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Balancing national and ethno-cultural belonging: State recognition and perceived government performance in Mauritius

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ABSTRACT

Amidst debates about national unity and cultural diversity, this paper examines whether and when people living in a highly diverse country self-identify as a member of their nation, their ethno-cultural group, or with both (dual self-identification). Two large-scale studies with nationally representative data of the Mauritian population show that a clear majority demonstrates dual self-identification. Furthermore, ethno-cultural group membership and perceived fairness of how the government treats one's ethno-cultural group were found to matter for people's self-identification. The findings are discussed in relation to the continuing debate about national unity and cultural diversity and the importance of conducting research in understudied contexts.

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Multicultural societies face the challenge of creating among their citizens a sense of shared national belonging across meaningful cultural group differences. The societal advantages of a shared national identity are commonly acknowledged (e.g., Miller and Ali 2014; Moore, 2001), also by proponents of multiculturalism (e.g., Modood, 2007; Parekh, 2000). Yet there are continuing academic and political debates about the importance of combining a national sense of “we-ness” with recognizing ethno-cultural group differences, and the role of the national government in this (e.g., Bloemraad, 2011).

Much of this debate and related empirical research focuses on the accommodation of immigrants and immigrant-origin groups in non-settler (Europe) and settler (Canada, USA) societies (Berry & Sam, 2013; Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007). In such countries, there is often a dominant ethno-cultural group that forms the “invisible default” to which ethnic minorities are marked, and critical questions and debates about the compatibility of national and ethno-cultural loyalty are not uncommon. There is hardly any work on relatively young, postcolonial multicultural societies (e.g., Maldives, Swaziland) that have tried to build a sense of national belonging, and especially not among many ethno-cultural groups that all have ancestral roots outside the country and

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in which there is no clear, dominant ethno-cultural group representing the nation (i.e., Mauritius). However, such societies can serve as an important example of the possibilities and challenges that societies face when trying to develop a sense of unity when there is high ethno-cultural diversity. In these states, cultural differences are embedded in a “familiar-but-strange plurality” (Yeoh, 2015: 549) in which there is no historically determined hierarchy of ethno-cultural claims. They provide unique cases to examine (1) the extent to which a sense of national belonging goes together with ethno-cultural group allegiances, and (2) whether this depends on the official recognition and perceived governmental treatment of the ethno-cultural group people belong to, and on how the performance of the government is evaluated.

We examine these two issues in the context of Mauritius, a former British colony described as a “laboratory of diversity” (Hempel, 2009: 464) and a strong candidate for “truly successful poly-ethnic societies” (Eriksen, 2004: 79). This small island state in the Indian Ocean has no native population and is characterized by a very high diversity of ethno-cultural groups that are all considered to be part of this “rainbow nation.” The inhabitants have original roots in Africa, Asia, and Europe, resulting in a complex multicultural mosaic with many different ethnic groups, with around fifteen languages being spoken, and with the presence of four world religions. Mauritius has a high level of communalism in which ethnicity is linked to diasporic ancestry culture with a strong inward orientation, together with an emphasis on tolerance toward cultural and religious diversity (*lakorite*) as being an integral part of Mauritian multiculturalism (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2015). In the preparation of and after the country’s independence in 1968, national unity and diversity became highly relevant topics on the political and societal agendas. Although inequalities exist and the numerical domination of the Hindus was initially feared, Mauritius has developed into a politically stable democracy that has, for example, a best-loser system in place to ensure political balance. This democratic stability stands in contrast to similar young postcolonial society such as the Maldives and Swaziland.

The overall aim of our research is to examine relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification of Mauritians and to what extent this self-identification depends on whether the state officially recognizes one’s ethnic group and how people perceive governmental treatment of their group and how they evaluate the performance of the government. To examine the robustness and stability of our findings, we examined these questions twice, using two sets of nationally representative data (Afrobarometer Data 2012, 2014).

Theoretical framework

Self-identification as national and ethno-cultural group member

Many studies have examined the societal benefits of feelings of national belonging. According to the national identity argument, national identification stimulates societal unity, political trust, and loyalty (see Miller & Ali, 2014; Moore, 2001). Ethno-cultural subgroup identification with the related feelings of ethnic belonging is sometimes seen as posing a threat to this national unity and sense of loyalty. In the words of Collier (2009: 52): “a society can function perfectly well if its citizens hold multiple identities, but problems arise when those subnational identities arouse loyalties that override

loyalty to the nation as a whole.” What matters is whether people attach more importance to their ethno-cultural group belonging than to their national belonging. In the current study, we therefore examine people’s national self-identification relative to their ethno-cultural self-identification.

We do this by relying on a survey question developed by Linz and adapted by Moreno (1988, 2006), that distinguishes between people who self-identify only or primarily as a member of their ethno-cultural group, equally as a member of their nation and their ethno-cultural group, and only or primarily as a member of their nation. For convenience, we will call these options respectively “ethno-cultural self-identification,” “dual self-identification,” and “national self-identification.” The main difference between ethno-cultural and dual self-identification is that national self-identification is more prominent in the dual than the ethno-cultural one, and the main difference between dual and national self-identification is that ethno-cultural self-identification is less prominent in the national than the dual one. This self-identification question has been used successfully in a variety of contexts among different groups, such as among Scots in Great Britain (Moreno, 1988), ethnic groups in African countries (Robinson, 2014), immigrants in The Netherlands (Fleischmann & Verkuyten, 2016), Flemish and Walloons in Belgium (De Winter, 2007), and adolescents in Mauritius (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010). It has the advantage of being straightforward and easy to understand which is important for doing research among people who are not very familiar with survey questions, as is the case for many people in Mauritius.

We expected that most Mauritians would demonstrate dual self-identification, for several reasons. Mauritius is a former British colony and British colonizers are known for their use of ethnic subgroup distinctions in the societies they colonized (e.g., Mazrui, 1983). Furthermore, postcolonialism encompasses the process of defining coherent ethno-cultural communities that can operate as ethnic stakeholders within the new, shared nation (Bhabha, 2004; Hempel, 2009). The colonial past combined with the relatively short period of the country’s national independence can leave its traces in how Mauritians understand themselves. Historical memory and legacy can play an important role in the way in which ethno-cultural and national identities are defined and understood (Hamilton, Hodgson, & Quirk, 2012).

Furthermore, Mauritius is a country that is economically and socially relatively well-developed. Economically, it is described as “the ‘teacher’s’ pet of Africa” (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2015: 682) and has a relatively high score on the Human Development Index (UNDP 2018). According to classical theories of modernization, this development leads to an increased importance of national belonging through processes such as urbanization, centralized education, and industrialization (Coleman, 1954; Smock & Bentsi-Enchill, 1976). This modernization expectation is confirmed in a cross-national comparison of fifteen African countries (Mauritius was not included) that showed that a higher Gross Domestic Product of a country is related to higher national versus ethnic identification (Robinson, 2014).

During independence it has been ensured that Mauritius would become a nation for all different ethno-cultural groups in the country. Mauritius is a highly diverse country that has embraced ethno-cultural diversity as an essential part of the Mauritian nation (Eriksen, 1994). Nowadays, with national elections, all candidates indicate which

ethno-cultural community they belong to (Hindu, Muslim, Sino-Mauritian, or General Population; Auerbach, 2010). Moreover, national holidays are related to festivities of every cultural group, all cultural groups are represented during Independence Day, and a discourse of tolerance and respect is hegemonic (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2015). Although various tensions between ethno-cultural groups exist and there have been group conflicts and riots in the past (1999), the emphasis is on Mauritius being a “mosaic,” “fruit salad,” or “rainbow nation” in which everyone belongs to both an ethno-cultural group and the nation. Reflecting this balance between national and ethno-cultural belonging, we expect that Mauritians will predominantly demonstrate a pattern of dual self-identification. This expectation is in line with an earlier finding among a sample of Mauritian adolescents who tended to identify as members of both their ethno-cultural group and the nation (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010).

Explaining self-identification

Commitment to the nation is important for societal unity, political trust, and the perceived legitimacy of the state. In the current study, we examine the role of the government for people’s self-identification as members of the nation relative to their identification as ethno-cultural group members. More specifically, we investigate to what extent official acknowledgement of one’s ethno-cultural group and the perceived unfair treatment of one’s group by the government as well as people’s perceptions of the performance of the government tip their self-identification more to the national or to the ethno-cultural aspect.

Regarding official acknowledgement of one’s ethno-cultural group, we focus on comparing the pattern of self-identification between Creoles on the one hand, and Hindus and Muslims on the other hand. Among the many cultural communities that are commonly distinguished in Mauritius, these are the three numerically largest ones: Hindus form the largest group of the total population (about 40 per cent), Creoles constitute approximately 25 per cent, and Muslims about 17 per cent (Hollup, 1994). However, whereas Hindus and Muslims are recognized as separate ancestral groups in the constitution, Creoles are not recognized but included in the broad “rest” category of “General Population.”¹ Moreover, in contrast to Hindus and Muslims, Creoles have a history of slavery and therefore are a diverse community in terms of ancestry, with people originating mainly from different parts of continental Africa and with having mixed backgrounds (Miles, 1999). In general, people are more inclined to identify with their community when it has relatively strong group boundaries, integrated norms, ancestral traditions, and social ties (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Therefore, we expect that Creoles are less likely to report dual self-identification and more likely to tip toward national self-identification than Hindus and Muslims.

Besides official recognition of one’s ethno-cultural group, perceptions of one’s own ethno-cultural group being unfairly treated by the government might also matter for self-identification. Research on perceived discrimination has argued and demonstrated that being treated unfairly or not feeling recognized by other members of society can hamper national identification and increase ethno-cultural group identification (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Solheim, 2009; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). Perceiving

discrimination of one's ethno-cultural group increases ethno-cultural self-identification because fellow ethno-cultural group members are likely to be a source of emotional, social, and political support in these negative circumstances. Not feeling treated equally and fairly by the government is likely to function similarly. Thus, it can be expected that the stronger people feel that their ethno-cultural group is treated unfairly by the government, the more likely they are to describe themselves in terms of their ethno-cultural as opposed to their national group.

Regarding perceptions of the performance of the government, institutional performance theories predict that political trust emerges from institutions "delivering what the public wants, e.g. building roads, improving the economy, or providing healthcare" (Berg & Hjerm, 2010: 392). Applied to the individual level, these theories state that the better people evaluate the performance of the government, the more likely they are to have political trust (Mishler & Rose, 2001). Similarly, in the context of supranational entities such as the European Union, Haas (1964) argues that loyalty is more likely to shift from the nation to Europe and the European Union when people are satisfied with the latter's performance. In line with these arguments, we expect that the more people are satisfied with how the Mauritian government performs, the more likely they are to tip their self-identification to the national side.

Methods

We tested our hypotheses in two studies using two sets of nationally representative data collected in Mauritius in 2012 and 2014 (Afrobarometer Data 2012, 2014). The recruitment of respondents took place for both data collections separately. With these two datasets we were able to assess the robustness and stability of the findings. Moreover, the data for Study 2 were collected five to six months before general elections, which might be relevant because research in several African countries (but not Mauritius) has shown that ethnic self-identification is more likely when a country is closer to a competitive presidential election (Eifert, Miguel, & Posner, 2010). Furthermore, in Study 2 we were also able to control for the possible confounding effect of the interviewer and respondent having the same ethno-cultural background (e.g., Weeks & Moore, 1981).

Data

Study 1

The data for Study 1 were collected in January and February 2012 (Afrobarometer Data 2012). In total, 1200 people participated in a survey that was administered in face-to-face interviews by trained interviewers. Most interviews were conducted in the Creole language (96 per cent).² The response rate was 86 per cent. We excluded respondents who lived on the island of Rodrigues ($N=120$). This island is part of the Republic of Mauritius but is located more than 500 kilometers east of the island of Mauritius, is inhabited mainly by Creoles, and has administrative autonomy (HRDC 2007).³ We also excluded respondents who had not answered our dependent variable, relative ethno-cultural versus national self-identification ($N=14$). The remaining sample consisted of 1066 participants.

Study 2

The data we used for Study 2 were collected in June and July 2014 (Afrobarometer Data 2014). The sampling and interview procedures were the same as in Study 1. The response rate was 68%. Also in this study, we excluded respondents who lived on the island of Rodrigues ($N = 120$) and those who had not answered the question of relative national versus ethno-cultural identification ($N = 33$), resulting in a final sample of 1047 participants.

Measures

Study 1

Relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification was measured by asking (Moreno, 1988, 2006): “Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Mauritian and being a [respondent’s ethnic group]. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?” The five answer options were coded as follows: “I feel only [respondent’s ethnic group]” (1), “I feel more [respondent’s ethnic group] than Mauritian” (2), “I feel equally Mauritian and [respondent’s ethnic group]” (3), “I feel more Mauritian than [respondent’s ethnic group]” (4), and “I feel only Mauritian” (5). We recoded this five-point scale into the following three point-scale: only or primarily ethno-cultural self-identification (categories 1 and 2 combined), dual self-identification (3), and only or primarily national self-identification (4 and 5 combined). For convenience, we refer to the first and last categories as “ethno-cultural” and “national” self-identification respectively. The correlation between the five- and three-point scales was very high (Kendall’s tau-b = .97).⁴

Official recognition of one’s ethno-cultural group was assessed by people’s ethno-cultural background. Participants were asked: “What is your ethnic community, cultural group, or tribe?” Interviewers coded the answers into one of ten categories, which we recoded into four dummies distinguishing the three main groups in Mauritius while putting other, numerically smaller ethno-cultural groups, into one category: “Hindu,” “Creole,” “Muslim,” and “Other ethnic group.”⁵ Given the very large diversity of the last group, we only pay attention to the comparison of Hindus, Creoles, and Muslims. Unfair group treatment was assessed by asking “How often are [respondent’s ethnic group members] treated unfairly by the government?” Because of a very skewed distribution the four answer options were recoded into a dummy distinguishing “never” (0) from “sometimes”/“often”/“always” (1).

Satisfaction with government performance was measured by asking: “How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say?” Sixteen items, such as “improving living standards of the poor,” “reducing crime,” and “addressing educational needs” were assessed. The possible answer options were “very badly” (1), “fairly badly” (2), “fairly well” (3), and “very well” (4). Based on principal component analyses we distinguished between two components: one indicating satisfaction with how the government handles the economy (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$), and the other indicating satisfaction with how the government handles social welfare provisions (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$; see Appendix – Table A). For both constructs average sum score variables were computed and used in the further analyses.⁶

We controlled for socioeconomic and demographic characteristics that might differ between the three ethno-cultural groups or have been shown to be related to national and ethno-cultural identification (e.g., Moreno, 2006). *Educational level* captured the highest level completed: “no formal schooling” (0), “informal schooling only (including Koranic schooling)” (1), “some primary schooling” (2), “primary school completed” (3), “some secondary school/high school” (4), “secondary school/high school completed” (5), “post-secondary qualifications, other than university, e.g. a diploma or degree from a polytechnic or college” (6), “some university” (7), “university completed” (8), “postgraduate” (9). We treated this variable as continuous. *Living conditions* were assessed by asking “In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions?” The answer scale ranged from “very bad” (1), “fairly bad” (2), “neither good nor bad” (3), “fairly good” (4), to “very good” (5). *Age* was measured in years. For *gender* a dummy variable contrasted men (0) with women (1).

Finally, we also controlled for potential social desirability effects by considering whether the participants thought the survey was commissioned by the government. At the end of the interview, the open question “Who do you think sent us to do this interview?” was asked. We recoded the answers into “government” (1) versus “non-government” (0).

Study 2

The main variables and controls were measured with the same items as in Study 1. For *evaluation of government’s performance* two similar components were constructed as in Study 1, although the set of items was slightly different (see Appendix – Table B).

Unlike in Study 1, we additionally controlled for *same ethno-cultural background of interviewer and respondent* by making a distinction between belonging to the same ethno-cultural group (1) or not (0).⁷

Analyses

Study 1

To examine the relationships of ethno-cultural group membership and the political variables with relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification, while controlling for the above-mentioned variables, we first performed an ordinal regression analysis in SPSS while cases with missing values were listwise deleted. The test of parallel lines showed that the regression coefficients were significantly different between the two specifications of the self-identification variable ($\chi^2_{with_controls}$ (11) = 31.73, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{without_controls}$ (6) = 22.80, $p < .001$), which is why we ultimately conducted a multinomial regression analysis and reported these findings below. The main relationships were similar in models with and without control variables so only the results including control variables are shown.

Study 2

We used the same procedure as in Study 1 for examining the correlates of relative national versus ethno-cultural identification. Again, multinomial regression analyses

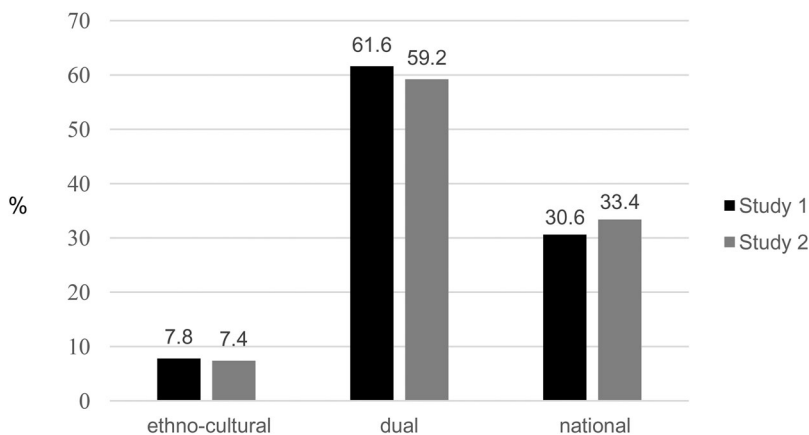


Figure 1. Bar chart with percentages of relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification.

were necessary because the tests of parallel lines in ordinary regression analyses showed that the regression coefficients were significantly different between the two specifications of the self-identification variable ($\chi^2_{with_same_controls_study1}$ (11) = 42.40, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{with_additional_control}$ (12) = 41.80, $p < .001$; $\chi^2_{without_controls}$ (6) = 28.15, $p < .001$).

Results

Description of self-identification

Study 1

In line with the expectation, most of the respondents indicated a dual national and ethno-cultural self-identification (62%). Nonetheless, 31% self-identified only or primarily as a member of the nation and 8% only or primarily as a member of their ethno-cultural group (see Figure 1).⁸

Study 2

The findings regarding the frequencies of relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification are very similar to those in Study 1 (see Figure 1). As expected, the majority of respondents reported dual self-identification.

Correlates of self-identification

Study 1

Table 1 presents the results of the multinomial regression analysis for Study 1. It shows the likelihood of dual versus ethno-cultural self-identification and the likelihood of national versus dual self-identification. We report the results per independent variable and we discuss to what extent the findings are similar or different for both comparisons.

With regard to the ethno-cultural groups, and as expected, Creoles, as the group that is not officially recognized by the national government, were more likely than Hindus and Muslims to have a national compared to dual self-identification. At the same time,

Table 1. Results from multinomial regression analyses with relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification as dependent variable, Study 1 ($N = 1003$).

	Dual self-identification (vs. ethno-cultural)		National self-identification (vs. dual)	
	B (SE)	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Exp(B)
Ethno-cultural group (ref. Creole)				
Hindu	.29 (.41)	1.33	-.74 (.19)***	.48
Muslim	-1.15 (.33)***	.32	-1.31 (.25)***	.27
Other	.40 (.67)	1.49	-.56 (.28)*	.57
Unfair treatment	-.67 (.29)*	.51	-.57 (.17)***	.56
Government economy	.01 (.26)	1.01	-.05 (.15)	.95
Government societal	.97 (.37)**	2.64	-.51 (.20)*	.60
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age	-.00 (.01)	1.00	.00 (.01)	1.00
Female	.28 (.26)	1.32	-.39 (.15)**	.68
Education	.13 (.09)	1.14	.07 (.05)	1.08
Living conditions	-.10 (.13)	.90	.27 (.08)***	1.31
Government survey	-.27 (.27)	.77	.37 (.15)*	1.45

Note. Nagelkerke's Pseudo $R^2 = .17$. Unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standard errors (SE) and odds ratio (Exp(B)) presented. In a model without the control variables, the regression coefficients of the main variables were similar as in this model (Nagelkerke's Pseudo $R^2 = .14$).

their likelihood of ethno-cultural compared to dual self-identification did not differ significantly from the one of Hindus and was lower than Muslims' likelihood of ethno-cultural self-identification.

Regarding the evaluation of the government, perceived unfair treatment of the own ethno-cultural group was related to a lower likelihood of dual than ethno-cultural identification, as well as a lower likelihood of national than dual self-identification. Furthermore, a better evaluation of the government's performance in the societal domain was related to a higher likelihood of dual versus ethno-cultural self-identification, and a lower likelihood of national self-identification compared to dual identification. Perceived government's economic performance was unrelated to self-identification.

None of the control variables was significantly related to the likelihood of dual self-identification versus ethno-cultural self-identification. National self-identification was only more likely than dual among men (versus women), people with relatively better living conditions, and people who thought the government had commissioned the survey.

Study 2

Table 2 shows the results of the multinomial regression analyses for Study 2. Model 1 includes the same variables as those presented in Study 1, and Model 2 includes the additional control variable related to interviewers' ethno-cultural background.

As in Study 1, Creoles were more likely than Hindus and Muslims to have a national compared to dual self-identification, although the first difference was only marginally significant once the ethnic background of the interviewer was taken into account ($p = .052$). This latter variable was not related to the likelihoods of dual and national self-identification. Also, Hindus and Creoles again did not differ in their likelihood of dual self-identification, and Muslims were less likely than Creoles to have dual self-identification.

Table 2. Results from multinomial regression analyses with relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification as dependent variable, Study 2 (N = 949).

	Model 1				Model 2			
	Dual self-identification (vs. ethno-cultural)		National self-identification (vs. dual)		Dual self-identification (vs. ethno-cultural)		National self-identification (vs. dual)	
	B (SE)	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Exp(B)
Ethno-cultural group (ref. Creole)								
Hindu	.37 (.41)	1.45	-.49 (.20)*	.61	.43 (.42)	1.54	-.40 (.21)	.67
Muslim	-.80 (.37)*	.45	-1.46 (.26)***	.23	-.77 (.37)*	.46	-1.42 (.27)***	.24
Other	.20 (.57)	1.22	-.59 (.27)*	.55	.15 (.57)	1.16	-.64 (.27)*	.53
Unfair treatment	-1.34 (.36)***	.26	.08 (.16)	1.08	-1.32 (.36)***	.27	.09 (.16)	1.09
Government economy	.20 (.29)	1.22	.56 (.16)***	1.75	.20 (.29)	1.22	.56 (.16)***	1.76
Government societal	-.17 (.30)	.84	-.61 (.18)***	.54	-.20 (.30)	.82	-.62 (.18)***	.54
<i>Control variables</i>								
Age	.03 (.01)**	1.03	-.01 (.01)	.99	.03 (.01)**	1.03	-.01 (.01)	.99
Female	.05 (.27)	1.05	-.57 (.15)***	.57	.05 (.27)	1.05	-.56 (.15)***	.57
Education	.23 (.10)*	1.26	.09 (.05)	1.09	.23 (.10)*	1.26	.09 (.05)	1.09
Living conditions	.02 (.15)	1.02	-.16 (.09)	.85	.03 (.15)	1.03	-.16 (.09)	.85
Government survey	-.14 (.29)	.87	.20 (.16)	1.23	-.12 (.29)	.88	.22 (.16)	1.25
Interview same ethno-cultural background					-.20 (.29)	.82	-.30 (.17)	.74

Note. Nagelkerke's Pseudo R²_{model,1} = .17; Nagelkerke's Pseudo R²_{model,2} = .17. Unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standard errors (SE) and odds ratio (Exp(B)) presented. In a model without the control variables, the regression coefficients of the main variables were similar as in this model (Nagelkerke's Pseudo R² = .12).

As in Study 1, perceived unfair treatment of one's ethno-cultural group by the government was related to a lower likelihood of dual than ethno-cultural self-identification but was not significantly associated with the likelihood of national compared to dual self-identification. In Study 2 and in contrast to Study 1, a more favorable evaluation of the government's societal performance was not significantly related to a higher likelihood of dual versus ethno-cultural self-identification. However, this evaluation was still related to a lower likelihood of national than dual self-identification. Similar to Study 1, perceived government's economic performance was not significantly related to dual compared to ethno-cultural self-identification, while it was, in contrast to Study 1, related to a higher likelihood of national than dual self-identification.

Discussion

In trying to make an empirical contribution to the continuing debate about national unity and cultural diversity, we examined relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification among the three largest communities in Mauritius. Mauritius is a highly diverse society in which all groups have roots in other parts of the world, and the country is considered to be an example of a truly successful diverse society (Eriksen, 2004). However, intergroup tensions and frictions are not absent and everyday reality can differ from the national multicultural mosaic discourse (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2015). In this specific context, we aimed, first, to assess the extent to which national and ethno-cultural group allegiances can go together. Second, we examined whether relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification varies with ethno-cultural group membership, perceived treatment by the government, and the evaluations of governmental performances.

Using two nationally representative datasets (Afrobarometer Data 2012, 2014) we found that most Mauritians self-identified in terms of their nation and ethno-cultural group without leaning more toward the one or the other. In line with the national discourse of unity in diversity (Eriksen, 1994; Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2015), combining both group memberships into a sense of self appears to be common. The proximity of national elections (Study 2, compared to Study 1) did not make a difference in this, which might indicate that the national discourse and the political best-loser system make that ethno-cultural competition is relatively low in Mauritian society (Eifert et al., 2010).

Instead of using one ordinal scale indicating increasing national self-identification toward one end and decreasing ethno-cultural self-identification toward the other end, statistical analyses indicated that ethno-cultural versus dual self-identification was different compared to dual versus national self-identification. In line with the expectations, we found in both studies that dual compared to national self-identification was less likely among Creoles than among Hindus and Muslims. It is likely that being member of a group that is not officially recognized in the constitution but rather classified as part of the General Population, in combination with the internal diversity of the Creole group, makes national self-identification more likely than dual self-identification among Creoles compared to Hindus and Muslims.

Furthermore, people who felt that the government treated their ethno-cultural group unfairly, were more likely to only self-identify as an ethno-cultural group member. The findings in Study 1 further indicate that people who felt that their ethno-cultural group was treated unfairly were also more likely to have dual than national self-identification, but in Study 2 this relationship was not significant. Overall, this pattern of findings suggests that perceived governmental group bias forms a potential threat to people's sense of (dual) national belonging in a country that presents and understands itself as a multicultural mosaic. Perceived unfair treatment seems to foster a stronger focus on one's ethno-cultural community and a moving away from a shared sense of national belonging.

The results concerning the evaluation of the government's performance as a potential explanation of relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification were rather mixed. Little support was found for the expectation based on instrumental theories (Berg & Hjerm, 2010) that people would lean more toward national self-identification when they have a more favorable view about the government's performance. It might be that these government evaluations are relevant for people's degree of national pride and commitment rather than for their self-identification, because favorable views might especially invoke feelings of national pride. The only significant finding that was consistent across both studies is that a more favorable evaluation of the government's performance in the social domain was related to a lower likelihood of national versus dual self-identification. In this domain, differences between ethno-cultural communities might be relatively prevalent and a positive evaluation of the government's performance implies that these differences are (implicitly or explicitly) taken into account. Further research could investigate this in more detail, for example by focusing on policies for specific ethno-cultural groups.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is that we cannot make any empirical claims about the direction of influence. For example, perceived governmental performance and actions were related to self-identifications but without longitudinal data we are not able to determine whether the one influences the other, or rather whether there are mutual influences. However, by using two nationally representative datasets collected two years after each other we were able to assess the stability of the findings and the importance of various correlates and possible outcomes of different forms of self-identification.

A second limitation concerns the restricted number of items available for some of the measures. In collecting large-scale datasets there are almost always various researchers involved, requiring a tradeoff between the number of topics covered and the number of questions that can reasonably be presented to participants. Thus, the advantages of collecting data among a large national sample has to be balanced with the number of questions that can be asked. For example, in the current sample, self-identification was measured with a single question whereas national and ethno-cultural group identification could also be measured with multiple items. Furthermore, except for perceived treatment of one's ethno-cultural group by the government, the questions about the government performances were not specifically related to ethno-cultural diversity issues.

However, despite the somewhat limited measures, a relatively clear and largely similar pattern of findings emerged across the two national datasets.

Conclusion

There is a continuing debate about the importance of establishing a sense of national belonging within culturally diverse societies. Some argue that a shared sense of nationhood is part of the solution to the lack of social cohesion and unity that cultural diversity would bring (Goodhart, 2013). Others claim that a society cannot ignore the demands of cultural diversity because this would provoke resistance, create suspicion and threaten the very unity that is required for a functioning society (e.g., Modood, 2007). This debate is mainly conducted in Western countries that try to accommodate immigrants and to manage the resulting cultural diversity. However, the questions involved are more general and should be examined in a range of national contexts, including highly diverse societies such as Mauritius.

Mauritius represents an understudied context that has its idiosyncrasies and limitations but we have tried to argue and show that taking up less known cases can broaden our perspective and make us aware of our hidden and limiting assumptions, such as the way in which ethnicity and multiculturalism are thought of and function in Western nations compared to Mauritius (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2015). This study shows that most people in Mauritius self-identify as members of both their nation and ethno-cultural group. This indicates that a dual identification in which both group allegiances are combined can become the dominant societal pattern in a society. However, perceived fairness of how the government treats one's ethno-cultural group and the specific ethno-cultural group to which one belongs were important for people's relative national versus ethno-cultural self-identification. Thus, even in a society that presents itself as a multicultural mosaic it matters to which ethno-cultural group one belongs and whether the government is seen to favor one group over the other. These findings indicate that a successful multicultural society needs to take into account how people perceive the functioning of the government and the different ethno-cultural communities to which they belong.

Notes

1. Besides Hindus and Muslims, the Mauritian constitution recognizes Sino-Mauritians as a separate group (about 3% of the total population according to a 1989 estimate; U.S. Library of Congress n.d.). Everyone who does not belong to one of these three groups is classified as belonging to the General Population although in daily life distinctions are made between, for example, Franco-Mauritians and the relatively large group of Creoles. We did not include Sino-Mauritians as a separate group in this study given its relatively small size.
2. The other questionnaires were administered in English (3%), French (.1%), or another language (.3%).
3. We had the option to weigh cases but did not do so because the weight variable is based on calculations including the population of Rodrigues.
4. We checked a recoding into an alternative three-point scale: combining the three middle answer categories into one and keeping the two end-categories, only ethno-cultural and only national, as separate ones. However, this alternative had a lower correlation with the original

variable (Kendall's tau-b = .83) and only a very few respondents self-identified as members of the ethno-cultural group only ($N = 14$).

5. Included in the "Other" category are "Chinese," "Euro-Mauritian (white)," "Marathi," "Tamil," and "Telegu."
6. Respondents who answered two or less of the items constituting a component were assigned a missing value for that component.
7. Interviewers were Hindu (52% of interviews), Creole (15%), or Muslim (33%).
8. See Appendix – Table C for all descriptive results, for all respondents together and per ethno-cultural group.

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