Citizens or Spectators? Civic Engagement and Informality of Citizenship in Ghana

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Abstract

In his inauguration speech on 7th January 2017, President Nana Akufo-Addo challenged Ghanaians to be 'citizens not spectators.' This call resonates with conceptions of citizenship that prioritise the state as the most salient arena of engagement. But social and political-economy factors shape how and where social belonging and civic participation get enacted. This paper offers some reflections on patterns of social belonging and civic engagement using data from the nationally representative Afrobarometer survey, which I supplement with qualitative materials from newspaper sources and in-depth interviews. The findings indicate that Ghanaians have a strong sense of social belonging and national attachment, but also shy away from formal engagement with the state. This phenomenon of *attached-detachment* is manifested in enthusiastic participation in highly circumscribed aspects of national political life, like voting, while recoiling from more institutionally structured aspects of civic life. Proximity – physically or socially defined – is important for this enactment of citizenship. There is high engagement with state officials that are nearby, but rarely with those at arm's-length. The paper elaborates on the underlying informality of this approach to citizenship.

Keywords: citizenship, attached-detachment, participation, ethnicity, Ghana

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Résumé

Dans son discours d'investiture du 7 janvier 2017, le Président Nana Akufo-Addo pria les Ghanéens d'être ≪ des citoyens et non des spectateurs ≫. Cet appel résonne avec les conceptions de la citoyenneté qui donnent la priorité à l'État comme l'arène d'engagement la plus importante. Or, les facteurs sociaux et économico-politiques déterminent comment et où l'appartenance sociale et la participation civique se concrétisent. Cet article propose quelques réflexions sur les modèles d'appartenance sociale et d'engagement civique en utilisant les données de l'enquête Afrobaromètre représentative sur le plan national, que je complète avec des ressources tirées de quelques journaux et des entretiens. Les résultats indiquent que les Ghanéens possèdent un fort sentiment d'appartenance sociale et d'attachement national, sauf qu'ils hésitent également à s'engager formellement avec l'État. Ce phénomène de *détachement attaché* se manifeste par une participation enthousiaste à des aspects très circonscrits de la vie politique nationale, tels que le scrutin, tout en s'éloignant des aspects plus structurés institutionnellement de la vie civique. La proximité − définie physiquement ou socialement − est importante pour cette promulgation de la citoyenneté. Il y a un engagement élevé avec les représentants de l'État qui sont à proximité, mais rarement avec ceux qui ne sont pas proches. L'article développe le caractère informel sous-jacent de cette approche de la citoyenneté.

Keywords : Citoyenneté, détachement attaché, participation, ethnicité, Ghana

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Introduction

President Nana Akufo-Addo started his presidency with a strong emphasis on citizenship. In his inaugural speech, he challenged Ghanaians to get actively involved in the task of nation-building, declaring that the time had come for us to be 'citizens not spectators'.[1] It is telling that, for him, the negation of citizenship was not subjecthood—as commonly expressed in this literature (see, for instance, Mamdani, 1996)—but spectatorship. Contrasting *citizenship* with *spectatorship* assumes that participation is the defining element of citizenship. While the citizen-versus-subject dichotomy presupposes an externally-driven denial of citizenship, the contrasting duality of citizen-versus-spectator holds individuals responsible for their own inclusion or exclusion from citizenship. The citizen-versus-spectator duality, therefore, posits an 'entrepreneurial' view built on the idea that opportunities for individual enactment of citizenship abounds, and that subjugation can only result from indifference or a lack of individual initiative in national life. Taken to its extreme, the view holds citizens responsible for the country's developmental challenges. Indeed, some scholars describe Ghanaians as 'uncritical' citizens who are quick to claim entitlements but reluctant to 'pay the price' of nation-building (Tetteh, 2019). Re-echoing these sentiments, the Charter of the president's flagship, Ghana Beyond Aid, agenda insists that even 'the most brilliant plan or strategy' would fail unless Ghanaians embrace active and responsible citizenship (Ghana Beyond Aid Committee, 2019: v).

However, Akufo-Addo is not alone in making this call.[2] Political leaders everywhere like to galvanise their people towards one kind of participation or another. Perhaps the most famous of such calls came from John F. Kennedy, who, also at his inauguration, famously charged Americans to 'ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country'.[3] Discourses of active citizenship have been on the rise over the past few decades (Marinetto, 2003), coinciding with the simultaneous democratisation of erstwhile autocratic states and the rise of neoliberalism as a dominant economic ideology (Boafo-Arthur, 1999). However, the underlying sentiment not new. Almost all administrations in Ghana's history have attempted in various ways to foster enthusiastic popular participation in selected areas of national life or in pursuit of particular goals. Ghana's first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah attempted this through mechanisms like the Young Pioneers Movement (Chazan, 1976), General Kutu Acheampong also tried to achieve this with his ultimately-doomed attempt at a Union Government (Chazan, 1982; Owusu, 1979), and Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings began his decades-long rule with populist rhetoric like 'people's power' and structures like People's Defence Committees (Bing, 1984; Owusu, 1996). For his part, Akufo-Addo's call involved a challenge for Ghanaians to get involved in the efforts at building communities and developing the nation.

It is easy to see why politicians are eager to push a definition of citizenship in terms of participation in national development. Popular participation lends legitimacy to governments, and safeguards the power of political leaders (Ninsin, 2006). Ghana's political culture is replete with rousing calls for civic engagement, with accompanying patriotic songs aimed at instilling the virtues of public spiritedness. One such song, 'Arise Ghana Youth for Your Country,' exhorts that in order to 'make the nation great and strong' Ghanaians ought to exhibit 'devotion' to the country. In the refrain, this exhortation is taken up again, reiterating the point that:

> We are all involved
> We are all involved
> We are all involved
> In building our father's land[4]
> (lyrics quoted in Djabaku, 2013, pp. 52–53).

Although the notion of political or civic participation accords analytical priority to the state as the integrative core of national life, institutional and infrastructural weaknesses limit the state's presence in everyday life for a majority of people, or its ability to promote structural transformation and improve livelihoods (Azarya and Chazan 1987; Whitfield, 2011). The possibility of building cohesive states and fostering political identities conducive to national integration against the backdrop of state weakness, and sometimes even predation, has preoccupied scholarly attention for generations (Asante, 2020a, 2020c; Owusu, 1996, 2017; Young, 2007). On the one hand, scholars warn that the disillusionment likely to arise from political mismanagement and economic failure could widen the rift between citizens and the state, and undermine the nation-building project (Azarya and Chazan, 1987; Owusu, 2017; Young, 2007). On the other hand, other scholars have conceptualised an

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[1] http://www.myjoyonline.com/politics/2017/january-7th/be-good-citizens-not-spectators-akufo-addo-urges-ghanaians.php

[2] In fact, hours after making this address, it was reported that the portion of the address dealing with citizenship had been lifted verbatim from the inaugural address of George W. Bush: https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/President-Akufo-Addo-plagiarizes-George-Bush-s-2001-Inaugural-Speech-499240

[3] http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20thcentury/kennedy.asp

[4] Some versions of the song use the term 'mother land'.

alternative basis for civic conceptions and engagements rooted in sociability—what Francis Nyamnjoh call 'conviviality'—one which lies outside formal state structures, and is imbued with possibilities, whether within or outside the framework of the state, since its potential remains unbounded by it (Mustapha, 1998; Nyamnjoh, 2017). In this paper, I argue that current patterns of Ghanaian citizenship lie between these two analytical extremes, where citizens' hold on the state is thin but resilient. I use the concept of *attached-detachment* to discuss the fundamental ambivalence of passionate attachment to the notional aspects of Ghanaian statehood while recoiling from engagement with the formal-institutional structures of the state

In this paper, I engage with this question by examining patterns of Ghanaian identifications and civic engagement. The analysis is based on the sixth round of the Afrobarometer survey, which I supplement with qualitative materials from newspaper reports and in-depth interviews. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section presents the literature review, where I discuss the political economy context for civic participation. This is followed by a brief data and methods section, after which I present the findings on civic conceptions and participation in Ghana. I conclude with reflections on the informality of Ghanaian citizenship and the concept of attached-detachment.

The political economy of civic participation

Prevailing discourses of civic participation are premised on the notion of the state as the inevitable locus for the organisation of socio-economic affairs. Considered as the superior vehicle for supplying material and social needs, these approaches take it as natural that 'various sectors of society [will] strive to associate with its institutions and gain access to its resources' (Azarya and Chazan, 1987: 106). The state is, therefore, implicitly or explicitly taken as a central analytical concept as well as the material context for the enactment of citizenship. Indeed, citizenship, defined as a set of rights and obligations arising from membership of a political community, is anchored on the modern national state which is at the heart of these discussions, whether in its western, imperial, or postcolonial iteration (Asante, 2019, 2020a; Mkandawire, 2001; Owusu, 2017). To understand the character of citizenship and how this is manifested in the patterns of engagement with the state, it is, therefore, important to appreciate how the history of state-building and the wider political context shapes the social arena in which citizenship is constructed and enacted.

It is widely acknowledged in political sociology that modern states emerged out of violence and bloodshed. 'War making, extraction, and capital accumulation interacted to shape European state making,' argued Charles Tilly (1985, p. 172). The need for well-resourced standing armies and the efficient administration of these armies resulted in the development of technologies of administrations, and the erection of bureaucratic edifices which became the functional nucleus of the modern state. By emphasising the constant processes of amalgamation and fragmentation that followed military victory or defeat, these explanations draw attention to the fact that there is nothing national, nor indeed natural, about modern states (Tilly, 1992).[5] This recognition is crucial for citizenship studies because it acts as a corrective for the tendency to assume that the roots of citizenship lie buried deep in primeval communities.

Whereas accounts of the emergence of modern states in the West point to dynamics internal to feudal and early modern Europe, theories of modern state formation in Africa emphasise their colonial origins. However, what both bodies of scholarship have in common is their emphasis on the repressive and predatory processes by which states came into being. This is especially so for Marxist theories which focus analytical attention on imperialism and "postcolonial" economic domination of the metropolitan centres' (Stark, 1986, p. 336). There is agreement in this intellectual camp that the postcolonial state is 'overdeveloped'—a notion first introduced by Alavi (1972) in reference to Pakistan and Bangladesh—because it emerged fully formed without much indigenous input (see Leys, 1976 for criticisms of this view). The 'importedness' of the postcolonial state is a view which enjoys widespread acceptance among scholars. For instance, Badie and Birnbaum (1983, p. 99) argue that national states in Africa are not only 'alien' but also 'pale cop[ies]' of their European counterparts which lack legitimacy because of their origin in colonial violence. A second tradition of scholarship privileges the role of dominant and charismatic leaders in African state formation. In his study of the radical transformation which Ghana underwent during the late colonial period, Apter (2015) 'bestowed upon [Nkrumah] individual responsibility for the new state of Ghana' (Stark, 1986, p. 337).

Whether they assign primacy to imperialism or to nationalist actors, however, both schools recognise that the postcolonial state, owing to its origin, is distinctive from the nation-states of Europe, with implications for the character of the postcolonial state and its people. Ekeh (1975) famously argued that colonialism resulted in the emergence of bifurcated publics in Africa; the civic public of the bureaucratic state and the primordial public marked by subnational attachments, while Mamdani (1996) argues that strategies of colonial control

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[5] Cultural approaches, by contrast, emphasise such factors as patriarchy and religious morality (Adams, 2005; Gorski, 2003; Steinmetz, 1999)

created a parallel system of political identification that accorded citizenship to a privileged class while consigning large portions of the population to subjecthood.

How do states, fashioned out of processes of bloodshed and repression, manage to win the allegiance of citizens and encourage engagement with its formal structures? The state-building literature broadly agrees on the integrative effects of state effectiveness in achieving some minimum of social wellbeing. Indeed, in the early years of African independence, scholars argued that if political leaders governed well and provided the material needs of their people, they could achieve national unity without having to constantly admonish their people about the dangers of disloyalty and sectarian tendencies (Young, 2007). This probably drew on lessons from the European experience with state-building, which initially begun with extension of concessions in the form of political rights to members of the feudal nobility, which were gradually extended to the general populations. Eventually, as industrialisation enhanced their fiscal capacities, and welfare states emerged to guarantee a minimum level of material wellbeing, the enjoyment of political, civil, and political rights served to bond citizens to the larger political systems (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Mann, 1987).

On the other hand, African countries came out of independence already severely constrained. Emerging out of colonial domination and often bitter anti-colonial struggles where the structures of the state were often the targets of popular hostility, the new leaders struggled to reconstruct the civic public sphere as a legitimate arena for political engagement (Ekeh, 1975). At the same time, these leaders put their faith in rapid economic modernisation as the sure means by which they could close the gap between them and the wealthier countries of the west, and assure decent livelihoods for their people. This was the era of bold and ambitious 'high modernist' projects (Scott, 1998) aimed at rapid economic transformation, exemplified in massive projects like the Akosombo Dam in Nkrumah's Ghana and the Villagisation Scheme under *Ujamaa* in Nyerere's Tanzania (Akyeampong, 2018). However, the implementation of these bold projects was hampered by severe fiscal constraints and international meddling in domestic politics (Mkandawire, 1999).

In the meantime, the failure of these projects and the onset of economic crises subjected the people to severe material hardships, resulting in disillusionment with the state and its democratic prospects as military dictatorships and one-party governments took roots across the continent (Akyeampong, 2018). This sense of disillusionment is most poignantly conveyed in question a respondent posed to a researcher in Nigeria: 'When will independence end?' (Mustapha 1998). As the crises deepened in the 1980s, and reliance on the state to fulfil material and social needs appeared increasingly as a failing prospect, scholars began to draw attention to what they described as citizen "disengagement" from the state. This disengagement took a number of forms, including increasing informalisation of the economy in the 1980s, escape from the state through mass exodus, and the emergence of parallel systems for social engagement (Azarya and Chazan, 1987). Under these conditions:

> ···local creativities and initiatives were blunted, and any sense of personal social responsibility were detrimentally skewed. Many Ghanaians commonly refer to public property as '*abandea*' – it 'belongs to the *aban*' – with the implication that it can be stolen, abused, or destroyed with no direct consequence. The Government is still considered to be a foreign entity, and too many people feel no compunction or obligation to protect its property or services. Those officials who enriched themselves by corruption were not stigmatised in the eyes of society···. The lack of accountability, therefore, promoted social vices like embezzlement and corruption' (Agyeman-Duah, 1987: 614-615).

The notion of 'disengagement' offers an opportunity to explore the relationship between social belonging and civic participation. Disappointing economic performance, together with increasingly competitive elections since the transition to constitutional rule creates conditions for the instrumentalisation of ethnicity (Asante, 2020b; Young, 2007). In its turn, sense of belonging is believed to lie at the root of civic participation. For instance, Huddy and Khatib (2007) find a strong positive effect of national attachment on national involvement. Many scholars consider participation to be central to the definition of citizenship. Moreover, because it enables citizens to influence policymakers, civic participation is held to be an important mechanism for the empowerment of citizens (Oduro, 2009; Verba, 1996). However, civic participation is itself theorised to be dependent on the strength of national attachment (Payton *et al,* 2005).

After the bleak realities of the 1970s and 1980s, Ghana has since transitioned from military dictatorship to an electoral democracy which many observers argue has placed the country on a path to democratic consolidation, although problems persist (Abdulai and Crawford, 2010; Botchway, 2018). At the same time, the country has succeeded in achieving impressive economic growth since the early 1980s, although this is not successfully translated into structural transformation (Whitfield, 2011) which can alone move the large majority of the people out of poverty. Against this new political economy context, how do Ghanaians engage with the state? This question is addressed below.

Identifying Patterns of Citizenship: Data and Methods

After a decade of continuous military rule, and an even longer chequered history of military intervention in national politics, Ghana was swept along by the so-called third-wave of democratisation. Since its return to constitutional politics was inaugurated with the 1992 elections, Ghana has ridden high on the crest of this wave, and is widely recognised as a democratic model in the region (Asante, unpublished).[6] The country's 25-year-old electoral politics has laid the foundation for certain patterns of citizenship conceptions and enactments to emerge. The paper offers an opportunity to reflect on these emerging patterns.

The analysis draws on data from the Afrobarometer survey on Ghana, which was collected in the years 2014/2015. The Afrobarometer dataset contains data on social, economic, and political life in over 30 African countries. With a sample size of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents in each country, carefully selected by trained enumerators, the dataset provides a rigorous, nationally representative sample for each participating country. The Ghana sub-sample of the dataset has a representative sample size of 2,400 respondents selected from across the country. The survey was administered using the languages commonly spoken across the country, namely Akan, English, Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, and Dagaari.[7]

The Afrobarometer Ghana survey constitutes an appropriate data source for this paper because it 1) provides a rigorous measure of variables relating to Ghanaian identity and civic engagement, and 2) the carefully constituted nation-wide sample makes the analysis generalisable. This dataset has been widely used by Africanist scholars to examine various aspect of social, economic, and political life in Ghana and beyond, including studies on electoral politics, political participation, and democratic development (Bratton, 2013; Gyima-Boadi, 2015; Mattes and Bratton, 2007; Shenga, 2007), and the micro-level determinants and outcomes of these wider political phenomena (Amoateng *et al.,* 2014; Dim and Asomah, 2019; Sulemana and Agyapong, 2019).

To supplement Afrobarometer data, the paper draws on two other sources of data: 1) newspaper articles on political engagement in Ghana, and 2) qualitative data from an in-depth interview conducted with 20 respondents from a variety of backgrounds, including students, journalists, activists, musicians, and lawyers. The interviews were conducted in Accra, the capital of Ghana, over a period spanning February 2017 to September 2019. Although these supplementary data sources were collected for different purposes, and are thus deployed advisedly in this study, they provide a necessary texture to the quantitative findings. As such, their core virtue, as used here, is that they give important directions to how future studies could take up the puzzles that emerge from the Afrobarometer findings.

I present below, findings on measures of *national identity, belonging,* and *participation.* National identity is measured using the Moreno question which attempts to assess the salience of ethnic identity relative to national identity. Respondents were asked: *Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a [Ghanaian] and being a _____Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?* And there are five response options ranging from 'exclusively ethnic' to 'exclusively national.' Ethnic tolerance is an aspect of national belonging. To measure this, I use the question to ask about respondents' attitude towards non-ethnic neighbours. To measure civic participation, I draw on a battery of questions measuring various civic actions, including voting, voluntary association membership, and contact with leaders on issues of public concern. Because the same questions were not asked across all the waves, and question wordings also varied across the waves, it is not possible to show how various measures of engagement with the state have varied over the two decades when the Afrobarometer data collection began.

Identification and Belonging

To examine identification and belonging, I focus on the relative salience of ethnic versus national identities of respondents. For postcolonial countries such as Ghana, ethnicity has long been understood to be an important form of identity for citizens. Owing to the arbitrary manner in which different ethnic groups were included in colonial states, it is often assumed that citizens in postcolonial African states would be torn between ethnic loyalties and allegiance to their countries (Eifert, Miguel, & Posner, 2010; Momoh & Adejumobi, 2017), and that the continuing salience of ethnicity would become a powerful weapon in political struggles on the national stage (Agbese, 2017; Gadjanova, 2017).[8] However, from the survey data, it appears that national identity is not strongly threatened by ethnicity (see Figure 1). In response to the Moreno question asking respondents to place themselves on an identity continuum, 11% of respondents felt predominantly ethnic sentiments, compared with over 54% who reported predominantly national sentiments. Those who felt both national and ethnic sentiments in equal measure were 35% of the sample.

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[6] Incidentally, the country earned similar praise for its enthusiastic implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme.

[7] More details about the methodology is available on the Afrobarometer website: www.afrobarometer.org

[8] See Robinson (2014) for a recent review of this literature.

Because formal education is believed to engender a cosmopolitan spirit which orients people towards the state and erodes the salience of ethnicity, it is also believed that level of education would be positively associated with national attachment (Godefroidt, Langer, & Meuleman, 2016). However, Figure 1 shows that there is not much difference between the national sample and the sub-sample of respondents who possess at least some university education.

Figure 1: Sense of identity
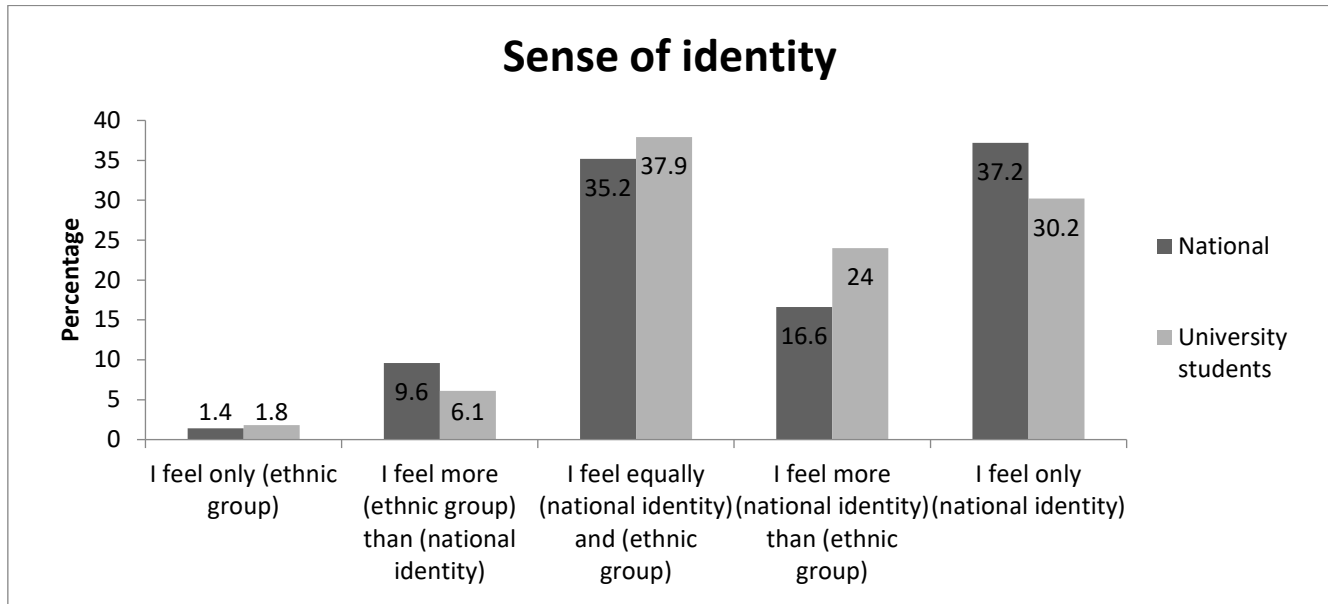
The survey measures ethnic tolerance with a question which asks about attitudes towards non-ethnic neighbours. Overall, ethnic intolerance was reported by a small proportion of respondents. Less than 4% (see Figure 2) of respondents expressed dislike for neighbours of other ethnic groups. The comparable figure for college-educated respondents was higher (11%). Moreover, it does not appear that the strength of ethnic attachment had any effect on intolerance of people of other ethnic groups (although ethnic intolerance itself was already very small to begin with). From the Moreno question, I created a dichotomous variable for ethnic salience (coded 1 for the categories 'I feel only ethnic' and 'I feel more ethnic than national'). Figure 3 shows that positive attitudes towards non-ethnic neighbours was expressed by over 95% of the overall sample, and even among those for whom ethnicity was more salient, inter-ethnic tolerance was as high as 92%. A bivariate correlation analysis between ethnic salience and ethnic intolerance yielded a negligible Pearson coefficient of 0.008, which was moreover not statistically significant (α = 0.692).

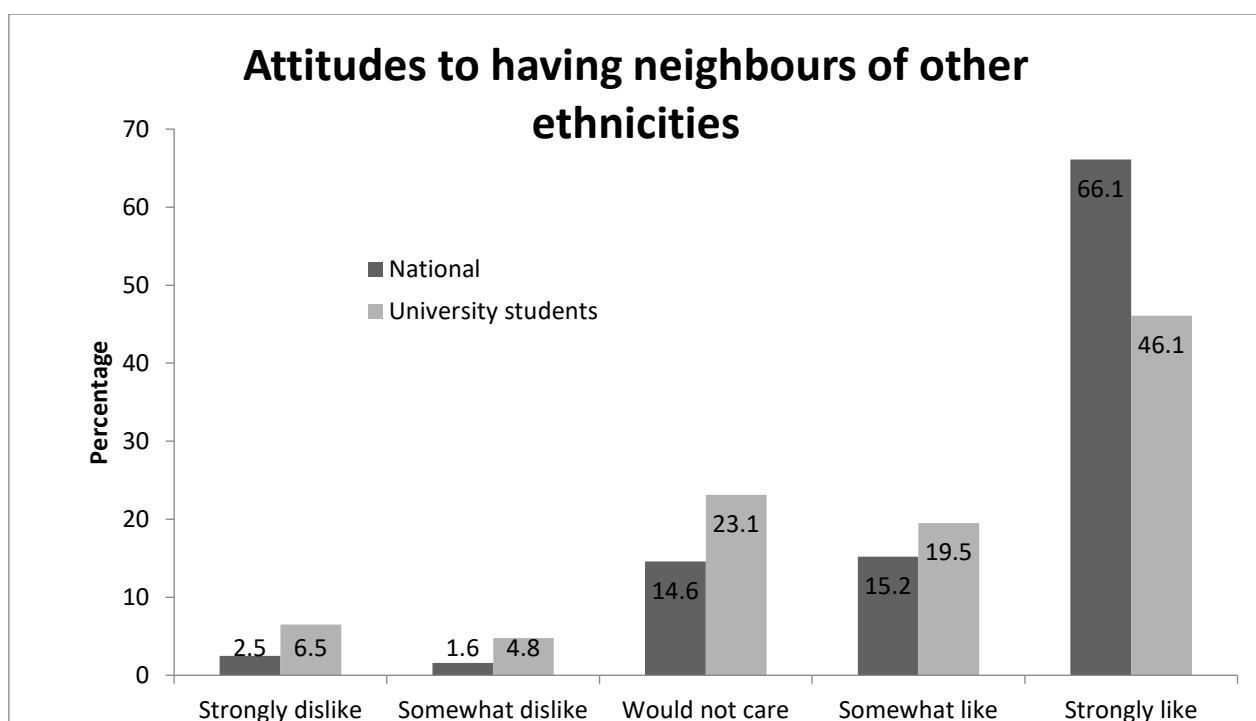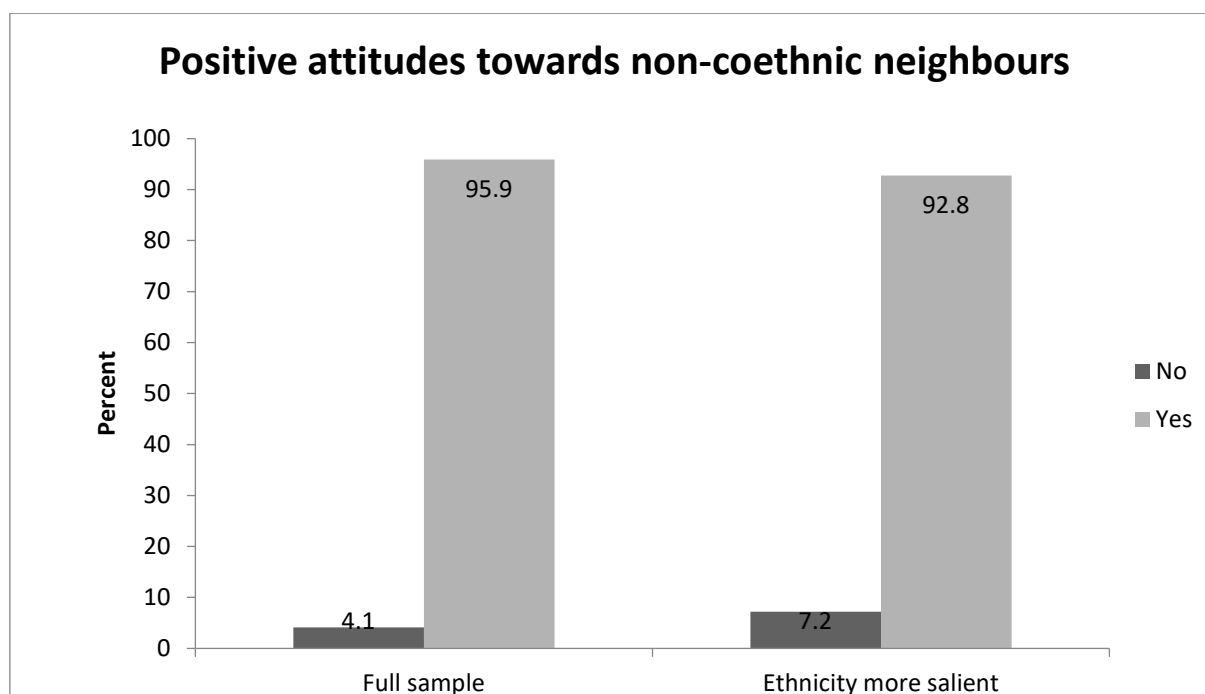Figure 2: Attitudes to having neighbours belonging to other ethnic groups

Figure 3: Positive attitudes towards non-coethnic neighbours

Positive attitudes towards non-coethnic neighbours

A similar picture emerges from the qualitative data. When describing what it meant to be Ghanaian, respondents pointed out that the civic state was a cold and uninspiring domain of belonging because of its roots in colonial rule, whereas ethnic or communal forms of belonging felt more intimate. According to one respondent, 'a Ghanaian is a paperwork left over by the British' (*male respondent, musician*). And for them, this fragmented basis of national belonging places a moral demand on them to assume personal responsibility for ensuring national cohesion. This responsibility entailed constant personal reminders of the fine line between cherishing one's ethnic traditions and harbouring sentiments of ethnic intolerance, as well as making the effort to overcome biases when one becomes conscious of it. The accounts of the two respondents below illustrate the varying ways in which this responsibility is enacted in practice:

> I am proud to an Akyem, I am proud to have a Fanti root and I am proud to have a Larteh root, you can decide to be part of all the tribes and you can speak your language and there is nothing wrong with it, but if you begin to look down on other peoples on account of that alone, you have a problem. (*Male respondent, activist*)

> I would begin by saying, when I was born, I was told about my ethnic background and that was what I knew. But as I grew up, I began to learn about being a Ghanaian is not only about your ethnicity, but also, being a part of a larger group···. When you go outside of Ghana, say you are a Ghanaian, see yourself as a Ghanaian. To me, I see myself as a Ghanaian. I lived in Accra but I moved to Akwapim and the people are so hospitable, they don't care about where you are coming from in Ghana, but they see you as a Ghanaian. They asked me where I come from and I said Accra, Ningo Prampram. And they welcomed me. They were ready to give me information about the area. So, I feel welcomed although I am a Ga and I live among them. (*Female respondent, student*)

Other studies have likewise reported low salience of ethnic attachments in Ghana. Godefroidt et al. (2016) found similar results to their own Moreno question in a survey administered to university students in Ghana. They observe that students unproblematically combined ethnic and civic conceptions of citizenship. Drawing on data from qualitative interviews with Ghanaian High School students, Levstik and Groth (2005) similarly argued that strong ethnic expressions among students did not detract from their national imaginations. They, in fact, found that often, ethnic narratives actually reinforce overarching national narratives (see also Asante, 2020b; Maclean, 2010).

Civic Engagement

To examine patterns of participation, I analyse responses to the question aimed at measuring aspects of civic engagement, including voting, group membership, and contact with leaders. Because it is a medium through which citizens can influence the making and implementation of policies beyond the electoral cycle, civic participation is accepted as crucial to the health of democracies (Lijphart, 1997; Oduro 2009; Verba, 1996). The data points to certain distinct forms of civic participation in Ghana. On the whole, Ghanaians seem to have a lively appetite for partisan politics. Voting is the most important civic act for respondents (see Figure 4). In the survey, 81% of respondents reported having voted in the most recent national elections. Almost a third of respondents have

also participated in partisan events related to the elections – like attending campaign rallies (31%) or campaign meetings (21%). Of those who did not vote, the reasons ranged from a decision to boycott the elections (5.4%)—which in itself can be understood as a political statement—being too young at the time when the voters' registration exercise was taking place (6.4%), and time constraints (2.4%).

Figure 4: Electoral participation
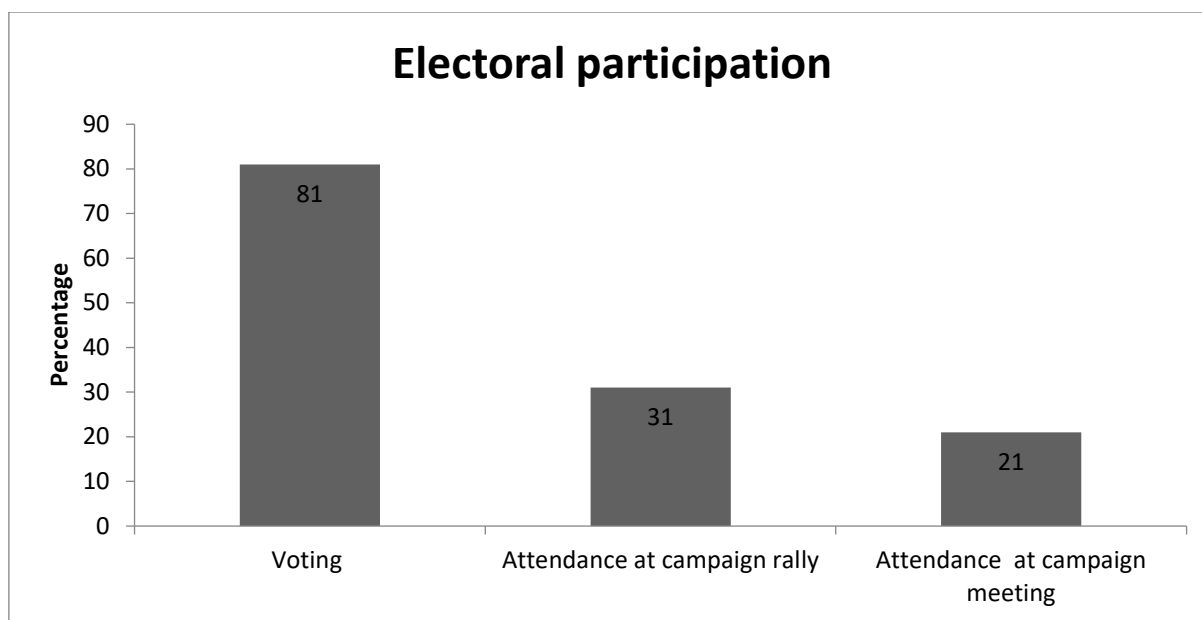
However, political engagement beyond the exciting and emotionally charged forms of actions associated with elections is limited. Representatives of the state were not the first point of call for respondents when crucial issues of public interest need to be addressed (see Figure 5). For instance, less than 15% of respondents had contacted members of parliament regarding an important problem or to present their views in the past year. The proportion of respondents who had contacted an official of a political party was about the same size, and a slightly smaller number had contacted an official of a government agency. On the other hand, about 20% reported going to their traditional leaders when they wanted to report a problem or to express their views on an issue. Crucially, there was a relatively greater tendency to approach local government representatives (27%) and religious leaders (39%).

Figure 5: Contact with leaders
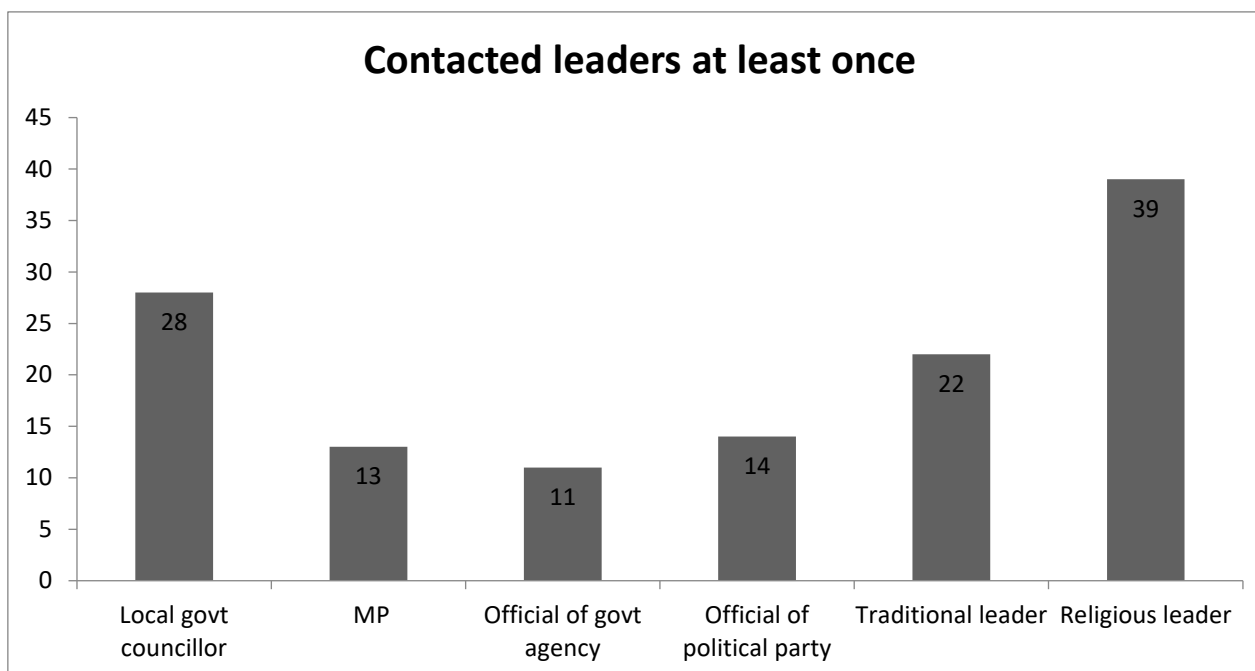
This hints at the importance of proximity—both physical and social—in the pattern of civic engagement of respondents. In other words, respondents felt more comfortable approaching those leaders closer to them (traditional and religious leaders, local councillors), than officials of the centralised government. The paradox of the situation is that those whom respondents reported approaching with their views and problems are also with the least amount of state power. Religious leaders are by definition outside the legal scope of functionaries of Ghana's secular state. Per the dictates of Ghana's 1992 constitution, traditional leaders are debarred from participating in partisan politics, which also happens to be the most consequential political arena. Local

government representatives, on the other hand, are legally constituted officials of the state with clearly-defined functions enshrined in various legislations, but these legislations have either not yet been given practical effect or are operating at sub-optimal levels (Ayee, 1995; Crawford, 2009; Yeboah & Obeng-Odoom, 2010).

The pattern of engagement with leaders on political issues seems to be influenced by the extent of formality involved. To put this pattern to a statistical test, I conducted a constrained principal components analysis (PCA) on the variables measuring frequency of contact with leaders. PCA makes it possible to examine a set of variables for an underlying 'pattern of similarity of the observations and the variables' (Abdi & Williams, 2010, p. 433). The PCA analyse revealed an underlying two-factor pattern. These two factors, *formal* and *informal engagement,* cumulatively accounts for 67.4% of the variation in the data (see Table 1). The first dimension, *Formal engagement,* with an Eigenvalue of 3.1, accounts for over 50% of the variation in the data, and loads on engagement with officials of government agencies, members of parliament, and political party officials. These leaders are the representatives of the state or aspirants to national office (as in the case of officials of opposition political parties). There is, at least theoretically, a strong bureaucratic element in this type of civic engagement. The second dimension, *Informal engagement,* accounts for 15% of the variation (with an Eigenvalue of 0.9), and loads on contact with religious and traditional leaders, as well as local government councillors. As opposed to *formal engagement,* which entails encounters with the bureaucratic arms of the state, *informal engagement* operates at the level of everyday life (see Paller, 2019). The popularity of the informal type of engagement may be partly due to the fact that the layers of bureaucracy which often restricts access to 'official' leaders is largely bypassed when citizens need to contact 'informal' leaders.

Table 1

Table 1: Pattern of civic engagement

Variable	Type of engagement	
	Formal	Informal
Contact official of a government agency	.815	
Contact political party official	.799	
Contact MP	.777	
Contact religious leader		.880
Contact traditional leader		.729
Contact local government councilor		.583
Eigenvalue	3.1	0.9
Percentage of variance accounted for	52.3	15

Other patterns of civic action follow the formal-informal pattern derived above. Political awareness, quite high among respondents, is an example. Three-quarters of respondents expressed some interest in national politics, and a similarly large proportion (67%) reported that they regularly discussed politics with friends and family (see Fig. 6). The Ghanaian airwaves are dominated by programmes dedicated to hot-button political issues. Political parties consider these programmes to be so crucial to their power-seeking strategies that have managed to get their agents, locally referred to as 'party communicators', permanently empanelled on these shows, as well as party-funded 'serial callers' who try to sway public discussions to their benefit (Nunoo, 2016).

However, this high interest in politics hardly translates into direct political action. For instance, respondents showed a reluctance to take steps to address particular dissatisfactions with government performance. Over 85% each of respondents have never contacted the media regarding issues of public importance, never contacted government officials for help in an area of government failing, or joined others to request for government action to remedy a public dissatisfaction. However, by far, the civic act from which most respondents recoiled was participation in demonstrations or protest marches, which recorded 93%, as presented in Figure 7.
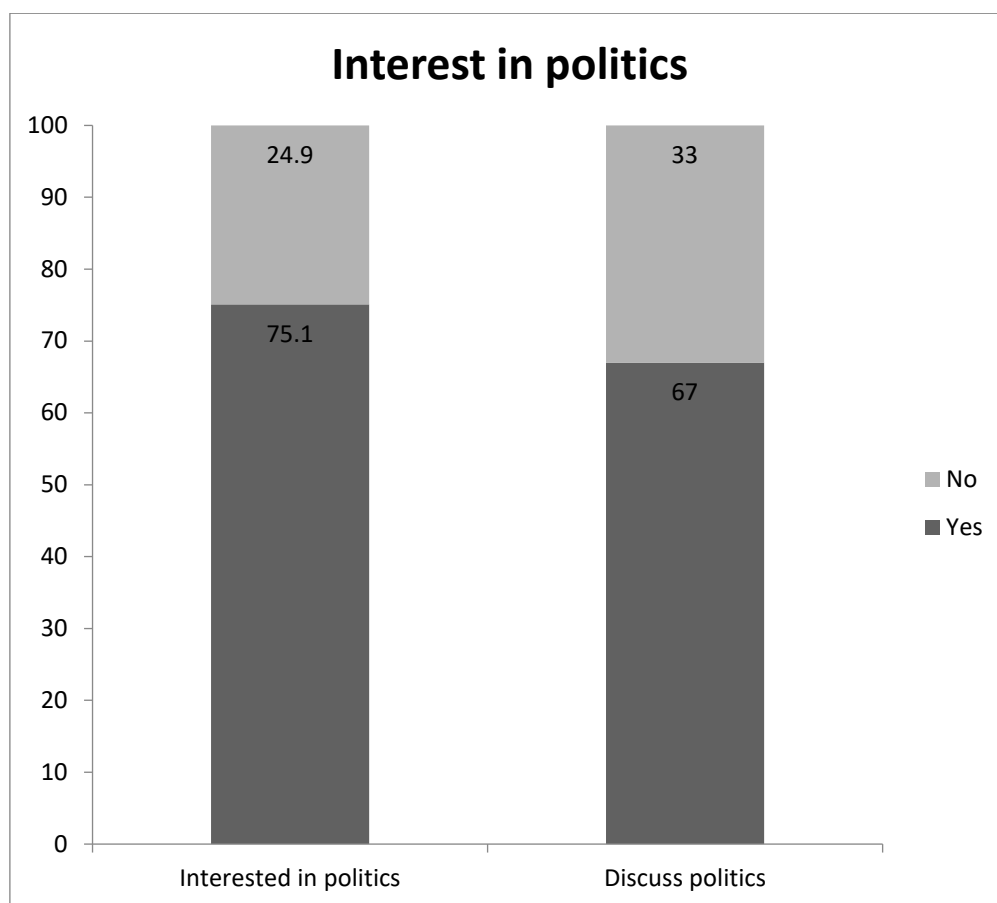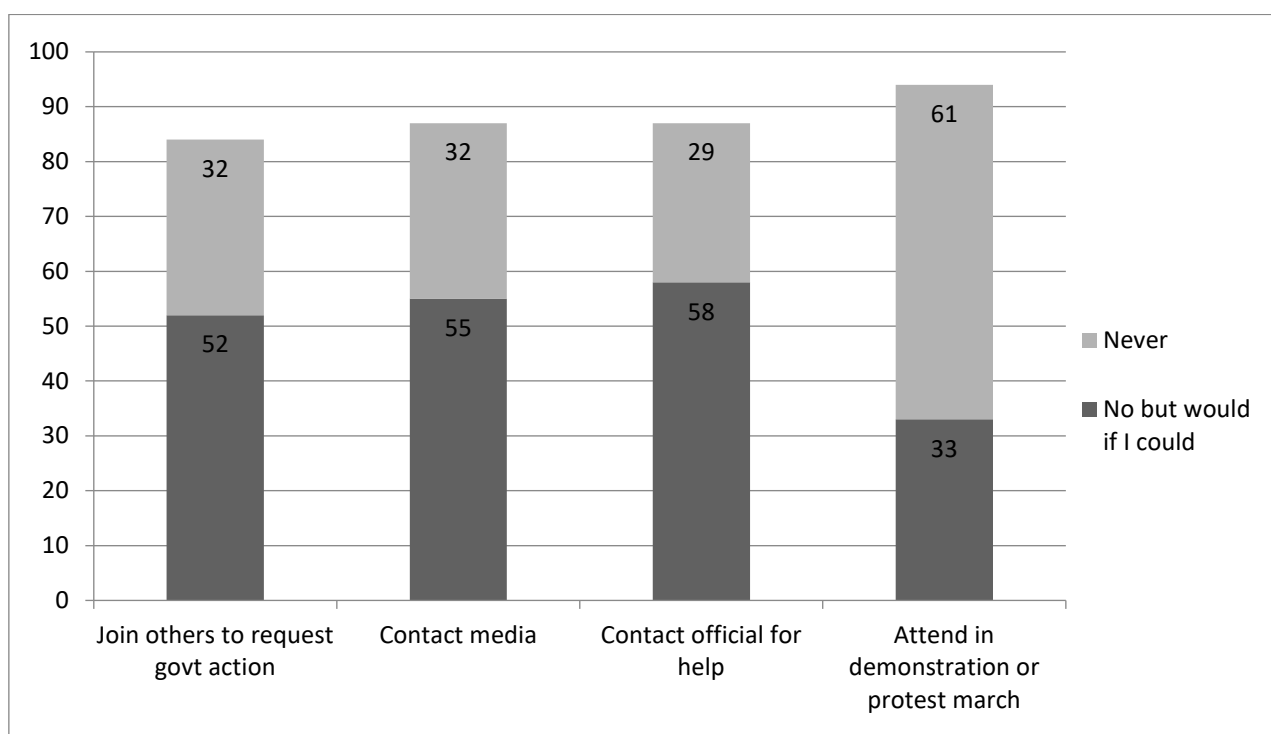
Figure 6: Interest in politics

Figure 7: Civic Engagement

The underlying factor of formality appears to apply to all the various measures of civic participation above. However, because of differences in question wording and different response categories, it was not possible to include them all in a PCA. Nevertheless, it is still possible to categorise the patterns of civic engagement in Ghana broadly into formal and informal types. Table 2 presents a summary of the results discussed above, and shows that the popularity of particular civic acts tends to be negatively associated with their relative level of formality.

Table 2: Formality of civic acts

Low > ~40–80%	Medium ~ 20–40%	High < 20%
• Voting • Discuss politics • Attendance at campaign rallies • Religious group membership • Contact religious leaders	• Contact local govt official • Contact traditional leaders • Contact party official • Attendance at campaign meetings • Join others to raise issue • Attend community meetings	• Contact MP • Contact govt agency • Voluntary association membership • Protest

In/Formality and Forms of Local Civic Engagement

The characterisation of civic engagement as informal is largely a heuristic device. In reality, it is marked by fluidity, and there is nothing rigid about the placement of actions within a category labelled as 'formal' or 'informal', as specific civic acts could move from one category of formality to the other, depending on context. For instance, although contact with lawmakers and other political representatives on matters of public concern take highly formalistic forms, not all kinds of contacts with these actors are similarly official. During campaigns for parliamentary elections, wide access is granted to political elites. During this period, political elites descend to the level of everyday life. In the 2008 elections, the leader of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), John Evans Atta-Mills, who subsequently won that election, heavily relied on what his party called 'door-to-door campaigning', where he was able to connect with voters in informal settings.[9] This strategy has remained popular thereafter. The leader of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) successfully combatted widespread perception of arrogance by similarly joining people in the arena of everyday life during his ultimately successful third presidential attempt in 2016.[10] NDC parliamentary candidate, Alfred Oko Vanderpuije, was pictured in homes joining women to braid hair and cook food![11] During electoral campaigns, (aspiring) political leaders join people in their everyday activities, in other to create a sense of communion with them.

Similarly, the actual act of demonstrating or protesting which occurs at street level, tend to be informal. At the same time, there is a lot of formality involved in the preparation process, which entails formally notifying law enforcement authorities and seeking clearance. Moreover, to ensure that a protest achieves its desired end, organisers need to be skilled in the art of negotiating the formidable world of complex bureaucracies, and accounts for why some civil society organisations are more successful in their activism than others (Asante and Khisa, 2019; Oduro, 2009). This 'high cost' of success partially accounts for citizens' reluctance to participate in these acts. In 2014, a much-publicised protest dubbed, 'Occupy Flagstaff House,' organised to demand accountability from government, did not draw the anticipated turnout.[12] It is instructive to note that those who attended were widely perceived to be highly educated, securely employed, and mainly professionals, leading to it being (pejoratively) tagged as a 'middle class' and 'elitist' protest.[13]

By contrast, the most popular forms of civic participation also happen to be the ones which are less bureaucratically constrained. In November 2014, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development set aside the first Saturday of each month as National Sanitation Day.[14] Owing to the limited bureaucratic cost of

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[9] https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/election2008/Professor-Atta-Mills-begins-door-to-door-campaign-in-Kumasi-145661

[10] http://www.ghanadot.com/news.ghanadot.kunate.012210c.html. Barely a year after the NDC lost the 2016 elections, party officials admonished party members to adopt the proselytising strategies of the Jehovah's Witnesses sect in a bid to wrestle back power: http://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/politics/politics/201802/343268.php?page=1&storyid=100&

[11] https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2016/october-19th/photos-oko-vanderpuije-doing-wonders-on-campaign-trail.php

[12] The low turnout was a relief to government officials, who had feared the possibility of the protest initiating a civil unrest as happened during the Arab Spring: https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/07/occupy-flagstaff-house-wake-up-c-20147145534549424.html. In apparent celebration, a government minister took to Twitter to mock the protest organisers over the low turnout: https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2014/july-1st/hannah-tetteh-scoffs-occupy-flagstaff-house-low-turnout-convener-unperturbed.php

[13] https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Occupy-Ghana-you-are-not-better-than-the-rest-of-Ghanaians-352701

[14] http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/media-center/news/128-ghanaians-should-see-sanitation-day-as-national-duty-lgwu

participating in this event, it enjoyed widespread participation across the country.[15] This positive public reception of this initiative is partly due to the fact that it resonated with a cultural tendency towards informal community self-help (Dei, 1988; MacLean, 2010; Paller, 2019). Furthermore, spontaneous acts are also preferred to more formal types of civic engagement. In February 2018, a photo showing banana trees planted in the middle of some streets in Ghana went viral on social media, a step apparently taken in frustration with the lack of efforts to fix yawning potholes in the streets.[16]

Participation becomes even more enthusiastic when fun and informality converge. Elections everywhere are exciting affairs, and in Ghana, elections are always heralded with fanfare. This is not to say that there is no solemn contemplation of the options being presented to the electorate, or of the possibility of ensuing electoral disorder. However, this in no way overshadows the jubilant mood spawned by national elections. In a report fittingly titled, 'Fear and laughter on the Ghana campaign trail,' the *Africa Report* quizzically observed that 'the results in what many see as Ghana's closest ever election on 7 December could come down to a choice between sugary fizzy drinks.' [17] This observation was in reference to the famous 'Kalyppo Challenge,' which started in reaction to the circulation of a photo meant to embarrass the NPP presidential candidate, Akufo-Addo, who was pictured on the campaign trail sipping on Kalyppo juice.[18] This playful 'challenge' went viral on social media, with users posting photos of themselves sipping Kalyppo juice while striking wildly imaginative poses.[19]

By contrast, there is a marked distance between citizens and their elected representatives after elections. Thus, the theoretical expectation (Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Payton et al., 2005) that stronger attachment would lead to greater civic involvement need to account for the ways in which formality of civic acts mediates the extent of civic involvement.

Conclusion

These findings point to some features and paradoxes of contemporary Ghanaian citizenship. Ghanaians have a strong sense of national identification and *attachment*, but also display *detachment* from the state in their everyday lives. This paradoxical state of *attached-detachment* is manifested in enthusiastic participation in highly circumscribed aspects of national political life, like voting, while recoiling from more mundane aspects of civic life. In line with this sense of attached-detachment, proximity—both physical and social—appears to be important. People tend to engage with state institutions or officials in close proximity, but rarely approach those at arm's-length. People also seem unwilling to approach state officials on matters of public concern, although they would very happily discuss these issues in informal circles. This reticent attitude towards state institutions and state functionaries contrasts with higher participation in customary and religious institutions, and greater interactions with leaders in these domains. This manifests an *informal* approach to citizenship. There appears to be a tendency to recoil from highly bureaucratic spaces and actions. The juridical centres of state power are avoided if this would pull people too far away from the informality of everyday life. This shows in the wild popularity of voting relative to other civic acts.

There is also an underlying cultural mechanism at play here. Rituals relating to the installation and deposition of leaders have long been central to social and political participation in Ghana. Thus, electoral processes and the rituals of chieftaincy tap into a common public sentiment. But this can be a double-edged sword. The paradox of active citizenship is that this enactment of substantive citizenship can yield consequences which are not only unintended, but sometimes even subversive of the spirit of electoral democracy which underlie it. Writing about the articulation of traditional patterns of political participation with the mode of civic engagement ushered in by the postcolonial state, Owusu (1986, p. 70) argued that their admixture often lays the ground for civil disorder. He argues, for instance, that 'successful military interventions in postcolonial politics resemble 'destoolments', that is, the formal removal of chiefs in Ghana ∙∙∙rooted in basic assumptions about moral rights and obligations that form constituent elements of the indigenous culture.'

It is obvious when Nana Akufo-Addo called on Ghanaians to be citizens and not spectators, he had in mind a specific type of civic engagement. Indeed, he charged Ghanaians to help build their communities and assist him to achieve the promises on which he campaigned for office. However, from the analysis above, it is obvious that Ghanaians perform a type of citizenship which would be difficult for politicians to readily utilise for narrowly-defined political ends. The phenomenon of *detached-attachment* indicates a flexible relationship with the state, and a readiness to withdraw, if temporarily, when prompted by necessity. This suggests that an adequate theorisation of citizenship and civic activism would need to reflect the ways in which civic acts are

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[15] http://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/tamale-residents-observe-sanitation-day-83172;
https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/kumasi-observes-national-sanitation-day.html
[16] http://3news.com/lifestyle/photos-planting-food-jobs-fixing-potholes/
[17] http://www.theafricareport.com/West-Africa/fear-and-laughter-on-the-ghana-campaign-trail.html
[18] Kalyppo is a drink for children, so the image was meant to infantilise the candidate.
[19] https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Akufo-Addo-Kalyppo-challenge-Strange-Kalyppo-selfies-hit-social-media-475994

grounded in social reality, and must be attentive to culture. Indeed, there is evidence from earlier studies (such as Cleaver, 2007; Osei-Kufuor & Bakare, 2013) that attending to culture as a crucial component of civic participation would yield dividends for greater understanding of citizenship.

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