December 2021

The Meritocracy Conundrum in Sub-Saharan Africa

Nicholas Alozie
Arizona State University

The Meritocracy Conundrum in Sub-Saharan Africa

Nicholas O. Alozie
Arizona State University, USA

The United Nations Development Program's Global Center for Public Service Excellence (GCPSE) has observed that "meritocracy in public services has a significant impact on public servants' motivation," and warned that "a motivated and trusted public service will be essential for successful achievement of the 2030 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)." This, at a time when lack of meritocracy is a recurrent theme on the list of obstacles to sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). From Kenya to Nigeria, to South Africa, there is no SSA nation where (re)discovering meritocracy is not on top of the policy agenda. Yet, observing the confusion that ensues when most countries' elites debate meritocracy, it is not apparent that many have a clear understanding of the scope of the problem given the paucity of systematic research on the subject. This research investigates three dimensions of the meritocracy question in SSA: the extent of mass orientation to the meritocracy ideology; the contemporary status of mass orientation to the meritocracy ideology; and the factors that explain inter-personal differences in orientation to the meritocracy ideology. It finds that, while orientation varies among individuals and across countries, mass orientation is robust—notwithstanding the fact that anti-meritocracy forces are contending powerfully and chipping away at the very foundations of meritocracy. It concludes that the challenge facing SSA in enthroning meritocracy does not hinge on the capacity to bathe SSA publics with more abstract prescriptions of the meritocracy creed with a view to expanding mass orientation: there is enough of that already. Rather, it hinges on the capacity to rein-in powerfully contending anti-meritocracy forces.

Keywords: Meritocracy, Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, development, rationality, efficiency

*T*he absence of meritocracy[1] is both a popular refrain of critical observers and recurrent theme on the list of obstacles to good governance, institutional dexterity and, ultimately, sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Ahlerup, Baskaran, & Bigsten, 2016). Meritocracy's absence, some contend, promotes inefficiencies by under- developing and underutilizing human capital, undercutting and obstructing capacity building, stifling innovation, celebrating mediocrity, and fostering corruption and resource waste (UNDP, 2015; Tangwa, 2010). Popular commentary conveys the salience of the meritocracy challenge as it dominates current discourse on SSA's development and social change (Amusan, 2016; Otti, 2016; Spio-Garbrah, 2016; Olowu, Barkan, & Ngʹethe, 2004).

---

[1]A social system in which people attain positions of power based on their talents, abilities, and performance—rather than the myriad of other factors typically grouped as particularism—including their money, family connections, nepotism, tribalism, ethnicity, regionalism, religiosity, party loyalty, and political clientelism.

3

Yet, for a supposedly decisive catalyst, the attention paid to meritocracy in SSA has been largely fleeting—confined primarily to its repercussions for public management (Amusan, 2016; UNDP, 2015). Rarely discussed is the broader sociological imperative of mass orientation to the meritocracy creed. Given the nexus between public opinion as shared value, public policy, and community outcomes, generally (Burstein, 2003), it would appear that an important step to any realistic discourse on meritocracy, especially as it is linked to ongoing efforts to increase social efficiency across SSA countries, should embrace assessment of the reservoir of the meritocracy ideology (MI) in the region's mass publics. In other words, does the meritocracy creed resonate with the ordinary Sub-Sahara African? For a social milieu already overburdened by the cultural legacy of particularism[2], focus on the broader sociological imperative can address compelling questions ranging from the lack of meritocracy in public life itself to the explanations for inter-personal differences in orientation to MI.

This research focuses on three facets of the sociological dimension of the meritocracy question in SSA. First, it probes the extent of mass orientation to MI and, in so doing, delineates the contemporary status of mass orientation to MI. Second, it identifies and clarifies the effects of factors that explain inter-personal differences in orientation to MI. Finally, it illuminates the consequences of the current state of mass orientation to MI. Data are drawn from Pew's 2014 Global Attitudes Survey (Pew, 2014) for seven SSA countries (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda). While these countries do not represent the entire SSA, analyzing them sheds some light on this pivotal subject about which systematic, empirical research is nonexistent. Indeed, given the wide variability of SSA countries culturally, politically, and socially, as observed by Coffé and Bolzendahl (2011), wholesale generalization is neither the impetus, nor is it the sine qua non, of the research. Even if extrapolation were not feasible, and the results are relegated to just the seven countries, systematic analysis of these questions across these countries must be preferable to the kind of vicious cycle of baseless speculation that currently shrouds this subject.

To provide some comparative nuance for SSA's mass orientation profile, data for the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), two of the world's most industrialized nations are also displayed. The results suggest a sufficiently high level of mass orientation to MI, to sustain an environment of meritocracy in SSA. This is apparent whether that orientation is measured independently or in comparison to the USA or UK. At the same time, the data also suggest that anti-meritocracy forces are contending powerfully and chipping away at the very foundations of meritocracy in SSA. Ultimately, this powerful contention becomes the difference between SSA and the USA/UK.

Meritocracy and Nation Building

As societies embrace capitalism and modernization, they expunge traditional arrangements (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart, 1990; Durkheim, 1893). Emphasis on achieving community cohesion shifts from kinship and familial networks (Durkheim, 1893) to those imperatives that support social efficiency (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart, 1990). Max Webber's early writings on management and bureaucracy laid down the roots of meritocracy as the basis of social efficiency. Today, the paradigm that higher levels of efficiency are achieved when individuals are advanced based on talent, abilities, and performance is largely undisputed (Webb 2006). It is encapsulated in MI—even if the meanings and appropriateness (UNDP, 2015; Arrow,

---

[2] These observations are consistent with the classical bureaucratic model that links social efficiency to application of principles of meritocracy. This is the basis of the Western Civil Service model prevalent in the developing world.

Bowles, & Durlauf, 1999), measures (Poocharoen & Brillantes, 2013; Ayers, 2010), and products (Low, 2014; McNamee & Miller, Jr., 2004) of the meritocracy creed itself are still contested[3].

Nations have, either for the exigencies of maintaining internal stability, or, to keep faith with the incessant march toward capitalism and modernization, bought into the dictum that "without the possibility of upward mobility through talent and self-determination, social divisions would become entrenched and ever more bitter" (Daley, 2016, p. 1). Regardless of culture and place, or by whatever peculiar taxonomy it is conveyed—such as the enthralling symbolism of the "American Dream" in the United States then, people are ingrained with the powerfully constructed ethos that theirs:

Is a land of limitless opportunity in which individuals can go as far as their merit takes them.... You get out of the system what you put into it....Getting ahead is based on individual merit, including innate abilities, working hard, having the right attitude, and having high moral character and integrity. (McNamee and Miller, Jr., 2004, p. 1)

These progressive principles, which have since survived both the ferment of the global culture wars and the backlash of Eurocentrism, have been embraced as both the embodiment of meritocracy and part of civic culture. They have been engineered and thoroughly embedded into orthodox social contracts across societies (Webb, 2006) and are drilled into successive cohorts during socialization as the proper path to a good life (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2019; Jorgenson, 2002), although their actual manifestations differ from one polity to another.

Societies, even more traditional enclaves such as those in the Middle East brimming with "wasta" or favoritism (Alghanim, 2014) and SSA still rooted in customs orthodoxy, venerate these doctrines as an ideal transformative tool for human development. They are seen as advancing the public good, and society generally (Lim, 2016). However, the greatest appeal of these doctrines at the societal level as nation states attain the cultural shift consistent with movement toward capitalism (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart, 1990), appears to stem from two intrinsic linkages. One is their obvious connection to liberal—"rational"—democracy (Rawls, 1999). The other is their embodiment of the invisible hand—whereby, they provide prospect for individuals to contribute to the common good, as they prosecute self-interest (Faust, 2015; Brosio, 1994).[4]

Meritocracy and SSA's Nation Building Conundrum
Whatever the original endowment, there is broad agreement that the doctrine of meritocracy as part of both the social contract and civic culture have come under intense pressure in SSA, where the socioeconomic hardship that has hit many countries because of sinking oil prices, poor resource management, widespread elite corruption, China's slowing economy, and political turmoil has created gloom (Swanson & Sieff, 2016). The crisis has been such that those who

---

[3] The author is aware of the sentiments evoked by meritocracy, where, for instance, "a moral or social system in which regard had for noting but merit and in which those lacking merit are disregarded" may offend humanists (Attfield, 1996, p.10). Moreover, the author is also aware of the numerous social issues associated with the general idea of meritocracy, especially the danger of approaching differences as "naturally" occurring, without equal weight to the many forces such as initial endowments and discrimination that structure opportunities and outcomes. While the purpose of this paper is not to vet these debates, one must acknowledge their legitimacy. See also UNDP (2015); Douthat (2018); Morgan, Tumlinson, and Vardy (2018), and Sandel (2021).

[4] As McNamee and Miller Jr. (2004, p. 10) correctly note, "it is generally acknowledged that a pure meritocracy is probably impossible to achieve." Thus, pure meritocracy is not contemplated here, not even for the U.S. (Hayes, 2012; The Economist, 2004).

could, have since emigrated, while many others continue to work to perfect their exit. Those who remain continue to eke out a living the best they can (Morgan, 2010; Okorie, 2015).

While the economic hardship has no doubt been excruciating, what has the capability of doing durable harm to human development (and the social contract, Levy & Kpundeh, 2004) is the pervasive speculation that the dire material conditions are beginning to muddle the human psyche.[5] In particular, the prospect that orientation to MI, however much of it is rooted in SSA to start with, may be mutating into "The Meritocracy Myth"—where what society promises through hard work and personal investment consistently falls short of what it actually delivers—is raising concern.[6] Across SSA, the masses groan under abject poverty, while (ex)public officials and other knaves flaunt their ill-gotten wealth—the former from the widespread looting of their nations' commonwealth (Burgis, 2015).

Everywhere one turns, it seems the returns to "deviance" (using personal connections, cheating, corruption and pilfering, manipulation, and patronage) are outpacing orthodox prescriptions of MI, as the gap between its promise and the reality on the ground about its performance appears irreconcilable. As McNamee and Miller, Jr. (2004) note, this "social gravity" (SG) – that is, the gap between what orthodox MI promises and what it actually delivers - occurs with the appearance of "a variety of non-merit factors that suppress, neutralize, or even negate the effects of merit and create barriers to individual mobility" (p. 1).

Social Theory and SSA's Meritocracy Paradox
Inglehart (2006), Inglehart, Norris, and Welzel (2002), Inglehart and Baker (2000), Inglehart (1990), Inglehart (1977), and Inglehart (1990) offer theories that embody strong predictive typologies for the meritocracy narrative in SSA. Broadly, this body of work contends that the level of a nation's industrialization and economic development affects citizens' value orientation. Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) summarize the premise succinctly:

> ...as nations undergo the process of industrialization and modernization, attitudes and values shift away from concerns about physical and economic security to worldviews that are increasingly rational, tolerant, and trusting. Instead of worrying about how to fulfill basic needs like food, shelter, and safety, people become increasingly interested in issues related to subjective well-being, quality of life, and self-expression (p. 340).

If countries' levels of industrialization and modernization affect their citizens' attitudes and value orientation, and higher levels of industrialization and modernization increase self-expression, then one can expect greater levels of orientation to MI by citizens of more industrialized countries. Based on their tortuous colonial histories, levels of industrialization, and stages on the march toward capitalism, for instance, one could readily predict that the American and British publics would embody higher levels of orientation to MI than SSA publics—the

---

[5] The study of the effect of the material conditions of production and consumption on the human psyche, made famous by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, is a well celebrated line of inquiry (see https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm).

[6] The Meritocracy Myth is defined by McNamee and Miller, Jr. (2004) as the gap between what MI promises and how the system works short of that premised outcome. See News24. "On the Myth of South African Meritocracy" (http://www.news24.com/mynews24/On-the-myth-of-South-African-meritocracy-20140515) for some commentary on Africa.

latter still in their initial transitional phases. Moreover, this may also become more complicated by another crucial catalyst in the SSA context. As Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) also note:

> ...when a nation is regularly faced with political and economic uncertainty and insecurity (as most SSA nations are), people are more likely to support values and norms that emphasize the familiar (citing Inglehart, Norris, & Welzel, 2002). As a result, people in nations that are characterized by a strong survivalist orientation (as most SSA nations are) may be less tolerant of nontraditional ideas and lifestyles (p.340).

The foregoing suggests that the survivalist environment of SSA will discount orientation to MI. Ironically, canvassing MI in the region produces something of a paradox because, while SSA clearly welcomes many attributes of meritocracy—rugged individualism over group affiliation, and other modalities accompanying the march toward industrialization—these are at odds with the region's communal cultural heritage.

Canvassing Meritocracy in Pre-Colonial SSA
SSA traditional beliefs were not consistent with the notion of equality of persons (Tangwa, 2010, p. 8). Nor did the practice of collective action produce a singular form of governance arrangement (Osafo-Kwaako & Robinson, 2013). While scholarly agreement remains that whatever governance arrangements that existed produced a great deal of egalitarianism across the adult population through group membership (Shumway, 2013), there was a sharp social stratification firmly anchored in a culture of privilege, where everyone had his or her place and considerable community resources were expended enforcing those partitions. Royal blood was supposed to have run in a bloodline and it was desirable to maintain the purity of that lineage, as well as make it traceable to ward off impostors. The gallantry ("warrior") blood was restricted to some families and it was crucial to delineate and harness that bloodline for the collective good. The intellectual blood flowed within some families, while other families were artisans. There was also the caste system of individuals thought inferior or less endowed (Aluko, 2002).

Families were ascribed certain roles based on the "natural" endowments they supposedly possessed. Parents supposedly bequeathed them to their posterity through their "genes." These rigid spatial designations also meant that these were communities where initial endowments at birth determined the life-course (Perbi, 1991). They were communities steeped in the purest traditions of Calvinism's doctrine of providence and predestination, where (their own deity) was supposed to have preordained things and had chosen individuals not based on virtue or merit, but by sheer will. People were supposed to embrace their social placement willy-nilly and "play the hand they were dealt."

While "restrictions on social mobility were woven into the fabric of the state" (The Economist, 2004), there was no simple stimulus for rise of stratification (Tuden & Plotnicov, 1970). Once in place, however, many normative factors guided social barriers to entry (Mazrui, 1978)—although their influence varied across space and time. These factors are chronicled to include family background, clan/tribe, gender, age, birth right (particularly being first son or daughter), and, in polygamous settings, both wife and child number (Perbi, 1991). These transformed into rigid social formations such as gender, age, and titled groups, cults and secret societies, and others that formed the bases for community solidarity and action, social cohesion, and exercise of sovereignty.

Of course, this is not to suggest that traditional SSA societies were bereft of meritocracy, however defined. These were environments where inter-tribal conflicts were routine. Thus, personal gallantry at war contributed to stratification of community warriors (Mazrui, 1978, p. 15). Also, success in intra- and inter-community social contests (wrestling matches, pain endurance, such as walking on fires and body piercing/tattooing, lifting and throwing, running and jumping, climbing, canoeing, hunting and angling, confronting danger) and other activities that tested human ingenuity, endurance, and survival instincts served as concrete bases for stratification and group hierarchy (Blackburn, 2006, p. 52). These human feats are not unlike the endeavors in modern competitive events such as the Olympic Games and professional sports. The difference is that these feats, while duly celebrated, did not facilitate inter-group upward mobility. Thus, a great warrior was venerated for his gallantry, which nudged him to the apex of the warrior stratum; however, that could not transpose him to another group stratum, say, the chieftaincy (Perbi, 1991).

Governance was an exclusive preserve that especially did not lend itself to upper mobility through personal achievement. The top position of community leadership was characteristically filled through family lineage and birthright (Perbi, 1991). Governing elites were typically composed of members of the chieftaincy (Antwi-Boasiako & Bonna, 2009), council of elders, or by whatever other nomenclature affixed. As Antwi-Boasiako and Bonna note, "there is no evidence in the limited chieftaincy literature that argues that those who become chief are based on merit" (p. 133). Such positions in the governing elites were pre- determined by family and clan lineage, within which birthright ultimately imposed the final choice (Tangwa, 2010, p. 8).

Canvassing Meritocracy in Post-Colonial SSA

Human societies are always in flux (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart, 1990). Internal imperatives partly explain that flux (Gennaioli & Rainer, 2005; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Mamdani, 1996; Inglehart, 1990; Sheriff, 1974). However, there is consensus that, for better or worse, Africa's contact with Europeans through the duo exogenous forces of colonization and globalization has been the potent animator of SSA's transformation (Amadi, Imo-Ita, & Obomanu, 2016; Falola, 2002; Fredland, 2001). The subsequent "Europeanization" that has left the region dangling between the indigenous and the acquired did not materialize immediately because of the vagaries of colonialism (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2013; Falola, 2002; Mamdani, 1996). However, the combined sustained effects of both catalysts have produced a paradox for meritocracy. On the one hand, Africans are cognizant of their communal cultural heritage (Shumway, 2013). On the other hand, they have also been bequeathed alternative societal arrangements that, although markedly appealing in sundry ways, are evidently at odds with their folkways (Garba, 2012). The strategy for pitching them the new dispensation has been wholesale discounting of that indigenous cultural heritage as "barbarous" and "unprogressive"—an albatross that must be unbundled in place of the bequeathed superior culture, if they are to achieve modernity (Mark, 2011; Falola, 2007; Fredland, 2001; Mazrui, 1978).

Part of this "loftier" culture wrought by colonialism, Tangwa (2010, p. 11) discerns, are the subversive dictatorial systems of control inherited after independence, which African leaders tried to justify by appeal to the need for national unity. Fisher (2012) also cites national unity for Africans' acceptance of the imaginary national borders willed by the colonialists upon their departure. However, the most profound effects of colonialism on meritocracy derived from two decisive catalysts, both imposed by imperialism. One is the imposition of western education (Dauda & Falola, 2016; Garba, 2012; Mazrui, 1978), while the other is introduction of the western career civil service system (Ayee, 2001). Unlike traditional African education anchored

8

on functionalism through apprenticeship that produced adults ready to engage in specifically targeted socioeconomic roles, Garba (2012) observes that western education emphasized examination results and abstract paper qualification, both of which augured well with modernization (Lloyd, 1975). With the introduction of western civil service, the new education system became the benchmark for positioning government bureaucracies and touting meritocracy (Mangan, 1990).

Africa has undergone at least three phases of globalization (Kwame, 2006). According to Kwame, the first, the period of international contacts, involved trade, including the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The second was colonialism, when European powers consolidated their imperialist powers over Africa, perfected about 1884 with the Berlin Conference. The third is the "new" globalization, defined by Giddens (1990, p. 64), as "intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa." The global emphasis on SSA since independence has been on the crises in governance and socioeconomic development (NEPAD, 2012). Given SSA's legacy of parochialism marred by nepotism, tribalism, ethnicity, regionalism, religiosity, party loyalty, and political clientelism (Langer & Ukiwo, 2007), achieving efficiency through spread of good governance remains a priority (UNDP, 2015; Olowu, Barkan, & Ng'ethe, 2004; Ayee, 2001).

SSA is clearly still steeped in ancient customs while it juggles its caustic colonial heritage (Mamdani, 1996). Education and the civil service (including private-sector bureaucratic employment) have provided the greatest platforms for instilling MI in the mass publics (Mazrui, 1978). Although noticeable progress has been made in education, the mass publics remain with little or no access to formal education, with the girl-child still relatively disadvantaged (Watkins, 2013). Much of the pressure from globalization is concentrated on de-politicization of the civil service (UNDP, 2015); however, both the multiplier and trickle-down benefits of the external pressure for change mounted by globalization have permeated the entire political economy (Andrews, 2013; Fredland, 2001). Such pressures have come particularly from international institutions such as the United Nations and its many field organizations (UN), The International Monetary Fund (IMF), to mention just a few.

The foregoing amplifies the two core questions underlying the current research. First, what is the reservoir of mass identification with the tenets of meritocracy? This question is important because it points to what needs to be done at the community level if the reservoir of the tenets of meritocracy is not sufficiently high to anchor community quest for meritocracy. Second, what factors are associated with inter-personal variations in levels of identification with the elements of meritocracy? Unlike the first, this question points to what needs to be done at the margin to elevate adherence to the principles of meritocracy. Combined, these two areas of inquiry form the nexus of action required to enhance meritocracy in SSA.

Data and Methodology

The data are drawn from Pew's 2014 Spring Global Attitudes and Trends Survey (Pew, 2014). The survey covered adults 18 years of age and over across 44 countries. Seven SSA countries were included in the survey (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda). Their sub-samples used in the study are presented in the Appendix. Ultimately, 7052 adults were interviewed in the region. As noted earlier, these seven nations are not posited as representative of the entire SSA region. They happen to be the only SSA countries included in Pew's survey. While these countries deserve to be studied in their own rights, the set of questions on meritocracy enabling this research are unique in that they are not typically asked of mass populations in SSA. The sample is also appealing in that it spans the entire SSA regions, includes

9

both Anglophone and Francophone countries, and showcases both the most populous and largest economies.

Measuring MI and SG

Meritocracy encompasses many abstract notions. However, the most accepted and familiar is the typology that insists that "getting ahead in life" be driven by individual talent, merit, and hard work, as opposed to any form of particularism, such as family background, etc. According to McNamee and Miller Jr. (2004), the two most prominent elements of this typology are educational qualifications and a good work ethic. Question 66 on Pew's survey reads as follows: "I am going to read to you a list of things that might be important for getting ahead in life. On a scale of 0 to 10, in your opinion, how important is it --- to get ahead in life, where 0 means not important at all and 10 means very important?" Choices include:

> A) To have a good education;
> B) To work hard;
> C) To know the right people;
> D) To give bribes;
> E) To be a male;
> F) To belong to a wealthy family; and
> G) To be lucky.

Respondents were also provided with the opportunity of saying "don't know" or to "refuse" to answer. These last two categories lacked enough numbers for separate analysis and were deleted.

McNamee and Miller Jr.'s (2004) two elements of the universal MI are captured by options A and option B (to have a good education and to work hard). Thus, throughout this analysis, these two options are presented as surrogate measures for orientation toward MI. Conversely, items C, D, E, F, and G deviate from the notion of getting ahead being driven by qualifications and personal merit and, therefore, are applied as measures of "deviance" or "social gravity" (SG) factors (McNamee and Miller, Jr., 2004). Since each option is a 0 to 10 scale, the options are taken at their respective means to represent the weight respondents are assigning them with respect to what it takes to get ahead in life. Thus, the closer the score is to 10, the greater the weight being accorded to the item by the respondent. The scores on these options are used to formulate the dependent variables, where higher scores on options A and B are generally held as evidence of stronger orientation toward MI, while higher scores on the rest of the items are conceived as greater orientation toward non-meritocracy.

Explanatory Variables

Several explanatory variables that could impact orientation to MI are included in the analysis. They include gender, measured as a dummy with men taking the value of 1 and women 0; age, measured as the actual age of the respondent; education, measured as a four-part dummy indicating no formal, primary, secondary, and post-secondary education [7]; marital status, with those married/cohabiting taking a value of 1, and 0 otherwise; employment, where those with paid employment score a 1, and 0 otherwise; religion is a three-part dummy with Christian, Muslim, and Other as categories; urbanization, with urban residents coded 1, others 0; and the number of biological children the respondent has had also as a continuous variable.

---

[7] Education for the analytical models is measured as a continuous value, starting with 1 for no formal education.

Data are reported on household income. However, such data cannot capture consumption levels in SSA, where most are informally employed, and income is not calculated and declared for purposes of taxation. As suspected, an initial diagnosis of the income variable reveals many missing observations relaying, in part, this confusion about reporting income in such a survey. To better capture consumption, like other studies in SSA (e.g., Isaksson et al., 2014), the study used Question 148, asking respondents whether they had a television, refrigerator, computer, car, bicycle, motorcycle or scooter, and radio in working order in their households. Ownership of these items in SSA clearly capture social status. An additive score of economic status was developed awarding each item a score of 1. Because of its overpowering position, the presence of a car was awarded six points, making it possible for one who has all items to score six points and no combination of scores can exceed six without a car being present. At the same time, the presence of a car guarantees more than six points. This scoring was arbitrary, but it captures level of consumption much better than anything the standard income variable could produce.

Several other factors, some instrumental variables, are also included. Question 2a presents respondents with a "ladder of life" with a range of 0 to 10, where zero represents the worst possible life, while 10 represents the best and asks respondents to locate where they feel they stand now. Question 9 asks respondents their feeling about the current economic situation of the country, whether good or bad. Those saying good are coded 1, others are coded 0. Question 12 asks: "What would you recommend to a young person in our country today who wants a good life? Should they move to another country, or stay in survey country? Respondents recommending moving to another country are coded 1, those recommending staying put are coded 0. Question 13b asks the respondent to agree or disagree with the statement "Success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control." Respondents who agree are coded as 1, those who disagree are coded 0.

Estimation
Three kinds of insights are of interest. The first is to establish patterns of mass orientation to MI. This is accomplished using cumulative descriptive statistics that provide direct comparisons. At this level of analysis, data for both the United Kingdom and the United States are brought in to provide context. The second kind of insight allows for estimating factors that account for inter-personal variations in orientation to MI. This requires inferential statistics. Since the dependent variable is a continuous range of 0 to 10, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression is used to estimate the multivariate models. The third and final insight pertains to establishing factors that explain meritocracy and social gravity distance, defined as the difference between the averages of the two combined MI options, minus the averages of the total score on the four social gravity factors. Here, OLS multivariate estimation is also employed. All models incorporate country fixed-effects designed to capture the effect of level of industrialization and modernization (Inglehart, 1977). South Africa, despite its violent political history of apartheid, serves as the reference category throughout, having had the most industrialized economy in the region for long.

The estimated models are of the form:

$$Y(M)i = \alpha = \beta Xi + e \qquad (1)$$

11

Where, M is the yth respondent's score on MI and X is the vector of the explanatory variables explaining that score for the yth respondent, including the country fixed-effects. In the instance of the ideological distance score, the models estimated are of the form:

$$Y(M\text{-}S)i = \alpha = \beta Xi + e \qquad (2)$$

Where, M-S is the yth respondent's ideological distance score (meritocracy minus Social distance) and X is the vector of the explanatory variables explaining that score, including country fixed-effects.

Empirical Results

The sampling profile for the data appears in the Appendix, while the basic statistics are presented in Table1. SSA Men and women are well represented in both the regional and country sub-samples. The typical respondent was 35 years of age. Men are more likely to have both formal and higher education. The struggle for girl-child education that has occurred in the last two decades appears to have closed the gender gap in primary school education.

However, the gender gaps on overall access and attainment of higher education are still evident. As should be expected in a patriarchal region, women are less likely to be formally employed, but more likely to be married or cohabiting. Consistent with the spread of Christianity in SSA, the respondents were predominantly Christian, with close to half resident in urban areas. The typical respondent has had about four biological children. The respondents score themselves halfway on the "ladder of life" and half rates their country economy as good. About 30 percent would recommend that a young person who wants a good life to exit their countries, while almost 60 percent agree that success in life is determined by forces outside our control. These latter variables display no significant gender gaps.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics (Weighted Means)

Variable	All	*SD*	Men	*SD*	Women	*SD*
Gender (men)	50.8%		50.8%		49.1%	
Age	35.2	14.8	35.7	15.3	34.6	14.3
Education						
No formal education	20.9%		17.1%		24.8%	
Primary education	22.5%		21.5%		23.5%	
Secondary	46.9%		49.4%		44.4%	
Post-secondary	9.6%		12.0%		7.2%	
Marital status	52.8%		51.9%		53.7%	
Economic status[a]	3.1	2.7	3.3	2.8	2.9	2.6
Employment status	43.8%		50.5%		36.9%	
Religion						
Christian	64.7%		63.5%		65.6%	
Muslim	29.9%		29.9%		29.9%	
Other religion	5.5%		6.6%		4.3%	
Urban status	43.2%		41.3%		45.1%	
Biological children	3.8	12.6	3.9	13.2	3.7	12.1
Ladder of life	5.4	2.1	5.4	2.1	5.5	2.1
Country economy good	47.8%		48.6%		46.9%	
Advice: move to another country	28.7%		29.1%		28.2%	
Success outside forces	59.9%		61.4%		58.3%	
N	7052		3585		3467	

[a]Range is 0-12 for all three groups (All, Men, Women).

12

Mass Orientation to MI in SSA

The first sets of data showing mass orientation to MI in SSA are displayed in Table 2. The data in Table 2 are designed to provide two kinds of insights. The first, using the SSA portion of the table, showcases mass orientation to MI in SSA. The second, using both the United Kingdom and United States portions of the table, offers some comparative analyses, analyses that provide some benchmark for assessing the results for SSA. Looking first at the results for SSA, the two items capturing orientation to MI—education (Mean=8.7) and hard work (Mean=8.6)—exhibit very high scores out of a maximum of 10 points each. These results suggest high levels of orientation to MI in SSA. At the same time, many items of SG also display robust loadings. Specifically, knowing the right people (Mean=8.1) and being lucky (Mean=8.2) exhibit scores directly comparable to those of MI. The only item which clearly lags is giving bribe (Mean=2.7).

Table 2 Weighted Means on Measures of MI and SG

Item	Sub-Saharan Africa			United States			United Kingdom		
	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women
Education	8.7	8.7	8.6	8.9	8.8	9.2	8.4	8.6	9.0
Work hard	8.6	8.7	8.6	9.3	9.2	9.4	9.1	8.8	9.3
Know people	8.1	8.1	8.1	7.8	7.8	7.8	7.8	7.9	7.7
Give bribes	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.6	2.9	2.3
Male	6.2	7.1	5.3	5.4	5.1	5.6	4.9	4.5	5.4
Belong to	7.5	7.6	7.5	6.0	5.9	6.1	6.2	6.1	6.3
Get lucky	8.2	8.2	8.2	5.2	5.3	5.2	6.1	6.0	6.2
N	7052	3585	3467	1002	488	514	1000	462	538

NOTE: Mean scores are out of a maximum score of 10 points. Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

The data for gender demonstrates a similar distributional pattern, portending that SSA men and women view meritocracy comparably. The only item that signifies a gender gap is the factor of being male—mean for men=7.1, and that of women=5.3. Surprisingly, SSA men are more inclined than women to see being male as advantageous. This is an important finding for the gender studies literature, as it is contrary to popular speculation that SSA women have become broadly sensitized to the issue of gender inequities in their patriarchal social milieu. Perhaps the outcome is explained by socialization in SSA that still largely differentiates (and justifies, often with both culture and religion) between gender roles. Taken together, though, the big picture that emerges from the data is the suggestion that while mass orientation to MI is robust in SSA, SG factors—especially knowing the right people, being lucky, and coming from a wealthy family—are equally strong. Thus, at least as regards mass orientation, SSA is not confronted with the binary specter of orientation or lack of orientation to MI. Instead, the data suggests a domain of fierce competition between elements of meritocracy and non-meritocracy.

The result for "being lucky" needs a little more explication. Quite a bit of literature has developed on the explosive growth of prosperity religion in SSA (see Gifford, 1990 for synthesis). This is a strand of Christianity that emphasizes material prosperity and consumerist orientation. The point of relevance with the "being lucky" phenomenon observed in these data is the fact that while prosperity pastors preach wealth accumulation and consumerist orientation, they do not necessarily augment their preaching with hard work as underlying that success. Instead, they bombard their parishioners with the specter of immediate and miracle wealth, fostered by "sowing seed" in church. Given the proportion of respondents in the data set identifying themselves as Christians, perhaps the results on "being lucky" is tapping some of this prosperity religion phenomenon of wealth from other than hard work.

Let us now turn to the comparative data for the U. K. and the U. S. As already noted, both countries are much further along in capitalism and modernization than SSA. The data do not evince robust differences on orientation to MI. If anything, the story worthy of note emerges with the SG measures, where the scores for SSA are robust, while those for the U.S. and U.K. are relatively weaker. Evidently, to the extent SSA differs from these two countries, it does not revolve on the American and British masses being more strongly oriented to MI per se. Rather, it revolves around the fact that the SG factors appear to be weighing more heavily, and competing more intensely, with MI in SSA than in either country.

The data in Table 3 and Figure 2 display country-specific data on orientation to MI. Except in Tanzania where the general scores for the elements MI drop below 8.0, all other SSA countries show strong orientation to MI. While inter-country variations are clearly small, the strongest orientations are in Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa. Regardless of the degree of orientation to MI, the scores for SG items are high across the board, mirroring the observation for SSA above that SG factors are competing quite aggressively with MI (see graphical illustration presented in Figure 2). To the extent one could speak of SSA countries where this competition between MI and SG is not as acute, South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania stand out. Knowing the right people and getting lucky are particularly salient across the board. Just like the analysis in Table 2, giving bribes remained weak throughout. This weakness may owe to the fact that bribery is associated more with single, spontaneous transactions with shorter-term results than the kind of long-term, continuous yielding, associated with the other gravity factors.

Figure 1 Combined Elements of the Meritocracy Ideology in Sub-Saharan Africa
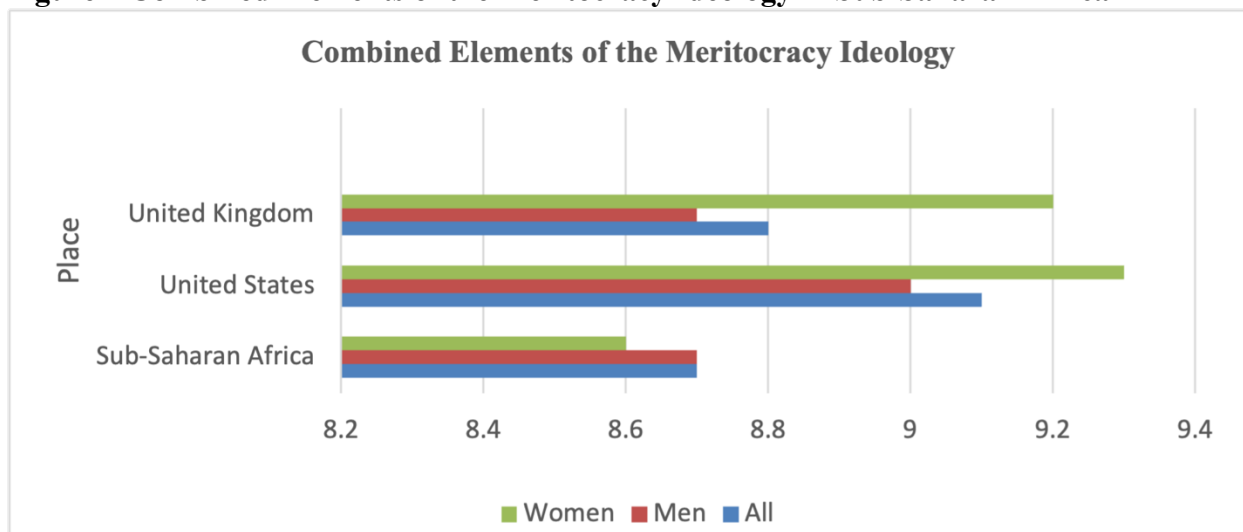
An important observation in Table 3 is the virtual absence of a gender gap. This absence obtains for both MI and SG. The only gender gap occurs on the item of being male. In every country, men scored higher on this item, indicating that men see their gender more of an issue than women do. Not only is this general inclination manifest across the board, but these gaps are quite robust in places, being as much as 3 points in Tanzania, 2.7 points in Ghana, and 2.5 points in Nigeria. As already noted, this is a significant finding in a patriarchal region where women are thought to be debilitated by men's supremacy.

14

**Table 3 Weighted Means of Measures of MI and SG (Country Profiles)**

	Ghana						Kenya					
	All		Men		Women		All		Men		Women	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Education	9.1	1.9	9.0	2.1	9.1	1.9	8.0	2.4	7.9	2.5	8.1[1]	2.4
Work hard	9.1	1.5	9.1	1.5	9.0	1.5	8.1	2.2	8.0[1]	2.2	8.2[1]	2.1
Right people	8.6	2.0	8.7	1.9	8.5	2.1	7.4	2.3	7.4	2.3	7.5	2.3
Give bribes	2.3	3.4	2.3	3.2	2.3	3.1	2.8	2.9	2.7	2.9	2.8	2.8
Be male	5.3	3.9	6.6	3.5	3.9	3.7	5.2	2.9	5.7	2.9	4.6	2.9
Wealthy family	8.3	2.3	8.4	2.2	8.2	2.5	6.5	2.6	6.5	2.6	6.5	2.6
Be lucky	8.6	2.1	8.7	2.2	8.6	2.2	7.2	2.4	7.3	2.3	8.6	2.2

	Nigeria						Senegal					
	All		Men		Women		All		Men		Women	
	(N=1014)		(513)		(501)		(1000)		(509)		(491)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Education	9.4	1.3	9.4	1.2	9.4	1.2	9.4[2]	1.3	9.4[2]	1.3	9.4	1.2
Work hard	8.9	1.6	8.9	1.6	8.7	1.6	8.9[2]	1.6	8.9[2]	1.5	8.7	1.6
Right people	8.8	1.6	8.8	1.6	8.2	2.1	8.3	2.1	8.3	2.1	8.2	2.1
Give bribes	2.9	3.8	2.9	3.7	2.7	2.9	2.7	2.9	2.7	3.0	2.7	2.9
Be male	7.1	3.4	8.3	2.6	6.6	3.3	6.8	3.2	7.1	3.0	6.6	3.3
Wealthy family	8.4	2.1	8.4	2.1	7.2	2.9	7.1	2.9	7.1	2.9	7.2	2.9
Be lucky	8.9	1.7	8.9	1.7	8.7	2.0	8.6	2.1	8.5	2.1	8.7	2.0

	South Africa						Tanzania					
	All		Men		Women		All		Men		Women	
	(1000)		(500)		(500)		(1016)		(503)		(513)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Education	9.1	1.6	9.2[2]	1.5	9.0	1.6	7.9	2.4	8.0	2.4	7.9	2.4
Work hard	8.6	2.0	8.7	2.0	8.5	2.0	7.9	2.3	8.1[1]	2.2	7.9	2.4
Right people	8.4	2.1	8.4	2.2	8.5	2.1	6.9	2.6	6.9	2.6	6.9	2.6
Give bribes	4.0	3.8	3.9	3.8	4.1	3.9	2.1	2.9	2.2	3.0	2.0	2.9
Be male	5.9	3.4	6.8	3.1	5.1	3.5	6.4	3.1	6.9	2.9	5.6	3.1
Wealthy family	7.3	2.9	7.4	2.9	7.2	2.9	6.8	2.6	6.7	2.7	6.8	2.7
Be lucky	7.6	2.7	7.6	2.7	7.6	2.6	7.3	2.5	7.3	2.5	7.4	2.6

	Uganda					
	All		Men		Women	
	(1007)		(557)		(450)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Education	9.0	1.8	9.1	1.7	9.0	1.9
Work hard	8.8	2.0	8.8	2.0	8.7	2.0
Right people	8.3	2.1	8.3	2.2	8.3	2.2
Give bribes	2.2	2.9	2.2	2.9	2.3	2.9
Be male	6.9	3.5	8.3	2.5	5.3	3.8
Wealthy family	8.3	2.5	8.4	2.3	8.2	2.7
Be lucky	9.1	1.8	9.1	1.9	9.1	1.8

NOTE: All scores range from 0 to 10, except where otherwise indicated. M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation. [1]Scores range from 1 to 10. [2]Scores range from 2 to 10.

15

Explaining Inter-Personal Differences in Orientation to MI
The results of the three multivariate OLS regression models explaining inter-personal differences in orientation to MI are displayed in Table 4. The first (All) is for the entire sample, while the other two are men's and women's sub-samples, respectively. The macro-evaluative statistics across all three models (F-Ratios and Adjusted R^2s) are robust, signifying that the independent variables are successful in explaining inter-personal differences in MI scores. Looking first at the specification for "All", neither gender, age, education, urbanism, nor number of children explain differences in orientation to MI. Conversely, lived life factors such as being married, having formal employment, economic standing, and religion are associated with orientation to MI. Marriage, employment, and higher economic status all boost orientation to MI. Respondents who see themselves as doing well in life are strongly oriented to MI, while those who generally score their country's economic performance high are less oriented to MI. Expectedly, advice to young people looking for a good life to exit the country is negatively linked to MI, correctly signaling lack of faith in the system. The country fixed effects confirm the variability of levels of orientation to MI, with Kenya and Tanzania trailing other countries.

Figure 2 Meritocracy v. Social Gravity in SSA
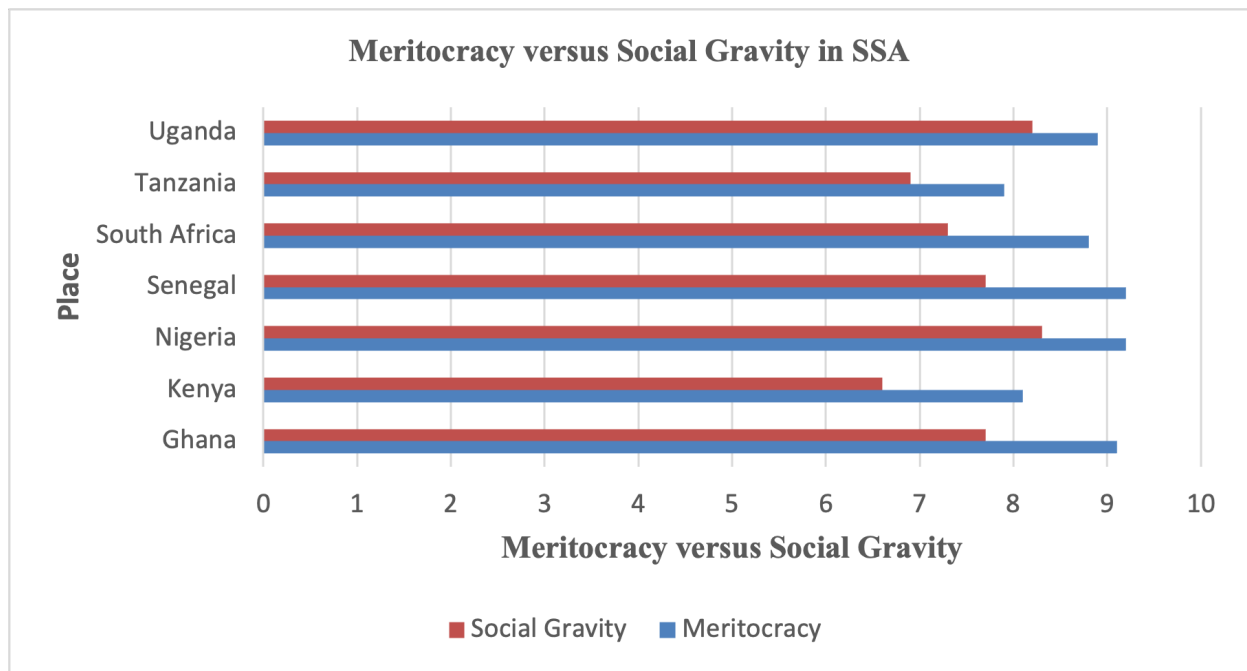
The sub-sample specifications indicate gender interaction effects. While higher economic status is linked to more robust orientation to MI for men, being in a relationship, educational attainment, and formal employment provide that linkage for women, although these linkages are clearly weaker than the linkage for men. These analyses further reveal that, while religion is not a factor for men, it discounts orientation to MI among women who are not Christians or Muslims. Finally, although men and women who view themselves as having done well in life are more oriented to MI, that relationship is obviously stronger for men. Only in Kenya and Uganda are the gender gaps in orientation robust.

16

Figure 3 Combined Elements of the Meritocracy Ideology in Sub-Saharan Africa
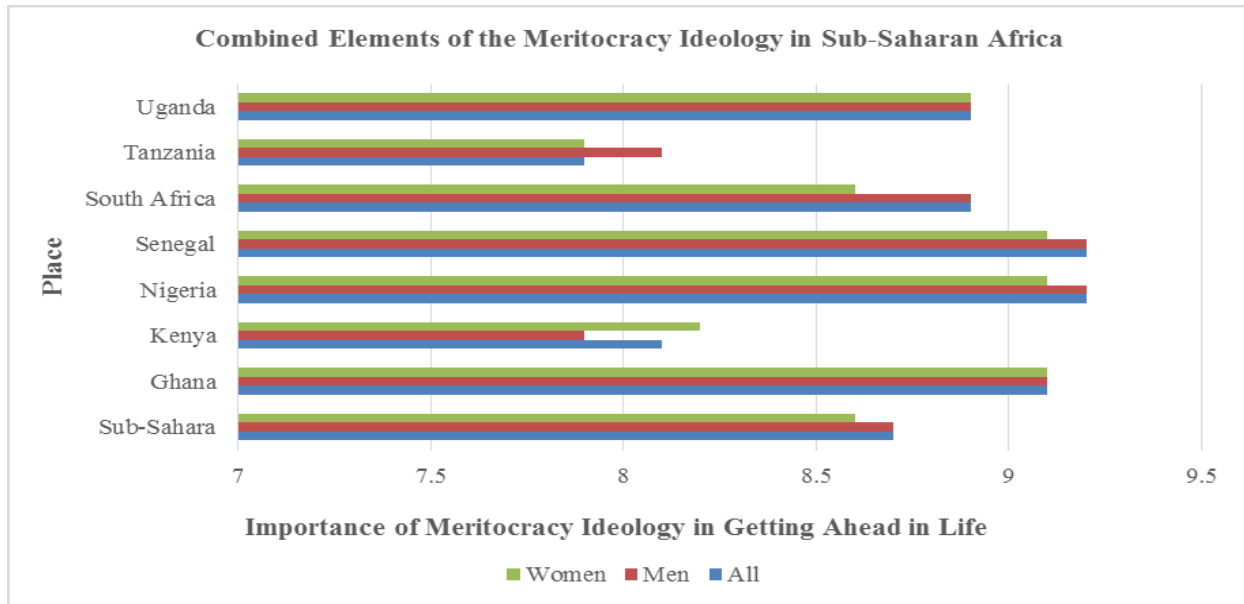
Table 4 OLS Analysis of Factors Explaining MI Score

Variable	All		Men		Women	
Gender (male)	-.01	(0.39)	-		-	
Age	-.02+	(1.78)	-.04*	(2.05)	-.01	(0.52)
Marital status (married)	.04*	(2.79)	.05*	(2.43)	.04+	(1.87)
Education	.04**	(2.95)	.03+	(1.68)	.06*	(2.53)
Employed	.02+	(1.67)	.01	(0.31)	.03+	(1.74)
Urban	.02	(1.43)	.03	(1.42)	.01	(0.40)
Underage children	-.03*	(2.01)	-.04*	(2.86)	-.01	(0.43)
Economic status	.02	(1.35)	.02	(0.79)	.02	(1.09)
Religion[a]						
Muslim	-.02	(1.16)	-.02	(0.81)	-.02	(0.71)
Other religion	.01	(0.72)	.04+	(1.95)	-.02	(0.96)
Success forces beyond control	-.01	(0.73)	-.02	(1.33)	.00	(0.23)
Position on "ladder of life"	-.01	(0.44)	.00	(0.04)	-.01	(0.58)
Country's economy doing well	-.01	(0.84)	-.01	(0.79)	-.01	(0.36)
Want a good life: move	.00	(0.33)	-.01	(0.28)	.00	(0.21)
Country fixed-effects[b]						
Ghana	.08***	(4.70)	.07*	(2.69)	.09***	(3.83)
Kenya	.10***	(5.48)	.11***	(4.37)	.10***	(3.96)
Nigeria	.02	(0.95)	.03	(1.21)	.01	(0.32)
Senegal	.08***	(3.80)	.08**	(2.87)	.08**	(2.59)
Tanzania		.08***	.11***	(4.09)	.07*	(2.64)
Uganda	.07***	(3.73)	.08**	(2.92)	.06*	(2.46)
Constant	0.07	(0.16)	0.42	(0.85)	-0.41	(0.64)
R^2 (x100)	14.0		16.0		17.0	
Adjusted R^2 (x100)	11.0		10.0		11.0	
F-Ratio	4.76***		2.86***		2.89***	
N	6610		3342		3268	

NOTE: Dependent variable is the average of MI minus the average of SG. Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients. Figures in parentheses are t-statistics. a=Christianity is the reference category. b=South Africa is the reference category.
+$p<.10$; *$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$. (Two-tailed tests).

17

Explaining Inter-Personal Distance between MI and SG

The final analysis conducted estimates the factors that explain the MI-SG orientation distance. As already noted, the dependent variable for this analysis is MI minus SG. Thus, a negative effect means that variable decreases the gap between MI and SG, favoring disposition to SG. Conversely, a positive effect means the variable heightens that gap, boosting orientation to MI. These results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5 OLS Analysis of Factors Explaining MI-SG Gap

Variable	All		Men		Women	
Gender (male)	-.01	(0.39)	-		-	
Age	-.02+	(1.78)	-.04*	(2.05)	-.01	(0.52)
Marital status (married)	.04*	(2.79)	.05*	(2.43)	.04+	(1.87)
Education	.04**	(2.95)	.03+	(1.68)	.06*	(2.53)
Employed	.02+	(1.67)	.01	(0.31)	.03+	(1.74)
Urban	.02	(1.43)	.03	(1.42)	.01	(0.40)
Underage children	-.03*	(2.01)	-.04*	(2.86)	-.01	(0.43)
Economic status	.02	(1.35)	.02	(0.79)	.02	(1.09)
Religion[a]						
Muslim	-.02	(1.16)	-.02	(0.81)	-.02	(0.71)
Other religion	.01	(0.72)	.04+	(1.95)	-.02	(0.96)
Success forces beyond control	-.01	(0.73)	-.02	(1.33)	.00	(0.23)
Position on "ladder of life"	-.01	(0.44)	.00	(0.04)	-.01	(0.58)
Country's economy doing well	-.01	(0.84)	-.01	(0.79)	-.01	(0.36)
Want a good life: move	.00	(0.33)	-.01	(0.28)	.00	(0.21)
Country fixed-effects[b]						
Ghana	.08***	(4.70)	.07*	(2.69)	.09***	(3.83)
Kenya	.10***	(5.48)	.11***	(4.37)	.10***	(3.96)
Nigeria	.02	(0.95)	.03	(1.21)	.01	(0.32)
Senegal	.08***	(3.80)	.08**	(2.87)	.08**	(2.59)
Tanzania	.08***		.11***	(4.09)	.07*	(2.64)
Uganda	.07***	(3.73)	.08**	(2.92)	.06*	(2.46)
Constant	0.07	(0.16)	0.42	(0.85)	-0.41	(0.64)
R^2 (x100)	14.0		16.0		17.0	
Adjusted R^2 (x100)	11.0		10.0		11.0	
F-Ratio	4.76***		2.86***		2.89***	
N	6610		3342		3268	

NOTE: Dependent variable is the average of MI minus the average of SG. Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients. Figures in parentheses are t-statistics. [a]Christianity is the reference category. [b]South Africa is the reference category.
+$p<.10$; *$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$. (Two-tailed tests).

Again, the robust F-ratios and adjusted R^2s convey that the models are successful in explaining the gap. Focusing first on the results for the macro-model (All), marital status, education, and employment enhance the gap in favor of MI, while age and the presence of children diminish it in favor of SG. The country fixed effects indicate that, except for Nigeria, status as a South African narrows the gap significantly across the board. This means, compared to other countries, the gap between orientation to MI and SG is narrowest among South Africans. This outcome also appears to be true in the gender sub-samples, which produced some important interaction effects. Age and the presence of biological children decrease the gap for men, in favor of SG, while marital status, education, and "other" religion increases the gap, in favor of

MI. For women, none of the factors produces a negative effect, while marital status, education, and employment all exert positive effects favoring MI. If there are notable gender effects in Table 5, they will be on the results for education and employment. Education is not only the factor with the greatest positive effect for women, but that effect is greater than that for men. Employment shows a weak positive effect for women, but no effect at all for men.

Summary and Conclusions
The analyses reported here anchor on self-reported data. Accordingly, the author invokes all caveats associated with the collection, use, and interpretation of such data, although the tight research design and data collection techniques outlined by PEW greatly minimize sources of data contamination. Secondly, the research is grounded on data from seven SSA countries. As already noted, these countries are not necessarily representative of all SSA. Nor are these results being postured as representing the entire region. This necessitates a warning over external validity or the prospects of generalization of the findings. Given the nature of the baseline results, there is no reason to anticipate that the policy implications of the research can only be confined to these seven countries. Still, care must be taken about generalization.

The levels of orientation of Sub-Saharan Africans to MI differ. Country effects on orientation to MI differ as well. Moreover, mass orientation to MI is alive and well among SSA's mass publics. Finally, the levels of mass orientation to MI observed among SSA, American, and British publics do not differ markedly, although SG factors are more pronounced with SSA publics. The first two of these observations are hardly profound and, are, in fact, predictable. The third that suggests that mass orientation to MI is robust in SSA is what will surely raise eyebrows—a surprise that arises from the fact that the grim realities on the ground on meritocracy do not match the levels of orientation to MI observed in these data. Obviously, the explanation for this divergence touches upon cultural, economic, and political imperatives. One that will likely garner consensus is the distortion that has arisen from SSA's political culture of excessive clientelism and spoils putting a wedge between the governors and the governed. As noted above, because of the underdevelopment of the private sector, government is the only game in town in many countries. To maintain their control, the ruling oligarchies centralize government and manipulate both the mass publics and the resultant meagre private sector.

There is a second important matter associated with the finding of high levels of mass orientation to MI in SSA. It concerns the speculation that perhaps the lack of meritocracy derives from a corresponding lack of mass orientation to MI. This research crystalizes the picture. It has become apparent that the question of whether there is mass orientation to MI in SSA is not the right one. Mass orientation levels are adequate to create a fertile environment for meritocracy to flourish. Rather, the precise question is what can be done to sustain mass orientation to MI and its vast implications for the social contract in the face of intense rivalry from SG forces. This presumption signals the futility of misplaced government policies lacking in either the courage to defy the privileged elites, or that have misdiagnosed the problem as absence of mass orientation to MI. Simultaneously, it opens the terrain up for appropriate policy action. An example of these misplaced policies was Nigeria's "Do the Right Thing: Transform Nigeria," a national social (re)engineering campaign initiated in 2005. It fell short of its promise (Constant 2010), supporting the proposition in these data that the challenge awaiting SSA countries regarding their prospects for cultivating a more meritocratic social milieu does not hinge on their capacity to mobilize the mass media to bathe their publics with more abstract prescriptions of the meritocracy creed with a view to expanding mass orientation.

19

Such a flanking attack will yield little dividend. Instead, the prospect hinges on their capacity to rein-in powerfully contending anti-meritocracy forces, chief among which appear to be pervasive nepotism and trusting on sheer luck, the latter obviously partly a product of ubiquitous overzealous charismatic/prosperity religiosity. About the latter, while many believe prosperity religion, especially the pervasive notion that one can flourish through prayer and accompanying miracles alone absent hard work, has taken its toll on the work ethic in SSA countries, governments have done very little to bridge the widening gap between the preaching and reality. In all cases, governments appear to have been cowed by incessant invocation of the Bible verses "to not touch God's anointed" by evangelists and other purveyors of the 'get-rich-quick-without-work' spectacle. However, there are many ways governments can intervene with public information and institutional design to begin to correct, as well as reorient, their mass publics away from such dogmas short of "touching the anointed".

Given the diagnosis proffered by these data, then, more appropriate policies should mount a direct and frontal attack on anti-meritocracy forces. They could begin with enactment and vigorous enforcement of anti-nepotism and discrimination laws and policies of the kinds already undertaken by industrialized countries. For instance, the U.S. Congress repudiated and stepped in with an anti-nepotism statue, when President John F. Kennedy selected his brother, Robert Kennedy, to serve as Attorney General of the U.S. That law has subsequently checkmated President Donald Trump's recent desire to employ family members in the U.S. government. Congress has also enacted other progressive statues such as Title IX education and Title VII Equal Employment Opportunity Acts and established the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to police the Acts, all of which have variously advanced meritocracy. Other policy options are those implied by the results for education and formal employment, the latter both in the public and private sectors. Besides its immediate benefits, education may become the game changer for cohort replacement, which some have suggested might well be the only hope for transforming SSA.

There is a necessity to expand the private sector and grow the economy to enlarge the size of the "pie." Much of the desperation in SSA appears to be linked to the frantic zero-sum scenario of too many people competing for too few opportunities, much of it within the limited public sector. In Nigeria, for instance, only 5%-15% of candidates who are eligible, and apply, get admitted to university annually (Aluede et al., 2012). This means 85 of every 100 applicants will not secure admission—admission that, given the country's constrained structure of opportunity, decides much of the life-course. With the stakes so high, it is not surprising that parents and students do "whatever it takes" to scale through, including duplicitous examinations, bribery, and illicit sex. Similar levels of desperation are known in the area of securing employment as well. For decades now, the emphasis in many SSA countries has been over fighting for what is available, as opposed to trying to expand its size to reach the teeming population. The size of both the unemployed and underemployed should awaken governments to what must be done to stabilize their nations and resuscitate meritocracy.

At another level, two gender issues highlighted by the results are worthy of reiteration—not only for their theoretical implications—but for their obvious policy implications as well. The first concerns the gender gap in the perceived importance of maleness. In a tough patriarchal setting like SSA, where women are not only socialized to behold men's supremacy but live it in every aspect of their daily lives, one would anticipate the male advantage to be a foremost sore point for women responding to a survey pertaining to meritocracy. Instead, and surprisingly, SSA women do not elevate the issue to the level of saliency that one would have ordinarily

anticipated. Given the overwhelming, uncontested role of men as both heads and breadwinners of their households in the SSA social milieu, one explanation might be that women have not elevated this issue as part of their social consciousness at the grassroots. That is, it may echo among highly educated and professional SSA women at the vanguard of the women's movement, but not among SSA women at the grassroots. The second issue concerns the effects of education and formal employment. It was not surprising that women benefited the most from both influences. Those who agitate for girl-child education and women's formal employment outside the home ground their case partly on the multiplier effects of both factors. The results presented here extend those effects to orientation toward meritocracy, a factor some would conceive as a strategic need required by women to uplift themselves.

Much more needs to be known about meritocracy in SSA. One study alone cannot cover the entire spectrum of what needs systematic data gathering and analysis. For instance, one area that needs urgent attention is the interaction of social and organizational culture and meritocracy. Another is tribalism, intergroup dynamics, and meritocracy. All said, though, the SSA social milieu is in dire need of cultural change when it comes to the discourse on meritocracy. In the least, that change should touch upon the two dimensions of the distress over meritocracy. As I noted much earlier in this research, my concern was not to engage the broader moral debate over the worthiness of meritocracy as currently conceived and practiced. As that debate has been perceived, one must concede it is a worthy discourse insofar as our conception of the "good" society. However, such a debate has its place. My more immediate concern pertains to the rational aspect of meritocracy as it is linked to bureaucratic arrangements and administrative efficiency. At least, this is the aspect of meritocracy that has been bequeathed by colonization and pushed through globalization to SSA countries as the right path to industrialization which, in turn, drives modern democratic governments and administrative processes throughout the region. It is clear from the research reported here that individuals in SSA do not pose a dilemma to the fundamental precepts of meritocracy and thus should not be in the forefront of such cultural change. Rather, the cultural change required the most appears to be about what should be occurring in what many have long identified as the Achilles hill of SSA underdevelopment— namely, the fragile, highly politicized, and massively corrupted social institutions and the impenitent elites who control them.

References

Ahlerup, P., Baskaran, T., & Bigsten, A. (2016). Government impartiality and sustained growth in Sub-Saharan Africa. *World Development,* 83, 54-69.

Alghanim, O. K. (2014). Meritocracy in the modern world. *The Huffington Post* (November 26). Retrieved from (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/omar-k-alghanim/ meritocracy-in-the-modern_b_6212390. html).

Aluede, O., Idogho, P., & Imonikhe, J. (2012). Increasing access to university education in Nigeria: Present challenges and suggestions for the future. *The African Symposium,* 12, 3-13.

Aluko, M.O. (2002). African cultural systems. In M.O. Shoremi & M.O. and Oyekunle, A.A. (Eds.), *The social structure of contemporary African societies.* Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.

Amadi, L. A., Imo-Ita, I., & Obomanu, E. F. (2016). Culture mutation in the era of globalization: Africa in perspective. *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies,* 2, 25-38.

Amusan, L. (2016). Spoils and meritocracy: Post-Apartheid challenges in the South African public service. *Journal of Public Administration,* 51, 293-305.

Andrews, M. (2013). Elitism, meritocracy, and governance in South African companies. Retrieved from (http://matthewandrews.typepad.com/matt andrews/2013/02/elitism-meritocracy-and-governance-insouth-african-companies.html).

Antwi-Boasiako, K. B., & Bonna, O. (2009). *Traditional institutions and public administration in democratic Africa*. Indiana: Xlibris Corporation.

Arrow, K., Bowles, S., & Durlauf, S. [Eds]. (1999). *Meritocracy and economic inequality.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Artfield, R. (1996). Preface. In G. Tangwa (Ed.), *Democracy and meritocracy: Philosophical essays and talks from an African perspective (p.* 10). India: Biblical Impex Pvt. Ltd.

Ayee, J. R. A. (2001). Civil service reform in Ghana: A case study of contemporary reform problems in Africa. *African Journal of Political Science,* 6, 1-41.

Ayers, W. (2010). *To teach: The journey of a teacher*. New York: Teacher's College, Columbia University.

Blackburn, R. (2006). Other theoretical models of psychopathy. In C. Patrick (Ed.), *Handbook of Psychopathy* (pp. 35-57). New York: Guilford Press.

Brosio, R. A. (1994). *A radical democratic critique of capitalist education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Burgis, T. (2015). *The looting machine*. London: HarperCollins Publishers.

Burstein, P. (2003). The impact of public opinion on public policy: A review and an agenda. *Political Research Quarterly,* 56, 29-40.

Cech, E. A. & Blair-Loy, M. (2010). Perceiving glass ceilings? Meritocratic versus structural explanations of gender inequality among women in science and technology. *Social Problems,* 57, 371-397.

Coffe, H., & Bolzendahl, C. (2011). Gender gaps in political participation across Sub-Saharan African nations. *Social Indicators Research,* 102, 245–264.

Constant, L. (2010). Cultural reorientation in Africa: Nigeria's 'Project Runway'. *The Huffington Post* (May 21). Retrieved from (http://www.huffingtonpost .com/linda-constant/cultural-reorientation-in_b_585305.html).

Daley, J. (2016). A meritocracy is a complex, dangerous thing—Theresa may must tread carefully. *The Telegraph*. (October 8). Retrieved from (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news /2016/10/08/a-meritocracy-is-a-complex -dangerous-thing--theresa-may-must-tre/).

Dauda, B. & Falola, T. (2016). *Representative bureaucracy, meritocracy, and nation building in Nigeria*. New York: Cambria Press.

Douthat, R. (2018). The case against meritocracy: An aristocracy that can't admit it. *The New York Times* (Dec. 8). Retrieved from https://www.nytimes .com/2018/12/08/ opinion/sunday/wasps-meritocracy-ross-douthat.html

Durkhiem, E. (1893). *The division of labour in society*. (see Lewis A. Coser, 1984. NY: Free Press).

Falola T. (2007). The Amistad's legacy: Reflections on the spaces of colonization. Fourth Annual Distinguished AMISTAD Lecture, Central Connecticut State University, 14(2). Retrieved from http://www.ccsu.edu/afstudy/upd).

Falola, T. (Ed.). (2002). *Colonial Africa, 18885-1939, Vol. 3 of Africa*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.

22

Fisher, M. (2012). The dividing of a continent: Africa's separatist problem. *The Atlantic* (Sept. 10). Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/ international/archive/2012/09/the-dividing-of-a-continent-africas-separatist-problem/262171/).

Fredland, R. A. (2001). *Understanding Africa: A political economy perspective*. Burnham Inc., Publishers

Faust, M. (2016). *The case for meritocracy*. Raleigh: Lulu Press, Inc.

Garba, S. J., & Saniya, J. (2012). The impact of colonialism on Nigerian education and the need for e-Learning technique for sustainable development. *Journal of Educational and Social Research,* 2, 53-61.

Gennaioli, N. & Rainer, I. (2005). Precolonial centralization and institutional quality in Africa. Mimeo. Retrieved from https://studylib.net/doc /8687721/precolonial-centralization-and-institutional-quality-in-a...).

Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gifford, P. (1990). Prosperity: A new and foreign element in African Christianity. *Religion,* 20, 373-388.

Hayes, C. (2012). *Twilight of the elites: America after meritocracy*. New York: Broadway Paperbacks.

Inglehart, R. (1977). Long term trends in mass support for European unification. *Government and Opposition,* 12, 150-177.

Inglehart, R. (1990). *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Inglehart, R. (2006). Mapping global values. *Comparative Sociology,* 5, 114-136.

Inglehart, R. & Baker, W.E. (2000). Modernization, cultural change, and the persistence of traditional values. *American Sociological Review,* 65, 19-51.

Inglehart, R., Norris, P. & Welzel, C. (2002). Gender equality and democracy. *Comparative Sociology,* 1, 321-345.

Jorgenson, J. (2002). Engineering selves: Negotiating gender and identity in technical work. *Management Communication Quarterly,* 15, 350-380.

Kwame, Y. (2006). The impact of globalization on African culture. Retrieved from (http://www.csus.edu/org/capcr/docs/2006%20conference%20proceedings-papers/yeboah%20kwame.pdf).

Langer, A., & Ukiwo, U. (2007). Ethnicity, religion and the state in Ghana and Nigeria: Perceptions from the street. *CRISE Working Paper No. 34*. University of Oxford: Center for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity.

Levy, B., & Kpundeh, S. (Eds.). (2004). *Building state capacity in Africa: New approaches, emerging lessons*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Lim, L. (2016). Knowledge, c*ontrol and critical thinking in Singapore: State ideology and the politics of pedagogic reconceptualization*. New York: Routledge.

Lloyd, P. C. (1975). *Africa in social change*. Hamondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.

Low, D. (2014). Good meritocracy, bad meritocracy. In D. Low, & S. Vadaketh (Eds.), *Hard choices: Challenging the Singapore consensus* (pp.48-58). Singapore: NUS Press.

Mamdani, M. (1996). Citizen and subject: *Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mark, Ç. T. (2011). British colonial education policy in Africa. *Internal Journal of English and Literature,* 2, 190-194.

23

Mazrui, A. A. (1978). *Political values and the educated class in Africa*. Berkeley: University California Press.

McNamee, S. J., & Miller, R.K., Jr. (2004). The meritocracy myth. *Sociation Today,* 2, 1-13.

Michalopoulos, S., & Papaioannou, E. (2013). Pre-Colonial ethnic institutions and contemporary African development. *Econometrica,* 81, 113-152.

Morgan, J., Tumlinson, J., & Vardy, F. (2018). The limits of meritocracy. *IMF Working Paper 231.*

NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency. (2012). *Africa's decade of change: Reflections on 10 years of NEPAD.* Retrieved from http://www.un.org/en/ africa/osaa/ pdf/pubs/2013 decadeofchange. pdf).

Okorie, F. (2015). The political mess of human trafficking. *NigeriaWorld*. Sunday, May 24.

Olowu, D., Barkan, J.D., & Ngꞌethe, N. (2004). Reflections. In B. Levy & S. Kpundeh (Eds.), *Building State Capacity in Africa: New Approaches, Emerging Lessons (pp.*365-375). Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank.

Osafo-Kwaako, P., & Robinson, J. A. (2013). Political centralization in pre-colonial Africa. *Journal of Comparative Economics,* 41, 6-21.

Otti, A. (2016). It is our turn: A discussion between mediocrity and meritocracy. *This Day Newspaper Nigeria* (June 6).

Perbi, A. (1991). Mobility in pre-colonial Asante from a historical perspective. *Research Review NS,* 7, 72-86.

Pew Research Center. (2014). Global attitudes and trends: Spring 2014 questionnaire. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Poocharoen, O., & Brillantes, A. (2013). Meritocracy in Asia Pacific: Status, issues, and challenges. *Review of Public Personnel Administration,* 33, 140-163.

Rawls, J. (1999). *A theory of justice (Rev. Ed.)*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Sandel, Michael J. (2021). *The tyranny of merit: Can we find the common good?* New York: Picador.

Sheriff, A. H. (1974). The dynamics of change in pre-colonial East African societies. *African Economic History Review,* 1, 7-14.

Shumway, R. (2013). Pre-colonial political systems. In T. Spear (Ed.), *Bibliographies in African Studies*. Oxford. New York: Oxford University Press.

Spio-Garbrah, E. (2016). Meritocracy must take over from kleptocracy, for Africa's social transformation. Retrieved from http://sites.dmaxstudios .com /spiogarbrah/downloads/ africantransformation.pdf).

Stockwell, A. J. (1990). Examinations and empire: The Cambridge Certificate in the colonies, 1857-1957. In J.A. Magan (Ed.), *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism* (pp. 203-220). Oxford: Manchester University Press.

Stoddart, K. (2016). How to live the good life without giving up on the rat race. *The Guardian* (September 02). Retrieved from (https://www.theguardian. com/money/2016/sep/2).

Tangwa, G. B. [ed.]. (2010). *Road companion to democracy and meritocracy*. Langaa RPCIG, Bamenda, Cameroon.

The Economist. (2004). Meritocracy in America: Ever higher society, ever harder to ascend. Washington, DC: *The Economist*. Dec. 29th.

Tuden, A., & Plotnicov, L. [Eds.]. (1970*). Social stratification in Africa.* New York: Free Press.

24

UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence. (2015). Meritocracy for public service excellence. Retrieved from www.undp.org/content/ dam/undp/library/capacity.../ Meritocracy-PSE.pdf?).

Watkins, K. (2013). Too little access, not enough learning: Africa's twin deficit in education. Brookings. Retrieved from (https://www.brookings.edu/ opinions/too-little-access-not-enough-learning-africas-twin-deficit-in-education/).

Webb, A. K. (2006). *Beyond the global culture war*. New York: Routledge.

Appendix

Composition of the Country Samples

Respondents	All	Men	Women
All	7052	3585	3467
Ghana	1000	486	514
Kenya	1015	517	498
Nigeria	1014	513	501
Senegal	1000	509	491
South Africa	1000	500	500
Tanzania	1016	503	513
Uganda	1007	557	450
(Non SSA)			
United Kingdom	1000	462	538
United States	1002	488	514

Author's Note. A Previous version of this paper was presented at the 59th Annual Meeting of the Western Social Science Association, San Francisco, California, April 12-15, 2017. The paper analyzes data from the 2014 Spring Pew Global Attitudes and Trends Survey. The views expressed in the paper are the author's and have no connection to Pew, its agents, or institutions. Please direct correspondence to: Nicholas Alozie, Faculty of Social Science, College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, Arizona State University, 7271 E. Sonoran Arroyo Mall-MC 2780, Mesa, Arizona 85212-6415, USA. Email: alozie@asu.edu.

Authors' Biography
Dr. Nicholas Alozie is a professor of public policy and head of the faculty of social science at Arizona State University's Polytechnic Campus, Mesa, Arizona, USA. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy from The University of Texas at Dallas. His research focuses on policy issues associated with women and minority political development, urban politics, economic development broadly defined, and the socialization of modern information technologies.