

Security and armed extremism in Nigeria: Setting a new agenda

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 29 | 'Kemi Okenyodo, Nengak Daniel Gondyi, and Peter Lewis

Summary

Widespread violence and crime made for a tense build-up to Nigeria's recent elections, with large swaths of the country effectively under the control of terrorists and frequent headlines reporting armed robberies and kidnappings.

Change has been rapid and remarkable: Within the span of a few months, virtually all territories (and hundreds of captives) have been liberated from extremist groups, and in March and April 2015, elections conducted with minimal disruption turned the incumbent party out of office after 16 years.

Still, security is a top priority for the new government assuming power on May 29, and citizens' experiences and perceptions with regard to public safety and extremist activities in their country may be valuable in setting the new agenda.

This analysis is based on Afrobarometer survey data collected in December 2014, reflecting views before the recent successes in fighting armed extremism, but informed by long experience of the country's security challenges.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Nigeria, led by Practical Sampling International (PSI) in collaboration with the CLEEN Foundation, interviewed 2,400 adult Nigerians between 5 and 27 December 2014. (For 80 cases, supplementary interviews were conducted on 18 and 19 January 2015.) A sample of this size yields national-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. (Note: Due to rounding, the sum of category percentages reported below may not always total 100%.)

The sample covered 33 of Nigeria's 36 states, as well as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). It was not possible to conduct interviews in three states in the North East zone – Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe – due to unrest in the region, so substitutions of sampling units were made from neighbouring states in the same zone. Thus, each of the country's zones is represented in proportion to its share of the national population.

Previous Afrobarometer surveys have been conducted in Nigeria in 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008, and 2012.

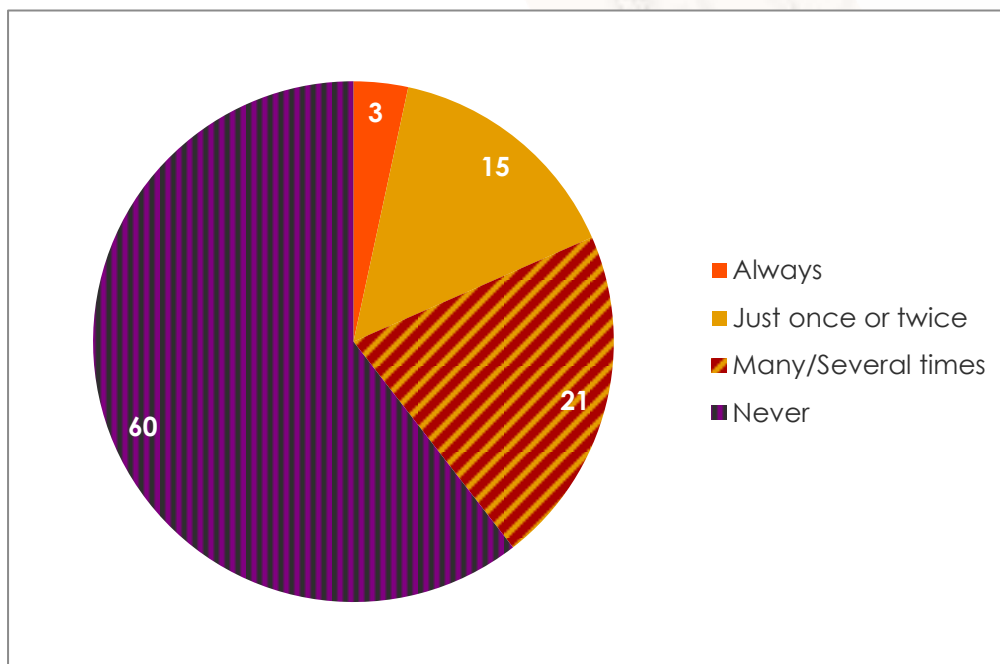
Key findings

- Almost four in 10 Nigerians (39%) do not feel safe in their neighbourhoods. One-third (33%) say they feared crime in their homes.
- Almost one-third (31%) of Nigerians experienced theft from their homes in the year preceding the survey, and 20% say they were physically attacked.
- More than half of Nigerians say the government has been largely unresponsive and ineffective in fighting the menace of armed extremists.
- One-third or more of Nigerians believe that “most” or “all” senior officials in the federal government, members of the Nigerian military, members of the National Assembly, Nigerian Muslims, and international extremist groups are involved in supporting and assisting extremist groups in Nigeria.
- Poverty and unemployment are seen as the main reasons people join extremist groups.
- Two-thirds of Nigerians oppose dividing the country as a solution to the challenges of extremism.

Perceptions of insecurity

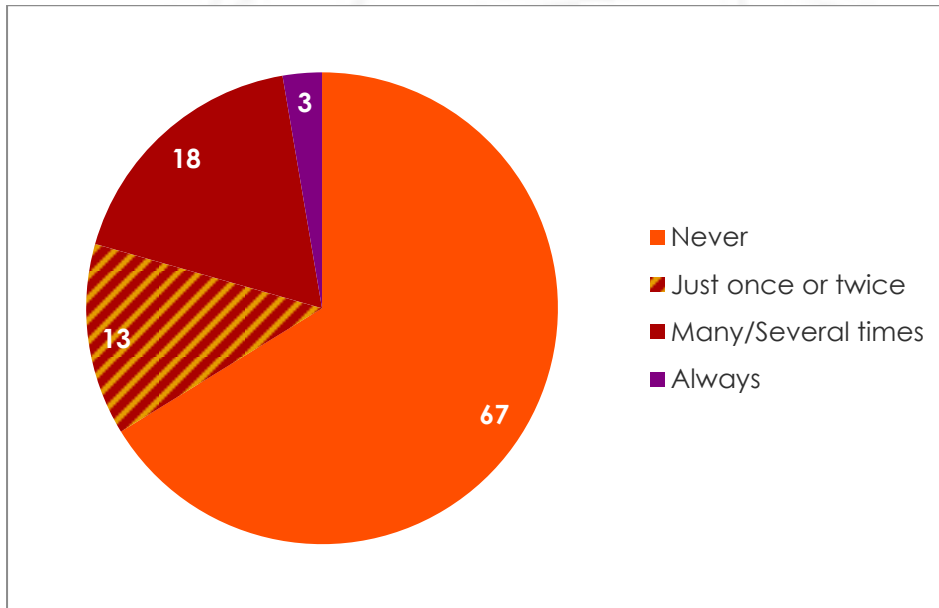
Fear is a reality for significant proportions of Nigerians, not only in unknown environments but also in their communities and homes. About four in 10 Nigerians (39%) say they felt unsafe while walking in their neighbourhoods at least once during the 12 months preceding the survey (Figure 1), while one-third (33%) say they feared crime in their homes (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Feeling unsafe in the neighbourhood | 2014



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? (%)

Figure 2: Fear of crime in the home | 2014



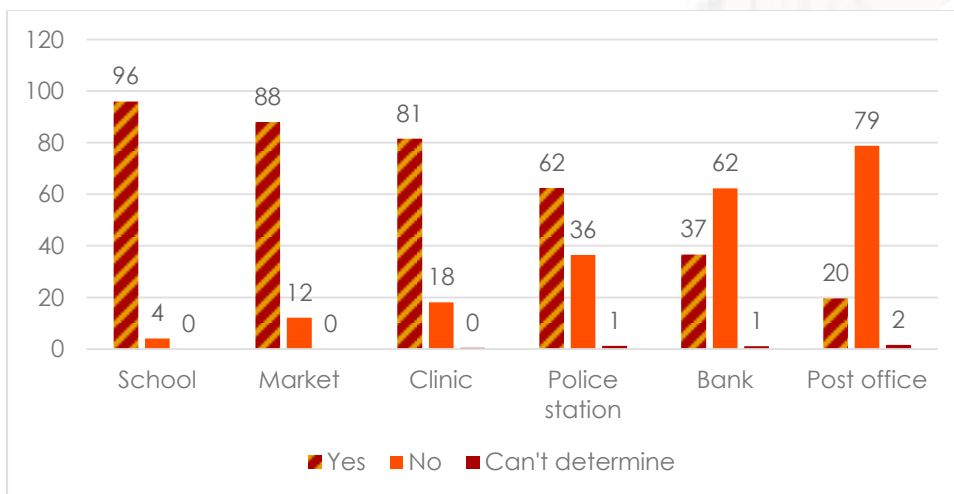
Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family feared crime in your own home? (%)

Access to security services

To better understand factors that influence perceptions of insecurity, we explored Nigerians' access to security services. While conducting Afrobarometer surveys, interviewers are asked to record the presence of various services in or within walking distance of the communities where the survey is conducted. Findings show that police stations are accessible in 62% of surveyed communities (Figure 3) – less common than schools (96%) and marketplaces (88%).

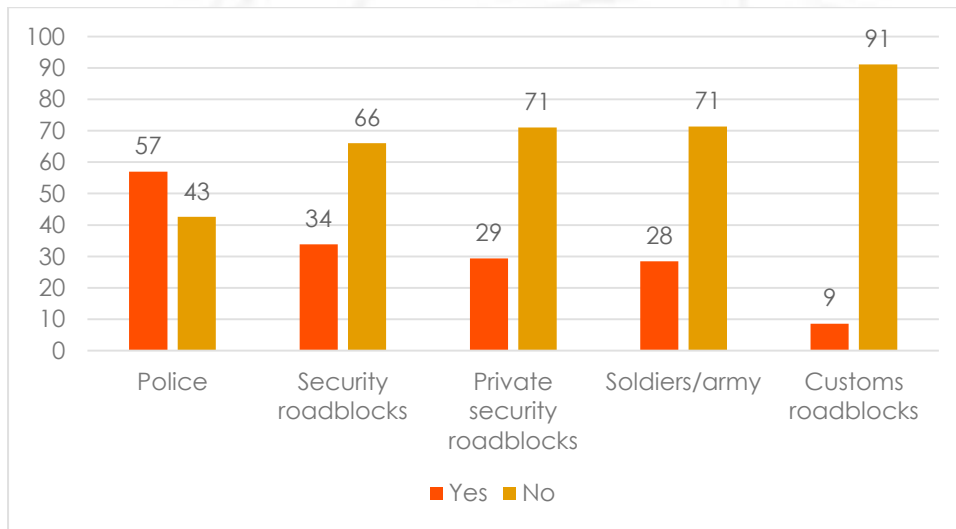
Among evidence of security services, the police are the most visible, with officers or police vehicles sighted in 57% of the sampling areas (Figure 4). Private or community security arrangements such as roadblocks or booms are about as common as the military (reported in 29% and 28%, respectively, of surveyed communities).

Figure 3: Access to social services | 2014



Interviewers were asked to record: Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit / enumeration area or in easy walking distance? (%)

Figure 4: Presence of security services | 2014



Interviewers were asked to record: In the primary sampling unit / enumeration area, did you (or any of your colleagues) see:

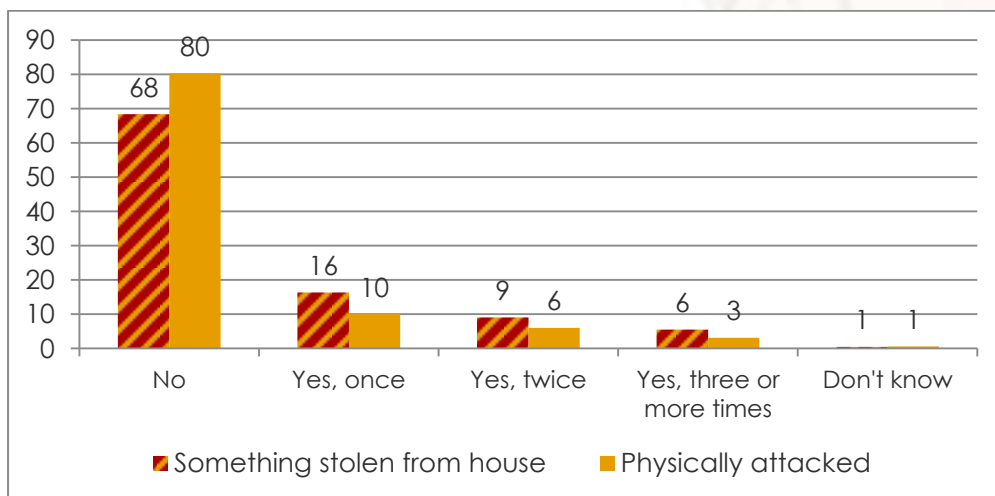
- Any policemen or police vehicles?
 - Any soldiers or army vehicles?
 - Any roadblocks set up by police or army?
 - Any customs checkpoints?
 - Any roadblocks or booms set up by private security providers or by the local community?
- (%)

Experience of crime

Almost one-third (31%) of Nigerians say that things were stolen from their homes at least once during the 12 months preceding the survey, including 6% who say they experienced theft at least three times. One in five respondents (20%) was physically attacked (Figure 5).

Most Nigerians (71%) say the government is performing “very badly” (39%) or “fairly badly” (32%) on the issue of reducing crime in the country (Figure 6).

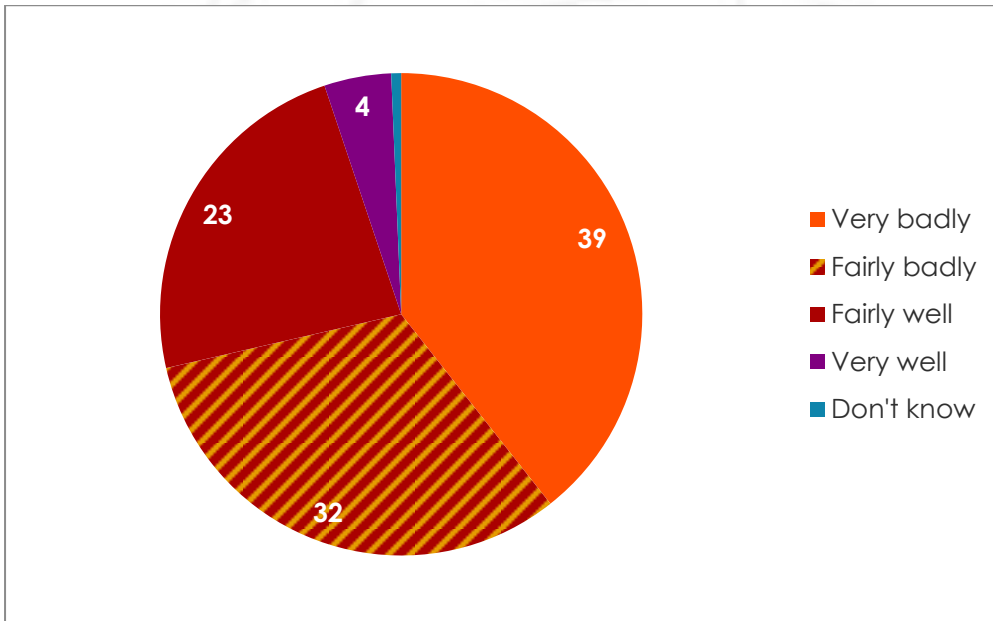
Figure 5: Experience of crime | 2014



Respondents were asked: During the past year, have you or anyone in your family:

- Had something stolen from your house?
- Been physically attacked? (%)

Figure 6: Rating of the government's efforts to reduce crime | 2014



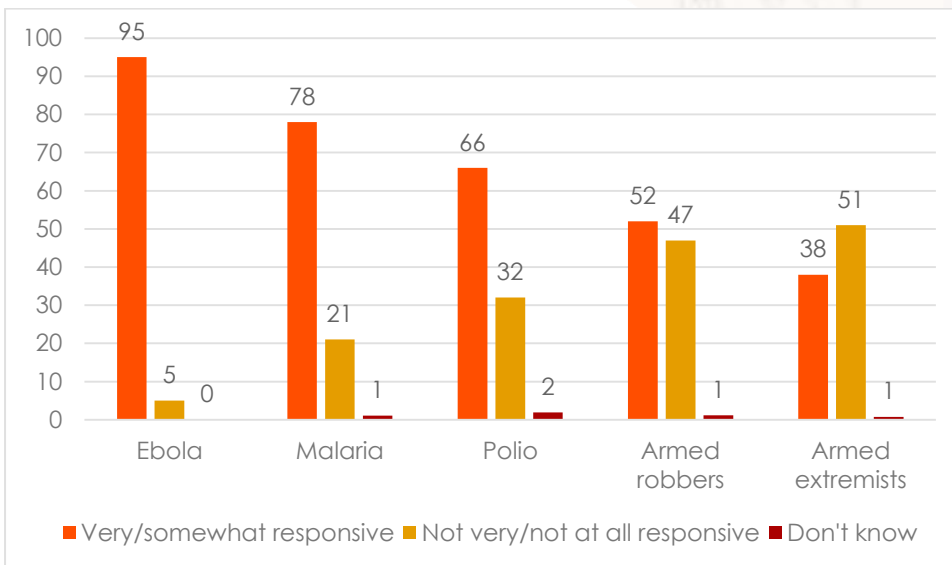
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Reducing crime? (%)

Armed extremism in Nigeria

Assessment of government response

When asked to assess the government's responsiveness to emergency situations, Nigerians rated the response to disease outbreaks more positively than the response to insecurity (Figure 7). More than half (51%) of Nigerians say the government has been "not very responsive" or "not at all responsive" to the menace of armed extremists.

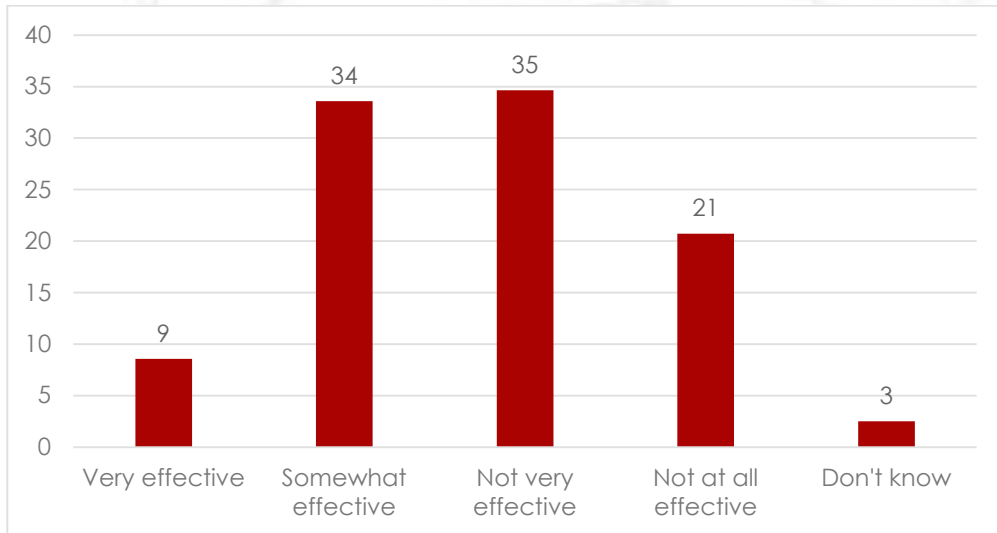
Figure 7: Government responsiveness to emergencies | 2014



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how responsive do you think the federal government has been to the following emergencies? (%)

Similarly, a majority (56%) rate the Nigerian government's efforts to fight armed extremists as "not very effective" or "not at all effective" (Figure 8).

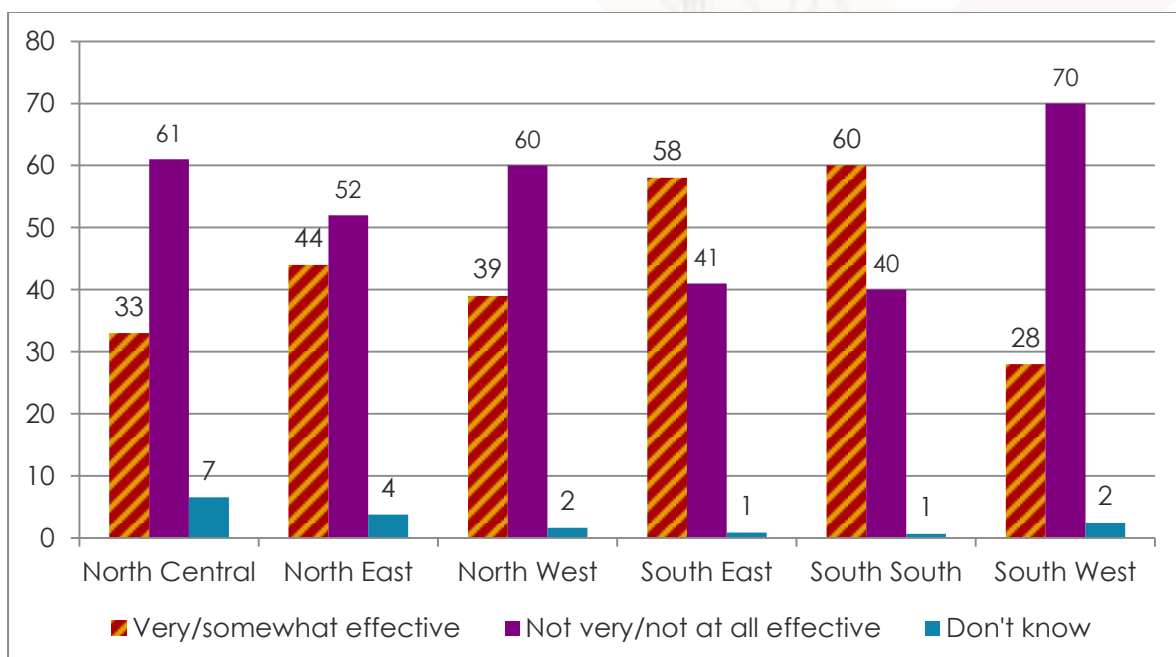
Figure 8: Perceived effectiveness of the government's fight against extremists | 2014



Respondents were asked: How effective do you think the Nigerian government has been in its efforts to address the problem of armed extremists in this country? (%)

Respondents in the South South region express the highest level of satisfaction with the efforts of the government to fight armed extremists; only 40% in the South South rate the government's performance as ineffective, compared to 70% in the South West. In the troubled North East region, which has experienced the worst of the armed extremism, 52% rate the government's efforts as ineffective. Men and women are about equal in their assessments of the government's performance against armed extremists.

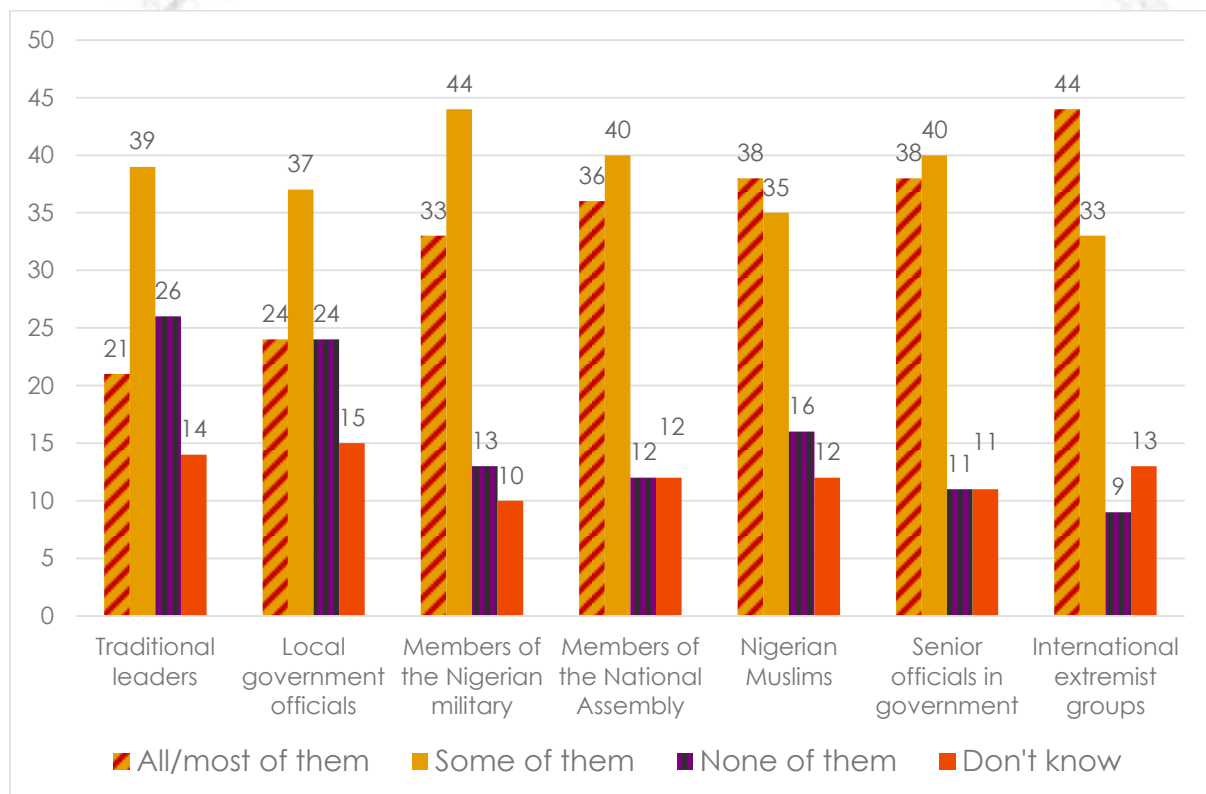
Figure 9: Perceived effectiveness of the government's fight against armed extremists | by region | 2014



Support for extremist groups in Nigeria

Survey findings show that significant numbers of Nigerians believe that a broad cross-section of their compatriots are sympathetic to extremist groups. One-third or more of Nigerians believe that “most” or “all” senior officials in the federal government, members of the Nigerian military, members of the National Assembly, Nigerian Muslims, and international extremist groups are involved in “supporting and assisting the extremist groups that have launched attacks and kidnappings in Nigeria” (Figure 10). While traditional rulers are perceived to harbour the least sympathies, only 26% of respondents say that “none” of them support extremist groups.

Figure 10: Support for extremist groups in Nigeria | 2014

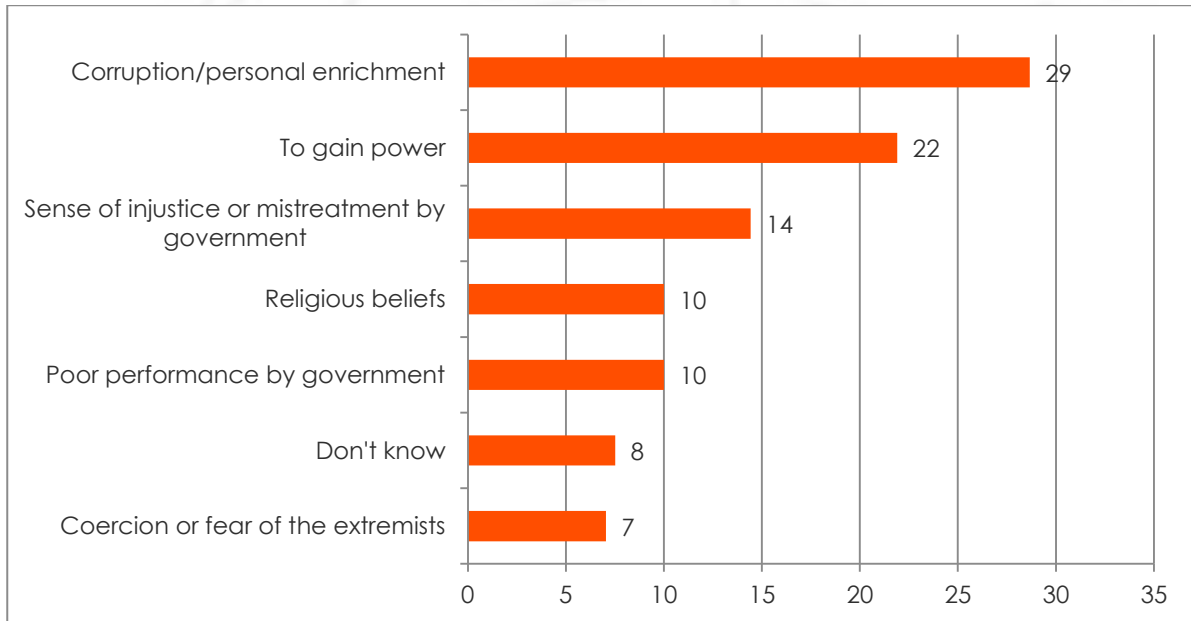


Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in supporting and assisting the extremist groups that have launched attacks and kidnappings in Nigeria, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (%)

Asked what is the main reason why some Nigerians support extremist groups, the factors mentioned most often are corruption or a desire for personal enrichment (cited by 29% of respondents) and a quest for personal power (22%) (Figure 11).

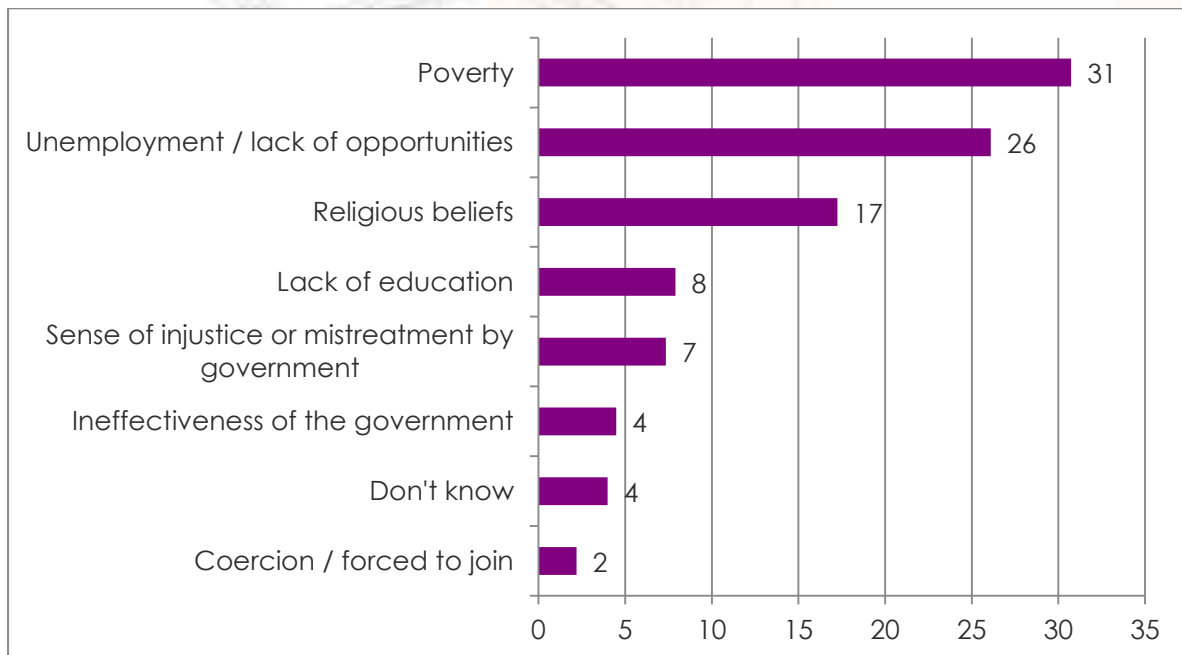
However, when asked why people join such groups, respondents are most likely to cite poverty (31%) and unemployment/lack of opportunities (26%) (Figure 12). Only 17% of respondents say that religious beliefs are the main reason that people join extremist groups.

Figure 11: Reasons why people support extremist groups | 2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what is the main reason why some people in Nigeria support and assist these armed extremist groups? (%)*

Figure 12: Reasons why people join extremist groups | 2014

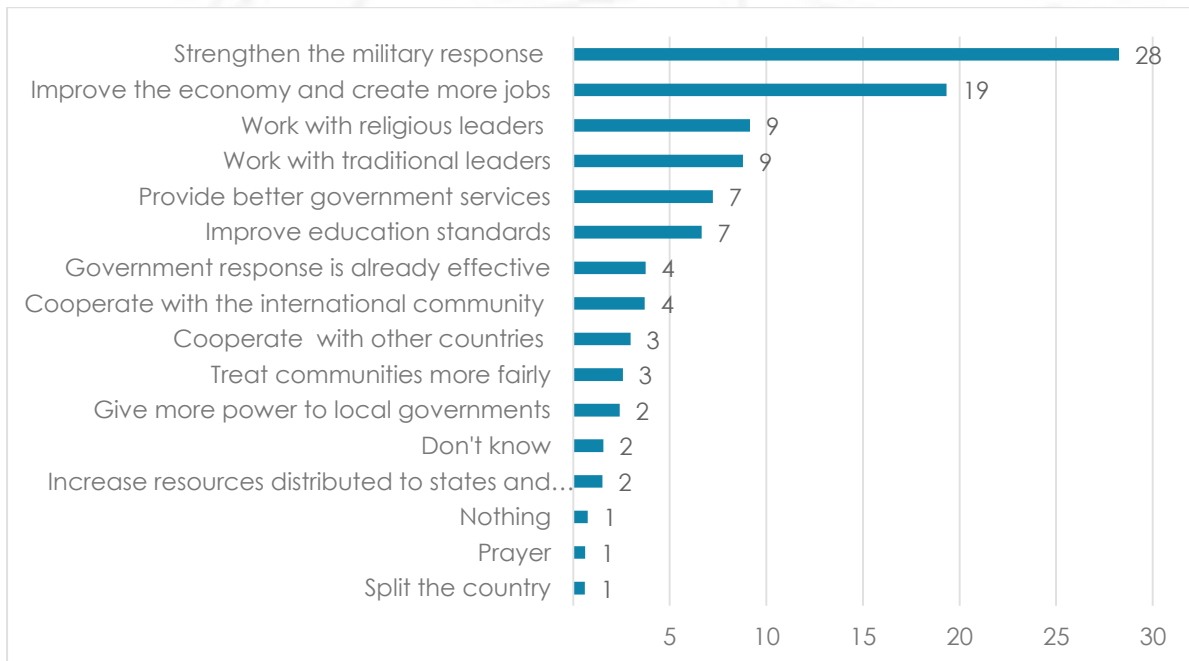


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what is the main reason why some Nigerians join extremist groups?*

Ways to fight extremism

When asked which strategies the government could adopt to be more effective in its fight against extremism, the leading suggestions are strengthening the military response (cited by 28% of respondents) and improving the economy to create jobs (19%) (Figure 13).

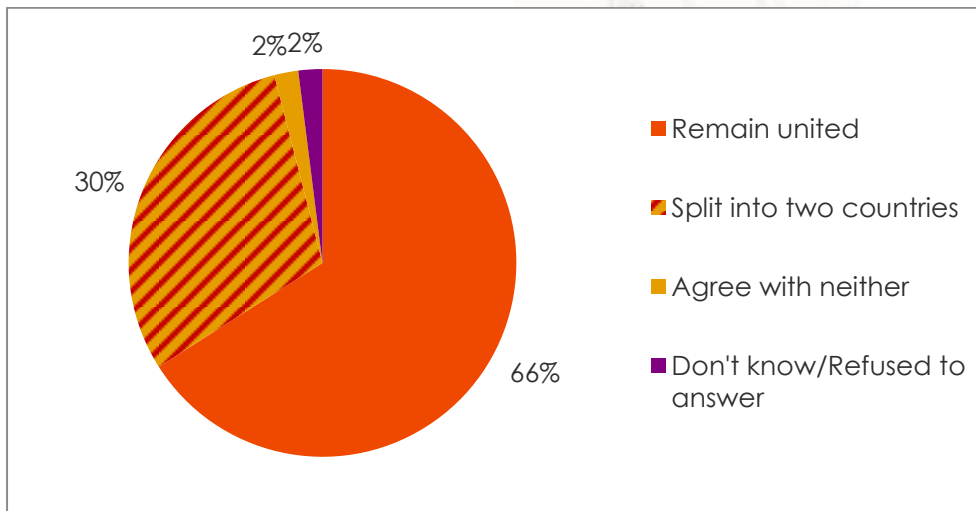
Figure 13: Suggested strategies to fight armed extremism | 2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what do you think would be the best way for the government to be more effective in addressing the problem of armed extremists in our country? (%)*

Considering the drastic “solution” of dividing Nigeria in two should armed extremism persist, two-thirds (66%) of Nigerians oppose such a step, while 30%¹ support it (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Views on dividing Nigeria if extremism persists | 2014



Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. (%)*

Statement 1: Nigeria should remain united as one country even if the extremist groups continue to cause problems.

Statement 2: If the problems caused by the extremist groups cannot be resolved, Nigeria should be split into two countries.

¹ This corrects an earlier version of this report.

Conclusion

Insecurity and violent extremism will be high priorities for Nigeria's incoming government. Although the Afrobarometer Round 6 survey was conducted before recent successes in fighting extremist violence, the perceptions and experiences reflected in its findings provide a rich menu of citizen feedback for the government to work with in setting its new agenda.

To further explore data from Nigeria, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer-online-analysis.com.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

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