenko and Sabirianova (2005), and Lehmann et al. (2006).

8. Nationality (*natsionalnost*) in the Ukrainian context reflects social, ethnic, or cultural identity rather than citizenship. We use the term accordingly.

9. Of Ukrainians who speak Ukrainian as their primary language, about 12 percent speak Russian as their second domestic language, 86 percent speak Russian, and all understand Russian. Of Russians who speak Russian as their first language, about 11 percent speak Ukrainian as their second domestic language, 46 percent speak Ukrainian, and 69 percent understand Ukrainian.

10. According to the 2001 Ukrainian Census, of Ukrainians who report either Ukrainian or Russian nationality (95.1 percent of the total population), 81.8 percent report Ukrainian

and 18.2 percent Russian nationality. In the same census, 67.5 percent of the population named Ukrainian as their native language (including Surzhyk speakers), and 29.6 percent reported Russian language.

11. Further estimations for a restricted sample of employed respondents (not reported here) show that inclusion of occupation and industry controls does not affect our results on the role of ethnicity for voting preferences.

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