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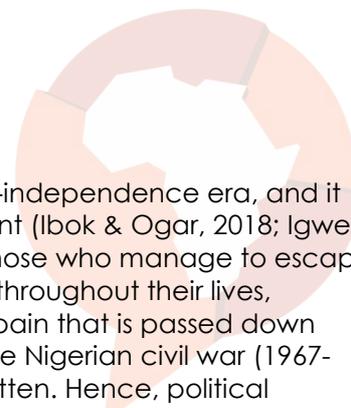
Explaining the experience of political violence in Nigeria

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Abstract

Violence has been part of Nigeria's politics since before political independence. While there have been attempts to understand why political violence happens in the country, little emphasis has been placed on explanatory factors for political-violence victimisation. This study investigates the influence of socio-demographic characteristics, presence of security apparatus, partisanship, political participation, and social group membership on the experience of political violence in Nigeria and examines how the influence of these factors varies between Northern and Southern Nigeria – two regions with major social and cultural differences. The study analyses data from the seventh round of the Afrobarometer survey, which were collected in 2017 from 1,568 adults across the 36 states and Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. Multiple linear regression models were fitted. Our analysis finds that about one in four persons has experienced at least one form of political violence. Living in the South, being young, being poor, living in an area with no police presence, being partisan, participating in politics, and being active in social groups increase the likelihood of political-violence victimisation. While women were more likely than men to experience political violence in the North, the reverse is the case in the South. Regional variation is also observed in the influence of political participation and the degree of the effect of party affiliation and social group membership.



Introduction

Political violence has been part of Nigeria's history since the pre-independence era, and it constitutes an impediment to the country's national development (Ibok & Ogar, 2018; Igwe & Amadi, 2021). In addition to people killed in political violence, those who manage to escape death are displaced from their homes, live with physical injuries throughout their lives, experience post-traumatic stress disorder, and carry emotional pain that is passed down across generations (Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017). A case in point is the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), which led to massive destruction – the story is never forgotten. Hence, political violence is better prevented than managed or resolved after its occurrence.

Raleigh and Kishi (2021) note that, unlike most African countries, Nigeria experienced more political violence in 2020 than in 2019. The 2017 Afrobarometer data set shows that about one in four Nigerians (26%) experienced at least one form of political violence during the previous two years, ranging from 23% in Northern Nigeria to 28% in the South. The most common form was violence at political campaigns/rallies (18%), followed by violence at a protest (14%) and violence by extremists (11%).

There is no clear-cut definition of what constitutes political violence. Hibbs (1973) opined that political violence must have three features. First, the behaviour or event must be anti-system. Second, it must have political significance, i.e. "it must pose a threat of at least severe inconvenience to the normal operation of the political elite" (p. 7). Third, it must involve collective or mass activity or action. Hibbs' notion of political violence can be said to be pro-political elites in the sense that his first criterion would regard anti-government protests as political violence. Moreover, it disregards state-perpetrated violence, such as a crackdown on minority groups. His second and third criteria would also disregard attacks on a few members of the lower classes, since violence against lower-stratum individuals may not pose much inconvenience to the running of the political class.

Anifowose (1982) sees political violence as:

the use of threat or physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals and/or property with the intention to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction to property and whose objective, choice of target or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects have political significance. ... (p. 4)

Hence, political violence may be perpetrated by one person or group of persons against a single individual or group. Political violence includes but is not limited to activities such as electoral conflicts; rioting; politically motivated assassination, kidnapping, and arson; armed insurgency; violent demonstrations; state repression of peaceful protests; militancy; terrorism; and fierce secession agitations (Hibbs, 1973; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017; Igwe & Amadi, 2021). The point here is that political violence can be perpetrated to distort the political process. The state can also perpetrate political violence against perceived political opponents or minority groups to achieve political goals.

Incidents of political violence are not new in Nigeria. Before Nigeria gained its political independence in 1960, there was the Aba Women's Riot of 1929 sparked by the abuse of power by warrant chiefs appointed by British colonialists under the indirect rule policy. Politically motivated riots killed scores of people in Jos in 1945 and in Kano in 1953 (Igwe & Amadi, 2021). The first decade after independence was marred by the census crisis of 1962/1963 over numerical supremacy between Northern and Southern Nigeria and the Western region crisis of 1962 between Obafemi Awolowo and S.L. Akintola, which led to the destruction of lives and properties and contributed to the first military coup in January 1966 and counter-coup in July, both of which were bloody. The country has since experienced political assassinations, military coups, state violence against civilians, and violent

demonstrations. Since the return to democracy in 1999, the power tussle between political elites has led to violence and scores of deaths, including more than 200 in each of the 2003, 2007, and 2011 elections (Chinwokwu & Arop, 2014). It is hard to have general elections without violence and political assassination in Nigeria.

Studies of political violence in Nigeria have focused on its causes and consequences (Chinwokwu & Arop, 2014; Ibok & Ogar, 2018; Emmanuel & Onyige, 2019; Igwe & Amadi, 2021). However, little emphasis has been placed on explanatory factors for political-violence victimisation in Nigeria. Perhaps this reflects a culture of neglecting victims while chasing perpetrators. This study investigates possible explanatory factors for the experience of political violence in Nigeria. Specifically, it asks: What is the role of socio-demographic factors (poverty, gender, age), presence of security apparatus, region, party affiliation, political participation, and social group membership in the reported experience of political violence in Nigeria? How do relationships between these factors and experiences of political violence vary across regions? An understanding of possible variations between Northern and Southern Nigeria is important for several reasons.

One, the two regions had different precolonial ways of life, and colonialism's indirect rule produced different results in the two regions. Before colonialism, tribes were governed by their traditional rulers. The British colonialists categorised the geographical entities into Northern and Southern protectorates. In 1914, the two protectorates were merged and tagged "Nigeria" for administrative convenience by the British colonialists, who adopted the indirect-rule system of governing through local chiefs. Writers have regarded the 1914 merger as a grave mistake and the bane of development for the country (Obi-Ani, Obi-Ani, & Isiani, 2016; Olowookere, 2017). While indirect rule was largely successful in the North, it was a failure in the South, which was the settlement of educated elites and comprised different autonomous tribes.

Two, ethnic and religious differences are likely to influence experiences of political violence. The North is dominated by the Hausa-Fulani (the largest ethnic group in Nigeria, according to 2006 population census figures) committed to the teachings of Islam, as evident in the use of shari'a law in 12 of the region's 19 states. In contrast, the South is dominated by the Yoruba (mainly in the Southwest) and Igbo (Southeast). A majority of the Igbo are Christians, while the Yoruba people practice both religions, depending on the state. Since electoral and political behaviours are shaped in part by religion and ethnicity in Nigeria (Seiyefa, 2017) and have since been manipulated by the political class, one should expect that the two regions will differ in their experience of, and reaction to, political violence.

Three, the two regions' different security challenges may prompt different responses to political violence. Their different orientations were apparent during the 2020 EndSARS protests that led to scores of deaths in the country. SARS – the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigerian police – was accused of extortion and extrajudicial killings of young people, sparking protests in many states in the Southern region and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. In contrast, there were pro-SARS protests in some parts of the North (Haruna, 2020). (Whether or not the pro-SARS protests were sponsored by political elites is beyond the focus of the current exercise.) In addition, while the Northern governors' forum showed support for SARS and voted that the unit should continue to be a part of the Nigerian police force, governors in the South resolved that SARS should be disbanded.

Another important reason to consider North-South differences is informed by the deviant place theory, which suggests that "victims do not motivate crime but rather are more likely to become victims due to the fact they live in social areas that are disorganised and contain high crime rates and therefore have the highest risk of coming into contact with criminals regardless of their lifestyle or behaviour" (Hussin & Zawawi, 2012, p. 858). Nigeria's Southern states tend to have higher population densities than Northern states. For example, Lagos State is the smallest in Nigeria in terms of land mass, but it arguably has the highest population in the country. High population density has been found to increase the likelihood of crime victimisation in Nigeria (Kunnuji, 2016). Similarly, the likelihood of violence at political

events such as rallies and campaigns may be higher if the population density is high due to the high possibility of social disorganisation. On the other hand, the Northern region covers more than 70% of land areas in Nigeria. In fact, Niger State (North Central) is larger than eight Southern states combined – Lagos, Anambra, Imo, Ebonyi, Abia, Ekiti, Akwa Ibom, and Enugu (Alabi, Atinge, Ejim, & Adejoh, 2020). One can travel many kilometres in the North without encountering security officials, enabling insurgent groups and armed bandits to travel from their forest hideouts to towns, abduct hundreds of students in trucks, and return to the forest without encountering interruptions from security agents.

Who are the victims of political violence? Conceptual and theoretical explanations

The concept of strategic targeting suggests that political violence does not happen at random. Instead, political violence may be planned and targeted at specific persons/populations to achieve certain political goals. As shown in Figure 1, a variety of theories and explanations may be situated within the strategic targeting concept.

Figure 1: Conceptual/Theoretical framework for the explanation of political violence



The soft target explanation suggests that before carrying out any attack, potential perpetrators calculate the risk of being arrested or overpowered by their victims. As part of being strategic, a perpetrator may choose to victimise those perceived as soft targets to increase their chances of getting away with the crime. Such soft targets include the poor, older people, unsuspecting women, and immigrants (Hussin & Zawawi, 2012). Studies on poverty and crime have shown that poverty increases vulnerability to crime. As Cuthbertson (2018, p. 1) noted, “the poor are by far the most likely to be affected by crime. One of the worst aspects of being poor ... is the far greater likelihood of living near criminals and being their victim.” A study by Elise (2017) also reported that poor people, regardless of where they live, are more vulnerable to crime victimisation than those who earn more. McLaughlin (2011) found that poor neighbourhoods are more likely to experience crime than rich ones. With respect to political violence, the rich are more likely to be able to afford private security. In

Nigeria, it is a common practice for the affluent to use Nigeria Police Force officers as their private security, given a shortage of security personnel in the country. In sum, it is strategic for perpetrators of political violence to target poor people because (1) the location of the victim is less likely to have adequate security personnel and infrastructure such as security gates and cameras and (2) victimisation of poor people is less likely to be taken seriously by security operatives and the political class, and this reduces the likelihood that perpetrators will be pursued and apprehended.

Some studies on gender and crime have found that women are more likely than men to be fearful of crime victimisation (Schafer, Huebner, & Bynum, 2006) and to experience crime (Fox, Nobles, & Piquero, 2009), though Adisa, Alabi, Ayodele, Attah, and Adejoh (2021) did not find a statistically significant association between gender and experience of robbery and organised crime in Lagos State. These studies focus on sexual, family, property, and intimate-partner forms of violence. In the realm of political violence, studies have suggested that due to patriarchy, women pay a higher price for political participation, as those who are powerful, visible, and hold high political offices may be more likely to be victimised than their male counterparts (Biroli, 2016; Håkansson, 2021). However, Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg (2020) found that women and men are similar in their experience of political violence, though the former are more vulnerable to sex-related intimidation in their political office.

Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo (2020) discuss three possible ways through which political violence can be gendered. The first is “gendered motives,” referring to perpetrators who use violence to preserve male domination and control of the political system in response to perceived challenges to traditional gender norms (see also Biroli (2016) and Håkansson (2021)).¹ The second, “gendered forms,” “show that gender structures how men and women perpetrate and experience political violence, regardless of whether gender appears in the motive. Both women and men experience violence specifically designed to inhibit their participation” (p. 918). The third, “gendered impacts,” refers to the subjective meanings that different individuals attribute to political-violence victimisation.

Another potential soft target is older people. Studies on the age-crime nexus have shown that young people commit more crimes than their elders (Siegel, 2007). The question is, whom do young criminals victimise? The soft target explanation suggests that old people may be victimised more often since they may not have the physical strength to fight back. However, there is evidence that targets may vary depending on the type of crime. Studies have shown that victims of violent crimes involving guns and other weapons are usually youth (Perkins, 1997). Some of this violence is due to gang/cult rivalry, which typically involves young people. Political campaign violence and attacks by armed groups are often outdoor crimes, and since older people spend more time indoors, they may be less vulnerable to such attacks. But this may not be the case in situations where political violence is planned and targets specific individuals or politicians. Older people dominate the realm of political affairs in Nigeria, so one may expect that political assassination will target older people even though the young are usually recruited – by older politicians – to carry out such heinous acts. Examples include Funsho Williams, a gubernatorial candidate in Lagos State who was assassinated in 2006 by suspected political rivals at age 58, and Bola Ige, a former chief of justice who was assassinated in 2001 at age 71 by suspected political rivals. However, Adisa et al. (2021) did not find a significant effect of age on crime victimisation in Lagos.

Aside from the soft target hypothesis, some explanations portray victims themselves as the reasons for their victimisation. Such explanations are situated within the victim precipitation theory and the lifestyle exposure theory. Victim precipitation theory holds that “people instigate or initiate a particular confrontation that may in the end lead to that person becoming victimised by injury or death” (Hussin & Zawawi, 2012, p. 857). Precipitation may be

¹ In the current 9th National Assembly of Nigeria, only 6.4% of 109 senators are women, as are only 6.1% of 360 members of the House of Representatives.

active, as when a person deliberately behaves in a way that triggers anger and leads to violence, or passive, as when a person has inherent or acquired characteristics that make another person or rival envious, leading to a violent attack by the latter. In Nigeria, one form of active precipitation, "negative campaigning," is a popular feature of political competition (Opeibi, 2006; Okolie, Enyiazu, & Nnamani, 2021). Negative campaigning includes "substantive criticism, such as disagreement between two parties or candidates over a specific policy, character assassinations, pejorative language or insinuate[d] rumors about a politician's very private life" (Haselmayer, 2019, p. 359). It is common for people who affiliate with a political party to speak ill of the rival party. In Nigeria this is usually between the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which was in power from 1999 until 2015, when then-President Goodluck Jonathan lost to Muhammadu Buhari.

Opeibi (2006) has argued that with freedom of speech that has accompanied democracy since 1999, political advertising in Nigeria has turned from addressing national issues, allowing candidates to sell themselves, to blame-shifting. Okolie et al. (2021) note, however, that negative campaigning was part of Nigerian politics before independence, as indigenous politicians spoke ill of colonialism and colonialists to gain sympathy from the populace, international organisations, and politicians around the globe. During the 16 years of PDP rule, the opposition was in direct antagonism regardless of what the ruling party did, accusing the PDP of gross corruption and misgovernance. Upon its creation in 2013, the APC adopted a broom as its symbol and "change" as its slogan. However, many PDP members who were accused of corruption before 2015 have cross-carpeted to the APC since the latter came to power.

The point here is that negative campaigning in Nigeria is a strategy for gaining public sympathy and votes regardless of whether the campaign's content is true or false. An example is the power tussle in Edo State, where then-National APC Chairman Adams Oshiomole, who had ruled Edo State for eight years, campaigned for Godwin Obaseki as his successor. In 2016, Oshiomole painted Obaseki as the messiah who had come to take Edo State to development and ran a negative campaign against PDP candidate Osagie Ize-lyamu. But after Obaseki's victory, things fell apart between him and Oshiomole, and the latter attempted to use his power as the APC's national chairman to impose a different candidate to run in the 2020 gubernatorial election in the state. This led to Obaseki cross-carpeting to the PDP to run for a second term, while Ize-lyamu went the opposite way, emerging as the APC's candidate. Many were surprised at a negative campaign alleging that Obaseki had not graduated from university and that the certificate he presented to the electoral commission was fake. One may wonder whether Oshiomole did not realise that the certificate was fake in 2016 when he painted Obaseki as the messiah.

In 2019 in Kwara State, the APC's slogan against the domination of Bukola Saraki, who was then Senate president and had ruled Kwara State for eight years, was "O to gee," meaning "Enough is enough." In the 2019 election, the PDP's Atiku Abubakar (who was vice president between 1999 and 2007) used the slogan "Take it back" against the APC's Buhari to signal that the PDP was ready to take power back from the APC, which had failed in its 2015 campaign promises. These choices of negative words as political slogans may trigger political violence before, during, and after elections. Sociology professor Lai Olurode (2017) argued in his inaugural address at the University of Lagos that inflammatory rhetoric is a cause of electoral and political violence in Nigeria. When people chant words that suggest rivalry, hatred, or victory during campaigns/elections, it may trigger the opposition or aggrieved parties and consequently precipitate violence. Hence, it makes sense to expect that those affiliated with a political party will be more likely to engage in negative campaigning and consequently experience political violence than those not affiliated with any political party.

Findings from studies on the link between political participation and political-violence victimisation are mixed. While some have found that the experience of violence makes people desist from politics or reduce their participation therein (Wood, 2006; Bratton, 2008), others report that political violence makes people more interested in politics as a way to change the political order (Bellows & Miguel, 2009). Such an association may also work in the

opposite direction, i.e. political participation may expose people to political violence, but studies in this regard are scarce. This assumption is informed by the lifestyle theory of crime victimisation, which maintains that certain lifestyles – whether deliberately chosen or determined by a person's occupation or inherent traits – may increase people's exposure to crime. Political participation can be of various forms, including registering for a voter's card, joining a political party, voting in elections, waiting at the polling booth until votes are counted, participating in protests, commenting on politics via the media, mobilising people to report community problems or demands to the authorities. Some of these behaviours are lifestyles and constitutional rights that individuals may choose to engage in regularly, while others are compulsory for certain individuals. For instance, journalists and political scientists may find themselves commenting on politics and taking a position on the government's decisions. Involvement in these activities may come at a cost. Sometimes political violence occurs in certain places, such as demonstrations and protest grounds. For example, on 28 June 2021, two Kaduna State College of Education students were shot dead by security operatives during a protest against a hike in school fees. Also, criticising an incumbent politician may increase the critic's vulnerability to political violence, either sponsored by the politician or perpetrated by supporters who think their leader has been disrespected. Similarly, perpetrators of political violence may target leaders or active members in religious or community groups that are seen as sources of political mobilisation. It is a common practice for Nigerian politicians to lobby leaders of such organisations to gain votes from their members, and perpetrators of political violence may target those perceived to not be on their side.

Regarding the presence of security, the goal of any security agency is to protect lives and property. The concept of "capable guardian" in the routine activity theory (see Cohen & Felson, 1979; Hussin & Zawawi, 2012) suggests that the presence of security apparatus is

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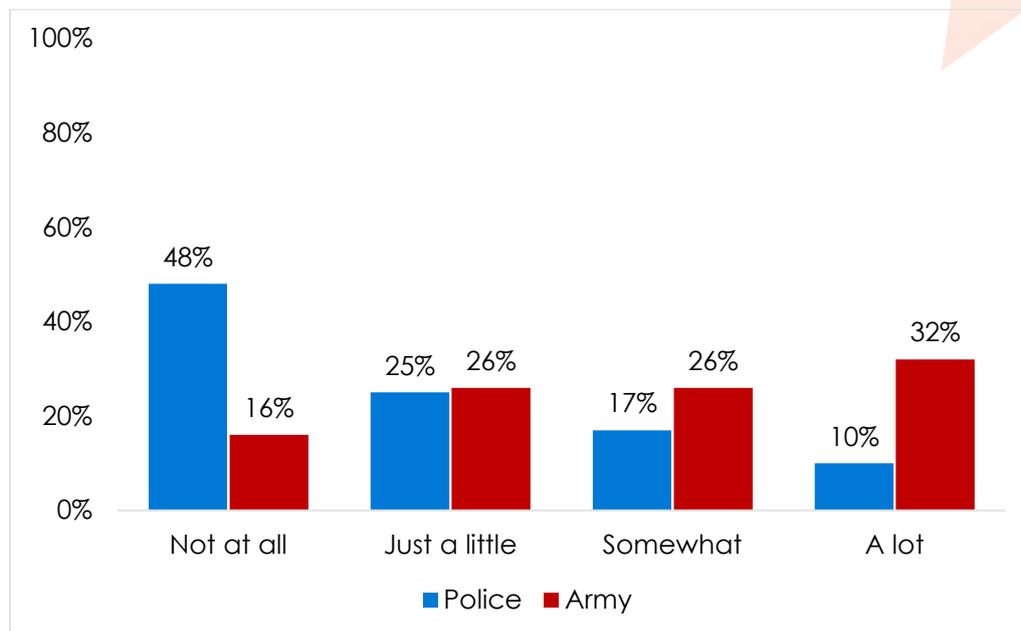
supposed to deter perpetrators and reduce crime victimisation. Therefore, the underlying assumption of routine activity theory is that residents in areas with formal security outfits will have less experience of crime. The question is, does the presence of the police and army make a significant difference in crime victimisation? Nigerian security institutions do not have adequate capacity to contain security challenges (Oshita &

Ikelegbe, 2019). In Nigeria, there is broad popular distrust and resentment of the police due to allegations of abuses against the citizens they are supposed to protect (Adisa et al., 2020). However, the Nigerian army is still believed to uphold discipline and thus commands some respect and trust from the populace (see Figure 2). Consequently, one may expect the presence of soldiers to reduce victimisation more than that of police officers.

The literature contains mixed findings on the influence of security presence on crime victimisation. Some studies have reported that the presence of the police or other security outfits may help reduce public fear and prevent anti-social behaviour and crime victimisation (Telep, Mitchell, & Weisburd, 2014; Mohler et al., 2015) because potential perpetrators fear arrest (Durlauf & Nagin, 2011). However, other studies have found negative consequences of security presence or actions (i.e. backlash effects), especially in large-scale political violence and demonstrations against the state (Earl & Soule, 2010; Baudains, Belur, Braithwaite, Marchione, & Johnson, 2019). An example of the backlash effect of security reactions occurred in Nigeria in October 2020. Small protests had demanded that the SARS be disbanded following allegations of extortion, abuse of power, and extrajudicial killings. After several failed promises by the Nigerian state to disband the police unit, youth took to massive protests across several states. On 20 October around 7 p.m. at Lekki tollgate in Lagos, the electricity at the tollgate was seized, putting the protesters in the dark, after which the Nigerian army came in trucks and shot at the protesters, killing at least 12 (Obiezu, 2020). Mob attacks followed, leading to the burning of several police stations and the brutal murder

of police officers across the state. With support from other security agencies, the police adopted maximum force to repress the angry youth, which led to the deaths of more than 40 people across the country. At first the army and Lagos State government denied any attack on peaceful protesters on the night of 20 October; the soldiers had removed the evidence of the protesters' corpses. However, a deejay shared an Instagram live video during the massacre, which led the army and Lagos State government to recant their initial denial. The deejay has since sought asylum in Canada due to threats against her life.

Figure 2: Trust in security apparatus | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following?

Methods

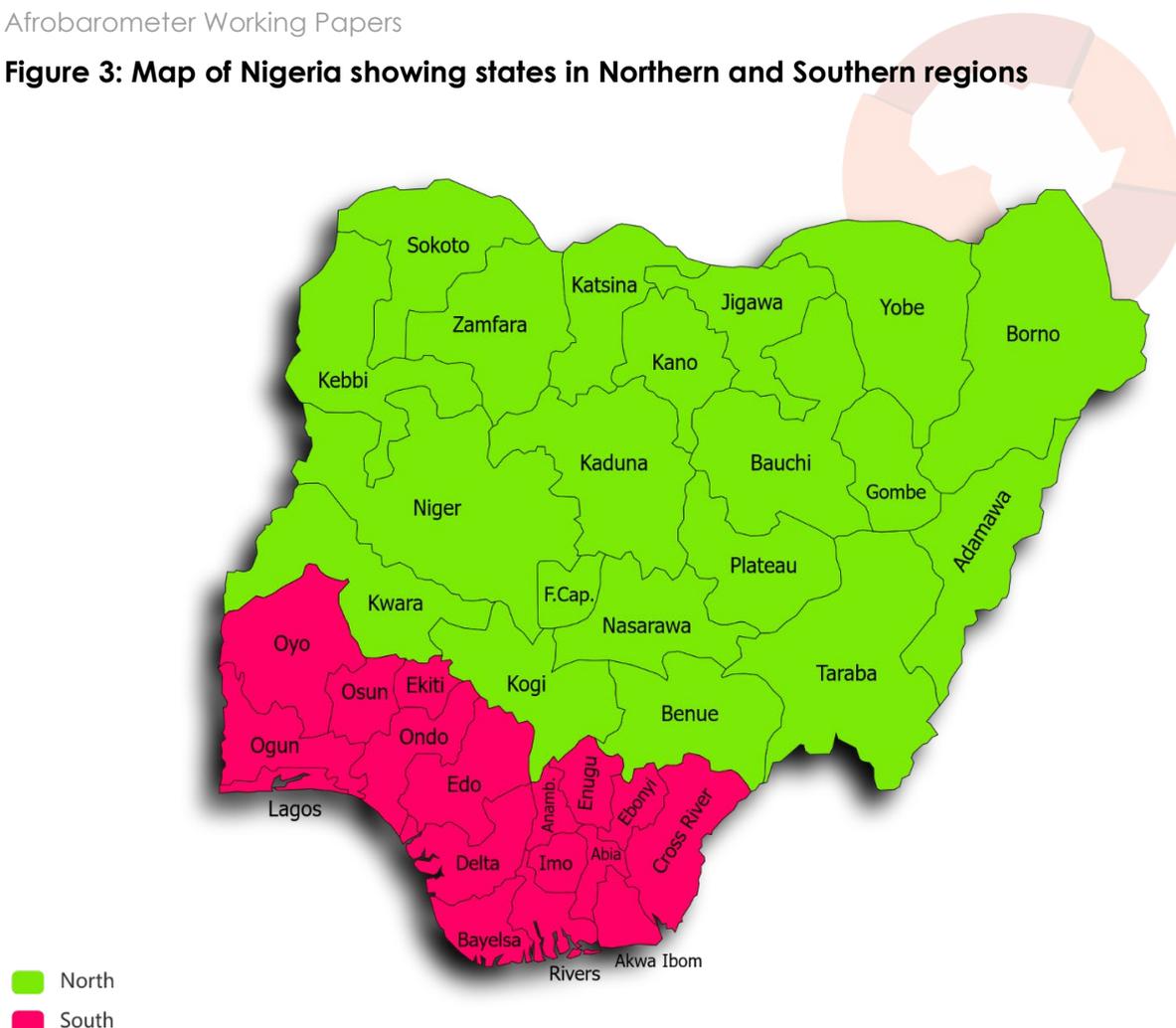
Data and population

This study analyses data from Afrobarometer's Round 7 (2017) survey in Nigeria. As part of its 34-country survey round, Afrobarometer collected data on Nigerians' experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, quality of life, and other issues, including trust in security agencies, perceived corruption, and perceptions, fear, and experience of different forms of violence.

The survey employed national multistage probability sampling to select 1,600 Nigerian adults (aged 18+) for face-to-face interviews, providing results with a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level; additional details on the sampling procedures can be found at <https://www.afrobarometer.org/surveys-and-methods/sampling/>. The survey is nationally representative; respondents were selected from the country's 36 states and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) using the 2006 population and housing census as a sampling frame. The data set categorises the states and FCT into six geopolitical zones, which are categorised into North and South in this study. Figure 3 shows the 19 states and FCT in the North and 17 states in the South of the country.

This study analyses the responses of 1,568 people (813 in the North, 755 in the South), excluding 32 cases due to a lack of valid responses to core variables.

Figure 3: Map of Nigeria showing states in Northern and Southern regions



Outcome variable

The dependent variable is political violence, a composite outcome of three variables. The survey questions asked whether respondents feared and/or experienced (1) violence at a political rally or campaign event, (2) violence occurring during a public protest or march, and (3) an armed attack by political or religious extremists during the previous two years. The response format for the three questions was 0=Never, 1=Feared but didn't experience, and 2=Feared and experienced. The Cronbach's alpha is 0.8. Because this study is interested in the actual experience of political violence, 0 and 1 were recoded as 0 to mean "no experience of political violence," while 2 was recoded as 1 to mean "experienced political violence." The three variables were then merged and treated as a composite/continuous measure with outcomes ranging from 0 to 3 (Cronbach's alpha=0.7). A score of 0 means that a respondent never experienced any of the three forms of political violence during the previous two years; scores of 1, 2, and 3 mean that respondents experienced one, two, and all three forms of political violence, respectively.

Independent variables

Five broad explanatory variables are used in this study. The first is a set of basic socio-demographic characteristics that includes region of residence (North or South), gender

(male or female), age, and lived poverty.² The second is the presence of security apparatus: In each enumeration area they visited, Afrobarometer fieldworkers recorded whether or not they saw (1) police officers or police vehicles and (2) soldiers or army vehicles. The third variable is partisanship: Respondents were asked whether they “feel close to” any political party and, if yes, which one. All registered political parties as of the time of the study were listed. This study categorises the options into two dummy variables: (1) ruling party=1, others=0” and (2) opposition party=1, others=0. The fourth variable, political participation, is operationalised using four stand-alone variables. Respondents were asked whether they had done any of the following within the past year: (a) joined others in their community to request action from the government; (b) contacted the media, such as calling a radio programme or writing a letter to a newspaper; (c) contacted a government official to ask for help or make a complaint; and (d) participated in a demonstration or protest march. Response options were in Likert scale formats ranging from 0 (Would never do this) to 4 (Often). These indicators of political participation have been used in previous studies (e.g. Dim & Asomah, 2019). The fifth variable is social group membership, which is measured by the extent to which respondents said they are active in (1) “a religious group that meets outside of regular worship services” and (2) “a voluntary association or community group.” Response options ranged from 0=not a member to 3=official leader.

Data analysis

The analysis begins at the descriptive level, where frequency distributions of all the variables are presented by region (i.e. North and South) in Table 1. Simple frequencies, means, and standard deviations are shown at the univariate level. Column and bar charts are used to show the experience of the different forms of political violence in each region. At the inferential level, a multiple linear regression model is fitted for the overall data set (Nigeria) and presented in Table 2 (Model 1). All the independent variables are included in Model 1. In Table 3, separate models (2 and 3) are fitted for each region. All the independent variables except region are included in models 2 and 3.

Results

The results in Table 1 show that 23% of respondents from the North experienced at least one form of political violence during the previous two years, compared to 28% in the South. As shown in Figure 4, the most common form of political violence experienced by respondents was violence at a political campaign or rally (18%), followed by violence at a protest (14%), while the least-experienced form was violent attacks by political or religious extremists (11%). This suggests that election-related activities account for the largest share of the political violence in Nigeria and brings to question the role of politicians in peace/violence in the country.

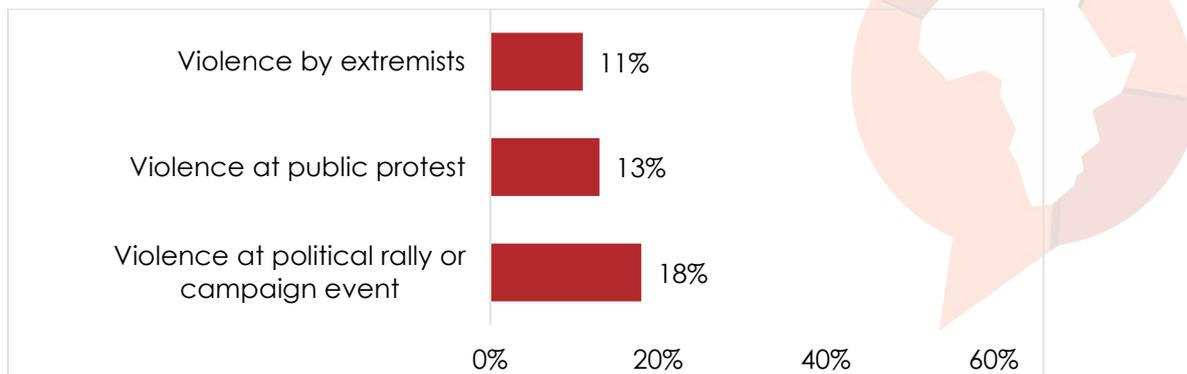
Figure 5 shows that while violence at political campaigns/rallies and protests is more common in the South than in the North, the reverse is the case for violent attacks by extremists. Figure 6, which presents the mean number of the forms of political violence recorded in each geopolitical zone, shows that South South experienced the highest rate of political-violence victimisation, with a score of 0.64, followed closely by North East (0.61), while North West, which is currently a zone of frequent armed banditry and kidnapping, recorded the lowest mean, at 0.25.

² Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes & Patel (2022).

Table 1: Frequency distribution of study variables | Nigeria | 2017

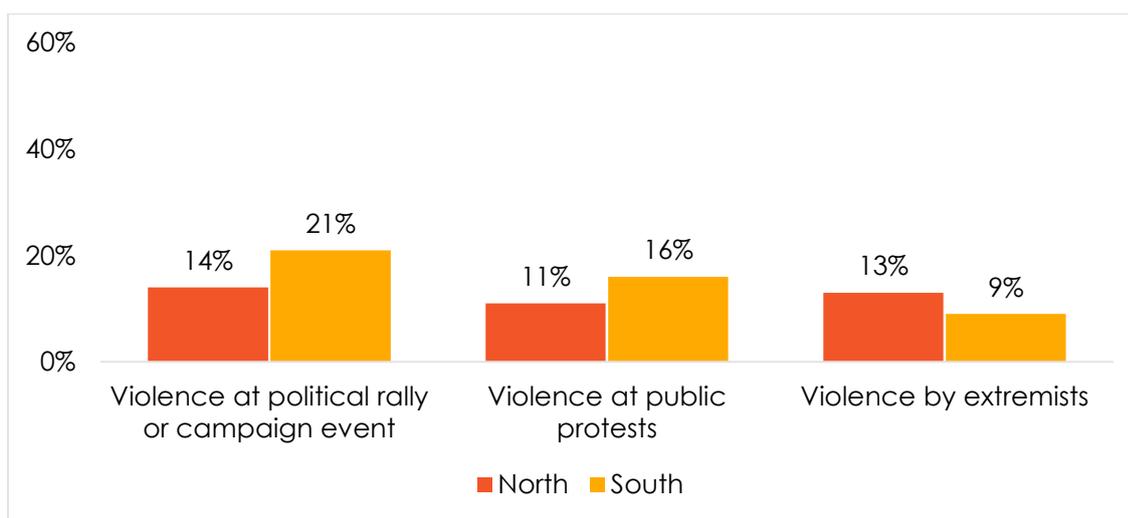
Variables	North (755)		South (813)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
A: Socio-demographic characteristics				
Gender				
Male	383	51	406	50
Female	372	49	407	50
Age	Mean: 32.4; SD: 11.956		Mean: 32.9; SD: 12.955	
Lived Poverty Index	Mean: 4.92; SD: 4.184		Mean: 4.84; SD: 3.919	
B: Security presence				
Presence of police				
No	451	60	419	52
Yes	304	40	394	49
Presence of soldiers				
No	668	89	749	92
Yes	87	12	64	8
C: Party affiliation				
Ruling party	296	40	102	13
Opposition party	118	16	222	28
No affiliation	331	44	479	60
D: Political participation/activism				
Request government action				
Never	160	21	222	27
Not yet	343	46	395	49
Yes	251	33	195	24
Contacted the media				
Never	234	31	193	24
Not yet	342	46	438	54
Yes	175	23	181	22
Contacted government official				
Never	187	25	221	27
Not yet	358	48	425	53
Yes	209	28	164	20
Attended a protest/march				
Never	454	61	419	52
Not yet	170	23	247	31
Yes	127	17	144	18
E: Social group membership				
Membership of a religious group				
Not a member	331	44	285	35
Inactive member	92	12	78	10
Active member	254	34	370	46
Official leader	74	10	78	10
Membership of a vol./comm. group				
Not a member	421	56	421	52
Inactive member	82	11	77	10
Active member	191	25	237	29
Official leader	58	8	76	9
Experience of political violence				
No	581	77	585	72
Yes	174	23	228	28

Figure 4: Experience of political violence | Nigeria | 2017



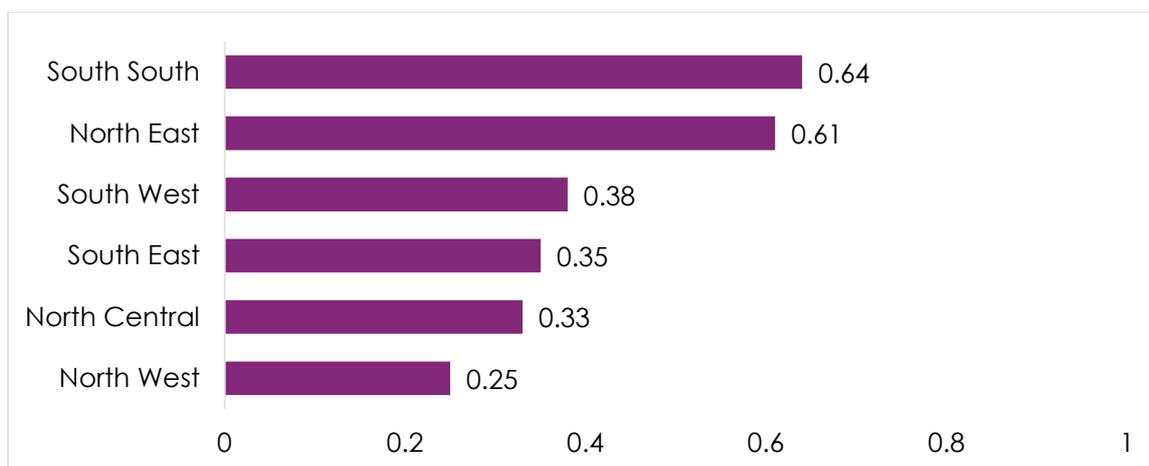
Respondents were asked: Have you actually personally experienced this type of violence in the past two years?

Figure 5: Experience of political violence | by region | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents were asked: Have you actually personally experienced this type of violence in the past two years?

Figure 6: Mean score of political-violence victimisation | by geopolitical zone | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents were asked: Have you actually personally experienced this type of violence in the past two years? (The figure shows the mean number of forms of political violence (ranging from 0 to 3) experienced in each zone.)

Explaining factors associated with experience of political violence in Nigeria

Table 2 shows our analysis of explanatory factors for the experience of political violence in Nigeria. Respondents from the Southern part of the country are less likely to experience political violence than their counterparts from the Northern region ($\beta=.076$; $p<.01$). Regarding socio-demographic characteristics, age and lived poverty are significant predictors of political-violence victimisation. The likelihood of experiencing political violence declines as age increases ($\beta=-.066$; $p<.01$), and it rises with level of poverty ($\beta=.086$; $p<.01$).

Considering security, respondents in areas with police officers/vehicles in sight have a lower likelihood of political-violence victimisation than those in areas where there is no police presence ($\beta=-.066$; $p<0.05$). However, caution is advised in drawing causal inferences based on this result and subsequent ones. In Nigeria, some areas are more volatile and prone to violence than others, and the number of politically connected people may be higher in one area than in others – factors that might affect the deployment of police. Presence of soldiers/army vehicles does not make any difference in the likelihood of political-violence victimisation.

Table 2: Linear regression model explaining the likelihood of political-violence victimisation | Nigeria | 2017

	N: 1,568 Nigeria (Model 1) F: 9.369; $p<0.001$ R²: 0.079
Predictor variables	β
Socio-demographic characteristics	
South	.076**
Age	-.066**
Female	-.001
Lived Poverty Index	.086**
Security presence	
Police presence in the area	-.066*
Soldier/Army presence in the area	.005
Partisanship	
Ruling party	.116**
Opposition party	.094**
Political participation	
Frequency of joining others to request government action	.036
Frequency of contacting media	-.005
Frequency of contacting government official for help	.033
Frequency of attending a demonstration/protest march	.069*
Social group membership	
Extent of activity in religious group	.114**
Extent of activity in voluntary or community group	.016

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$

Being partisan appears to be positively associated with political-violence victimisation. However, some differences were observed in the coefficient between those who identify with the ruling party ($\beta=.116$; $p<.01$) and opposition parties ($\beta=.094$; $p<.01$). Only one of the four indicators of political participation is significantly associated with political-violence victimisation – frequency of attending a demonstration or protest march. The result shows that those who attend demonstrations/protests frequently are more likely to be exposed to political violence. Similarly, the likelihood of political-violence victimisation increases with the extent of activity in religious groups. The extent of activity in voluntary or community groups does not make any difference in political-violence victimisation.

Table 3 shows the influence of these factors across Northern and Southern parts of the country. The results show that age, which was a significant explanatory variable in the overall model, is not significant across the models for North and South. Gender, which was not a significant predictor in the overall model, is significant across the two regions, but in opposite directions. In the North, women have a higher likelihood of experiencing political violence than men ($\beta=.077$; $p<.05$), but the reverse is the case in the South ($\beta=-.071$; $p<.05$). Lived poverty remains a significant predictor across the two regions ($\beta=.096$; $p<.01$ in the North; $\beta=.074$; $p<.05$ in the South).

Table 3: Linear regression model explaining the likelihood of political-violence victimisation | by region | Nigeria | 2017

	N: 755 North (Model 2) F: 7.072; p<0.001 R²: 0.113	N: 813 South (Model 3) F: 4.436; p<0.001 R²: 0.068
Predictor variables	β	β
Socio-demographic characteristics		
Age	-.061	-.067
Female	.077*	-.071*
Lived Poverty Index	.096**	.074*
Security presence		
Police presence in the area	-.064	-.067
Soldier/Army presence in the area	.033	-.027
Partisanship		
Ruling party	.145**	.087*
Opposition party	.088*	.092*
Political participation		
Frequency of joining others to request government action	.118*	-.022
Frequency of contacting media	.035	-.053
Frequency of contacting government official for help	-.023	.073
Frequency of attending a demonstration/protest march	.039	.109**
Social group membership		
Extent of activity in religious group	.134**	.088*
Extent of activity in voluntary or community group	.010	.011

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$

Police presence, which was a significant explanatory factor in the overall model, is not significant across models 2 and 3. Party affiliation remains a significant explanatory factor across the two regions. Being affiliated with the ruling party increases the likelihood of political-violence victimisation ($\beta=.145$; $p<0.01$ in the North; $\beta=.087$; $p<.05$ in the South). For affiliation with opposition parties, the results are $\beta=.088$; $p<.05$ in the North and $\beta=.092$; $p<0.05$ in the South. Two indicators of political participation are significant predictors, but with regional differences. Joining others to request government action was significant in the North ($\beta=.118$; $p<0.05$) but not in the South, while attending a protest was significant in the South ($\beta=.109$; $p<0.01$) but not in the North. The extent of activity in religious groups remains significant in both regions (North: $\beta=.134$; $p<0.01$; South: $\beta=.088$; $p<0.05$).

Discussion

This study investigates explanatory factors for political-violence victimisation in Nigeria and how such factors vary between Northern and Southern parts of the country. We find that residents in the Southern region had a higher likelihood of experiencing political violence than those in the North, and the South South geopolitical zone recorded the highest rate of political violence, followed by North East and South West. The finding that the Southern region had a higher likelihood of experiencing political violence may be explained by the deviant place theory: Nine of the 10 states with the highest population densities in Nigeria are in the South, while the 15 states with the lowest population densities are in the North. Our finding aligns with the earlier finding by Kunnuji (2016) that population density is an explanatory factor in crime in Nigeria. In addition, the mainstay of Nigeria's economy is oil, which is generated in the South. Five of the six states in the South South geopolitical zone are oil-producing states. Struggle for a share of "oil money" may explain why the South South zone is the seat of militant groups (such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta or MEND) that regularly engage in violence. Oil conflict, which has been politicised and fuelled by politicians in the region (Emuedo, 2010), may explain why the South South zone recorded the highest level of political violence. The guns and other weapons in stock with the militant groups and youth – who see it as their responsibility to defend their oil-rich land against exploitation by foreign organisations and the Nigerian government – may be used to render political thuggery service to politicians in the region in exchange for money.

The Northern region would have recorded a much lower rate of political violence but for the North East geopolitical zone, a stronghold of Boko Haram insurgents known for suicide bombings, attacks on security outfits, abduction of girls, etc. In all, the Southern region is more accepting of ideological, cultural, and political differences than the North (Kunnuji et al., 2017; Alabi et al., 2020), and this may explain why the rate of armed attack by political and religious extremists was higher in the North than in the South, as seen in Figure 5.

The regional variation in the influence of gender on political-violence victimisation is interesting. Our finding that women were more likely than men to experience political violence in the North may be explained by the fact that perpetrators of political violence in the region consider women to be soft targets. In addition, the North is more patriarchal than the South. Twelve of the 19 states in the North operate under shari'a law, which many adherents believe does not support women in political positions. Hence, one should expect, as Biroli (2016) and Håkansson (2021) suggested, that women who attempt to have their voices heard in politics in the North may experience political intimidation and violence as a response to challenging persistent male domination of politics in the region. The finding that men had a higher likelihood of political-violence victimisation than women in the South supports the study of Fox et al. (2009) but contradicts the soft target explanation and the finding of Adisa et al. (2021), who found no significant association between gender and crime victimisation in Lagos State in the South. However, since men are more likely than women to engage in risky behaviours (such as cultism and being hired for thuggery services by politicians), it is expected that the former will experience a higher level of political-violence victimisation than the latter. In addition, political violence is mostly conducted outdoors. Since Nigerian society is largely patriarchal, one expects that men will be present

at the scene of violence more often than women. This is not to say that women do not engage in economic and outdoor activities in the South. However, there is a higher likelihood of finding a housewife (who is not otherwise employed and not looking for a job) than a “house husband” in Nigeria.

This study's finding that younger people were more likely to experience political violence than older people contradicts the study of Adisa et al. (2021), who reported no significant influence of age on crime victimisation in Lagos State, but supports Perkins' (1997) finding that young people are more likely to be victims of violent crimes. There are plausible reasons why young people may experience more political violence than older people. First, some forms of political violence happen in public places, where older people are less likely to be present. Second, young people are more impulsive and less patient, which makes them more likely to resort to violence against their peers when differences occur. Similarly, the finding on the influence of poverty on political-violence victimisation is expected and supported by earlier studies (McLaughlin, 2011; Elise, 2017; Cuthbertson, 2018). Further, I argue that while political violence against a single individual may target the influential or rich for certain political reasons, the poor are more likely to be victimised in mass political violence.

Surprisingly, there appears to be a negative association between the presence of police officers/vehicles and the likelihood of political-violence victimisation in Nigeria. This finding contradicts that of Adisa et al. (2021), who reported that police patrol has no significant effect on crime victimisation in Lagos metropolis, but that the presence of private security outfits reduces residents' exposure to crime victimisation. One may be tempted to interpret this result as meaning that despite public distrust and perceived ineffectiveness of the police, their presence can send a fear signal to perpetrators, thereby reducing the likelihood of political-violence victimisation, or that the police are indeed capable guardians, thereby giving credence to the routine activity theory. It should be noted, however, that the deployment of police may be political and class-based. Even so, it makes sense to submit that with adequate police reform and the provision of modern equipment and training, the police will have greater capabilities to curb political violence in Nigeria. The finding on army presence could be explained by the fact that the military operates on call and is only present in critical internal security situations that are perceived to be out of control of the police.

The association between party affiliation and political-violence victimisation may be explained by the concepts of negative campaigning (Haselmayer, 2019) and inflammatory rhetoric (Olurode, 2017) that are inherent parts of Nigerian politics (Opeibi, 2006; Okolie et al., 2021) and are used by party supporters to spite political opponents, which may precipitate political violence.

The finding that participating in demonstrations and protests has a significant effect only in the South may be explained by the fact that Nigerian politics is parochial, such that any region that produces the president is likely to be more represented in federal appointments and development programmes. The current Nigerian president is from the North, and his administration has been accused of making one-sided appointments and putting development emphasis on the Northern region. This may explain why the recent waves of protests in the South are usually addressing federal issues. There have been protests by secessionist groups – including the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Oduduwa Republic – in the South because of the perceived unfairness of the federal government toward the South. There have also been Endbadgovernance and BuhariMustGo protests, all of which started in the South and target the federal government. Considering the repressive nature of the Nigerian state, these protesters are often violently repressed by security forces, which may explain why participation in protest appears to be associated with political-violence victimisation in the South but not in the North.

The finding that joining others to request government action is a predictor of political-violence victimisation in the North is surprising and as yet unclear, as is the fact that a higher proportion of people in the North than in the South reported requesting government action.

Future studies are needed to shed more light in this regard. The influence of activity in religious groups may be explained by lifestyle exposure theory and the fact that leaders of religious groups in Nigeria are being used as tools by politicians. Consequently, active members of religious groups may be targets of political violence due to their political influence.

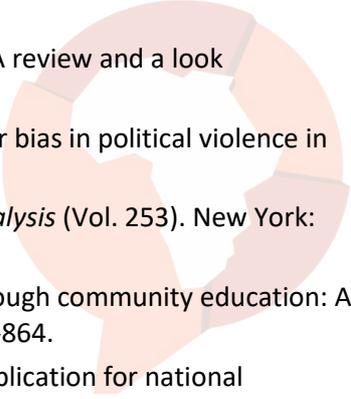
Limitations of the study

This study has a few limitations. First, Nigeria is multicultural, and the grouping into North and South may not sufficiently show regional differences. The country has six geopolitical zones, and within each zone, cultural and ethnic differences exist. Second, the data used in this study was collected in 2017, so it does not capture the waves of current and ongoing political violence (such as armed banditry, EndSARS killings, secessionism, etc.) in Nigeria. Third, the data set relies on self-reported information, which is prone to forgetfulness and exaggeration. Fourth, this study does not include cases of those who have died because of political violence in Nigeria. It focuses on personal experience of political violence, which can only be told by someone who is alive.



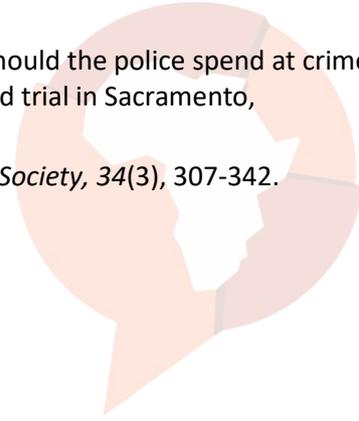
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