



You're not like us! Ethnic discrimination and national belonging in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of ethnic discrimination on Nigerians' sense of national identification relative to ethnic identification. The regression results revealed that the experience of discrimination prompts Nigerians to prioritize their ethnic identity over their national identity. The regressions also showed that the negative effect of discrimination on national identification is larger than its positive effect on ethnic identification. These findings are robust to different operationalizations of discrimination and to the use of individual survey data covering 34 African countries. Among the Nigerian population, Igbo ethnicity increased the likelihood of individuals prioritizing their ethnic identity over their national identity, while Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani ethnicities had the opposite effect.

Keywords

Discrimination, Ethnicity, Religion, National belonging, Intergroup conflict, Nigeria, Africa

JEL Classification

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1. Introduction

Nigerians have a weak sense of national belonging. In present-day Nigeria, “ethnicity, religion, and language—not nationality—remain the touchstones of personal identity and the albatross around the neck of a true national identity.” (Agbiboa 2013, pp. 3–4). Similarly, Ake (1973, p. 383) observes that most African states are characterized by political instability “because the loyalties of their subjects tend to be focused on primary groups, such as tribes, instead of on the more ecumenical institution, the state.” The Round 8 Afrobarometer survey conducted in 2020 (BenYishay et al. 2017) shows that 35 percent of Nigerians had experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity at least once or twice during the past year. The survey also shows that 36 percent of the population believes there is more that divides Nigerians as a people than unites them. The weak sense of national belonging among Nigerians is not a recent phenomenon. Nigeria’s first prime minister, Tafawa Balewa, openly admitted that Nigeria existed only on paper (Siollun 2009, p. 12). Obafemi Awolowo, one of Nigeria’s founding fathers, referred to the country as a “mere geographical expression” (Awolowo 1947, pp. 47–48).

Although these statements might appear scathing, especially coming from people in leadership positions who were supposed to champion the cause of national unity, they are better appreciated when examined against the background of how Nigeria was created, the relationship between Nigeria’s major ethnic groups, and the nature of politics in Nigeria’s first republic. The amalgamation of 1914 that merged Nigeria’s Northern and Southern Regions, previously distinct protectorates of the British, led to the establishment of Nigeria. The British merged the two protectorates for administrative convenience without paying attention to the ethnic and religious differences among the people who were being brought together (Lugard 1914). “Historically, it was easier to establish the Nigerian state than to nourish the Nigerian nation. Though the former was to a large extent achieved through the 1914 amalgamation, the latter eluded both the British officials and Nigerians for several decades thereafter.” (Tamuno 1970, p. 564). Sir. Ahmadu Bello, one of Nigeria’s founding fathers, referred to the amalgamation as a mistake (Sklar 1963, p. 128).

Two years before Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule, Coleman (1958, p. 331) noted that one of the major fault lines in Nigeria is “the rivalry between the peoples of the southern provinces and the Muslim peoples of the north, isolated as they were in their Northern fortress by an official policy of controlled acculturation.” Moreover, “Religion is practiced along ethnic lines in Nigeria which further accentuates ethnic divisions and hatred in the country.” (Nche 2023, p. 31). Northern Nigeria primarily consists of a Muslim majority with a sizeable Christian minority. In contrast, the Southern Region has a predominantly Christian population with a significant number of Muslims, especially among members of the Yoruba ethnic group (Laitin 1986).² Muslims are concentrated in Northern Nigeria because most parts of the region were under an Islamic caliphate (i.e., Sokoto Caliphate) for a century until the British conquered it in 1903. After yielding to British control, the Muslim emirs requested that the British respect their religious customs and not interfere with them. This explains why Lord Lugard, Nigeria’s first Governor-General, had clearly stated that “Government will in no way interfere with the Mohammedan religion.” during his speech at Sokoto in 1903 (Kirk-Greene 1965, p. 44). Following the amalgamation, the British maintained distinct administrative approaches between the Northern and Southern Regions. In Northern Nigeria, they kept existing systems largely intact and utilized traditional institutions for governance. In contrast, Southern Nigeria experienced significant integration of British values due to its openness to Western culture (Campbell & Page 2018, p. 78; Diamond 1988, p. 26; Coleman 1958, p. 333). Moreover, the concentration of Christian missionary activity in the South led most of the population to substitute Christianity for their traditional religions.

Regional divisions were a major obstacle to Nigerians developing a strong sense of national unity after gaining independence in 1960. Although the nationalists were able to work together to

² The Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba constitute Nigeria’s three major ethnic groups. The Hausa/Fulani are predominantly Muslims, the Igbos are predominantly Christians, while both religions are almost evenly represented among the Yoruba (Laitin 1986). Moreover, Nigeria’s population is almost evenly split between Christians and Muslims. Although some Nigerians still practice traditional religions, this number is quite insignificant compared to that practicing Christianity and Islam.

secure Nigeria’s independence from British colonial rule, “Almost without exception, the nationalist movements of Africa tended to fragment on the eve of independence” due to the pursuit of the interests of members of their own ethnic group (Ake 1973, p. 348). According to Mustapha (2007, p. 6), “Nigerian nationalists kept one eye on the British colonialists and the other on their ethnic and regional competitors from other parts of the divided country.”



Figure 1: Nigeria’s three major regions

Note: The figure shows the administrative boundaries of the states within Nigeria’s three main regions (i.e., the Northern, Eastern, and Western Regions) and the countries surrounding Nigeria. Nigeria previously had two regions (i.e., Northern and Southern Regions), until in 1939 when the Eastern and Western Regions were carved out from the Southern Region.

With the division of Nigeria’s Southern Region into the Eastern and Western Regions in 1939 by the British government (see Figure 1), regionalism, hinged on ethnicity, became entrenched in Nigerian society. This is because each of the three regions coincided with one of Nigeria’s three major ethnic groups: The Northern Region was dominated by members of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group, the Eastern Region was dominated by the Igbo, and the Western Region was dominated by

the Yoruba (Attah 2013, p. 611; Ayoade 1986, pp. 74–78).³ “The numerical and hegemonic strength of these three ethnic groups within the Nigerian federation has meant that Nigeria has a tripod ethnic structure, with each of the three majority ethnic groups constituting a pole in the competition for political and economic resources.” (Mustapha 2007, p. 3). Although Nigeria consists of over 250 ethnic groups, the minority ethnic groups “are forced to form a bewildering array of alliances around each of the three dominant ethnicities.” (Mustapha 2007, p. 3).

During the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, each region had a leading political party whose support base consisted mainly of members of the dominant ethnic group residing there (Falola & Heaton 2008, p. 153; Attah 2013, p. 612). The Hausa/Fulani were the main supporters of the Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC), the Yoruba were the main supporters of the Action Group (AG), and the Igbo were the main support base of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) (Ojie 2006, pp. 550–552). Political leaders were so focused on regionalism to the extent that they prioritized the interests of their supporters over the broader needs of the Nigerian population—hence neglecting the principle that “leaders must build the nation before they can build the state.” (Collier 2009, p. 52). Moreover, the major parties did not hesitate to punish constituents who had voted for the opposition by withholding infrastructure and social amenities from them (Diamond 1988, pp. 39–40).

Yet, there is generally a lack of quantitative studies examining how the individual experience of ethnic discrimination influences Nigerians’ sense of belonging to their nationality relative to their ethnicity. Using the framework of the rejection-identification and rejection-disidentification theories, this study aims to address that gap. More specifically, it investigates whether Nigerians who experience discrimination are more likely to prioritize their ethnic identity over their national identity. The study then proceeds to test this relationship for the larger African population. Finally, using the data for Nigeria, the study investigates how belonging to each of the major ethnic groups

³ According to the Minority Rights Group, the Hausa/Fulani constitute 29 percent of Nigeria’s population, the Yoruba constitute 21 percent, while Igbos constitute 18 percent. To access this information, visit: <https://minorityrights.org/country/nigeria/>

(i.e., Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, and Yoruba) influences the likelihood of national identification relative to ethnic identification.

Furthermore, most studies testing the rejection-identification and rejection-disidentification theories have been conducted in Western countries and tend to focus on immigrants and racial minorities (e.g., Baldwin-White et al. 2017; Kunst et al. 2012; Leach et al. 2010; Verkuyten & Yildiz 2007). There is generally a lack of studies testing these theories among different ethnic groups with the same nationality in Nigeria and the larger African continent. A similar study to this one is Robinson's (2014) seminal work, in which she used both individual and country-level variables to examine how modernization, colonial experience, and ethnic diversity influence the likelihood of Africans identifying with their nationality relative to their ethnicity. She found that educational attainment, employment, and residing in an urban center increased the likelihood of individuals feeling closer to their nationality than their ethnicity. Her regression results also showed that ethnic diversity and the partitioning of ethnic groups across artificially created state borders increased the likelihood of individuals prioritizing their national identity over their ethnic identity.

This study differs from the one conducted by Robinson (2014) in the following ways: First, it specifically examines how the individual experience of ethnic discrimination influences the likelihood of Nigerians and the African population identifying with their nationality relative to their ethnicity. Second, this study provides a detailed analysis of the Nigerian case study. It is important to focus on the Nigerian case because Nigeria is not only Africa's most populous country, but also home to one of the continent's most diverse populations.⁴ Third, this study utilizes a more robust dataset. Unlike Robinson's study that used the Round 3 Afrobarometer survey data that covered only sixteen African countries ($n = 22,155$), the present study pools the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer survey data that cover 34 African countries ($n = 93,907$). Lastly, while Robinson collapsed the five response categories of the variable measuring the importance of national identity

⁴ Among the 16 African countries included in Robinson's study, Nigerians had the weakest sense of national identification.

relative to ethnic identity into a dummy variable, this study, which employs ordered logit regression as the analytical technique does not do that. This makes it possible to determine the effect of ethnic discrimination on each of the five categories of the dependent variable.

Consistent with the rejection-identification and the rejection-disidentification theories, this study finds that the experience of ethnic discrimination prompts Nigerians to prioritize their ethnic identity over their national identity. This finding is robust to different operationalizations of discrimination. Furthermore, these theories are supported by individual-level data covering 34 African countries. The regression results also show that among Nigerians, Igbo ethnicity increases the likelihood of individuals prioritizing their ethnic identity over their national identity. This is likely because members of the Igbo ethnic group harbor grievances due to their exclusion from political power at the center in post-war Nigeria. Conversely, belonging to the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups had the opposite effect. This may be attributed to their frequent representation in central political power, which fosters a stronger sense of national belonging.

The remainder of this study is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses selected ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria, emphasizing events from over five decades ago to provide context for understanding present-day ethnoreligious divisions. Section 3 discusses the relevant theories and states the hypotheses. Section 4 introduces the data and operationalizes the variables that will be used to estimate the regression models. Section 5 presents and discusses the regression results, while Section 6 summarizes the study and concludes.

2. Ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria's history is marked by violent ethnoreligious conflicts.⁵ Having an ethnically and religiously diverse population is not necessarily a problem because "A society can function perfectly well if its citizens hold multiple identities, but problems arise when those subnational identities arouse loyalties that override loyalty to the nation as a whole." (Collier 2009, p. 51). The problem with

⁵ Ethnicity and religion overlap to a great extent in Nigeria. See Tuki (2024).

ethnicity and religion in Nigeria is that they have become “an instrumental marker that is used to mobilize and successfully appropriate power, resources, and political ascendancy.” (Agbiboa 2013, p. 6), turning Nigeria into “an amalgam of rival ethnic groups pitched against each other in a jostle for power and resources that have been reflected in the political processes, sometimes threatening the corporate existence of the country.” (Agbiboa 2013, p. 10).

To better understand Nigeria’s current situation, it is crucial to review past conflicts that have marred its history and consider how ethnicity and religion contributed to intensifying the violence. As discussed in Section 1, Southern Nigeria’s population was more receptive to British influence compared to that in the Northern Region during the colonial era. Moreover, due to the focus of Christian missionary evangelization in the Southern Region, most of its inhabitants substituted Christianity for their traditional religions. Conversely, the emirs in the Northern Region prohibited Christian missionary evangelization because they wanted to protect their religious customs from external interference.

Because most schools during the colonial era were established by Christian missionaries, the population in Southern Nigeria had greater access to Western education than their counterparts in the Northern Region, resulting in a literacy and development gap that continues to exist in Nigeria today (Vaughan 2016, pp. 53–54; Laitin 1986, p. 6; Ogunsola 1974, pp. 1–8; Coleman 1958, pp. 330–331). This explains why Chinua Achebe asserted that the Hausa/Fulani in Northern Nigeria had been held back by “a wary religion.” (Achebe 1983, p. 46). It should be emphasized, however, that the primary goal of the missionaries was to spread Christianity, not to educate the local population. Education served as a powerful means to accomplish this goal by teaching people to read and write in English, making it easier for them to read the Bible and understand the missionaries’ proselytization (Siollun 2021, pp. 267–270).

After taking control of Northern Nigeria, the British encountered a lack of educated individuals among the local population. Moreover, the Muslim Hausa-Fulani people’s unwillingness to associate with the British, whom they regarded as infidels, prompted the British

government to bring in migrants from the Southern Region to meet their needs. The Hausa-Fulani were averse to the Southern migrants mainly because they had adopted Western values and embraced the imperialists' *abominable* religion—i.e., Christianity. To reduce the potential for conflict between Southern immigrants and the Hausa-Fulani population, the colonial government implemented a policy of residential segregation. They created special areas known as *Sabon Gari* where immigrants would reside. The purpose of this policy was to limit interactions between the native population and the immigrants. These segregated areas were established in the major Northern cities such as Kano, Zaria, and Kaduna (Albert, 1996, pp. 94-95; Gale, 1980). In his 1962–63 study of Hausa migrants who had emigrated to Southern Nigeria (particularly in Yoruba towns) for the purpose of trade, Cohen (1969) found that they also lived separately from the host population in enclaves called *Sabo* (an abridged form of *Sabon Gari*). These enclaves, which were headed by a Hausa chief called *Sarkin Hausawa*, were “established on the basis of Hausa cultural distinctiveness under the Hausa motto: ‘Our customs are different.’” (Cohen 1969, p. 9).

Although colonialism is generally seen as an extractive and exploitative institution that has hindered Africa's development (Acemoglu & Robinson 2012; Rodney 1982), the path to ending colonial rule in Nigeria was complex. Nigeria gained independence from British rule in 1960, but it might have achieved independence four years earlier were it not for the contentious relationships between the dominant political parties in the three regions (i.e., NPC, AG, and NCNC)—and, consequently, Nigeria's three major ethnic groups. In 1953, the NCNC and the AG backed a motion to set Nigeria's independence date for 1956. However, the leader of the NPC, Sir. Ahmadu Bello, was reluctant to support the motion because he believed Nigeria was not yet prepared for self-governance. The NPC's reluctance to back the motion strengthened the alliance between the NCNC and AG, which had previously been rivals. Together, they pressured the NPC and the Northern population to endorse self-rule. Northern leaders were ridiculed and labelled “imperialist stooges” who couldn't make decisions independently, which escalated tensions between the Northern Region and the other two regions. Despite the deadlock, the NCNC and AG remained

determined to achieve self-government and sent delegations to the city of Kano in the Northern Region to rally support. This effort led to a four-day riot in Kano between Northerners and Southerners, resulting in 36 deaths (Coleman 1958, pp. 398–400).

The killings during the Kano riots followed a specific pattern: 15 Northerners were killed in the mainly Christian area of *Sabon Gari*, while 21 Southerners were killed in the predominantly Muslim areas outside of *Sabon Gari*. In the aftermath of the riots, residential segregation along ethnic and religious lines became more salient, as the few surviving Hausa/Fulani residents of *Sabon-Gari* fled to the predominantly Muslim areas, while the remaining Southerners in the Muslim-majority areas moved to *Sabon Gari* (Albert 1996, p. 97). The NPC's opposition to early independence stemmed from the fear that the Northern Region would be dominated by the Eastern and Western Regions (i.e., Southern Region), whose populations were better educated and equipped with the requisite skills to fill positions in the civil service (Falola & Heaton 2008, pp. 150–153). Northern leaders were willing to endure prolonged colonial rule to protect their regional interests.

Prior to the Kano riots, the 1945 Hausa-Igbo riot occurred in Jos, starting with a dispute between an Igbo and a Hausa merchant and escalating into an inter-ethnic conflict between members of their respective ethnic groups. Plotnicov (1971) noted that competition between the Hausa and Igbo in trade, the poverty and hardships following the end of World War II, and residential segregation all played significant roles in fueling the conflict. The Igbos lived in a segregated area known as *Sarkin Arab's Ward*, making them easy targets for the hostile Hausa mob. In response, the Igbos regrouped and retaliated against the Hausa.

The two conflict incidents discussed so far can be linked to the concept of separateness. Allport (1954, p. 19) observed that separateness can lead to intergroup conflict because “People who stay separate have few channels of communication. They easily exaggerate the degree of difference between groups, and readily misunderstand the grounds for it.” While segregation can be a result of legislation, as demonstrated by the *Sabon Gari* case in Northern Nigeria, segregated

areas can also be “established by the immigrants themselves through their continuous aggregation in given locations within an urban system.” (Albert 1996, p. 86). Furthermore, “It is not always the dominant majority that forces minority groups to remain separate. They often prefer to keep their identity, so that they need not strain to speak a foreign language or to watch their manners.” (Allport 1954, p. 18).

A major event in Nigeria’s history is the pogroms of 1966, which resulted in the killing of tens of thousands of Igbos, particularly those living in Northern Nigeria. This followed a coup by a group of young army officers, mostly of Igbo ethnicity, who overthrew Nigeria’s first civilian government in 1966. The coup claimed the lives of many prominent Northerners, including Nigeria’s first prime minister, Tafawa Balewa; the Northern Region’s premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello; and high-ranking army personnel. The premier of the Western Region, Samuel Ladoke Akintola, a Yoruba, was also killed during the coup. Due to the ethnicity of the perpetrators, coupled with the fact that top government officials of Igbo ethnicity like the president and the premiers of the Eastern and Midwest Regions had not been killed, the coup was interpreted as an attempt by the Igbos to assert dominance over the other ethnic groups. Moreover, Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, who was the most senior military officer at the time and of Igbo ethnicity, assumed power (Siollun 2009, pp. 77–80).

Upset over the deaths of many Northerners during the coup, Northern soldiers launched a counter-coup that resulted in Aguiyi-Ironsi’s death. They then systematically targeted and killed their Igbo colleagues. “Within three days [after the coup] every Igbo soldier was either dead, wounded, or fleeing for their life.” (Siollun 2009, p. 124). Following this, Northern soldiers expanded their attacks to the civilian population, killing Igbo civilians and destroying their property. This triggered a mass exodus of Igbos back to their homeland in the Eastern Region (Achebe 2012, pp. 82–83; Siollun 2009, pp. 127–138). The Igbos no longer felt safe in a united Nigeria. Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, the military administrator of the Eastern Region, soon declared the Eastern Region as the independent state of Biafra, sparking a three-year civil war that resulted in

over a million deaths between 1967 and 1970 (Ekwe-Ekwe 1990; Achebe 2012). The war ended in 1970 with the defeat of Biafran forces and the reintegration of Biafra into Nigeria, but separatist agitations continue to exist in Eastern Nigeria today (Tuki 2024a).

In this section, I have intentionally focused on conflicts that happened over fifty years ago to emphasize the historical origins of Nigeria's current divisions. The present is built upon the past whose legacies can endure. In the early 2000s, 12 out of the 19 states in Northern Nigeria adopted sharia law (Olaniyi 2011), further intensifying the divide between the Northern and Southern regions. Ethnoreligious conflicts and residential segregation along ethnic and religious lines continue to be issues in Nigeria (Rudloff & Vinson 2023; Scacco & Warren 2021; Eke 2022; Madueke 2019; Hoffmann 2017; Angerbrandt 2011, 2018). Members of the Hausa ethnic group residing in the predominantly Igbo Eastern Region today still live in segregated areas known as *Abakpa Quarters* (Albert 1996, p. 86), while the areas designated as *Sabon Gari* during the colonial period continue to have predominantly Christian populations. Religion remains a central aspect of Nigerians' daily lives. This explains why Campbell & Page (2018, p. 76) assert that "For most Nigerian Christians and Muslims, the Western concept of a rigid separation between religious and secular spheres is incompatible with 'true religion.'" According to the Wave 7 World Values Survey (WVS) (Haerpfer et al. 2022; Inglehart et al. 2014) conducted in 2018, 61 percent of Nigerians think it is good to have "a system governed by religious law in which there are no political parties or elections." Additionally, the survey reveals that 70% of the population believe their religion is the only acceptable one.

3. Theoretical considerations

3.1. Rejection-identification and rejection-disidentification models

Allport (1954, p. 7) defined prejudice as "an aversive or hostile attitude towards a person or group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group." He identified five stages through which people acted out their prejudice, of which discrimination was one: The first, *antilocution*, consisted of the verbal expression

of antagonism towards the outgroup but did not involve any form of action. Although most prejudice never went beyond this stage, this did not necessarily make it harmless: “Violence is always an outgrowth of milder states of mind. Although most barking (antilocution) does not lead to biting, yet there is never a bite without previous barking.” (Allport 1954, p. 57). The second, *avoidance*, involved the prejudiced person making deliberate efforts to avoid members of the outgroup, even if this came at his or her expense. The third, *discrimination*, involved excluding members of the outgroup from opportunities that were beneficial to them, such as employment, housing allocation, access to education, and political rights. The fourth stage, *physical attack*, involved violent actions that threatened the physical wellbeing of the outgroup. The fifth and final stage, *Extermination*, consisted of systematized violent events like pogroms, massacres, and genocides, which were driven by the goal of obliterating members of the outgroup.

Yet, discrimination can engender cohesion among minorities contending with a dominant outgroup. In their rejection-identification model, Branscombe et al. (1999, p. 137) asserted that “when devalued group members [i.e., minorities] believe that acceptance and fair treatment by a more powerful group is improbable, identifying with the lower status in-group may be the best possible strategy for feeling accepted and enhancing psychological well-being.” They identified certain conditions under which discrimination could strengthen ingroup identification: First, the minority group must view discrimination as persistent and widespread. Second, the minority group must perceive discrimination as unfair. Although they recognized that discrimination adversely affects minorities’ wellbeing and self-esteem, they noted that a stronger sense of identification among minority ingroup members due to discrimination could lead to improvements in their wellbeing and self-esteem. Additionally, the model purports that stronger ingroup identification is associated with increased hostility towards the dominant outgroup.

Branscombe et al. (1999, p. 144) evaluated their model using data from African Americans in the United States. They concluded that “When they [i.e., African Americans] perceive themselves as not receiving equal treatment across a variety of situations, they resent the powerful group and

align themselves more closely to the minority group.” Leach et al. (2010, p. 548) also conducted a series of experimental studies that led them to the following conclusion: “Thus, the response to evidence that ‘others devalue us’ was to assert that ‘I value us.’” They explained the mechanism underlying stronger ingroup identification among members of the devalued group thus: “Although the assertion of group identity may not alter the reality of the group’s devaluation or the rejection felt about it, it can establish that one has the resources to handle this potential threat.” (Leach et al. 2010, p. 547). In a study carried out among the Turkish-Dutch in the Netherlands, Verkuyten and Yildiz (2007) found that perceived social rejection led to stronger Turkish identification. The positive effect of discrimination on ethnic and religious identification has been found among Latino Youth and Arab Muslim Americans in the United States (Baldwin-White et al. 2017; Hakim et al 2018), among Muslims in Switzerland (Lindemann & Stolz 2021), among Kurds in Turkey (Sarigil & Fazlioglu 2014), among German-Turks and Muslims in Germany (Kunst et al. 2012; Holtz et al. 2013; Skrobaneck 2009), among Muslims who belong to established immigrant groups in the Netherlands (Maliepaard 2015), and among immigrants in Canada (Hou et al. 2018).

Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (2009) criticized the rejection-identification model on the grounds that it disregards the multiple identities that immigrants and ethnic minorities possess, which may also be meaningful to them. They argued that national identity could moderate the effect of discrimination on outgroup hostility. This is because ethnic minorities who face discrimination might decide to distance themselves from the larger society (i.e., dis-identification), which in turn prompts negative attitudes toward the national outgroup. They termed this the rejection-disidentification model. Analyzing panel data collected from immigrants originating from former Soviet countries (i.e., Estonia and Russia) in Finland, they found that discrimination indeed weakened people’s sense of national identification. Furthermore, they discovered that ethnic identification did not moderate the effect of discrimination on wellbeing. The negative effect of discrimination on national identification have been found among ethnic minorities in Canada (Wu & Finnsdottir 2021), Latin American immigrants in Spain (Lobera 2021), British Muslims in the

United Kingdom (Hutchison et al. 2015), ethnic minority early adolescents in Germany (Fleischmann et al. 2019), the elderly in China (Yao et al. 2018), and ethnic minorities in the United States (Hakim et al. 2018; Molina et al. 2015).

By employing a dependent variable that simultaneously considers respondents' national and ethnic identities, this study incorporates elements of both the rejection-identification and rejection-disidentification models. Within the context of Nigeria, I anticipate that the experience of discrimination would diminish people's sense of national belonging and strengthen their identification with their ethnic group. In other words, I expect confirmation of both the rejection-identification and rejection-disidentification models. Moreover, Nigeria meets the necessary conditions of discrimination being perceived to be *persistent* and *widespread*, as stipulated by the rejection-identification model. As discussed in Section 2, ethnoreligious divisions were present in Nigeria even before its independence from British colonial rule in 1960, and they still remain a problem today. Furthermore, the Afrobarometer survey data (BenYishay et al. 2017) upon which this study relies, shows that in 2020, 35 percent of Nigerians reported that they had experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity during the past year. I also expect these theories to hold in the larger African context. The discussion so far leads to the first hypothesis that this study seeks to test:

H1: *Among Nigerians and the larger African population, the experience of ethnic discrimination is negatively correlated with national belonging—i.e., individuals who have experienced discrimination are more likely to prioritize their ethnic identity over their nationality.*

3.2. Variation in national belonging among Nigeria's major ethnic groups

Yet, it is possible that some Nigerian ethnic groups might be more inclined to prioritize their nationality over their ethnicity than others. This might be due to political reasons. Agbiboa and Maiangwa (2013, p. 383) observed that “elections and political appointments are areas where the interplay between religion and politics are most clearly demonstrated in Nigeria.” Nigerians may prefer members of their ethnic group to hold central political power because the country's political system is highly centralized, concentrating most authority in the president's office. Additionally,

having control at the center equates to managing the nation's substantial oil revenues (Smith 2007, p. 192). Considering this context, along with Nigerians' tendency to vote based on ethnoreligious affiliations (Ostien 2012), and the tendency for politicians to favor their co-ethnics in the provision of public goods (Mousseau & Mousseau 2023; Ejdemyr 2018; Franck & Rainer 2012), individuals from ethnic groups not represented at the central level may have a diminished sense of national belonging due to the feeling of being unrepresented by the government. Analyzing survey data for Africa, Green (2020) has found that individuals are more likely to identify with the nation once the incumbent president is their co-ethnic, and more likely to identify with their ethnic group once the president belongs to another ethnic group. In a similar vein, Wimmer (2017) pointed out that national pride is not necessarily predicated on the size of an ethnic group, but rather by the degree to which the group is represented politically—i.e., the political power it wields. This indicates that ethnic minorities might have levels of national pride that are comparable with those of the dominant ethnic groups if they are represented in the political sphere.

To contextualize the discussion so far, a historical overview of political representation at the center among Nigeria's three major ethnic groups (i.e., Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani) is warranted. Nigeria was mainly ruled by military dictators from 1970, after the Biafra war ended, until 1999 when the military formally handed power to a civilian government. During this period, a person of Igbo ethnicity never held the position of Head-of-State. Nigeria's first president after the democratic transition, Olusegun Obasanjo, belonged to the Yoruba ethnic group. He served two terms from 1999 to 2007, and his vice-president, Abubakar Atiku, belonged to the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group. Subsequently, Umaru Yar'Adua, also of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group, was elected president in 2007. He did not complete his first term in office because he died in 2010, allowing his vice-president, Goodluck Jonathan, from a minority ethnic group in the Southern Region, to assume the presidency. Goodluck Jonathan appointed Namadi Sambo, a member of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group, as his vice-president. Although Goodluck Jonathan and Namadi Sambo won the 2011 presidential elections, allowing them to remain in office from

2011 to 2015, their victory was marred by post-election violence, much of which occurred in Northern Nigeria because the opposition candidate, Muhamadu Buhari, of Hausa/Fulani ethnicity, along with some of his supporters, refused to accept the election results. The post-election violence, which had an ethnoreligious undertone, resulted in hundreds of deaths (Angerbrandt 2018; Human Rights Watch 2011). Muhammadu Buhari won the 2015 presidential elections and served two terms until 2023. His vice-president, Yemi Osinbajo, belonged to the Yoruba ethnic group. Bola Ahmed Tinibu, of Yoruba ethnicity, won Nigeria's most recent elections in 2023 alongside his vice-president, Kashim Shettima, who belongs to the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group.

Because members of the Igbo ethnic group, despite constituting a major ethnic category, have been excluded from political power at the center, I expect that they would identify more with their ethnicity than nationality. This political exclusion of Igbos partly explains why neo-Biafran groups, which are agitating for the independence of Nigeria's predominantly Igbo Eastern Region, have emerged (Tuki 2024a; Lewis 2023; Nche 2023). Although Nigerians typically attach significant importance to their ethnic identities, I expect that members of the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba ethnic groups would prioritize their nationality over their ethnicity because they have been frequently represented at the center of political power. This should foster in them a sense of national belonging. This leads to the second set of hypotheses that this study seeks to test:

H2a: *Members of the Igbo ethnic group are likely to prioritize their ethnicity over their nationality*

H2b: *Members of the Yoruba ethnic group are likely to prioritize their nationality over their ethnicity*

H2c: *Members of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group are likely to prioritize their nationality over their ethnicity*

4. Data and methodology

This study relies mainly on the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer survey data (BenYishay et al., 2017) for Nigeria that were collected in 2017 and 2020 respectively.⁶ Each survey round consists of 1,600 observations, which gives a total of 3,200 observations. In each survey round, respondents were

⁶ To access the Afrobarometer data and survey questionnaire visit: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/>

drawn from all of Nigeria’s 36 states, plus the federal capital territory (i.e., Abuja). Respondents were at least 18 years old with males and females represented in the ratio 50:50. The data reflected the dominance of Nigeria’s three major ethnic groups with the Hausa/Fulani (35%), Yoruba (19%), and Igbo (14%) together accounting for 68 percent of the sample. Section 4.1 discusses the variables that will be used to estimate the regression model, while Table A1 in the appendix presents the summary statistics for these variables. I only used the Rounds 7 and 8 data for the analysis because the relevant question from which I derived the explanatory variable—i.e., *ethnic discrimination*—was asked in only these survey rounds. I discuss the pooled data for Africa in section 5.2.

4.1. Operationalization of the variables

4.1.1. Dependent variable

National belonging. This measures the degree to which respondents feel close to their nationality relative to ethnicity. It was derived from the question: “Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Nigerian and being a [Respondent’s ethnic group]. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?” The responses were measured on an ordinal scale with the following five categories: “1 = I feel only [Respondent’s ethnic group], 2 = I feel more [Respondent’s ethnic group] than Nigerian, 3 = I feel equally Nigerian and [Respondent’s ethnic group], 4 = I feel more Nigerian than [Respondent’s ethnic group], 5 = I feel only Nigerian.” I treated “don’t know” and “refused to answer” responses as missing observations. This led to a marginal decrease in the number of observations. I applied this rule to all variables derived from the Afrobarometer survey.

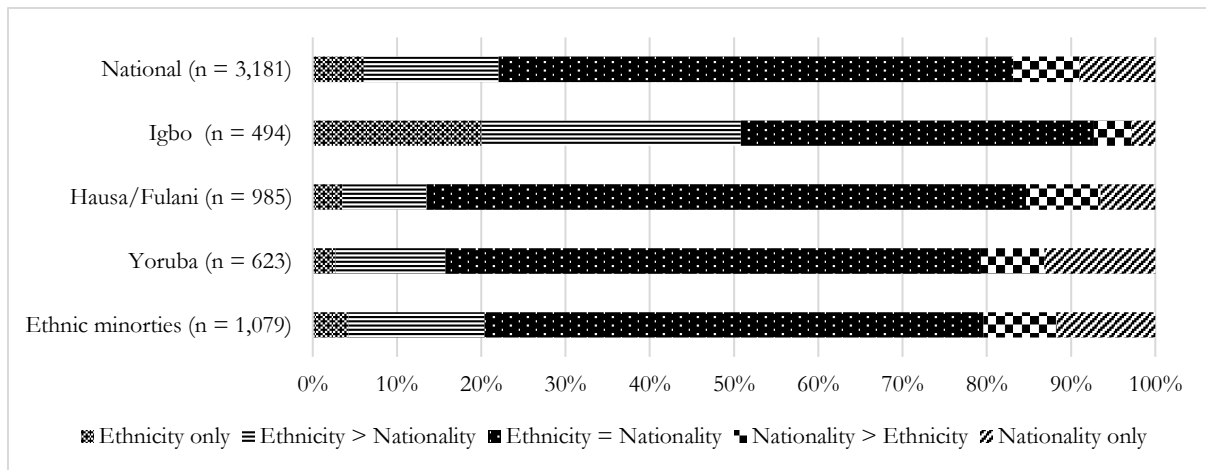


Figure 2: Ethnic distribution of national belonging in Nigeria

Note: The y-axis shows the total number of respondents and the number of respondents based on ethnicity who answered the relevant question about the degree to which they feel Nigerian relative to their ethnicity. The x-axis shows the percentage of respondents associated with the various response categories. Ethnic minorities are respondents who belong to other ethnic groups besides the major three (i.e., Igbo Hausa/Fulani, and Yoruba). The figure is based on pooled data from the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer survey.

Figure 2 shows that only 22 percent of Nigerians feel either an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnic group or feel closer to their ethnicity than nationality, while 17 percent of them feel either an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality or feel closer to their nationality than ethnicity. Disaggregating the data based on the major ethnic categories revealed that members of the Igbo ethnic group have the weakest sense of national belonging: While 51 percent of Igbos feel either an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnic group or feel closer to their ethnicity than nationality, the estimates for the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, and ethnic minorities did not exceed 20 percent.

4.1.2. Explanatory variables

Discrimination (binary). This is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if a respondent has experienced discrimination based on his/her ethnicity during the past year and 0 otherwise. More specifically, it was derived from the following question, “In the past year, how often, if ever, have you personally been treated unfairly by other Nigerians based on your ethnicity.”⁷ The responses

⁷ This is the exact question asked in the Round 8 survey. In the round 7 survey, the question differed slightly: “In the past year, how often, if at all, have you personally been discriminated against based on your ethnicity?”

were measured on a scale with four ordinal categories ranging from, “0 = never” to “3 = many times.” I collapsed the responses into a dummy variable by coding the subsample of respondents who had never experienced discrimination as 0, and those who had experienced discrimination at least once or twice as 1. Because the binary measure of discrimination combines all respondents who have experienced discrimination into a single category—irrespective of the frequency of the experience—I developed an alternative measure of discrimination in which, using the subsample of respondents who had never experienced discrimination as the reference category, I developed dummy variables for the remaining three response categories—i.e., “once or twice,” “several times,” and “many times.” This allows me to determine the effect of different levels of ethnic discrimination on people’s sense of national belonging.

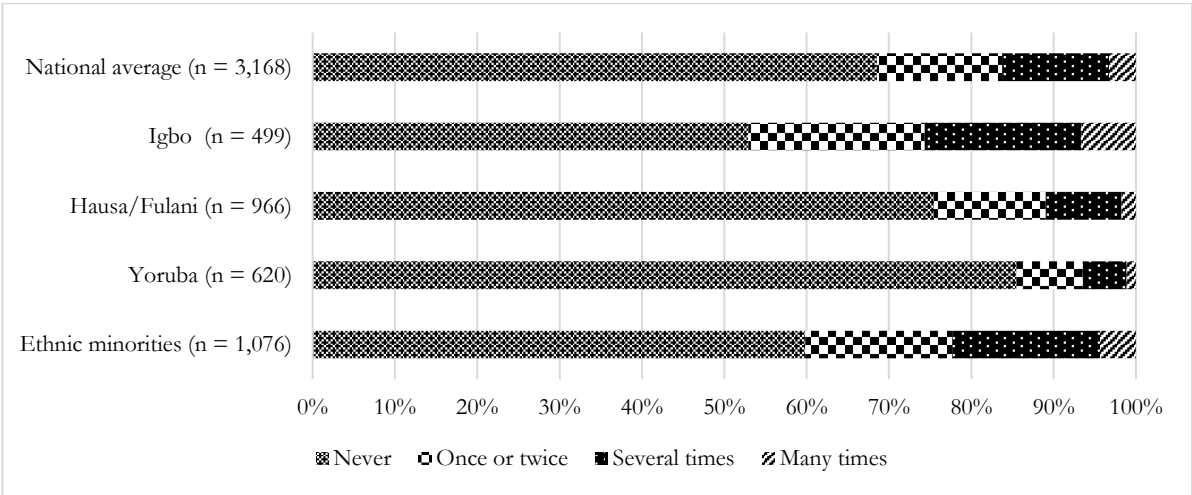


Figure 3: Experience of ethnic discrimination among Nigerian ethnic groups

Note: The y-axis shows the total number of respondents and the number of respondents based on ethnicity who were asked the relevant question about the experience of discrimination. x-axis shows the percentage of respondents associated with the various response categories. Ethnic minorities are respondents who belong to other ethnic groups besides the major three (i.e., Igbo Hausa/Fulani, and Yoruba). The figure is based on pooled data from the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer surveys.

As shown in Figure 3, on average, 31 percent of Nigerians have experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity at least once or twice during the past year. Disaggregating the data based on the major ethnic categories reveals that members of the Igbo ethnic group reported the highest level of ethnic discrimination: 47 percent of them reported experiencing discrimination at least once or twice. Minority ethnic groups came in second place with 40 percent having experienced

some degree of discrimination. Members of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group came in third place, with 25 percent of them experiencing some form of discrimination, while members of the Yoruba ethnic group reported the lowest level of ethnic discrimination, with only 15 percent of them reporting that they had experienced discrimination.

Ethnicity. I developed four dummy variables for the three major ethnic categories (i.e., Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa/Fulani) and ethnic minorities. The ethnic minority variable consists of respondents who do not belong to the major three ethnic groups. The dummy variables take the value of 1 if respondents belong to the ethnic category of interest and 0 otherwise. This means that the reference category consists of respondents who do not belong to the ethnic category of interest. For instance, the variable *Igbo* takes a value of 1 if a respondent belongs to the Igbo ethnic group and 0 otherwise.

4.1.3. Control variables

Educational level. This measures the highest level of education that the respondents have attained. It is measured on a scale with ten ordinal categories ranging from “0 = no formal schooling” to “9 = post-graduate.”

Demographic covariates. This includes respondents’ age, gender, and religious affiliation. Gender takes a value of 1 for male and 0 for female. Christian affiliation takes a value of 1 if a respondent is Christian and 0 if Muslim. Age is measured in years.

4.2. Analytical technique

To examine the effect of ethnic discrimination on Nigerians’ predisposition to prioritize their national identity over their ethnic identity (i.e., Hypothesis 1), I estimate a regression model of the following form:

$$\gamma_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Discrimination}_i + \beta_2 \lambda'_i + \delta_i \quad (1)$$

Where γ_i is the dependent variable which measures the degree to which respondent i feels Nigerian relative to his/her ethnicity, λ'_i is a vector of control variables measuring the respondent’s

educational attainment and demographic characteristics, β_0 is the intercept, β_1 and β_2 are the coefficients of the explanatory and control variables respectively, and δ_i is the error term.

To determine whether certain ethnic groups in Nigeria are more inclined to prioritize their ethnicity over their nationality (i.e., Hypothesis 2), I estimate a series of bivariate regression models of the following form:

$$\gamma_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Ethnic group}_i + \delta_i \quad (2)$$

Where γ_i , β_0 , β_1 and δ_i are same as in equation (1). *Ethnic group*_{*i*} could represent any of the three main ethnic groups (i.e., Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, and Yoruba) or belonging to a minority ethnic group—i.e., other ethnicities besides the major three.

Because the dependent variable is measured on a scale with five ordinal categories, I estimated the model using ordered logit (Ologit) regression, which is based on maximum likelihood estimation. A benefit of this approach is that it allows me to determine the effect of the ethnic discrimination on each category of the dependent variable. Fixed effects for the ethnic groups to which respondents belong were included in the regression models based on Equation (1) to capture the effect of ethnic affiliation on the outcome variable. Fixed effects for the survey rounds were also added to the model. Standard errors were clustered at the state level to account for potential correlation between observations within the same state.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. The Nigerian case

5.1.1. Ethnic discrimination and national belonging

Table 1 reports the results of regression models examining the effect of ethnic discrimination on the degree to which Nigerian's feel close to their nationality relative to their ethnicity. In model 1, where only the binary measure of discrimination was considered, it carried the expected negative sign and was significant at the 1 percent level. This supports Hypothesis 1, indicating that Nigerians who have experienced ethnic discrimination are less likely to identify with their nationality than

with their ethnicity. In other words, the experience of discrimination strengthens Nigerians' sense of belonging to their ethnicity relative to their nationality. This finding is consistent with both the rejection-identification and rejection-disidentification theories.

Table 1: Ordered logit models regressing national/ethnic identification on ethnic discrimination among Nigerians

National belonging ^σ	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Discrimination (binary)	-0.429*** (0.149)	-0.387*** (0.148)	-0.306** (0.125)			
<u>Discrimination frequency</u>						
<i>Never (reference)</i>						
Once or twice				-0.279* (0.149)	-0.267* (0.149)	-0.157 (0.132)
Several times				-0.546*** (0.192)	-0.486** (0.189)	-0.45*** (0.169)
Many times				-0.725* (0.39)	-0.604 (0.388)	-0.505* (0.289)
Educational level		0.011 (0.019)	0.025 (0.018)		0.011 (0.019)	0.026 (0.018)
Christian affiliation		-0.42** (0.185)	0.152 (0.142)		-0.412** (0.183)	0.164 (0.144)
Male		-0.067 (0.093)	-0.069 (0.1)		-0.066 (0.093)	-0.069 (0.1)
Age		-0.005* (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)		-0.005** (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)
Intercept 1	-2.881*** (0.195)	-3.242*** (0.205)	-3.39*** (0.238)	-2.886*** (0.193)	-3.243*** (0.205)	-3.395*** (0.238)
Intercept 2	-1.405*** (0.141)	-1.754*** (0.171)	-1.794*** (0.2)	-1.407*** (0.141)	-1.753*** (0.171)	-1.794*** (0.201)
Intercept 3	1.474*** (0.139)	1.162*** (0.234)	1.319*** (0.239)	1.476*** (0.14)	1.165*** (0.234)	1.321*** (0.24)
Intercept 4	2.191*** (0.181)	1.861*** (0.278)	2.041*** (0.272)	2.193*** (0.182)	1.864*** (0.279)	2.043*** (0.273)
Survey round FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Ethnic group FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	3152	3109	3109	3152	3109	3109
Pseudo R²	0.004	0.009	0.05	0.005	0.01	0.051
Log pseudolikelihood	-3709.586	-3634.321	-3485.442	-3706.435	-3632.392	-3482.643
AIC statistic	7429.171	7286.642	7036.884	7426.87	7286.783	7035.287

Note: Clustered robust standard errors are in parenthesis, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. The regression results are based on pooled data from the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer survey. σ is the dependent variable which measures the degree to which respondents feel close to their nationality relative to their ethnicity.

Model 2 shows that this result is robust to the inclusion of control variables. Among the control variables, only Christian affiliation and age were statistically significant. If the negative sign accompanying Christian affiliation were to be taken at face value, it suggests that compared to Muslims, Christians are more likely to prioritize their ethnicity over their nationality. The negative sign accompanying age suggests that people tend to feel closer to their ethnicity than their nationality as they get older. The statistical insignificance of gender suggests that men do not differ

from women in terms of the likelihood of prioritizing their nationality over their ethnicity. Likewise, the statistical insignificance of educational level suggests that education has no effect on the degree to which individuals feel closer to their nationality relative to their ethnicity.

In model 3, where I added fixed effects for the respondents' ethnicities and the survey rounds, the AIC statistic was 7,036, which is lower than that in the preceding models. This suggests that model 3 has a better fit than its predecessors. Although the binary measure of discrimination maintained its negative sign, its significance level dropped to 5 percent. Moreover, Christian affiliation became statistically insignificant. This is not surprising because ethnicity and religion overlap to a great extent in Nigeria; excluding ethnic groups fixed effects in model 2 might have led to an overestimation of the effect of religious affiliation on the outcome variable.

However, the binary measure of discrimination prevents me from determining how different levels of discrimination influence the dependent variable because all levels of discrimination were collapsed into a single category. This prompted me to conduct a robustness check in which, using the subsample of respondents who had never experienced discrimination as the reference category, I developed dummy variables for the remaining three categories of discrimination. As shown in model 4, where I considered only the three levels of ethnic discrimination, they all carried negative signs and were statistically significant. Moreover, the size of the coefficient for each level of discrimination increased with the frequency of discrimination. This might indicate that the negative effect of discrimination on national identification increases with the frequency individuals experience discrimination.

In model 5, where I added the control variables, the highest frequency of discrimination—i.e., *many times*—became statistically insignificant. In model 6, where I added fixed effects for the respondents' ethnic groups and the survey rounds, the AIC statistic of 7,035 was much lower than those in models 5 and 4, indicating that model 6 has the best fit of the three models. Furthermore, only the lowest level of discrimination—i.e., *once or twice*—was statistically insignificant in model 6. This suggests that respondents who have experienced discrimination only once or twice do not

differ statistically from the reference category—i.e., those who have not experienced discrimination—in terms of the likelihood of prioritizing their national identity over their ethnic identity. Conversely, individuals who have experienced discrimination either several times or many times are more likely than those in the reference category to prioritize their ethnicity over their nationality.

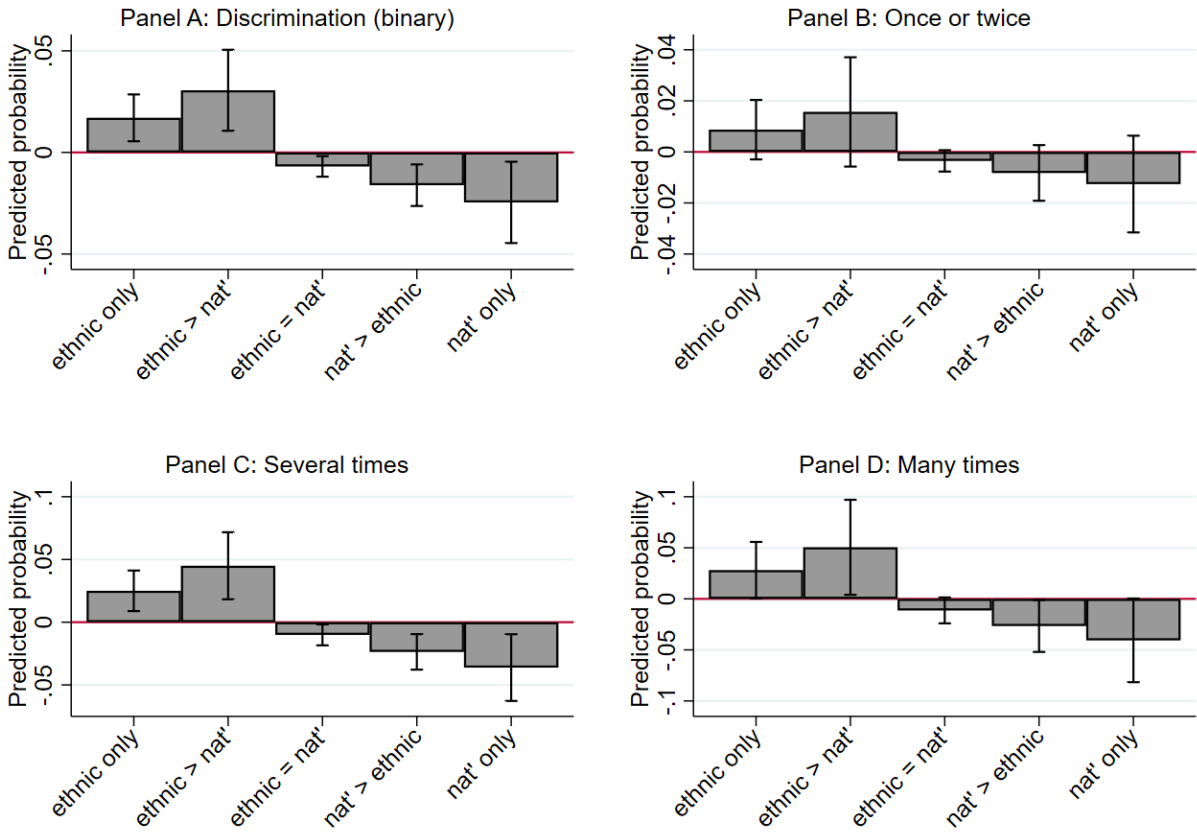


Figure 4: Average marginal effects of discrimination on national belonging in Nigeria

Note: Panel A (based on model 3 in Table 1) visualizes the effect of the binary measure of ethnic discrimination on the five categories of the dependent variable, which measures the importance that Nigerians attach to their nationality relative to their ethnicity. Panels B, C, and D (based on models 6 in Table 1) show the effect of the various levels of discrimination on the dependent variable. Confidence intervals are at the 90 percent level. “nat” denotes “national identity,” while “ethnic” denotes “ethnic identity.”

To illustrate the effect sizes of the results reported in Table 1, I plotted the predicted probabilities as shown in Figure 4. A cursory look at the figure shows that the effect of discrimination on national belonging is largest on the response category where respondents were asked whether they felt closer to their ethnicity than their nationality. Panel A shows that compared to individuals who have not experienced discrimination, those who have (irrespective of the

frequency) are 1.7 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnic group and 2.46 percentage points less likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. As shown in Panel B, where all the whiskers cross the horizontal line at zero, individuals who have experienced discrimination once or twice do not differ statistically from those in the reference group—i.e., individuals who have not experienced discrimination in the past year. Panel C shows that compared to the reference group, individuals who have experienced discrimination several times are 2.5 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnic group and 3.6 percentage points less likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. Panel D shows that individuals who have experienced discrimination many times are 2.8 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnic group and 4.1 percentage points less likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. A recurrent pattern that can be observed in the four panels is that the negative effect of discrimination on national identification is larger than its positive effect on ethnic identification.

5.1.2. Ethnicity and national belonging

To determine whether certain ethnic groups are more inclined to prioritize their ethnicity over their nationality than others, I estimated a series of bivariate regression models focusing on Nigeria's three major ethnic groups (i.e., Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) and ethnic minorities—i.e., individuals who belong to other ethnic groups besides the major three. Table 2 reports the regression results. In model 1, where I considered Igbo ethnicity, it carried a negative sign and was significant at the 1 percent level. This result, which supports Hypothesis 2a, indicates that compared to non-Igbo, members of the Igbo ethnic group are less likely to prioritize their nationality over their ethnicity. Put differently, Igbos are more likely to identify with their ethnicity than nationality. This might be because Igbos feel that they have been politically marginalized in post-war Nigeria (e.g., Tuki 2024a; Lewis 2023). In model 2 where I considered Yoruba ethnicity, it carried a positive sign and was significant at the 1 percent level. This finding, which supports Hypothesis 2b, suggests that compared to non-Yoruba, members of the Yoruba ethnic group are

more likely to prioritize their nationality over their ethnicity. Likewise, in model 3, where I considered Hausa/Fulani ethnicity, it carried a positive sign and was significant at the 10 percent level, indicating that members of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group are more likely to prioritize their national identity over their ethnic identity compared to the non-Hausa/Fulani. This finding is consistent with Hypothesis 2c. The strong sense of national belonging among the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani might be because they have been frequently represented in political power at the center, which fosters in them a strong sense of national belonging.

Table 2: Ordered logit models regressing national/ethnic identification on ethnicity among Nigerians

National belonging σ	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Igbo	-1.602*** (0.151)				-1.549*** (0.185)
Yoruba		0.438** (0.214)			0.18 (0.212)
Hausa/Fulani			0.315* (0.174)		0.033 (0.145)
Ethnic minorities				0.275 (0.173)	
Intercept 1	-3.14*** (0.133)	-2.643*** (0.208)	-2.628*** (0.229)	-2.631*** (0.238)	-3.087*** (0.151)
Intercept 2	-1.577*** (0.1)	-1.182*** (0.156)	-1.164*** (0.176)	-1.173*** (0.184)	-1.524*** (0.133)
Intercept 3	1.446*** (0.131)	1.692*** (0.139)	1.709*** (0.177)	1.693*** (0.15)	1.501*** (0.159)
Intercept 4	2.173*** (0.171)	2.413*** (0.17)	2.426*** (0.217)	2.414*** (0.183)	2.228*** (0.199)
Survey round FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3181	3181	3181	3181	3181
Pseudo R²	0.035	0.003	0.002	0.002	0.035
Log pseudolikelihood	-3628.569	-3747.801	-3751.23	-3753.226	-3626.937
AIC statistic	7267.139	7505.602	7512.46	7516.451	7267.874

Note: Clustered robust standard errors are in parenthesis, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. The regression results are based on pooled data from the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer survey. σ is the dependent variable which measures the degree to which respondents feel close to their nationality relative to their ethnicity.

In model 4, where I considered only ethnic minorities, the result was statistically insignificant. This suggests that Nigerians who belong to the minority ethnic groups do not differ statistically from other Nigerians (i.e., members of the majority ethnic groups combined) in terms of their likelihood to prioritize their nationality over their ethnicity. This result is quite striking because ethnic minorities often contend with discrimination from majority ethnic groups, which could make them identify strongly with their ethnic ingroup members and have a weak sense of national

identification. However, it possible that pooling all the minority ethnic groups into a single category might have masked some heterogeneities, as these ethnic groups vary in size, and this might have implications for their sense of national belonging. In model 5, I altered the model. I used ethnic minorities as the reference category and considered the three major ethnic groups simultaneously. Only Igbo ethnicity was statistically significant, with its negative sign providing further support for Hypothesis 2a. The statistical insignificance of Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani ethnicities indicates that members of these groups do not differ statistically from ethnic minorities in terms of the likelihood of prioritizing their national identity over their ethnic identity.

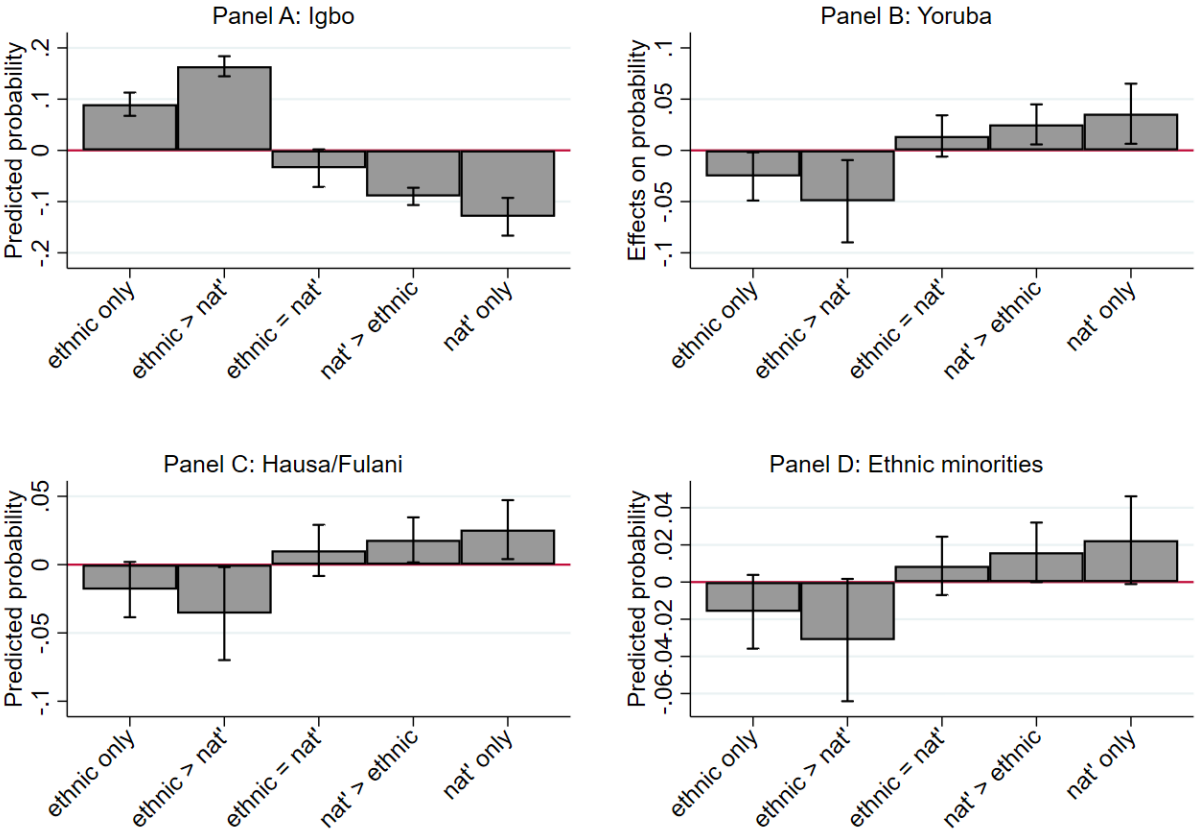


Figure 5: Average marginal effects of ethnicity on national belonging in Nigeria

Note: Panels A, B, C, and D (based on models 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Table 2) visualize the effect of ethnicity on the five categories of the dependent variable, which measures the importance that Nigerians attach to their nationality relative to their ethnicity. Confidence intervals are at the 90 percent level. “nat” denotes “national identity,” while “ethnic” denotes “ethnic identity.”

To illustrate the magnitude of the effects reported in Table 2, I plotted the predicted probabilities (see Figure 5). A cursory look at the four panels indicates that the effect on ethnicity on national belonging is also largest on the response category where respondents were asked

whether they felt closer to their ethnicity than their nationality. Panel A shows that compared to non-Igbos, Igbos are 9 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnic group and 13 percentage points less likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. Panel B shows that compared to the non-Yoruba, members of the Yoruba ethnic group are 2.5 percentage points less likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnic group and 3.6 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. Panel C shows that compared to the non-Hausa/Fulani, members of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group do not differ statistically in terms of the likelihood of having an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnicity. This is evidenced by the whisker associated with that response category crossing the horizontal line at zero. Nevertheless, they are still 2.6 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. As shown in Panel D where all the whiskers crossed the horizontal line at zero, ethnic minorities do not differ statistically from other Nigerians (i.e., members of the three main ethnic groups combined) in terms of the likelihood of prioritizing their national identity over their ethnic identity.

5.2. The African case

A poignant question one might ask is, *Do the predictions of the rejection-identification and rejection-disidentification models also hold in the case of Africa?* This prompted me to pool the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer survey data for 34 African countries and use it to replicate the regression results in Table 1. The sample consists of 93,907 observations, with over 500 ethnic groups represented. Because Africa's population is multi-religious and, unlike Nigeria, does not have the binary Christian-Muslim divide, I did not control for religious affiliation in the model. Nevertheless, I still included fixed effects for the respondents' ethnic groups, the survey rounds, and the countries in which respondents resided. I also clustered the standard errors at the country level. Table A2 in the appendix reports the summary statistics of the variables used to estimate the regression models for Africa, while Table A3 lists the 34 African countries included in the sample and the total number of observations drawn from each of them.

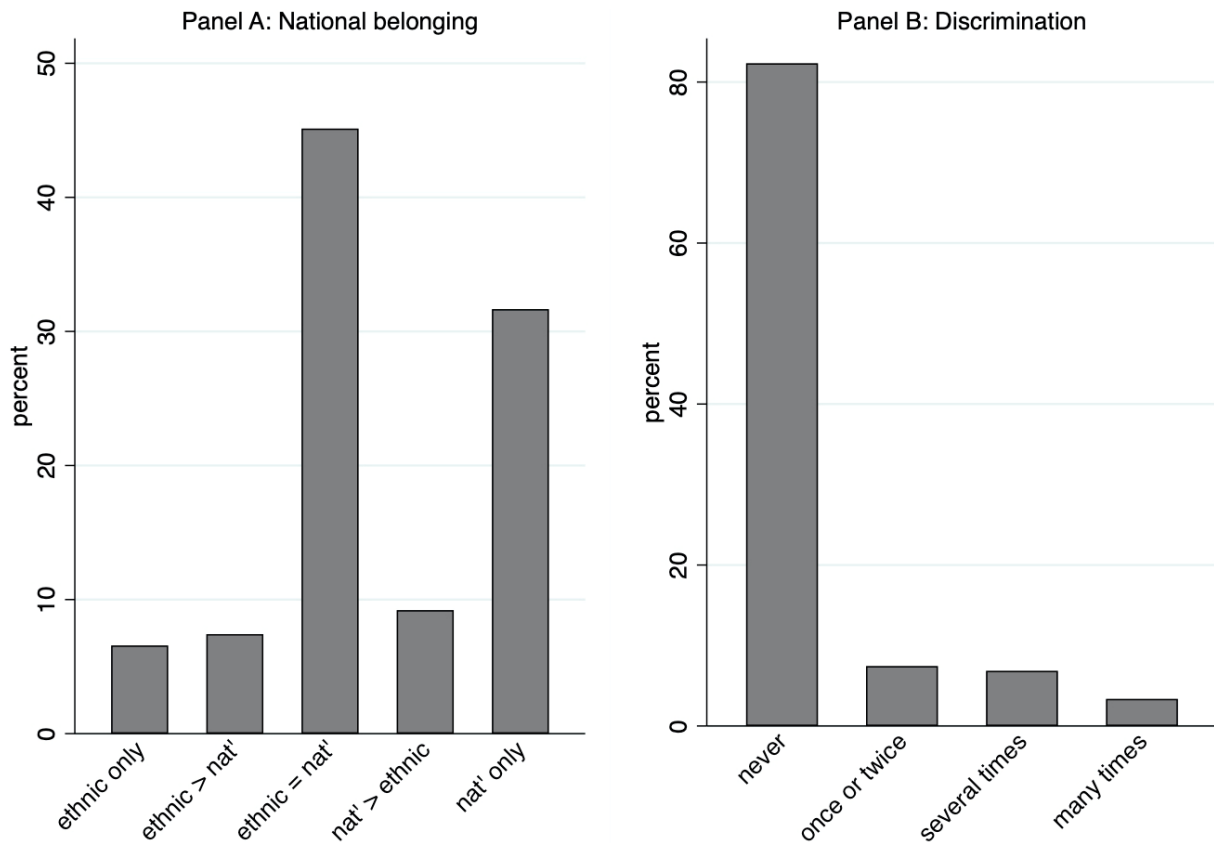


Figure 6: National belonging and discrimination in Africa

Note: Panel A visualizes the responses to a question asking Africans about the importance they attach to their national identity relative to their ethnic identity, while Panel B visualizes the responses to a question asking them about the frequency with which they have experienced ethnic discrimination during the past year. Panels A and B are based on samples of 81,678 and 91,934 respondents respectively. I treated the “don’t know” and “refused to answer” responses in the relevant questions as missing observations. The sample size in Panel A is smaller than in panel B because more respondents chose responses that I treated as missing. The x-axis in both panels shows the response categories, while the y-axis shows the percentage of respondents associated with each of the response categories. Both panels are based on pooled data from the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer surveys covering 34 African countries.

Panel A in Figure 6 shows that 14 percent of Africans either feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnicity or feel closer to their ethnicity than their nationality. This estimate is 8 percentage points lower than the Nigerian case. Moreover, 32 percent of Africans feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality, which is 23 percentage points higher than the estimate for Nigeria. Panel B shows that 18 percent of Africans have experienced discrimination at least once or twice during the past year. This is 13 percentage points lower than the estimate for Nigeria.

Table 3 reports the results of regression models examining the effect of discrimination on national belonging among Africans. Similar to the Nigerian case, Models 1 to 3 are based on the binary measure of discrimination, while models 4 to 6 are based on an operationalization of

discrimination in which, using the subsample of respondents who have not experienced discrimination as the reference category, I developed dummy variables for the remaining three categories of discrimination. In model 1, where I considered the binary measure of discrimination, it carried a negative sign and was statistically significant at the 1 percent level. This provides more support for Hypothesis 1, which states that the experience of discrimination weakens national identification and strengthens ethnic identification.

Table 3: Ordered logit models regressing national/ethnic identification on ethnic discrimination among Africans

National belonging ^σ	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Discrimination (binary)	-0.468*** (0.073)	-0.475*** (0.071)	-0.277*** (0.049)			
Discrimination frequency						
<i>Never (reference)</i>						
Once or twice				-0.407*** (0.071)	-0.415*** (0.067)	-0.177*** (0.04)
Several times				-0.483*** (0.093)	-0.493*** (0.092)	-0.342*** (0.064)
Many times				-0.585*** (0.1)	-0.588*** (0.101)	-0.383*** (0.082)
Educational level		0.016 (0.02)	0.055*** (0.009)		0.015 (0.02)	0.055*** (0.009)
Male		0.121*** (0.025)	0.107*** (0.02)		0.121*** (0.025)	0.108*** (0.02)
Age		0.001 (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)		0.001 (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)
Intercept 1	-2.758*** (0.097)	-2.595*** (0.115)	-1.593*** (0.104)	-2.758*** (0.097)	-2.598*** (0.114)	-1.594*** (0.104)
Intercept 2	-1.913*** (0.082)	-1.749*** (0.11)	-0.714*** (0.094)	-1.913*** (0.082)	-1.751*** (0.11)	-0.714*** (0.094)
Intercept 3	0.29*** (0.105)	0.457*** (0.134)	1.701*** (0.085)	0.29*** (0.105)	0.456*** (0.133)	1.701*** (0.084)
Intercept 4	0.691*** (0.114)	0.859*** (0.141)	2.151*** (0.093)	0.691*** (0.114)	0.858*** (0.141)	2.152*** (0.093)
Country FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Survey round FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Ethnic group FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	81203	80913	80891	81203	80913	80891
Pseudo R²	.004	.004	.054	.004	.004	.054
Log pseudolikelihood	-106349.83	-105881.42	-100561.16	-106341.04	-105873.12	-100544.85
AIC statistic	212709.7	211778.8	201164.3	212696.1	211766.2	201123.7

Note: Clustered robust standard errors are in parenthesis, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. The regression results are based on pooled data from the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer survey. σ is the dependent variable which measures the degree to which respondents feel close to their nationality relative to their ethnicity.

These results are robust to the inclusion of control variables (model 2) and fixed effects for the respondents' ethnicities, the countries in which they reside, and the survey rounds (model 3). All the control variables were statistically significant in model 3. The positive sign accompanying

educational level indicates that individuals who are educated have a higher likelihood of prioritizing their national identity over their ethnic identity. This contrasts with the Nigerian case where educational level was statistically insignificant. The positive sign accompanying the dummy variable for gender suggests that compared to women, men are more likely to prioritize their nationality over their ethnicity. This differs from the Nigerian case where men do not differ statistically from women in this regard. The positive sign accompanying age suggests that as people get older, they become more likely to prioritize their national identity over their ethnic identity. This contrasts with the Nigerian case where the opposite effect was found.

In model 4 where I considered the three levels of discrimination simultaneously, they all carried negative signs and were significant at the 1 percent level. This indicates that compared to Africans who have not experienced discrimination during the past year, those who have experienced it once or twice, several times, or many times, are less likely to prioritize their national identity over their ethnic identity. Similar to the Nigerian case, the size of the coefficients for the three variables also increased with the frequency of discrimination. These results are robust to the inclusion of control variables (model 5) and fixed effects for the respondents' ethnic groups, the countries in which they reside, and the survey rounds (model 6).

To illustrate the effect sizes, I plotted the predicted probabilities for the baseline models—i.e., models 1 and 4. A cursory look at the four panels reveals that the effect of discrimination on the dependent variable is largest in the fifth response category where respondents were asked whether they felt an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. This contrasts with the Nigerian case where the effect was largest in the second response category where respondents were asked whether they felt closer to their ethnicity than their nationality. Panel A shows that compared to the reference category—i.e., Africans who have not experienced discrimination during the past year—those who have (irrespective of the frequency) are 2.86 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnic group and 10.1 percentage points less likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. Panel B shows that compared to the reference

category, Africans who have experienced discrimination once or twice during the past year are 2.49 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnicity and 8.7 percentage points less likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. Panel C shows that compared to the reference category, Africans who have experienced discrimination several times are 3 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnic group and 10.4 percentage points less likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. Panel D shows that compared to the reference category, Africans who have experienced discrimination many times are 3.6 percentage points more likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their ethnicity and 12.6 percentage points less likely to feel an exclusive sense of belonging to their nationality. Similar to the Nigerian case, the negative effect of discrimination on national identification is larger than its positive effect on ethnic identification.

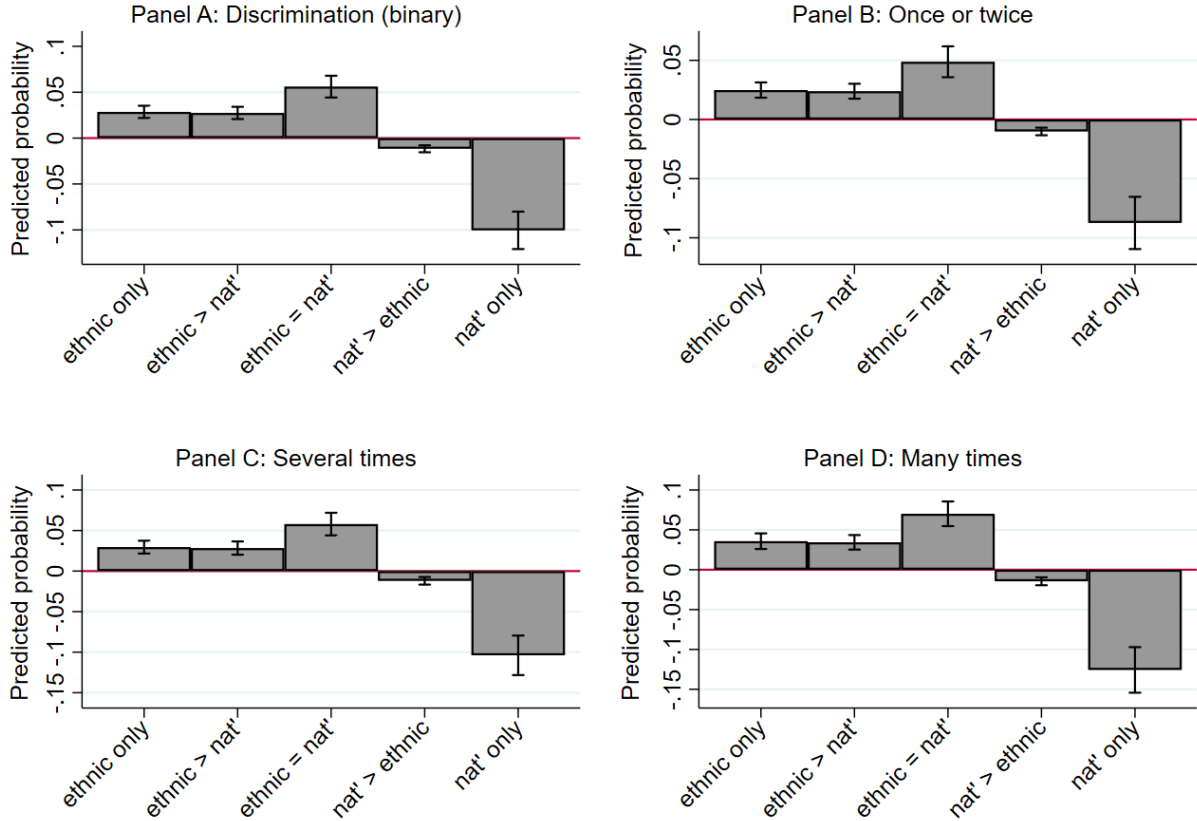


Figure 7: Average marginal effects of discrimination on national belonging in Africa

Note: Panel A (based on model 1 in Table 3) shows the effect of the binary measure of discrimination on the five categories of the dependent variable, which measures the importance that Africans attach to their

nationality relative to their ethnicity. Panels B, C, and D (based on models 4 in Table 3) show the effect of the various levels of discrimination on the dependent variable. Confidence intervals are at the 90 percent level. “nat” denotes “national identity,” while “ethnic” denotes “ethnic identity.”

6. Conclusion

This study examined the effect of ethnic discrimination on the importance that Nigerians attach to their nationality relative to their ethnicity. The regression results, which support the rejection-identification and rejection-disidentification models, revealed that the experience of discrimination strengthens ethnic identification and weakens national identification. In other words, discrimination prompts individuals to prioritize their ethnic identity over their national identity. The regression results also showed that the negative effect of discrimination on national identification was larger than its positive effect on ethnic identification. These results are also applicable to the case of Africa. Among the Nigerian population, Igbo ethnicity increased the likelihood of individuals identifying more strongly with their ethnic identity than their national identity. The weak sense of national identification among Igbos might be because of their exclusion from political power at the center in post-war Nigeria. Conversely, Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani ethnicities both increased the likelihood of individuals prioritizing their national identity over their ethnic identity. The stronger sense of national belonging among the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani might be because they have been frequently represented at the center of political power in Niger.

Furthermore, this study showed that the ethnoreligious divisions in present-day Nigeria have historical roots. The words of Kirk-Greene (1975, p. 19) still hold true: “Fear has been constant in every tension and confrontation in political Nigeria. Not the physical fear of violence, not the spiritual fear of retribution, but the psychological fear of discrimination, of domination. It is the fear of not getting one’s fair share, one’s dessert.” If the Nigerian government intends to engender a strong sense of national belonging among the country’s population, it needs to pursue policies that elevate a shared national identity over ethnicity and religion. It also needs to make a deliberate effort to divorce ethnicity and religion from politics because these are antithetical to the spirit of nationalism.

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Appendix

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics (Nigeria)

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
National belonging	3181	2.976	0.919	1	5
Discrimination (binary)	3168	0.314	0.464	0	1
Once or twice	3168	0.152	0.359	0	1
Several times	3168	0.13	0.336	0	1
Many times	3168	0.033	0.178	0	1
Educational level	3189	4.366	2.22	0	9
Christian affiliation	3164	0.535	0.499	0	1
Male	3199	0.501	0.5	0	1
Age	3197	33.412	12.81	18	85
Igbo	3192	0.156	0.363	0	1
Hausa/Fulani	3192	0.309	0.462	0	1
Yoruba	3192	0.195	0.397	0	1
Ethnic minority	3192	0.339	0.474	0	1

Table A2: Descriptive Statistics (Africa)

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
National belonging	81678	3.52	1.194	1	5
Discrimination (binary)	91934	0.177	0.381	0	1
Once or twice	91934	0.074	0.263	0	1
Several times	91994	0.069	0.253	0	1
Many times	91994	0.034	0.18	0	1
Educational level	93453	3.473	2.273	0	9
Male	93907	0.5	0.5	0	1
Age	93849	37.105	14.863	18	120

Table A3: List of African Countries

Country	No. of observations
Benin	2400
Botswana	2398
Burkina Faso	2400
Cabo Verde	2400
Cameroon	2402
Cote d'Ivoire	2400
eSwatini	2400
Gabon	2399
Gambia	2400
Ghana	4800
Guinea	2394
Kenya	3999
Lesotho	2400
Liberia	2400
Madagascar	1200
Malawi	2400
Mali	2400
Mauritius	2400
Morocco	2400
Mozambique	3502
Namibia	2400
Niger	2399
Nigeria	3199
Sao Tome and Principe	1200
Senegal	2400
Sierra Leone	2400
South Africa	3440
Sudan	3000
Tanzania	4798
Togo	2400
Tunisia	2399
Uganda	2400
Zambia	2400
Zimbabwe	2400
Angola	2400
Ethiopia	2378
Total	93,907

Note: The table presents a list of the 34 African countries used in the cross-country analysis and the total number of observations collected from each of them. The number of observations is based on the pooled data from the Rounds 7 and 8 Afrobarometer survey.