Ethnicity and Religion as Sources of Political Division in Africa

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Abstract:
This study evaluates the relative divisiveness of ethnicity and religion as political identities in West Africa. Based on results from a variant of the Dictator Game conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, the findings point to the following conclusions. First, religious divisions appear to be greater than ethnic ones. Those divisions cannot be attributed to Islam, however, since Muslim participants mirrored the behavior of non-Muslims. Instead, the divisiveness of religion can be attributed almost entirely to the political context, since in-group/out-group religious differences appear strong where religion has been politicized in the course of conflict but effectively absent where it has not.

Introduction

Political divisions in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the context of civil conflict, often follow either ethno-linguistic or religious lines. South Sudan's civil unrest is regularly described in Dinka-Nuer terms. In the Central African Republic, power struggles morphed into fears of ethnic cleansing against the Muslim community. Periodic civil unrest in Nigeria takes on an ethnic label in some instances and a religious one in others. Indeed, data suggests that over three-quarters of conflicts in the region are coded as either ethnic or religious (see Sambanis 2001). As Crawford Young (1993: 15) notes of contemporary African politics, "religion joins ethnicity…as the earlier version of the state tends to fade."

Still unclear, however, is whether one or the other of these identity types divides citizens with greater consequence. Does attention to ethnicity inspire stronger bias and hatred? Or do the non-negotiable aspects of religion more thoroughly reinforce animosity between in-group and out-group members? The answer can provide clues to the mobilization strategies that leaders employ, especially in the course of conflict. Critically, ethnicity and religion are the two most prominent social markers in sub-Saharan Africa, suggesting that groups and leaders engaged in conflict have a choice. Does the choice to identify with one or the other more severely aggravate inter-group tensions?

Scholars trained in constructivist and instrumentalist logics may be quick to dismiss any notion of systematically different degrees of bias in ethnic and religious contexts. The political divisiveness of identities like ethnicity and religion, they would argue, turns on contextual factors such as group size, elite rhetoric, the targets of violence, and the institutions through which power is assigned. Identity types themselves are simply labels with which groups

organize collectively. The effects of those labels differ only to the extent that political actors exploit them differentially.

And yet, political science literatures offer five distinct views on the question. A largely out-of-fashion perspective argues that ethnic differences primordially define Africans and their conflicts (Douglass 1988). Second, scholars of religion and politics highlight religion's non-negotiable features that may exacerbate dislike of the other (Reynal-Queral 2002; Toft 2006). A third view, receiving renewed attention in popular and journalistic accounts, suggests that the important distinction is not between ethnicity and religion but rather between particular religious groups, owing to the militant nature of Islam (Huntington 1996). Fourth, within the instrumentalist tradition, some suggest that only the size of social identity groups matters politically, irrespective of whether those groups are ethnic, religious, or something else (Posner 2005).   Finally, the contemporary, context-dependent view of political identities holds that the capacity of identities like ethnicity and religion to inspire political action and division depends largely on the political environment (Eifert et al 2010; Laitin 1986).

Understanding the relative divisiveness of ethnicity and religion in African politics thus requires additional study. Efforts to do so observationally, however, suffer from the fact that ethnicity and religion can affect African political behavior simultaneously. Almost all Africans have both ethnic and religious identities, and many treat both as important. Political leaders can employ them interchangeably, and if we were to focus our observations on singularly ethnic or religious adherents, the analyses would suffer from selection bias.

To overcome that challenge, I present results from a controlled laboratory-like experiment conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in West Africa. Participants played a version of the Dictator Game, an exercise of endowment division typically used to measure altruism and

generosity (List 2007). Exploiting the easy recognizability of names in the region as markers of particular social identity groups, the experiment randomly assigned participants to an ethnic or religious context and to either an in-group or an out-group partner. Resource allocations to partners constituted the outcome measure. A simple difference-in-differences analysis indicates that differences in allocations to in- and out-group members appear greater in the religious context. Those divisions are not a function of the specific religious groups to which participants belong, as the behavior of Muslims toward out-group members mirrors the behavior of non-Muslims. However, a comparison of data from the two countries suggests that the divisiveness of ethnicity and religion can be attributed almost entirely to the political context: in-group/out-group religious differences appear strong in Côte d'Ivoire, where at the time of data collection religion had been politicized through the course of a civil conflict, but effectively absent in Ghana, where it was not.

The results lend empirical support to the context-dependent perspective on identity salience and division. Further, they highlight the importance of replicating research designs across multiple political contexts and exploring heterogeneity in the effects of identity types in those distinct political environments. Short of adding data from Ghana, or of disaggregating the results by country, the study would have provided unambiguous yet spurious evidence suggesting that religion serves as a stronger social divider. Instead, the research design employed in this study leverages data from the two countries to adjudicate between the numerous perspectives on identity salience and division that emerge from political science literatures. These constitute the theoretical and practical contributions of the research.

Theories and Their Implications

Though studies frequently explore changes in the salience of ethnicity, religion, or other social identities, few pit two social identity types directly against one another as relative sources of political division. This shortcoming in the empirical literature is unfortunate, since doing so can provide important clues into the strategies that political leaders adopt when both ethnicity and religion are key social identifiers. Starting from the assumption that stronger identity salience correlates closely with intensified inter-group animosity (Tajfel and Turner 1986), at least five distinct perspectives offer insight into why divisiveness may be greater in the ethnic or religious contexts in Africa.

The oldest of these intellectual traditions, ethnic primordialism suggests that politics and conflict in the region hinge on hardened antagonisms between ethnic or "tribe" groups (Horowitz 1985; see also Douglass 1988; Geertz 1963); it has since been supplanted by approaches that better account for agency and for variation in identity salience across contexts. Despite those shortcomings, however, the longstanding popular appeal of a theory positing innate antagonisms between predominant ethnic groups might be explained by Fearon and Laitin's (2000) articulation of an "everyday primordialism"—the notion that people mistakenly believe their ethnic categorizations to be natural and inevitable—or by Brubaker's (2004) description of "self-sameness over time", the feeling from an individual perspective that one's ethnic identity is indeed immutable. In my own field research accompanying this study, a prominent traditional leader in southern Côte d'Ivoire explained his self-identification in ethnic terms by repeatedly jabbing a finger at his veins, to indicate that his ethnicity is "in his blood" in a way that no other identity type is. The implication for this study of an everyday ethnic primordialism or self-

sameness over time would be divisions between ethnic group members that systematically dwarf those between members of different religions, irrespective of contextual factors.

Scholars of a different political science literature, who would likely not ascribe to a primordialist label, nevertheless propose arguments for the primacy of religious divisions that parallel ethnic essentialism. Reynal-Querol's (2002) analysis of the causes of civil war indicates that religious differences are more important than ethno-linguistic ones as a result of religion being a "fixed and nonnegotiable" identity. Toft (2006) argues that religion introduces intangible benefits to otherwise straightforward calculations of inter-group conflict, thus tilting religious actors further away from out-group members and closer to their own. Others, such as Juergensmeyer (1991), suggest that strong links between religious identity, sacred scripture, and behavioral decrees imply an exclusivity that renders inter-group violence an inherent feature of religion. The implication for this study is that, pitted against the ethnic identity, religious divisions should be systematically stronger, and religious dislike of out-group members should overshadow ethnic bias. For scholars who suggest that recent waves of religious violence in Africa and elsewhere are driven by a rise in fundamentalism (Almond et al. 2003; Danjibo 2009), religious divisions may not be time-invariant but may nevertheless constitute an enduring, generational feature of political identity.

A third perspective on the relative divisiveness of ethnicity and religion in Africa suggests not simply that religion is a source of greater tension but that Islam in particular inspires greater out-group animosity. Huntington (1996) famously argues that political division in Africa and beyond is not a function of Islamic radicals but rather of Islam itself, owing to a militancy that makes the "us versus them" mentality all the more acute. Haynes (1999) claims that the historic association between religion and law in the Islamic culture has fortified the political

identity of Muslims, leaving the Muslim/non-Muslim distinction the central source of division. Rapoport (1984), Stern (2003), and others note that Islamic ideology underpins terrorist violence, further associating Muslim identity with stark political divisions. A testable hypothesis related to this study is the following: religious divisions may be stronger than ethnic ones among Muslims in the study pool, as Muslims are particularly biased against non-Muslims. Alternatively, one may argue that non-Muslims adopt a distrust of Muslims, so that religious bias is stronger than ethnic bias because of strong out-group dislike on the part of non-Muslims.

According to a fourth perspective on the salience of ethnicity and religion in Africa, their relative divisiveness changes by dint of the group size. That is, when the size of ethnic coalitions confers an advantage or otherwise shapes outcomes, ethnicity becomes the dominant political cleavage and both in- and out-group members see themselves first and foremost as ethnic rivals. Where instead the size of religious coalitions determines political outcomes, religion is more salient and religious antagonisms intensify. Key characteristics of group size may include ethnic or religious minimum winning coalitions (Posner 2005), head counts that ensure leverage in a patronage system (Chandra 2004), numerical dominance (Elischer 2013), or polarization (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005). The foundation of arguments that explain identity divisions in terms of group size is purely instrumental: actors are thought to realign themselves and to develop discrete rivalries to the degree that doing so aids their utility or political strength. In the context of this study, a group size rationale for identity divisions would lead us to expect that respondents alter their bias against ethnic or religious outgroup members if and only if coalition sizes change.

Finally, constructivist accounts of identity salience allow the relative divisiveness of identities like ethnicity and religion in Africa to vary according to political environment. Laitin

(1986) describes the strength of ancestral identities in a social setting otherwise dominated by religion as a function of colonial-era construction of ancestral city states for administrative purposes. Eifert et al. (2010) explain changes in the salience of ethnicity in Africa as rooted in proximity to political elections. Lynch (2011) portrays ethnic divisions in Kenya, and the very existence of the Kalenjin ethnic group, as constructed over time in the course of competition for political power. Religion's salience can similarly change as political conditions change, as Langer and Ukiwo (2007) demonstrate in Nigeria. If a context-dependent explanation for identity divisions best accounts for the relative divisiveness of ethnicity and religion in Africa, we should expect to find that ethnic and religious bias differs across political contexts, and that no single identity type is systematically associated with greater out-group antagonisms.

The aim of this study is to adjudicate between the competing perspectives on ethnic and religious divisiveness. Each suggests an observable implication that can either be tested explicitly or held constant as other factors vary. Without such tests, one may find ample theoretical grounds on which to dispel essentialist descriptions of ethnic or religious antagonisms, but would still lack clear evidence to support the claim that identity divisions are fluid and malleable.

Research Design

Data to test the divisiveness of ethnicity and religion were drawn from four enumeration areas across two countries, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (see Figure 1). The four research sites constituted data clusters intended to maximize diversity on key demographic variables. Korhogo in northern Côte d'Ivoire is ethnically Senoufo and Malinké. Divo in southern Côte d'Ivoire is inhabited primarily by members of the Dida ethnic group. In northern Ghana, Tamale is a predominantly Dagomba location. In southern Ghana, Cape Coast is predominantly Fante. In

addition, owing to a natural barrier that created a fairly stark geographic divide between Islam

and Christianity in this part of Africa, the two northern sites are predominantly Muslim, whereas

the southern site in each country is predominantly Christian. Nevertheless, orthogonal ethnic-

religious pairings exist among individuals in each cluster. Participants were drawn from the

provincial capital itself and from four surrounding villages in each location.

[Figure 1 here]

One strategy for testing in-group/out-group bias in ethnic versus religious contexts would

be to gather attitudinal data from individuals firmly committed to either their ethnic or religious

groups, and to then determine if the ethnic adherents hold stronger or weaker biases relative to

the religious adherents. If, for example, members of an ethnic council of elders demonstrated

stronger attachments to their coethnics and more intense dislike of their non-coethnics relative to

the in-group/out-group bias recorded among congregants of a Christian church, one might

conclude that ethnicity is a greater source of divisiveness than religion. The shortcoming to a

strategy of that sort, however, is that members of those organizations likely differ in systematic,

unobserved ways from the outset, thus introducing selection bias to the comparison. Instead, in

order to evaluate the divisiveness of ethnicity and religion independent of the unobserved

characteristics of participants in the study, those participants must be randomly assigned to either

an ethnic or a religious context.

Participants

Approximately 250 participants were selected from each of the four research areas,

resulting in a total of 1,008 observations. Participants were selected via a multi-stage

randomization process, using fixed intervals to identify households and name draws (with

stratification by gender) to identify individuals within households. The Dictator Games were

administered in face-to-face settings by trained enumerators in the participants' homes between January and June of 2009. Enumerators also gathered demographic information and survey data for separate analyses. Table 1 provides summary statistics of the sampled population.

[Table 1 here]

Outcome Measure

Dictator Games are one-stage decision tasks that match a participant (the Dictator) with a partner (the Receiver), who is typically anonymous. The Dictator is assigned a fixed endowment of resources and is instructed that she can give none, some, or all of that allocation to the Receiver. The rest is hers to keep. The share of the allocation that the Dictator gives to the Receiver is treated as an indication of generosity, or, negatively, as a measure of distance or dislike. An advantage of Dictator Games is that they provide a quantifiable measure of other-regarding preferences. By introducing information about the Receiver in the form of randomized controlled treatments, the outcomes of Dictator Games can also help to generate strong causal inferences (Franzen and Pointner 2013).

In this study, all randomly selected participants played the role of Dictator. They received endowments of four coins totaling 800 Francs CFA in Côte d'Ivoire or two Ghana Cedis in Ghana—the equivalent of approximately $1.50 at the time of the trials. Upon making an allocation decision, Dictators put the Receiver's share in a coded envelope, sealed it, and dropped it in a drop-box, out of the view of the enumerator. The outcome for each trial was measured as the amount that the participant donates to the Receiver. All results are standardized in terms of Ghana Cedis to facilitate comparisons. Thus, five outcome values were possible: zero coins = zero Cedis, one coin = 0.50 Cedis, two coins = 1.00 Cedis, three coins = 1.50 Cedis, and all four coins donated to the Receiver = 2.00 Cedis.

Treatments

The goal of the experiment was to isolate participants' attention on either the ethnic or the religious identity of their partner, and then to evaluate average differences in allocations to in-group members and out-group members across those two identity contexts. Participants thus received treatments that manipulated both the identity type in question as well as the status of the Receiver as an in-group member or an out-group member. Assignments were distributed randomly across five categories: Same Ethnicity, Different Ethnicity, Same Religion, Different Religion, and Control.

To isolate attention on either Ethnicity or Religion, a two-stage treatment was employed. First, participants listened to a five-minute, professionally produced radio report on local society. Those reports were identical, except that references to identity types were altered: those assigned to the ethnic treatment heard a report about relations between ethnic groups in their country, and those assigned to the religious treatment listened to a report on religious group relations. The purpose of this preliminary treatment was to prime subjects to the context of either ethnicity or religion.[1]

The second stage of the treatment reinforced the ethnic/religious context and pitted participants with either an in-group partner or an out-group partner. It did so by exploiting the easy identifiability of names in the region as markers of particular ethnic or religious groups. Prior to making their allocation decisions, participants were told the following:

> *Unfortunately, we have very little information about your partner. The only thing I can tell you is that her/his name is _____.*

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[1] Reports were developed specifically for use in the study. Subjects listened to the reports in either French or English or their local language on hand-held audio devices. The control group did not hear a report: some listened to content-free radio banter and others were not provided with a listening treatment.

Respondents randomly assigned to the Ethnicity treatment were told only the family or surname of the Receiver (of which there are a limited number associated with each ethnic group). Based on pre-experiment focus groups, the following common surnames were employed: *Soro*—a Senoufo name in northern Côte d'Ivoire; *Coulibaly*—a Malinké name in northern Côte d'Ivoire; *Dago*—a Dida name in southern Côte d'Ivoire; *Naporo*—a Dagumba name in northern Ghana; and *Asafo*—a Fante name in southern Ghana.[2] Respondents assigned to the Religion treatment were told only the given or first name of the Receiver: *Paul* (Christian), *Ibrahim* (Muslim), *Christine* (Christian), or *Fatimata* (Muslim).[3]

In addition to reinforcing the ethnic or religious treatment, the second stratum of the experiment simultaneously assigned participants to play the Dictator Game either with an in-group member or an out-group member: those who received the Same treatment were paired with a partner whose name indicated shared group membership, and those who received the Different treatment were paired with a partner whose name indicated out-group status (holding gender constant, to be the same as the participant's).[4] For example, a male Muslim Malinké assigned to the Same Ethnicity treatment was paired with *Coulibaly* (a Malinké ethnic name); a female Muslim Dagumba assigned to the Different Religion treatment was paired with *Christine* (a Christian religious name).[5] Other studies have similarly employed a strategy of priming in-

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[2] The research area of Korhogo in northern Côte d'Ivoire is somewhat unique in that two ethnic groups of important relative size inhabit the area. Names for each were included to ensure an adequate share of in- and out-group assignments.

[3] In order to avoid introducing deception, the research team identified individuals to serve as Receivers, and thus to receive allocations from participants. In a revision of the initial IRB protocol, those allocations were made as donations to local non-governmental organizations where we were able to locate individuals of the assigned names. This approach allowed us to respect the principal of non-deception without providing relatively large sums of money to a few individuals who played no other role in the project (and who might likely have received scorn from other participants in the fairly tight-knit research areas).

[4] Enumerators obtained information on the participants' ethnic and religious identities through survey questions prior to the Dictator Game. As part of a separate study, the same participants also listened to news reports that primed ethnic and religious identity and provided responses to additudinal questions.

[5] Subjects belonging to an unaccounted for ethnic or religious group who were assigned the "Same" group treatment were dropped from the sample, since matched partners were not available. There were a total of cite 56 such trials.

group or out-group membership via name recognition (see McCauley 2014; Scacco and Warren 2015).

Participants assigned to the Control group did not receive any information about the Receiver. They were prompted with, "unfortunately, we do not have any information about your partner." As a result, they could draw no reasonable inferences about the religious or ethnic identity of their partner.[6] F-tests confirm joint balance on covariates across the treatment and control groups (see Online Appendix).

Results

On average, subjects in the game offered almost half of the money to the Receivers, a high amount but one in keeping with other Dictator Game experiments conducted in the region (Camerer 2003). Furthermore, simply by learning the name of the Receiver, sharing rates increased: those who heard a religious name gave on average 1.00 Ghana Cedis (out of 2), and those who heard an ethnic name gave 0.95 Ghana Cedis, compared to an average among the Control group—those who heard no name—of 0.88 Ghana Cedis.[7] Among the Ethnic and Religious treatment groups, however, rates of sharing differed in systematic ways based on the status of the Receiver as either an in-group or an out-group member.

Bias in Ethnic vs. Religious Contexts

The principal goal is to test the difference in generosity to in-group versus out-group members in an ethnic versus a religious context. As Figure 1 illustrates, that difference-in-

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[6] One subtle difference between treatment and control is that Control subjects received no information about the gender of their partner, whereas the gender of partners for Treatment group subjects was implied. Explicitly providing information about partner gender to the Control group subjects would likely have created stronger effects than its implied nature in Treatment groups, so we chose not to provide it.

[7] For simplicity of explanation, I present all trials (from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire) in terms of Ghana Cedis.

differences is significantly greater among participants assigned to the religious context: those assigned to the Same Religion treatment constituted the most generous sub-group, sharing 1.11 out of 2.00 Ghana Cedis with their partner, while those assigned to the Different Religion treatment were the stingiest of the treated participants, sharing just 0.91 Cedis (*p*-value on the difference = .001). The difference shared with in-group vs. out-group members in the ethnic context was significantly smaller: those receiving the Same Ethnicity treatment shared 0.98 Cedis with their partners, while those assigned to the Different Ethnicity treatment shared 0.93 (*p* = .38). The difference-in-differences in generosity to in-group and out-group members across ethnic and religious contexts is statistically significant at p = .10. This finding undermines the notion that ethnicity constitutes a primordially more divisive identity type. Instead, all else equal, religion seems to induce greater in-group/out-group divides than does ethnicity.

[Figure 2 here]

Also apparent from Figure 1, however, is the fact that most of the differential is in fact explained by greater attachment or generosity to one's religious in-group, rather than greater bias against the out-group. Indeed, average donations to out-group members in the ethnic and religious contexts are statistically indistinguishable, both from one another and from the Control group (0.93 vs. 0.91 Cedis, *p* = .75; Control group = 0.88 Cedis). That religious divisions are best explained by affinity toward in-group members as opposed to animosity toward out-group members casts some doubt on the perspective that the non-negotiable aspects of religion exacerbate dislike of those who do not share one's faith. Instead, it appears, in this research context at least, that shared faith generates a particularly strong form of bonding.

Muslim Bias against Non-Muslims

Disaggregating the data by religious faith helps to address the literature purporting greater out-group bias among Muslims. The results show no such bias in this study. Muslims matched with a non-Muslim partner in the Different Religion treatment were equally as generous as were non-Muslim participants who received the Different Religion treatment (0.92 vs. 0.91, *p* = .84). Muslims matched with fellow Muslims in the Same Religion treatment were slightly more generous than non-Muslims who received the Same Religion treatment, but the difference is not a notable one (1.13 vs. 1.09, *p* = .68). Thus, no evidence exists from this study supporting the claim that Islam inspires greater out-group dislike or that Muslims are even particularly exclusive in their attachments.

The Effects of Political Context on Identity Divisions

Finally, the research design allows for a comparison of inter-group divisions across political contexts. Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana differ in colonial histories, but sufficient similarities exist across these neighboring countries—in terms of ecology and agricultural production, economic opportunities, social identities, population density, and other factors—that numerous scholars have exploited the comparison as a means to evaluate the effects of different national political contexts on otherwise similar populations (Langer 2008; MacLean 2010; McCauley 2013). The critical national-level difference is that Côte d'Ivoire suffered through a decade of civil war and turmoil in the 2000s that exacerbated ethnic, and especially religious, divisions (Langer 2008).

In Côte d'Ivoire, after decades of ethnic and religious cooptation during the post-Independence era, President Henri Konan Bedié introduced in the 1990s the policy of *Ivoirité*, or Ivoirianness, a cultural project intended to "forge a common culture for all people living on

Ivoirian soil, foreigners as well as citizens" (Le Pape 2003: 34, author's translation), but which in fact created explicit political advantages for those born in Côte d'Ivoire of southern heritage. Northerners faced overt discrimination, and at the street level, the policy was interpreted as a blow against Muslims and those of northern ethnicities (Daddieh 2001). Political rhetoric exacerbated the religious divide: southern, Christian President Laurent Gbagbo referred to the northern opposition as the "Ivoirian Taliban" (Soudan 2003: 61), while party members of the excluded northern candidate (and eventual president) Alassane Ouattara argued that "if we accept this we aren't good Muslims…" (Roger 2010).

Ghana, conversely, enjoyed sustained peace and stability over the same period, with few instances of political contestation that would intensify ethnic or religious cleavages. Successive democratic elections have taken place since 1992, significant conflict has been absent since Independence,[8] and scholars describe Ghana as a setting in which ethnic and religious identities have taken a backseat politically (Tsikata and Sieni 2004).

As Figure 2 illustrates, these starkly different political contexts are associated with clear differences in social divisions: in Ghana, generosity to partners of the Same Religion and a Different Religion were nearly identical (1.07 vs. 1.02, $p = .53$). In Côte d'Ivoire, on the other hand, the difference in generosity to coreligionists and non-coreligionists is striking: those who received the Same Religion treatment offered 1.15 Cedis to their partner, while those receiving the Different Religion treatment gave just 0.81 Cedis to the receiver ($p = .000$). Patterns in ethnic bias were similar, though not as strong (and Ghanaians actually showed greater generosity to non-coethnics than to coethnics). If results from the Dictator Game can be taken as an

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[8] The only notable communal conflict was a localized dispute in 1994. See McCauley (2013).

indication of bias, respondents exposed to the Ivoirian political context showed significantly more bias, particularly in terms of religion, than did their Ghanaian counterparts.

[Figure 3 here]

Robustness Check

One possible concern is that the identity options of ethnicity and religion are difficult to disentangle in the study region. Insofar as they covary strongly, we cannot be sure that hearing a family name signals ethnicity and that hearing a given first name signals religion; those cues may become increasingly interchangeable as the covariance in ethnic and religious identities increases. Because the experimental design is an incomplete factorial with no options for orthogonal identification (eg. an in-group religious first name followed by an out-group ethnic surname), I cannot determine the degree to which ethnicity may frame the bias of those assigned to a religious context, and *vice versa*.

The strong overlap in ethnic and religious identities in the study region is precisely the rationale for studying their discrete effects: to assume that political leaders employ both in the mobilization of supporters, or that supporters themselves convey ethnic biases to religious contexts, offers no purchase in determining which motivates greater divisiveness. Nevertheless, to account for the possibility that respondents may infer one identity type when given information regarding the other, I report the results of additional data from the two enumeration areas in Ghana.[9]

The additional sample included 188 participants, 98 in Cape Coast and 90 in Tamale. In this version of the experiment, participants played the Dictator Game with partners whose first

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[9] Collected in the summer of 2015. The study environment in Ghana has remained more stable than in Côte d'Ivoire, and this robustness check aimed only to test name associations rather than the effects of a changing political environment.

and family names they learned. Those experimental partners acting as Receivers were selected to cover four types, relative to the predominant identities in northern and southern Ghana: 1) same ethnicity and same religion, 2) same ethnicity and different religion, 3) different ethnicity and same religion, and 4) different ethnicity and different religion.[10] The results do not reveal stronger influence on inter-group bias from either identity type: participants were statistically more generous to partners sharing both their ethnic and religious identity (giving 1.10 Cedis), but were equally stingy with those who differed on ethnic grounds (0.93 Cedis), religious grounds (0.95 Cedis), and both dimensions (0.91 Cedis).[11]

Conclusion

Ethnicity and religion both constitute critical identities in African politics; this study aimed to evaluate the relative divisiveness of each. Using a version of the Dictator Game that employed names to distinguish partners as members of the Same Ethnicity, a Different Ethnicity, the Same Religion, a Different Religion, or a Control group, the results demonstrate three important patterns. First, religious divisions appear to be greater than ethnic ones. Second, the divisiveness of religion cannot be attributed to Islam, since Muslim participants mirrored the behavior of non-Muslims. Finally, the divisiveness of religion turns almost entirely on the political context, since in-group/out-group religious differences appear strong where religion has been politicized in the course of conflict but effectively absent where it has not.

On a micro scale, the study helps to evaluate a number of arguments related to ethnic and religious politics. First, it casts doubt on the primordial importance of ethnicity. Second, it suggests that if religion is a hardened, non-negotiable divide in some places, it is much less

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[10] Gender was held constant at male.
[11] Half were randomly selected for exposure to the pre-treatment radio reports, which had no statistical effect.

divisive in others. Third, a clash of civilizations based on Muslim exclusivity or bias receives no support. Fourth, the design of the study precludes group size as an explanation for divisiveness, by holding that factor constant: members of the same groups were randomly assigned to either ethnic or religious contexts, without the actual size of the groups to which they belong ever changing. Thus, while the size of coalitions may matter in terms of identity salience and division, the results here suggest that inter-group divisions must also hinge on other factors. Finally, consistent with constructivist accounts of identity, the findings from this Dictator Game experiment ultimately lend support to the notion that ethnic and religious divisiveness is a function of the political environment.

The evidence across political contexts is not experimental; subjects were evaluated in their countries of residence rather than assigned to Côte d'Ivoire or Ghana. Nor is the cross-national evidence particularly robust: given just two national-level contexts, it is at best suggestive of the effect that political context exerts on identity divisions. Nevertheless, the results of this dictator game add critical insight that would be missed in a single-country study. Had the experiment been conducted only in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, scholars who support religious essentialism would have enjoyed strong but ultimately incomplete evidentiary support. Thus, in addition to providing support for the context-dependent nature of identity divisions in African political settings, the study highlights the importance of replicating micro-level studies across multiple political contexts.

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FIGURE 1. Map of the Research Locations.
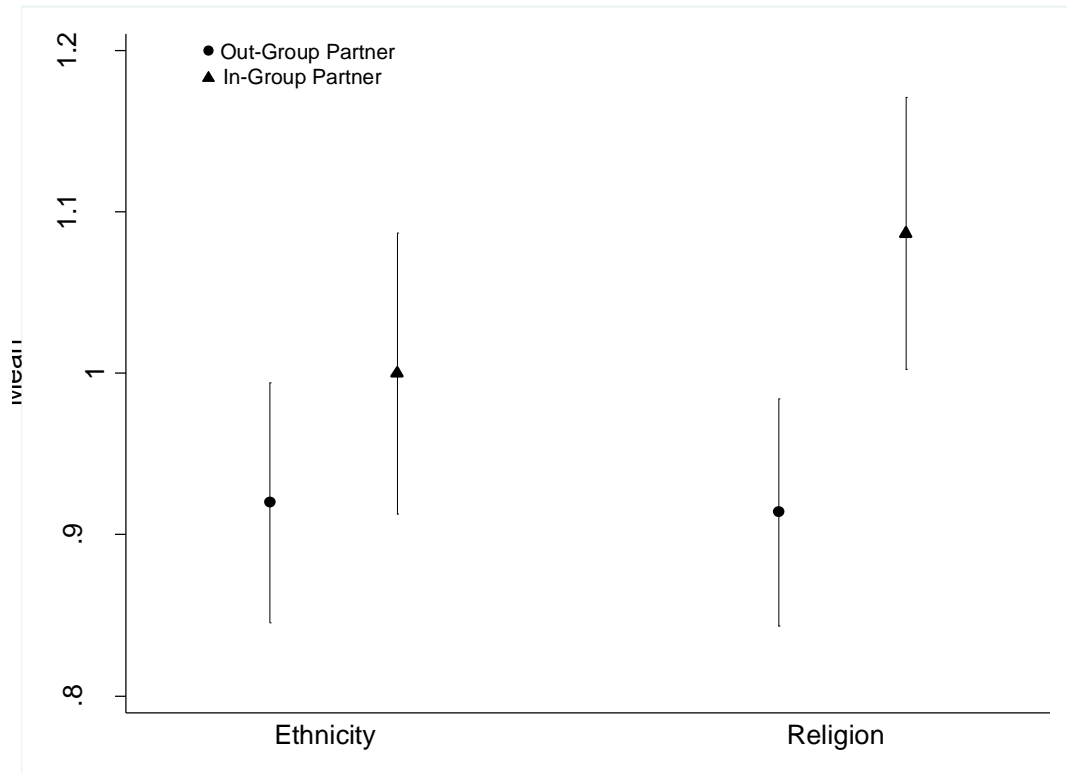
FIGURE 2. Dictator Game Offers by Identity Context.

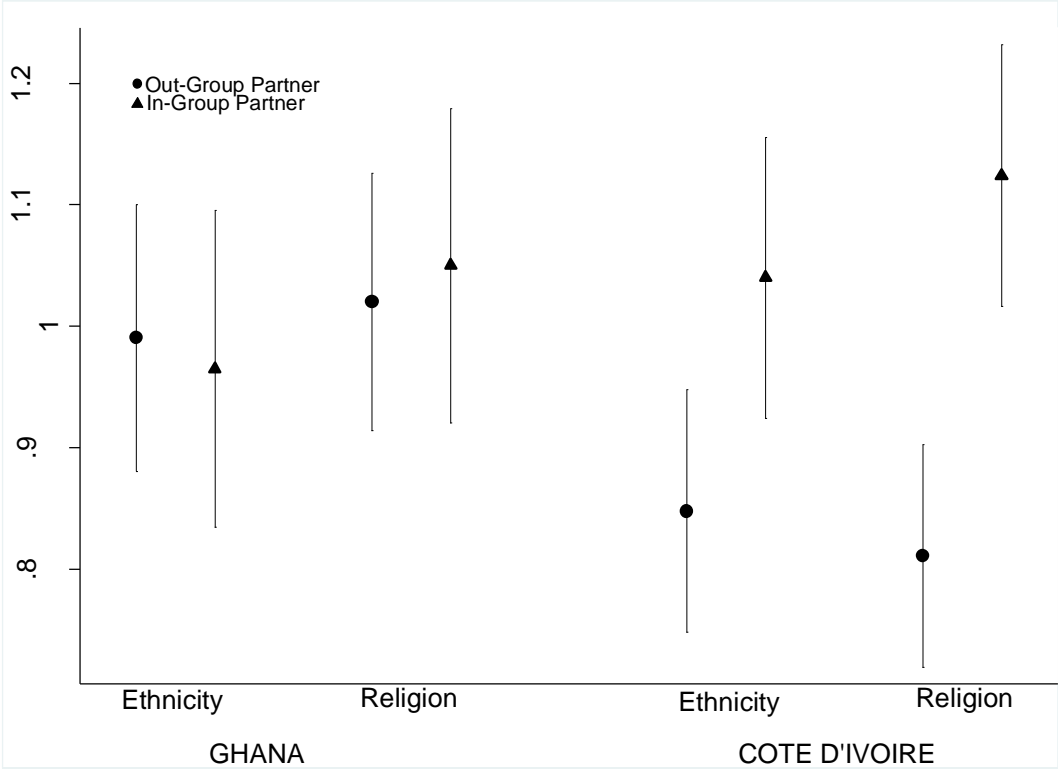FIGURE 3. Dictator Game Offers by Country and Identity Context.

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics.

	Côte d'Ivoire		Ghana	
	Korhogo (North)	Divo (South)	Tamale (North)	Cape Coast (South)
N	243	212	293	260
Mean Age	36.9	39.8	37.3	38.8
Percent Female	50	50	50	50
Percent Muslim	68	21	75	16