



## Understanding Regional Variations in Political Violence Victimization in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Political violence has been part of Nigeria's history such that even to date, major political processes are still characterized by violence. However, most studies have focused on the causes of political violence, with little emphasis on the vulnerability to political violence victimisation. Using the data from Afrobarometer survey that comprised 1,568 adults, this study investigated the prevalence of political violence victimisation, associated factors and variations between the Northern and Southern regions in Nigeria. Linear regression models were fitted to understand the influence of gender, age, poverty, presence of security apparatus, political participation, party affiliation and social group membership on political violence victimisation across the two regions in Nigeria. The study found that the experience of political violence was higher in the South than in the North. Age, poverty, security presence, political participation, social group membership, and party affiliation were statistically associated with the experience of political violence. In the North, women had a higher likelihood of experiencing political violence than men ( $\beta = 0.077$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), but the reverse was the case in the South ( $\beta = -0.071$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The frequency of participating in demonstrations or protest marches significantly increased the likelihood of political violence victimisation only in the South ( $\beta = 0.109$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), while the frequency of engaging in collective actions was positively associated with the experience of political violence only in the North ( $\beta = 0.118$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The study submits that the two regions have notable differences that must be considered when formulating security policies in Nigeria.

### Keywords

Political Victimization, Political Participation, Political Violence, Party Affiliation, Social Group Membership

### 1. 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). Apart from people who have been killed in political violence, those who managed to escape death are displaced from their homes, live with physical injuries throughout their lives, experience post-traumatic stress disorder, and have feelings of emotional pain that are passed down across generations (Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017). A historic case in point is the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) whose story is never forgotten due to its massive destruction. Recent cases include the attack on voters, politicians and staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the 2023 national elections (Amata, 2023; Ojo, 2023). As Apter

(1997) rightly put it, even when the intention for political violence is heroic, its consequences are devastating and long-lasting. Hence, political violence is better prevented than managed/resolved after its occurrence.

Political violence has been conceived in several ways by scholars and organisations. The World Health Organisation (2002) sees political violence as the intentional use of force to psychologically or physically intimidate or hurt another person or a group to achieve political goals. It includes the deliberate denial of access to human rights and basic needs. On the other hand, Hibbs (1973) opined that political violence may have three features. First, the behaviour/event must be anti-system. Second, the event/behaviour 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). Three, it must involve collective or mass activity/action. In this regard, 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. But it disregards state-perpetrated violence, such as a crackdown on minority groups. Also, his second and third criteria would disregard attacks on a few lower-class members since violence against lower-stratum members may not pose much inconvenience to the running of the political class. Similarly, 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).

Thus, 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. The European Consortium for Political Research (2014) noted that political violence can be distinguished by the targets of attacks, the nature of objectives, and the organizational make-up of the perpetrators and modes of their operation. However, it is important to note that political violence, in some instances, may be unplanned and unorganised.

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 Samuel 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). Fatalities were also recorded in 2015, 2019 and 2023 elections (Adam et al., 2015; Agbo, 2019; Olokor, 2023). Observed experience suggests 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 is known about factors that may increase the vulnerability of people to political violence victimisation in Nigeria. Perhaps this reflects a culture of neglecting victims while chasing perpetrators. Therefore, this study investigates possible explanatory factors for the experience of political violence in Nigeria. Specifically, it inquires on the following fundamental questions: What is the role of socio-demographic factors (poverty, gender, age), region, party affiliation, political participation, presence of security apparatus, and social group membership in the reported experience of political violence in Nigeria? Does the influence of these factors in political violence victimisation vary between North and South?

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

An understanding of possible variations between Northern and Southern Nigeria is important for several reasons. One, the two regions had different pre-colonial 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 the 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 partly by religion and ethnicity and manipulated by the political class (Seiyefa, 2017), one should expect that the two regions will differ in their experience of, and reaction to, political violence.

Three, the two regions have dissimilar security challenges and respond differently to them. An example was the case of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigeria Police Force, which was accused of extrajudicial killings and extortion of young people. While there were protests against SARS in most parts of the south, pro-SARS protests occurred in some parts of the Northern region (Haruna, 2020). Whether or not the pro-SARS protests were sponsored by political elites is beyond the focus of the current study. Furthermore, while some governors in the Southern region were against the activities of SARS, advocated for its reform and appreciated its disbandment, the Northern Governors Forum kicked against the disbandment and published a statement in that regard on its official website.<sup>1</sup>

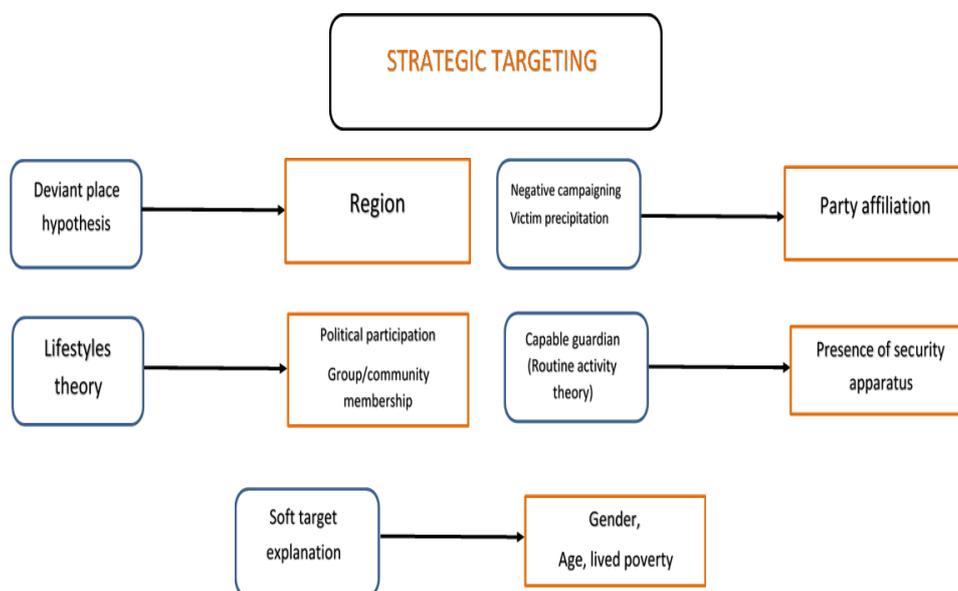
Another important reason to consider North-South differences in Nigeria is informed by the deviant place theory, which suggests that "victims do not motivate crime but rather are

<sup>1</sup> <http://nggovernorsforum.org/index.php/homepage/82-topics/1803-northern-govs-we-want-sars-it-helped-curtail-activities-of-bandits-armed-robbers> Accessed on May 28, 2024.

more likely to become victims due to the fact that 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 is associated with a high crime rate in Nigeria (Kunnuji, 2016). On the other hand, the Northern region covers more than 70% of land areas in Nigeria. In fact, Niger State of North Central is larger than the seven selected states combined in the South (Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Enugu, Imo, Lagos) (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.

### 2.1. *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 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. Similarly, 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. However, influential and wealthy people are also targeted for political violence, especially political assassination, but the volume of violence and the number of persons affected may differ. In the case of a political assassination of the upper class, the number of victims may be lower compared to when a poor neighbourhood or locality is attacked for political reasons.

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, Attoh, 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)). The second is “gendered forms,” which “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 is “gendered impacts,” referring 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 and includes the abduction of young boys and girls from their schools by bandits or insurgents. 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. However, 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.

Apart 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 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] rumours 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 was usually between the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). PDP won the presidential election and ruled the country from 1999– when Nigeria returned to democratic rule– to 2015 when it lost to APC. In recent times, negative campaigning has transcended a two-party affair and now includes the Labour Party (LP), which became popular during the 2023 elections and known for antagonising the APC government.

Opeibi (2006) argues that with the 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. After the 2023 elections, the APC and LP have been directly antagonistic, irrespective of the potential benefits of the actions of leaders in each political party. To the fervent supporters of LP, APC can never be right; to those who are sympathetic to APC, LP always finds faults in the current administration to seek public attention.

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-Iyamu. However, 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-Iyamu went the opposite way, emerging as the APC's candidate.<sup>2</sup> 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 forged. One may wonder whether Oshiomole did not realise that the certificate was fake in 2016 when he painted Obaseki as the messiah. Consequently, there were pre-election political threats and records of political violence in the 2020 elections in Edo State.

On the other hand, 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 Oluode (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, emasculation 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 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, internet bloggers 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<sup>th</sup> June 2021, two Kaduna State College of Education students were shot dead by security operatives during a protest against a hike in school fees.<sup>3</sup> 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 of 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

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/399505-timeline-obaseki-vs-oshiomhole-from-political-sweethearts-to-implacable-foes.html?tztc=1> . Accessed on June 22, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/470452-updated-student-shot-dead-two-others-injured-during-protest-against-fees-hike-in-kaduna.html?tztc=1> . Accessed on June 30, 2024

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 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 it is 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.

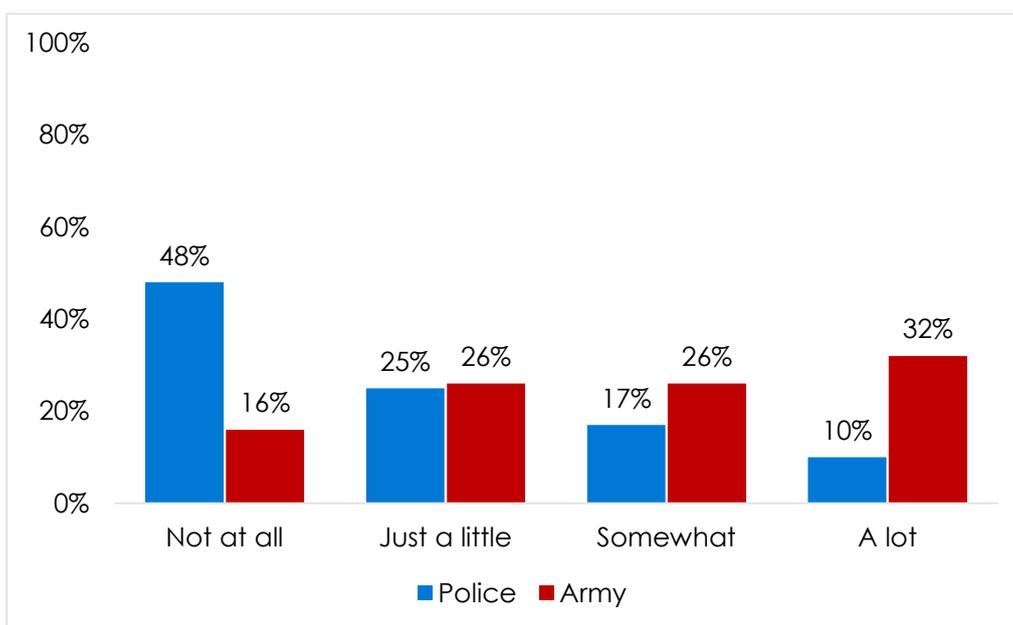


Figure 2: Trust in security apparatus in Nigeria in 2017 (%)

Contradictory results have been reported on the influence of security presence on crime occurrence. While some studies found that the presence of security agencies, including the police may deter crime and reduce public fear (Telep, Mitchell, & Weisburd, 2014; Mohler et al., 2015) because potential perpetrators fear arrest (Durlauf & Nagin, 2011), other studies reported the opposite (Earl & Soule, 2010; Baudains, Belur, Braithwaite, Marchione, & Johnson, 2019), demonstrating that security presence may cause backlash effects in large-scale political demonstrations and violence.

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<sup>th</sup> October 2020 around 7 PM. 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<sup>th</sup> October 2020; the soldiers had removed the evidence of the protesters' corpses. However, a certain deejay shared an Instagram live video during the massacre, which led the army and Lagos State government to recant their initial denial. Consequently, the state or its security agencies may also be perpetrators of political violence.

### 3. Methods

This study utilises quantitative secondary data. Specific characteristics of the datasets and analysis are discussed below.

#### 3.1. Data and Population

The study utilises data from Afrobarometer's Round 7 (2017) survey in Nigeria<sup>4</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>; 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: Nigeria's map showing Northern and Southern states**

<sup>4</sup> Additional details on the sampling procedures can be found here: <https://afrobarometer.org/surveys-and-methods/sampling-principles>.

### **3.2. 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.

### **3.3. Independent variables**

Five broad explanatory variables were used in this study. The first was a set of basic socio-demographic characteristics, which included region of residence (North or South), gender (male or female), age, and lived poverty index (LPI)<sup>5</sup>. The second was the presence of security apparatus. Fieldworkers were asked whether or not there was a presence of (1) policemen or police vehicles in the area; (2) soldiers or army vehicles in the area. The third variable was partisanship. Respondents were asked about the political party they felt close to, and all the registered political parties as of the time of the study were listed. This study categorised the options into two dummy variables: (1) "ruling party =1; others =0"; (2) "opposition party= 1; others = 0". The fourth variable, political participation, was operationalised using four different stand-alone variables. Respondents were asked whether they have done any of the following within the past year: (a) "joined others in your community to request action from government," (b) "contacted the media, like calling a radio program or writing a letter to a newspaper," (c) "contacted a government official to ask for help or make a complaint," (d) "participated in a demonstration or protest march." The 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 was social group membership, which was measured by the extent to which respondents were active in a (1) "religious group that meets outside of regular worship services"; (2) "voluntary association or community group". The response option ranged from '0'= not a member to '3'=official leader.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

The analysis began 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 were shown at the univariate level. Column and bar charts were used to show the experience of the different forms of political violence in each region. At the inferential level, a multiple linear regression model was fitted for the overall data set (Nigeria)

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

and presented in Table 2 (Model 1). All the independent variables were included in Model 1. In Table 3, separate models (2 and 3) were fitted for each region. All the independent variables except region were included in models 2 and 3.

#### 4. Results

The descriptive results in Table 1 show that both male and female respondents in both regions were almost equally represented. The mean age of respondents in both regions was nearly 33. More people in the North tend to join political parties than Southerners. Moreover, the descriptive statistics also show more citizens who actively engage in politics in the North than in the South.

**Table 1: Frequency distribution of study variables**

Variables	North (755)		South (813)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<b>A: Sociodemographic characteristics</b>				
Gender				
Male	383	50.7	406	49.9
Female	372	49.3	407	50.1
Age	<i>Mean: 32.4; SD: 11.956 Mean: 32.9; SD: 12.955</i>			
Lived poverty index	<i>Mean: 4.92; SD: 4.184 Mean: 4.84; SD: 3.919</i>			
<b>B: Security presence</b>				
Presence of police				
No	451	59.7	419	51.5
Yes	304	40.3	394	48.5
Presence of soldiers				
No	668	88.5	749	92.1
Yes	87	11.5	64	7.9
<b>C: Party Affiliation</b>				
Ruling party	296	39.7	102	12.7
Opposition party	118	15.8	222	27.6
No affiliation	331	44.4	479	59.7
<b>D: Political participation/activism</b>				
Request govt. action				
Never	160	21.2	222	27.3
Not yet	343	45.5	395	48.6
Yes	251	33.3	195	24.1
Contacted the media				
Never	234	31.2	193	23.8
Not yet	342	45.5	438	53.9
Yes	175	23.4	181	22.3
Contacted govt. official				
Never	187	24.8	221	27.3
Not yet	358	47.5	425	52.5
Yes	209	27.7	164	20.2
Attended a protest/march				
Never	454	60.5	419	51.7
Not yet	170	22.6	247	30.5
Yes	127	17.1	144	17.8
<b>E: Social group membership</b>				

Membership of a religious group				
Not a Member	331	43.8	285	35.1
Inactive Member	92	12.2	78	9.6
Active Member	254	33.6	370	45.5
Official Leader	74	9.8	78	9.6
Membership of a voluntary/community group				
Not a Member	421	55.8	421	51.8
Inactive Member	82	10.9	77	9.5
Active Member	191	25.3	237	29.2
Official Leader	58	7.7	76	9.3
Experience of political violence				
No	581	77.0	585	72.0
Yes	174	23.0	228	28.1

The results also show that one in four persons (25.6%) experience at least one form of political violence. Furthermore, about 23% of respondents from the North have experienced at least one form of violence, compared to 28% in the South. Figure 4 shows that, overall, the most common form of political violence experienced by respondents is violence at a political campaign/rally (18%), followed by violence at a protest (14%), while the least-experienced form is violent attacks by political/religious extremists (11%). Figure 5 shows that while violence at political campaign rallies and protests is more common in the South than in the North, the reverse is the case for violent attacks by extremists. In Figure 6, the mean number of the forms of political violence experienced in each geo-political zone is presented. The figure shows that the South-South has recorded the highest rate of political violence victimisation with a score of 0.64, followed by North East, while North West, which is currently the zone of armed banditry and kidnapping, recorded the lowest mean of 0.25.

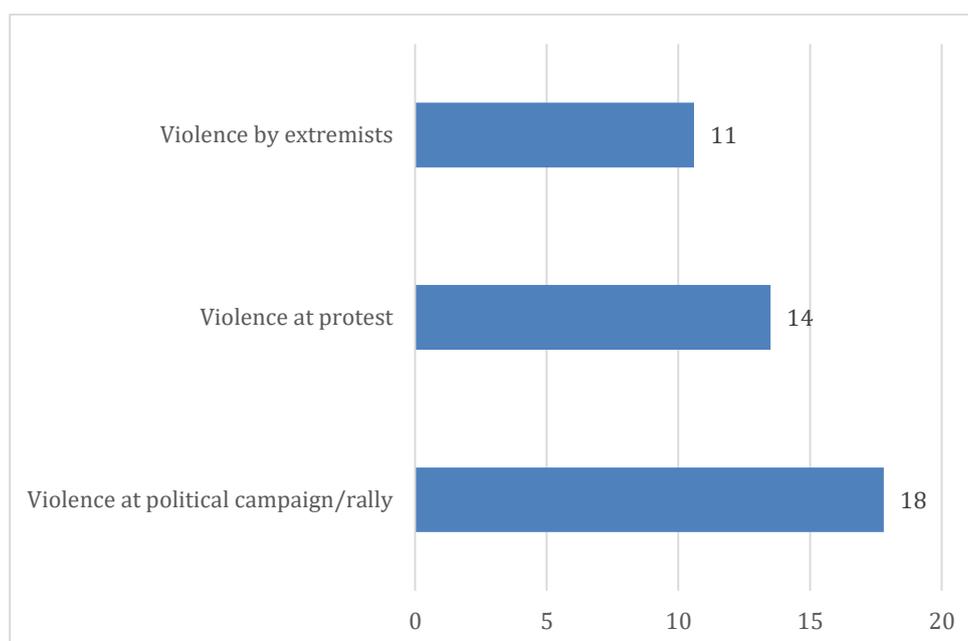
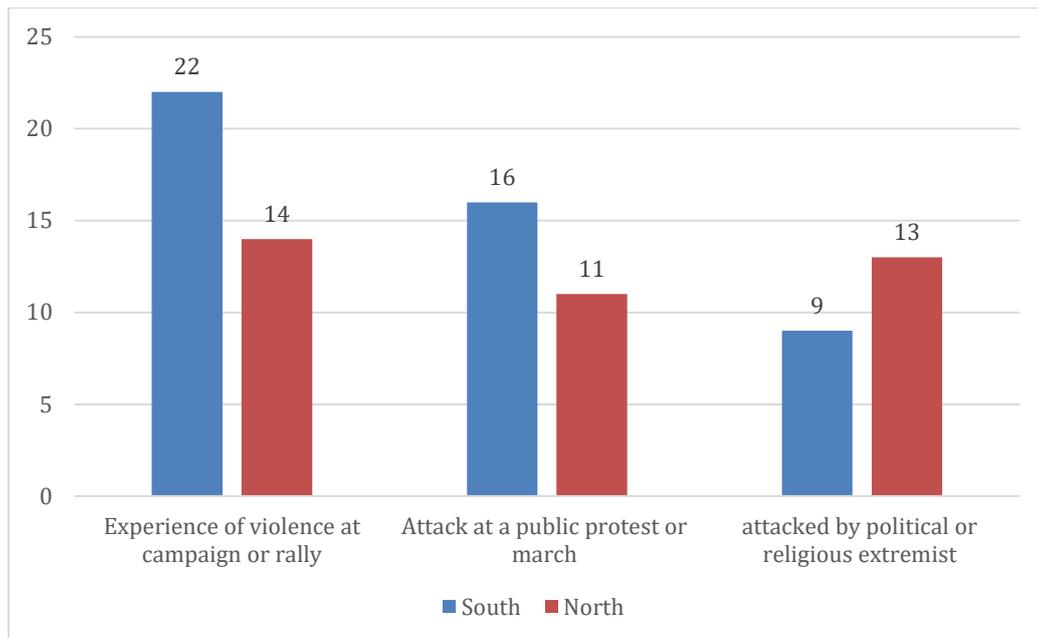


Figure 4: Experience of political violence in Nigeria in 2017 (%)



**Figure 5: Experience of different forms of political violence in Nigeria by region in 2017 (%)**



**Figure 6: Mean score of forms of political violence victimisation across geo-political zones in 2017**

**4.1. Explaining Factors Associated with Experience of Political Violence in Nigeria**

Table 2 shows the 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.

Being partisan appears to be positively associated with political violence victimisation, that is, affiliation with a political party (whether the ruling party or opposition party) increases the chances of experiencing political violence. 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 2: Linear regression model explaining the likelihood of political violence victimization in Nigeria**

	N: 1568 Nigeria (Model 1) F: 9.369; P<0.001 R <sup>2</sup> : 0.079
Predictor Variables	$\beta$
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>	
South	.076**
Age	-.066**
Female	-.001
Lived poverty index	.086**
<b>Security presence</b>	
Police presence in the area	-.066*
Soldiers/army presence in the area	.005
<b>Partisanship</b>	
Ruling party	.116**
Opposition party	.094**
<b>Political participation</b>	
Frequency of joining others to request government action	.036
Frequency of contacting media	-.005
Frequency of contacted government official for help	.033
Frequency of attending a demonstration/protest march	.069*
<b>Social group membership</b>	
Extent of activity in religious group	.114**
Extent of activity in voluntary or community group	.016

\* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$

Table 3 shows the influence of these factors across the 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).

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 ( $\beta=.145$ ;  $p<.01$  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  $\beta=.092$ ;  $p<.05$  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 ( $\beta=.118$ ;  $p<.05$ ) but not in the South while attending a protest was significant in the South ( $\beta=.109$ ;  $p<.01$ ) but not in the North. The extent of activity in religious groups remains significant in both regions (North:  $\beta=.134$ ;  $p<.01$ ; South:  $\beta=.088$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

**Table 3: Linear regression model explaining the likelihood of political violence victimization in Northern and Southern Nigeria**

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

\* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$

#### **4.2. 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. It was found that residents in the Southern region had a higher likelihood of experiencing political violence than those in the North, especially violence at political rallies and public protests. The South-South geopolitical zone recorded the highest rate of political violence (39.8%), followed by North East (38.1%). 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. The finding of this study 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.

As seen in Figure 5, the Northern region would have recorded a much lower rate of political violence but for the North East geopolitical zone, which is the 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 attacks 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. The 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 (12) 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, this article argues 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 findings 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 president of Nigeria during the previous administration was from the North, and his administration was accused of making one-sided appointments and putting development emphasis on the Northern region. This may explain why protests in the South during the previous administration were targeted at the federal government. There were 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 were also Endbadgovernance and BuhariMustGo protests, all of which started in the South and targeted the federal government. Considering the repressive nature of the Nigerian state, the protesters were often violently repressed by security forces. The current president is from the South and is being accused of giving key appointments to Southerners and people from his ethnic group. Hence, Nigeria's politics and

voting patterns are shaped by religion and ethnicity. The question of which of the two factors (ethnicity or religion) is more important in Nigeria's politics is another level of analysis.

The finding that engaging in collective action is a predictor of political violence victimisation in the North is surprising and as yet unclear. More surprising 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 on this. 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.

## 5. Conclusion

Political violence is still common in Nigeria. The state and the people are perpetrators of political violence. Violence occurs mainly during political campaigns and rallies, which are often carried out by the people, even when they are sponsored by the political class. However, violence at public protests is often perpetrated by the state to repress protesters. As previous studies (see Alabi et al., 2020; Kunnuji et al., 2017) have demonstrated, the Northern and Southern regions have notable differences. While violence by extremists is higher in the North, violence during political campaigns and public protests is common in the South. Consequently, attempts to reduce political violence in the country should consider the sociocultural configuration of each region (and each geopolitical zone and state). In addition, the dynamics of predictors of political violence in each region should be considered. Despite the regional differences, some factors (such as gender, poverty, partisanship, political participation and social group membership) explain the vulnerability to political violence in Nigeria.

## Acknowledgement

Sincere appreciation to Afrobarometer for the online seminar workshop where the idea of this paper was properly shaped.

## Funding

This research did not receive any funding.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest to disclose.

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<sup>i</sup> 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, 2023 electoral violence, kidnappings, 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.