

Working Paper No. 209

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Abstract

How does foreign policy of African governments reflect the preferences of their constituents? Scholars have studied public opinion in Africa and how constituents assess government performance. Yet social scientists neglect how and why foreign policy by African governments reflects public opinion, despite much anecdotal evidence of citizens expressing opinion on African foreign policy. In this paper, we investigate the congruence of governmental foreign policy positions and public opinion on issues of free movement and free trade across 34 African countries. We explore two drivers of foreign policy congruence: first democratic vs. autocratic government, and second external rents accruing from natural resources, aid, and remittances. Our descriptive evidence suggests that, on free trade, African publics tend to be more trade-sceptic than the liberalised policy positions of their governments, meaning low foreign policy congruence. On free movement, low foreign policy congruence stems from African constituents preferring more liberalisation than what governments provide. Surprisingly, multivariate analysis indicates that democracies show lower foreign policy congruence than autocracies on issues of free trade. We argue that this may be because democracies systemically oversupply market liberalisation. We cannot find an effect of external rents on foreign policy congruence.

Keywords: foreign policy, congruence, Africa, public opinion, free trade, free movement, African Union

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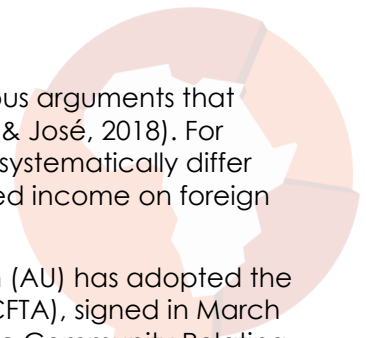
1. Introduction

Does foreign policy of African governments reflect the preferences of their constituents? What determines congruence of foreign policy and public attitudes across African countries? Scholars have studied public opinion in Africa (Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Lieberman & McClendon, 2013; Mattes & Bratton, 2007) and how congruence between constituency preferences and representatives' policy or ideology plays out (Belchior, Sanches, & José, 2018; Clayton, Josefsson, Mattes, & Mozaffar, 2019; Lupu & Warner, 2022; Resnick, 2012; van Eerd, 2011). Yet despite social scientists studying the link between public opinion and foreign policy outside of Africa (Aldrich, Gelpi, Feaver, Reifler, & Sharp, 2006; Rathbun, Kertzer, Reifler, Goren, & Scotto, 2016), researchers largely neglect how and why *foreign policy* by African governments is associated with constituent views (Quinn, 2010).

This is surprising, given much anecdotal evidence of citizens expressing opinions pertinent to "Africa's international relations" (Death, 2015; Whitaker & Clark, 2018). African constituents try to influence their government's *foreign policy*, defined as government positions and actions on issues with cross-border (i.e. international) ramifications, addressing interests and relations with other states or international bodies, and involving other countries and governments' spheres of interest. Examples include xenophobic riots in South Africa (Chutel, 2019) and violent anti-South Africa reactions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Zambia (Capron & O'Brien, 2019); protests against France in Senegal (Chutel, 2021); demonstrations by traders against COVID-19-related border closures between Chad and Cameroon (Kindzeka, 2020); strikes by truck drivers at the Kenya-Uganda border because of harassment by Ugandan security forces (Ochunge & Sali, 2020); and trade unions organising rallies against exploitative work practices for African migrant workers in Arab Gulf states (Adewumi, 2019). These events may trigger governments to account for citizens' views, and yet, there is so far little systematic, comparative evidence on how foreign policy in Africa reflects constituent preferences.

Addressing this important gap, we investigate whether and how foreign policy by African governments is associated with mass public opinion on foreign policy issues. We introduce the concept of *foreign policy congruence*, the proximity between a government's foreign policy position and the expressed preferences of its constituents on the same issue. To our knowledge, this is the first study applying the long-established concept of policy congruence to foreign policy in Africa (for an overview, see Shim & Farag, 2024). As we outline in the theory section, this study investigates the association of foreign policy positions and public preferences through the lens of foreign policy congruence. We are not seeking to establish causality. Yet understanding which factors are correlated with foreign policy congruence is a necessary first step for future work on causal pathways, i.e. how public opinion drives foreign policy in Africa or vice versa.

We study the congruence of governmental foreign policy positions with mass public opinion on issues of free movement and free trade across 34 countries in Africa. We consider two theoretical drivers of foreign policy congruence. First, in democracies, we expect higher foreign policy congruence than in autocracies, given normative arguments about democracies' greater ability to aggregate collective preferences. Second, unearned income and external rents (Ahmed, 2012, 2019; Ross, 2001), e.g. from natural resources, aid, or remittances, may drive a wedge between constituents and governments, making the latter more independent from public preferences, leading to lower foreign policy congruence. To preview our findings, our descriptive evidence suggests that, on free trade, African publics tend to be more trade-sceptic than the liberalised policy positions of their governments, meaning low foreign policy congruence. On free movement, low foreign policy congruence stems from African constituents preferring more liberalisation than what governments provide. Interestingly, and counter to our expectations, our multivariate analysis indicates that democracies tend to have lower foreign policy congruence than autocracies on issues of trade: We show that democracies on average are more liberal on international



market integration than their constituents prefer. This speaks to previous arguments that policy congruence is not unique to democracies (Belchior, Sanches, & José, 2018). For congruence in freedom-of-movement policies, democracies do not systematically differ from more autocratic countries. We cannot find an effect of unearned income on foreign policy congruence in either trade or freedom of movement.

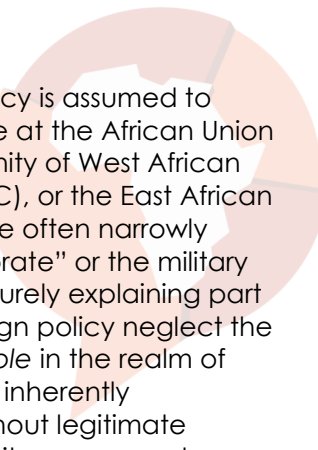
The focus on trade and free movement is timely, as the African Union (AU) has adopted the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), signed in March 2018, and the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment (AfFM), signed in January 2018. The 55 AU member states vary on whether they signed and ratified the AfCFTA and AfFM, and more generally on how liberalised their foreign policies are in terms of free movement and free trade. And, as Whitaker (2023) has recently shown, cross-border dynamics affect public opinion on free movement in Africa.

2. Foreign policy, public attitudes, and policy congruence in Africa

Political scientists typically understand foreign policy as a “two-level game” in which “central decision-makers strive to reconcile domestic and international imperatives simultaneously” (Putnam, 1988, p. 460; see also Milner, 1997). Yet for African countries, domestic imperatives regarding foreign policy running from the people’s preferences to the executive have rarely been systematically and comparatively studied. Existing analyses see foreign policy in Africa as a function of negotiations either among African government elites or between African governments and great powers or international donors (overviews can be found in Khadiagala & Lyons, 2001a; Quinn, 2010; Wright, 1999; Whitaker & Clark, 2018). A notable exception is Ojjone’s analysis of Nigerian public opinion regarding the government’s asylum offer to former Liberian President Charles Taylor. In his assessment, this foreign policy decision showed that the “government adopted ... a mode of moral judgment that was antagonistic to that of the people whom it is ideally supposed to stand for” (Ojjone, 2008, p. 71).

Historically, scholarship has focused on the executive as the fulcrum of foreign policy decisions (Zartman, 1966), as post-independence states in Africa saw the influence of competing centres of authority to the executive, such as judiciaries, legislatures, and the state bureaucracy, quickly limited and dominated by governments after independence (Khadiagala & Lyons, 2001b). The move toward multiparty politics after the end of the Cold War led observers to predict a more salient role of democratic processes for foreign policy formulation across a wide variety of African countries (Khadiagala & Lyons, 2001b). Whitaker and Clark (2018) cover the historical and contemporary facets of African foreign policy exhaustively. Social scientists have analysed African foreign policy with a focus on regional integration and the African Union (Adejumobi & Olukoshi, 2008; Kefale, 2019; Makinda & Okumu, 2007; Murithi, 2005; Tiekou, 2004; Warner & Shaw, 2018), security cooperation (Adejumobi & Olukoshi, 2008; Baimu & Sturman, 2003; Touray, 2005), foreign aid (Milner & Tingley, 2013; Milner, Findley, & Nielson, 2016), climate policy (Held, Roger, & Nag, 2014), trade relations (Carmody & Owusu, 2007; Cheru & Obi, 2011; Kirkpatrick & Watanabe, 2005), monetary cooperation (Cooper, 2007; Tapsoba, Sembene, Gammadigbe, & Issifou, 2019), conflict and peace-making (Kagwanja, 2006; Maundi, Nuamah, Zartman, & Khadiagala, 2006), elite identity and foreign policy (Clark, 2024), as well as foreign policy of African governments with influential non-African state actors, e.g. China, the United States, India, or the European Union (Barton & Men, 2013; Alden, 2000; Mampilly, 2018; Jura, Kopyński, Polus, & Tycholiz., 2024). However, the role that constituent demands play in shaping African foreign policies, and how government foreign policy reflects public opinion, remain largely ignored.

This neglect may have three reasons. First, foreign policy of governments in Africa has often been understood as dependent on external parties (e.g. international organisations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, or the World Bank; powerful states such as the United States, China, Russia, or India; donors such as the Gates Foundation) pressuring domestic African governments to adopt certain positions because of financial dependency



or other power asymmetries. Second, African governments' foreign policy is assumed to emerge solely in the interaction between strong executives, for instance at the African Union or regional supranational organisations, such as the Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), or the East African Community (EAC). Third, if domestic constraints are considered, they are often narrowly defined, as specific elites and clientelistic networks such as the “selectorate” or the military limiting governmental foreign policy, jointly with external parties. While surely explaining part of how foreign policy emerges, all three understandings of African foreign policy neglect the possibility that policy makers take into account preferences of the *people* in the realm of foreign policy. They stem from a conception of African governments as inherently undemocratic – led by “big men” and corrupt elites entering office without legitimate electoral mandates and ignoring public opinion – or without the capacity or agency to pursue foreign policy in the interest of their constituents. At a minimum, they assume an electorate not sufficiently important for their opinions to be reflected in their country's foreign policy.

We argue that this conception of African foreign policy is outdated or at least incomplete. First, this limited view of African governments' foreign policy neglects the rise in “people power” in Africa (Marks, Chenoweth, & Okeke, 2019). Citizens increasingly express their preferences – through mobilisation, demonstrations, elections, lobbying, activism, civil unrest, or rioting – on government policy in general, and foreign policy specifically. Even if governments have considerable independence, some of these public preferences may in fact be mirrored or incorporated in governments' foreign policies. Second, understanding foreign policy without taking public preferences into account ignores the great variance in democratic institutions across countries, with democracies such as Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, or Namibia, and hybrid anocratic or autocratic regimes such as in Eswatini, Central African Republic, Tanzania, or Uganda. As it stands, from a theoretical and empirical perspective, we have very limited understanding and lack basic evidence as to what extent African governments' foreign policies mirror constituent preferences. We do not know whether and which governments ignore or incorporate public views on foreign policy.

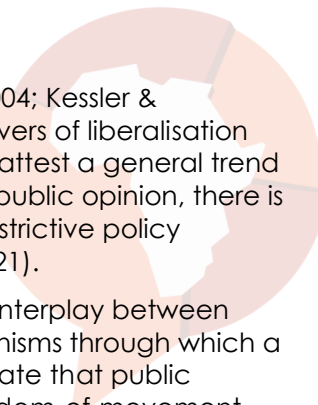
However, we can learn from scholarship on advanced economies of the Global North, where scholars have shown that voters can hold informed opinions on foreign policy generally, and will base their votes on those policies if they are sufficiently salient (Aldrich, Sullivan, & Borgida, 1989; Aldrich et al., 2006).

Regarding free trade, economic theory suggests that constituents hold preferences that reflect how trade affects their livelihoods.¹ In turn, these economic preferences have been shown to influence both executive actions and legislative voting. While this work has been done almost exclusively for U.S. politics (e.g. Hiscox, 2002; Milner & Tingley, 2015), in a European context there is evidence that trade shocks contribute to voter support for nationalist and isolationist parties (Colantone & Stanig, 2018a) and for trade-relevant initiatives such as the Brexit referendum in the UK (Colantone & Stanig, 2018b). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that trade is an important issue for constituents, and there is clear evidence of constituent preferences affecting political outcomes.²

For freedom of movement, studies also centre on advanced economies of the Global North. Most frequently, the focus rests on European Union countries, arguably because of their liberal internal migration regime embedded in the European Single Market. Studies typically

¹ See the Stolper-Samuelson theorem (Rogowski, 1990) as well as the more refined Ricardo-Viner theorem (Hiscox, 2002).

² At the same time, attitudes can deviate from economic self-interest because of framing effects and as a function of educational backgrounds (Hiscox, 2006; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2006; Tobin, Schneider, & Leblang, 2022). The extent to which these moderating influences apply in an African context is unclear, given the differences in economic and political systems.



investigate the sources of public opinion on immigration (e.g. Lahav, 2004; Kessler & Freeman, 2005) and the role of party politics and political systems as drivers of liberalisation (Howard, 2010; Akkerman, 2015; Abou-Chadi, 2016). While many works attest a general trend of European immigration regimes to liberalise over time, irrespective of public opinion, there is evidence that public opposition to migration is associated with more restrictive policy outcomes in countries with large foreign-born populations (Böhmeit, 2021).

These studies show that foreign policy congruence arises in a complex interplay between constituent preferences, elite communication, and the specific mechanisms through which a political system reacts to public pressures. However, they also demonstrate that public opinion is an important factor for policy congruence for trade and freedom-of-movement policies in countries of the Global North. This informs our expectation that public opinion matters for foreign policy congruence in African states as well.


The goal of this paper is to initiate the theoretical debate and identify the empirical basis for understanding how public preferences and government foreign policies in Africa are linked. For this purpose, we leverage and build on insights from the literature on congruence – a long-established concept used in political science (Eckstein, 1961; Golder & Stramski, 2010; Golder & Lloyd, 2014; Miller & Stokes, 1963) and applied to measure the match and correlation between elites or representatives and constituency preferences over ideology, issues, or policy (for extensive overviews see Powell, 2004; Shim & Farag, 2024; Lupu, Selios, & Warner, 2017). Shim and Farag review the geographic coverage of this literature and mention no studies focusing on Africa. However, a few exceptional studies exist applying the concept of congruence empirically with reference to African politics. Lupu and Warner (2022) include African countries in their global analysis of whether affluent constituents are better represented. Belchior et al. (2018) use congruence to describe how the policy preferences of members of Parliament (MPs) and voters align in Angola. Resnick (2012) shows how populist strategies by opposition parties in Zambia lead to greater policy congruence with poor urban constituents. Finally, Clayton et al. (2019) analyse, among other things, to what extent male and female MPs across Africa pursue policies more congruent with preferences of male and female voters. Our paper contributes to this nascent stream of literature by offering the first analysis of foreign policy congruence using cross-national evidence on Africa.

As we argue in the theory section below, in the realm of foreign policy in Africa, the most democratic governments should be expected to show greater foreign policy congruence with citizen preferences. However, as previously argued by scholars working on policy congruence in non-democracies (Belchior et al., 2018; Shalaby & Aydogan, 2020), even autocratic governments may formulate foreign policy with an eye toward the preferences of the population. However, these often just reflect a subgroup of the population defined by clientelistic representation (e.g. an ethnic group, the urban population, border communities, etc.).

3. Theory and hypotheses

Our analysis centres on the congruence between the attitudes of domestic constituents and their government's foreign policy position on free movement and free trade. We study foreign policy congruence at the national level. Similar to Clayton et al. (2019), we argue that understanding congruence at the national level is important, since foreign policies (a) apply in the aggregate to the overall population; and (b) have cross-border ramifications.

If constituent attitudes on foreign policy matter, then governmental foreign policy positions should reflect those of the populace, especially for constituency groups for which free movement and trade are salient issues. We conceptualise this as foreign policy congruence. Taking free trade as an example, congruence is "close" if, on a scale running from full protectionism to complete free trade, a government's position is close or identical to that of its constituency, or parts of its constituency. This in turn could mean that public opinion is



reflected in the formulation of foreign policy. Of course, close congruence of foreign policy positions and public preferences does not necessarily mean that governments have generated their position strictly based on public opinion. Governments and populace could simply hold similar positions without an aim for greater representation. That said, understanding which factors are associated with foreign policy congruence is a first step toward understanding to what extent public opinion drives foreign policy in Africa, or vice versa.

In the following, we present two channels and related explanations that may influence foreign policy congruence in Africa: first, whether governments are more democratic, and how this translates to closer foreign policy congruence, and second, whether governments and constituents rely on unearned income, and how this shapes to what extent governments make independent decisions from their constituency, leading to variance in congruence. We formulate and test two hypotheses.

Channel 1: Democracies vs. autocracies

H1: The more democratic a government is, the greater the foreign policy congruence.

Democratic governments should be more reflective of their constituents' preferences than more autocratic governments (see similar argument in Clayton et al., 2019), including on issues of free movement and free trade. Much of the literature on congruence focuses on democratic countries (Shim & Farag, 2024). Democracies should be more effective in aggregating public preferences through elections and other accountability mechanisms, thereby translating the majority's (or median voter's) view into foreign policy positions. This does not mean that special interests do not play a role in determining foreign policy, but rather that democratic governments should empirically, all else equal, show greater congruence with constituent preferences. Moreover, compared to autocracies, full-fledged democracies not only hold free and fair elections, but have a more liberal policy outlook, favouring free trade and movement of people, especially if their constituents agree to those measures. Thus, we might expect the most democratic countries in Africa to have a more liberally minded populace that favours free movement and trade and a government in favour of such liberalised policies.

Channel 2: Unearned income and external rents

H2: The higher the unearned income and external rents accruing to governments and constituents, the lower the foreign policy congruence.

Countries in which governments have to rely less on taxing constituents for government revenue, because of external rents and unearned income, could display lower policy congruence.³ Three mechanisms may drive this relationship. First, governments that receive larger amounts of foreign-aid income can rely less heavily on revenue from their constituents via taxation (Ahmed, 2012; Bräutigam & Knack, 2004; de Mesquita & Smith, 2009). Second, governments that have significant revenue from natural resources can depend less on public preferences, as the income from external rents allows them to rely less on income from taxation or constituency support based on governance performance (Chaudhry, 1994; Ross, 2001). The result may be that governments in resource-rich nations show lower foreign policy congruence on free movement and trade. Third, countries in which income from remittances is high may experience lower foreign policy congruence: As constituent households receive external income flows from remittances, they may invest in private services instead of relying on public services provided by the government (especially where public services are poor to begin with). This effectively "substitutes" government spending on services, allowing governments to divest even further from responding to public preferences (Ahmed, 2012, p.

³ According to Ahmed (2012, p. 146), "[u]nearned income refers to nontax government revenue. Unearned foreign income refers to income generated from outside a country's border that can change (either directly or indirectly) a government's revenue base" (original emphasis).

146). Generally, this argument on the independence of decision making of African governments in foreign policy reflects previous debates on strong executives in Africa (“big men”): Reliance on rents and natural-resource income makes them less responsive to their constituents.



4. Research design: Data and methodology

4.1 Data

To study the congruence between governments' foreign policies and public preferences, we require data on both implemented policy regarding free trade and free movement as well as expressed preferences of constituents. For policy data, we rely on the trade-integration and freedom-of-movement components of the 2019 Africa Regional Integration Index (ARII), which was jointly developed by the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2020). Table 1 shows the variables used in computing the freedom-of-movement and trade-integration components of ARII. The index was derived by normalising each component to lie in the [0, 1] interval and then aggregating components by taking a weighted average.⁴ We only retain variables that capture government policies (such as tariff rates and signing of AfCFTA) and disregard variables that relate to policy outcomes (such as a country's share of intra-regional trade). Some variables are inversed so that higher values reflect more integration (tariffs on imports, number of countries requiring a visa).⁵

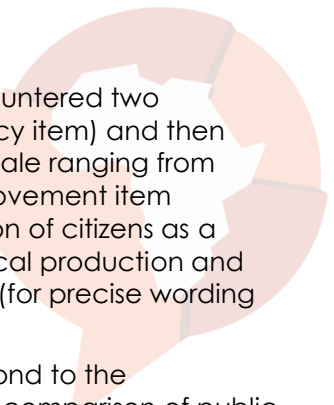
Data on public preferences and public opinion come from Round 8 (2019/2021) of the Afrobarometer surveys, covering 34 countries (see Table A.1 in the Appendix for a full list). Unfortunately, earlier Afrobarometer rounds contain only very limited questions pertaining to free movement and trade policy. Regarding the specific battery of questions we utilise, the item on trade is only included in Round 8. The item on freedom of movement is included in Round 6, not included in Round 7, and then again jointly included with the trade item in Round 8. It is not included in Round 9. Consistent intertemporal information would allow us to study dynamic aspects of policy formulation and would potentially provide more opportunities for causal identification. However, we are able to incorporate some backward-looking aspects into the analysis to compensate for this, such as the length of tenure of the current government coalition. In addition, Round 8 is particularly timely given that the AfCFTA and AfFM were adopted in 2018, just prior to the Round 8 data collection.

Table 1: 2019 Africa Regional Integration Index (ARII) components

Variable	Source
Trade integration	
Average tariff on imports	International Trade Centre
AfCFTA signature & ratification	African Union
Freedom of movement	
AfFM signature and ratification	African Union
Number of countries whose citizens may obtain a visa on arrival	African Development Bank
Number of countries whose citizens require a visa to enter	African Development Bank

⁴ Relative weights of the components are based on principal-component analysis. We retain the original weights where we make use only of sub-components of the ARII (i.e. for trade integration).

⁵ We lack public opinion data on preferences regarding free movement and free trade for any period other than 2019-2021. As Afrobarometer queries these issues only in Round 8, we only include the ARII 2019 and do not utilise the ARII 2016.



For both free trade and freedom of movement, each respondent encountered two statements (one in opposition and one in support of the respective policy item) and then chose from several responses. Those responses form a four-item Likert scale ranging from strong opposition to strong support of the respective policy. The free-movement item mentions trade and work as reasons for open borders and the protection of citizens as a reason against. The free-trade item juxtaposes trade integration with local production and protection of local producers as strategies for economic development (for precise wording see Table A.2 in the Appendix).

We rescale the response variables to lie on the $[0, 1]$ interval to correspond to the operationalised policy index (i.e. foreign policy positions). This allows for comparison of public preferences and foreign policy positions. While both scales order preferences and policy positions consistently from most restrictive to most liberal, comparison involves the additional assumption that it is meaningful to compare levels across scales. At the endpoints of the scales this is not problematic, since these represent the observed extremes of the measured underlying concepts. Nonetheless, we cannot be certain that the mathematical midpoints of the scales precisely fall in the middle of the measured constructs.⁶ However, we are not aware of any theoretical or empirical priors about the direction or nature of these deviations. We therefore argue that it is justified to treat this uncertainty as random measurement error.⁷

The multivariate analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we aggregate to the country level and perform regressions that relate public preferences to foreign policy positions, conditioning this relationship on the different channels that affect congruence, such as levels of democracy and measures of unearned income. However, this approach does not allow us to control for how these moderating channels interact, as with $n=34$ country cases this is not statistically feasible. To remedy this, we also leverage the rich individual-level variation in the data (with more than 46,000 respondents across 34 countries) and estimate multilevel models of congruence between government policies and individual opinions.

The key independent variables tap into the two channels that influence how greater foreign policy congruence emerges. To measure democracy, we rely on data and conceptual developments from the V-Dem project (Coppedge et al., 2022). We use V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index, which aims to capture the competitive nature of elections, including whether they are free and fair, and the ability of civil society groups to organise political competition. The variable is called *polyarchy*. As an alternative, we use the Liberal Democracy Index. This puts additional emphasis on freedom of expression and the protection of minority rights. It is less process-oriented, but does integrate some of the components of the polyarchy variable.

Regarding unearned income, we look at foreign aid, remittances, and natural-resource income. Foreign aid is official development aid (ODA). While only a part of ODA is directly spent by the government, project aid has the potential to reduce political demands for government spending, freeing the government to spend on other things. This justifies using a broad measure of aid in terms of percentage of gross national income. For remittances, we rely on a similarly broad measure, capturing total flows as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). Finally, natural resources can directly provide government income where ownership is in state hands. But even if run privately, royalties from natural-resource extraction provide government income without increasing the tax burden for citizens. To capture this overall effect, we use natural-resource income as a percentage of GDP. All three independent variables are taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2023).

⁶ This implies that there could be non-linearities in how the measure relates to the underlying concept.

⁷ This means that the additional noise from measurement error will make it more difficult to identify statistical effects, but will not introduce bias into the results.

We control for a range of possible confounders, both on the country level and the level of the individual respondent. The theoretical channels – democracy and the prevalence of unearned income – strongly correlate with a country's level of economic development (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997; Ross, 2003; Bettin, Presbitero, & Spatafora, 2017). We therefore control for GDP per capita. After a change in government, it might take some time for new policies to be implemented. Likewise, longtime rulers might become increasingly insulated from constituent needs with the passage of time. The longevity of rulers in power in turn is correlated with both influence channels (Knutson & Nygård, 2015). Accordingly, we control for the number of years a current ruler has been in power. Finally, in countries with large diasporas, governments potentially pay more attention to foreign policy issues (Shain & Barth, 2003; Ho & McConnell, 2019). Since the causal pathway of this influence likely runs through constituent preferences, we control for the total stock of a country's population that has migrated abroad. On the individual respondent level, we control for personal characteristics, including gender, age, and education, key occupations in agriculture and trade, income, rural vs. urban residence, as well as distance to international borders and waterways. All of these factors differentially expose respondents to the consequences of government policies on free trade and movement and affect their ability to make their voices heard in the political process. In turn they likely vary with the presence of unearned income and a country's regime type. Summary measures for all variables included in the analysis can be found in Table A.3 in the Appendix.

4.2 Methodology

To study foreign policy congruence, we need to handle data at two levels of aggregation. Foreign policy positions are national-level phenomena, whereas public opinion is recorded at the individual level. This introduces challenges for statistical analysis. One intuitive way of testing whether mass public opinion is congruent with policy is to assess whether the two vary together across countries, e.g. whether open-trade policies are systematically associated with public support for openness. This approach is simple, and can be done using linear regression via ordinary least squares (OLS), but it has limitations. We only have 34 countries to compare. And since public opinion data exist only for one year, we cannot exploit intertemporal variation. In addition, the approach relies on discarding a lot of information about the distribution of policy preferences within countries, as we need to compute the within-country mean or median as aggregate representation of public opinion.

The second possibility is to leverage this considerably greater individual-level variation. Because individuals are nested within countries, and there are only 34 government policy positions, it is not possible to replicate the aggregate-level approach and simply study the correlation between individual policy preferences and government policies. Instead we need to devise a measure of foreign policy congruence for each individual, capturing the distance between the individual's policy preference and their government's policy position. We can then explore variation in this measure within and across countries. This requires a more advanced statistical approach (multilevel modelling).

We pursue both approaches in turn. We start with an aggregate analysis of governments' foreign policy positions, estimated via OLS. Again, this approach captures the idea of foreign policy congruence by testing the extent to which foreign policy positions co-vary with public opinion:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Government foreign policy}_i &= \beta_{12} * \text{Public opinion}_i * \text{Channel}_i + \\ &\beta_1 * \text{Public opinion}_i + \beta_2 * \text{Channel}_i + \zeta + \text{Controls}_i * \gamma + \varepsilon_i, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where i denotes Country i , the parameters of substantive interest are called β , ζ is a constant, γ is a vector of parameters for the controls, and ε is the error term. *Government foreign policy* is the foreign policy position (ranging from 0 to 1) for Country i . *Public opinion* in Country i is an aggregate, computed as the average of the individual response variable.

To test our hypotheses about the conditions of foreign policy congruence, we interact the public opinion variable with the respective variable capturing the theoretical channels outlined above on democratic government and unearned income, i.e. via measures of democracy levels, aid, natural-resource revenues, remittances, etc. To avoid higher-order interactions, and given the low statistical power with $n=34$, we estimate separate models for each of the channels. A significant positive interaction relationship between public opinion and the channel is evidence that the channel is associated with a stronger correlation between public opinion and the government's foreign policy position, indicating foreign policy congruence.

The second approach leverages individual-level variation in foreign policy preferences.

We define *absolute foreign policy congruence* (AFPC) as

$$AFPC_{ij} = 1 - Abs(DFPC_{ij}), \quad (2)$$

where *DFPC*, directional foreign policy congruence, in turn is given by

$$DFPC_{ij} = ARII_j - Response_j, \quad (3)$$

Here, j indexes individuals and i countries. Conceptually, absolute foreign policy congruence is a measure of proximity between an individual's preference and their government's foreign policy position that considers how close the two are aligned, but not the direction of divergence (i.e. whether a trade policy is more open or more restrictive than the individual's preference). An AFPC value of 0 indicates the largest possible divergence, and 1 perfect congruence. We use this measure in the multivariate analysis.

However, directional foreign policy congruence is descriptively richer, as it preserves information about whether a government oversupplies or undersupplies a policy relative to a constituent's stated preference. It ranges from -1 (undersupply), where government policy is most restrictive and constituents prefer full liberalisation, to 1 (oversupply), where government policy is fully liberalised but constituents prefer restrictive policies. A value of 0 indicates perfect congruence. We use this measure in the descriptive analysis below.

For the multivariate analysis, we estimate multilevel models that incorporate characteristics of individual survey respondents, as well as country-level characteristics:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Absolute foreign policy congruence}_{ij} = & \text{channels}_i * \beta + \text{controls}_i * \gamma \\ & + (\text{individual traits}_{ij} - \overline{\text{individual traits}_i}) * \xi \\ & + \overline{\text{individual traits}_i} * \psi + \zeta + (u_i + \varepsilon_{ij}), \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

where j indexes individual respondents and i countries. The coefficients of substantive interest are denoted as vector β , featuring elements b_1 to b_4 for each of the four variables that capture the two influence channels. Country-level controls are captured by γ . In addition, the model controls for individual-level traits of respondents, decomposed into within effects (ξ) and between effects (ψ), following Bell and Jones (2015). The constant ζ and error terms at country and individual level (u_i respectively ε_{ij}) complete the model.

5. Analysis

5.1 Descriptives: Public opinion and government positions

Given space constraints, Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the distribution of popular views on, respectively, free movement and free trade by the number of respondents for each of the 34 countries in our sample, ordered by average support on each issue. There is considerable variance in terms of popular views on free trade and free movement: In some countries, popular views are skewed toward strong support of free movement and trade (Zimbabwe,

Uganda) or strong opposition (Botswana). In other countries, populations differ in their support, e.g. in Lesotho, respondents favour free movement but oppose free trade.

Figure 1: Public opinion on free movement, by country, ordered by mean support

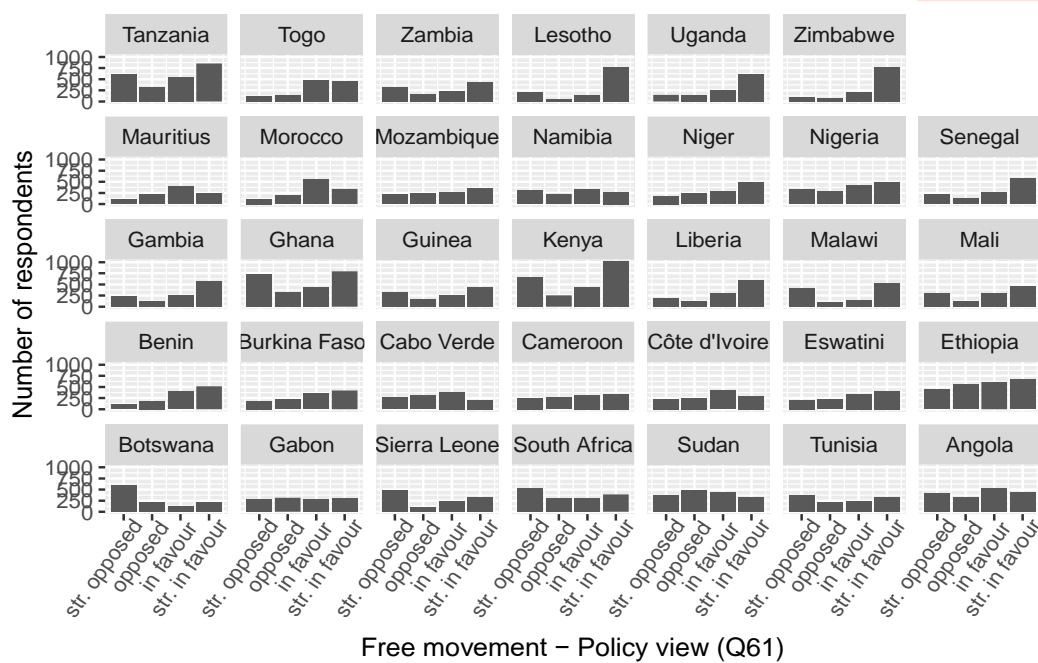


Figure 2: Public opinion on free trade, by country, ordered by mean support

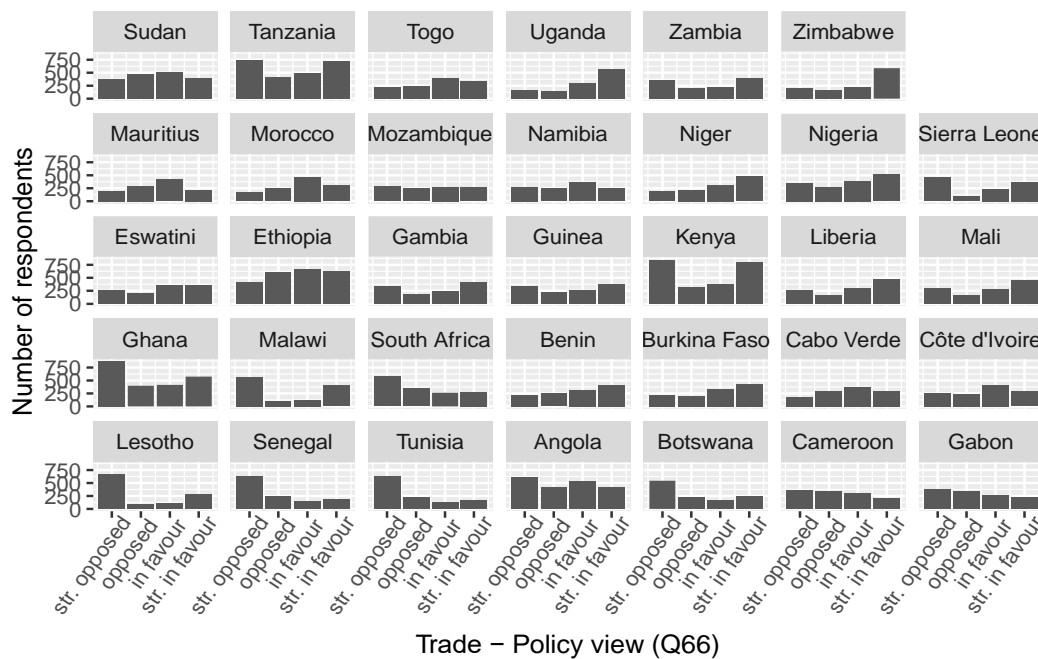
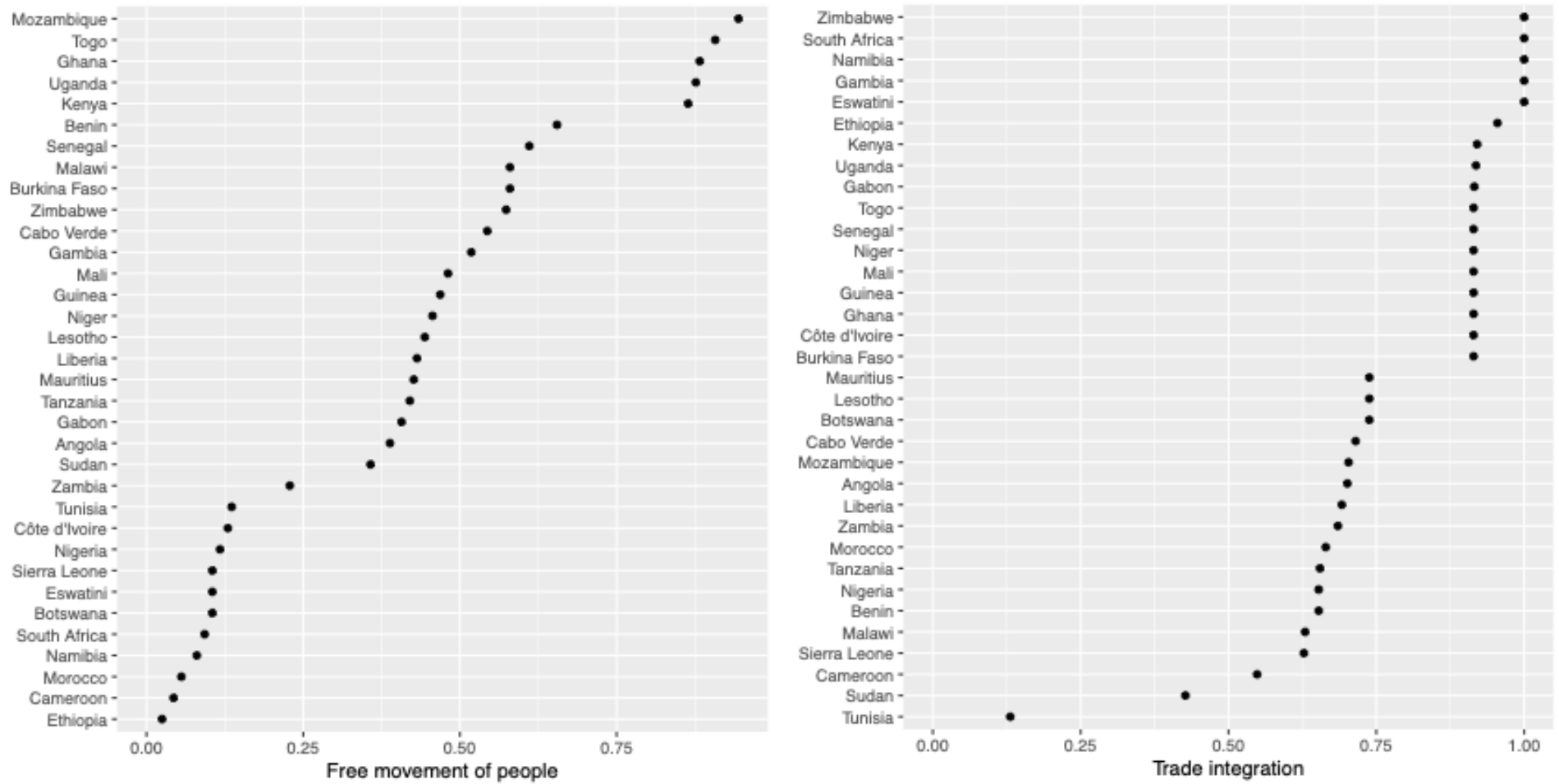


Figure 3 shows the distribution of government foreign policy positions (i.e. based on the ARII) on free movement and free trade, with countries ordered from the most protectionist to the most liberalised policies. Overall, there is wide variation across countries, though on free trade the distribution is skewed toward more openness in government positions.

Figure 3: Government positions on free movement and trade (ARII)



Regarding free trade, there are three groups of country positions: those with very open economies, with governments having signed and ratified the AfCFTA and having very low or no tariffs on imports; those that have joined the AfCFTA but maintain somewhat higher tariff barriers; and restrictive outliers, such as Cameroon, Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Tunisia. The trade openness of Southern African countries contrasts with their relatively restrictive policies on freedom of movement.

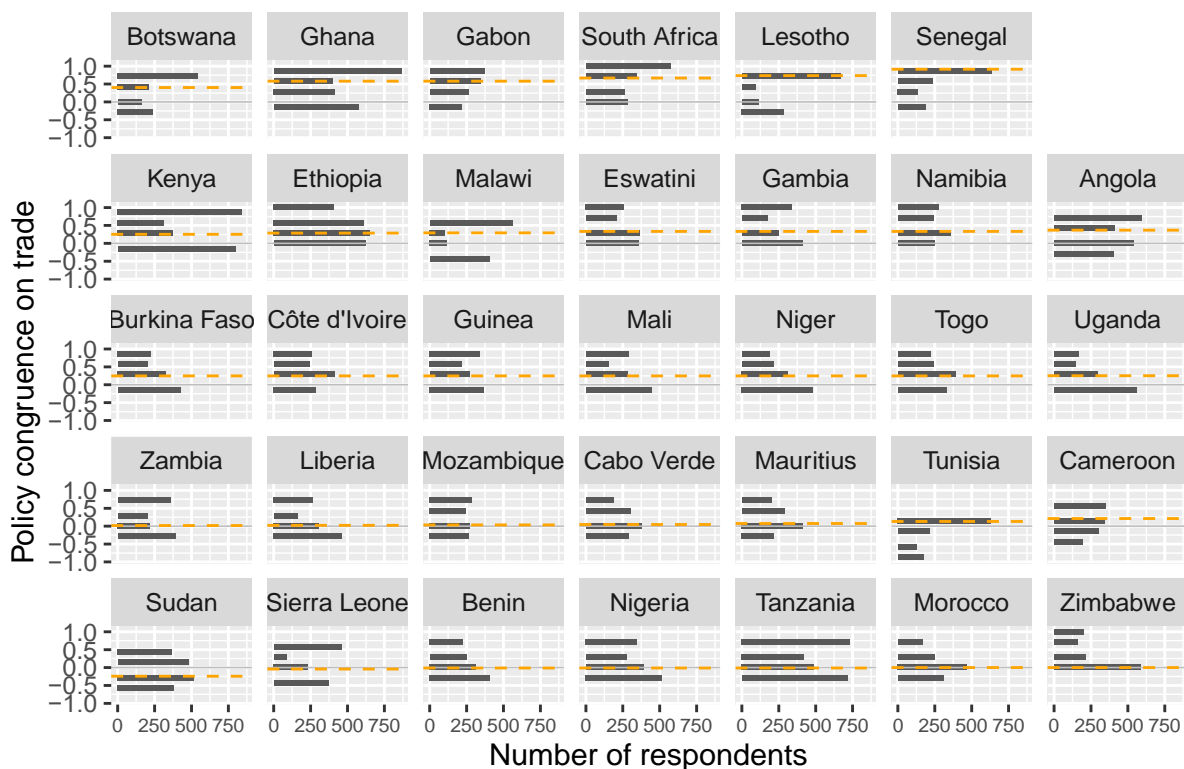
5.2 Descriptive evidence on foreign policy congruence

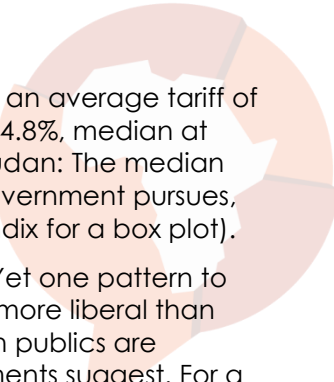
Free trade

Regarding foreign policy congruence on free trade, Figure 4 shows the DFPC between government policy and respondent preferences. The number of respondents associated with each policy position on free trade is plotted on the x-axis in each country panel (strongly opposed, somewhat opposed, somewhat in favour, strongly in favour), and the resulting distance – i.e. DFPC – to their government’s policy position on free trade is given on the y-axis. The orange line marks the median respondent position. The light-grey line marks the position of the government (graphically shown here as zero distance). Countries are ordered (from right to left, top to bottom) from the most positive DFPC (countries in which the government pursues a policy that is more liberalised than the median constituency preference, i.e. policy oversupply) to the most negative (countries in which the government has implemented a policy that is more protectionist than the median constituency preference).

To illustrate, Senegal shows the greatest positive DFPC, indicating that the median constituent prefers much less liberalised policies than the government of Senegal pursues on free trade, leading to large foreign policy incongruence in Senegal. More than half (53%) of Senegalese respondents strongly agree that protection of local producers from foreign competition is necessary for development, with another 20% agreeing somewhat.

Figure 4: Directional foreign policy congruence on trade





Yet Senegal has signed and ratified the AfCFTA agreement and imposes an average tariff of 14.1% on imports, just below the mean of all 34 countries in the sample (14.8%, median at 13.4%). At the other end of the spectrum, the DFPC is most negative in Sudan: The median constituency preference is more liberalised policies on trade than the government pursues, leading to foreign policy incongruence (see also Figure A.1 in the Appendix for a box plot).

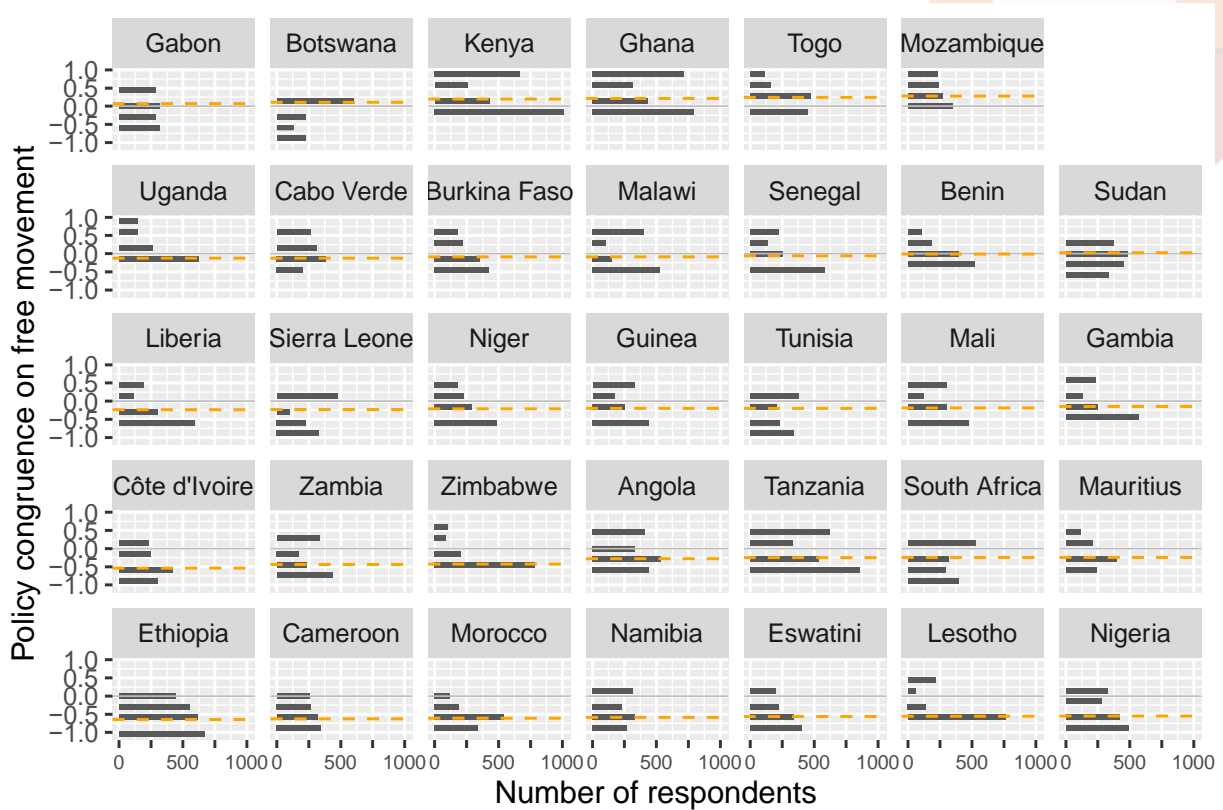
Foreign policy congruence on trade varies widely across the continent. Yet one pattern to note is that about two-thirds of all countries have trade policies that are more liberal than what public opinion supports (Figure A.1). This suggests that many African publics are generally more trade-sceptical than the policy positions of their governments suggest. For a handful of countries, the oversupply of liberalised-trade foreign policy is very pronounced. Similar patterns to Senegal can be observed in Lesotho, South Africa, and Gabon, though in the latter two countries public opinion in opposition to free trade is not as concentrated. Some governments implement policies that align with only one side of a rather polarised public opinion spectrum, whereas others choose a more centrist position. For example, in Ghana and Kenya, government policies align with a large group of constituents who strongly support free trade, but leave a similarly large number of constituents who are strongly opposed with a poor policy match. Moreover, based on our measure of DFPC, quite a few countries show a relatively strong foreign policy congruence with the median constituent preference on trade (Mauritius, Cabo Verde, Mozambique, Liberia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Tanzania, Nigeria, Benin, and Sierra Leone). That said, these countries have fairly different distributions of public opinion on trade. Apart from Sudan, our measure does not suggest that there are other countries in the sample where the DFPC is positive (i.e. where constituents would prefer a more liberalised policy than their government pursues).

Free movement

Turning to free movement, the emerging picture of foreign policy congruence is quite different. Figure 5 illustrates that Mozambique shows the greatest positive DFPC, i.e. the median constituent prefers less liberalised policies than the government of Mozambique pursues on free movement, leading to foreign policy incongruence. The DFPC is most negative in Ethiopia: The median constituency preference is to have more liberalisation than existing government policies allow, leading to foreign policy incongruence (see also Figure A.2 for a box plot). DFPC varies widely across the continent. Looking again at the examples of Ghana and Kenya, we can see that some populations are polarised on the issue of free movement. In both countries, government policy is more congruent with the opinion of the most supportive respondents of the population. A pattern to note here is that we observe more negative DFPC across countries than on trade: Based on our measure of foreign policy congruence, median public opinion of African publics seems to frequently be more liberal than the restrictive policies implemented by the governments. Countries such as Senegal, Benin, Sudan, and Gabon appear to show the closest foreign policy congruence relative to median public opinion on free movement.

Similar patterns exist in Sierra Leone and South Africa, but with more protectionist government positions. In both cases, the largest (modal) group of respondents strongly opposes freedom of movement. Government policies are very restrictive and therefore representative of these groups. However, because of polarised public opinion, large numbers of respondents would prefer liberal freedom of movement policies, resulting in an undersupply of these policies in the aggregate. In countries such as Ethiopia and Cameroon, government policies are very restrictive, leaving the majority of people with a policy that is not representative of their more liberal views on freedom of movement. Finally, for a good number of countries, we observe an overall close congruence between aggregate opinion and foreign policy. These countries include Gabon, Cabo Verde, Burkina Faso, Sudan, and Angola.

Figure 5: Directional foreign policy congruence on freedom of movement



5.3 Multivariate analysis: Absolute foreign policy congruence, democratic institutions, and unearned income

Free trade

We begin the regression analysis of foreign policy congruence with free trade. Starting with country-level data, the interactive OLS model (Equation 1) has government trade policy positions as dependent variable. We explore whether these policy positions correspond to mean constituent opinion and how this relationship is moderated by democratic institutions and unearned income. We then leverage the considerably richer individual-level data to look directly at the relationship between the two channels and absolute foreign policy congruence.

Table 2 shows the results from the country-level OLS analysis.⁸ Models 1 and 2 interact a country’s mean public opinion with the two operationalisations of democracy. Models 3, 4, and 5 do the same for external rents and unearned income. While the interaction terms themselves do not attain statistical significance, we cannot interpret the conditional relationships directly. Instead we need to look at the statistical significance of constituents’ trade preferences across the entire range of the conditioning variable (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006).

⁸ Breusch-Pagan and Wald tests indicate the presence of heteroskedasticity. Accordingly we report robust standard errors with small sample bias adjustment.

Table 2: Free trade policy – public opinion and conditioning factors | OLS

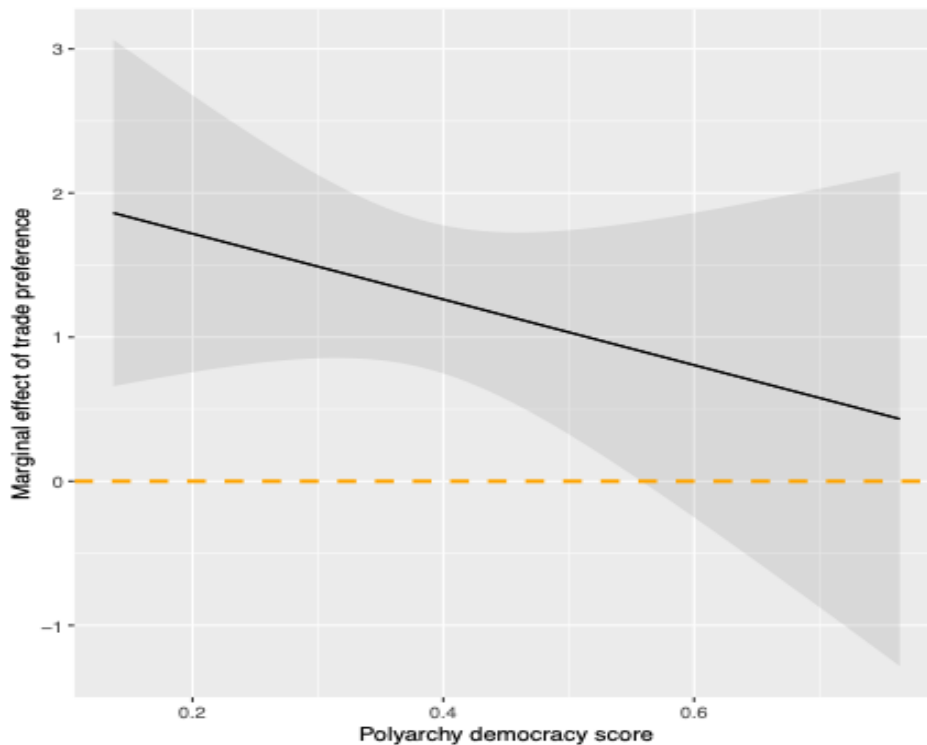
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Trade preference (mean)	1.674*	2.174**	0.849	1.294*	1.565*
	(0.826)	(0.897)	(0.747)	(0.716)	(0.804)
Liberal democracy score	0.871				
	(1.420)				
Trade preference × liberal democracy	-1.910				
	(2.666)				
Polyarchy democracy score		1.221			
		(1.230)			
Trade preference × polyarchy		-2.279			
		(2.217)			
Net ODA, % of GNI			-0.028		
			(0.051)		
Trade preference × ODA			0.022		
			(0.094)		
Remittances, % of GDP				0.030	
				(0.028)	
Trade preference × remittances				-0.062	
				(0.064)	
Natural resources, % of GDP					0.064
					(0.040)
Trade preference × natural resources					-0.144
					(0.085)
Stock of migrants sent abroad, log	-0.052	-0.053*	-0.062*	-0.045	-0.044
	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.032)
Years in power leader	-0.004	-0.003	-0.004	-0.003	-0.004
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
GDP pc, 1,000s, 2017 const ppp	-0.0001	-0.002	-0.011	0.001	-0.004
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Constant	0.659	0.357	1.340***	0.729*	0.678
	(0.651)	(0.730)	(0.355)	(0.389)	(0.419)
Observations	34	34	34	34	34
R ²	0.232	0.246	0.286	0.236	0.294
Adjusted R ²	0.062	0.079	0.127	0.066	0.137

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Once we do that, we find a statistically significant relationship for polyarchy, i.e. the Electoral Democracy Index. To explore this relationship, the marginal effects plot in Figure 6 shows on the y-axis the amount of change in a government's position on free trade that is associated with a one-unit increase in public opinion, mapped over the range of the conditioning polyarchy variable. Concretely, we can see that the least democratic countries in the sample have a considerably higher correspondence between public opinion and policy outcome. For example, fixing polyarchy at 0.2, a 1-percentage-point increase in the public opinion scale for free trade is associated with a trade policy that is more liberal by around 1.75 percentage points. For more democratic countries, this relationship is weaker. Although this decline itself is not statistically significant (reflecting the lack of statistical significance of the interaction coefficient), for polyarchy scores greater than 0.55, public opinion ceases to have a statistically discernable effect on policy outcomes. We therefore have evidence of a

systematic difference in policy congruence for autocracies and democracies that runs opposite to what we expected in Hypothesis 1.⁹

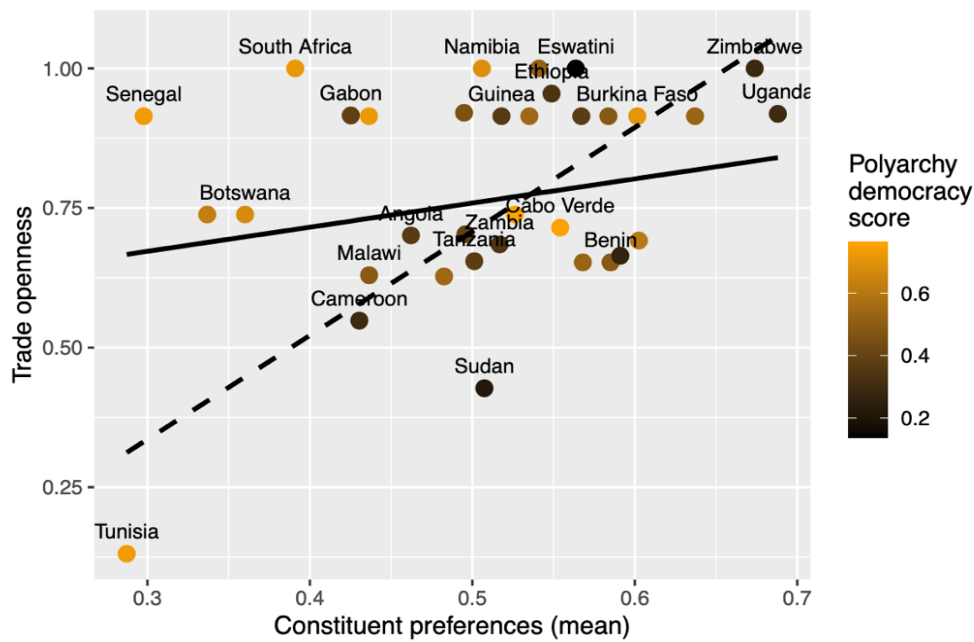
Figure 6: Conditional marginal effect of public opinion on trade-openness policies



To explore what is driving this unexpected pattern, we calculate fitted values for the dependent variable (trade openness) and plot them against constituent preferences for trade, holding other variables at their respective means (Figure 7). Each country is represented by a dot. The dots are coloured according to respective polyarchy scores, with black representing the least democratic and yellow the most democratic countries. To illustrate the effect of the interaction term, we draw two regression lines corresponding to how the model summarises the data for highly democratic and highly autocratic countries. The solid line shows fitted values (predictions) for a hypothetical highly democratic country, setting the polyarchy score to that of the most democratic country in the sample (Mauritius, 0.764), while varying constituent preferences from low to high. The dashed line is generated in the same way, but setting polyarchy equal to the value of the least democratic country (Eswatini, 0.137).

⁹ Given the centrality of colonial pasts in the study of contemporary African politics (Athow & Blanton, 2002; Grier, 1999), we incorporate robustness checks in this regard. Our concern that historical colonial contexts are not a sufficient predictor of foreign policy congruence today is supported by these checks. Table A.6 reproduces the analysis from Table 2 including a dummy variable for former British colonies. The control does not reach statistical significance, and main results for polyarchy remain unchanged but are estimated with less precision. Table A.7 reproduces the results from Table 3, splitting the sample into former British colonies and colonies of other countries. Again, main results are unchanged, though there is heterogeneity in effect sizes.

Figure 7: Fitted values from OLS regression of trade openness



Least (most) democratic country in analysis: dashed line (solid line). Other variables kept at their respective means.

The slope of the regression line predicting trade policies for very autocratic countries is much steeper than for very democratic countries. This signifies that non-democratic countries have greater foreign policy congruence between their constituents' preferences and policies on free trade. In fact, as we have seen in the discussion of marginal effects above, for democracies the slope of the regression line cannot be statistically distinguished from zero. The graph reveals interesting patterns. Among democracies, the lack of policy congruence is due to a considerable number of countries having very open trade policies that do not reflect their constituents' much more protectionist preferences. These cluster in the upper left quadrant and include Senegal, South Africa, and Botswana. The only democracy that achieves high policy congruence with constituents who oppose free trade is Tunisia (in the lower left quadrant). In non-democracies, public opinion tends to be generally moderately to highly supportive of free trade, and government policies are more congruent with these preferences. Accordingly, non-democratic countries cluster in the centre upper right quadrant and the centre of the graph. The most pronounced outliers are Gabon, which has a trade policy that is more liberal than public opinion, and Sudan, which is more protectionist.

In the next step, we draw on the entire data set of individual survey responses. This will enable us to test whether the revealed patterns are robust to controlling for all influence channels simultaneously and to overcome any econometric issues associated with small-*n* regression. Table 3 reports results of the multilevel model (see Equation 4). The dependent variable is *absolute foreign policy congruence*, with higher values signifying a closer match between a respondent's preferences and their government's trade policy position. Model 1 reports results for all influence channel variables without any controls. For democracy, we now focus only on the polyarchy variable, which was significant in the OLS analysis. Model 2 includes country-level and individual-level controls but omits estimates for them. The complete results can be found in Table A.4 in the Appendix.

Starting with Model 1, the polyarchy variable is associated with a decrease in foreign policy congruence, confirming the finding from the national-level analysis. While the estimated

effect is only statistically significant at the 10% level, it becomes highly significant once we include the full set of country- and individual-level controls (Model 2). We can interpret the regression coefficient directly as marginal effect: For each percentage-point increase in a country's polyarchy score (coded on the 0-1 interval), the congruence between a constituent's preference for open trade and their government's policy position on average decreases by 0.4 percentage points. To put this into perspective for the countries in the analysis, going from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean polyarchy score (mean is 0.49, standard deviation 0.17) reduces a constituent's trade policy congruence on average by 13 percentage points (-0.13 on the variable's 0-1 scale), a substantively large difference. Together with similar patterns from the country-level analysis and the fitted values from Figure 7, this provides robust evidence that democratic governments in Africa have trade policies that are systematically more liberal compared to what their constituents want, while non-democratic governments achieve higher trade policy congruence.

Table 3: Absolute foreign policy congruence on trade | national channels
| linear multilevel model

	(1)	(2)
Polyarchy democracy score	-0.164*	-0.393***
	(0.088)	(0.117)
Net ODA, % of GNI	0.004	0.007**
	(0.003)	(0.004)
Remittances, % of GDP	-0.002	-0.003
	(0.003)	(0.004)
Natural resources, % of GDP	0.0003	0.003
	(0.003)	(0.002)
Country-level controls	No	Yes
Individual-level controls	No	Yes
Observations	46,039	46,039
Log likelihood	-8,884.122	-8,740.600
Akaike inf. crit.	17,782.240	17,621.200
Bayesian inf. crit.	17,843.400	18,232.810
Number of countries	34	34
Standard deviation (country)	0.084	0.078

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Model 2 also shows a statistically significant and positive relationship between aid inflows and absolute foreign policy congruence. A 1-percentage-point increase in net ODA inflows as a percentage of GNI is associated with a 0.7-percentage-point rise in AFPC. However, this effect is substantively considerably less important compared to regime type. If we move from one standard deviation below the variable's mean (0.40% of GNI) to one standard deviation above (9.1% of GNI), trade policy congruence increases by 6.5 percentage points, about half the effect size of the polyarchy democracy score. In addition, the result is not reproduced in Model 1 and in the OLS specification. Given that the effect is in the opposite direction of what we expected, with aid-dependent governments appearing to be more in tune with their constituents, we count this as only moderate evidence for a relationship, but cannot claim support for our hypothesis.

Free movement

We now explore foreign policy congruence for freedom of movement. Table 4 reports results from the country-level regression.¹⁰ Again, models 1 and 2 capture the moderating effect of democracy, and models 3-5 look at unearned income. As with trade, none of the interaction terms are directly statistically significant, and we have to evaluate marginal effects to identify statistically significant relationships. For remittances (Model 4), there is congruence between public opinion on free movement and government policy. Figure 8 shows the two variables moving together in a statistically meaningful way, but only if remittances stay below 3% of GDP. This is a very narrow range, and the model does not simultaneously control for the effects of other influence-channel variables. To assess robustness, we therefore turn to the individual-level analysis and multilevel modelling.

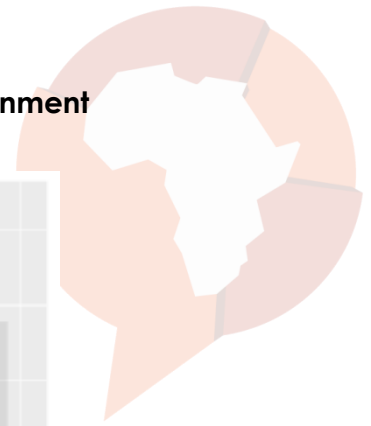
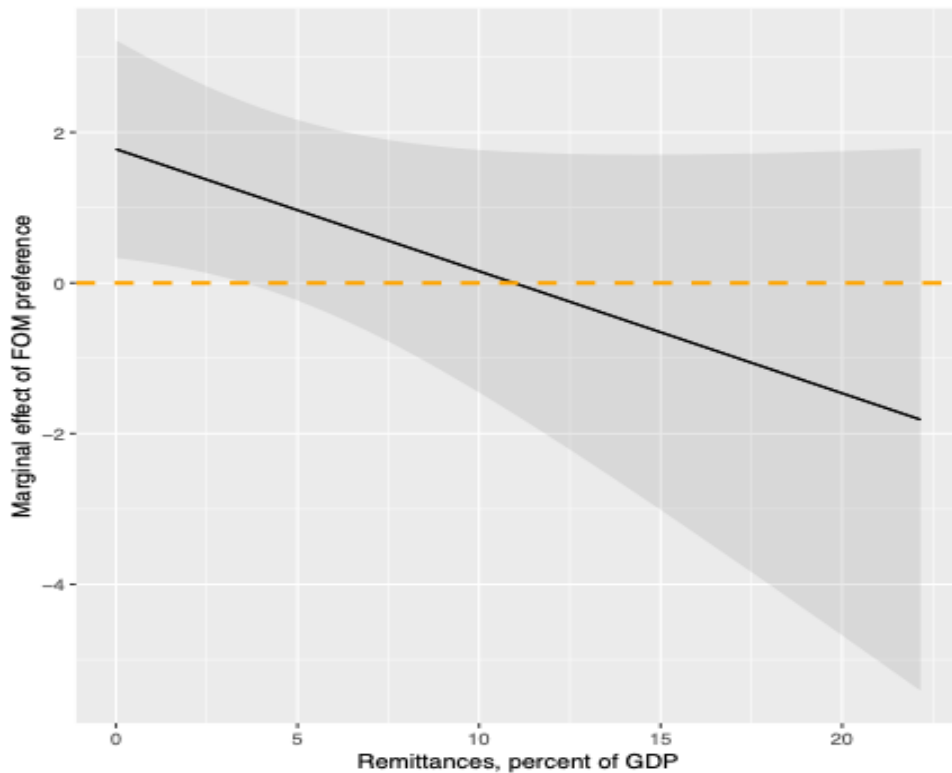
Table 4: Free movement policy – public opinion and conditioning factors | OLS

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
FOM preference (mean)	1.500 (1.269)	1.570 (1.551)	1.141 (0.796)	1.777** (0.737)	1.449* (0.788)
Liberal democracy score	0.885 (1.682)				
FOM preference × liberal democracy	-1.001 (2.948)				
Polyarchy democracy score		0.833 (1.720)			
FOM preference × polyarchy		-0.876 (2.866)			
Net ODA, % of GNI			0.015 (0.069)		
FOM preference × ODA			-0.011 (0.112)		
Remittances, % of GDP				0.106 (0.064)	
FOM preference × remittances				-0.162 (0.097)	
Natural resources, % of GDP					0.036 (0.066)
FOM preference × natural resources					-0.052 (0.123)
Stock of migrants sent abroad, log	0.003 (0.044)	0.001 (0.045)	0.013 (0.048)	-0.012 (0.045)	0.004 (0.044)
Years in power leader	-0.0005 (0.006)	-0.0001 (0.006)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)
GDP pc, 1,000s, 2017 const ppp	-0.015 (0.011)	-0.014 (0.011)	-0.004 (0.014)	-0.009 (0.010)	-0.009 (0.011)
Constant	-0.529 (0.913)	-0.602 (1.063)	-0.423 (0.792)	-0.392 (0.641)	-0.456 (0.704)
Observations	34	34	34	34	34
R2	0.270	0.268	0.256	0.315	0.279
Adjusted R2	0.107	0.105	0.090	0.163	0.118

*p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

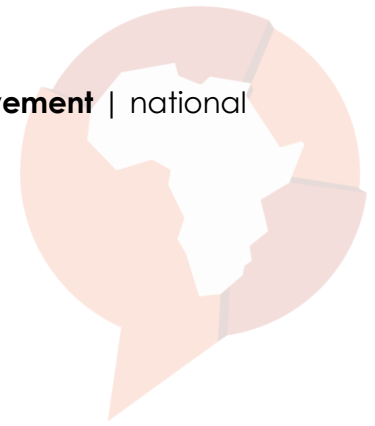
¹⁰ Diagnostics did not detect heteroskedasticity, so we report non-adjusted standard errors.

Figure 8: Conditional marginal effects of public opinion on government on freedom-of-movement policies



The results are summarised in Table 5. The dependent variable again is *absolute foreign policy congruence*, with Model 1 showing results without any controls and Model 2 including country-level and individual-level controls (omitted, full results in Table A.5 in the Appendix). Neither of the models finds a significant relationship between remittances and policy congruence, and we are unable to confirm the relationship from the OLS analysis. However, as with the previous result for trade openness, net ODA flows are highly statistically significant and positively associated with greater absolute foreign policy congruence. Again, this effect is of modest substantive size. Each percentage-point increase in net ODA, relative to GNI, is associated with a 0.9 percentage point gain in AFPC. Moving from one standard deviation below the variable's mean to 1 standard deviation above results in an increase of 7.8 percentage points in policy congruence. Following our reasoning from the analysis of trade openness, given the small substantive effects size, lack of robustness across specifications and unexpected direction of the effect, we count this only as moderate evidence for the relationship.

Table 5: Absolute foreign policy congruence on freedom of movement | national channels | linear multilevel model



	(1)	(2)
Polyarchy democracy score	0.126 (0.079)	0.149 (0.109)
Net ODA, % of GNI	0.002 (0.003)	0.009** (0.004)
Remittances, % of GDP	-0.002 (0.003)	0.001 (0.004)
Natural resources, % of GDP	0.003 (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)
Country level controls	No	Yes
Individual level controls	No	Yes
Observations	45,736	45,736
Log likelihood	-2,767.710	-2,664.355
Akaike inf. crit.	5,549.420	5,468.709
Bayesian inf. crit.	5,610.534	6,079.854
Number of countries	34	34
Standard deviation (country)	0.084	0.078


*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

6. Discussion and conclusion

Does foreign policy of African governments reflect the preferences of their constituents? What determines congruence of foreign policy and public attitudes across African countries? Social scientists largely neglect how and why foreign policy by African governments matches constituent views (Quinn, 2010), despite much anecdotal evidence of citizens expressing opinions pertinent to “Africa’s international relations” (Death, 2015; Whitaker & Clark, 2018). The goal of this paper was to initiate the theoretical debate and identify the empirical basis for understanding how public preferences and government foreign policies in Africa are linked. For this purpose, we build on insights from the literature on congruence. To our knowledge, ours is the first study applying the concept of policy congruence to foreign policy in Africa (for an overview on congruence, see Shim & Farag, 2024).

We study foreign policy congruence of governmental foreign policy positions with public opinion on issues of free movement and free trade across 34 countries in Africa. We consider two theoretical drivers of foreign policy congruence: First, in democracies, we expect higher foreign policy congruence than in autocracies; second, where unearned income and external rents from natural resources, aid, or remittances are high, we expect low foreign policy congruence.

Our empirical contribution is both descriptive and explanatory. We find two interesting patterns in our descriptive analysis that contextualise the 2018 adoption of the AfCFTA and AfFM. On free trade, African publics tend to be more trade-sceptic than the liberalised policy positions of their governments, meaning low foreign policy congruence. On free movement, low foreign policy congruence stems from African constituents preferring more liberalisation than what governments provide. While our analysis reveals variance across the continent in




terms of foreign policy congruence at the country level, it allows us to identify those countries with better foreign policy congruence, as well as those that are oversupplying or undersupplying liberalisation. While the issues of free trade and free movement are related, our findings suggest that governments and constituents do not necessarily sort in a simple protectionism-vs.-liberalisation dichotomy. Constituents arguably perceive, experience, and comprehend the issues of free trade and free movement quite differently. These insights could mean that African publics do not perceive the same gains from free trade as their governments, or that the free-trade policies adopted by their governments and the African Union are not delivered to the satisfaction of the constituents. On the issue of free movement, it is possible that different countries exhibit different features in terms of being net senders or net hosts of foreign constituent movement, which will shape public opinion and government positions alike.

Our multivariate analysis, counter to our expectations, indicates that democracies tend to have lower foreign policy congruence than autocracies on issues of trade: We show that democracies on average are more liberal on free trade than their constituents prefer. We cannot find a robust effect of unearned income on foreign policy congruence. While these findings are surprising, they also speak to previous arguments that policy congruence is not unique to democracies (Belchior et al., 2018). More autocratic states may require a certain level of foreign policy congruence to stabilise their rule. In addition, the insight that democracies oversupply free trade – i.e. governments pursue a more liberalised trade policy than constituents prefer – may be a consequence of democracies generally being more liberal not just with regard to political participation, but also regarding market liberalisation and international market integration. Democracies may also simply be more prone to pursue free trade with economies outside of Africa. Since the constituents of these governments do not appreciate trade openness to the same extent as their governments, this points to a central tension in African foreign policy.

Our analysis provides the steppingstones for further research, with the potential for spawning a larger research agenda on foreign policy congruence in Africa. First, future analyses should broaden the issue space beyond free trade and free movement. This would, however, require further data on both government positions *and* specific survey data asking constituents to express or assess foreign policy positions. Second, ideally, these data would be collected over time, to allow for clarification of the causal link between public preferences and policy: Does public opinion drive foreign policy or vice versa? The data currently available did not allow for such an intertemporal perspective. Finally, scholars interested in foreign policy congruence could start to investigate the domestic underpinnings of the observed differences between countries. While government positions at the national level are a good starting point, additional insights could be gained from collecting survey data from MPs or foreign office staff on their foreign policy positions and constituent influences on these positions. Moreover, disaggregating public opinion (e.g. by gender, profession, etc.) promises an understanding of which groups and interests are better represented in African foreign policy and why.

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Appendix

Tables

Table A.1: Countries in analysis

Country	Number of respondents
Angola	2,402
Benin	1,200
Botswana	1,200
Burkina Faso	1,200
Cabo Verde	1,200
Cameroon	1,200
Côte d'Ivoire	1,200
Eswatini	1,200
Ethiopia	2,378
Gabon	1,200
Gambia	1,200
Ghana	2,400
Guinea	1,200
Kenya	2,400
Lesotho	1,200
Liberia	1,200
Malawi	1,200
Mali	1,200
Mauritius	1,200
Morocco	1,200
Mozambique	1,106
Namibia	1,200
Niger	1,199
Nigeria	1,599
Senegal	1,200
Sierra Leone	1,200
South Africa	1,600
Sudan	1,800
Tanzania	2,398
Togo	1,200
Tunisia	1,200
Uganda	1,200
Zambia	1,200
Zimbabwe	1,201



Table A.2: Afrobarometer survey items on freedom of movement and trade (Round 8, 2019/2021)

Question 61 (freedom of movement)

Now let's talk about how our country should relate to other countries in [respondent's region] and the world. Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: People living in [East] Africa should be able to move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries.

Statement 2: In order to protect their own citizens, governments should limit the cross-border movement of people and goods.

Value labels

Agree very strongly with 1

Agree with 1

Agree with 2

Agree very strongly with 2

Question 66 (Free trade)

Now let's talk about how our country should relate to other countries in [respondent's region] and the world. Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: In order to develop, our country must rely on trade with the rest of the world, including by opening our borders to foreign imports.

Statement 2: In order to develop, our country must rely on local production and protect local producers from foreign competition.

Value labels

Agree very strongly with 1

Agree with 1

Agree with 2

Agree very strongly with 2

Table A.3: Overview of variables

Statistic	N	Mean	St. dev.	Min	Max
Trade openness policy	34	0.786	0.192	0.131	1.000
Free movement policy	34	0.413	0.280	0.025	0.944
Polyarchy democracy score	34	0.493	0.176	0.137	0.764
Liberal democracy score	34	0.368	0.174	0.097	0.678
Net ODA, % of GNI	34	5.158	4.627	0.034	19.588
Remittances, % of GDP	34	4.212	4.936	0.005	22.156
Natural resources, % of GDP	34	6.746	5.898	0.002	26.138
Stock of migrants sent abroad, log	34	12.989	1.110	10.774	14.998
Years in power leader	34	7.176	10.140	0	36
GDP pc, 1,000s, 2017 const ppp	34	5.480	5.082	1.217	23.682
DFPC – free trade	46,039	0.283	0.424	-0.869	1.000
DFPC – free movement	44,690	-0.155	0.461	-0.975	0.944
AFPC – free trade	46,039	0.593	0.307	0.000	1.000
AFPC – free movement	44,690	0.595	0.269	0.025	0.988
Respondent in agriculture	46,039	0.240	0.427	0	1
Respondent in trading	46,039	0.111	0.314	0	1
Distance to border (inverse)	46,039	0.0004	0.005	0.00000	0.366
Urban respondent	46,039	0.452	0.498	0	1
Going without income	46,039	2.048	1.347	0	4
Age	46,039	37.257	21.405	18	999
Gender	46,039	0.504	0.500	0	1
Education	46,039	3.519	2.302	0	9

Table A.4: Absolute foreign policy congruence on free trade | national channels, complete results | linear multilevel model

	(1)	(2)
Polyarchy democracy score	-0.164* (0.088)	-0.393*** (0.117)
Net ODA, % of GNI	0.004 (0.003)	0.007** (0.004)
Remittances, % of GDP	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.004)
Natural resources, % of GDP	0.0003 (0.003)	0.003 (0.002)
Country-level controls (between variation)		
Migrants sent abroad (log)		0.009 (0.018)
Government spell in power (years)		-0.0003 (0.002)
GDP per capita		0.002 (0.006)
Share of respondents in agriculture		-0.151 (0.155)
Share of respondents in trading		0.193 (0.246)
Distance of respondent to border (inverse, average)		27.800 (35.373)
Share of urban respondents		-0.176* (0.106)
Respondent going without income (average frequency)		-0.073** (0.032)
Education (average)		0.003 (0.020)
Gender (share of male respondents)		28.512** (13.061)
Age (average)		0.012* (0.007)
Individual-level controls (within variation)		
Respondent in agriculture		0.001 (0.006)
Respondent in trading		0.005 (0.005)
Distance of respondent to border (inverse)		-0.257 (0.325)
Urban respondent		-0.006 (0.005)
Respondent going without income (frequency)		-0.002 (0.002)
Education		-0.004** (0.002)
Gender (male)		0.003 (0.003)
Age		0.0002 (0.0001)
Constant	0.663*** (0.051)	-13.872** (6.380)
Observations	46,039	46,039
Number of countries	34	34
Standard deviation (country)	0.084	0.078
Log likelihood	-8,884.122	-8,740.600
Akaike inf. crit.	17,782.240	17,621.200
Bayesian inf. crit.	17,843.400	18,232.810

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.5: Absolute foreign policy congruence on freedom of movement
| national channels, complete results | linear multilevel model

	(1)	(2)
Polyarchy democracy score	0.126 (0.079)	0.149 (0.109)
Net ODA, % of GNI	0.002 (0.003)	0.009** (0.004)
Remittances, % of GDP	-0.002 (0.003)	0.001 (0.004)
Natural resources, % of GDP	0.003 (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)
Country-level controls (between variation)		
Migrants sent abroad (log)		-0.027 (0.017)
Government spell in power (years)		0.002* (0.001)
GDP per capita		0.016*** (0.005)
Share of respondents in agriculture		-0.048 (0.146)
Share of respondents in trading		0.706*** (0.231)
Distance of respondent to border (inverse, average)		-65.776** (32.972)
Share of urban respondents		-0.189* (0.099)
Respondent going without income (average frequency)		0.032 (0.030)
Education (average)		-0.007 (0.019)
Gender (share of male respondents)		32.341*** (12.224)
Age (average)		0.002 (0.007)
Individual-level controls (within variation)		
Respondent in agriculture		-0.009** (0.005)
Respondent in trading		-0.006 (0.005)
Distance of respondent to border (inverse)		0.358 (0.298)
Urban respondent		-0.003 (0.003)
Respondent going without income (frequency)		0.001 (0.001)
Education		-0.004*** (0.001)
Gender (male)		-0.005 (0.004)
Age		0.0001 (0.0001)
Constant	0.511*** (0.046)	-15.534*** (5.973)
Observations	45,736	45,736
Number of countries	34	34
Standard deviation (country)	0.084	0.078
Log likelihood	-2,767.710	-2,664.355
Akaike inf. crit.	5,549.420	5,468.709
Bayesian inf. crit.	5,610.534	6,079.854

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.6: Trade-openness policy, controlling for former GB colony | OLS

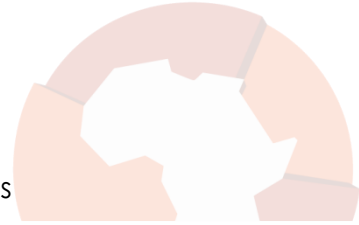
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Trade preference (mean)	1.710 (1.080)	2.237* (1.155)	0.864 (0.770)	1.294* (0.728)	1.564* (0.826)
Liberal democracy score	0.913 (1.716)				
Trade preference × liberal democracy	-1.992 (3.243)				
Polyarchy democracy score		1.273 (1.444)			
Trade preference × polyarchy		-2.398 (2.706)			
Net ODA, % of GNI			-0.026 (0.056)		
Trade preference × ODA			0.019 (0.103)		
Remittances, % of GDP				0.030 (0.029)	
Trade preference × remittances				-0.062 (0.065)	
Natural resources, % of GDP					0.064 (0.042)
Trade preference × natural resources					-0.144 (0.087)
Former GB colony	-0.010 (0.084)	-0.014 (0.080)	-0.009 (0.068)	-0.001 (0.069)	-0.004 (0.070)
Stock of migrants sent abroad, log	-0.053 (0.032)	-0.054* (0.032)	-0.063* (0.037)	-0.045 (0.036)	-0.044 (0.032)
Years in power leader	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)
GDP pc, 1,000s, 2017 const ppp	0.657 (0.677)	0.351 (0.761)	1.346*** (0.359)	0.730* (0.408)	0.684 (0.455)
Constant	-0.0001 (0.007)	-0.002 (0.007)	-0.011 (0.007)	0.001 (0.008)	-0.004 (0.008)
Observations	34	34	34	34	34
R ²	0.233	0.248	0.286	0.236	0.294
Adjusted R ²	0.026	0.045	0.094	0.030	0.104

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A.7: Former GB colonies vs. other colonial histories – free trade | split samples

	Former colonial power			
	GB	GB	Others	Others
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Polyarchy democracy score	-0.209*	-1.301***	-0.162	-0.144*
	(0.108)	(0.116)	(0.148)	(0.077)
Net ODA, % of GNI	0.001	0.025***	0.004	0.019***
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Remittances, % of GDP	-0.002	0.030***	0.002	-0.018***
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.004)
Natural resources, % of GDP	0.004	0.016***	-0.001	0.001
	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Country-level controls (between variation)				
Migrants sent abroad (log)		0.041***		0.041**
		(0.007)		(0.017)
Government spell in power (years)		-0.009***		-0.001
		(0.001)		(0.002)
GDP per capita		0.064***		0.022***
		(0.008)		(0.008)
Share of respondents in agriculture		0.968***		0.150
		(0.110)		(0.221)
Share of respondents in trading		1.225***		1.897***
		(0.263)		(0.304)
Distance of respondent to border (inverse, average)		-335.668***		4.869
		(60.022)		(37.625)
Share of urban respondents		-0.050		0.00004
		(0.077)		(0.134)
Respondent going without income (average frequency)		-0.077**		-0.240***
		(0.030)		(0.032)
Individual-level controls (within variation)				
Respondent in agriculture		0.002		0.017**
		(0.010)		(0.008)
Respondent in trading		0.015**		0.005
		(0.007)		(0.007)
Distance of respondent to border (inverse)		0.716		-0.681
		(0.772)		(0.420)
Urban respondent		-0.005		-0.016***
		(0.007)		(0.005)
Respondent going without income (frequency)		0.002		-0.004*
		(0.003)		(0.002)
Constant	0.671***	-0.053	0.672***	0.257
	(0.073)	(0.184)	(0.077)	(0.348)
Number of countries	16	16	18	18
Standard deviation (country)	0.074	0.03	0.087	0.051
Observations	23,271	23,271	22,899	22,899
Log likelihood	-4,909.284	-4,859.474	-3,989.865	-3,934.232
Akaike inf. crit.	9,832.569	9,798.947	7,993.730	7,948.463
Bayesian inf. crit.	9,888.954	10,121.150	8,050.002	8,270.017

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01



Figures

Figure A.1: Foreign policy congruence on trade | box plots

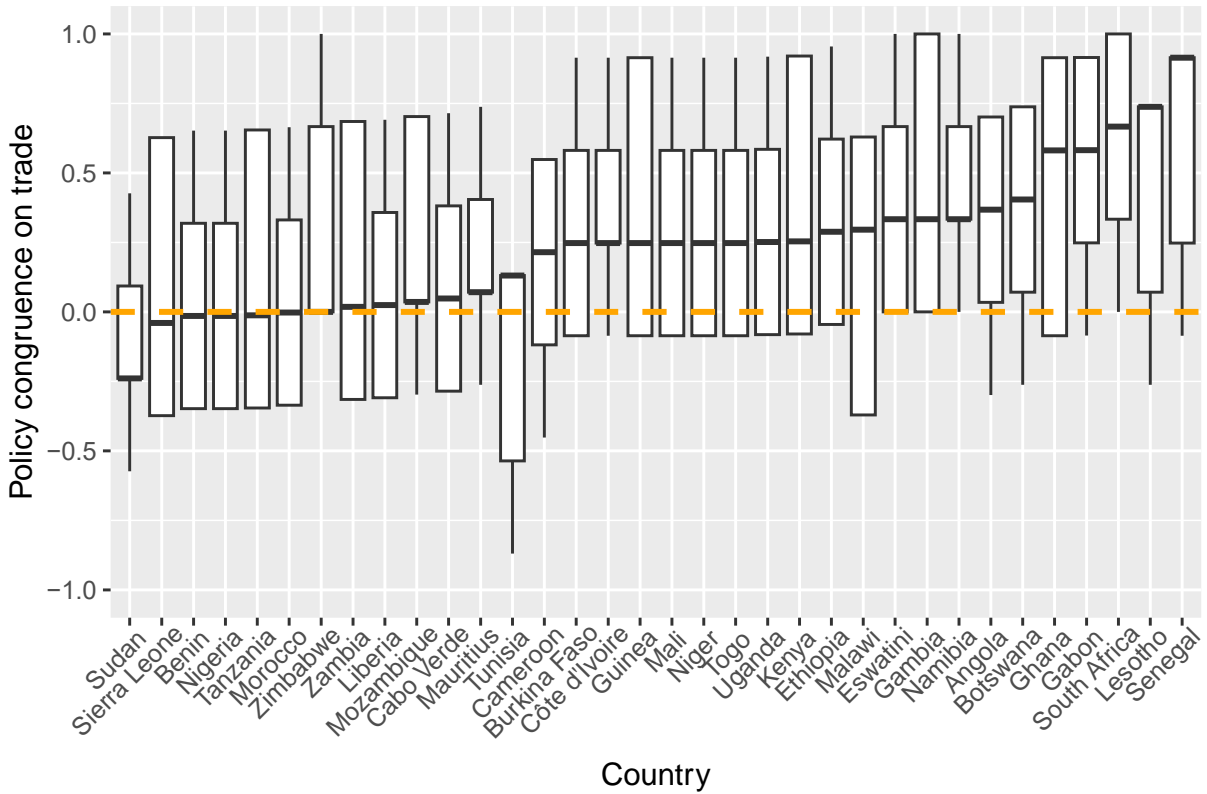
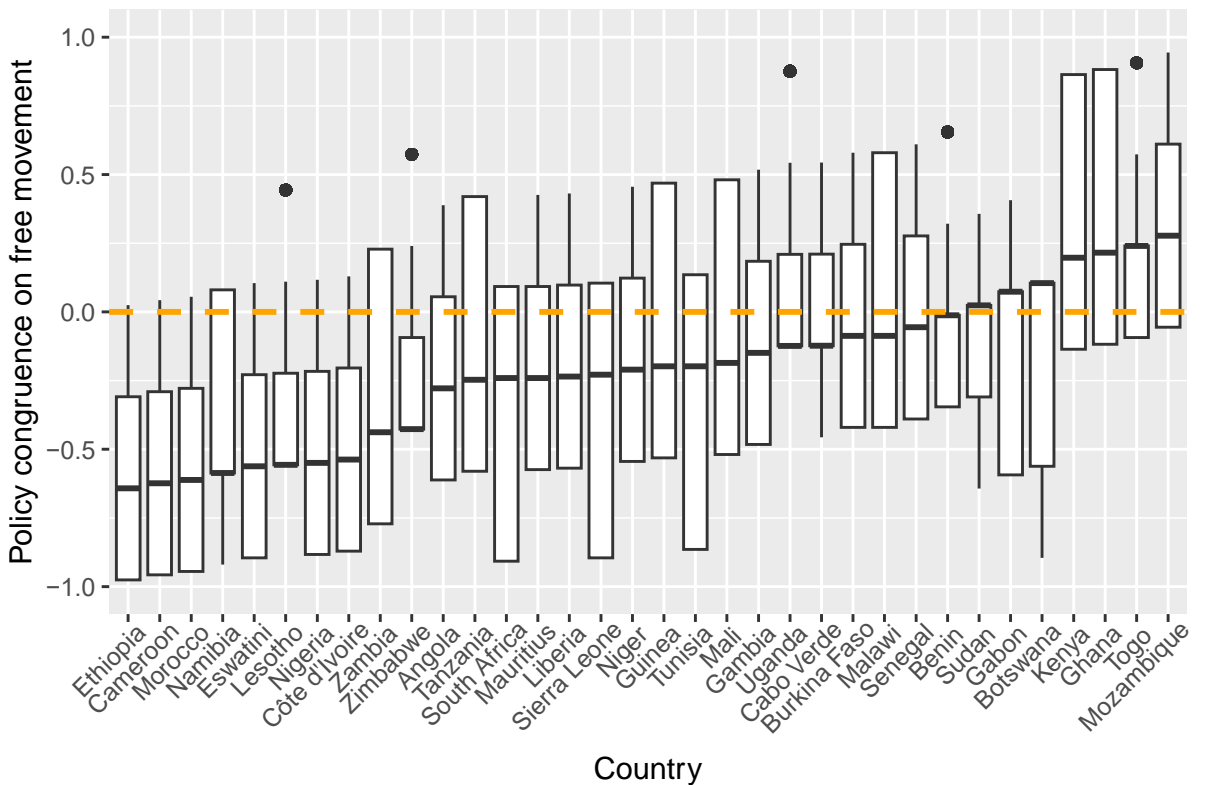


Figure A.2: Foreign policy congruence on freedom of movement | box plots



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