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What is This?

Individual Identity Attachments and International Conflict: The Importance of Territorial Threat

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Abstract

This article provides some of the first individual-level evidence for the domestic salience of territorial issues. Using survey data from more than 80,000 individual respondents in 43 separate countries, we examine how conflict affects the content of individual self-identification. We find that international conflict exerts a strong influence on the likelihood and content of individual self-identification, but this effect varies with the type of conflict. Confirming nationalist theories of territorial salience, territorial conflict leads the majority of individuals in targeted countries to identify themselves as citizens of their country. However, individuals in countries that are initiating territorial disputes are more likely to self-identify as members of a particular ethnicity, which provides support for theories connecting domestic salience to ethnic politics. That conflict has variegated effects on identity formation suggests the relationship is not endogenous. Our within-case analysis of changes in Nigerian self-identifications further demonstrates that individuals are quite susceptible to the types and locations of international conflict.

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Keywords

Why territorial claims are salient to the states involved is not well understood. A large and growing number of studies associate territorial issues with higher rates of disputes and wars, a greater number of casualties, and an increased likelihood of conflict recurrence. However, the findings linking territorial issues to conflict have been established mostly at the dyadic level, and theoretical explanations connecting territorial issues to increased conflict rely on domestic-level processes that are often just assumed.

In this article we provide a partial explanation for territorial salience by developing and testing a comprehensive theory of individual self-identification responses to international territorial conflict. Although disagreement persists within the identity literature as to whether conflict causes or follows intensified self-identifications in affected populations, we argue that both processes may actually be at work. Among initiating states, ethnic self-identifications will often be linked to territorial conflict as elites or ethnic groups push the state to follow through on irredentist claims, which is a process that is consistent with Huth's (1996) arguments on ethnic outbidding as a source of territorial conflict. The reaction is much different for individuals in targeted states, however. As Vasquez (1993, 2009) has argued, territorial conflict creates incentives for unity against rivals, and this provokes strong nationalistic responses among the citizenry. Our argument implies that self-identifications are responsive to both conflict location and the role of the state (as initiator or target) and confirms a multifaceted relationship between conflict and identity. A comparison of territorial conflict with other issues also demonstrates empirically the salience of territorial issues for individual citizens.

We test our argument with the first cross-national, multilevel analysis of individual responses to international conflict. Using two large survey data sets—the Afrobarometer and the World Values Survey—we analyze self-identification responses by more than 80,000 respondents in 43 separate countries and find strong support for our argument for a complex relationship between conflict and identity. Territorial issues are indeed salient domestically since they consistently provoke individual self-identification responses; furthermore, those responses vary between group and nation based on the location and role of the state as target or initiator.

We begin our argument in the next section with a discussion of the literature on the relationship between identity and conflict. Our theory section follows and describes why international conflict over territorial issues influences

the content of individual identity responses. We then describe the data used to test a multilevel model of identity formation and follow with a discussion of our results.

Connecting Identity and Conflict

Though identity has long been an important concept, influencing numerous fields, we focus our investigation on a small portion of the literature—the relationship between individual self-identification and conflict. We argue that the choice of whether an individual self-identifies as a member of a group or as a citizen of the state turns most consistently on his or her exposure to external pressures. Left unexposed, individuals may privilege occupation, class, or some other group choice; when exposed, however, salient pressures help individuals privilege certain choices, based largely on which memberships identify "us" and "them." We argue that territorial conflict is one such salient external pressure.

This circumscribed view of identity as a choice among groups for the individual is consistent with several working definitions of the concept.[1] For example, Fearon (1999) suggests identity is commonly a social category with certain attributes and expected behaviors into which individuals sort themselves. Furthermore, these social categories determine the "rules of membership that decide who is and is not a member" and the "sets of characteristics . . . thought to be typical of members" (Fearon & Laitin, 2000, pp. 848). This implies that individuals do have actual choices over which memberships will be emphasized as describing their identity (e.g., ethnicity or nation), though the choice of groups available to the individual will often be limited by the ascribed characteristics of the individual. After all, few individuals can transcend group identities that are based on language, race, or common ancestry, when they do not actually share those same characteristics with the rest of the group. The identity literature also suggests that self-identifications are not transient but rather stable (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, & McDermott, 2006) and changes across memberships are rather constrained (Chandra, 2006). Nevertheless, identities are still subject to manipulation for instrumental purposes, and individuals can also construct or elevate certain identities for strategic purposes (Wood, 2008). Individual preferences over salient identities can also change over time and contexts (Hale, 2004).

Though they are somewhat constrained, individuals can essentially choose (consciously or subconsciously) among their possible self-identifications, and much of the identity literature suggests that external stimuli are the most consistent predictors of these choices (Coser, 1956; Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Gurr,

2000; Quillian, 1995; Simmel, 1955; Stein, 1976; Sumner, 1906; Wood, 2008). This consistency results from the ability of external stimuli to shape definitions of both "us" and "them" (Brewer, 1991, 1999, 2007; Brown, 1995, 2000; Tajfel, 1981), which is of primary importance for self-identification (Kinder & Kam, 2009). Indeed, the social context provided by external stimuli determines which group identities are relevant to the individual and, consequently, affects who and how the individual views as out-groups (Brewer, 1991, 1999, 2007; Brown, 1995, 2000; Tajfel, 1981). We argue that when the stimulus is conflict based, the individual's group identity cleaves according to combatant role. Salient conflicts cause targeted groups to unify, but, even before this identity hardening occurs, individuals in the initiating group have solidified their memberships along group characteristics as well.

Identity and Conflict Initiation

The literature linking identity differences to conflict allows many different causal mechanisms. For example, constructivists often point out that identity can be a key factor driving conflict by arguing that elites construct or harden certain group identities in antagonistic terms for instrumental purposes, usually to gain or maintain political power (see Brass, 1997; Fearon & Laitin, 2000). As these identities become more polarized, the elites may seek to push these groups into conflict. Leaders with a tenuous position on their power reify ethnicity and use conflict to coerce compliance among their followers (Woodward, 1995). Moderates fall in line with the extremists within the group and support the leader under these conditions (De Figueiredo & Weingast, 1999).

In these cases, the political entrepreneur is also an identity entrepreneur, and the role of elites becomes the intervening factor shaping the directionality of this relationship. Although this dynamic is most often associated with incidents of ethnic or religious-based intrastate conflict, it also applies to certain types of interstate conflict. The literature on irredentism asserts that ethnic and national identities play a major role in the outbreak of certain interstate conflicts, including who initiates and who is targeted (Ambrosio, 2001; Kornprobst, 2008; Saideman, 1997, 2001; Saideman & Ayres, 2000, 2008; Toft, 2003). From this perspective, elites use and frame salient issues to cultivate and harden certain group identities. However, as a result of this manipulation, these identities sometimes serve as motivation for conflict between other groups or, in some cases, other states on behalf of their ethnic or religious brethren. Thus, identity is viewed as a cause of certain types of conflict.

Group Targeting and Self-Identification

Conversely, conflict is also often cited as a key factor in generating, hardening, or shifting individual identity preferences. Because identities are multiple, are fluid, and can change over time, conflict becomes a contextual factor that elevates or reinforces some identities over others, reinforcing the ethnicity of the individual or the nationalism within the state. Conflict and threat act as "hardeners" by crystallizing individuals' group identities over time (see Coser, 1955; Simmel, 1955). However, not all conflicts or threats are equal. To exert this type of influence on individual attitudes and behavior, including identity preferences, the conflict or threat needs to be perceived by the population at large as a serious societal danger (see Davis & Silver, 2004; Gibson, 2006).

Studies on intrastate group conflict offer strong empirical support for the contention that conflict increases ethnic identification among individuals (Caselli & Coleman, 2006; Kaufmann, 1996a, 1996b; Lake & Rothchild, 1996). This evidence is actually consistent with several prominent theories of state building that have long noted the relationship among external threats, conflict, and increased nationalism within societies. Tilly and others argue that conflict and external threat are effective in state building by fostering national identity, even in multiethnic contexts (Barnett, 1995; Herbst, 1990; Tilly, 1990). The state as we know it is a war-making enterprise. Nationalism as an attachment to the nation-state emerged because war had the effect of "homogenizing" populations. Commonalities emerged within and not between borders, and war brought forward national identity as a commitment to the state's international strategy (Tilly, 1990, p. 116). More recently, Saideman and Ayres (2008) have provided much evidence of this dynamic with an examination of Hungary in 1956; the external threat from the Soviet Union toward multiethnic Hungary in 1956 effectively solidified a lasting Hungarian ethno-national identity. But this process does not have to be dependent on invasions, wars, and other realized threats since the existence of potential conflict, or a rival, may also be sufficiently salient to serve as a socializing mechanism that unifies a national population (Coser, 1956; Quillian, 1995; Simmel, 1955).[2] This suggests that either conflict or the threat of conflict can cause or reinforce certain self-identifications.

We have outlined a conflict–identity link in the literature that remains ambivalent as to the direction of the causal arrow. Some link conflict with identity construction, whereas others suggest identity differences lead to conflict. We argue that both mechanisms may in fact be operating during most transnational conflicts.

As many studies have suggested, salient issues are likely to provoke intense reactions in targeted groups, creating a unifying bond among those affected. This is why conflict often leads to self-identifications that are responsive to the actors in the conflict. Nevertheless, ethnic differences have also been linked to processes that encourage group conflict, and, in this sense, individual self-identifications will either intensify or even lead to transnational conflict over issues that are salient to the groups involved. Thus, we argue for a multifaceted approach to the connection between self-identification and conflict.

The Effects of Territorial Threat on Individual Self-Identification

Our study represents one of the first attempts in this literature to examine the relationship between conflict and identity using cross-national survey data that directly assess individual preferences. Although recent studies have employed these data to examine the effects of institutional designs on identity (see Eifert, Miguel, & Posner, 2010; Elkins & Sides, 2007), conflict has remained unspecified in these models. Nevertheless, several theories in the international conflict literature share similar roots with identity theories of conflict, and, as we outline in this section, these arguments can provide important answers for questions related to individual self-identification.

Two Complementary Theories of Territorial Conflict

Territorial issues have consistently been linked with higher rates of conflict that are often intense and more severe than other types of issues.[3] However, theories of territorial conflict have thus far simply assumed that the domestic cause of this severity is an increased salience for the citizens of the states involved. For example, Vasquez argues that territorial issues affect the bargaining position of leaders (Vasquez, 1993).[4] Locked in dyadic crisis bargaining, leaders demonize their enemy to harden their domestic publics, garnering both support and increased funding for their military. Huth offers a similar theory but also directly links territorial issues to the domestic constituencies that leaders must cultivate to maintain power (Huth, 1996). Huth argues that leaders often play on irredentist claims to gain power or secure regional ethnic support for their regime (also see Ambrosio, 2001; Saideman, 1997, 2001; Saideman & Ayres, 2000, 2008; Toft, 2003). These constituencies then apply political pressure on decision makers so as to harden political strategy and tactics in the hopes of winning territorial concessions, and this,

in turn, limits the ability of leaders to achieve peaceful international compromise. Indeed, the incentives derived from domestic constituencies are such that leaders must use all means at their disposal to resolve territorial disputes in their favor.

These two theories of territorial conflict lead to rather complementary predictions regarding individual self-identification across both states of the disputing dyad. For example, Vasquez's theory addresses the role of rivalry in centralizing domestic public attitudes in the targeted state (Vasquez, 1993). As the target of a rival, citizens are likely to coalesce around their state (or leaders qua the state), and individuals in states targeted by territorial threats should therefore be more likely to identify themselves as members of their particular state. Huth, on the other hand, argues that leaders often encourage irredentist claims to gain the political support of regional ethnic groups (Huth, 1996). The territorial issue is thus characterized as an ethnic issue for the initiating state, and, given the emphasis placed on ethnicity by their leaders, citizens of that state should be more likely to self-identify as members of their ethnic group.[5]

Territorial conflicts should also influence the intensity of self-identifications. Indeed, territorial conflict is likely to overshadow all other environmental factors controlling identity if the conflict is proximate enough to the individual. After all, conflict can have deleterious effects on individual welfare that last for many years. This is especially true for conflicts involving territorial issues. When fighting occurs over a particular piece of land of which occupation in large part determines ownership, conflict greatly increases the likelihood of death, disease, and disability for individuals in and proximate to the disputed territory. Intense conflicts also sap the resources available to manage the public health and relocation issues that follow the end of fighting (Ghobarah, Huth, & Russett, 2003). Thus, the average individual residing in or near disputed territories has reason to fear the start of conflicts over his or her land since most status quos are better than the likely outcome of nearby conflicts.

External Territorial Threats and Self-Identity Preferences

Figure 1 presents an outline of our expectations. Individuals in states that may initiate an ethnicity-based territorial challenge respond to the conflict in one of two ways.[6] Those who share the same ethnicity as the majority group in the contested territory will self-identify according to their ethnicity. Individuals not part of that group will of course be more likely to self-identify as national citizens since ethnic self-identification threatens their political power.

	Initiator: Individual is part of group or country that is initiating the conflict	**Target:** Individual resides in the contested territory	**Target:** Individual resides in the targeted country, outside the contested territory
Shared Ethnicity: Individual shares same ethnicity as ethnic group that defines the contested territory	Individual is more likely to choose ***Ethnic Identity***	Individual is more likely to choose ***National Identity***	Individual is more likely to choose ***National Identity***
Different Ethnicity: individual does not share same ethnicity as majority group that defines the contested territory	Individual is more likely to choose ***National Identity***	Individual is more likely to choose ***Ethnic Identity***	Individual is more likely to choose ***National Identity***

Figure 1. Expected individual identity choices according to location and type of contested territory

Individuals in targeted states are of two groups: those residing in the contested territory and those residing in other areas of the country. Beginning first with the far right side of Figure 1, those individuals residing outside the contested area are much more likely to self-identify as national citizens. Making ethnicities salient would only undercut the sovereignty and indivisibility of the state. This is consistent with Vasquez's argument that territorial rivalries increase state cohesion and national self-identification (Vasquez, 1993).

Still remaining are those individuals residing in the disputed territory. Self-identity labels turn toward the state for those individuals in the majority ethnic group within the contested enclave. This group represents the ethnic group that largely defines the territory, and they have at least two incentives to avoid making ethnicity salient in the region. First, as above, territorial conflicts are incredibly dangerous for the occupants of contested areas, especially when primitive logistics are used. Downplaying ethnic divisions and embracing the state become rational responses among those who hope to avoid impending military interventions by either government within the rivalry.[7] Second, ethnic self-identification invites retribution from other ethnic groups. Ethnic majorities in contested territories are often small minorities within the larger group of citizens in the targeted state. Should these minorities become a source of conflict for the government, other groups would decrease their tolerance for individuals from this ethnicity (Hutchison & Gibler, 2007) and perhaps eventually try to repress that ethnic group (Gibler, 2012).

Minority groups within the contested territories are likely to self-identify as members of their ethnic group. The same incentives of likely conflict and repression have the opposite effect on these individuals, leading them to clearly differentiate their groups from the ethnic majority of the contested territory. These individuals also do not want territorial conflict over their homes and are therefore likely to emphasize that the contested territory is not so easily divisible from the state using ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, should repression become likely, minority groups within the contested territory have every reason to signal their government that they are different and should not be targeted.

These expectations ultimately lead to three specific hypotheses. First, we expect that territorial disputes are more likely than other types of disputes to increase the likelihood of nationalistic self-identification by individuals in states targeted by territorial issues. This is an important baseline hypothesis because it ultimately provides evidence for the relative salience of territorial issues compared to other issues types.

We also contend that territorial threats are likely to reinforce ethnic cleavages within states initiating conflict when ethnic differences provide an important rationale for territorial aggrandizement. This move elevates ethnic differences over other cleavages within society. In targeted states, the threat to territory privileges national unity as individuals choose national identities in support of their at-risk state. Territorial issues thus provide a salient threat capable of reinforcing in-group and out-group definitions within both states of the dyad. Restating the first hypothesis into a more complex set of expectations, we should find that individuals from majority groups in states initiating group-based territorial conflicts are more likely to identify as part of their ethnic group whereas individuals from minority groups in initiating states are likely to self-identify as citizens of the state. We also expect that individuals in states targeted by territorial conflicts are more likely to identify as citizens of their state.[8]

Testing the Argument

To examine the effects of conflict on group identity formation, we analyze two different sets of cross-national, cross-sectional surveys: the Afrobarometer and the World Values Survey (WVS).[9] The Afrobarometer survey is, for the most part, consistent across states and covers a large number of states in sub-Saharan Africa in multiple waves. The identity portion of the surveys asks respondents to choose between being a national identity and being a member of the respondent's identity group: "Which of these two do you feel most strongly attached?" In most of the surveys, the respondents are offered a simple choice between national or group identity.[10] Thus, our individual-level

dependent variable is a dichotomous measure with 1 indicating national identity and 0 indicating group identity. In the Afrobarometer sample, approximately 2 out of 3 respondents preferred their national identity.

We rely primarily on two waves of the Afrobarometer survey, Rounds 2 and 3, which were conducted between May 2002 and October 2003 and between March 2005 and February 2006, respectively.[11] These two rounds provide 25 macro-level units (representing both country and year) that span 16 different African countries.[12] Our macro-level variables are lagged to the year of the survey for each country offering unique values for each Level 2 unit. The total aggregated sample size in these 25 surveys is 31,399 respondents.[13]

We also use the WVS data as an additional robustness check for confirmation of our theoretical expectations. Although the WVS surveyed more individuals in more countries and more regions than did Afrobarometer, the individual-level identity questions are less consistent across surveys. Nevertheless, several identity questions are available across the five waves of the WVS data, and we use the same identity question as the Elkins and Sides (2007) study, which asks respondents to best describe their identity when given several country-specific group choices, including national identity group. Unlike the Afrobarometer question, which generally presents the respondent with a dichotomous choice between national and group identity, this question offers multiple options for the respondent to choose from when selecting his or her primary identity. Since these response groups are inconsistent across countries, and to provide conformity with our Afrobarometer analyses, we transform these identity responses into a dichotomous variable with 1 indicating national identity and 0 indicating group identity. In the WVS sample, 55% of the total respondents preferred their national identity.

The final WVS sample provides 31 surveys across 29 countries drawn from the 1994–1999 and 1999–2004 waves. This sample represents several different regions of the world, including Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. As with the Afrobarometer sample, the macro-level variables are lagged to the survey year.[14] The total aggregated sample size for these 31 WVS surveys is 48,803 respondents.[15]

The countries in our samples vary widely on several key state-level variables, such as external conflict levels, development, and electoral proximity. However, the countries included in the survey do not necessarily represent an unbiased sample since few surveyors are willing to travel within heavily contested countries or country regions. Democracies also tend to be more willing to allow access to their citizens. Thus, internally stable and democratic regions are overrepresented in our sample, especially in Africa.

We believe that this nonrandom sample presents at least two problems for our analyses. First, since the sample is biased toward stable, less conflict-prone states, we have substantially less variation than we otherwise would across our conflict-based independent variables of interest. If the relationship between conflict and identity is linear, as we expect, then the sample actually presents a difficult test for confirmation of our theory, and the magnitude of our findings will be biased downward.

A more serious problem may stem from the overrepresentation of higher democracy levels in the sample because ethnicity often provides a way of motivating voting blocs prior to election (Eifert et al., 2010; Posner, 2004). Combined with the now common findings demonstrated by the democratic peace literature that democracies do, in fact, behave differently in conflict than other types of states (democracies tend to be more peaceful and more capable), the interaction of conflict and democracy in this sample may complicate the relationships we wish to examine. As we detail in the following section, we control for this by including such variables as the length of time until elections, the competitiveness of elections, and the level of wealth in the country.

A Multilevel Model of Group Versus National Identity Preference

Our hypotheses focus on the state-level (conflict) attributes that determine individual identity formation, but we estimate the effects of these variables with controls for several characteristics that have been associated with individual identity formation.

State-Level Conflict Variables

Militarized interstate disputes. This is our primary measure of external threat to the state. As defined by the Correlates of War project, a militarized interstate dispute (MID) includes any threat or show or use of force between two or more states (Ghosn, Palmer, & Bremer, 2004). We use a dichotomous measure to note whether each country experienced a militarized dispute in the 5 years prior to each Afrobarometer survey; we use a 5-year count variable for the WVS analyses.[16] We classify a dispute as territorial if territory is the primary issue for each participant; all other disputes are coded as nonterritorial disputes. We use the revisionist state indicator in the MID data set to distinguish initiators, which we define as those states trying to revise the status quo from the very first day of a dispute. In cases where both states are cited as revisionist, we code each as targets in the dispute.[17] Since the surveys vary by year, even within the same round, we lag the conflict data to the exact year of the survey.

Civil conflict. Experience with a civil conflict is likely to influence identity preferences across society. Therefore, we control for this effect using the Correlates of War data on civil wars in the international system (Sarkees, Wayman, & Singer, 2003). Our dichotomous civil war measure indicates whether a civil war occurred within the 5-year period prior to the survey.

State-Level Control Variables. At the country level, we control for two electoral variables—proximity to next election (in months)[18] and electoral competitiveness (the margin of victory between the winner and closest challenger in the last election)[19]—both of which have proven to be reliable predictors of self-identification responses (see Eifert et al., 2010). We also control for *ethnic fractionalization* and the level of *economic development* in the country.[20] Posner (2004) argues that the salience of ethnic identities is determined by their relative size within a country, so we identify the percentage share of the largest ethnic group within the state population (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).[21] *Economic development* is defined using GDP data from the World Bank; these data are measured in 2000 U.S. dollars and are lagged to the year of each individual survey. To minimize the effect of outliers, we use the natural logarithm of GDP in the analyses below, though our results remain robust when using the unaltered data.

Individual-Level Factors. We use standard measures of socioeconomic characteristics in our individual-level model. For example, the *age, gender*, and *education* variables are self-explanatory and consistent across both surveys. We also differentiate based on occupation (*blue-collar* or white-collar jobs) and whether an individual lives in a rural or urban setting.[22] *Blue-collar* jobs and *urban* settings often correlate with ethnic self-identifications. One factor that mitigates these individual determinants of identity is *media exposure*. Respondents with higher exposure to media sources may be less likely to self-identify in ethnic terms. For the Afrobarometer surveys, we use an additive index of exposure to radio, newspapers, and television; for the WVS, we rely on responses to the one media question—the frequency with which the respondent watches television.

Does Territorial Conflict Lead to Nationalistic Self-Identifications?

Table 1 presents four multilevel identity preference models using the Afrobarometer survey data.[23] In Model 1, we begin with the base model that does not differentiate between types of threat at the macro level. Model 2 then distinguishes between territorial and nonterritorial international conflict. Model 3 examines the effects of targeting conflict versus initiating conflict, and, finally, Model 4 includes the fully specified macro-level model that discriminates by source and type of conflict.

Table 1. Effects of External Threat on National Versus Group Identities Across 25 Afrobarometer Surveys

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	N = 31,399 (ind)		N = 31,399 (ind)		N = 31,399 (ind)		N = 31,399 (ind)	
Intercept	0.71***	(0.17)	0.71***	(0.17)	0.71***	(0.17)	0.71***	(0.15)
Individual level								
Age	0.001	(0.002)	0.001	(0.002)	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)
Gender (0 = *male*)	−0.02	(0.03)	−0.02	(0.03)	−0.02	(0.03)	−0.02	(0.04)
Urban	0.02	(0.14)	0.02	(0.14)	0.02	(0.14)	0.02	(0.14)
Education	0.06***	(0.02)	0.06***	(0.02)	0.06***	(0.02)	0.06***	(0.02)
Media exposure	−0.004	(0.01)	−0.004	(0.01)	−0.004	(0.01)	−0.004	(0.01)
Blue collar	−0.07*	(0.04)	−0.07*	(0.04)	−0.07*	(0.04)	−0.07*	(0.04)
Country level								
Militarized interstate dispute (5yr-D)	−0.19	(0.22)						
Territorial dispute (5yr-D)			−0.50*	(0.24)				
Nonterritorial dispute (5yr-D)			0.24	(0.19)				
Targeted dispute (5yr-D)					−0.06	(0.20)		
Initiated dispute (5yr-D)					−0.50**	(0.23)		
Targeted territorial dispute (5yr-D)							0.55*	(0.27)
Targeted nonterritorial dispute (5yr-D)							0.92**	(0.43)
Initiated territorial dispute (5yr-D)							−1.41***	(0.27)
Initiated nonterritorial dispute (5yr-D)							−0.03	(0.20)
Civil conflict (5yr-D)	−0.21	(0.41)	0.06	(0.45)	−0.37	(0.43)	−1.19**	(0.42)
Electoral proximity	−0.02	(0.01)	−0.02	(0.01)	−0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)
Electoral competiveness	0.03***	(0.005)	0.04***	(0.005)	0.03***	(0.005)	0.02***	(0.005)
Economic development (log)	0.04	(0.07)	0.09	(0.07)	0.13*	(0.07)	0.32***	(0.06)
Ethnic fractionalization (F & L)	−1.09*	(0.58)	−1.61***	(0.58)	−1.16**	(0.54)	−2.25***	(0.58)
Random effect								
Variance component	0.75***		0.69***		0.71***		0.54***	
df	17		16		16		14	
χ^2	130.93		121.82		120.80		84.46	

Entries were estimated with HLM 6.02; robust standard errors accompany the coefficients, in parentheses. Positive coefficients denote increased likelihood of respondent self-identification as a member of the nation. Negative coefficients denote group self-identifications.
*Significant at the .10 level. **Significant at the .05 level. ***Significant at the .01 level.

We begin by testing the relationship between generalized threats to the state and individual identity preference in Model 1. In this model, MIDs have no effect on individual identity preferences. Of course, the general MID variable makes no distinctions as to either the issues in dispute or the target of hostilities. As we demonstrate in the models below, these distinctions have important influences on individual identity preferences.

Perhaps more curious, however, is that only two of our state-level controls have any effects on individual identity preferences. In fact, across each of these models, we find only the degree of competitiveness in the most recent election and the size of the largest ethnic group consistently affect individual identity preference. Individuals in African countries feel a stronger attachment to their self-identified group when the majority ethnic group in the country is large compared to other countries in the sample. This result is mildly surprising given conventional wisdom associating pluralities with increased attachments toward ethnicity. Our finding linking increased electoral competitiveness with increased individual preference for their national identity is also unexpected. Thus, although Eifert et al. (2010) find that electoral competitiveness increases the likelihood that individuals will self-identify along ethnic dimensions, our results suggest that increased electoral competitiveness does not lead individuals to feel a stronger attachment to their group identity.

Of the individual-level variables predicting identity attachment, only education and the presence of blue-collar jobs are found to have any effect on an individual's identity attachment. These results further suggest that we are studying a different attitudinal dynamic than Eifert et al. (2010), who found stronger relationships between some individual-level characteristics and individual group self-identification. Clearly, the differences we report here suggest that the factors affecting the content of self-identity responses are not synonymous with the factors controlling the strength of those attachments.[24]

Moving to an examination of the macro-level variables of interest, we demonstrate the necessity of distinguishing between types of external threat in Models 2 and 3. Having earlier identified territorial disputes as one of the most salient threats to the state, we introduce external threat measures that account for the presence of a territorial dispute and differentiate between the target and initiator. In Model 2, we find that the effect of external threat on identity preference depends strongly on the type of issues involved in the disputes. Specifically, we demonstrate that individuals are more likely to appreciate a stronger attachment to their group identity in countries that recently experienced militarized disputes over territorial issues. A higher level of nonterritorial disputes has no statistically significant effect on individual identity response. This finding lends empirical support to our earlier

contention that threats to territory are different from other types of external threat, but the direction of the relationship runs counter to some of our expectations for individual self-identification. Further specification of the source of the threat is therefore necessary.

In Model 3, we assess whether the effect of external threat on identity preference is conditioned by the role of the state (target or initiator) in the dispute. We find clear differences in this model concerning the effects of dispute initiation on individual identity preferences. Our results indicate that individuals in states initiating MIDs are more likely to feel a stronger attachment to their group identity, as we expected. Individuals in states targeted by disputes remain unaffected in this model.

Model 4 presents the full specification of the external threat variables, including separate measures for both territorial versus nonterritorial disputes and the target versus initiator of the dispute. Full specification of the external threat variables confirms our expectations. First, individuals in countries initiating territorial disputes are more likely to feel a stronger attachment to their group identity, whereas the initiation of nonterritorial disputes has no effect on identity preference. Second, individuals in states targeted by territorial disputes are more likely to prefer their national identity over their group identity. It is somewhat surprising that this effect also holds for individuals in states targeted by nonterritorial disputes.

These results are especially encouraging when considering the sample of data we are testing. We have individual-level data by country, but the surveys do not allow us to match individuals to their specific ethnic groups on any consistent basis. Thus, even though our theory suggests only the majority in the initiating state will self-identify ethnically, we are also including minority group members in the test, which will decrease the strength of the ethnic identity finding. If these minority group individuals were tested separately, the coefficients for group attachment in the majority population of the initiating state would likely be even stronger. The same holds true for targeted states.

Note that Model 4 is the first time we find that individuals in states recently experiencing a civil war are more likely to prefer their group identity over their national identity. We believe this is consistent with our theoretical claims. Only in Model 4 are target versus initiator and territorial versus nonterritorial fully specified within the model. This suggests the civil war variable in this model is essentially capturing the effects of conflicts not initiated by neighboring states through insurgency funding or safe havens. If civil conflicts become pervasive across the state, rather than remaining localized events, then ethnic self-identification should increase across the state as well.

The results in Model 4 are consistent with this expectation, as we find a much stronger preference for group identity over national identity.

Overall, our results using the Afrobarometer data provide strong, confirmatory evidence that territorial disputes are linked to increases in nationalistic self-identifications in targeted states. We also find evidence for a correlation between territorial initiations and group-based self-identifications. The next step for our study is to determine how well these conclusions travel from the African continent to other regions.

World Values Survey Results

We use Table 2 to present the multilevel identity preference models of the WVS data. In the first set of estimates, Model 5, we replicate the final analyses of the Afrobarometer data that demonstrated threat type, location, and initiator status greatly affected identity choice, and we find striking similarities with our previous findings in these additional models. Recall that one of our primary predictions was that individuals in countries targeted by territorial disputes would be much more likely to prefer their national identity. This is exactly what we find in Model 5 using the WVS sample of country surveys. This finding alone lends further support to our general expectations and demonstrates that our key Afrobarometer findings are robust despite significant differences in regional contexts.

Although the evidence in Model 5 matches well our findings using the Afrobarometer data, the nature of the WVS data leads to the inclusion of several country cases that may actually bias our analyses. For example, the WVS survey not draws only from a much broader sample of countries but also from an earlier period, and many of the countries included in the sample are also listed as involved in some of the largest international peacekeeping disputes of the 1990s because of their memberships in the United Nations and NATO. These include several disputes involving NATO action in the former Yugoslavia and also UN action in Iraq. In most cases, the country-level support for these missions was nominal, but this support was enough to differentiate these countries from the later, Africa-only sample in which none of the countries was associated with these conflicts. Therefore, to account for this bias between survey samples, we include a dummy variable for whether the country was involved in one of these UN- or NATO-based actions.[25] These disputes are likely to affect the general publics of only the countries that are actively fighting in these disputes.

After controlling for UN and NATO actions in Model 6, we find even stronger evidence supporting our overall expectations. In addition to once again finding that targeted territorial disputes are associated with stronger national

Table 2. Effects of External Threat on National Versus Group Identities Across 31 World Values Surveys

	Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	N = 48,803 (ind)		N = 48,803 (ind)		N = 48,803 (ind)		N = 48,803 (ind)	
Intercept	0.17	(0.19)	0.17	(0.19)	0.17	(0.19)	0.16	(0.18)
Individual level								
Age	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)
Gender (0 = *male*)	−0.02	(0.03)	−0.02	(0.03)	−0.02	(0.03)	−0.02	(0.02)
Urban	0.01	(0.06)	0.01	(0.06)	0.01	(0.06)	0.01	(0.06)
Education	0.02	(0.01)	0.02	(0.01)	0.02	(0.01)	0.02	(0.01)
TV frequency	−0.004	(0.02)	−0.004	(0.02)	−0.004	(0.02)	−0.004	(0.02)
Blue collar	0.01	(0.02)	0.01	(0.02)	0.01	(0.02)	0.01	(0.02)
Country level								
Targeted territorial dispute (5yr-D)	1.13***	(0.30)	1.45***	(0.34)				
Targeted nonterritorial dispute (5yr-D)	−0.29	(0.37)	0.50	(0.39)				
Initiated territorial dispute (5yr-D)	0.29	(0.34)	−0.53*	(0.29)				
Initiated nonterritorial dispute (5yr-D)	−0.41	(0.42)	−0.13	(0.45)				
Targeted territorial dispute (5yr)					0.52***	(0.12)		
Targeted nonterritorial dispute (5yr)					0.07	(0.10)		
Initiated territorial dispute (5yr)					−0.12	(0.13)		
Initiated nonterritorial dispute (5yr)					−0.18	(0.22)		
Targeted territorial dispute (1yr)							0.88**	(0.34)
Targeted nonterritorial dispute (1yr)							−0.06	(0.20)
Initiated nonterritorial dispute (1yr)							−0.58	(0.39)
Civil conflict (5yr-D)	−0.08	(0.42)	−0.38	(0.40)	0.10	(0.49)	−0.02	(0.46)
Electoral proximity	−0.06**	(0.02)	−0.04*	(0.02)	−0.02	(0.02)	−0.01	(0.02)
Electoral competiveness	−0.001	(0.01)	−0.01	(0.01)	−0.01	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)
Economic development (log)	−0.24***	(0.05)	−0.29***	(0.07)	−0.33***	(0.06)	−0.37***	(0.08)
Ethnic fractionalization (F & L)	−1.54**	(0.70)	−1.34	(0.79)	−1.72***	(0.60)	−3.10***	(0.53)
UN/NATO action			−0.99**	(0.38)				
Random effect								
Variance component	4.93***		5.32***		4.53***		4.25***	
df	21		20		21		22	
χ^2	525.77		542.49		489.79		471.12	

Entries were estimated with HLM 6.02; robust standard errors accompany the coefficients, in parentheses. Positive coefficients denote increased likelihood of respondent self-identification as a member of the nation. Negative coefficients denote group self-identifications.

*Significant at the .10 level. **Significant at the .05 level. ***Significant at the .01 level.

identity preference, Model 6 also reveals that individuals in countries that initiated territorial disputes are more likely to prefer their group identity. These results mirror our key findings from the Afrobarometer data. Territorial conflict affects identity preferences in predictable ways—individuals in targeted states are likely to self-identify with their country or nation, whereas initiating countries experience a higher incidence of ethnic self-identifications.

To further ensure that our results are robust to different specifications of external threat, we conduct two additional analyses using the WVS survey data. The earlier surveys in WVS allow us to specify actual 5-year and 1-year counts of dispute involvement for each country-year, which we do in Models 7 and 8 of Table 2.[26] These results largely correspond with our previous findings, especially with respect to the effects of targeted territorial disputes on identity preferences. As with the previous models, we find the strongest support for the contention that territorial disputes increase national identity preferences in targeted states.

We should note that our evidence for ethnicity attachments among initiating states remains limited to the Afrobarometer data. However, this makes sense when one considers that not all territorial disputes involve irredentist claims. In areas in which ethnicity plays a part in territorial conflict—such as sub-Saharan Africa—territorial initiation is more likely to follow identity politics. In other regions, the cause of territorial conflict follows no such outbidding process.

The Case of Nigeria

Although our analyses have largely been cross-sectional, the WVS data do offer two countries with multiple surveys over time—Spain and Nigeria—that we can use to demonstrate changes to self-identifications. Spain experienced no territorial conflict during the survey periods, so we focus our next set of tests on Nigerian responses to WVS questionnaires.

Between the 1995 and 2000 WVS questionnaires, Nigeria was involved in an increasing number of disputes. Nigeria was involved in two MIDs prior to the 1995 survey and seven MIDs prior to the 2000 survey. This increase in militarized conflict stemmed from three separate developments: intervention in the civil conflicts occurring in noncontiguous Sierra Leone and Liberia, Nigerian-initiated actions against Cameroon over islands on Lake Chad on the northern border, and a series of conflicts with Cameroon over ownership of the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula in eastern Nigeria (Ghosn et al., 2004).

Nigeria really presents an excellent case for testing our theory because there was a significant increase in militarized conflict, these conflicts were
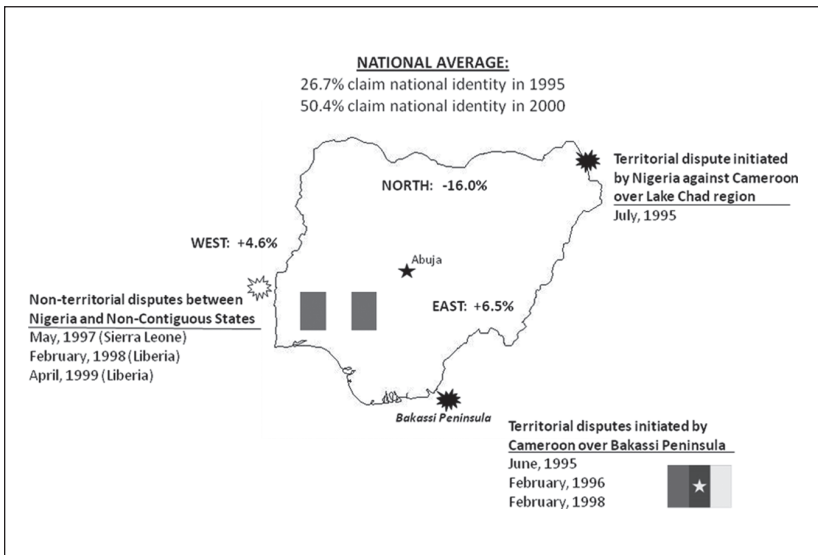
Figure 2. Regional differences in Nigerian claims of national identity

fought over several different types of issues, and there was variation in whether Nigeria was the initiator or targeted by the dispute. Furthermore, the disputes affected several different regions of the country, which allows better precision when examining the effects of exposure to conflict.

In Figure 2, we offer a simple chart of the Nigerian survey data matched to the location and type of dispute experienced prior to the 2000 survey.[27] Overall, the increase in the number of territorial and other types of disputes corresponds to a general increase in the percentage of the population that self-identified as Nigerian. In 1995, 26.7% of the population self-identified as Nigerian, but, following several conflicts that targeted Nigeria, that number grew to 50.4% in the 2000 survey, which is a 24% increase.

The variation in the location of territorial conflict in the country is also associated with changes in the level of Nigerian self-identification, as our theory would predict. For example, individuals in Nigeria's eastern regions were 6.5% more likely than other citizens to self-identify as Nigerian in 2000; in 1995, citizens in the eastern regions were 11.5% *less* likely to identify as Nigerian.[28] Three territorial MIDs initiated by Cameroon against land close to this region correlate with this marked sensitivity to Nigerian citizenship. Meanwhile, Nigeria initiated one MID against Cameroon's territory,

which was adjacent to Nigeria's northern regions, and this region had an average national self-identification that was 16% less than the Nigerian average in 2000. In 1995, the region differed from the national average by only 4%. Thus, the difference between the region and the national average grew substantially in this area of the country.

Though statistically significant, the substantive effects of being targeted by nonterritorial MIDs may be quite small, if Nigeria is a representative case. As our Figure 2 demonstrates, Nigeria was targeted by two nonterritorial MIDs, by Sierra Leone in 1997 and by Liberia in 1999, and those disputes correspond with a small increase in the level of nationalistic self-identification between 1995 and 2000. Nationalistic self-identifications in the western regions of Nigeria, which are closest to both Liberia and Sierra Leone, increased from 1.9% above the national average in 1995 to 3.3% above the national average in 2000.

The patterns of identity preferences within and across Nigeria correspond quite closely with our expectations and those found in the cross-national models. As our theory predicts, conflicts over territorial issues appear to affect individual identity preferences differently than disputes over other issues at the regional level. Furthermore, the nature of these effects is contingent on who initiates and who is targeted in the conflict. Of course, as a single case, the results found in Nigeria can be considered only illustrative and anecdotal. Yet when considered in conjunction with our earlier models, these longitudinal analyses underscore the robustness of our overall findings. We are able to predict both regional and temporal changes self-identification.

Conclusions

Overall, our analysis of more than 80,000 individual respondents across 43 countries suggests strong support for our expectations. International territorial conflict does matter in individual lives, even to the extent of causing changes in the likelihood of various identity preferences. Citizens in states targeted by territorial disputes are much more likely to identify themselves as citizens of their attacked country. We found this to be the case both in the Afrobarometer countries, which include states commonly thought to be populated by group-oriented citizenries, and among the many countries included in the WVS. Furthermore, our case analysis of Nigeria over time suggests that territorial conflict precedes self-identification changes and that self-identification changes were more likely for citizens that were proximate to the conflict events. Together, these regional and temporal changes again confirm that territorial conflict is quite salient for individuals in targeted states.

We also find confirmation for our expectation that conflict initiations over territory are likely to be correlated with ethnic or group self-identifications. Not all territorial conflict is ethnic in nature, but when ethnicity can be a source of mobilization, as in our Afrobarometer countries, individuals in initiating states are more likely to self-identify with their groups. In other countries, this effect is less pronounced. As our large-*N* analyses of the WVS demonstrated, the strength of the ethnicity–initiation link is weak. Nevertheless, when confined to countries in which ethnicity-based groups matter (e.g., Nigeria), even the WVS data suggested that ethnic self-identifications correlate strongly with territorial conflict initiations.

The connection between international conflict and identity formation we establish here may provide some answers for why certain types of conflict are more likely to escalate to war. The long list of studies linking territorial conflicts with crisis recurrence and rivalry, increased fatalities, and war have largely left untested the rationale explaining why territorial disputes are so different. Unlike those of other studies of territorial conflict, our results provide evidence that territorial issues, unlike other issue types, consistently resonate with the domestic publics in both states of the dyad. In fact, territorial conflicts can shape the strength and content of individual self-identifications, especially among targeted states. This is at least one reason why territorial issues, unlike other issues, are so salient domestically.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. Though commonly thought of as distinct from group identities, nationalism can also be considered a group identity, and, in fact, national membership shares

many of the factors that often define ethnicity—common language, common ancestry, location, founding myths, and so on.

2. The dynamics we describe here are of course similar to the studies of the "rally round the flag" effect that demonstrate increased individual support for the state and internal cohesion of society in the face of external threats and conflicts (Mueller, 1973).

3. Territorial issues have been consistently associated with international conflict onset in an increasing number of studies (Goertz & Diehl, 1992; Holsti, 1991; Kocs, 1995; Senese & Vasquez, 2003, 2005, 2008; Vasquez, 1993, 1995). Territorial disputes have higher fatality rates than other types of disputes (Senese, 1996), and territorial disputes are more likely to result in crisis recurrence (Hensel, 1994).

4. Senese and Vasquez (2008) and Vasquez (2009) also provide more recent arguments to this effect.

5. This point is better developed by Saideman (1997, 2001). According to Saideman, "ethnic politics" gives leaders both opportunity and constraints on intervention in secessionist and irredentist conflicts elsewhere in the international system. We rely on Huth (1996) above because of its focus on international territorial conflict.

6. We differentiate among territorial dispute initiations here for a reason: Not all territorial conflicts are started because of irredentist claims. Thus, only those territorial challenges that are cast in terms of ethnic-group challenges will correlate with intensified group-based self-identifications. Nevertheless, as we argue below, *all* territorial challenges will increase nationalistic self-identifications in the majority of citizens residing in targeted states. The salience of territorial issues to the individual provokes this response.

7. This does not mean the territorial issue necessarily goes away. Political entrepreneurs (separatists) and even insurgents supported by the neighboring state may continue their calls for autonomy or independence.

8. The data do not yet exist to test additional hypotheses from our theory, which depend on the location of the group and the conflict. Nevertheless, we do believe that individuals from minority groups that reside in contested territories are more likely to identify as members of their ethnic group. However, these territories almost always represent a small fraction of the total population in our data set below, and, thus, our survey data should be dominated by national identities in targeted states. The lack of location data will bias downward our results only for targeted states.

9. The Afrobarometer is a regional survey project conducted over a dozen sub-Saharan African countries measuring political, social, and economic attitudes (Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005). These data are publically available and can be accessed at www.afrobarometer.org. The World Values Survey (European Values Study Group & World Values Survey Association, 2006) is a global survey project

conducted over dozens of countries throughout the world and over time. These data are publicly available and can be accessed at www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

10. Complications arise, however, in a handful of surveys that offer the respondents an expanded set of choices to indicate the strength of their preference, including a middle category in which national and group identities are treated equally. The expanded response options were offered in the Ghana (2005), Uganda (2005), Mozambique (2005), Malawi (2005), Lesotho (2005), and Botswana (2005) surveys. To answer which identity they felt most strongly attached to, the respondents could choose among the following options: "ethnic identity only," "ethnic identity more than national identity," "national and ethnic identities equal," "national identity more than ethnic identity," and "national identity only." To convert this item into a dichotomous measure to correspond with the other surveys, we treated responses indicating a preference for one identity over the other as a positive response for that identity. For the middle category, we categorize those respondents as choosing their national identity over their group identity. Results with the middle category coded as group identity do not differ substantially from those reported in the text.

11. The question from which we construct our dependent variable was not asked in Rounds 1 and 1.5 of the Afrobarometer. Therefore, we use only surveys from Round 2 or later.

12. See Table 1 of the Web Appendix for summary statistics for both data sets.

13. The Afrobarometer uses large nationally representative samples, which results in a sampling error of ±3 percentage points. The Afrobarometer relies on standardized questionnaires with certain questions customized, including ethnic groups and political parties, to the particular country being administered.

14. The surveys for the World Values Survey (WVS) were generally taken earlier than the Afrobarometer surveys and provide a closer temporal match to our conflict data.

15. We should note that these tests were not part of the original manuscript submission to *Comparative Political Studies*. Thus, they represent a strong robustness check for our theory that was originally tested using only Afrobarometer data.

16. We use a dichotomous measure for our threat variables because the current version of the militarized interstate dispute (MID) data extends only to 2001. The MID scores for countries in the second round of the Afrobarometer surveys are therefore likely to be biased downward given the fewer number of years in our 5-year window. However, since disputes and crises often repeat within the same dyads, a dichotomous measure using the 5-year lag does still captures the dyads most likely to have interstate conflict. We are able to use 5-year counts for the WVS analyses since the surveys were recorded earlier than the Afrobarometer surveys. Analyses with the count data match well our analyses with dichotomous measures in all respects.

17. In those cases where no revisionist state is noted, we use the country coded as Side A in the dispute and confirm this measure using the MID narratives data.

18. We code the electoral proximity variable using the closest presidential election except in the cases of Botswana, Lesotho, and South Africa. For these countries, we use the closest national legislative election. We used various sources to identify those national elections closest to the timing of the Afrobarometer survey, including the 2011 Election Results Archive and Adam Carr's 2011 comprehensive election archive website. For countries without elections, we include the placeholder of 60 months to avoid missing data.

19. In country-years in which the national legislative election was more recent than the presidential election, we use the margin of victory between the two top parties. In the countries where no elections occurred, we code the margin of victory as 100%.

20. We also examined whether the level of democracy in a given country-year affects individual identity preferences. In separate analyses we find that the addition of a variable operationalized as the combined Polity IV autocracy scale has no effect on individual identity preferences. A dichotomous measure for democracies (above 6 on the scale) also has no effect.

21. We also use Posner's (2004) politically relevant ethnic group measure of ethnic diversity in a country as a robustness check for our results. Using this measure did not change the substance of the results for this variable or our other variables of interest.

22. Although the Afrobarometer survey question is straightforward, we base the WVS measure on a town size question. We coded respondents living in an urban area if they were in a town with a population greater than 50,000 people.

23. We estimate our models using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM 6.02) estimation techniques (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, Congdon, & du Toit, 2004). We allow for both random intercepts and random slopes for each survey, a specification that makes no assumptions regarding the direction of the explanatory variable effects on individual identity preference and thereby accounts for the uniqueness of each country survey in the sample (Kreft & De Leeuw, 1998).

24. Differences also may arise from changes in estimation techniques. Here, we are using multilevel modeling to properly control for the hierarchical nature of the data—individuals, nested within countries.

25. This dummy variable indicates whether the country was involved in one of the large multilateral international actions in the 5-year period prior to the survey. These include several NATO versus former Yugoslavia MIDs (3551, 4137, 4187, and 4343) as well as the Gulf War MID (3957).

26. In the WVS sample, none of the countries initiated a territorial dispute in the year prior to the survey, so the initiated territorial dispute variable dropped from Model 4. Given that disputes are relatively rare events, this is not particularly

surprising examining only 1 year across a 31-country sample. Unfortunately, though, this does not allow us to assess the effect of this variable on identity preference and provide the full set of dispute specifications offered in previous, Afrobarometer models.

27. To better correspond with the regional coding of the 1995 survey for comparison purposes, we combined the northeast and northwest regions into an overall north region. For presentation purposes, we do not include the Lagos region from these figures but include their totals when calculating regional preferences. Lagos is a large city on the southern coast of Nigeria where the principal investigators of the survey were located. As such, these respondents were demographically distinct from the rest of the regions and were not located near any conflicts. Respondents from Lagos expressed a strong preference for national identity in the 2000 survey that was 11.8% higher than the preference in the rest of the country. This is consistent with our own findings above and also those in Eifert, Miguel, and Posner (2010).

28. We compare regional averages to the national average in 2000. Although there is substantial regional variation over time between 1995 and 2000, much of that variation is probably the result of a change in the identity question between surveys (in 1995, the baseline category was the respondent's ethnic group; in 2000, the baseline was the respondent's religious or ethnic group). Restricting the regional comparisons to the 2000 survey alleviates only any bias resulting from the change in the baseline category.

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