IDENTITIES’ CONFLICTS: WEDDING NIGERIA’S SUBNATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IDENTITIES AND THE CONFLICTS THEY ENABLE

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BY KEVIN H. ELLSWORTH

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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kevin.ellsworth@asu.edu – www.public.asu.edu/~ellsworke
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INTRODUCTION

At the very least, this paper presents the problematic effects of democratization in Nigeria’s deeply divided society. But it promises to do much more. Many scholars describe various manifestations of the relationship between ethnicity and democracy. Still others prescribe institutional remedies to prevent or restrain the violence that sometimes results. None, however, explores the representational practices that bind the manifestations of ethnic and democratic identities to each other across their domestic and international environments. Nor do they explore how these practices affect the likelihood and magnitude of the communal conflicts that sometimes accompany democratization. I propose to begin that exploration—to consider issues of communication, meaning, and identity in order to explain how democracy is imposed, adopted, written and read across the international-domestic divide, and finally, to reveal how that process affects communal relations.

Central to this study lies the notion of political identity. According to Lapid and Kratochwil (1996), the focus on identity has “returned” to IR theory. Long acknowledged as an important consideration, identity is not new to political theory. After ebbing temporarily, however, studies of identity and IR theory have recently met anew, but not as they had met before. Instead, each has now adopted a more sophisticated character, and IR’s “reflectivist/constructivist/postpositivist/postmodernist/poststructuralist” turn holds great promise in better assessing the identity issues that return (4).

One popular attempt to integrate theories of identity into international relations is the burgeoning literature on social constructivism. Popularized by Nicholas Onuf (1989) and Alexander Wendt (1992), this approach has promise in disclosing the social nature of relations between communal groups or between democratic and democratizing states. This young approach is not, however, without several serious drawbacks. As Jeffery Checkel (1999) astutely points out, theories on social constructivism tend to neglect agency and even more importantly, they neglect the processes that tie the agents to the structures of meaning. I begin the attempt here to overcome some of these shortcomings.

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1 Distinguished from social identity by Laclau (1994) due to its questioning a presupposed social structure.

2 See Garcia (1996), Pollis (1996), Myers et al (1996), Posse (1993), and Wilmer (1997) for applications of social constructivism to ethnic relations. Regarding social constructivism and democracy, the very prolific and productive IR literature on Democratic Peace Theory considers in its dyadic, normative school the social relationship among democracies, that makes it ripe for application of a social constructivist approach. More directly Mark Peceny in the recent International Studies Review (Spring 1999) suggests that although many scholars of democratization hint at social constructivist processes, they do little to capitalize on the social or international natures of that process.
Focusing on two identity-related nodal points, democracy and ethnicity, this paper begins to reveal power and practices operating beyond what traditional literature on democratization or ethnic conflict considers.

Political identity is a fruitful focus for political scholars who can no longer ignore the emotive origins of much political participation, especially in its most violent or oppressive expressions. At the roots of the war, identities based on religion, ideology, patriotism, and ethnicity make possible the mass mobilization and tireless execution of bloodshed and sacrifice. Thus identity represents the foundation upon which profound political power may be exercised.

Yet, on the other side of this coin, these identities represent the effects of the even more profound power of representational practices. The formation and manipulation of these identities are bound in the historical processes of structural and personal practice. Molded by organizations, manipulated by opportunist elites, forged in local and global political-economic social structures, and adopted by individuals, these identities comprise the fire for all subsequent decision and action. Never set in stone, these identities are constantly in flux, to be acted upon from within and without. Nevertheless, when accessed and activated, they have power to compel the individual or the nation to both sacrifice and shed blood.

To better expose the power-based nature of identity, I explore the current process of democratization in Nigeria and its effects on domestic communal relations. Nigeria has arisen as an ideal case for such a study. Since the death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998, Nigeria has moved steadily toward democracy culminating in the inauguration of the democratically elected President Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999. This began Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, the heir to three previously failed attempts at democratization. The entire process has been rife with the rhetoric of international ‘support’ and national transformation. Nigeria’s democratization has thus provided an ideal independent, identity-related variable. Internally, Nigeria offers a mosaic of subnational identity groups, varying in type (religious and ethnic), size, and political-emotional intensity. The relations among these communal groups are likewise inherently identity laden, and to the extent those relations are changing, they offer an ideal identity-related dependent variable.

In this paper, I will explore the relationship between these two variables—how Nigeria has come to identify itself in the international society and how Nigerians have come to identify themselves within the domestic realm. Specifically, I will consider pressures of political-economic liberalization that have led Nigeria to adopt a domestic democratic system as it had been constructed. I then contrast Nigeria’s successful entrance to the global democratic society on one hand with the construction of Nigeria’s communal groups and their newly read and preformed liberal-democratic roles on the other.

First, in the international arena, a society consisting of national, transnational, and supranational organizations both construct a consensus of what democracy represents (based primarily on a reading of U.S. exemplarity) and then persuade Nigeria to adopt a democratic identity. To this call, Nigeria answers by dawning a democratic identity and adapting its behavior to better act the part. Second, within the domestic arena, communal (primarily ethnic and religious) groups astutely eavesdrop on this

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3 Laclau and Mouffe’s term (1985, 112) cited in Doty (1996, 10) referring to “privileged discursive points that fix meaning” in ways that temporarily enable certain practices, predictions, and classifications.
conservation, interpreting for themselves the meaning attached to the expectations (the democratic performance) and promises (mostly material) attached to 'democracy'. In this domestic realm, however, the international agents and the Nigerian state and its apparatuses have not in any meaningful way fostered the democratic norms and national identities compatible with the new ‘democratic’ identity the state has adopted. Nor has the state the sufficient strength to regulate violent forms of competition and expressions of frustration that may emerge when the promises heard through eavesdropping are not fulfilled.

The international representational practices and socialization efforts, therefore, not only affect state identity, but they also introduce a set of inherently competitive structures and primarily material expectations into the domestic society where it affects communal identities in ways incompatible with the promises it boasts. Tragically, the resulting frustration and competition are thus marked more often by blood than by progress and prosperity. That people continue to die, in part due to the policies of the west and the superficially constructed discursive veneer we call ‘democracy’, demands that we better understand these processes and their consequences.

In short, my preliminary observations, interviews, and readings suggest that these processes appear to be operating in contradictory and dangerous ways (as modeled in Figure 1 below), and thus lead me to expect violent consequences.

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**Figure 1.** Model locating three structural tensions (T1 - T3) resulting from the social interactions in both the international and national social arenas.
In brief summary, even though the structural tension marked T3 most directly contributes to ethnic tension and violence, this more-often studied (J-curve) tension cannot be well understood without a consideration of two related structural tensions: T1 marking the constant discursive tensions between the “new dawn” rhetoric and the “don’t hope for too much” disclaimers constantly pouring down from both Nigerian state officials and the spokesman of international agencies; and T2 highlighting the tension between the international and national desires for Nigeria to adopt a superficial democratic identity contrasted with its deeper needs to build a national identity and social and political capacity.

**HYPOTHESIS and PROPOSITIONS**

**Hypothesis –**
To the extent that the international discourse and practice have contributed to Nigeria's adopting a form of democratic identity, and to the extent that this process has influenced expectations of the citizenship, and to the extent that the population has constructed identities and interpretations of 'democracy' in conflict with democratic norms, beliefs, associations, or a national identity, *communal competition and conflict will increase with the advent of democracy.*

**Propositions –**
- Socializing efforts of international political and economic agents have successfully pressured Nigeria’s population and political elite to adopt a formal democratic identity.  
  *International socialization ∫ a construction and adoption of ‘democracy’*

- Nigerian citizens have been aware of these conversations and have raised political and economic expectations as a result of what they think they heard.  
  *Eavesdropping on international discourse ∫ Rising political-economic expectations*

- Nigerian citizens have drawn on communal identities to seek the fulfillment of those expectations.  
  *Rising expectations ∫ Communal > Noncommunal mobilization*

- Nigerian communal organizations frame their demands to be in conflict with the demands of other communal groups, that is, more often in zero-sum terms than in cooperative or positive-sum terms.  
  *Communal Mobilization ∫ Competition > Cooperation*

- This competition in the absence of adequate state capacity to manage it, will lead to increasing communal conflict in Nigeria.  
  *Competition ∫ Violence and Death > Democratic political expressions of competition*
Especially since the time of Abacha’s death, the United States government has actively promoted democracy in Nigeria through both word and deed. No official public communication from the US to Nigeria fails to mention democratic transition thus defining this particular aspect of US-Nigerian relations as its premier focal point. How democracy is, and is not, defined, however, and how the US consistently uses the promise of economic rewards is a matter of some concern.

First, the United States’ interest in Nigeria and in Nigerian democracy is interesting both in its magnitude and because of its predominantly economic nature. Perhaps no evidence makes as compelling a case that Nigeria has become a “vital” U.S. interest as do the results of the most recent drug certification process. During this consideration of countries who produce or export illicit drugs to the US (which determines what countries are eligible for financial aid) Nigeria was declared on the basis of “vital national interests” to be eligible for financial assistance despite its not having lived up to any of the standards of eligibility. Nigeria is the source of 30% of US heroin imports (Rice 1999) and yet in the past year, “There were no major trafficker prosecutions or arrests . . . nor were there any extraditions in response to outstanding U.S. extradition requests. Corruption was widespread and potentially effective counter-drug laws were generally not enforced.” Despite this all, the Administration chose to make Nigeria an exception arguing that a “decision not to certify Nigeria would block assistance that the new democratically-elected government needs to meet these challenges, seriously damaging the prospects for success of stable, transparent democracy in Nigeria.” (White House, Office of Press Secretary, 2000). This exception is even more notable given Under Secretary Thomas Pickering’s uncompromising claim in December 1998 that “In fact, the U.S. under our own legislation cannot provide any assistance . . . until the government is certified to be cooperating with us on counternarcotics goals . . . Nigerian Government action is necessary before we can revisit the certification issue.” (Pickering 1998).

What are the reasons for this recently acquired “vital national interest”? According to White House and State Department documents, the interest is predominantly economic. Ambassador Howard Jeter explains, “A democratic Nigeria is key to a stable and prosperous West Africa, and invigorated Africa, and to U.S. national and economic security. Nigeria is our second largest trading partner in all of Africa. American companies have invested over $7 billion in the country’s petroleum sector; we import approximately 40% of Nigeria’s oil production, and Nigeria supplies nearly 8% of our total oil imports.” (Jeter 1999). In 1997 US exports to Nigeria totaled $814 million, and Nigerian exports to the US (mostly oil) totaled more than $6 billion. (Rice 1998).

This fits well into the broader picture of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa generally. President Clinton remarked at the opening of the National Summit of Africa in February 2000, that among other reasons, the United States must be involved in Africa, “Because we want to broaden global growth and expand markets for our own people . . . ” (Clinton, 2000). Secretary of State Madeleine Albright speaking publically in Abuja Nigeria on October 20, 1999 claimed that “Nigeria is important to the United States and the world because you have the potential to be an economic powerhouse for Africa and global markets” (Albright 1999).

With an even more candid explanation, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Susan Rice clarifies the nature of U.S. interests in Africa generally. “Still, the United State’s share of the African market is small—only 6%, making it the largest untapped market for the U.S. in the world.”
Furthermore, “Almost 50% of Africans are under the age of 15. These are young people who can
develop fierce brand loyalties for everything from soft drinks to blue jeans. Africa, a market of
approximately 700 million potential consumers, truly represents the last frontiers for U.S. exporters and
investors.” (Rice 1999). Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa with a population of more than
110 million people and growing rapidly, fits well within this definition of “vital” interests.

**Defining Democracy**

Given this context, it should not be entirely surprising that the U.S. has marketed democratic
reform to the Nigerian people in similar economistic terms, relatively shallow in its political content, and
relatively easily attained.

Consider first the speed to which this transition occurred. As late as March 27, 1998 in a State
Department press briefing James Foley stated that “To suggest that anything that is going on in Nigeria
today is tantamount to the beginnings of a free, fair electoral process - credible electoral process - is
really illusory and unfounded.” Later he defined “True civilian, democratic rule” as one which must
include “free political activity, release of political prisoners, freedom of the press and free, fair and
transparent elections.” (Foley, 1998). Just earlier that month, secretary Albright had defined
democratic transition in similar terms. Speaking of General Abacha’s rule she stated, “He must allow a
real transition, not a phoney or a cosmetic one. If Nigeria’s promise is to be realized, political prisoners
must be released, the harassment of NGOs and human rights monitors must end. A free press must be
allowed. And there must be a true election, conducted under fair elections, resulting in civilian rule.”
(Albright 1998a).

Not long thereafter, Susan Rice, the State Department’s Assistant Secretary for African Affairs
provided another similar definition of democracy stating that “Our road map for measuring democratic
progress is universal and unwavering. A credible transition would include a transparent and
participatory process; unconditional release of political prisoners; provisions for free political activity
and party formation allowing all those who wish to run to do so freely; freedom of association, speech,
and the press; unrestricted access to the media by all candidates and parties; impartial electoral
preparation; and elections open to all.” (Rice 1998). Although each of these political factors is a
necessary element in a successful transition, to suggest as has Rice, Albright, and Foley that they
represent a “real,” “true,” or “credible” transition, appears hollow and short-sighted in the face of
Nigeria’s profound social obstacles.

More recent statements have all stressed the economic side of democratization. Secretary
Albright addressing African democracy in February 2000 clearly tied an economic element to her
definition of democracy stating that “Elections, moreover, are but one note in the democratic symphony.
A full orchestra is required, including markets that reward initiative . . . ” In a much earlier speech
Secretary Albright referred to Nigeria’s “democratic path, which is also the path to prosperity and
social progress for the Nigerian people.” (Albright 1998)

Under Secretary Thomas Pickering presented a similar economic component to democratic
reform stating that “Our interests have been consistent across the decades. The United States would
like to see a Nigeria that is democratic and ably governed by civilians; a Nigeria with a good human
rights record; a prosperous Nigeria that is committed to a market economy.” (Pickering 1998).
Some might argue that democracy and capitalism have their own rewards, but to prevent Nigeria’s leaders and population from missing that point, the United States offered many more tangible and immediate promises as well.

Economic Promise or the Rewards for Good Behavior

When democratic elections were nullified in 1993, the United States imposed sanctions and halted all development aid. Soon thereafter the US cut military ties and banned all direct flights from Nigeria to the US. By 1999, however, with the appearance of democratic transition underway, the United States turned the spotlight on numerous carrots it might offer a democratic Nigeria. In March 1999, Thomas Pickering promised that “If Nigeria can stay the reform course, substantial multilateral assistance and debt relief become real options” (Pickering 1999). On a visit to Kano Nigeria, US Ambassador, Williams Twaddell, promised that if Nigeria returned to democracy, sanctions would be relaxed. In the Nigerian media, references were made to sanctions being lifted and trade being increased. Rumors circulated throughout Nigeria that direct flights might resume. Nigeria, they felt, would lose its pariah status with the advent of democracy and numerous economic benefits would consequently flow.

With such explicit economic benefits offered in reward for successful socialization to the capitalist-democratic society, one must question whether such a behaviorist approach can produce the deep social changes necessary for a consolidated democracy. Perhaps instead this Skinner-like attempt at manipulation will result more in simple behavioral adaptation than actual transformation. Whatever the actual consequence, Nigeria did democratize and social and economic rewards were offered.

The British Commonwealth, for example, had sanctioned Nigeria and suspended her from the Commonwealth years earlier but promised Nigeria that on the very day of the civilian government’s inauguration, Nigeria would be readmitted. Indeed, the transformation was instantaneous. The day after the inauguration, the Commonwealth General-Secretary was able to announce that “Nigeria is not only back fully in the Commonwealth, Nigeria’s standing internationally at the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity and all other international organizations has been fully restored.”

Japan likewise indicated it might lift sanctions on Nigeria stating that “Now that the completion of the transition to a civilian rule is done . . . [t]he Japanese government will study extending appropriate assistance to Nigeria’s effort for reform and development.”

In June 1999 the G-8 issued a press release from their summit stating that “The G8 warmly welcomes Nigeria’s return to civilian rule and democracy.” Furthermore, they made the requisite financial promise claiming also that the “G8 will assist . . . the reduction of poverty.” (G-8, 1999).

Just two weeks after the new democratic government’s inauguration, the United States restored military ties which had been severed in 1995. On December 22, 1999, the US government lifted its ban on direct flights to Nigeria and in very social terms the US Secretary of Transportation stated that “I am deeply gratified to see a government chosen by the Nigerian people earning the trust and respect of the world.” (White House, 1999). Secretary Albright announced to an audience in Kano, Nigeria that “. . . President Clinton and Congress have nearly quadrupled our assistance to Nigeria” (Albright, 2000). On February 16, 2000, the US Trade Representative and Nigeria’s Vice President signed a “trade investment framework agreement” (White House, 2000). At a press conference with the visiting President Obasanjo, President Clinton claimed that there is much the United States will do to support
Nigeria. Of the three points he mentioned all are concretely economic benefits for Nigeria—stimulating trade and investment, relieving the “crushing debt burden” and supporting Nigeria’s regional peacekeeping efforts (of which the US had already provided $11 million in assistance that year) (Clinton, 2000b).

A change had immediately occurred in Nigeria’s international social status as well. In addition to receiving the warm welcome of the G-8 and the prodigal feast of the Commonwealth, Nigeria even received a Papal blessing. Speaking just before the new governments inauguration, Thomas Pickering, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs stated in social terms that under Abacha, Nigeria was “isolated from the community of nations” but that after elections and cooperation with the World Bank and IMF the “international community is impressed, enthusiastic, and ready to assist.” Pickering concluded his speech titled “Nigeria Returns: America Responds” with more social imagery “Nigeria is not alone. . . . Nigeria, in just 9 months, has moved from a position of alienation in the international community to a place where Nigerian hopes for democracy, prosperity, and a better life correspond with our own vision. . . .” (Pickering, 1999).

Nigerians’ Perceptions of Democracy

Certainly more important than what was said is what was heard by those on the ground in Nigeria. Did the international promise of economic benefits translate to rising economic expectations, or did the people of Nigeria instead have their minds on the purer political benefits of democracy? Over and over when I asked people what democracy meant to them, they tended to respond, “a better standard of living.” In an environment of profound poverty, it is not surprising that people have their minds on their standard of living.4

It was especially revealing to be present in the city of Jos, not far from the capital, on May 29, 1999, the day of the new government’s inauguration. Knowing the positive billing the event was receiving in the international news, and aware that CNN International was broadcasting portions of the ceremony around the world, I had expected that Nigerians themselves would be even more excited. The national newspapers proclaimed with gigantic headlines and bold color photos the excitement of the occasion, but on the street there was an eerie lack of celebration. In every way it was business as usual.

I spent the midday hours walking the length of the city, and of the thousands of people I saw engaged in typical commerce, I only had three encounters with the inauguration. First, I walked by an electronics shop that was broadcasting the ceremony over a loudspeaker. Nobody appeared to listen. Second, I walked by a tiny television shop, which had one of its TV’s tuned to the ceremony. I walked closer to take a look, and when the owner approached me, I eagerly asked him if he’d been watching and what he thought. He responded only by trying to sell me that television. Finally, I wandered into an “upscale” grocery story which had a television. No one was there except three young, underemployed staff who were watching. Their conversation was not one of excitement or celebration,

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4 Academics I interviewed frequently referred to Nigeria’s political culture with Almond and Verba’s Civic Cultural term, “subject”, but I would be inclined instead to categorize what I saw more as Ronald Inglehart would; Nigeria had not yet achieved a post-materialist culture.
however, but puzzlement. “What does democracy mean?” they asked each other, apparently with no good answers except that life should improve in some vague manner.

When asked how people expected their lives to change under democracy, those I interviewed in Nigeria inevitably referred to expected economic benefits. When asked why they expected democracy would help, they most frequently blamed their poverty on their government’s corruption and on their international pariah status. Accepting democracy, they reasoned was the solution to each. They expected that once trade and aid began flowing into Nigeria, and once a corrupt government stopped hoarding the economic goods for itself, the Nigerian people would prosper.

Unfortunately, in the past, governments whether democratic or authoritarian were judged legitimate based on their economic performance. General Muritala Murtala’s military regime still elicits positive responses among the public due to the stability, order, and economic benefits he is credited for. Alihaji Shehu Shagari’s 1976 democratic regime is still criticized. In fact, when a military coup ended this democratic experiment, there was notable public support (not unlike Pinochet’s Chile or Pakistan’s recent experience).

Secretary Albright suggests the importance of economic prosperity to political legitimacy. She states “President Obasanjo enjoys broad popular support, but his government is fragile, and he must also cope with high public expectation: During the 1970’s oil boom, Nigeria’s per capita income was more than four times what it is today.” (Albright, 2000c). Unfortunately, a democratic government cannot create another oil boom, yet it must now deal with the expectations of international economic promise as well as the glory of their own past.

Unfortunately, such a perception of democracy becomes dangerous when applied to an environment of fractured sub-national identities like Nigeria’s.

**Nigeria’s Subnational Identities**

Nigeria is frequently categorized as a “deeply divided” society—divided both by religion (a predominantly Muslim north and predominantly Christian south) and by ethnicity (experts estimate that Nigeria contains between 250 and 400 distinct ethnic groups including three major players: the Yoruba, Hausa, and Ibo). Their history is a bleak one including the Biafran war, one of the world’s worst, which cost Nigeria approximately two million lives. Despite international attempts to integrate Nigeria into international society, there has been little success at integrating sub-national religious and ethnic groups into a national society. In order to quantify the existence and strength of these subnational identities, I went to Nigeria and surveyed more than 350 university students regarding their identities. I asked each respondent to indicate his identity in each of six international, national, and sub-national categories and then rank the relative value of each identity to that individual. Below I present the applicable data disaggregated between the northern and southern regions of Nigeria.

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5 For more information on the populations I sampled and the questions I asked see a summary in Appendix B or for a fuller account refer to the original and complete account of my survey findings (Ellsworth 1999).
It becomes immediately apparent that Nigerians in both the north and the south claimed religious identity as their most central (Figure 2). This is not surprising given previously published research on religion in Africa. Nor is it atypical of religious identification generally. This finding is, however, noteworthy because religion has historically been one of the principal cleavages in Nigeria dividing northern Muslims and southern Christians. Although it was not the primary mobilizing identity in the Biafran war (the Christian Yoruba sided with the Muslim Hausa—a fact that still draws deep resentment among some of the Ibo I interviewed), the salience of religion did arise unsolicited in most of my interviews in both regions. It is important, therefore, that this especially divisive identity is also the strongest in both regions.

Those I interviewed in the north played down the importance of religious differences claiming that there were many Christians living in the north, and believing that their presence represented a meaningful cross-cutting cleavage. As Table 1 shows, there were many Christians in the north, but that alone is not evidence of cross-cutting cleavages.

Table 1. Distribution of religion by region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of Residence</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>153 (96.8%)</td>
<td>4 (2.5%)</td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>26 (14.4%)</td>
<td>158 (85.1%)</td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The essence of cross-cutting cleavages lies in identity. What lacks in making these cleavages truly cross-cutting is that the respondents’ common regional or perhaps ethnic identities, which might have the potential to temper their differing religious identities, are relatively so weak. In fact, most of the northern Christians identify even more strongly than do their southern counterparts with their southern ethnic origins and religion. More troubling is that the most recent cases of extreme violence between Muslims and Christians all occurred in regions where residences are most integrated (Sagamu, Kano, and Kaduna).
The other very divisive category, that of ethnic identity, further portrays its potentially divisive strength as well as another sharp divide between north and south. Although southerners were more likely to rank ethnicity first, northerners were still very likely to rank it within the first two spots. Because ethnicity is the second highest ranked identity country-wide (after religion), its divisive nature between the north south and with the southern region should not be neglected. Because the north is ethnically relatively homogenous and the south heterogeneous in the extreme, any strong identity associated with ethnicity is liable to have not only a divisive impact between the northern and southern regions, but among the southern regions themselves.

In Figure 4, all of the respondents’ rankings in each category are averaged together to produce a single mean score for each identity. It is once again clear that religion occupies the top ranked identity in both regions, although the difference between north and the south is still remarkable. Ethnicity is also depicted to hold a dominant position. Compared with these two potentially divisive identities, the national and international identities, with their potential to unify Nigerians, fall far behind in strength. It is also clear that any international identity whether continental (Pan-African) or regional (West African--ECOMOG or ECOWAS) remain the lowest ranked in both regions, and about equally so. A national-Nigerian identity is somewhat stronger, but cannot compete nation-wide with the more divisive categories shown above.

Given the prominence of these particular ethnic and religious identities, and given their propensity internationally to represent some of the deepest social schisms, one might realistically dread what might occur in conditions of rising expectations and a political field that introduces new forms of competition. Conflict might easily follow.
**Conflict**

Communal conflict in Nigeria is unmistakably on the rise. Although communal conflicts are part and parcel of Nigeria’s history, and seasons of pervasive peace are rare if they exist at all, the recent epidemic of ethnic/religious conflicts is remarkable even by Nigerian standards. Not surprisingly, they coincide precisely with the introduction of democratic local and national governments.

To establish the magnitude of these trends, I reviewed the past three years of Nigerian news and quantified any reference to deaths resulting from communal violence.\(^6\) The fruits of my labor are depicted on the following chart.

![Death Toll of Communal Conflicts by Quarter](image)

**Figure 5.** Death toll of communal clashes as reported in *Post Express*.

There is an undeniable spike in the number and magnitude of communal conflicts immediately following the advent of democratic governance in the second quarter of 1999. Whereas in quarters previously there was rarely more than one reported conflict in a given quarter and none with more than 100 reported deaths, the quarter following the transition reported ten separate conflicts, and,

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\(^6\) To achieve this, I searched the *Post Express Wired*’s archives for "(communal OR ethnic OR regional OR religious OR tribal) and (kill OR killed OR death OR deaths OR died OR die OR clash OR conflict OR riot OR riots)" and then skimmed each of the 1100-1200 articles to count the number of communal conflicts and the reported death tolls of each.
culminating in this quarter’s Kaduna riots in which more than 1,000 people died, several with very substantial death tolls.

As always, correlation does not prove causation. Therefore, I propose three causal mechanisms to link communal conflict with the process of democratization. Each of the three mechanisms draws on the inherently competitive nature of the democratic political system. In any democracy, interest groups are compelled to compete in each of three major fields. First, who is represented? In other words, how are constituencies defined and how are subnational political borders drawn. Second, to whom are economic resources dispensed? In other words, local groups must compete with each other for political control of economic assets as well as jockey with state and federal government for their share of the tax revenue from such assets. Third, what law rules? In other words the very nature of the law established invites competition over which laws and which legal system is established. Unfortunately, as each of these fields of competitive democracy is applied to Nigeria, they all assume zero-sum natures. Examples below will clarify each.

**First – Who Rules What?**

In any federal system, subnational boundaries must be established, and this establishment is unavoidably and ultimately a political issue. Nigeria is no exception, and its efforts at drawing those subnational boundaries is long and tortured. Nigeria began with just three states, but quickly divided them into six. With each new division, new communal balances led to further demands for new states. Through a process sometimes referred to as hyperfederalism, Nigeria now has 36 states and is considering (it is unclear how seriously) demands for several dozen more. Many of these demands are relatively peaceful, but some turn violent.

Even many of those clashes occurring before the actual inauguration of the democratic government can thus be linked to preparations for the transition to and preparation for a federal democracy. On April 23, 1998, “barely three days [before] the National Assembly elections” the Igbira and Bassa ethnic groups clashed leaving 14 dead. The crisis was linked to the new round of political competition, the last of which (local elections in March 1997) led to the eventual deaths of 500 people. At that time a Bassa won two prominent seats, “leaving us (Igbiras) with nothing in spite of our number and historical status in Toto Local Government,” explained an Igbira elder (Chiahemen 1998).

In August of 1997, the headquarters and boundaries were adjusted in Osun State leading to conflict between the Ife and Modekekes and the deaths of 65 in August and at least another 30 in September. According to one Ife Chief, the “Ifes would fight with the last drop of their blood because nobody would allow Modakeke to take any of Ifeland.” (Agboh, 1997).

In November of 1997, seven people were killed when the Jukuns, Cambe, and Kutep clashed over a political boundary adjustment. At this the police commissioner “expressed dismay” that this clash “negated the noble spirit behind the creation of additional local government areas.” (Post Express, 1997).

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One of the boundary adjustments in 1997 is still causing bloodshed. At that time nine communities were reassigned from Taraba to Benue in return for seven others. But most of those communities refused to cooperate and to this date whenever state tax collectors appear or elections come, the boundary tensions reawaken as does the violence. In June 15, 1999, another 10,000 refugees fled and an unknown number died in a clash when two groups of tax collectors each claimed legitimacy (Chukwu 1999).
On June 6, 1999, seven died in clashes between the Ikot Ottung and the Ameakere Ibiono. The conflict began over a political boundary drawn to federalize power, but to the dissatisfaction of the parties involved. A request for adjustment was submitted to the National Boundary Commission who ruled in favor of the Ikot. Soon thereafter “some” houses were burned, seven were killed, and 800 villagers fled as refugees (Okwe, 1999).

Even between the Okun and Ikun in Cross Rivers state, these two people who “share the same tradition and have been inter-marrying for ages” have taken up arms against each other over an unclear boundary causing several deaths (Okwe 1999).

In April 1999 one of the worst ethnic wars began between the Umuleri and the Aguleri in Anambra. Over the course of three weeks of fighting between 500 and 700 people died. What began as a dispute over local government control quickly took on a life of its own (Ebele, 1999)

Even when ethnically “homogenous” municipalities were created, conflict has a way to ensue. The Apu-na-Ekpu community was created to solve the above-illustrated problems, but the community quickly broke into two camps over whom the new leader should be. In September 1999, 20 homes were burned in this conflict (Nwosu 1999). Finally, a peculiar conflict erupted over representation of the indigenous peoples who were displaced to create the neutral Abuja Federal Territory (the new capital).\(^7\) Despite all of this, one Nigerian Senate Committee Chairman advocated that more states and local areas must be created “if the new democratic set-up is to be taken seriously” (Brown 1999).

Due simply to their size, the larger ethnic groups do not face the same micro-level governance problems, but are faced with a potentially even more dangerous awareness of the competitiveness of the new political field.

Among the Yoruba (Nigeria’s second largest ethnic group), the O’odua People’s Congress has taken on the cause of ensuring that the Yoruba people are not underrepresented nationally. Rather than frame this in a cooperative democratic spirit, or in terms of a healthy competition, the rhetoric and actions instead portray a zero-sum mentality. Its president remarked that its 2.4 million members must come together to “resist the gradual but certain enslavement of their children and future generation” which he seems to feel characterizes the Yoruba status in “ . . . their present predicament in a fraudulent pseudo-federal Nigeria . . . ” (Obayagbon 1999).

Many Ibo (or Igbo or Ndigbo—Nigeria’s third largest ethnic group) likewise feel themselves marginalized. As the third largest ethnic group, the Igbo anticipated that they alone could never win the presidency so they instead entered a coalition with the large and predominantly Hausa party in hopes that the Igbo would in turn be rewarded with appointed positions in government. Not surprisingly, however, they are not satisfied with the resulting level of representation and have even accused the new

\(^7\) In an unusual side-effect of democratization, one reporter declared that “Abuja [Nigeria’s new capital city] is a Time Bomb” due to an unanticipated competition for representation (Jombo 1999). When the capital of Nigeria was moved to Abuja, now called “The Centre of Unity” to provide a central, neutral governmental seat, the indigenous Gbabyis (or Gwaris) were relocated without compensation. The very least they want now is political representation in the government of Abuja State, but because of its special designation as a Federal Territory, they will get none. Tempers are flaring and violence could easily break out right at the nation’s “Centre of Unity”.

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President Obasanjo of “a deliberate plot to destroy the leading political lights” of their region (Ohuegbe 1999). It appears more and more that the Igbo are framing their right to representation in the new government in zero-sum and violent terms. Urged to unify in their pan-Igbo convention of December 29, 1999 in Nigeria, and even in the World Igbo Congress in September of 1999 held here in Chicago, the Igbo have the shadow of the Biafran wars hanging heavily on their shoulders. In a recent statement from the Igbo Youth Movement protesting some Igbo that had been caught in the recent cross-fire of a Yoruba-Ijaw conflict, the movement recounted the Igbo’s long history of victimization claiming that now “People erroneously believe that Ndigbo do not have the capacity to fight back . . . ” and claimed that another provocation comparable to that beginning the Biafran war “would leave Nigeria in shambles as a result of sophisticated weapons now available in the world.” (Post Express 1999). In a similar spirit, the Secretary-General of the Igbo-Eze Socio-Cultural Group claimed that 29 years after the civil war the Igbo “are still being treated as prisoners of war” (Ohuegbe 1999). In a less violent but equally conflictual spirit, Igbo are now suing the federal government for compensation for a 1967 massacre of 700 Igbo during the Biafran war (Post Express, 1999).8

Unfortunately, many of the expectations I heard while visiting Nigeria were followed by a threat if those expectations were not met. Speaking with a focus group of Ibo before the cabinet appointments were made, they all voiced deep confidence that this democratic government would have to incorporate them into the government. “What if they do not?” I would ask. “You are still a numerical minority, and in democracy, the majority rules.” “They will,” they replied. “And if they don’t?” Their final response: “There could be war.”

Not surprisingly, some of the northern Hausa (Nigeria’s largest ethnic group) are also complaining of marginalization (Alechenu 1999).

SECOND—WHO GETS WHAT?

Most Nigerians I interviewed expected that once trade and aid began flowing into Nigeria, and once a corrupt government stopped hoarding the economic goods for itself, the Nigerian people would prosper. Much more importantly, they believed that not only would the country as a whole benefit from international assistance, but moreover their particular region or ethnic group would finally receive their “fair share” of the economic and political goods distributed internally. Many of the recent communal clashes illustrate this tragic consequence of misread democracy wherein federalism means local prosperity and “fair” often means having more than the rest.

One such resulting conflict reaches back to the beginnings of earlier democratic transitions. A boundary between the Erei and the Okon-Ohafia in Adia was decided by the Boundary Adjustment Commission in 1976 and again by the 1983 Commission which granted the Erei a large palm oil estate, an economic asset they both coveted. In December 1998, 20 lives were lost in a violent attempt to redraw those boundaries and control those assets (Post Express, 1998c). In contrast to the earlier issue of political borders, the goal in this conflict seems to be to control economic assets rather than simply control political representation. Likewise, in November 1999, the Oleh and Olomoro communities in Delta State took up arms against each other claiming 47 lives over the ownership of

8 Later they demanded 8.7 trillion Naira (about $87 billion) in compensation for “all atrocities committed against [the Igbos] in the country between 1966 and 1999” (Jombo, 1999).
pipes abandoned by Shell oil (Onoiribholo, 1999). Finally, in December 1999, an election of leaders of the Sukura Yam Sellers Association in a lucrative Lagos market broke down in violent conflict, when voting coalitions mobilized around Yoruba and Hausa ethnic cleavages. The competition soon turned violent and eventually twelve people were killed (Post Express, 1999d).

If palm oil, pipes, and yams can elicit such violence, than it should be of no surprise that the vast stores of crude oil in the Niger Delta region would create still more tension and violence. Approximately ninety percent of Nigeria’s revenue (about $40 million daily) comes from delta oil. Although the delta region had always been a conflictual one under any regime, it seems that the democratic promise of granting a degree of local autonomy and control (which implied local benefit from local resources) has greatly increased competition for political control of such areas and the economic benefits they promise.

In the Delta area, the economic competition brought about by the potential for political control over economic resources has fractured society along three faults. First, it has pitted local political interests against national political interests over the derivation formula—how much of the oil profit falls in local government coffers compared with that the national government takes. Second, it has pitted local political interests against each other over which local government controls oil resources and therefore has a right to any revenue the national government allows them to keep. Third, there is a violent schism between the oil producers (MNCs and their Nigerian workers and security personnel) and the local inhabitants who feel they possess the land but have had no claim to the oil profits.

Examples of these three schisms turning violent are, unfortunately, frequent and numerous, but no group epitomizes all of them as well as the Ijaw who find themselves constantly engaged in all three categories of competition. First, the leadership of the Ijaw Youth Movement has demanded that at least 25% of the oil revenue be allocated to local governments. Others among the Ijaw have suggested that 100% of the revenue ought to stay in hands of the local governments. Currently, the national government have suggested that local governments receive a 13% cut, which is substantially more than they have had in the past.

In a sobering conversation I had with a supporter of the Ijaw Youth Movement, he expressed hope that the government would meet recent demands of the region to allow the oil profits to remain in that area. The group this youth supported was already in the process of mobilizing action in the event the government did not respond to their wishes. The military wing of a Yoruba group had been offering them military training and stolen weapons. Even more shocking, he was on his way to meet with a representative of Sierra Leone’s rebels to negotiate joint exercises. Although at the time, I was inclined to doubt him, I quickly grew more concerned. September 1999’s news reported that several dozen oil workers were taken hostage in his area – another tactic he warned me about (“If you’re still here and things get worse, you’ll probably be kidnapped because you’re white, but don’t worry. We are educated people and we will take good care of you if you cooperate.”)

While sitting with five professors in the oil-rich region of Port Harcourt, they adamantly explained to me that the oil profits must stay in the state where the oil is. For too long, they claimed, the north had grown fat on their oil. How much should they keep? Some argued all of it, others were more modest and only wanted most of the profits. “What would happen to the economy of the north?” I asked. If the northern states can’t be economically self sufficient, they should cease to exist—the dozen northern states should merge into one that Kano’s commerce could support.
Regarding the second oil-induced schism, the Ijaw have been involved in several protracted conflicts with neighboring groups, most notably with the Itsekiri of the Warri area which in May 1999 cost both sides about 250 lives. In August 1999, Ijaw clashes with the Ilaje cost another 50 lives. Ongoing violence with the Yoruba has taken a more protracted though less dramatic toll on life as well. Finally, regarding the third schism, the Ijaw have been in constant conflict with the actual owners and operators of the oil companies, engaging in kidnappings, sabotage, and military-style assaults on their security forces. Because the oil companies sometimes employ members of non-local ethnic groups, these conflicts may also take on communal colorings.

**Third – Ruled by What? Or Western Law of the Sharia?**

Today the problems brought about by economic and political competition have been eclipsed by those concerning religious law. Democratic governance demands some type of rule of law, yet which specific type of law is adopted is by no means predetermined, nor is it an empirical issue devoid of political, cultural, and identity conflicts.

Currently, Nigeria faces a number of very deadly disputes regarding whether states may adopt the Sharia (Islamic legal system) as the official code of law to govern its people. When supported by a majority of the population, many claim, such adoption is democratic, and when challenged to separate church and state, they respond that western law is no less religiously based, but is built upon centuries of Christian heritage and belief. It seems, that these conflicts are yet one more inevitable consequence of democratic transition in a deeply divided religious society.

The Sharia was first adopted in October 1999 in Zamfara state. The seeds of unrest were already present, but nonviolent in their manifestation. In the ceremony the state’s governor claimed that the Moslem faith could not be complete without the Sharia. Many outside the ceremony supported the Sharia arguing that Muslims in Nigeria had for years “endured subjugation and denial of their rights to live as [M]uslims.” Echoing those sentiments, the Secretary-General of the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs argued that “No true Moslem can oppose or avoid Sharia” (Emerole et al, 1999).

Commenting on Zamfara’s new law at the time of its adoption, Nigeria’s Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, was clearly unaware of what this peaceful ceremony had set in motion. “Events are still unfolding as regards the issue. As at now, the Federal Government is just watching.” (Faturoti et al, 1999). Unfortunately, as one might expect in this deeply divided society, events are unfolding tragically.

In southern areas where large Muslim minority populations live, a religious crisis soon emerged within this tense atmosphere. In July 1999 in Ogun state a Hausa woman was killed for violating a “no-movement” requirement in observance of the Yoruba cultural festival. Hausas reacted violently and soon more than 40 people had died on either side of this religious divide (Adedeji 1999). Violence then spread to the far reaches of the north where in Kano, Muslims retaliated against Christian enclaves. Within a week 70 more were dead and thousands more were displaced.

Nowhere has conflict over the Sharia been so violently expressed as in Kaduna, the north’s second largest city, where the Sharia was imposed with dire consequences. Fighting between the Christians and Muslims broke out in late February 2000 and within four days had cost an estimated 1,000 lives. Corpses littered the streets. On fleeing, one Christian commented succinctly “Nigeria is divided. I am going home to the eastern region” (Nwosu, 2000b). Framed even more in the competitive zero-sum attitude, another fleeing resident claimed that “the Moslems don’t want peace with us, they want to make us follow their religion, they have to know we will never accept Sharia.
Never.” Yet another claimed that “the Moslems should realise that Nigeria is a Christian country. The majority of us in Nigeria are Christians and we will resist any attempt to force us into Islam.” (Nwosu, 2000a).

This situation has the potential to easily overspill its ethnic and religious bounds as well. Soon after the religious conflict began in Kaduna, an Igbo organization, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), claimed that because Christian Igbo were targeted in the Kaduna riots, it would soon “mobilise Igbos in retaliate against Hausas in the South.” They furthermore added that “Igbos resident in Kaduna, in particular, and in the North in general, should use every amount of force available to defend themselves, with any ammunition in their possession . . .” (Ukeh 2000).

**CONCLUSION**

Communal conflict occurs under many circumstances and in many conditions. Nigeria also exhibits many violent communal conflicts that appear in no way related to democratization. Nevertheless, given the sharp rise in communal conflicts accompanying democratization, and given the degree to which many of the conflicts are directly linked to democratic competition over representation, economic assets, and code of law, it appears clear that democratization in Nigeria is strongly associated with its rising levels of communal violence.

More importantly, the relationship between democracy and communal relations in Nigeria illustrates the interconnectedness of the international and the national social-political spheres and of national and subnational identities. International communications had domestic consequences. All of this implies that identity research in international relations and comparative politics should not be done in isolation of one another. Finally, it cautions domestic and international policy makers to carefully consider the social effects of their policies across the domestic-international divide.
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Should the reader have the patience, it is useful to consider more traditional literature on my primary ‘dependent’ variable, ethnic relations. Addressing recent trends in this literature and its pivotal debate regarding the rational versus affective nature of ethnicity will also expose the limits of this literature, the barriers of essentializing, and the need to move on. Thereafter, I will more precisely address literature on democratization and ethnicity applied to African cases.

Ethnic Identity

A broad examination of the literature on ethnicity and identity quickly reveals its Kuhnian character. Since the early 1950s, not only have scholars exerted a constant tension between the more versus the less rational facets of ethnicity, but over time the whole field has periodically swayed back and forth from rational to the ‘non-rational’ conceptualizations of ethnicity. Most recently, as ethnicity has been adopted into studies of international relations, it has suffered some rather serious setbacks that need to be redressed. Despite some productive advances in exposing the structural environment of ethnic relations, because many IR scholars currently describe ethnicity in predominantly (sometimes exclusively) rational terms, they fail to comprehend and incorporate theoretically the profound emotional power that lies at the heart of ethnic identity.

As studies of ethnicity crossed from their traditional anthropological and sociological domains to that of political science, political science scholars felt it necessary to apply their newly recognized rigors of science, retaining some sense of identity but focusing on the institutional environment as well. Arend Lijphart began in 1967 to explore institutional remedies to ethnic divisions by manipulating the rational elements of ethnic groups’ actions through consociational arrangements. This institutional focus has since become one of the most productive and voluminous research programmes in political science. With Consociational Democracy, Lijphart began the concerted effort of finding ways to contain ethnic cleavages into democratic institutions. Critiquing the winner-take-all models of majoritarian democratic rule, Lijphart wrote about alternative institutional arrangements that would involve more proportional representation and therefore focus ethnic interests onto an institutionally constructed rationally oriented arena of competition.

Somewhat in reaction to the perceived to this rationalization and institutionalization of ethnicity, other scholars began to focus more on the identity dimensions that Lijphart largely assumes. Crawford Young (1976), Donald Horowitz (1985), and Walker Connor (1966-1994) carried the discipline through the 70s and 80s with rich discussions of how the less rational facets of ethnic identity and culture relate to economic and political institutions. At times they reacted quite strongly to the

9 Although it is recently criticized as a nonfalsifiable programme by Lakatosian standards.

10 Still contributing to the discussion, Lijphart has gotten a lot of criticism for this point lately. For example, a recent article on the democratic transition in the Republic of South Africa criticized Consociational institutions as not allowing the flexibility for ethnic identities and cultures to evolve and adapt, instead grounding them in a permanent institutional framework.
rationalization of ethnicity. Walker Connor, perhaps the most vocal of this force wrote about the R(N)rational question and suggested that what was being described as rational decisions (i.e. ethnic groups mobilizing to seek economic and political resources) is really just an expression of deeper cultural identities that must not be discounted. It is fundamentally irrational, he argued in a chapter explicitly targeted against economic reasoning, to die for economic gain. Horowitz echoed many of these sentiments by claiming simply that rational calculations cannot account for the emotional power underlying many ethnic conflicts. In even stronger terms, Horowitz claims that “The sheer passion expended in pursuing ethnic conflict calls out for an explanation that does justice to the realm of the feelings. A bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory” (1985, 140). Finally, David Laitin (1985) presents a compelling argument for the centrality of ethnic identity (framed as culture) by studying religious relations in southwestern Nigeria.

At this point in the world’s and field’s history two things happened. First, driving it all, the Cold War ended leaving many IR scholars scratching their heads and wondering how to proceed. Second, and in part as a consequence of the Cold War’s end, the world seem to explode with ethno-political violence. Always event-driven, political scientists soon produced a plethora of good and bad scholarship on ethnic relations.

One approach justified its pursuit through the construction of the primordialist straw man and a newly constructed debate between the primordialists and the rest. Representative of this trend is John Bowen’s “The Myth of Ethnic Conflict” (1996 *Journal of Democracy*) in which he constructs one side of the debate citing the conceptually anemic works of Robert Kaplan’s “Balkan Ghosts” (1993) and Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” (1993). Bowen then proceeds to dismiss these poorest forms of the identity-centered arguments to suggest instead that the rational, calculating actions of national leaders are instead responsible for ethnic war.

Others more central to the IR cannons have been equally dismissive of the identity-level arguments, although somewhat more productive. Barry Posen (*International Security*, 1993) is typical of this new wave of scholarship. He draws on Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Van Evera to present a theory of the security dilemma applied to ethnic antagonisms which, he implies, operate by the same rational-action assumptions that realists had long applied to states-as-actors. Michael Brown canonized this wave in three volumes (1993, 1996, and 1997) in a manner also suggestive of this trend. The focus throughout these books is on the leaders, the international environment, and the political and economic calculation/conditions of the populations. Barry Posen introduces the anarchic system and perceptions of offensive versus defensive arms (including the nuclear question). Gagnon forcefully introduces the role of rational, opportunistic leaders. Jack Snyder discusses the role of the weak state institutions.

Most telling, perhaps, is that Brown’s 1996 volume (*Internal and International Conflict*) which although it doesn’t focus specifically on ethnic conflict, documents a broad list of possible variables to consider, which are then transported in whole to the 1997 volume on ethnic conflict with

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11 Even before, Horowitz was lamenting the poverty of the field and claiming that the discipline could now longer ignore ethnic violence. It had “fought, burned, and bled” its way onto the scholarly scene. Ted Gurr documents that in 1995 there were 58 militarized conflicts, only one of which was interstate, and 49 were ethno-political (Gurr 1996).
barely a change, suggesting that the forces driving ethnic conflict are identical to those driving other non-ethnic domestic conflicts. Identity, introduced as the last perceptual variable on the list, is typically considered just to be discounted. It seems that the rational-choice explanations were unable or unwilling to integrate cultural/identity elements.

One reason for political science’s new neglect of the social and affective aspects of ethnicity, stems from its traditional reliance on a rational construction of state actors. Reflecting the powers it seeks to describe, international relations scholars often resist integrating an understanding of ethnic phenomena, just as the states they analyze resist their ethnic minorities’ exertions of power. Even as the topic of ethnicity becomes more familiar in IR scholarship, the recognition of ethnicity’s impact has not yet been reflected in the depth of international relations theory.

Walker Connor, a pioneer in this field, challenged this state-centric perspective in his published collection, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (1994), which documents his scholarship on ethnic nations (or ethnonations as he calls them). Connor constructs a paradigm of true "international" relations by placing ethnonations center stage as the world’s primary actors in the place of political states. This bold paradigm shift reveals many important implications, the greatest of which are the nonquantifiable, intangible, "nonrational" identity issues that state-centricists had avoided (75).

The shift from state to ethnic group is innovative and useful when dealing with ethnically centered phenomena. However, a paradigm based on ethnic groups alone would suffer many of the same ontological and epistemological shortcomings of the traditional state-centric paradigm in addition to a multitude of empirical and conceptual difficulties. In the words of Donald Horowitz,

Although a number of important similarities can be identified between international relations and interethnic relations, attempts to base a theory of ethnic conflict on theories of international relations seems likely to end by resting one unknown upon another (1985, 95).

Clearly a theory of the state, the ethnic group, and their relationship is necessary. Scholars have attempted to define this relationship in several ways.

The most accepted trend in the literature on ethnic conflict is to consider both the state and ethnic group but to maintain a distinction and treat the ethnic unit theoretically as a subset of the state. This theoretical hierarchy manifests itself in at least three different ways. First, ethnic conflict itself may be considered as simply one form of many intra-state conflicts with no distinct nature other than the conflict is mobilized along ethnic lines.

Second, ethnic groups are viewed as entities to be managed by the referee state. Along such logic, Lake and Rothchild (1996) speak of the state as the potential arbitrator among the ethnic entities within it. The state may be able to mitigate the impact of the security dilemma by facilitating information transfer and credible commitment; “the state sets the terms of competition between groups. . .” Such explanations credits the state with substantial power, relegates ethnic relations to a predominantly domestic concern, and consequently of academic concern to comparative politics more than international relations. Fortunately, Lake and Rothchild’s explanation does not end there. The referee

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12 Furthermore, the introductory chapters of each volume are almost identical.
state is not valued so much for its potential impartiality, but for its power. The state cannot transcend the conflict, but instead “becomes an object of group struggle” (45).

In these terms the sufficiently strong state might transcend the ethnic group as a referee, but it rarely transcends its status as the object of conflict. This is especially true where the state is dominated by one ethnic majority and thus reflects its interests. In such settings where the state boundary no longer represents that theoretically crucial dividing line between domestic order and international anarchy, inter-ethnic relations, even those internal to a ‘sovereign state’ take on characteristics much more within the realm of international relations theory. (Apply to Nigeria’s Biafran wars (1969-70)).

A third theoretical hierarchy considers the state as a manipulator of the political instrument of ethnicity. A great deal of literature from the instrumentalist camp deals with this manipulation. Colonial powers are claimed to have divided and ruled along ethnic lines, even ‘creating’ ethnicity in some instances. Elites from both inside and outside of the state bend ethnic identities and common myth to suit their personal ambitions, thus framing ethnic identity as an essentially dependent variable.

Other authors argue to the contrary claiming ethnicity is an independent variable in the conflict equation. Oystein Gaasholt (1989) and William Douglass (1988), for example, “argue that the strength and persistence of communal movements cannot be understood without recognizing the importance of people’s nonrational ‘affect’ or ‘passions’ for threatened cultural forms and lifeways” (Gurr 1993, 368).

Finally, a handful of authors acknowledge both sides of this debate and expose a more complicated web of dynamics. “There are advantages and disadvantages to writing about ethnic identity, and they stem from the same characteristic: ethnic identity is a powerful phenomenon. It is powerful both at the affective level, where it touches us in ways mysterious and frequently unconscious, and at the level of strategy, where we consciously manipulate it” (Royce 1982, 1).

Ted Gurr addresses this approach to the state-ethnic relationship. He addresses the debate between the state-centric, ethnic-centric views with the following:

> It should be clear that we disagree with observers who . . . regard the states that govern them [ethnic groups] as inherently artificial entities. . . . We also disagree with observers who take this argument to the other extreme and regard communal groups as merely one kind of transitory association created to pursue members’ material and political interests (Gurr 1993, 4).

There are other signs of scholars attempting to transcend these debates. Even in the Brown volumes, a minority or authors like Renee de Nevers and Stuart Kaufman consider a more sophisticated integration. Kaufman attempts with some success to integrate a sense of ancient hatreds, the security dilemma, and the role of leaders. Leaders can mold identity and harness ethnicity’s mobilizing potential but not in a vacuum. De Nevers represents a rich tradition of institutional/cultural crossover that considers how the process of instituting democracy can antagonize ethnic relations. Outside of Brown’s works a number of scholars pick up on each of these trends.

Several authors approach the debates with what appears to be more a laundry list of possible variables and hypotheses than a cohesive integration (Gurr’s hundred variables 1993, 1996; Van Evera’s long list of “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War”; and Carment’s 40 variable review). Others take a more integrative and theoretically sophisticated approach. Carment and Jones consider outright the relationship between the “Rational Choice” and the “Affective” (emotional, identity) issues. Unfortunately, their attempt, the most direct and focused yet, seems to fall flat as identity is more
The single-party system is still the dominant and often preferred system in African politics as evidenced by the longevity of Daniel arap Moi’s, Biya’s, and Jerry Rawling’s ruling parties.

Each of these attempts an integration begins promising but at most produces incremental progress in accommodating identity into IR’s now dominant structural and rational choice frameworks regarding ethnic relations. A revival of and integration with more classical works on ethnicity could prove to be very beneficial. With a similar opinion Timothy Sisk, writing under the auspices of the U.S. Institute of Peace (1996), laments that so much of this new research has sprung out a theoretical vacuum or makes a suboptimal theoretical transplant, because so little of it fails to consider the rich history of the discourse (he especially mentions Horowitz and Lijphart).

Finally, sociologists and anthropologists consider ethnicity structured in terms of similar debates. In their conclusion, Gonzales and McCommon (1989) resolve that ethnicity is a strong dependent variable to be manipulated in conflict situations, which supports their introductory claim that “the essence of ethnicity is its tactical importance within a context of conflict” (26). They conclude that, “First, the studies offered here remind us that ethnicity is more than a matter of identification and affiliation with a cultural system or ‘style’ (as in Royce 1982, 18); it is also a matter of strategy, of the active use of that system or style by its adherents” (Gonzalez and McCommon 1989, 138).

Durham (1989) readdresses the causal debate by claiming that anthropologists sometimes view ethnicity as either a dependent or an independent variable. Some ethnic cleavages have long historical roots that maintain latent conflict and intermittently produce violence, but in other cases, ethnicity may be invented or reawakened as a reaction to outside forces. Anthropologists have frequently dealt with this phenomenon, calling it ‘nativism,’ ‘revivalism,’ of ‘revitalization.’ In the end, however, Durham sides with the mobilizationists discussing ethnicity in terms of instrumentalism – ethnic symbols being manipulated for specific ends.

The American Ethnological Society, on the other hand, in their 1982 symposium considered 13 reports regarding the prospects for plural societies. A main thread running through all the papers was that each of the case studies considered “do not support the theories that ethnic distinctions are reducible to other factors or that they are obsolete and bound to disappear. On the contrary, ethnicity is seen as a factor that is often distorted or improperly understood but that continues nevertheless to be a resilient, enduring and independent variable in human affairs” (Maybury-Lewis 1984, 6).

Ethnic Relations and Democratization in Africa

Africa’s historical experience with democracy is marked with both success and failure. The euphoria of the independence movement soon gave way to the grim reality of the political hardships the new African ‘nations’ faced. Where democracy took hold it often immediately degenerated into single-party systems as in Nyerere’s Tanzania and in Nkrumah’s Ghana. More often than not, independence from the colonial powers gave way to bondage under the founding father or his party. As time advanced, however, a much more mixed picture of African democracy emerged. While Guelke (1992) and Joseph (1991) wrote of the “Rebirth of Freedom,” others painted pictures of a

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13 The single-party system is still the dominant and often preferred system in African politics as evidenced by the longevity of Daniel arap Moi’s, Biya’s, and Jerry Rawling’s ruling parties.
At the broadest level, Rothchild (1986) writes about nine methods for dealing with ethnic cleavages ranging from one extreme, subjugation, to the other, power-sharing. Two authors acknowledging these extremes, paint the most complete and accurate picture of Africa’s condition. Crawford Young in “Africa: Interim Balance” (1996) writes about both successes and failures. Although he could name only a few clear successes (i.e. Namibia, perhaps a now dated example), there were also only a handful of utter failures (Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, etc.). Forty-two of Africa’s fifty-two countries, he claimed, have adopted elements of a democratic governance even if incomplete. Chege (1995) in “Between Africa’s Extremes” contrasts the extremes of 1994: the unbelievable dream of successful elections and peaceful transition in the Republic of South Africa versus the horrors of the Rwandan massacres. In the words of a Nigerian poet greeting President Clinton in 1998 “South Africa is our dream, Rwanda was is our nightmare.” Both of these extreme cases revolved around ethnic peace or ethnic war. But what can account for these differences? Why was democracy able to succeed on one hand, yet fail so miserably on the other? A careful look at the effects of ethnicity may provide answers to these questions.

Many authors have now considered ethnicity’s effect on prospects of democracy. Huntington in “The Third Wave: 20 Years After” explains that ethnically splintered societies risk awakening or escalating ethnic violence once the political trophy of the state is thrown open to competition. Like Kaplan in “Was Democracy Just a Moment,” Huntington sees that political parties could easily form along ethnic lines and therefore magnify the already competitive relationships. Especially in a winner-take-all system, ethnic relations could sour upon democratizing. Stepan and Linz (Democratization and Consolidation) likewise question the prudence of introducing a democratic government before the “stateness” of the country can be established—a nation must be built before a state can handle democracy. A rich literature has dealt more exclusively with this ethnic question.14

At the heart of it all is Arend Lijphart whose work on consociational democracy now spans several decades. Described by Lustick (1996), consociationalism represents one of the most productive Lakatosian research programmes in the field. It is founded on the premise that specially adapted political institutions are necessary for democracy to survive in ethnically divided societies. Based on his Dutch experience, Lijphart distilled four features of a consociational democracy. These are 1) electoral system of proportional representation producing a grand ethnic coalition, 2) a federal division of powers, 3) a minority veto, and 4) a system of power sharing. In an attempt to apply this remedy to South Africa’s woes, Lijphart in Power-Sharing in South Africa (1985) prescribes such a system, which he declares in a later publication (1994) as exactly what South Africa adopted. As promising as this approach sounds, it is not without its critics.

Connors (1996) addresses Lijphart’s approach to South Africa in particular. Consociationalism, he claims, runs the risk of permanently marking ethnic divisions in the political arena. It denies the fluid nature of ethnicity that might otherwise allow peaceful adaptation, and freezes ethnic relations in ways that could later lead to conflict. Guelke (1992) likewise criticizes Lijphart’s prescriptions suggesting that he does not understand the hostility South African’s have toward ethnic

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14 At the broadest level, Rothchild (1986) writes about nine methods for dealing with ethnic cleavages ranging from one extreme, subjugation, to the other, power-sharing.
labels that consociational remedies might require. Finally, Lustick (1996) criticizes Lijphart’s whole programme. It has, Lustick argues abandoned the early Lakatosian rigor and instead relies principally on its aesthetic appeal. It simply does not fit well with reality.

The greatest among these critics is Donald Horowitz. Having already written extensively about ethnicity in democratic systems (1985), Horowitz likewise took on the South African issue in A Democratic South Africa? (1991). In a more generalizeable forum, Horowitz addresses the issue more broadly in the “Democracy in Divided Societies” (1993). There he explains that the remedy of consociationalism begs the question—it requires consensus and an accommodation to enable the consociational institutions that are allegedly needed to foster that very cooperation. Actual events in Nigeria support many of these concerns.

A grand coalition wherein many ethnic groups are forced to cooperate to run the country sounds like a practical and ideal fruit of consociationalism, but events in Zambia may prove otherwise. The broad coalition that led the independence movement degenerated over time along ethnic lines. Smaller partners in the coalition are easily abandoned once power is consolidated (Zambia’s experience with the MMD providing a perfect example). 15

The ideal solution to this, says Lijphart, is to find coalitions that roughly split the country in half. This might work especially well in Nigeria where a natural geographic and religious fault line divides northern and southern Nigeria almost in half. There are, however, two problems with this ‘ideal’. The first is noted by Diamond and Platter in Democracy and Ethnicity. Unlike ruling coalitions in societies not fragmented by ethnicity, ethnic parties are very resistant to changing membership. Cleavages are not cross-cutting, and the dominant cleavage, ethnicity, is resistant to negotiation or bargaining. Ethnic identity cannot be divided, bartered, or traded off like political power or economic wealth or opportunity. Second, resulting from the first problem, a near 50-50 split may not lead to a regular exchange of power (as with the democrats and republicans in the U.S.) but instead enable the permanent marginalization of the near minority. This, claims Horowitz, is what happened to Nigeria leading to the Biafran wars and some of the worst bloodshed, starvation, and suffering in modern Africa. 16 A more recent cost to Nigeria, as suggested by Bach (1992) who depicts the increasing attempts to devolve power is creating a federalist system run amok. Nigeria, despite all good intentions, had so fragmented that it could no longer efficiently run its government.

Horowitz’s remedy for deeply divided societies differs from Lijphart’s in its accent on the divisive nature of ethnicity and a different application federalism. Prudently applied federal structures can ease the ethnic cleavages’ impact in several ways. To the extent that provincial districts are not cut along ethnic lines, they establish another, cross-cutting cleavage of power. Ethnic groups lumped

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15 Something of a “grand ethnic coalition” brought Nigeria’s new president, Obasanjo, to power. The Hausa of the north allied with the Ibo and the Plateau groups, but there is little now to keep the much more numerous Hausa from abandoning the minority groups.

16 Run-off elections also prescribed to create a near majority situation also runs this risk. In Benin, a run-off election prevented a small minority taking power on a plurality vote, but the run-off too was divided along ethnic lines. The winning president won 90% of the North’s vote, but lost 94% of the south’s.
together in one region will have new incentives to cooperate as they compete against other regions for influence at the national level. On the other hand, ethnic groups that are divided among regions may be institutionally compelled to competition politically among themselves where regional interests trump unified ethnic interests. This appears on the surface to resemble Lijphart’s reliance on institutional remedies, but it reaches deeper into the minds of those affected. By acknowledging the power of identities, Horowitz seeks not to institutionalize them but to acknowledge their ranked and nested nature and create an environment in which political, provincial identities temper ethnic identities.17

Given this background, Nigeria makes for a very fascinating case. It has a long post-colonial history (independent in 1960) during which time it has attempted three democratic transitions each democratic government surviving only a few days to a few years. It also has a fascinating mix of ethnic groups and a rich history of their relations. Forced into one country by British policy (Nigerians refer to it as “the mistake of 1914”) the three major groups: the very large northern Muslim Hausa, the smaller southwestern Christian Yoruba, and the still smaller southeastern Christian Ibo, have had at best an uneasy relationship and at worst fought the nightmarish Biafran civil war. Numerous institutional arrangements (some mentioned above) were attempted, but all apparently failed. The current effort, codified in a lengthy constitution does very little to address ethnic and regional differences as either Lijphart or Horowitz would prescribe. The only constitutional remedies are first, to prohibit discrimination, second, to require the government to promote intermarriage (however that might be done politically!), and third a scanty attempt to keep political parties more national than ethnic in character.

The constitution allows for multiple parties, but with a first-past-the-post presidential rules, the parties quickly organized into two blocks. The militarily appointed election commission required that to qualify as an official party, the party must have received at least 10 percent of the local election votes in at least 2/3 of the states, but the constitution only requires that the party have one member in each of 2/3 of the states. Nothing, it seems, is being done to cut through the ethnic and regional cleavages that already characterize the state boundaries and party membership. Given the continental context, it seems that Nigeria has joined the global trend toward democratization, but with an overreliance on institutional tools to manage or constrain communal relations, it is hard to be optimistic that it will join with Africa's few success stories.

17 How these identities rank and their propensity to counter one another is the main focus of my questionnaire.
APPENDIX B – SUMMARY OF SURVEY METHODOLOGY

I visited six of Nigeria’s major cities\(^\text{18}\) and eight universities\(^\text{19}\) performing the following tasks: first, interviewing political science faculty, the leaders of non-govermental organizations, university students, and others of more average status and lifestyle; and second, conducting a survey of university students.

Case Selection

I visited eight universities in six cities. Selection criteria of the cities includes the following features: first, ensuring adequate representation of the three major ethnic groups of Nigerian politics (the Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo) as well as considering several minor ethnic groups; second, the presence of a substantial university (most enrolled about 13-14,000 students).

Regarding the selection of ethnic groups, I focus first on the three most populous ethnic groups who have historically dominated Nigeria’s political scene (often not peacefully): the Hausa, the Ibo, and the Yoruba. Devastated by the Biafran wars, the Ibo of eastern Nigeria have since been all but excluded from national politics, but were quite central historically having been favored and groomed for leadership by the British. The Hausa are the militarily powerful Muslim bloc of northern Nigeria. By far the largest of all groups, the Hausa have ruled Nigeria longer than any other, often through its military strength. The Yoruba of southwest Nigeria occupied the area

\[\text{Figure 6. Map of Nigeria’s major Linguistic groups. (CIA, 1979)}\]

\(^{18}\) The cities in which I spent the most time conducting interviews and surveys include the following: Benin City, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Jos, Kano, and Ibadan.

\(^{19}\) The universities included the University of Benin, University of Port Harcourt, Abia State University, Port Harcourt Branch, Enugu State University, University of Nigeria (in Enugu), University of Jos, Bayero University--Kano, and the University of Ibadan.
of the former capital and the most established financial center of the country. Obasanjo, the recently elected president of Nigeria is Yoruba, but as a former general, has thick ties to his Hausa supporters.

The Port Harcourt Delta is the nation’s source of oil, which provides most of the national revenue. It is inhabited by numerous small but vocal groups (like the Ogoni, known for their battle with Shell Oil and their martyr, Ken Saro-Wiwa) who have been an active and influential force in Nigerian politics recently. The people of Benin were traditionally a great kingdom of pre-colonial Nigeria and their current political status will be worth exploring. The plateau peoples of Jos, consider themselves as occupying an important “Middle Belt” position between the major groups of the Muslim north and those of the Christian south.

Surveys

I visited the campuses of eight of Nigeria’s major universities, interviewing political science faculty there and administering simple surveys to their classes. The core of the survey replicates in spirit that conducted by William S. Miles and David A Rachefort (1991) conducted in Nigeria over a decade ago and published in APSR. Therein I measure the relative strength of the six identities:

• Religion
• Continental Identity (African)
• International Regional Identity (West African)
• Ethnic Group
• Nationality (Nigeria)
• and State or Province.

In a simple list, I ask students to fill in the particular values of each category (i.e. what religion are they) and then rank those identities according to the degree that each defines who they are.

Regarding how to code ethnic identity, the survey is my measure and definition. Rather than impose a definition of identity and code a series of question responses, I allow the respondent to identify him or herself. Then to judge the centrality of different identities, rather than attempt to code a value to each, I allow the respondent to order them as they perceive them. This predominantly subjective bias, I feel, is appropriate for the subjective effect of identity.