

# **SOCIAL ROOTEDNESS: EXAMINING ETHNIC AND NATIONAL ATTACHMENTS IN GHANA**

*Kofi Takyi Asante*

Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse (IAST)

[kofi.asante@iast.fr](mailto:kofi.asante@iast.fr)

## **Abstract**

The question of national unity has exercised the minds of researchers and politicians since the dawn of independence. But since the wave of democratisation in the late 1980s, ethnicity again has come under the spotlight as electoral competition highlighted the problem of divisive politics across the democratising world. In this study, I pose the question: what is the impact of alternative group loyalties on national attachment? Using a survey of 996 university students, I find evidence supporting recent reports of declining salience of ethnicity in Ghana. However, the effect of ethnicity on national attachment was counterintuitive. Conceptually, individualistic orientations undermined national attachment, while collectivistic orientations boosted it. I argue that rather than being contradictory impulses, ethnicity and national attachment are both underlaid by the same collectivistic orientation, pointing to the importance of social rootedness. I deploy qualitative and historical data to give substance and texture to these findings.

Ethnicity, national attachment, individualistic and collectivistic orientations, social rootedness, Ghana

Nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more graphically than the chequered fortune of the word *tribe* in her vocabulary. *Tribe* has been accepted at one time as a friend, rejected as an enemy at another, and finally smuggled in through the back-door as an accomplice.

(Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, 5)

## INTRODUCTION

The question of national unity has exercised the minds of researchers since national independence appeared on political horizons across Africa. Modernisation theorists in the 1950s and 1960s proposed an evolutionary model of development in which newly independent nations would follow the paths beaten by European states. As the dreams of political and economic development turned to nightmare in the 1970s, another set of scholars turned to accounts of historical exploitation to explain the continuing salience of ethnicity. Since the so-called third wave of democratization in the late 1980s, ethnicity has again come under the spotlight as electoral competition created divisive politics across the democratising world.

Ethnicity, or its impolite synonym tribalism, is an elusive concept. It was used among early anthropologists 'as a heuristic category... with only intuitive meanings attached to it,' but later attempts at a more concrete definition proved to be 'not enlightening' (Ekeh 1975, 662). As used in the literature, ethnicity refers to feelings of attachment to an 'imagined community' at the subnational level, a community often defined in terms of common language, history, culture, or political systems (for a review of this large body of works, see Lentz 1995). Ethnicity may or may not come with discriminatory attitudes towards outsiders. John Lonsdale (1994) argues that the most contentious issues relating to ethnicity has to do with struggles over what it means to be a good member of particular ethnic communities.

This paper is a first stab at a much broader project aimed at theorising citizenship in Ghana. For such an endeavour, perhaps the most apposite starting point is ethnicity, because ethnicity is widely understood to be the mortal enemy of a true civic orientation. My purpose in this paper is simple; I seek to measure the strength of national attachment in Ghana, and the effect of ethnicity on this attachment. To do this, I frame the problem more generally, asking: what is the impact of alternative group loyalties on national attachment? To answer this question, I select five forms of identifications whose salience can be theorised as directly in competition with the state for the loyalties of citizens.

I deploy qualitative and historical data to give substance and texture to the statistical findings. In particular, I emphasise the importance of a historical perspective on citizenship and identification. This is important because a key weakness of scholarship on national

belonging in Africa has been the ‘tend[ency] to foreshorten historical time and to privilege the present at the expense of the past’ (Hunter 2016b, 1). Examining the ways in which ‘basic assumptions about moral rights and obligations’ (Owusu 1989, 373; Lonsdale 1994) are embedded in local cultures helps to understand the ways in which national belonging is imagined and performed.

In what follows, I review the literature on ethnicity, focusing specifically on its theorised relationship with national identification. I then turn to the main empirical data, a survey of university students conducted in March and April 2017 in Ghana. Results from descriptive analysis support recent findings about the declining salience of ethnicity in Ghana. However, the effect of ethnicity on national attachment is counterintuitive. Conceptually, I find that individualistic orientations undermined national attachment, while collectivistic orientations boosted it. Thereafter, I use qualitative and archival data to expatiate on the statistical results, and evaluate prevailing theories of ethnic and national identification.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: ETHNICITY AND THE NATION STATE IN AFRICA**

At independence, African leaders felt the heavy weight of the responsibilities they were inheriting from departing colonial administrators. Radical economic transformation was necessary to ‘catch up’ with the West. But they feared that their state-building agenda risked being jeopardised by the persistence of strong subnational attachments. There was the need to transform their people from parochial ‘tribesmen’ to cosmopolitan citizens, to enlarge their vistas to accommodate the diversity of peoples who now composed these new nations. At the All-African Peoples Conference held on 5-13 December 1958 in Accra, it was declared that ‘tribalism’ was an ‘obstacle’ in the way of ‘the unity... the political evolution... (and) the rapid liberation of Africa’ (quoted in Sklar 1960, 493).

This anxiety was also shared by scholars. The literature can be broadly classified into modernisation (classic and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation) and colonial legacy explanations (Eifert, Miguel, and Posner 2010; Robinson 2014). Modernisation theorists argued that with economic and social development, narrow ethnic sentiments would eventually wither away, while their dependency theory-style counterparts attributed the intensity of subnational allegiances to the legacies of colonialism.

Modernisation theory was developed from structural functionalism. Drawing on the works of European theorists like Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies, structural functionalism was a theoretical behemoth totalistic in its reach. In *The Division of Labour in*

*Society*, Durkheim (1893) proposes a theory of social change from simple, small-scale societies based on mechanical solidarity – bonds of attachment arising from shared norms – to more complex societies held together by organic solidarity – social bonds based on interdependence. Whereas mechanical solidarity was essentially an automatic emotional response, organic solidarity was reasoned and deliberate. Tönnies labels the two ends of this evolutionary continuum *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). Using contradictory terminology but espousing the same logic, Tönnies (1955, 74) argues that *Gemeinschaft* relationships are those that organically sprang out of ties of blood and land. On the other hand, the *Gesellschaft* represents an ‘artificial construction,’ a ‘superficial’ entity and one held together by the sole medium of instrumental calculation. He, therefore, argues that ‘[a]ccordingly, *Gemeinschaft* (community) should be understood as a living organism, *Gesellschaft* (society) as a mechanical aggregate and artefact’ (Tönnies 1955, 39).

Talcott Parsons, the formidable structural functionalist, details out the conceptual distinctions between traditional and modern societies in an elaborate theoretical framework. These he summarised in the famous pattern variables, a set of five dichotomous variables ‘focused on the relational aspect of the role structure of the social system’ (Parsons 1991, 43 [1951]). The binary oppositions of the pattern variables projected an image of traditional societies as parochial in contrast to the cosmopolitanism of modern societies. Modernisation was going to deliver traditional peoples from the shackles of their own irrational affections and prejudices. Parsons (1991, 137) argued that traditional societies are characterised by a collectivistic outlook, modern societies by an individualistic one.

In the meantime, urban sociologists, especially in the Chicago School, were using the city as a laboratory to test out the ideas of the classical thinkers. Titles like ‘Urbanism as a Way of Life’ provided empirically rich descriptions of the theorised effects of modernisation on the individual. However, contrary to Durkheimian optimism, many early students of the city noticed a lack of community, resulting in debilitating effects on social and political participation (Zorbaugh 1983 [1929]). There was growing bifurcation in cities along lines of class, ethnicity, and lifestyle. Du Bois was one of the earliest scholars to recognise the devastating consequences that residential segregation, along racial lines, could engender (Du Bois and Eaton 1899). Contrary to earlier assumptions that affectivity would give way to rationalism in urban areas, Du Bois’ studies proves that some of those sentiments were actually intensified, sometimes perversely so. Studies at the turn of the twentieth century illustrated the resilience of primordial attachments with the failure of races to mix in most urban centres of America, resulting in what Massey and Denton (1993) call an *American*

*Apartheid*. The promised affective neutrality and universalism proclaimed by Parsons in the pattern variables had failed to be realised in the quintessential *Gesellschaft*.

Nevertheless, modernisation theorists, clutching to insights from structural functionalism and wielding the faith that moves mountains of contradictory evidence, ventured into newly independent countries with prescriptions for welding together into unified states their motley collections of ethnic groups. What these countries needed to do was to lose their traditional orientations and they would be on the highway to development. Rostow (1959, 7), for instance, believes that the development of a national spirit was an important part of the precondition for take-off stage, since ‘a definitive political transformation’ can ‘[harness these] national energies, talents, and resources around the concrete tasks of economic growth’.

These scholars believed that with economic development, ethnic sentiments would fizzle out. Urbanisation, industrialisation, and the widening of wage employment were going to be crucial elements in this process. Wage employment would reduce reliance on ethnic networks for access to agricultural land. This, together with industrialisation, would pull villagers into towns and cities, forcing them to interact with people of all ethnicities. This would lead to greater tolerance and the development of a national orientation (Robinson 2014). Moreover, investment in massive developmental projects by the state would call forth from within the hearts of the citizenry affection and loyalty. For their part, nationalist politicians also embarked on deliberate campaigns and projects to generate feelings of attachment to the state. Some scholars pointed out that these processes were yielding mixed results. For instance, Cohen (1969) found that in some instances, urbanisation weakened ethnic attachments while in others, ethnic sentiments were intensified; processes he referred respectively to as *detrribalisation* and *retribalisation*. Sometimes, there was even the phenomenon of *supertribalisation*, where related ethnic groups combined in urban settings to form umbrella associations (Rouch 1956).

Not all scholars of ethnicity in Africa were worried, though. Richard Sklar’s provocatively titled paper, ‘The Contribution of Tribalism to Nationalism in Western Nigeria,’ is an example. He argues that without the pantribalism which gave ‘impetus to the growth of mass political parties...[t]he British Government would not, in principle, have transferred power’ to the leaders of the nationalist struggle (Sklar 1960, 493, 502). Immanuel Wallerstein (1960) also argues that ethnic mobilisation was a necessary step towards the ultimate destination of exclusive national attachment. Invoking Parsons’ pattern variables, he argues that tribalisation was a positive development because it reduced the salience of familial

ties, which he considered more damaging to national attachment than ethnicity. Echoing Robert Banfield's (1958) then prevailing notion of 'amoral familism,' he argues that family attachments compels one to focus on a very narrow sphere of life, whereas ethnic allegiances orient the affections towards a much larger, more diffuse, more abstract social sphere, ultimately embracing the entire nation.<sup>1</sup> From this standpoint, ethnic politics was never a threat, because it mobilised individuals to participate in national life.

After decades of political and economic stagnation in Africa, including divisive political crisis and ethnically-linked violence, most scholars could not afford Sklar and Wallerstein's optimism. Nevertheless, a group of scholars, exhibiting admirable theoretical fidelity, decided it was time to revise rather than reject modernisation theory. These scholars, nicknamed 'second-generation modernisation' theorists by Eifert *et al* (2010), advocated an instrumentalist conception of ethnicity. They no longer saw the disappearance of ethnic identification as an inevitable consequence of development. Instead, they argued that rather than dampen ethnic sentiments, the politics of development could actually make these subnational identifications more salient, as communities and groups struggled to control access to state resources.

Colonial legacy explanations, on the other hand, lay the blame on colonialism. Arbitrary colonial boundaries are said to have laid the foundation for intractable interethnic tensions by cobbling together diverse and sometimes antagonistic ethnic groups, resulting in suspicion and tensions in the new states (Young 1979). Furthermore, they claim that the cynical manipulation of ethnic identities by colonial administrators, in their quest to entrench colonial power, exacerbated ethnic tensions. This argument draws on the famous 'invention of tradition' thesis. In their attempts to bolster the authority of traditional leaders with whom they collaborated, colonial regimes sought to clearly define customs and identities, in the process freezing identities which had been marked by fluidity in the past. This was reinforced by nationalist politicians in the ensuing power struggles at the dawn of independence (Ekeh 1975).

The quantitative literature on ethnicity has not taken advantage of advances made in the study of ethnicity since *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012 [1983]). Scholars in history and anthropology have moved beyond top-down notions of 'invention' to argue that transformation in ethnic identities was an endeavour which could not have been dominated by colonial officials. Colonial initiatives were challenged or abetted by different

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<sup>1</sup> Wallerstein did not directly quote Banfield.

actors in colonial societies, as they struggled to secure their perceived interests (Berry 1992; Lentz 1995; Spear 2003). Ranger, the author of the Africa chapter in *The Invention*, has since recanted his position, and has suggested that scholars should shift from a focus on ‘invention’ to one of ‘imagination’, in acknowledgement of the realisation that official colonial attempts were simply one out of many endeavours to remake ethnic identities; and that, in contrast to ‘invention,’ imagination acknowledges the contingencies that characterised outcomes of official attempts (Ranger 1993).

Scholars have also moved beyond a static view of identities. Instead, they see them as constantly shifting principles by which people relate to one another, and which are perpetually adjusted in response to given situations. In the Gold Coast, although plans by colonial officials to imprint fixity and stability on mercurial social conditions ‘could nowhere be translated into practice,’ local chiefs tried to ‘appropriate’ these official colonial idioms in a bid to entrench their own power (Lentz 2000, 116–17). The shifting meanings of ethnicity have continued into the postcolonial period. In her study on politics and ethnicity in Ghana, Naomi Chazan (1982) observes that in practice, ethnicity could mean anything from language groups, to communities, to administrative regions, depending on the matter at hand.

These insights have not been incorporated into most quantitative studies on ethnicity in Africa. Even when not drawing on an crudely essentialist or primordial conception of ethnicity, these studies have largely proceeded on the assumption that ethnicity is a category that has objective stability and can be accurately measured (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2013; Miguel 2004; Miguel and Gugerty 2005; Nunn 2008). It is necessary to guard against the assumption of stability or even objective existence of these identities, and to instead investigate how actors think about themselves in relation to these identities.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

To examine the impact of ethnicity on national identification, I ask a more general question: what is the impact of potentially competing group identifications on national attachment? In addition to ethnicity, I include religion. Mustapha (1986) points out that religion can, under certain circumstances, be an equally salient mode of attachment. Under colonial rule, religion became an instrument of protest. In West Africa, churches were Africanised and the theologies of sects like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, were appropriated into potent weapons of colonial resistance (Hodgkin 1956). I also include professional identities; if modernisation theory is correct, we should expect greater salience of professional identities to result in

greater national attachment. Pan-African identity, while not a subnational attachment, could potentially detract from the loyalty which citizens would otherwise offer the state. There are some overlaps between the selected forms of identifications and other measures in the literature, like Eifert and colleagues' (2010, 497).<sup>2</sup>

Since the dynamics between these forms of allegiance and national identification are seen as a zero-sum game, I propose the following hypothesis: *Greater levels of attachment to non-state identities would result in lower levels of attachment to the state.* Secondly, we can expect from the Durkheimian assumptions underlying modernisation theory, that *greater attachment to a professional identity would result in greater national attachment.*

This paper is mainly based on data from a survey administered to 996 students at the University of Ghana and Ghana Institute of the Management and Professional Administration between March and April 2017. Questionnaires were administered to students at both undergraduate and graduate levels. This is admittedly unrepresentative. Nevertheless, the views of students are important, because they are the section of the population whose daily rounds of activities, give them the greatest exposure to the legitimating ideologies of the state. In addition, they constitute 'the political and economic elite' in its embryonic form, which 'makes their ideas on citizenship especially relevant' (Godefroidt, Langer, and Meuleman 2016, 7–8). Since this survey is not nationally representative, I use data from the Wave 6 of the nationally representative Afrobarometer survey (2015), a dataset of 2400 respondents, to get a sense of how closely attitudes of my sample respondents approach national averages. I further contextualise the quantitative findings using qualitative data from ongoing interviews, and I historicise them by using archival materials and the rich historical and anthropological stock of knowledge on mutations of ethnic identities.

### ***Dependent variable***

The dependent variable is national attachment. I define this as the sum of citizens' emotional responses towards the state. National attachment is an amalgam of different sentiments. To measure this concept, the questionnaire included a battery of questions regarding; 1) sense of belonging, 2) national pride, 3) sense of having a personal stake in the country, 4) willingness to die for the country, and 5) a self-rated sense of patriotism. Respondents were presented with a set of statements (see Figure 1 below) and asked to indicate the extent of their agreement on a Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly

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<sup>2</sup> Their list of salient identities includes ethnic, religion, class/occupation, gender, and a miscellaneous category labelled "other."



disagree), with 3 as a neutral midpoint. To make for intuitive interpretation I reverse-coded the Likert items.

Feelings of national pride and national belonging were high among the sampled students (4.38 and 4.30 respectively, out of a maximum of 5). Self-professed sense of patriotism and a sense of having a personal stake in the country were only slightly lower (4.1 and 3.9 respectively). In spite of this clear sense of national loyalty, respondents balked at the idea of sacrificing their lives for the country. Figure 1 shows that ‘dying for the country,’ falls below the mid-point line indicating a small degree of disagreement with the statement.

[Figure 1 here]

Most studies attempting to measure national attachment use the Linz-Moreno question. This question asks respondents to place themselves on an identification scale that ranges from ‘solely ethnic’ to ‘solely national,’ with a midpoint indicating equal ‘ethnic and national identification.’ Exclusive use of the Linz-Moreno question to measure the relative salience of ethnic or national attachment makes it impossible to independently measure the salience of each of these identifications (Guinjoan and Rodon 2015). I address this weakness by generating a new measure of national attachment. To do this, I combine the individual national sentiment questions into a composite variable as a measure of national attachment (Cronbach’s alpha, 0.79). I give twice more weight to willingness to sacrifice and a sense of having a stake in the country, because these two items indicate a more intense, and possibly action-oriented component, of national sentiment than the three other more notional components.

### ***Independent variables***

Due to the design of the survey, education was naturally controlled for. The ages of respondents range from 17 to 64 years, with a mean of 21.6 years. The other demographic variables are summarised in Table 1 below. Females made up just over 51% of the sample. Because of the youthfulness of the sample, most were single. In terms of partisan distribution, the governing New Patriotic Party (NPP) enjoys 43.4% support among students, with the main opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) commanding only 11.6%. The support of the smaller parties combined is negligible, a reflection of the *de facto* two-party character of Ghanaian electoral politics. The share of support of the two main parties in the sample also reflects recent national trends. In the 2016 general elections, the NPP swept the votes in all university campuses in the country.

[Table 1 here]

The main independent variables measure the relative salience of the selected identities: religion, ethnicity, profession/education, family, and Pan-African identity. The preamble to this set of questions closely follows the wording of the Moreno question in the Afrobarometer survey. The questionnaire presented respondents with a hypothetical choice scenario and asked: Would you consider any of the options below more important than being Ghanaian? Responses ranged from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’, with a ‘neutral’ middle category. I also asked questions measuring participation in civic life (voting, voluntary group membership, and protesting) as control variables.

Figure 2 below graphically represents the mean scores of the variables (identification variables are the first five bars on the right). Family attachment is the most salient (4.34), whereas the ethnic group has the least salience relative to national identification. In fact, the ethnic score of 2.97 is evidence of a tiny mean disinclination among the students to choose ethnic over national identity. All other forms of identification – religion, studies/profession, pan-African – are above the neutral midpoint line.

[Figure 2 here]

The low salience of ethnic scores is consistent with findings from the nationally representative Afrobarometer survey (see Figure 3 below). Eleven percent of all respondents in that survey chose a predominantly ethnic attachment in response to the survey’s Moreno question. The comparable figure for tertiary students in that sample was almost 8%. In another study of Ghanaian university students, Godefroidt *et al* (2016) found a similar pattern of responses to their Moreno question. They also found what to them was a puzzling observation, that Ghanaian students’ conception of citizenship was a combination of both ethnic and civic elements.

[Figure 3 here]

The other independent variables in my survey data are measures of participation in national life. Voting is the most popular form of civic engagement, but national level elections

(3.9) far outweighed local level elections (2.96) in importance. Participation in local level elections actually shows a slight disinclination. The trend of disinclination was much more obvious in all the other measures of participation. Demonstrations and protests are the most unpopular civic acts among my respondents, even though universities are generally hotbeds of unrests and protests (Balsvik 1998).

[Figure 4 here]

The Afrobarometer survey shows a similar trend of participation across different spheres of civic action. As shown in Figure 4 above, electoral participation remains by far the most popular civic act. Other forms of civic engagement, associational life and contact with leaders remain low. Participation in direct forms of civic protest among Afrobarometer respondents remain as low as it was with my student sample.

### **FINDINGS**

For the analysis, I created dummy variables for the five identification questions. ‘Agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ were coded 1 (‘Yes’), and remaining response categories were coded 0 (‘No’). I also created dummies for sex (with ‘Male’ as reference category) and party affiliation (NDC, NPP, and Neutral). Figure 5 graphically represents the results of the OLS regression prediction of the strength of national attachment as a function of other forms of identification. Model 1 includes only the estimated effects of the main independent variables. Religion, African, and ethnic identities have positive effects, while the effects of studies/profession and family are negative. All of these effects are significant at the 0.01 alpha level, with the exception of ‘Africa’ and ‘Religion,’ which are significant at the 0.05 level. This finding rejects the modernisation theory-inspired hypothesis that leads us to predict an inverse relationship between ethnicity and national attachment. It also rejects another modernisation theory hypothesis that a positive relationship should exist between professional identification and national attachment.

[Figure 5 here]

Although the Afrobarometer survey does not contain a directly comparable question, we can infer from other questions, if not confirmation, at least some confidence that the

causal direction of ethnicity here is not due to random error. To gauge tolerance, Afrobarometer respondents are asked to answer a battery of question about attitudes towards having certain social groups as neighbours. Only 4.1% of national respondents expressed discomfort at having non-ethnic neighbours. As can be seen from Figure 6 below, more university students (11.3%) actually expressed aversion for members of other ethnic groups. Moreover, these attitudes appear to be independent of the strength of ethnic attachment. The second chart in Figure 6 compares respondents whose identities were mainly ethnic (see Fig 3 above) and the full Afrobarometer sample. In both groups, tolerance for non-ethnics was overwhelming, at more than 90%.

[Figure 6 here]

After adding demographic controls to my regression model, the effect sizes do not change much. There is a small increase in the effect of religion and slight decreases in the effects for familial, African, and ethnic identities. However, the effect sizes and direction of these demographic variables are interesting in their own right. Being single results in a large decrease in national attachment, and partisan neutrality, rather than partisanship, negatively affects national attachment. However, none of these demographic variables was significant. The full model includes the variables for civic participation. All have positive effects except participation in public protest, which is also significant. Including participation controls only slightly reduces the impact of the identification variables.

On examination would render these findings less surprising. Levstik and Groth (2005) found in a study of high school students in Ghana, that ethnic salience was not incompatible with intense expressions of nationalism. Among the students in their study, ethnic histories fed into, rather than detracted from national histories. They argue that this attitude was important in fostering tolerance for ethnic diversity among these students.

Similar sentiments were expressed by respondents in ongoing qualitative interviews I am conducting as part of this project.<sup>3</sup> My respondents repeatedly made reference to the colonial origins of the country, a fact which made them keenly alive to the responsibility that ‘we’ve got to find a way to life together.’ Thus, in their definitions of Ghanaianess, their first

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<sup>3</sup> This qualitative component of the study is being conducted using a theoretical sampling method which is marked by an iterative approach to data collection and analysis. The process commenced in a two-fold process: 1) follow-up interviews with participants in the survey, and 2) interviews with prominent or influential public personalities, such as journalists. As the study progresses, further data collection will be informed by emerging insights from the initial set of data being collected. Thus far, about twelve interviews have been conducted.

impulse was to resort to the legal stipulations: possession of Ghanaian passports, birth certificates, and the like. A musician, Odo Nkooa,<sup>4</sup> said that the essence of Ghanaianess ‘is just a piece of paper left by the British.’ When they referred to cultural ingredients of the Ghanaian identity, this reference was always vague. It was only upon further probing that they mentioned specific cultural norms and practices, such as peculiarities of speech or greetings, themselves not exclusively Ghanaian traits.

Like the respondents in Levstik and Groth’s study, my respondents tended to see no contradiction between a strong ethnic and national identification. They warned about the dangers of sliding into bigotry and assuming airs of superiority, but in itself, they found nothing wrong with celebrating one’s ethnicity. Indeed, journalist Naa Oyo confessed that a sense of ethnic belonging came more naturally to her than national identification. As she said, ‘I don’t struggle with what it means to be Asante. There’s a certain connection there that I don’t feel with being Ghanaian.’ This largely arose from her sense of the failures of the Ghanaian state to, as she so poetically put it, make her ‘feel like a *beloved*.’ This sentiment mirrors some scholarship of the Ghanaian state. The Ghanaian state has been described as ‘a pain disseminating rather than a welfare state’; as a reluctant or inefficient distributor of welfare benefits, but a generous dispenser of pain (Anyimadu 2006, 5). Jonathan Frimpong-Ansah (1991) has given Ghana the bloodcurdling soubriquet, *Vampire State*.

### ***Individualistic and Collectivistic Orientations***

The regression results seem to map onto an underlying pattern. The variables which presented negative effects (career, family, singlehood, and partisan neutrality) are variables that point to an underlying *individualistic orientation*. On the other hand (religion, Pan-African identity, ethnicity, and partisanship) all point towards a *collectivistic orientation*. Recognising the underlying pattern removes the surprise that might have been occasioned by the positive effect of ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>

The most telling evidence comes from the predicted values for marital status and political affiliation (Figure 7). As we should expect from the direction of the regression results, marriage and widowhood yield positive predictions. Divorce generates an even greater negative effect than singlehood. This again is confirmation of the inference that it is individualistic orientation that is driving the effects; for divorce is evidence of a strong self-

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<sup>4</sup> The respondents’ names used in this paper are all pseudonyms.

<sup>5</sup> However, since the effects of partisanship are not statistically significant, we cannot say much about its effect beyond the observation that they provide a straw-in-the-wind proof for the individualistic-collectivistic pattern which I discern in the data.

assertive spirit, especially in a social context where marriage is so highly valued. We find a similar pattern for partisan affiliation. The predicted probabilities for the ruling and all the important opposition parties are also positive, even though there is reason to assume that membership in an opposition party could weaken national attachment. It is actually partisan neutrality which yields a negative prediction. This evidence is important because non-partisanship is often touted as evidence of closer identification with the nation-state, and is accorded greater normative value than the supposed divisiveness of partisanship.<sup>6</sup>

[Figure 7 here]

My in-depth interviews provide further qualitative evidence for the inferred underlying pattern. Respondents repeatedly mentioned ethnic belonging as an important component of their senses of national identity. Naa Oyo, who reports a high salience of her ethnic identification, claims, nevertheless, to hold both national and ethnic identifications harmoniously: ‘I can be both Asante and Ghanaian.’ Much of her notions of belonging came from her father, whom she describes as being ‘pro-Ghana, pro-CPP, pro-Asante.’<sup>7</sup> It is telling that all three identifications – country, political party, ethnic group – fall on the collectivistic end of the orientation scale. He inculcated in her the importance of all these forms of belonging because, she said, ‘society mattered to him.’ It is clear here, as I have also shown in the analysis of the statistical results, that the collectivistic orientation which underpins ethnic identification, is what also underpins attachment to the state. The expectation of modernisation theorists that nationalistic identities would supplant ethnic loyalties, is contradicted by this data. Even more importantly, my study shows that both forms of identifications are underlaid by the same collectivistic orientation.

### **SOCIAL ROOTEDNESS<sup>8</sup>: TOWARDS A THEORY OF ETHNICITY AND NATIONAL ATTACHMENT**

In spite of their other differences, modernisation and colonial legacy theories agree on the perverse effects of ethnicity on national attachment. Both versions of modernisation theory conceive of the relationship between ethnic and national identifications as a zero-sum game.

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<sup>6</sup> The Ghana Freedom Party and the Great Consolidated People’s Party are insignificant parties with comical leaders, and we can assume that support for these parties indicates a dismissive attitude towards the state.

<sup>7</sup> CPP, the Convention People’s Party, is the party of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president.

<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to Kofi Blankson Ocansey for this phrase.

Even Sklar and Wallerstein view ethnicity as simply help-along-the-way, a catalyst which will self-obliterate after performing its good works. They assume that with the transition from tradition to modernity, ethnic identification would atrophy. It was that misunderstanding that led Godefroidt and colleagues (2016), finding that Ghanaian students had both ethnic and civic conceptions of citizenship, to describe these conceptions as ‘postmodern.’ I will argue below that there is nothing postmodern about it; and, further, that this phenomenon is not even new.

Durkheim’s theory of the relationship between mechanical and organic solidarity has been hugely influential with modernisation scholars in spite of the fact that in *The Division of Labour*, there appears to be a lack of clarity about the actual nature of these solidarities. On the one hand, Durkheim argues that solidarity based on interdependence and self-interest, was going to totally supplant the prevailing primordial moralities which underlaid solidarities in traditional societies. On the other hand, he recognised that in addition to associational/occupational ethics and complex division of labour, there was still a need for a more generalised morality, drawing from the traditional order, to hold modern societies together (for an extended discussion of this criticism, see Pope and Johnson 1983). Thus, the agonistic conception of the relationship between organic and mechanism solidarity is problematic.

Colonial legacy arguments, on the other hand, place the blame for ethnicity’s damaging effect on the hubristic imposition of colonial boundaries, and on the cynical manipulation of apparent ethnic differences by colonial authorities in their quest to maintain control. Moreover, the ‘importedness’ of the state itself in postcolonial societies, the argument goes, has resulted in estranged state-society relations. Badie and Birnbaum (1983, 99) claim that ‘to this day the “state” is no more than an imported artifact in both Africa and Asia, a pale copy of utterly alien European social and political systems, a foreign body that is not only inefficient and a burden on society but also a fomenter of violence.’ But such arguments can be taken to extremes by scholars of ethnicity in postcolonial countries. Rather than being a starting point of an empirical examination, it ends up foreclosing close scrutiny. The underlying assumption is that colonialism motivated people to look inward into their ethnic groups, rather than outwards to the emerging state.

But there is limited evidence for the proposition that an ‘organic’ state would be more acceptable to its people than an ‘imposed or imported’ one. Historically, the emergence of states has been marked by struggles. Theories of state formation in Europe highlight the formative role of (figurative) banditry (Olson 1993), coercion, and violence (Tilly 1985 likens

the process to organised crime). Similarly, colonialism created deep social fractures, but those fractures subsequently became strategic spaces for negotiations. In the history of the Gold Coast, there were moments of protests and agitation, and there were moments of cooperation. With the consolidation of colonial rule, educated elite and traditional rulers jostled for influence in the emerging juridical order. Commoners did not remain passive in this process either.

Colonial regimes were oppressive and violent, but they often also were convenient weapons in ongoing social struggles among the colonised populations (Spear 2003). Many of the vulnerable sections of the colonial population appealed to administrators for redress against trammels of the traditional political order. Petitions against specific customs became arenas where commoners (strategically) praised the colonial regime and poured out their aversion for the status quo. This was the case even in the Asante Kingdom, where resistance to British colonial incursions was strongest and lasted the longest. For instance, a petition against death taxes claimed among other things that:

Since the British Government came into existence in Ashanti, we have seen the welfare of the nation, everybody getting his daily bread, and besides fine buildings have been erected in Ashanti. The only thing is that in olden days whenever any body died the king or chief seized the whole of the deceased's properties, while the deceased's families were living. This brought the downfall of the Ashanti nation...<sup>9</sup>

Commoners also appealed to colonial authorities on more mundane matters. Many of these have to do with extortion in the customary courts. In response to an apparent complaint by an aggrieved litigant, the Berekumhene received a letter of reproach from his district provincial administrator chiding him that: '[b]ecause you have power to charge up to sixteen pounds it is not necessary you should always do so.'<sup>10</sup> Looking beyond the cavalier tone in which colonial officials addressed these traditional rulers, it can be seen that commoners felt they could be given protection by these officials. In response to an apparent attempt by the Bechemhene to force the return of a subject, a commissioner, after speaking to the woman in question, informed the chief that 'she was contended and would return to Bechem when she wishes to do so.'<sup>11</sup>

The same dynamic could be observed in the Gold Coast Colony proper. A woman requesting the dissolution of her marriage due to abuse was refused by Nene Mate Kole of

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<sup>9</sup> Petition Against Death Duties, reproduced in Arhin (1974, 152).

<sup>10</sup> Letter IX reproduced in Arhin (1971a).

<sup>11</sup> Letter XVIII reproduced in Arhin (Arhin 1971a).



Eastern Krobo, who insisted she returned to her husband. In a tone less abrupt but no less condescending, the commissioner wrote thus to the King:

Whether her statement is true or not I can not tell, one thing I know that nowadays people use to tell plenty lies. But in my own opinion, I think it better to beg to allow or to please to call Dogoro [her husband] to get his money back and free the woman. No any good words or threatening could persuade this woman to go back to Dogoro from what I have seen....

P.S. if the woman said you refused to listen to her, that is not bad, it is our general rule to resist such women first & try to advice them to live peaceable with husbands. But if we see that they are not controllable we allow them to do what they choose.<sup>12</sup>

It would appear that vulnerable sections of the population found in the presence of the colonial government an opportunity to rebel against aspects of the prevailing social order they found intolerable. The notion that the African state, because of its colonial origins, automatically invokes the hostility of citizens is based more on logic than on evidence. On this question, it would seem that academics and politicians have projected their own anxieties and misgivings about the state onto the general population. An emerging body of scholarship on the dynamics of colonialism have started to show that the widely accepted dichotomy between citizenship and subjecthood is simplistic and precludes serious analysis of the negotiations over rights and belonging (Hunter 2016a; for a famous statement of this dichotomy, see Mamdani 1996). Arguments like Berman's (2010, 11; for a well-known statement of the dichotomy, see Mamdani 1996) that colonialism led to an erosion of trust to the extent that '[t]here was little basis for the development of impersonal systemic trust in the state as the impersonal arbiter of conflict or as an honest and disinterested distributor of public resources' are not tenable.

This does not mean that colonial officials necessarily went out of their way to provide succour to the afflicted. Commoners had comparatively more favourable attitudes towards colonial governments because of the opportunities they provided to escape certain constraints of the precolonial status quo, but preoccupied with maintaining order and control, administrators chose to side with traditional rulers who were more interested in the consolidation, or reinstating, of their own powers (Arhin 1974; Rathbone 1996; Wilks 2000). It is such ironies which have led scholars like Dorward (1974) to describe colonial dynamics as a 'working misunderstanding'. Colonial regimes presented opportunities for social groups to resist some aspects of the prevailing social order, even if they might have found the colonial regime itself problematic in other respects. Taking a long term view of responses to

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<sup>12</sup> SC 17/17, COMMISSIONER to Mate Kole, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1901

political transformations, Raufu Mustapha (1998, 222) argues that '[i]ndependence was conceived [by African peasants and commoners] as yet another "era", comparable to previous "eras": the era of this or that traditional ruler, the era of the whiteman, the era of civilian politicians and the era of military rulers.' Like seasons, these eras come and go, each with its opportunities and constraints, and so not to be totally embraced or uncritically repudiated.

Second, inter-ethnic tension isn't the whole story. Recent scholarship has started revisiting interpretations of the precolonial past which have privileged warfare between states. In a recent paper, Karl Haas (2017) takes issue with interpretations of Asante-Dagbon relations which emphasize conquest and Asante control, showing that these 'have been greatly exaggerated' (p. 224). Indeed, there is sufficient historical evidence of inter-ethnic cooperation or co-existence before and during colonial rule. For instance, in his autobiography, *Milestones in the history of the Gold Coast*, Nii Kwabena Bonne (1953) describes himself as Mantse of Osu Alata (in Accra) and Oyokohene of Asante. That Kwabena Bonne could hold traditional leadership titles in both states point to the fluidity of notions of belonging before and during colonialism.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, many communities throughout the country have historically hosted 'stranger quarters or settlements.' Things were by no means always paradisiac and this arrangement came with its inevitable tensions and open conflicts. But these periods of conflict punctuated long periods of harmonious coexistence.<sup>14</sup> It was not uncommon for stranger quarters to be ultimately assimilated formally into the social and political structures of their hosts.

Patterns of economic relations, migration, and settlement often defied attempts by both colonial officials and traditional rulers to define or impose rigid ethnic identities. An interesting case is the attempt by Paramount King of Akyem Abuakwa, Nana Sir Ofori Atta to define a distinctive Akyem identity. This hegemonic attempt was countered by commoners. In a rich account of the ensuing drama, Rathbone (1996, 518) describes the role played by the *asafo*, which...:

...in all respects a profoundly Akan institution, was composed not only of Akyemfo commoners but also of Asante, Akuapems and, more strikingly, Ga and Northern residents of the kingdom. Accordingly it would seem fair to argue that Ofori Atta's agenda, which increasingly defined a[n Akyem] citizenship based upon something close to ethnicity, did not go uncontested. It seems fair to conclude that Ofori Atta's definition of citizenship presented his people with a heavier burden, the increasing obligations of being subjects, rather than expanding their access to rights. This

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<sup>13</sup> This was not unique to the Gold Coast. States and kingdoms have been enlarged through, for instance, marriage throughout history. Notions of belonging and identification have never been fixed in place.

<sup>14</sup> For two fascinating case studies, see Arhin (1971b) and Kobo (2010).

propensity allowed some unlikely bedfellows to emerge in the numerous struggles against the palace's attempts to centralize power in the kingdom.

Ethnicity is a fact of social life, a reflection of the human desire for social rootedness.

This rootedness, whether found in ethnic, religious, or national communities, does not automatically express itself in automatic antagonism to other communities. In fact, as Lonsdale (1994, 132) argues, '[e]thnicity is always with us; it makes us moral – and thus social - beings.' Moreover, as I have pointed out above, there was a pattern of interethnic relations before and during colonial rule. Thus, the notion that ethnic co-existence was suddenly going to be a problem in the newly independent states misrepresents the problem of post-colonial nation building, as was the corresponding view that the people needed to be tutored by their 'bettered brethren' who had acquired the precious gift of cosmopolitanism. These problematic assumptions, however, continue to inform much scholarship on ethnicity.

### CONCLUSION

Statistical analyses reported by this paper show that contrary to prevailing theoretical expectations, strong ethnic identification actually predicts stronger national attachment. I draw on qualitative and archival data to give flesh to the skeleton of the statistical findings. I argue that rather than being a zero-sum game, ethnic and national identifications are actually manifestations of the same underlying orientation. All the forms of identification which are collectivistic in orientation – ethnic, African, and religious – have positive effects on national orientations. On the other hand, individualistic orientations – family, career, and political neutrality – reduce the strength of national attachment (see Table 2 below).

[Table 2 here]

What does this mean, in practical terms, for contemporary problems of national unity? As noted in the introduction, anxieties about the negative effects of ethnicity pervade public discourse in Ghana and, indeed, in many other African states. In a public lecture, political scientist Kwame Ninsin (2008), expresses worry about how politics 'has tended towards tribalism,' warning that increasing salience of ethnic identities 'threatens stability and peace.'

Interethnic conflicts pose serious threats to national cohesion. At the same time, most local conflicts in Ghana have occurred not *between* but *within* ethnic groups. These conflicts have occurred over such matters as access to land or chieftaincy disputes (Tsikata and Seini 2004). And where there have been ethnically motivated political tensions or conflicts, the culprits have mostly been members of the elite class. Indeed Ninsin (2006, 5) has pointed out

elsewhere that ‘primordial identities like ethnicity and religion have become part of the ideology of domination by which the political class manipulates the electorate to enhance their electoral fortunes’ (see also Ekeh 1975). This contradiction of the caretaker turned offender was captured in Achebe’s (1984, 5) *The Trouble with Nigeria*:

I was an eye-witness to that momentous occasion when Chief Obafemi Awolowo “stole” the leadership of Western Nigeria from Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in broad daylight on the floor of the Western House of Assembly and sent the great Zik scampering back to the Niger “whence [he] came.” Someday when we shall have outgrown tribal politics, or when our children shall have done so, sober historians of the Nigerian nation will see that event as the abortion of a pan-Nigerian vision...

Ninsin (2006, 2) is even harsher in his general condemnation of the political class in Africa. He decries their ‘iconoclastic propensities,’ and blamed them for the implosion of the ‘institutions of self-government that the people had built during the struggle for independence.’ The object of Ninsin’s worry is what Lonsdale (1994) refers to as ‘political tribalism.’ Since ethnicity as such does not necessarily entail intergroup tensions or intolerance, nor indeed does it lie at the root of all conflicts in Africa, it is actually ‘political tribalism itself [which] always needs to be explained’ (Lonsdale 1994, 132). Even though some forms of ethnic tensions find social expression, these rarely achieve political salience unless it is capitalised on as a weapon in national struggles over resources. And since these struggles are wages between national elites, it is clear that they are the ones most in need of their own sermons on national integration which they direct to ‘the masses.’

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic variables

| <b>Variable</b>               |                  | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Age</b>                    | Mean             | 21.6          |                |
|                               | Range            | 17 - 64       |                |
| <b>Sex</b>                    | Female           | 498           | 51.2           |
|                               | Male             | 474           | 48.8           |
|                               |                  | <b>972</b>    | <b>100</b>     |
| <b>Marital status</b>         | Single           | 920           | 95.8           |
|                               | Married          | 35            | 3.6            |
|                               | Divorced         | 3             | 0.3            |
|                               | Widowed          | 2             | 0.2            |
|                               |                  | <b>960</b>    | <b>100</b>     |
| <b>Political affiliation*</b> | NPP              | 360           | 43.4           |
|                               | NDC              | 96            | 11.6           |
|                               | Neutral          | 332           | 40             |
|                               | PPP              | 28            | 3.4            |
|                               | CPP              | 6             | 0.6            |
|                               | GFP              | 2             | 0.2            |
|                               | GCPP             | 1             | 0.1            |
|                               | Other            | 1             | 0.1            |
|                               | Multiple parties | 3             | 0.4            |
|                               |                  | <b>829</b>    | <b>100</b>     |

\* NPP (New Patriotic Party), NDC (National Democratic Congress), PPP (Progressive People's Party), CPP (Convention People's Party), GFP (Ghana Freedom Party), GCPP (Great Consolidated Popular Party).

Table 2: Orientations and national attachment

| <b>Individualistic orientation</b> | <b>Collectivistic orientations</b> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Family                             | Religion                           |
| Career (profession/studies)        | Ethnic group                       |
| Partisan neutrality                | Pan-African identity               |



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Dimensions of national attachment

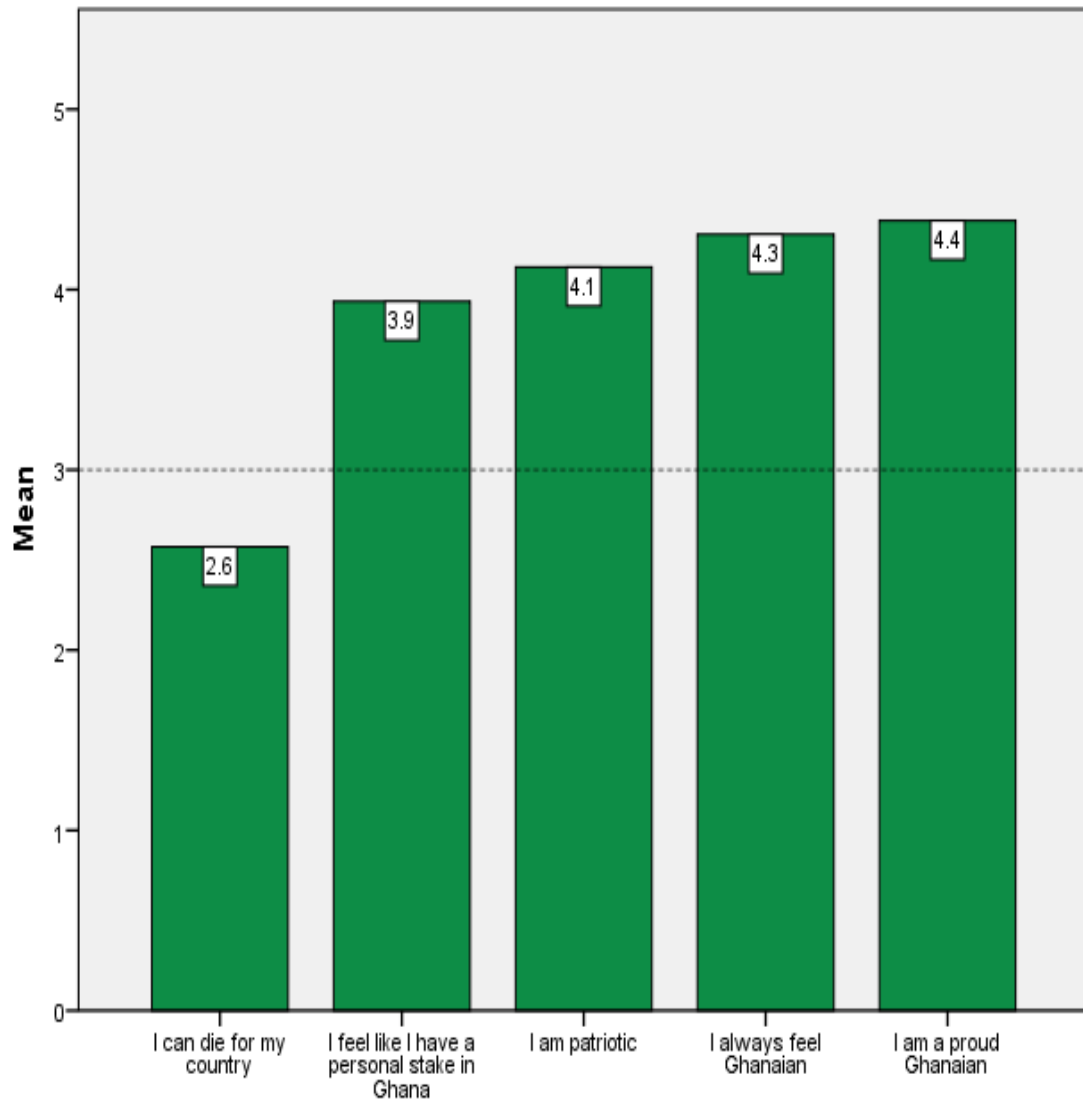


Figure 2: Independent variables

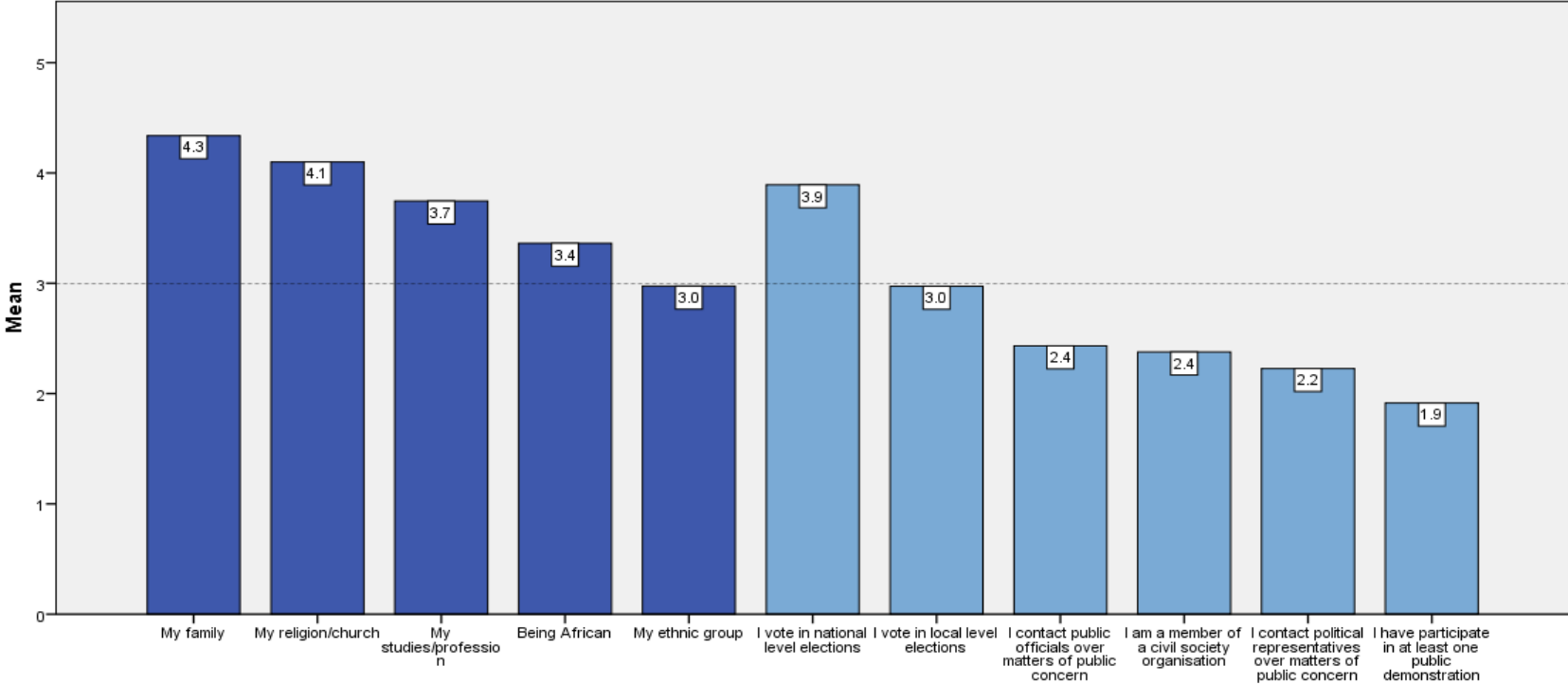
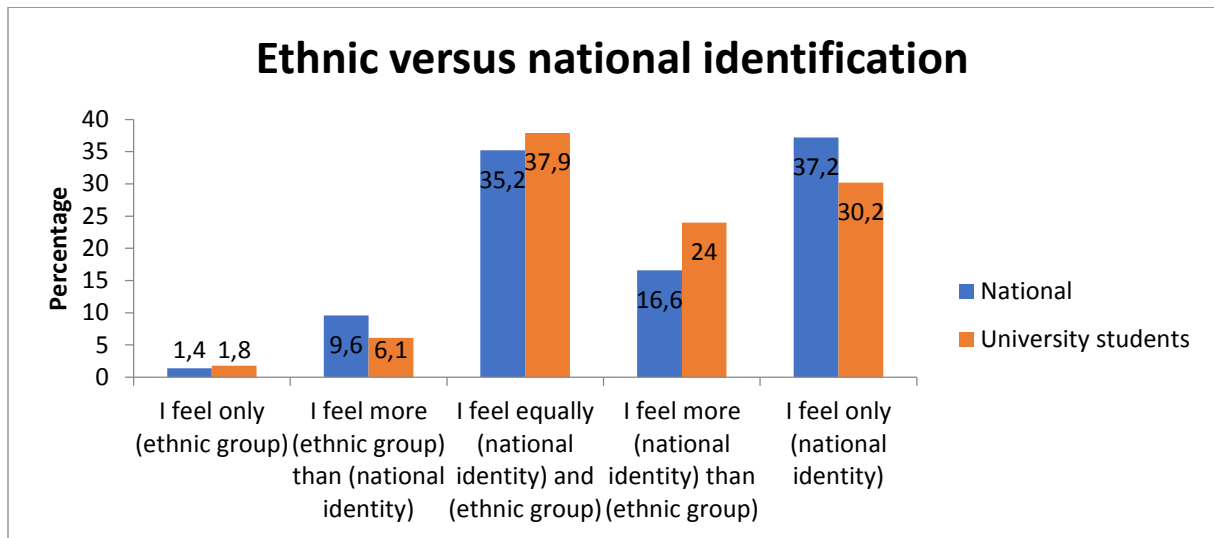
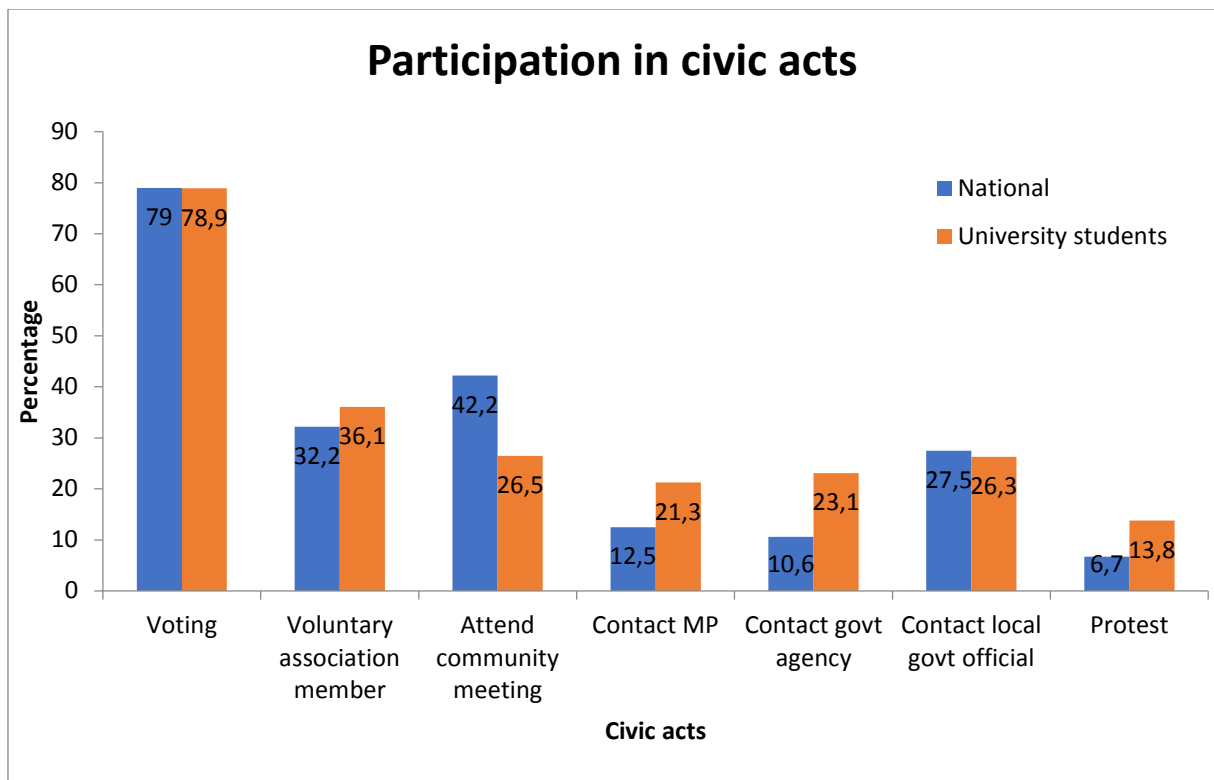


Figure 3: Ethnic versus national identification



Source: Afrobarometer R6

Figure 4: Participation in civic acts



Source: Afrobarometer R6

Figure 5: OLS predictions of strength of national attachment

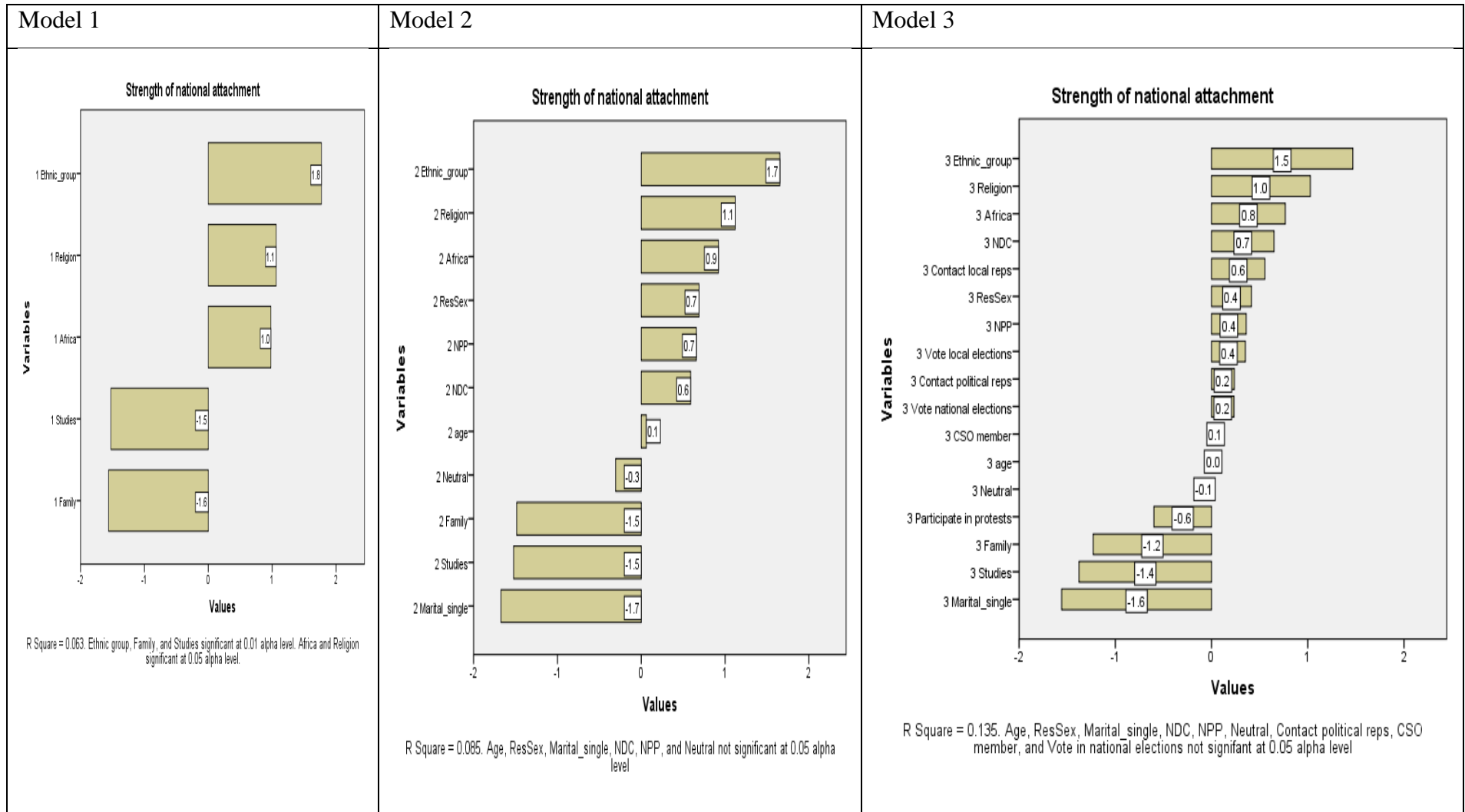
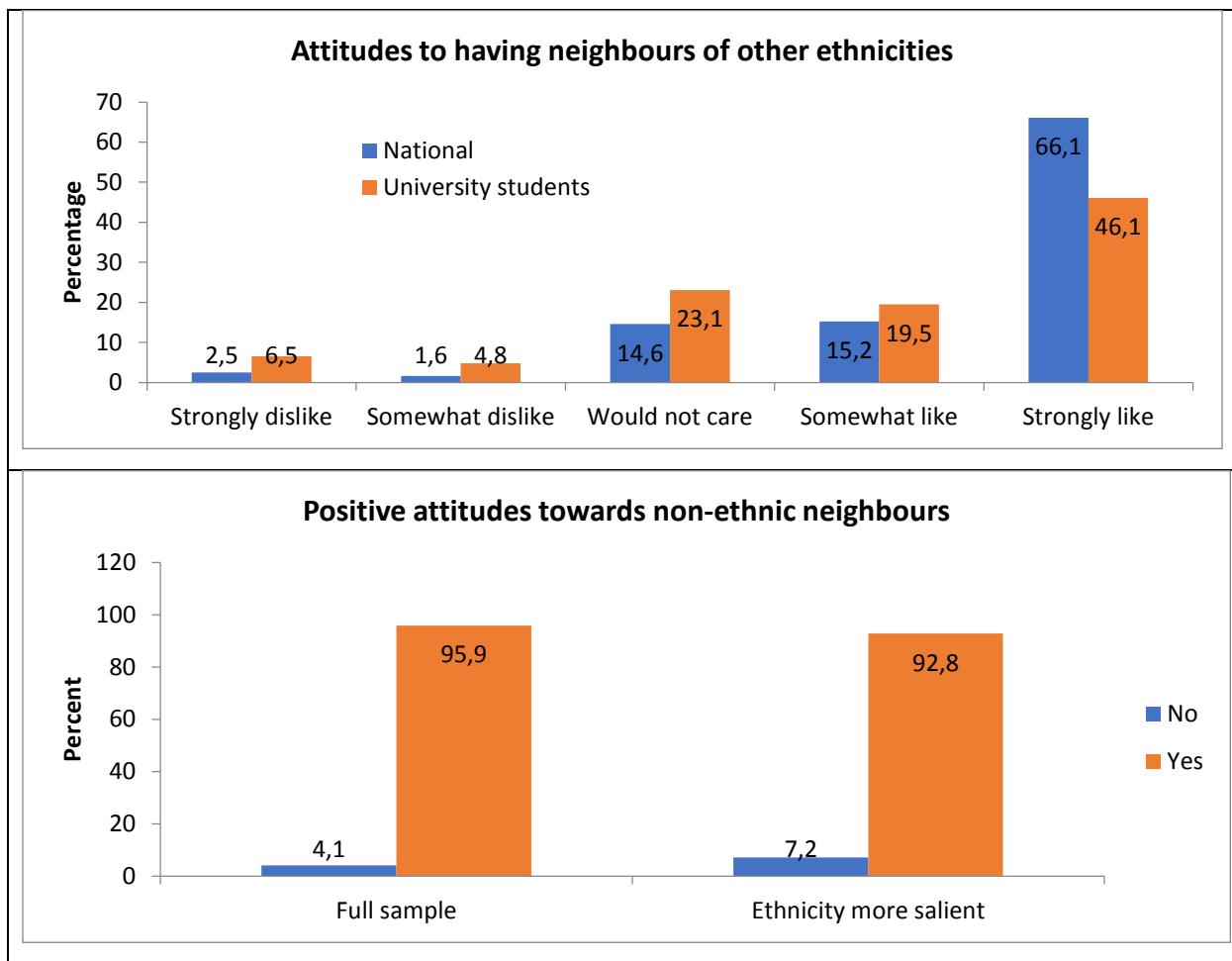


Figure 6: Attitudes to having non-ethnic or foreign neighbours



Source: Afrobarometer R6

Figure 7: Predicted probabilities for the dependent variable

