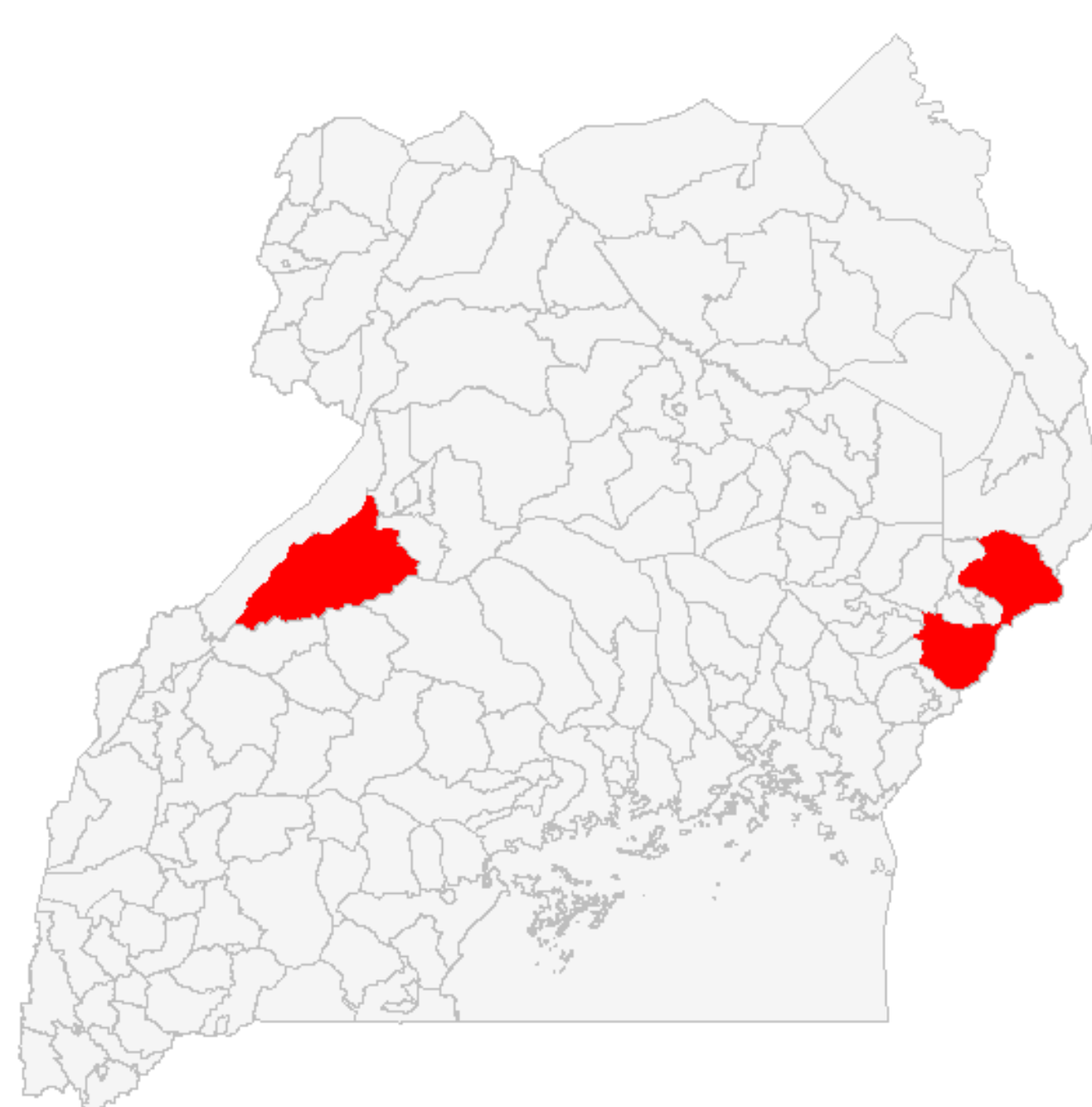


# On Dangerous Ground: Evidence on the link between land insecurity and violence

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## 1 Background

Recent explanations for land conflict – especially in Africa – have focused on the role of customary land institutions in channeling violence along ethnic group lines. These property rights institutions grant full access based on membership in ethnic communities.



Case: Uganda  
Survey and interviews conducted in four districts: Buliisa, Hoima, Kapchorwa, and Mbale. Oil production in the western region is resulting in rapidly increasing land values.

## 2 Research Questions

- Why does land conflict fall along ethnic lines in some contexts and not others?
- Which institutional rules are closely associated with conflict, and do any reduce its likelihood?
- What explains variation within customary communities?
- Do landholders respond to land competition by “investing” in their customary identity and community?

## 3 Theory

- Collective action is costly, and customary leaders are resource-constrained
  - They cannot respond equally to all land claims
- These leaders also have a political incentive to respond to land claims made by committed community members
- Where landholders anticipate land competition, they engage with their customary community *before* threats appear

## 4 Data & Key Variables

- Sample: 980 individual survey respondents, data collected November-December 2018
- Dependent variables: ethnic attachment, frequency of contacting clan head in past 3 months
- Controls: age, gender, education, ethnic outsider
- A list experiment: “In the past year, tell me how many of the following activities you have done? Helped a friend or neighbor plant crops; Attended a community meeting; Bought a new piece of land; Traveled outside of Uganda”
  - Treatment includes: “Threatened violence against someone because of a dispute over land”

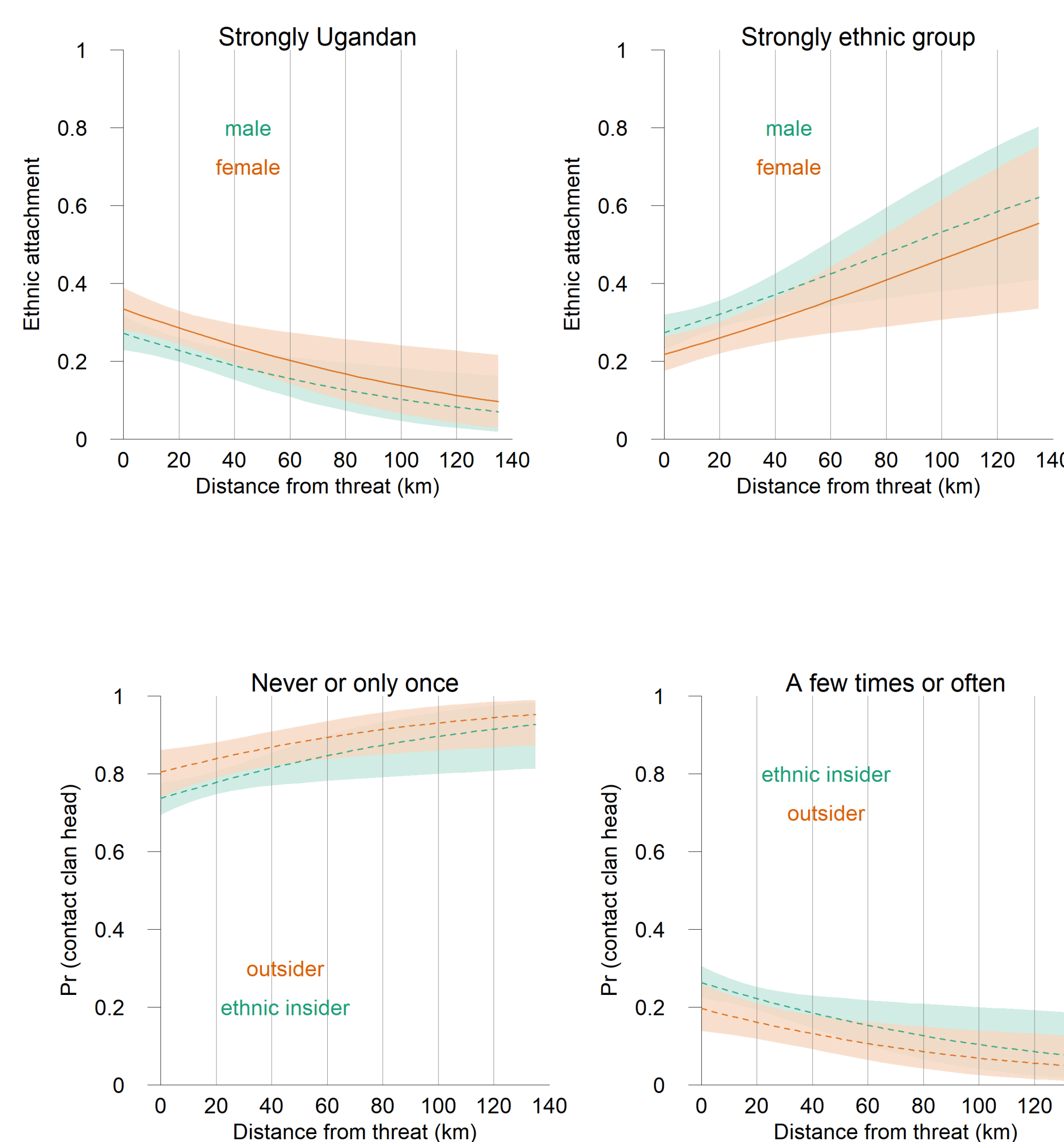
Table 1: Do you identify more as your ethnic group or as Ugandan?

	Strongly ethnic group	More ethnic group	About the same	More Ugandan	Strongly Ugandan
Buliisa	75	13	0	9	142
Hoima	1	34	163	22	32
Kapchorwa	154	42	8	20	22
Mbale	27	13	65	38	98

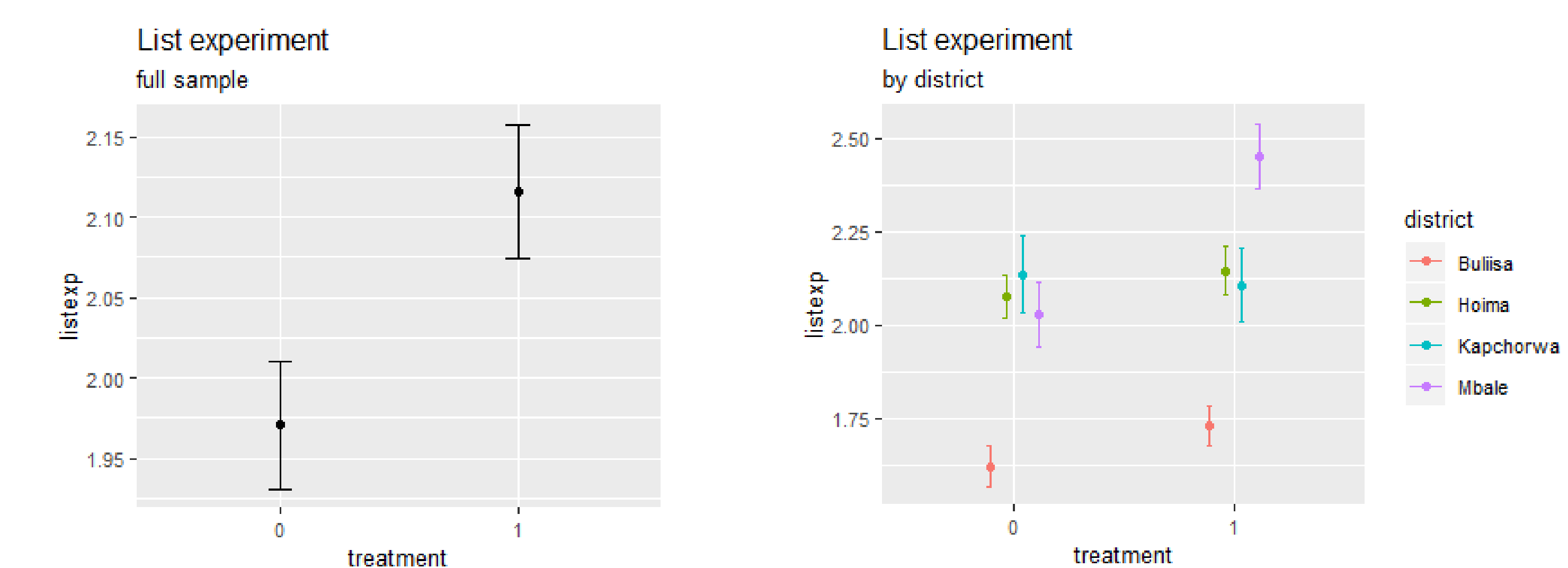
Table 2: How often in the past 3 months have you contacted your clan head?

	Never	Only once	A few times	Often
Buliisa	154	31	50	5
Hoima	151	60	19	21
Kapchorwa	98	59	60	23
Mbale	118	86	32	5

## 5 Findings



Figures above show predicted probabilities for the extreme values of ethnic attachment (strongly Ugandan and strongly ethnic group), as well as combined categories of frequency of contacting one’s clan chief (never or only once & a few times or often).



Experiment shows that land conflict takes place, but not necessarily where existing theory would suggest.

## 6 Discussion

- Institutional theory of ethnic land conflict finds mixed support in the Ugandan context
- Interview evidence suggests that Buliisa District’s history of communal property explains a greater reliance on collective defense of property – and thus, greater likelihood of landholders investing in their customary community
- Interviews also suggest that when customary leaders can effectively monitor their community members, landholders routinely contribute to their community to maintain status, rather than reacting only when land rights are threatened
- This work suggests that while customary land tenure can channel conflict along ethnic lines, this relationship is contingent on the specific rules in place, and in some cases the rules can defuse conflict before it begins