Working Paper No. 68

IDENTITY, INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

by Peter Lewis

A comparative series of national public attitude surveys on democracy, markets and civil society in Africa.

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AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS

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Identity, Institutions and Democracy in Nigeria

Abstract

Ethnicity is a central theme in the analysis of Nigerian politics. Conventional approaches to ethnic politics in Nigeria often assume the existence of stable identities and consistent group motives. It is also commonly asserted that Nigerian political behavior is driven by ethnic solidarities. Ethnic political parties, clientelism, and social polarization are all associated with strong communal allegiances. These practices are regarded as inherently corrosive to a plural democracy. This paper questions prevailing assumptions about the salience and impact of ethnicity on Nigerian politics. Based on extensive survey data, I find that identity in Nigeria is fluid and contingent, with substantial variation among groups and over time. The relative construction of identity influences attitudes and collective action. When communal identities are construed politically, they have stronger effects on views and behavior. Moreover, institutions have a marked effect on the construction of identity and on political attitudes. In particular, the character of elections provides a key catalyst for the intensity of ethnic identification, the strength of political ethnicity, and attitudes toward democracy. Overall, the salience of ethnicity in Nigerian politics should be placed in perspective. There is no question that communal divisions are crucial in the political life of the country, but the "ethnic" and "civic" divide in Nigeria does not consistently shape attitudes toward democracy or modes of political participation. These findings suggest that democratic politics can play an important role in managing Nigeria's plural society.

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Executive Summary
Ethnicity forms a central theme in Nigeria's post-colonial politics. Ethnic identity and communal contention have been prominent factors in many of the political changes, and much of the instability, of the contemporary era.

Conventional narratives of ethnicity emphasize strong, consistent identities in Nigeria, and persistent motives among communal groups. However, current scholarship on comparative ethnicity emphasizes the fluidity and contingency of identities. Recent changes in ethnic participation and federal institutions in Nigeria raise questions about traditional assumptions regarding ethnicity and participation.

This paper uses data from four Afrobarometer surveys in Nigeria (2000, 2001, 2003, and 2005) to evaluate ethnic identity and politics since the 1999 transition to democracy. Employing different questions, we distinguish between a "social" definition of identity (i.e. self-described identity) and a "political" definition (i.e. preferred ethnic or national identity).

There are several important findings:

- Although ethnicity is clearly important to Nigerians, *identities vary significantly* among groups and regions, and they fluctuate over time. Ethnic feeling is strongest in the embattled Niger delta, the traditionally restive southeastern (Igbo) states, and among Yoruba speakers in the southwest. Elsewhere, ethnicity may be offset by economic or religious identities. In addition, ethnic sentiments have waxed at election time, and waned between elections.

- There is a marked distinction between *social identity* (the way that people label themselves in the social domain) and *political identity* (individuals' preference for ethnic or national allegiances). We find that politically-constructed identities have a noticeable impact on opinions and collective action, while socially-constructed identities have minimal effects on attitudes or political behavior.

- A variety of factors influence the intensity of ethnic feeling, including socio-economic modernization and proximity to resources. Institutions, however, have the most evident effects on identity. In particular, *the quality of elections has a strong and visible impact on ethnic affinities*. Ethnicity among Igbo and Ijaw speakers has intensified substantially in recent years, coinciding with badly flawed elections in these regions.

- Turning to the effects of identity, we find that *political ethnicity* has more salient effects on attitudes than ethnicity defined in social terms. There is little difference among social identity groups in trust for fellow Nigerians. However, politically-defined "civics" (who lean toward a national identity) tend to be less trustful of others than political "ethnics" (who emphasize group identity). Similarly, social identity groups show little difference in perceptions deprivation or discrimination, but "ethnics" perceive substantially greater discrimination than do "civics."

- Similarly, differences in attitudes toward *institutions* can be distinguished among types of identity. Nigerians generally express low levels of trust in major public institutions (including the legislature, the electoral commission, and the military). "Civic" Nigerians, however, express somewhat greater levels of institutional trust than ethnically-identified Nigerians.

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- Nigerians with pronounced ethnic identities do not reflect especially strong preferences for political *clientelism*. Though Nigerians generally have considerable tolerance for informal lobbying and patron-client relationships, ethnically-identified Nigerians tend to be more critical of political patronage, perhaps out of concern that clientelism provides unfair advantages to others.

- Regarding *democracy*, we find no differences in preferences for democracy among identity groups. "Ethnic" Nigerians are just as likely as "civics" to support democracy, and to reject non-democratic political alternatives. However, ethnics show greater dissatisfaction with the performance of the democratic system, and they are more critical of the quality of democracy.

- Concerning *collective action*, we do not find that ethnicity per se has a strong influence on participation or political engagement. "Ethnics" and "civics" are equally likely to participate in associations, and they express similar degrees of personal political efficacy. Party affiliation differs only slightly among those with ethnic or civic orientations, as "civics" lean somewhat toward the ruling party.

In conclusion, I find that public attitudes do not affirm the traditional image of strong, consistent ethnic identities. Further, common assumptions that ethnicity is inherently at odds with civic engagement and democracy are also refuted. The findings suggest that institutional quality and democratic representation – especially as embodied in elections – have important influences on feelings of identity. Given the obvious importance of ethnicity and ethnic politics in Nigeria, a central conclusion is that democracy matters, for good or ill, in managing Nigeria's heterogeneous society.

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Introduction

Ethnicity is a central theme in the analysis of Nigerian politics. The country's turbulent political history spans two previously failed democratic regimes, six successful military coups, and a devastating civil war (1967-70) that claimed more than a million lives. Many of these pivotal events were instigated by ethnic rivalries or driven by communal conflicts. Observers and participants have often ascribed the country's political dilemmas to ethnic polarization. Ethnic contention forms a master narrative in contemporary Nigerian affairs.

Since the transition to democratic rule in 1999, ethnic identity and mobilization have been prominent features of the political landscape, with serious consequences for political stability. More than five hundred incidents of communal violence have occurred throughout the country, in which at least 11,000 people have died. There have been incidents in virtually all regions, with particular concentrations in the oil-producing Niger delta, Muslim-majority states in the northwest, plural communities in the Middle Belt, Igbo-majority areas in the southeast, and the commercial capital of Lagos. Violence and insecurity have reached levels considerably higher than those experienced under previous military regimes, a problem that is clearly hazardous for Nigeria's fledgling democracy.

Conventional approaches to ethnic politics in Nigeria often assume the existence of stable identities and consistent group motives. These traditional views of ethnicity and collective action can be challenged in light of current perspectives on communalism. Comparative scholarship on ethnicity has increasingly emphasized the fluid nature of social identities. A related literature on institutions and politics further suggests that the nature of institutions significantly affects the strategies of political actors. The complex resurgence of ethnicity in Nigeria leads us to re-examine the formation of identities and paths of participation in contemporary affairs.

Another central assumption, prevalent in the literature and in public perception, is that Nigerian political behavior is driven by ethnic solidarities. Ethnic political parties, clientelism, and social polarization are all associated with strong communal allegiances. These practices are regarded as inherently corrosive to a plural democracy.

This paper questions prevailing assumptions about the salience and impact of ethnicity on Nigerian politics, with broader implications for other multi-ethnic states. The findings help to clarify the basis of identity and the effects of ethnicity on political life. Based on extensive survey data, I find that identity in Nigeria is fluid and contingent, with substantial variation among groups and over time. The relative construction of identity significantly influences attitudes and collective action. A central distinction can be drawn between socially-defined identities and politically-defined identities. When communal identities are construed politically, they have stronger effects than when identities are viewed in social terms.

Moreover, institutions have a marked effect on the construction of identity and on political attitudes. In particular, the character of elections provides a key catalyst for the intensity of ethnic identification, the strength of political ethnicity, and attitudes toward democracy.

Overall, the salience of ethnicity in Nigerian politics should be placed in perspective. There is no question that communal divisions are crucial in the political life of the country. Social identities have varying effects, however, and communalism does not consistently drive public attitudes or behavior. The "ethnic" and "civic" divide in Nigeria is not a consistent determinant of attitudes toward democracy or modes of political participation. These findings suggest that democratic politics can play an important role in managing Nigeria's plural society.

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Ethnicity, Identity, and Political Action

The examination of identity and politics in Nigeria is set against the background of general debates about ethnicity and its influence on political action. One perspective holds that social identities are essential and enduring, or primordial in nature.[1] Against this view, others emphasize an instrumental view of ethnicity, maintaining that groups adhere to identities chiefly as a means of claiming resources or defending perceived material interests.[2] The constructivist perspective predominating in current scholarship focuses on the mutable and contingent aspects of social identity and collective action.[3] Viewed through a constructivist lens, identities coalesce, wax and wane according to variety of conditions, including structural factors, material inducements, and the strategic calculations of actors.

Traditional accounts of ethnic politics in Nigeria have tended to blend primordial and instrumental perspectives, framing communal politics as a struggle among fixed identity groups who contend over scarce resources. Yet Nigeria's historical experience reflects varying communal identities and shifting lines of political contention. If we focus instead on flexible identities and strategies of participation we come closer to a constructivist view of social divisions. Further, a consideration of changing institutions in Nigeria's turbulent political system allows us to examine the effects of institutional performance on communal alignments.

These theoretical concerns are not only academic. It is useful to ask whether democratic institutions should be seen as an *independent* influence on ethnic participation, or as *dependent* on powerful social forces? These are important question for policymakers and for the consolidation of democracy. If ethnicity changes in salience, form, and political effects, then democratic politics can have a significant influence on the management of plural societies. This has major implications for the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria and in other diverse, contentious societies.

To put the point differently, if ethnicity is malleable, then democracy matters as a mechanism for shaping identities and reducing conflict. On the other hand, if ethnicity forms a set of unchanging identities in the struggle over resources, then democratic politics can only contain or balance these corrosive influences, with fewer prospects for shifting to a more cooperative equilibrium.

Framing Identity and Politics in Nigeria

A set of common assumptions has governed the analysis of ethnicity in Nigerian politics and society. First, ethnic identification is presumed to be the most salient and consistent source of social identity in Nigeria. Second, ethnicity is regarded as a central avenue for collective action. There is a common expectation that Nigerians gravitate toward ethnic solidarities as an avenue for political organization and participation. Third, ethnicity is assumed to be a generally destabilizing influence, with particularly corrosive influences on democracy. These assumptions can often be found in the broader literature on ethnicity and politics in Africa.

A number of implications follow from these premises. Since political competition is organized along ethnic lines, both democratic and authoritarian regimes presumably have an ethnic character. Civilian governments supposedly encourage ethnic political parties, while military regimes are said to reflect a clear sectional ruling group. Structures of political control are also constituted ethnically, through clientelist networks and patronage systems. Ethnic identity, in a context of rivalry over scarce resources, is viewed as fostering polarization and conflict. All of these tendencies – the focus on ethnic parties, the influence of clientelism, and the tensions

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among communal groups in the political sphere – will tend to undermine democratic values and practices.[4]

While these traditional assumptions have a strong historical basis, we must also take account of social and political changes that have altered the contours of identity and politics in Nigeria. First, patterns of group mobilization have changed in recent decades. Traditional models of ethnic politics in Nigeria stress the competition among the country's three largest groups: the northern Hausa-Fulani (about 27 percent of the population), the southwestern Yoruba (about 21 percent) and the southeastern Igbo (about 17 percent). "Minority" groups (of which there are at least 250) are often regarded as being marginal to political competition. However, political action by communities in the Niger delta and the ethnically-diverse "middle belt" of the country has been increasingly prominent in national politics. Also, religious mobilization (both by Muslims and Christians) has often overshadowed ethnic solidarity, especially in the northern states.

In addition to changing identities and lines of differentiation, major institutional changes have altered the avenues of participation in Nigeria. The central features of Nigeria's federal system have been repeatedly modified, shifting the political geography of the country from three regions at independence to 36 states today. Major regional blocks have been subdivided into discrete states, and many smaller minorities now constitute majorities within their states. Revenue allocation formulas have also changed the allotment of centrally-collected resources to the states. In the sphere of politics, constitutional reforms have proscribed the formation of ethnic parties, and created impediments to winning national office through sectional voting.

In many respects, the types of parochial politics that dominated the country from the 1950s through the 1980s have been transformed. Social and economic changes have influenced the perception of cultural identities in Nigeria, while institutional reforms have affected the political responses to identity. These distinct ways of thinking about identities – as both social and political constructions – guide the analysis presented in this paper.

Identity, Attitudes, and Action

Taking into account these structural and institutional changes, several questions are relevant regarding identity and political mobilization. First, as a matter of description, how *salient* and *consistent* are communal identities in Nigeria? Do Nigerians mainly identify with their ethnic group, and is ethnic loyalty relatively constant over time? Further, how do social identities accord with political identification?

Second, can we identify the effects of *institutions* on identity? Are communal identities and mobilization influenced by institutional arrangements or performance? Are particular institutions especially influential in the formation of identities?

Turning to the effects of identity construction, how does identity shape perceptions of *social distance* and *institutional trust* among Nigerians? Do communal identities affect trust toward their fellow citizens? Do Nigerians feel acute ethnic inequality or discrimination? Does identity broadly influence attitudes toward leading institutions? How does the construction of identity influence these attitudes?

Fourth, what are the effects of identity on attitudes toward *democracy*? Following the general literature on ethnicity and politics, can we distinguish "ethnic" Nigerians from "civic" Nigerians? Do these different identity groups hold markedly different attitudes about the democratic system or democratic participation?

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Finally, considering political behavior, how does identity shape *collective action*? Do ethnic solidarities guide political participation among Nigerians? Is this more evident in the formal realm of parties and voting, or in the less formal realm of civic association and mobilization?

Measuring Identity and Behavior

Survey research illuminates important aspects of identity and behavior. Rather than inferring interests and perceptions from descriptions of events or deductive models of behavior, we can directly measure and assess the expressed attitudes of individual Nigerians. Survey methods can also capture important elements of political action.

To date, the Afrobarometer has conducted four surveys in Nigeria (in 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2005). Each of the Afrobarometer surveys sampled a random, representative population of Nigerian citizens of voting age (18 and above). They offer detailed empirical information on identity, attitudes and participation over time. The four surveys traverse national elections in 1999 and 2003, allowing us to measure opinions in election seasons and in mid-term periods.[5] Also, measures for identity vary among the surveys, allowing us to probe the nature of communal solidarities.

Respondents across the different surveys named more than ninety different ethnic or linguistic groups as their chosen identity. For the purposes of this analysis, we will look at four groups: the three central language groups (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo), and the Ijaw, the most prominent group in the Niger delta. We also take note of the relative importance of religious identities, which have been increasingly evident in recent years.

In the analysis that follows, we focus on a central distinction between *social* identities and *political* identities. These measures reflect different self-conceptions and modes of communal identification. While social identity suggests how individuals define themselves within Nigerian society, political identity measures the relative strength of affiliations to ethnic or national communities. This distinction, with its attendant measures, is elaborated below.

Social and Political Identities

Social identity refers to the way that individuals principally identify themselves in the social-economic system. It reflects the spontaneous affiliation that people choose to emphasize among various attributes including occupation, income, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, or individual qualities. Social identity allows individuals to situate themselves in a broader social terrain. This dimension of identity does not take political solidarities into account, although particular social identities may be closely associated with political orientations.

As used here, political identity refers to an individual's relative solidarity or loyalty in the context of the nation-state. Given an explicit choice between ethnic and national identity, which do people choose to emphasize? Do they balance loyalties? This measures a political conception of membership and collective action, rather than a simple marker of identity.

Social identity and political identity are measured in separate ways. Social identity was measured in the first three rounds of Afrobarometer surveys in Nigeria, when respondents were asked an open-ended question about the identity to which they felt most strongly attached.[6] Among the diverse answers, responses clustered among ethnic, religious, and class or occupational (i.e. economic) categories, which are reported below. Other categories of identity were far less prevalent than these basic modes of self-identification. Information on primary language and

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residence was recorded separately, and may be used to profile the types of identities favored by different linguistic and regional groups.[7]

Political identity was measured in two ways. In the 2001 and 2003 surveys, after expressing a social identity, individuals were also asked to rank their preferences for social or national identities. The survey in 2005 adopted a different approach, in which a specific political measure of ethnicity was the dominant criterion. The survey asked respondents to identify their tribe or ethnic group without offering other options for self-identification. They were then asked about the relative conditions of their group, and, as in earlier surveys, their preference for ethnic or national identity. By focusing on ethnic identity versus national identity, the interview asked people to consider the relative importance of this one dimension.

The Distribution of Identities

How salient are ethnic identities in Nigeria? Do people hold strong, enduring allegiances to their ethnic group? Many accounts of Nigerian society, whether emphasizing primordial loyalties or instrumental competition for resources, maintain that Nigerians view themselves primarily in ethnic terms, and that these preferences are consistent over time.[8]

Table 1 shows an aggregate picture of social identities in Nigeria. In three rounds of surveys, people were asked an open-ended question about how they would describe themselves "besides being Nigerian." Altogether, 43 percent of Nigerians identified themselves in ethnic terms, followed by 28 percent who used mainly economic categories (either class categories such as "poor" or occupational descriptions such as "farmer") and 21 percent who identified their religious affiliation. A solid plurality of Nigerians identify in ethnic or regional terms, while nearly two-thirds (64 percent) choose communal identities of ethnicity, region, or religion. Little more than a quarter of Nigerians identify themselves in economic (or functional) terms rather than cultural terms.

Table 1
Social Identities in Nigeria (%)

Ethnic	43
Religious	21
Economic*	28

Surveys 2000, 2001, 2003; n=8117.
*Economic=class and occupational identities
Cells do not total 100 percent; not all responses are reported.

These identity preferences, however, are far from consistent across space or over time. In Table 2 we see two perspectives on identity, selected by language group and region of residence. There is considerable variation in ethnic identification among groups. For instance, Ijaw speakers, the largest minority group in the Niger delta, overwhelmingly identify with their ethnic character, as do two-thirds of Igbos in the southeastern states. The strong ethnic solidarities among these groups are frequently accompanied by complaints of political and economic marginality. Both groups also have a history of contention with the central state.

Among Yorubas, a plurality labels themselves ethnically, embodying historically strong cultural and political identity among this group.[9] Muslim Hausa speakers, however, choose religion as often as ethnicity in selecting identity. Yoruba-speaking Muslims more often view themselves in linguistic or regional terms, while Hausa speakers in the north tend to emphasize their religious

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identity. This reflects the historical salience of Islam in the formation of the northern emirates in the early 19th century, and the continuing importance of emirs and religious authorities in framing identities in the northern states.

Table 2
Social Identity by Language Group and Region (%)

	Ethnic	Religious	Economic
Language			
Yoruba	43	23	34
Igbo	65	15	20
Ijaw	80	6	13
Hausa	34	33	34
Other	47	19	34
Region			
Lagos	45	24	32
Southwest	43	22	35
Southeast	71	14	15
South-South (Niger delta)	64	12	14
Northwest	31	34	35
Northeast	42	25	34
North Central	45	24	32

Surveys 2000, 2001, 2003; n=7472
Economic=class and occupational identities

The observed regional variations in identity suggest that regional location often provides a good proxy for ethnic group. Self-proclaimed identities in Lagos and the Southwest are nearly identical to those among Yoruba speakers; the same is true of the Northwest states and Hausa speakers. The Southeast closely corresponds to professed identities among Igbo speakers. Reflecting the pluralism of minorities in the South-South, the strong ethnic identity among Ijaw speakers is diluted within the region at large (although ethnicity throughout the region is prominent). Identities in the Northeast and the middle belt (North-Central) are close to the national norm.

In the 2005 survey, we sought to measure the strength of politically-defined ethnicity. As noted earlier, the survey specified only ethnic group identity, and then asked Nigerians to choose their preferred identity, whether ethnic, national (Nigerian), or equally ranked. The profile of political identity is seen in Table 3.

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Table 3
Political Identity, Nationally and by Group
(% who identify with each identity)

	Mainly ethnic identity	Mainly national identity	National and ethnic identities equal
All Nigerians	31	17	51
Language			
Hausa	29	19	52
Yoruba	22	16	62
Igbo	53	7	40
Ijaw	45	13	42
Other	30	18	52

Survey 2005; n=2202

A notable finding is the generally low preference for national identity, which is chosen by only 17 percent of Nigerians. Nearly twice that proportion gravitate toward an ethnic identity, while a broad "middle ground" of 51 percent hold ethnic and national identities in approximate balance.

Once again, we see considerable variation among different language groups in Nigeria. Igbo and Ijaw speakers lean strongly toward ethnic solidarities, with only residual proportions emphasizing national identities. By comparison, Hausa and Yoruba speakers are less likely to rank their ethnic identity uppermost. However, these groups also show weak preferences for national identities, with a degree of national identification that is close to the national pattern.

The fact that a large proportion of Nigerians give equal weight to ethnic and national identities raises an interesting question. Are people within this group simply making an easy choice by selecting the "middle" option on a sensitive question, or do they truly hold their national and particular identities to be co-equal? Is there a civic bias or an ethnic bias among the Nigerian public?

Ethnics and Civics

Another way of addressing these questions is to compare social identities with political identity preferences. In other words, we may characterize a segment of "ethnic" Nigerians who identify themselves ethnically, and state a preference for their group identity. It is also possible to identify a segment of "civic" Nigerians who identify themselves in functional (rather than cultural or communal) terms, and who prefer a national identity.

Table 4 displays the balance of political identity preferences within social identity groups.[10] Those who identify themselves in ethnic terms are evenly divided among their preferences for group or national identities. Nigerians with religious identities are strongly inclined to prefer their group identity to a national identity. Those with economic identities are equally strong in their

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inclination toward a Nigerian national identity. The results are not intuitive, since we might expect that ethnic identity and group solidarity would be more closely associated. This balance of attitudes does seem to confirm the large middle ground (seen in Table 3) who hold ethnic and national identities in some equivalence.

Table 4
Ethnic v. Civic Orientations

	Group identity preferred	National identity preferred
Ethnic	49	50
Religious	68	30
Economic	33	66

Survey 2003; n=2431

The prevalence of different identities becomes clearer when we situate them within the general population. We may distinguish "strong ethnics" as those who identify themselves socially in ethnic terms, and who politically stress a group identity to a national identity. Conversely, "strong civics" could be considered those who choose a functional or economic social identity (hence avoiding any group label), and who stress their political preference for a national identity.

Table 5
"Ethnics" and "Civics" among Nigerians

	Group identity preferred	National identity preferred
Ethnic Identity	23% *"strong ethnics"*	24%
Functional Identity	7%	14% *"strong civics"*

Survey 2003; n=2431
Note: cells do not total 100 percent; not all responses are counted

Table 5 illustrates that about a quarter of Nigerians are strong ethnics, who emphasize ethnicity both as a social identity and a political identity. Just 14 percent could be considered strong civics, who eschew ethnicity for functional and national identities. Ethnicity certainly overshadows civic orientations, and ethnic solidarities are prominent in the spectrum of public attitudes. However, strong ethnic feelings are not as prevalent as might be expected from the conventional narratives of ethnic politics in Nigeria.

The Changing Forms of Identity
Social identities are also quite fluid over time. As reflected in Table 6, half of Nigerians chose an ethnic identity in 2000, followed by a seeming abatement of ethnic perceptions. Just eighteen months later (in our second survey) only about a third of the public identified themselves ethnically, and some 45 percent chose economic categories to describe themselves. Yet ethnicity proved resurgent by 2003, when 57 percent professed ethnic identities.

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Table 6
Social Identity over Time (%)

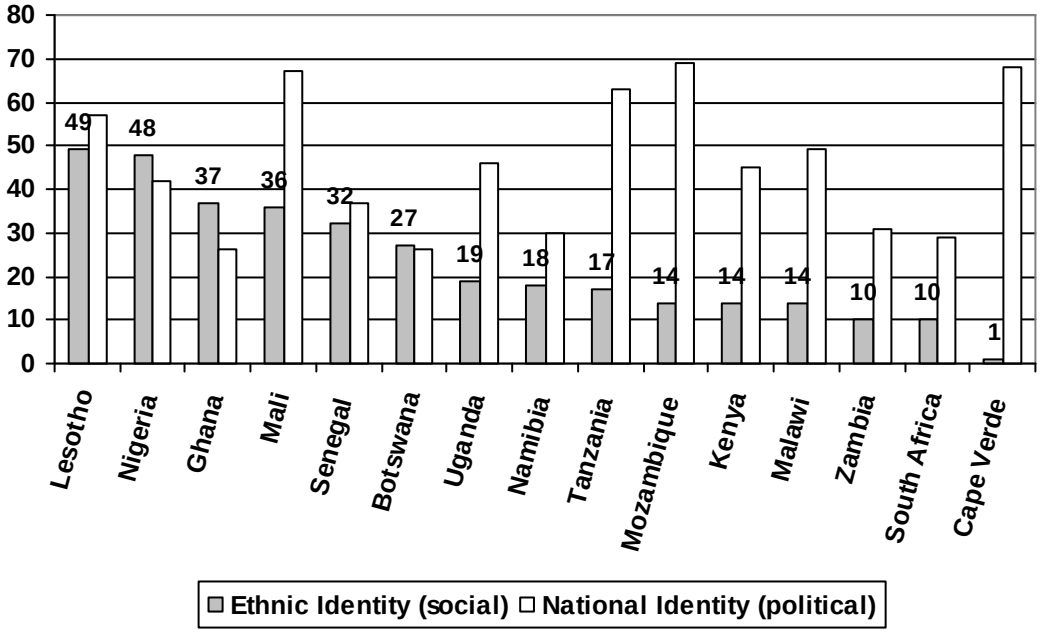
	2000*	2001	2003*
Ethnic	49	32	57
Religious	22	23	24
Economic	29	45	19

Surveys 2000, 2001, 2003; n=7474
Economic=class and occupational identities
* post-election

Nigerian experience confirms patterns found elsewhere in Africa, where ethnic solidarities appear to intensify at election time.[11] This makes intuitive sense, since electoral contests sharpen the public's focus on competition over resources and influence. Further, many parties and politicians in Nigeria (as throughout Africa) employ overt or veiled communal appeals in their quest for support. In Nigeria, two surveys conducted shortly after the 1999 and 2003 national elections show substantial ethnic attachments among the public.

Nigeria's comparative experience is highlighted by considering the relative salience of Nigerian identities among other countries in the region. Figure 1 shows Nigeria in comparison with fourteen other African countries, measured in Afrobarometer surveys in 2002-2003.

Figure 1
Social and Political Identity in Africa



Note: "Ethnic Identity" measures the percentage of respondents who chose an ethnic social identity.

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"National Identity" measures the percentage who ranked their national identity politically above group identity.
Source: Afrobarometer surveys 2002-2003

When viewed regionally, the prominence of ethnic identification in Nigeria is clear. Citizens of Nigeria measure well above other countries in their emphasis on socially-defined ethnicity. Nigerians are nearly three times more likely than Tanzanians and five time more likely than South Africans to identify themselves ethnically. They also gravitate toward ethnicity to a greater degree than their West African neighbors in Ghana, Mali, and Senegal, to say nothing of Cape Verde (where ethnic feeling appears virtually absent). At the same time, Nigerians are close to the mean in their political emphasis on national identity: 42 percent ranked national identity above group identity in 2003, against a mean value of 46 percent for all countries in the sample.

To summarize, we find that ethnic identity is pronounced in Nigeria, both in absolute and comparative terms. About four in ten Nigerians choose to label themselves ethnically, nearly a third prefer their group identity to a national identity, and about a quarter of the population can be considered "strong ethnics" who emphasize both ethnic identity and group solidarity. Further, Nigerians show the strongest inclination toward ethnicity among fifteen countries surveyed by Afrobarometer.

While the preference for ethnicity accords with conventional narratives of identity in Nigeria, we find that ethnicity is neither uniform nor stable among Nigerians. The importance and strength of ethnic feeling varies among groups and regions of the country, and may fluctuate considerably over time. This leads to a consideration of the factors that influence ethnic perceptions and identities.

Sources of Identity: History, Structure, Institutions

There is a long debate about the sources of communal identity in Africa. The primordial perspective emphasizes the intrinsic social or historical attributes of groups as a basis for identity. Structural approaches explain the expression of ethnicity in terms of economic endowments, demographic characteristics, or the configuration of groups. Constructivist scholarship has stressed political strategies and institutional design in the formation of identities and collective action.[12]

Intrinsic Ethnicity?

Analysts stressing a primordial view of ethnicity regard group identities as fixed or essential in character. Survey data, however, shows substantial fluctuation in identity, which contravenes an image of consistent solidarities. The "u-curve" in identities, illustrated in Figure 2, reveals a cyclical pattern of communal identification, with a clear correspondence to election periods. Not only are social identifies fluid, but identification varies in intensity. While Ijaw and Hausa ethnic identification was higher in 2003 than in 1999, Igbo and Yoruba groups rebounded at lower levels. Despite variability, we note that relative degrees of ethnic identification are steady, with Ijaws at the top of the figure and Hausas at or near the bottom.

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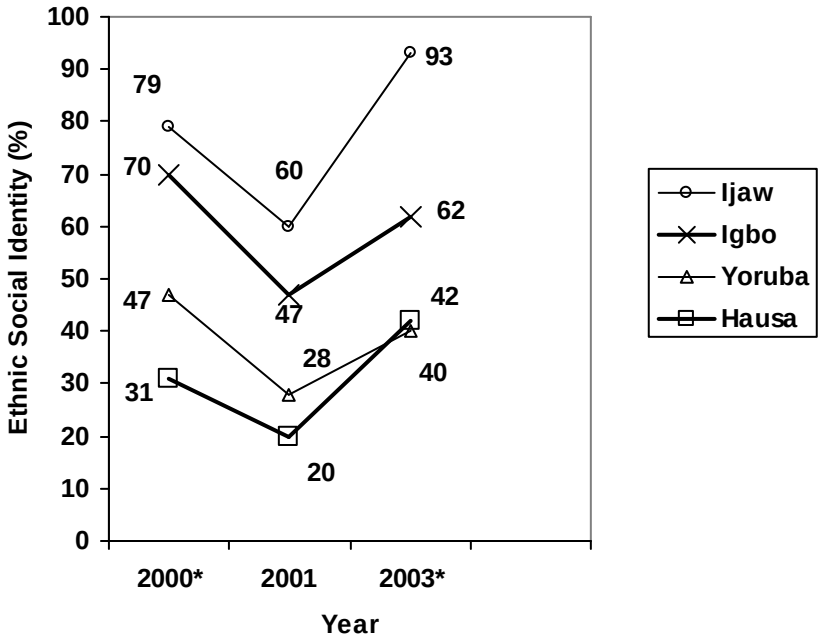
Figure 2
Social Identity over Time, by Language Group



*Post-election surveys
Surveys 2000, 2001, 2003

Structural Explanations

Structural explanations receive some validation from the survey data. A recent analysis of Afrobarometer data by Bannon, Miguel and Posner found a significant positive association between attributes of modernity and expressions of social identity. Across Africa, urbanization, education, and non-rural occupation are correlated with stronger ethnic feeling.[13] These findings broadly mirror Nigerian realities. We find that ethnicity is stronger in the southern regions of the country, which are more heavily urbanized, reflect stronger educational endowments, and have a higher concentration of modern economic activity.

In other respects, structural explanations are less compelling. The relative size and position of groups does not clearly correspond with identity. Nigerian politics has been shaped by rivalry among the country's three largest minorities. In the early years after independence, smaller minorities were overshadowed by the larger groups within three regions. These lesser groups attained greater political visibility after the creation of numerous states in the 1970s and 1980s.

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Analysts have suggested that group identity is accentuated when group size or position furnishes a competitive "minimum winning coalition."[14] The distribution of social identities in Nigeria, however, does not clearly reflect group size or position. As displayed in Table 7, Nigeria's three large minorities vary substantially in their attachment to ethnicity. Hausa speakers show the weakest attachment to ethnic social identity, while Igbos are twice as likely to emphasize their ethnicity. The dominant groups do not reflect uniform ethnic identities.

It is plausible to expect that smaller groups might become politically assertive over time, especially those with a foothold in the newer states. In general, however, we do not find a consistent pattern among lesser minorities (i.e. groups that comprise about 2-6 percent of the national population). Turning again to Table 7, we see that some smaller groups stress ethnic identification (e.g. Ijaw and Tiv), while others are no more ethnically-oriented than the larger groups (e.g. Kanuri, Edo, Urhobo, or Ibibio-Efik). In brief, there is no consistent degree of ethnic sentiment among lesser minorities.

Table 7
Groups and Social Identity
(% of ethnic identity among language groups, in selected regions)

North		**Middle Belt**		**South-South**		**Southwest**		**Southeast**	
Hausa	30	Tiv	54	Ijaw	76	Yoruba	39	Igbo	61
Fulani	37	Igala-Idoma	45	Ibibio-Efik	42	Edo	44		
Kanuri	35			Urhobo	46				

Surveys 2000, 2001, 2003; n=8241

A further possibility is that proximity to resources serves to accentuate ethnic identity. Recent literature has called attention to the role of resource wealth as an inducement for mobilizing ethnic sentiment and fostering conflict.[15] Following this logic, we would expect communities in the Niger delta to reflect relatively stronger identities. In fact the largest group in the delta, the Ijaw, displays the most pronounced ethnicity in Nigeria. However, other minorities in the delta, including the Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Ibibio-Efik, have much more modest ethnic identification. The location of resource wealth seems to influence ethnicity, but is not a strong predictor of social identity.

Institutions and Identity

Given the salience of institutional factors in the recent literature on ethnicity, and the weakness of alternative explanations, we shift our focus to the role of institutions: are there aspects of institutional design or institutional performance that help to explain variation in ethnic identities among Nigerians?

Among Nigerians, Igbo speakers (dominant in the southeastern states) and Ijaw speakers (preeminent in the Niger delta) display the strongest socially-defined ethnicity as well as the most assertive political ethnicity. Both of these groups have been involved in violent conflict with the central state, the Ijaws most recently in militia activities over the past decade, and the Igbos in the attempted Biafran secession of 1967-70. Neither intrinsic (primordial) or structural explanations adequately account for the distinctive strength of ethnic feeling among these groups.

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Nigeria's federal system is the centerpiece for considering the effects of institutional structure. Since independence, many groups in Nigeria have agitated for the division of additional states. With the advent of major oil exports, pressures for state creation have been accompanied by demands for a redistribution of Nigeria's central revenues. The country's electoral institutions are also designed so that candidates cannot succeed without a broad distribution of votes across regions.

Institutional design may contribute to the salience of ethnic identification. Nigeria's early federal system in fact reinforced ethnic solidarities, as each of the three regions was controlled by separate ethnically-aligned parties.[16] The regional governments had sufficient revenue autonomy to sustain independent functions and to offer patronage to sectional elites. Igbo mobilization in the 1960's was shaped by the Eastern Region, which was controlled by the NCNC political party and encompassed the emerging oil-producing areas. After the defeat of the Biafran secession, the Igbo-speaking communities harbored lingering resentments about their wartime treatment and perceived marginality in the political system.

The Ijaw communities in the delta region have long-standing grievances about their political weakness and economic deprivation. The current wave of mobilization had its immediate origins in the formation of additional states and local governments by the Abacha regime in 1996. The new boundaries sparked communal clashes among local groups, and crystallized Ijaw resentments toward the central government and foreign oil companies. A substantial increase since 1999 in the proportion of oil revenues allocated to the core states of the delta reflects another major change in federal structure.

In sum, it is possible to construct a narrative about boundaries and resource control – the key elements of institutional structure – that helps to account for ethnic identity, especially in the southeastern portions of the country. Nonetheless, this is only a partially satisfying explanation. While structure has been consistent since 1999, performance has varied. The uneven distribution of identities, and their fluctuations over time, suggests that elements of institutional performance might be equally important.

Institutional Performance and Identity: The Importance of Elections

Since Nigeria's transition to democratic rule in 1999, the conduct of elections has offered one of the most central barometers of institutional performance. Elections serve as an affirmation of democratic rights, inclusion, and transparency.[17] The conduct of elections can enhance confidence in the political process or inspire alienation from the system. The periodic nature of elections offers a regular "test" of democratic institutions that is distinct from the more continuous functions of the legislature or the judiciary.

Nigeria's recent elections have been highly controversial. Domestic and international observers identified significant flaws and misconduct in the 1999 polls. Nonetheless, much of the Nigerian public, eager to see the end of military rule, offered relatively favorable assessments of the elections.[18] In 2003, observers also noted widespread disorganization and electoral fraud; some assessments even viewed the second elections as worse than the transitional elections. In both elections, observers agreed that the most serious areas of misconduct and fraud were the states of the southeast and the Niger delta. Some commentators asserted that there effectively were "no elections" in the core delta states.[19] A palpable sense of resentment could be felt among Igbo and Ijaw communities, and incidents of violence spiked in the months after the polls.[20]

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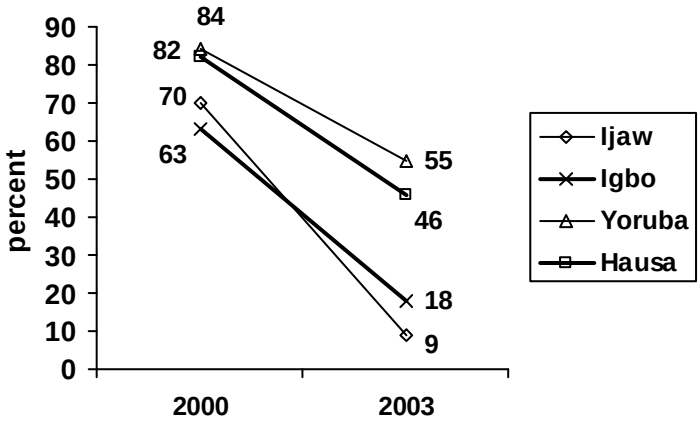
Figure 3 displays overall trust in elections. In each survey respondents were asked whether the preceding elections were conducted relatively "honestly" or "dishonestly." The figure clearly illustrates ethnic disparities in assessments of elections, as well as a sharp deterioration in public evaluations between the transitional (1999) and second (2003) elections. Hausa and Yoruba voters assessed the 1999 elections in similar fashion, while Ijaw voters were somewhat less effusive, followed by Igbos. A significant finding of the 2000 survey was the discrepancy between critical assessments of the elections by observers, and average citizens' affirmative views of the polls. At the time, we attributed this to a post-transition "euphoria."

And indeed, with time, realism clearly set in.[21] By 2003, assessments of elections plummeted. Once again, it is important to note that Nigerian and foreign observers evaluated the 2003 elections as significantly flawed, though generally comparable to the transition elections. Average Nigerians, however, were dramatically more critical of the second elections. Hausa and Yoruba assessments declined by about thirty percentage points in gauging the honesty of elections. Still, about half of each of these groups felt the 2003 elections were conducted relatively honestly.

Among Igbos and Ijaws, the shift is striking. Both groups moved from comparatively strong estimations of the 1999 elections to virtually no confidence in the second elections. With only single digits allowing that the 2003 elections were honestly conducted, Ijaw trust in elections virtually collapsed, while Igbos were scarcely more positive.

Figure 3
Trust in Elections



Not surprisingly, the diminishing confidence in elections is echoed by declining trust for the peak electoral authority, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In the year 2000, as seen in Figure 4, generally high levels of trust for INEC were evident across the population, ranging from about two-thirds (among Igbos) to 90 percent (among Hausas). By 2003, trust in INEC slumped to around two-thirds among Hausas, half among Yorubas, and a quarter or less among Igbos and Ijaws

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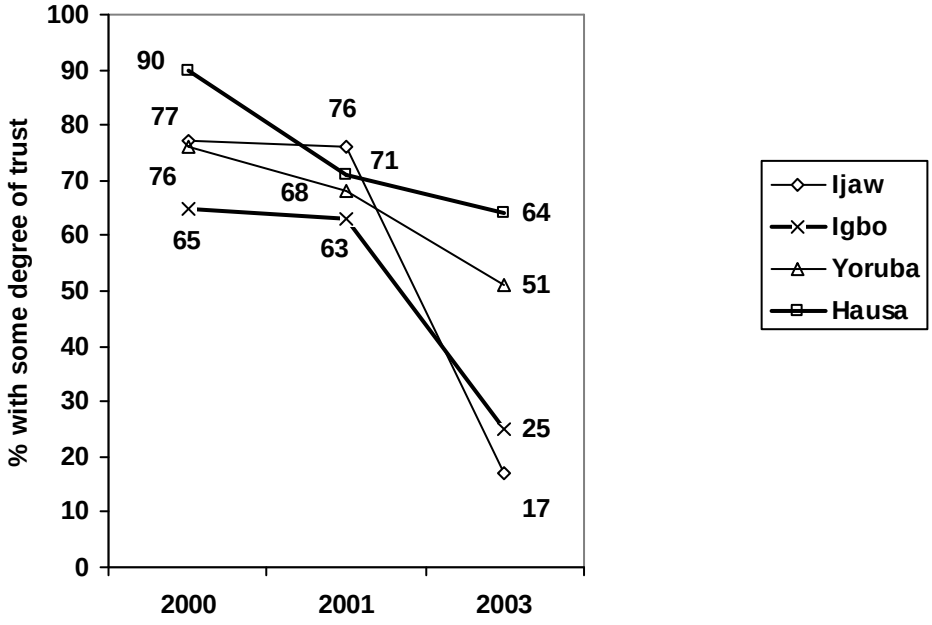
Figure 4
Institutional Trust: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)



There is a coincidence of declining trust in electoral institutions and assertive ethnicity. Social endowments, history, and aspects of institutional structure help to explain the relative intensity of ethnic feeling. However, the performance of elections, as an outlet for communal expression and representation, appears to have a marked effect on the salience of ethnic social identities. Seriously flawed elections in the Southeast and the South-South have been shadowed by resurgent ethnic feeling among Igbo and Ijaw -speakers, which in turn reinforces strong identities among these communities.

In short, institutional performance – notably the credibility of elections – helps to shape ethnic identity. This inference is supported by data reflecting how different groups perceive their treatment by government. Figure 5 displays responses to the question "How often [is your group] treated unfairly by government?" Immediately after the political transition, the major ethnic groups expressed modest concerns about discrimination, and their views clustered. General perceptions of discrimination rose gradually, as the restive Ijaw community expressed heightened objections to poor treatment by government. By 2003, following the second election, there is a

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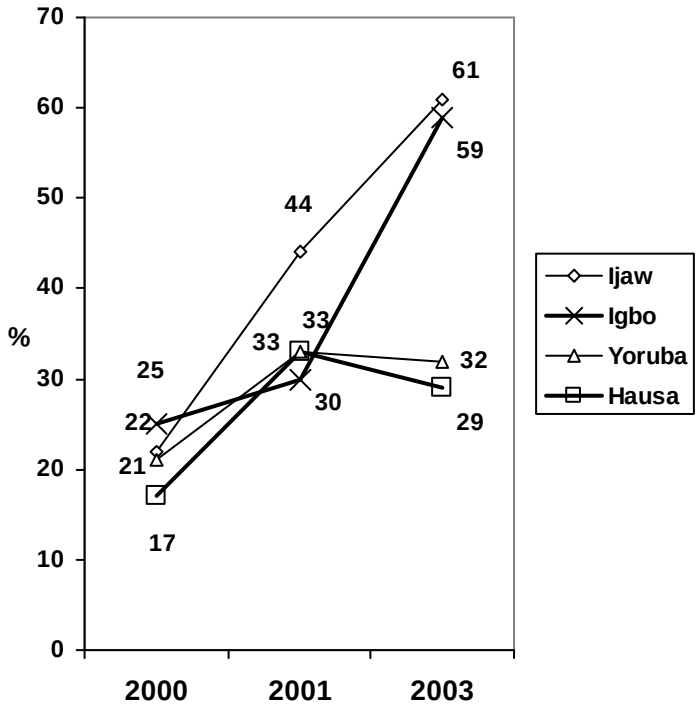
clear divergence among Hausas and Yorubas, who remain modestly concerned about government discrimination, compared with Igbos and Ijaws, who have acute perceptions of mistreatment.

Figure 5
Perceived Treatment among Groups
"How often [is your group] treated unfairly by government?"
(% answering often/always)



What are the principal changes in this period? The electoral cycle is evident. Ijaws experienced multiple sources of grievance, including rising levels of violence and insecurity, contention over resource control, and frustration over the lack of development in their region. However the soaring Ijaw perception of government discrimination in 2003, paralleled by an abrupt increase in resentment among Igbos, concurs with the provocative effects of flawed elections in their regions. The perception of being excluded from the electoral process substantially incited ethnic feeling among the aggrieved groups.[22]

The Effects of Identity

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Having considered the sources of ethnicity in Nigeria, we must still explain the social and political implications of these identities. Are "ethnic" Nigerians more likely to be polarized from other citizens outside their communal group? Do they have more acute feelings of inequality or deprivation than others? These would be natural assumptions arising from conventional accounts of ethnic politics in Nigeria.

Social Distance

In this section we consider the effects of identity on social trust and relative equity. In each instance, we compare attitudes associated with those reflecting a socially-constituted ethnicity, and those adhering to ethnic political identities.

Table 8
Social Trust
(% with some degree of trust)

	Social identity		*Political identity*	
	Ethnic identity *	Economic identity *	Ethnic identity preferred**	National identity preferred**
Trust own ethnic group	64	69	69	79
Trust other ethnic groups	48	57	52	75

* Survey 2000; n=3603
** Survey 2005; n=2202

Table 8 displays measures of social trust from surveys in 2000 and 2005. Each survey provides a different measure of identity, which we describe as "social" and "political" identities. As might be expected, Nigerians generally tend to express greater trust for their own ethnic group than for other groups, and those with stronger ethnic identification have relatively less trust for out-groups.

Some of these findings, however, do not match the conventional wisdom. When measuring socially-constituted identities (whether ethnic or economic), we find that about two-thirds express trust for their own group while about half express trust for out-groups. There is only a modest difference between those professing ethnic or economic identities: indeed in-group trust is nearly identical, while out-group trust is modestly lower among ethnically-defined Nigerians. In short, social identities appear to have a minimal influence on ethnic trust.

We get a different picture when we measure politically-constituted identities. "Civic" Nigerians are the most consistently generous in their estimation of fellow citizens. Those who prefer a national identity over an ethnic identity display significantly higher levels of social trust overall, as nearly eight in ten express trust for their own ethnic group, and three-quarters trust other groups. Politically defined "ethnics" are comparatively less trustful, and far less inclined to trust outsiders. For those preferring an ethnic identity, little more than two-thirds express trust for their own group, and just half trust other groups. The construction of identity influences attitudes toward social distance, as Nigerians professing a civic identity differ markedly from ethnics.

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Equity and Marginality

A similar pattern can be seen with regard to measures of equity and political standing. In Table 9, we see two measures of perceived inequality among different identity groups in Nigeria. Respondents were asked to rank their group's economic conditions in comparison to other groups, and to say how often they believe their group is treated unfairly by the government. These questions yield findings that do not match the common narratives of ethnic deprivation in Nigeria.

Despite frequent public protests of "marginalization" by various ethnic groups in Nigeria, we see that overall levels of perceived deprivation or unfairness are not especially high among social identity groups. Among those with either an ethnic or an economic identity, little more than a quarter feel their group's economic conditions to be inferior to others. Those with an economic identity in fact perceive greater unfairness from government than those who identify with their ethnic group, perhaps reflecting the grievances of organized labor, farmers, or students toward authorities. Again, the distinctions along the lines of social identity are modest.

Table 9
Perceived Equity and Fairness

Social identity	Ethnic identity *	Economic identity *
Group economic conditions *(% saying worse/much worse than others)*	26	29
Group treated unfairly by government *(% saying often/always)*	29	38
Political identity	Ethnic identity preferred**	National identity preferred**
Ethnic group's economic conditions *(% saying worse/much worse than others)*	51	31
Ethnic group treated unfairly by government *(% saying often/always)*	49	38

* January 2000, n=3603
** August-December 2005, n=2202

A different picture emerges when we measure politically-constituted identities. Among Nigerians who emphasize their ethnic identity, half perceive economic inequalities, and an equal proportion believe their group is treated unfairly by authorities. Their perceptions of unequal standing are far more pronounced than among "civic" Nigerians who emphasize their national identity. This latter group is indistinguishable from economically-defined social identity groups in their perceptions of inequality.

To emphasize the central finding, political identities show more pronounced effects of ethnicity than social identities. Politically-defined "ethnics" evince less social trust and stronger feelings of deprivation than citizens who see themselves primarily as Nigerians. (As we have seen, Ijaw and Igbo-speakers, in particular, reflect stronger feelings of discrimination and more politicized conceptions of identity). Furthermore, distrust of out-groups and perceptions of inequality are

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stronger among political "ethnics" than among those with a socially-constituted ethnic identity. Identity matters most when it is politically constructed.

Institutions and Representation

To consider another important set of attitudes, do identity groups differ in their stance toward political institutions and strategies of representation? The history of ethnic contention in Nigeria might lead us to expect that ethnic solidarity is associated with disaffection from formal institutions, and with clientelist strategies of representation. For those who identify strongly with their ethnic group, feelings of deprivation or inequality might lead to distrust of the political system, and a corresponding preference for informal lobbying through local and ethnic notables.

We seek to measure these attitudes and behaviors in two ways. First, we present key measures of trust in major political institutions: the National Assembly (parliament), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and the military.[23] These represent important elements of the political system and the Nigerian state. They also influence representation, competition, and the essential stability of the regime. In assessing clientelism, we measure both attitudes and behavior. The frequency of (self-reported) contact with various officials and notables is presented, along with expectations for obtaining government services, and attitudes toward clientelist political behavior.

Table 10 displays patterns of trust in institutions. It is clear that that Nigerians have minimal confidence in their institutions, as they do not generally trust their elected representatives in the Assembly or their electoral administration, INEC. There is slightly greater trust in the armed forces (perhaps because of their distance from average citizens and their absence from politics for several years), though less than a third of Nigerians express strong confidence in the military. Further, no more than four in ten believe in the integrity of the previous (2003) elections.

Among social identity groups, there is little variation in trust for institutions. Those expressing an ethnic identity reflect less trust in the military, and a lower estimation of the 2003 elections, though they differ from economic identity groups by only six to eight percentage points. It is likely that particular ethnic groups shape these attitudes. Minorities in the Niger delta (South-South) show strong antipathy toward the military, and we know that they have a very low assessment of the 2003 elections. Since there is also strong ethnic identification in the South-South, this likely anchors the overall pattern among socially-ethnic Nigerians.

Table 10
Institutional Trust

	*Social identity**		*Political identity***	
	Ethnic identity	Economic identity	Ethnic identity preferred	National identity preferred
Trust the parliament (National Assembly) *% with relatively strong trust* †	9	10	16	26
Trust the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)	10	11	15	26
Trust the military	18	24	20	30
How honest [free and fair] were the (2003) elections ? *% positive* ‡	35	43	25	38

*Survey 2003; n=2431
**Survey 2005; n=2202

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† For 'trust' questions, 2003: % answering "A lot/A very great deal" (two strongest categories of trust)
For 2005: % answering "Somewhat/A lot" (two strongest categories of trust)

‡ For 2003: % answering "Fairly honest/Very honest"
For 2005: % answering "Free and fair with minor problems/Completely free and fair"

There is greater variation in trust among politically-constituted identity groups, though here too the differences are modest. Overall, civic Nigerians (national identity preferred) are more inclined than their ethnic counterparts to trust elected officials, electoral authorities, and the military. "Civics" also express more confidence in the 2003 elections than "ethnics," though again the assessment is overall quite low. Recalling the distribution of ethnic preferences in Table 3, Ijaw and Igbo speakers are the most strongly skewed toward ethnic identity to the exclusion of national identity. Their regions also reported the highest levels of fraud and misconduct in the 2003 elections, with correspondingly low popular assessments of the quality of the elections.

In brief, institutional trust differs noticeably among politically-construed identity groups, but almost trivially among social identity groups. Gaps in institutional trust between ethnics and civics are modest, and particular groups appear to shape the pattern of attitudes. Overall, it is difficult to conclude that ethnicity is strongly associated with confidence in institutions.

Informality and Clientelism

Given the manifest lack of trust in formal institutions, we consider political clientelism as an alternative strategy of representation. Patron-client networks, commonly structured along ethnic lines, form a mode of lobbying and representation that is ubiquitous in Nigeria, as well as throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Table 11 displays various indicators of citizens' stance toward, and use of, clientelist relationships.

In general, the survey data illustrates the prevalence of clientelism. Nigerians are more likely to contact traditional rulers or notables (an "influential person") than their elected officials, and least likely to contact their legislators, who have relatively less discretion over individual patronage (e.g. jobs, licenses, contracts, or land). Further, in the 2003 survey more than a third of Nigerians report they would be willing to use bribes or influence to speed a permit or license. In the 2005 survey, substantial proportions (42 percent of "ethnics" and 54 percent of "civics") express some acceptance of patronage behavior from politicians.

Table 11
Political Clientelism

	*Social identity**		*Political identity***	
Contacted:	Ethnic identity	Economic identity	Ethnic identity preferred	National identity preferred
National Assembly rep.	5	8	7	8
Local government representative	17	17	17	26
Traditional ruler	33	32	25	35
Other influential person	17	25	25	34
"What would you do [if] you were waiting for a government permit or license, but kept encountering delays?"				
Offer a tip or bribe	24	18	6	6
Use connections with influential people	13	13	9	7
[What is your opinion of the following]:				

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"A public official decides to locate a development project in an area where his friends and supporters live"				
Not wrong	--	--	16	14
Wrong but understandable	--	--	26	40
Wrong and punishable	--	--	56	44

*Survey 2003; n=2431
**Survey 2005; n=2202

Among social identities, there are few discernable differences in the stance toward clientelism. Both ethnic and economic identity groups report similar patterns of representation, and comparable attitudes toward using bribery and connections.

Greater variation is seen among political identity groups, though the gaps are not wide and the patterns are counter-intuitive in some areas. Nigerians professing a national identity are more assertive about contacting nearly all types of people, from local government representatives to notables. They are also somewhat more likely to seek help from traditional patrons (local rulers and influential persons) than their ethnic counterparts.

The 2005 survey shows markedly less acceptance of using influence or inducement for government services. This may reflect the high-profile anticorruption efforts of the administration since 2003, which has increased public attention and opprobrium toward corrupt behavior. However, there is still considerable acceptance of political patronage, as seen in responses to a new question in 2005.

It is especially interesting that those with a strong ethnic identity are more critical of patronage behavior than those with a civic orientation. More than half of those expressing a national identity are tolerant of patronage behavior, contrasted with 56 percent of outright rejection among "ethnics." This may be explained by the prevalence of ethnic competition for resources, leading to common expectations that other groups will unfairly benefit from clientelist relationships. Since each group is concerned about their own distributional advantage, they may be more likely to condemn clientelism among other groups.

Contrary to widespread expectations about ethnic mobilization and political behavior, we do not find that identity is closely associated with variations in institutional trust, willingness to utilize formal institutions, or dispositions toward political clientelism. Nigerians generally hold their officials and key institutions in low esteem, and they are more inclined to turn to local notables than to government officials in resolving their problems. Further, a substantial segment of Nigerians take a lenient view toward patronage behavior by politicians. However, these attitudes or behaviors are not strongly influenced by ethnicity per se.

Identity and Democracy

In this section we consider attitudes toward democracy. We recall the common expectation found in comparative analyses as well as treatments of Nigerian politics, that civic orientations are more compatible with democratic politics. Ethnicity is commonly regarded as a parochial view that distances citizens from one another, undermines collective action for national goals, and alienates group members from a broader political community. Is there evidence of these effects from survey data?

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In order to probe these issues, we measure stances toward democracy in various ways. Drawing from previous Afrobarometer analyses, we can broadly distinguish the "demand" for democracy from the "supply" of democracy. In other words, how much do people want democracy and "how much democracy" do they think they are getting? On the demand side, here we use separate measures rather than the composite index used in other studies.[24] We assess overall support for a democratic system; the rejection of non-democratic political options; and relative patience with the shortcomings of democracy. On the supply side, we note overall satisfaction with the way democracy works; and the perceived extent or degree of democracy.

Generally speaking, Nigerians have shown a resilient demand for democracy since the political transition of 1999, though they have become disillusioned with the perceived supply of democracy. Elsewhere we have discussed the euphoria that characterized the popular mood in the aftermath of military rule, which soon gave way to more sober assessments of political life.[25] These views are evident in Table 12, which shows large majorities that support democracy and reject non-democratic alternatives, alongside very low satisfaction with democracy and a very modest assessment of the degree of democracy. We can see that these overall patterns hold for all identity groups.
Moreover, we find no distinction in attitudes to democracy among socially-constituted identity groups. Levels of support for democracy, and the rejection of both military rule and single party rule, are identical whether citizens choose to identify themselves ethnically or by economic category. Differences in expressed patience with the democratic regime vary marginally. The same is true on the "supply side": there are only minor variations among identity groups in satisfaction with democracy and the perceived degree of democracy.

Table 12
Attitudes Toward Democracy

	*Social identity**		*Political identity***	
	Ethnic identity	Economic identity	Ethnic identity preferred	National identity preferred
Support for democracy "Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government" *% agree*	67	68	65	64
Reject military rule *% who Disagree/Very strongly disagree with this political option*	68	69	73	66
Reject one-party rule *% who Disagree/Very strongly disagree with this political option*	80	80	79	80
Patience with democracy "Our present system of elected government should be given more time to deal with inherited problems" *% Very strongly agree/Agree*	55	60	53	55
"If our present system cannot produce results soon, we should try another form of government" *% Very strongly agree/Agree*	40	35	39	40
Satisfaction with democracy "Overall, how satisfied are you with the way				

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democracy works in Nigeria?" *% very/fairly satisfied*	34	31	17	35
Degree of democracy "In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Nigeria today? *% answering "Not a democracy"*	15	10	27	16
% answering "A democracy with few problems/A full democracy"	33	27	19	36

*Survey 2003; n=2431
**Survey 2005; n=2202

However, there are distinctions among politically-defined identity groups. On the demand side, we see little difference. Those who prefer an ethnic identity are hardly distinguished in their views from so-called "civic" Nigerians who emphasize their national identity. Both groups show equal preferences for democracy, rejection of alternatives to democracy, and relative patience for the democratic regime. Further, these views are quite close to the views of social identity groups polled two years earlier.

On the supply side, however, we observe pronounced differences. Ethnically-identified Nigerians show markedly lower satisfaction with political performance, and a correspondingly harsher assessment of the degree of democracy in the country. Ethnicity does appear to be associated with the most critical views of the political system and the process of democratic development.

To conclude, ethnicity does not appear to weaken commitments to democracy at the individual level, though ethnic conflict is clearly damaging to democracy in the national political arena. Ethnic attachments, however, are associated with more critical assessments of democratic performance, as ethnics show greater dissatisfaction with the performance of democracy and the achievements of the new regime. "Ethnic" Nigerians may be viewed as especially discontented democrats.

Collective Action

Finally, we consider important aspects of political behavior. If "ethnic" Nigerians are more aggrieved about their economic and political conditions, and less trustful of fellow citizens, does this lead them to pursue collective strategies for advancement? Is there an association between forms of identity and types of political participation? The following tables measure three dimensions of collective action: membership in various civic and cultural associations; forms of political participation, from meetings to voting; and measures of political efficacy and engagement.

We find little variation in orientations to collective action along the lines of social or political identity. On all dimensions of collective action, there are minor differences among Nigerians professing different identities, and in many instances the differences are statistically insignificant. Table 13 displays patterns of association membership. We might expect that strong feelings of ethnicity would be more closely associated with membership in religious groups, as individuals gravitate toward cultural solidarity. The corresponding assumption would be that "civic" Nigerians are more likely to join associations for economic interests or community development.

Table 13
Association Membership
% claiming active membership/leadership roles

	*Social identity**		*Political identity***	
	Ethnic identity	Economic identity	Ethnic identity preferred	National identity preferred
Religious group	60	54	56	64
Trade union or business assn.	13	16	17	20
Community development assn.	12	16	22	21

*Surveys 2000, 2001, 2003; n=7472
**Survey 2005; n=2202

In fact, neither of these assumptions is borne out. Religious membership differs only modestly among identity groups. Among social identities, ethnically identified Nigerians appear somewhat more likely to be active members of religious groups. Among political identity groups, however, it is "civic" Nigerians who are more active in their religious communities. For other categories of membership, the differences are within the margin of error. Those expressing economic or national identities are no more inclined to participate in civic associations than their "ethnic" counterparts.

A similar pattern is seen with political participation in Table 14. Identity groups are indistinguishable in their propensity for attending community meetings, raising civic issues, or engaging in protest.[26] In the 2005 survey, a question about voter participation showed virtually identical rates among those preferring ethnic or national identities. Participation does not differ among identity groups.

Table 14
Political Participation
% who have done each of these actions within the past year

	*Social identity**		*Political identity***	
	Ethnic identity	Economic Identity	Ethnic identity preferred	National identity preferred
Attended a community meeting	38	41	34	32
Got together with others to raise an issue	42	42	44	46
Attended a demonstration or protest march	6	7	6	7
Voted in last election	n/a	n/a	67	68

*Surveys 2000, 2001, 2003; n=7472
**Survey 2005; n=2202

Finally, we consider measures of political efficacy, or citizens' sense of personal political voice and engagement. Based upon narratives of ethnic contention in Nigeria, we can hypothesize that ethnically-oriented citizens would be more inclined to be disaffected from the political system, and more inclined to gravitate toward communal groupings and ethnic parties. Once again, these assumptions are not supported by the data.

"Ethnics" do not appear markedly alienated from political discussion. As seen in Table 15, surveys from 2000, 2001 and 2003 indicate that social identity groups show little distinction in their readiness to raise concerns with politicians. For each group, about half believed they could

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‘get together with others’ to press their interests. Similarly, in the 2005 survey, “civic” Nigerians were just as likely as ethnics to express a sense of marginality or lack of voice.

Table 15
Efficacy and Engagement

	*Social identity**		*Political identity***	
	Ethnic identity	Economic identity	Ethnic identity preferred	National identity preferred
“If you had to, you would be able to get together with others to make elected representatives listen to your concerns” *% agree/strongly agree*	52	53	n/a	n/a
“As far as politics is concerned, friends and neighbors don’t listen to you” *% agree/strongly agree*	n/a	n/a	49	45
Close to a political party? *% yes*	42	43	45	51
PDP	25	29	26	31
Other parties	17	14	19	20

*Surveys 2000, 2001, 2003; n=7472
**Survey 2005; n=2202

Further, we see little variation in party affiliation. Those professing ethnic or economic identities are just as likely to feel close to a political party. Measured by political identity, those with a national outlook are only slightly more inclined to express a party preference. Moreover, we see no evidence that “ethnic” Nigerians gravitate toward minor ethnic parties: levels of support for the ruling party, and for smaller parties, are quite similar among identity groups. This suggests that Nigeria’s institutional engineering in recent decades has been effective in discouraging the emergence of sectional parties.

In sum, we find little discernable difference in orientations to collective action among identity groups. Nigerians who identify themselves ethnically do not show greater disaffection from the political process, and their patterns of participation are not distinguished from Nigerians professing other identities. Perhaps most important, those with ethnic political identities do not appear to be especially alienated from political life, do not gravitate toward sectional parties, and are not more inclined to protest than other Nigerians.

Conclusion

This paper offers a preliminary look at public attitudes toward identity and politics in Nigeria. Ethnic allegiances and communal contention clearly form a dominant theme in Nigeria’s post-colonial history. Prevailing analyses of ethnicity in Nigeria treat sectional groups as relatively fixed, enduring, and consistent in their perceptions and goals. The data from four Afrobarometer surveys, however, casts doubt on this image of identity and politics.

Ethnicity is a salient identity among Nigerians, though ethnic feelings vary among language groups and fluctuate over time. Politically-constituted identities matter far more than socially-defined identities in accounting for differences in attitudes among identity groups. Those Nigerians who adhere to ethnic group identity to the exclusion of national identity (about three in ten overall, whom we label as “ethnics”) are less trustful of other ethnic groups, more likely to feel economically deprived and politically marginalized, and show less confidence in major political and state institutions. In particular, Nigerian ethnics are highly critical of the quality of

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elections, and extremely discouraged by the overall performance and quality of democracy since the transition to civilian rule.

Contrary to expectations, ethnicity is not clearly associated with different perceptions of social distance or deprivation, nor do ethnic solidarities give rise to different forms of participation or collective action. Though most Nigerians are alienated from formal political institutions, "ethnics" as a category are not particularly disaffected nor do they show a greater preference for clientelist modes of informal representation. Further, ethnically-identified Nigerians are no less committed to democratic ideals than are citizens with stronger national identity.

What are the implications of these findings? First, we find a pattern of attitudes that appears consistent with constructivist accounts of ethnic identity. Ethnicity is not integral, uniform, or consistent, but rather mutable and contingent. Further, variations in ethnic attitudes among groups, and changes in ethnicity over time, suggest that institutional effects and democratic performance are important in shaping public attitudes.[27] The quality of elections, and the availability of representation through formal political channels appear to have important influences on ethnic feeling and confidence in the democratic regime. In short, inclusion and transparency appear to be catalysts of civic development. Exclusionary and opaque politics chart a path to ethnic solidarity and disaffection. These inferences can be further tested and elaborated. However, even at a preliminary level, the findings suggest the possibilities for democratic politics to handle communal tensions. Politics matter for the management of ethnicity.

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Endnotes

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[4] See for instance Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963; Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; and Larry Diamond, "Nigeria: The Uncivic Society and the Descent into Praetorianism," in *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences With Democracy*, 2nd ed., edited by Larry Diamond, J. Linz, and S.M. Lipset. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995.

[5] The four samples were as follows: *2000:* n=3603; *2001:* n=2190; *2003:* n=2428; *2005:* n=2202.

[6] Responses were post-coded.

7 In surveys for 2001 and 2003, a separate measure of political identity was introduced by asking Nigerians to choose or rank their preferences among national identity or a parochial identity.

[8] For example, see James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958; and Billy Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982.

[9] David Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

[10] In the 2003 survey, respondents were asked to choose among ethnic or national identities, without an option of weighing both equally.

[11] Alicia Bannon, Edward Miguel, and Daniel N. Posner. "Sources of Ethnic Identification in Africa." *Afrobarometer* Working Paper No. 44, 2004.

[12] See for instance Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002; Posner, *Ethnicity and Institutions in Africa*; and Bates, "Modernization, Ethnic Competition and the Rationality of Politics in Africa."

[13] Bannon et al, "Sources of Ethnic Identification in Africa," p.1.

[14] Bates, "Modernization, Ethnic Competition and the Rationality of Politics in Africa."; and Daniel N. Posner, "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4, 2004: 529-545.

[15] See Michael Ross, "How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases," *International Organization* 58 (2004): 35-67.

[16] Larry Diamond,. "Nigeria: The Uncivic Society and the Descent into Praetorianism," in *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences With Democracy*, 2nd ed., edited by Larry Diamond, J. Linz, and S.M. Lipset. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995.

[17] Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993; Staffan Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections in Africa*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

[18] See the National Democratic Institute and The Carter Center, *Observing the 1998-99 Nigeria Elections, Final Report*, 6/1/1999, accessed through: http://www.accessdemocracy.org/accessdem.asp; and Peter Lewis and Michael Bratton, "Attitudes Toward Democracy and Markets in Nigeria," *Afrobarometer* Working Paper No. 3, Michigan State University, April 2001.

[19] Human Rights Watch, *Nigeria: Crackdown in the Niger Delta*, Vol.11, No. 2 (A)May 1999, p. 1.

[20] This is documented in a dataset of violent incidents in Nigeria since the transition to civilian rule, collected by Human Rights Watch and the SAIS African Studies Program.

[21] Peter M. Lewis, Etannibi Alemika, and Michael Bratton, "Down to Earth: Changes in Attitudes Toward Democracy and Markets in Nigeria," *Afrobarometer* Working Paper No. 20, Michigan State University 2001.

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[22] This conclusion is bolstered by the vigorous expressions of ethnicity among Yorubas in the aftermath of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. M.K.O. Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim, was evidently elected by a large national majority, but General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the election results and set aside the political transition. Survey results are not available from this period, but the intensity of regional feeling was apparent. Interestingly, survey data does show a rapid attenuation of Yoruba ethnicity after 1999, when a Yoruba president (Obasanjo) was elected.

[23] The Presidency is not measured here, since it is too easily conflated with the person of the president, and is less clear as a measure of trust for institutions. Generally, assessments of the President track closely with assessments of the parliament.

[24] See Michael Bratton, Robert Mattes, and E. Gyimah-Boadi, *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[25] Lewis, Alemika, and Bratton, "Down to Earth."

[26] Even if we assume that participation in protests and demonstrations are underreported because of legal concerns, there is no reason to think that the rate of reporting varies among identity groups.

[27] See Posner, *Ethnicity and Institutions in Africa*.

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