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## Conflict exposure and expected victimization in Nigeria

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#### ABSTRACT

Although the Northern Nigerian state of Kaduna has the second highest incidence of violent conflicts among Nigeria's 36 states, the population generally reports a low level of expected victimization. A large-N survey conducted in the state in 2021 showed that 65% of the population believe they are unlikely to be directly affected by violent conflict in the future. This is surprising, given that 42% of respondents experienced at least 10 conflict incidents within a 10 km radius around their dwellings between 1997 and 2020. Ordered logit regressions reveal that the more individuals are exposed to conflict, the less worried they are about getting victimized. The negative correlation between violent conflict and expected victimization might be due to the existential threat posed by violent conflict, which prompts people to rely more heavily on their ethnoreligious kinship ties for both material and non-material support. This, in turn, attenuates their fear of victimization.

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#### **KEYWORDS**

Violent conflict; expected victimization; social cohesion; religion; ethnicity; Kaduna State; Nigeria

## Introduction

In the 2024 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), Nigeria was one of the countries most affected by terrorism. It ranked eighth in the world and fourth in Africa (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024). Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Events Database (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010) shows that in 2023 alone, Nigeria recorded a total of 3265 violent conflict incidents, making it the country's second most violent year since 1997.<sup>1</sup> The Round 8 Afrobarometer survey, which is representative of Nigeria's population, shows that in 2020, 18% of Nigerians had experienced some form of violence in their neighborhood during the past two years. The Round 9 Afrobarometer survey, conducted in 2022, shows that 76% of Nigerians think the country is unsafe to live in; 71% think the country has become less safe to live in compared to five years ago; and 73% think the government has performed poorly in preventing and resolving conflicts across the country.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, although there is considerable violence in Nigeria, its incidence is unevenly spread across Nigeria's 36 states, with a few of them accounting for most of the incidents. This

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study focuses on the Northern Nigerian state of Kaduna, which has the second-highest incidence of violent conflict in the country. Kaduna has featured frequently in both the domestic and international news lately – sadly, not for good reasons. On 7 March 2024, armed men stormed a school and kidnapped over 287 pupils along with some teachers (Ewokor & Rhoden-Paul, 2024; Voice of America, 2024). On 3 December 2023, a drone strike launched by the Nigerian army killed over 80 people at a religious celebration; they had been mistaken for bandits operating in the vicinity (Punch Newspaper, 2023; Sunday, 2023). Besides the nagging problem of banditry and ransom-driven abductions, the state is also grappling with intercommunal violence between nomadic herders and sedentary communities (Ojo et al., 2023; Okoli & Abubakar, 2021; Tuki, 2024a, 2024b).

Relying on novel large-N survey data collected from Kaduna State as part of the Transnational Perspectives on Migration and Integration (TRANSMIT) research project, this study seeks to examine the effect of exposure to violent conflict on expected victimization among the state's population.<sup>3</sup> To the best of my knowledge, a similar study has not been conducted in Nigeria. Conflict exposure was measured by computing the total number of violent conflict incidents within a 10 km radius around the respondents' dwellings using QGIS software. The variable measuring expected victimization was derived from a question in the TRANSMIT survey asking respondents about the likelihood that they will be directly affected by violent conflict in one year's time. The responses were measured on a scale with five ordinal categories ranging from, 'very likely' to 'very unlikely.'

The descriptive results show that 65% of the population in Kaduna believe they are either 'somewhat unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to be victims of violent conflict in the future. Only 23% of them believe they are 'somewhat likely' or 'very likely' to be victimized; the remaining 12% believe the likelihood of being victimized within one year is the same as it was at the time of the survey (i.e. 2021). The low expectation of being victimized among the population in Kaduna is particularly striking given the high conflict incidence in the state. Ordered logit regressions reveal that as conflict exposure increases, people's expectations of being victimized decrease. A plausible reason for the negative correlation between conflict exposure and expected victimization, as shown by the data, is that exposure to violent conflict strengthens cohesion within ethnoreligious ingroups. Conflict-induced mortality salience prompts individuals to rely more heavily on their ethnoreligious kinship ties for both material and non-material support (including security), which in turn enables them to deal with the existential threat posed by violent conflict.

This study contributes to the broader literature on terror management theory and intergroup conflict (e.g. Castano et al., 2002; Garshasbi & Maleh, 2024; Lickel et al., 2006; Park & Pyszczynski, 2016; Tuki, 2024a). The remainder of this study is organized as follows: the second section discusses relevant literature and states the hypotheses. The third section introduces the data, operationalizes the variables used to estimate the regression models, and discusses the analytical technique. The fourth section presents and discusses the regression results, while the fifth section summarizes the study and concludes.

## **Theoretical considerations**

Terror management theory 'posits that people are consistently, and unconsciously, motivated to maintain faith in their cultural worldviews, self-esteem, and close relationships to protect themselves from the anxiety produced by the awareness that death is inescapable' (Darrell & Pyszczynski, 2016, p. 6). Put differently, cultural world views, selfesteem, and close interpersonal relationships serve as anxiety buffers that enable people to carry on with their normal lives despite being aware of death's inevitability. These buffers are crucial because unrestrained anxiety could lead to paralyzing fears that 'undermine the goal-directed behavior necessary for our survival' (Park & Pyszczynski, 2016, p. 194). Darrell and Pyszczynski (2016, p. 4) defined cultural world views as 'symbolic constructions that are by definition abstractions of observable reality, and therefore cannot be directly observed.' This means cultural world views are akin to a lens through which people view and make sense of the uncertain world around them. Because cultural world views may not be underpinned by objective reality, they need to be constantly validated by people who also share the same beliefs: 'Just as faith in our personal value depends on others sharing our positive self-evaluations, so too does faith in our conception of external reality depend on others sharing these conceptions' (Pyszczynski et al., 1997, p. 16). In a similar vein, people with low self-esteem and those who do not have close relationships upon which they could rely usually find it difficult to deal with anxieties induced by mortality salience (Lancaster et al., 2016).

Awareness of one's mortality – i.e. mortality salience – has been found to foster cohesion among ingroup members and prejudice toward outgroup members. This is because having ingroup members who share the same cultural worldviews reinforces people's belief in that worldview and attenuates their existential anxieties. Conversely, outgroup members who have different cultural worldviews challenge the cultural worldviews of ingroup members, hence making them more vulnerable to anxiety (Harmon-Jones et al., 1996). These intergroup distinctions could be based on religion, ethnicity, nationality and political orientation (Pyszczynski et al., 1997). Castano et al. (2002) have highlighted the importance of integrating terror management theory (TMT) with the theory of intergroup relations, as this offers an enhanced understanding of human behavior: Insights from TMT theory might in fact be used to understand what are the fundamental fears and needs of the individual/group member, whereas research on intergroup relations tells us about the specific mechanisms' (Castano et al., 2002, p. 137). Moreover, they note that if mortality salience indeed fosters positive attitudes toward ingroup members, then individuals must perceive the ingroup as 'having a real existence, as being a real entity' – a phenomenon referred to as entitativity (Castano et al., 2002, p. 136; Lickel et al., 2006).

Some empirical studies have shown that mortality salience indeed strengthens ingroup cohesion and leads to outgroup prejudice. In an experimental study, Greenberg et al. (1990) found that mortality salience prompted Christians to view their co-religionists more favorably than Jews. Moreover, Christians who had been primed by being reminded about death viewed Jews more unfavorably than the control group that had not been primed. In a study conducted among university students in Italy, Castano et al. (2002) found that, compared to the participants in the control condition, individuals in the treatment group who had been reminded about death assessed their fellow Italians more favorably than Germans, identified more with their ingroup members, and perceived the ingroup as being more entitative. Bradley et al. (2012) conducted a study among white students in the United States in which they found that respondents who had been reminded about their mortality took longer to associate names typically borne by

black people with positive attributes compared to participants in the control condition. In a recent study, Garshasbi and Maleh (2024) have shown that children residing in Al-Hawl refugee camp in northeastern Syria are particularly vulnerable to Islamist radicalization. This is because they face discrimination from other children at school and have difficulty associating with children residing outside the camp – due to the tendency for the camp's residents to be associated with ISIS. Moreover, the high rate of mortality in the camp due to violence and the absence of basic necessities makes death salient among the camp's residents. These children, in a bid to attenuate their death-related anxieties, might resort to embracing ISIS ideology as a means to develop self-esteem and a sense of purpose.

In a study conducted in the wake of a terrorist attack perpetrated by the radical Islamist group Boko Haram, Harding and Nwokolo (2024) found that exposure to violence weakened Nigerians' sense of national identity and strengthened their feeling of ethnic belonging. Analyzing survey data for Nigeria, Tuki (2024a) found that exposure to violent conflict made Nigerians reluctant to have people of different ethnicity and religion as neighbors. He argued that this was because the threat posed by violent conflict fostered ingroup cohesion and eroded trust in outgroup members. This was especially so when the opposite party to the conflict constituted a distinct cultural outgroup. In their study, which examined the effect of the Nepalese civil war on social cohesion, Gilligan et al. (2014) found that exposure to violent conflict had a positive effect on social cohesion. They explained their findings using the 'purging' and 'coping' mechanisms. The *purging* mechanism functioned such that people who had weak social networks fled the communities due to conflict, leaving behind those with strong social networks. The coping mechanism functioned such that those who remained in the communities despite the conflict (i.e. those with strong social networks) pooled their resources so they could better deal with the existential threat confronting them.

Returning to the Nigerian case, Nigeria's population is almost evenly split between Christians and Muslims (Campbell & Page, 2018, p. 72). This has been a source of tension because polarization peaks when a society is divided equally between two cultural groups, which heightens the risk of violent conflict (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2005, 2003). The tensions between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria stem from the country's precolonial history (Tuki, 2024a). Nigeria's cultural landscape is mirrored in the state of Kaduna, where the population is also almost evenly split between Muslims and Christians. The TRANSMIT survey dataset, upon which this study relies, shows that all respondents (n = 1353) reported a religious affiliation, with a 56:44 ratio of Muslims to Christians. The survey included a question asking respondents to choose which aspect of their identity (i.e. ethnicity, religion, or nationality) was most important to them: 74% chose their religion, 5% chose their ethnicity, 4% chose their nationality, while the remaining 16% said all identities were equally important.<sup>4</sup> The survey also showed that 95% of respondents agreed that the rules of the Bible or Quran were more important to them than the laws of Nigeria.<sup>5</sup>

Muslim–Christian tensions in Kaduna State also have historical roots. During the precolonial period, the northern part of Kaduna was a Muslim emirate (i.e. Zaria Emirate), while the southern part of the state consisted of peoples who practiced their traditional religions. Since slaves were crucial to the functioning of the emirates, and it was forbidden to enslave fellow Muslims due to the common brotherhood shared in Islam, the non-Muslim peoples in southern Kaduna were often raided by Muslim jihadists from the emirates who sought to capture slaves. These traditional peoples, who did not appreciate being enslaved, often fought back. With the advent of colonialism and Christian evangelization, most of them embraced Christianity as a means of resisting the threat posed by the Muslim emirates (Morrison, 1982; Van Beek, 1988; Vaughan, 2016). Kaduna has remained a hotbed of deadly Muslim–Christian conflicts in postcolonial Nigeria, as evidenced by the Kafanchan Crisis in 1987, the Zangon Katab Riots in 1992, the Shariah Crisis in 2000, the Miss World Riots in 2002, and the Post-election Crisis in 2011, among others (Angerbrandt, 2018, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2003; Scacco & Warren, 2021; Suberu, 2013).<sup>6</sup>

Among the population in Kaduna, exposure to violent conflict might have a negative impact on expected victimization. This is because conflict-induced anxieties prompt people to rely more heavily on their ethnoreligious networks for both material and non-material support (including security). These networks serve as buffers that enable individuals to carry on with their 'normal' lives despite the threat of violence. People might prefer to rely upon their ethnoreligious networks rather than security agencies in times of crisis because they have more trust in traditional institutions than formal institutions. Security agencies are sometimes slow in responding to conflict situations, and there have been reports of security personnel siding with their co-ethnics and co-religionists during conflicts (Human Rights Watch, 2024; Krause, 2011). Data obtained from the Round 9 Afrobarometer survey conducted in 2022 supports this pattern: 52% of Nigerians do not trust the police at all; 46% do not trust the president at all; 43% do not trust local government authorities at all. However, the level of distrust in religious and traditional authorities is much lower: Only 20% of the population do not trust traditional rulers at all, and the estimate for religious leaders is 16%.<sup>7</sup>

As shown in Figure 1, the police are not the first port of call when Nigerians need security-related assistance; they tend to rely more on traditional rulers, family members, and



<sup>■</sup> Number of respondents per response category (n = 1,554)

#### Figure 1. Nigerians' first call when in need of security-related assistance.

Note: The *y*-axis shows the institutions that Nigerians first call upon when in need of security-related assistance. The *x*-axis shows the number of respondents associated with the various institutions. The figure is based on the following question in the Round 8 Afrobarometer survey conducted in 2020: 'To whom do you normally go to first for assistance when you are concerned about your security and the security of your family?'



■ Number of victimized respondents (n = 232)

Figure 2. Source of assistance among people who have been victimized in Kaduna.

Note: The *y*-axis shows the source of assistance received by the 232 respondents in Kaduna who reported that they had been directly affected by violence during the past decade (i.e. 2011–2021). The *x*-axis shows the number of respondents associated with the response categories. Respondents were allowed to select multiple sources of assistance. The figure is based on the Transnational Perspectives on Migration and Integration (TRANSMIT) survey conducted in Kaduna in 2021.

neighborhood vigilante groups. As shown in Figure 2, most people who have been directly affected by violence in Kaduna did not receive any support. Among those who did, the main sources of support were family and friends/neighbors, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the government played a limited role. Recognizing the rising threat of insecurity across Nigeria, coupled with the inability of Nigerian security forces to effectively address this problem, many communities have established vigilante groups, some of which are committed to protecting specific ethnic and religious groups (Charles, 2021; Chukwuma, 2017; Higazi, 2008; International Crisis Group, 2022).

Another reason why conflict exposure might negatively correlate with expected victimization in Kaduna is the long history of intergroup conflicts in the state. While the measure of conflict exposure derived from ACLED data (Raleigh et al., 2010) considers only conflict incidents starting from 1997. Muslim-Christian conflicts predate this year. This implies that the population might have already been relying on their ethnoreligious networks for support before 1997, and as the conflict incidence rose, they became less worried about being victimized because they increasingly relied on their kinship ties. A point worth highlighting is that the frequent occurrence of violent conflicts in Kaduna has led to residential segregation along ethnic and religious lines (Hoffmann, 2017; Scacco & Warren, 2021; Suberu, 2013). Segregation makes it easier for communities to establish vigilante groups. This is because the shared ethnicity and religion among community members enable them to overcome the challenges associated with collective action more easily. In other words, people who belong to the same ethnic and religious groups find it easier to cooperate in achieving the common goal of providing security for their community. The discussion so far leads to the following hypotheses that this study seeks to test:

**H1:** Among the population in Kaduna, exposure to violent conflict negatively correlates with expected victimization.

**H2:** Among the population in Kaduna, exposure to violent conflict positively correlates with the importance that individuals attach to their ethnoreligious identities.

## Data and methodology

This study relies on the Transnational Perspectives on Migration and Integration (TRANS-MIT) survey data collected from the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna in 2021. A total of 1353 respondents aged 15 and above were interviewed. The data were collected using clustered random sampling. Data were collected from all 23 local government areas (LGAs) (i.e. municipalities) in the state, except for 4 of them (i.e. Giwa, Birnin Gwari, Kauru, and Zangon Kataf). These four LGAs were excluded from the sampling frame due to the high risk of intercommunal conflicts and banditry, which made it unsafe for enumerators to conduct interviews there. Section B in the appendix provides more details on the sampling strategy.

Before the survey was conducted, ethical approval was sought from the WZB Berlin Social Science Center Ethics Review Committee (Application No.: 2020/3/101) and the National Health Research Ethics Committee of Nigeria (NHREC), and granted. Respondents were clearly informed about the nature of the survey, its purpose, and how the collected data would be processed prior to the interviews. Enumerators began the interviews only after consent was granted. In the case of respondents who were minors (i.e. under 18 years), consent was first obtained from the household head, followed by consent from the minor. Interviews proceeded only when both parties granted consent. Respondents were also informed that they could opt out of the interview at any time.

## **Operationalization of the variables**

#### Dependent variable

*Expected victimization.* This variable measures the respondents' expectations of becoming victims of violent conflict within a year. It was derived from the question, 'Looking towards the future, say one year from now, how likely is it that you will be affected by violence?' The responses were measured on a scale with five ordinal categories ranging from '0 = very unlikely' to '4 = very likely.'

As shown in Figure 3, most respondents do not believe they will be affected by violence within a year. Sixty-five percent of them chose either the 'very unlikely' or 'somewhat unlikely' response categories. Only 23% of them believe they are either 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' to be affected by violence. The remaining 12% responded



**Number** of respondents per response category (n = 1,298)

#### Figure 3. Expected victimization among the population in Kaduna.

Note: The vertical axis shows the various response categories to the question asking respondents about their expectation that they would be affected by violent conflict within a year. The values on the horizontal axis show the number of respondents associated with the various response categories.

that the likelihood of being victimized in one year's time would remain the same as at the time of the survey (i.e. 2021). A binary version of the dependent variable was developed, where 'very likely' and 'somewhat likely' responses were coded as 1, and the remaining three response categories as 0. This variable was used to conduct a robustness check because, as shown in Figure 3, the responses are clustered in the 'somewhat unlikely' and 'very unlikely' categories.

*Cultural salience.* This is a dummy variable that measures the extent to which individuals prioritize their ethnoreligious identity over their national identity. It was derived from the question, 'So far, we know your religion, ethnicity, and nationality. Among these three items, which is most important to you?' Respondents who chose either their ethnic or religious identity were coded as 1, while those who chose their nationality or said each of the three aspects of their identity were equally important were coded as 0. Ethnicity and religious affiliation were collapsed into the same category because they overlap to a great extent in Nigeria (Agbiboa, 2013; Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2013; Agbiboa & Okem, 2011; Tuki, 2024a).

As shown in Figure 4, the population in Kaduna attaches the most importance to their religious identity and have a weak sense of national identification. A total of 962 respondents, equivalent to 74% of the sample, chose their religious identity; 5% chose their ethnicity; 4% chose their nationality; while the remaining 16% said all identities were equally important.

## **Explanatory variable**

*Violent conflict.* This variable measures the total number of violent conflict incidents that occurred within a 10 km radius around the respondents' dwellings from 1997 to 2020.<sup>8</sup> Using QGIS software, this variable was developed by leveraging the georeferenced dimensions of the TRANSMIT and Armed Conflict Location and Events Data Project (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010) datasets. Based on the ACLED dataset, violent conflicts are defined as events that belong to one of these three categories: battles, violence against civilians, and explosions/remote violence. Conflict incidents within the radius from 1997 to 2020 were considered because this study is particularly interested in the cumulative effects of conflict exposure. Some studies have shown that the effects of violent conflict tend to persist and shape behavior in the present (e.g. Tint, 2010; Tuki,





#### Figure 4. Most important aspect of identity among the population in Kaduna.

Note: The vertical axis shows the various aspects of the respondents' identities, while the values on the horizontal axis show the total number of respondents who attach the most importance to the various identity categories.

2024c; Wagoner & Brescó, 2016). 79% of the 1353 respondents had at least one conflict incident within the 10 km radius around their dwellings, and 42% had at least 10 incidents within the buffer. Another version of the explanatory variable was developed where conflict exposure was rather measured within a 5 km radius. This variable was used to conduct a robustness check.

Using alternative conflict data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (Sundberg & Melander, 2013)<sup>9</sup> and the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2022),<sup>10</sup> two alternative measures for conflict exposure were developed. The UCDP and GTD datasets differ from the ACLED data in terms of the duration for which data are available and the inclusion criteria for events into the database. The UCDP dataset records only conflict incidents that caused at least one fatality. Since the UCDP dataset is available beginning from 1989, all conflict incidents within the 10 km buffer from 1989 to 2020 were considered while developing the measure of conflict exposure. The GTD dataset records terrorist activity around the world and, like the ACLED dataset, does not impose a fatality threshold as an inclusion criterion. Since the GTD dataset is available from 1970, all incidents within the buffer from 1970 to 2020 were computed. These two variables were also used to conduct robustness checks.

## **Control variables**

Control variables for past victimization, perceived state capacity, perception of gun proliferation in the community, socioeconomic condition, and the demographic attributes of the respondents were considered. Each of these variables is discussed below.

*Past victimization.* This is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent or a close family member had been directly affected by violence during the past decade (i.e. 2011–2021), and 0 otherwise. It was derived from the question,

During the last 10 years, have you or your close family members been affected by violence? By 'affected' I mean (a) You or your close family were threatened by violence, (b) You or one of your close family members was injured or killed, (c) Your home or property was destroyed by an attacker.

18% of the respondents had been victimized, which translates to approximately 1 in 6 households. Victimization differs from conflict exposure (i.e. the explanatory variable) because it measures the concrete experience of violence. In contrast, being exposed to violent conflict does not necessarily imply being victimized. This is because it is possible for people to live in conflict zones and devise coping strategies that enable them to carry on with their 'normal' lives despite the conflict. Victimization could confound the relationship between the explanatory variable and dependent variable because it could lead to psychological distress and PTSD (Matlow & DePrince, 2013), and also increase the incidence of violence by fueling people's desire for revenge (Gerlsma & Lugtmeyer, 2018; Zhao & Zheng, 2024).

*State capacity.* This measures the degree to which respondents believe the police are effectively fulfilling their role in providing security. It was derived from the question, 'To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The police are doing a

good job of providing security for the community?' The responses were measured on a scale with five ordinal categories ranging from '0 = strongly disagree' to '4 = strongly agree.' This variable was included in the model because it could confound the relationship between the dependent and explanatory variables. For instance, people who think the police are ineffective might feel unsafe and hence expect to be victimized. On the other hand, people who think the police are ineffective might be more inclined to resolve disputes by taking the law into their own hands, which could, in turn, increase the risk of violent conflict (Bagu & Smith, 2017). 64% of the population in Kaduna either 'strongly agree' or 'somewhat agree' that the police are doing a good job at providing security, while 31% either 'somewhat disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with the statement.

Gun proliferation. This measures the respondents' perceptions of the trend in gun ownership in their communities. It was derived from the question, 'Has the ownership of guns become more common, less common, or stayed about the same in the last 10 years?' The responses were measured on a scale with the following three ordinal categories, 0 = lesscommon,' '1 = stayed the same,' '2 = more common.' This variable was included in the model because the perception of weapon proliferation could also confound the relationship between the dependent and explanatory variables. When people feel that gun ownership is rising (e.g. in neighboring rival communities), this could heighten their level of perceived threat and expected victimization (Eke, 2022a, 2022b). To attenuate the threat, other communities might resort to purchasing firearms. This could increase the risk of violence because people who possess firearms might use them when they feel threatened (Schaub, 2014). This mechanism is especially plausible in scenarios where the population is polarized along ethnoreligious lines. 49% of the population in Kaduna believe gun ownership has become more common in their communities during the past decade, 12% believe gun ownership has stayed the same, while the remaining 39% believe it has become less common.

*Household income.* This measures the socioeconomic circumstances of the households to which respondents belong. It was derived from the question, 'Which of the following statements best describe the current economic situation of your household?' The responses were measured on a scale with five ordinal categories ranging from, '0 = money is not enough for food' to '4 = we can afford to buy almost anything.' Socioeconomic condition could potentially confound the relationship between violent conflict and expected victimization. For instance, deprivation could increase the risk of conflict by lowering the opportunity cost of joining a rebel group (Collier, 2008; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). On the other hand, wealthy households and wealthy communities might have sufficient resources to finance private security and vigilante groups to address insecurity, which could, in turn, lower their expected victimization. Conversely, wealthy individuals might have a high level of expected victimization because their wealth could make them potential targets for criminal groups (Hinton & Montalvo, 2016).

*Demographic covariates.* This includes respondents' religious affiliation, gender, marital status, and age. Religious affiliation takes a value of 1 for Muslims and 0 for Christians. Gender takes the value of 1 if for female and 0 for male. Marital status takes the value

Variable	Total observations	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Expected victimization <sup>a</sup>	1298	1.19	1.359	0	4
Expected victimization (binary)	1298	0.233	0.423	0	1
Cultural salience <sup>a</sup>	1298	0.79	0.407	0	1
Violent conflict (10 km)	1353	31.29	48.968	0	139
Violent conflict (5 km)	1353	14.376	32.874	0	125
Violent conflict [UCDP] (10 km)	1353	10.934	17.906	0	48
Violent conflict [UCDP] (5 km)	1353	5.19	12.996	0	47
Violent conflict [GTD] (10 km)	1353	14.534	20.671	0	60
Violent conflict [GTD] (5 km)	1353	6.429	12.609	0	49
Past victimization	1298	0.179	0.383	0	1
State capacity	1298	2.492	1.577	0	4
Gun proliferation	1298	1.106	0.933	0	2
Household income	1298	0.978	0.921	0	4
Muslim affiliation	1298	0.561	0.496	0	1
Age	1321	34.391	14.004	15	85
Female	1321	0.557	0.497	0	1
Married	1298	0.74	0.439	0	1

#### Table 1. Summary statistics.

Note: <sup>a</sup> is the dependent variable, 'expected victimization (binary)' is a reduced form of the dependent variable where its five response categories were collapsed into two main categories.

of 1 if the respondent is married or has ever been married, and 0 otherwise. Age is measured in years.

Table 1 reports the summary statistics of all the variables.

## Analytical technique

To determine the effect of violent conflict on expected victimization and cultural salience, a model of the following general form is considered:

$$\gamma_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Violent conflict}_{1997-2020} + \beta_2 \lambda'_i + \delta_i \tag{1}$$

where  $\gamma_i$  is the dependent variable which could be either expected victimization or cultural salience for respondent *i*,  $\lambda'_i$  is a vector of control variables that have been discussed earlier,  $\beta_0$  is the intercept,  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  are the coefficients of the explanatory and control variables, respectively, and  $\delta_i$  is the error term. An ordered logit (Ologit) regression was used to estimate model because it respects the ordinal nature of the dependent variable. Moreover, this approach makes it possible to determine the effect of the explanatory variable on each category of the dependent variable. A robustness check was conducted using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression as an alternative estimation method.

## **Results and discussion**

## Conflict and expected victimization

Table 2 reports the results of ordered logit models regressing expected victimization on violent conflict. In Model 1, where only violent conflict was considered, it carried the expected negative sign and was statistically significant at the 1% level. This supports Hypothesis 1, which states that, among the population in Kaduna, exposure to violent conflict lowers the likelihood of having a high level of expected victimization. Put differently, the more people are exposed to violent conflict, the lower their expectation of

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Expected victimization <sup>a</sup>	Ologit	Ologit	Ologit	OLS	Ologit	Ologit
Violent conflict	-0.003***	-0.003***	-0.003**	-0.002***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Violent conflict (UCDP)					-0.008***	
				(0.003)		
Violent conflict (GTD)						-0.004*
						(0.003)
Past victimization		0.441***	0.366***	0.268**	0.365***	0.363***
<b>.</b>		(0.134)	(0.14)	(0.105)	(0.14)	(0.14)
State capacity		-0.101***	-0.091***	-0.069***	-0.091**	-0.09**
Commune life and in a		(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.025)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Gun proliferation		0.146***	0.16***	0.11***	0.158***	0.16***
Hausahald in same		(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.04)	(0.057)	(0.057)
Household income			0.055	0.037	0.054	0.054
Muslim affiliation			(0.050)	(0.041)	(0.050)	(0.050)
			-0.343	-0.304	-0.337	-0.309
٨de			0.002	0.004)	0.002	0.001
Age			(0.002	(0.003)	(0.002	(0.001)
Female			0.176	0.117	0 176	0 173
i cindic			(0.112)	(0.079)	(0.112)	(0.112)
Married			-0.069	-0.059	-0.074	-0.05
			(0.156)	(0.109)	(0.156)	(0.157)
Constant			(	1.37***		
				(0.162)		
Intercept 1	-0.216***	-0.237*	-0.247		-0.247	-0.235
	(0.065)	(0.139)	(0.234)		(0.234)	(0.235)
Intercept 2	0.526***	0.517***	0.512**		0.513**	0.523**
	(0.067)	(0.14)	(0.236)		(0.235)	(0.237)
Intercept 3	1.107***	1.107***	1.108***		1.108***	1.118***
	(0.073)	(0.142)	(0.239)		(0.238)	(0.24)
Intercept 4	2.471***	2.488***	2.497***		2.498***	2.506***
	(0.113)	(0.169)	(0.258)		(0.257)	(0.259)
Observations	1298	1298	1298	1298	1298	1298
R-squared				0.043		
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.002	0.01	0.014		0.014	0.013
Log pseudolikelihood	-1815.596	-1800.677	-1794.292		-1793.791	-1795.555
AIC statistic	3641.191	3617.354	3614.584	4441.793	3613.582	3617.109
BIC statistic	3667.034	3658.702	3681.775	4493.479	3680.774	3684.301

Table 2. Ordered logit models regressing expected victimization on violent conflict.

Notes: Robust standard errors are in parentheses, \*\*\*p < .01, \*\*p < .05, \*p < .1, a is the dependent variable, conflict is measured using buffers with a 10 km radius. All models are estimated using ordered logit (Ologit) regression except for Model 4 which is estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. The dependent variable is measured on a scale with five ordinal categories ranging from '0 = very unlikely' to '4 = very likely.'

being directly affected by violence. In Model 2, where the first set of control variables for past victimization, state capacity, and gun proliferation were included, violent conflict maintained its negative sign and remained significant at the 1% level. All three control variables were also significant at the 1% level. Unlike conflict exposure which carried a negative sign, past victimization carried a positive sign. This suggests that people who have been directly affected by violence (compared to those who have not) are more likely to have a high level of expected victimization. This result also indicates that people respond differently to conflict exposure and the concrete experience of violence. The negative sign associated with state capacity suggests that people who believe the police are doing a good job at providing security are more likely to have a low level of expected victimization. Gun proliferation carried a positive sign, which indicates that

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people who think gun ownership has increased in their neighborhood are more likely to have a high level of expected victimization.

In Model 3, where the last set of control variables for the respondents' socioeconomic status and demographic attributes was included, conflict maintained its negative sign, but its significance level dropped to 5%. Among the control variables, only religious affiliation was significant. Its negative sign suggests that, compared Christians, Muslims are less likely to have a high level of expected victimization. Put differently, Christians are more likely than Muslims to have a high level of expected victimization. The statistical insignificance of household income implies that there is no difference in expected victimization between the poor and the wealthy. The statistical insignificance of gender, marital status, and age suggest that in terms of expected victimization, men do not differ from women; married people do not differ from their unmarried counterparts; and the elderly do not differ from the young.

In Model 4, where expected victimization was treated as a continuous variable and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used as an alternative estimation method, the regression results were consistent with those in the preceding ordered logit models. Models 5 and 6 show that the main results are robust to alternative operationalizations of violent conflict based on the UCDP and GTD datasets. The results reported in Table 2 are also robust to using a different version of the explanatory variable that measures violent conflict incidents within a 5 km radius around the respondents' dwellings (see Table A1 in the appendix). Furthermore, the results are robust to a binary operationalization of expected victimization and to the use of linear probability model (LPM) as an alternative estimation method (see Table A3 in the appendix).

To illustrate the effect sizes, the average marginal effects for the full ordered logit model and the linear predictions of the OLS model were plotted in Figure 5. A quick look at panel A, which is based on the ordered logit model (i.e. Model 3 in Table 2), shows that the effect of violent conflict on expected victimization is largest for the 'very unlikely' response category of the dependent variable and smallest on the 'some-what unlikely' category.<sup>11</sup> Keeping all covariates at their mean levels, a 1-unit increase in conflict raises the probability of respondents choosing the 'very unlikely' response category by 0.06 percentage points when asked about their expectation of being victimized by conflict within a year. In contrast, it reduces the probability of choosing the 'very likely' response category by 0.02 percentage points.

Panel B, which is based on the OLS model (i.e. Model 4 in Table 2), shows the linear predictions of expected victimization at different levels of conflict exposure, ranging from 0 to 150 incidents, in intervals of 25. The negative slope of the function provides further support for Hypothesis 1, which states that people's expectation of being victimized decreases as exposure to conflict increases. The figure also shows that the predicted value of expected victimization is highest when conflict is set at 0 and then declines steadily as conflict increases. This is likely because Kaduna has a long history of ethnoreligious conflicts that predates the conflict data used to derive the explanatory variable. For instance, the ACLED dataset only includes conflicts beginning in 1997, thereby excluding major conflict events in Kaduna such as the Kafanchan Crisis in 1987 and the Zangon Katab Riots in 1992, which have had a significant impact on Muslim-Christian relations in the state (Suberu, 2013).



Figure 5. Average marginal effects of violent conflict on expected victimization, and linear predictions of expected victimization.

Note: Panel A, which is based on the full Ologit model (i.e. Model 3 in Table 2) visualizes the average marginal effect of violent conflict on the five categories of expected victimization. Panel B, which is based on the Ologit model (i.e. Model 4 in Table 2) plots the linear predicted effect of violent conflict on expected victimization. Confidence intervals are at the 95% level.

## **Conflict and cultural salience**

To test the second hypothesis regarding whether exposure to violent conflict fosters ingroup cohesion by prompting people to place more importance on their ethnoreligious identity (i.e. cultural salience), a linear probability model (LPM) regressing cultural salience on violent conflict was estimated. An LPM model was used because cultural salience is measured as a binary variable, allowing the regression coefficients to be interpreted directly as probabilities. Table 2 reports the regression results.

In Model 1, where only violent conflict was considered, it carried a positive sign and was significant at the 1% level. Specifically, a 1-unit increase in violent conflict increases the probability of individuals placing the greatest importance on the ethnoreligious aspect of their identity by 0.1%. This supports Hypothesis 2, which states that exposure to conflict prompts people to place more importance on their ethnoreligious identities. This may be because people rely on material and non-material resources within their ethnoreligious networks, which helps them better cope with the existential threat posed by violent conflict. This aligns with the observation made by Castano et al. (2002, p. 141): '[T]he ingroup might serve as an anxiety buffer per se. Ingroup entitativity might be the foremost ingroup feature that group members will care about when they are confronted with the threat of annihilation of their personal self.'

In Model 2, where the first set of control variables for past victimization, state capacity, and gun proliferation were included, violent conflict remained significant at the 1% level and maintained its positive sign. Among the control variables, past victimization and state capacity were significant. Past victimization was negatively correlated with cultural salience, which contrasts with the positive sign accompanying conflict exposure. This further supports the earlier assertion that people do not respond in the same way to conflict exposure and the concrete experience of violence – i.e. victimization. State capacity carried a negative sign and was significant at the 1% level. This suggests that the perception that the police are doing a good job at providing security lowers the probability of people prioritizing their ethnoreligious identity over their national identity. In other words, improvements in state capacity can weaken ethnoreligious identification.

In Model 3 where the remaining control variables for income and the respondents' demographic characteristics were included, only Muslim affiliation was significant. Its positive sign suggests that Muslims are more likely than Christians to prioritize their ethnoreligious identity over their national identity. Models 4 and 5 show that these results are robust to different operationalizations of conflict based on the UCDP and GTD datasets. It is also worth noting that the results reported in Table 3 are also robust to an alternative operationalization of conflict, where conflict exposure is measured within a 5 km radius around the respondents' dwellings (see Table A2 in the appendix).

Cultural salience <sup>a</sup>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Violent conflict	0.001***	0.001***	0.001**		
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)		
Violent conflict (UCDP)				0.001**	
				(0.001)	
Violent conflict (GTD)					0.001**
					(0.00)
Past victimization		-0.089***	-0.064**	-0.064**	-0.063**
		(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)
State capacity		-0.024***	-0.027***	-0.028***	-0.028***
. ,		(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Gun proliferation		-0.001	0.00	0.00	0.00
		(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Household income			0.013	0.013	0.013
			(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Muslim affiliation			0.088***	0.088***	0.093***
			(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Age			-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
			(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female			0.008	0.008	0.008
			(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Married			-0.007	-0.008	-0.009
			(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)
Constant	0.767***	0.845***	0.835***	.836***	0.835***
	(0.014)	(0.027)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)
Observations	1298	1298	1298	1298	1298
R-squared	0.008	0.023	0.038	0.038	0.037
AIC statistic	1342.902	1329.484	1318.942	1319.104	1320.665
BIC statistic	1353.239	1355.327	1370.628	1370.79	1372.351

Table 3. Linear probability models regressing cultural salience on violent conflict

Notes: Robust standard errors are in parentheses, \*\*\*p < .01, \*\*p < .05, \*p < .1, <sup>a</sup> is the dependent variable, violent conflict is measured using buffers with a 10 km radius. All regressions are estimated using a linear probability model (LPM). Cultural salience is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if respondents attach more importance to either their religion or ethnicity than their nationality, and 0 otherwise.



Figure 6. Linear predictions of cultural salience.

Note: The figure, which is based on Model 3 in Table 3, visualizes the linear predicted effect of violent conflict on expected victimization. Confidence intervals are at the 95% level.

Figure 6 visualizes the linear predictions of cultural salience at different levels of conflict exposure ranging from 0 to 150 incidents in intervals of 25. The positive slope of the function provides further support for Hypothesis 2, which states that the more people are exposed to violent conflict, the more importance they will attach to their ethnoreligious identity.

However, while ingroup cohesion can be beneficial in that it serves as a buffer against conflict-induced existential anxieties, it can also be problematic because increased cohesion within ethnoreligious groups makes intergroup boundaries more salient. This, in turn, could heighten the risk of intergroup conflict. Furthermore, increased cohesion among ingroup members allows them to overcome the challenges associated with collective action, making mobilization in conflict situations easier. Such mobilizations might be driven by the desire for revenge, which could lead to a downward spiral where each attack creates conditions for a reprisal. This is especially relevant in scenarios where the population is polarized along ethnoreligious lines and cultural groups are highly entitative. These elements are present in Kaduna, which might explain why it has a particularly high level of intercommunal violence, characterized by reprisal attacks along ethnoreligious lines (e.g. Suberu, 2013; Tuki, 2023). Schaub (2014, p. 19) succinctly described this phenomenon: 'Rather than being an indicator of "social capital," cooperation in the context of communal violence is driven by a form of potentially aggressive "solidarity with a sharp edge."'

Although this study asserts that ingroup cohesion underlies the negative correlation between conflict exposure and expected victimization, another plausible explanation for this relationship could be apathy and the normalization of violence. ACLED data (Raleigh et al., 2010) shows that Kaduna ranks second among Nigeria's 36 states in terms of the incidence of violent conflict. Between 2018 and 2023, the state experienced 1403 conflict incidents. In 2021, the year in which the TRANSMIT survey was conducted, there were 421 incidents, averaging about 1.15 incidents per day.<sup>12</sup> This marked the highest number of conflicts in Kaduna since 1997. Given the frequent occurrence of violence, coupled with the inability of Nigerian security forces to effectively address the problem of insecurity, it is possible that residents have become desensitized to the violence, leading to its normalization within society. Future research could focus on empirically testing this mechanism.

## Conclusion

This study examined the effect of violent conflict on expected victimization among the population in the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna. The regression results revealed that exposure to violent conflict was negatively correlated with expected victimization. This implies that the more people are exposed to conflict, the lower their expectation of being directly affected by conflict in the future. A plausible explanation for this, as shown empirically, is that the existential threat posed by violent conflict prompts people to rely more heavily on their ethnoreligious kinship ties for material and non-material support. This, in turn, enables them to carry on with their 'normal' lives despite the conflict.

Yet, while the strengthening of ingroup cohesion as a result of conflict can be beneficial in fostering resilience and recovery, it can also be problematic. This is because increased cohesion among ingroup members may make intergroup boundaries more salient, which, in turn, could heighten the risk of intergroup conflict. The results of this study provide valuable insights into how people respond to violence and the mechanisms underlying intergroup relations. If the government in Kaduna intends to reduce Muslim– Christian conflicts, it needs to focus on policies that foster intergroup trust and emphasize the superordinate identity of being Nigerian among the population. This could make intergroup boundaries less salient. Religious leaders might also have a pivotal role to play in achieving this goal because Nigerians generally have more trust in religious authorities than the government.

Beyond the case of Kaduna, these findings may also apply to the broader Nigerian context and other countries experiencing conflicts between different cultural groups. Examples include the violent clashes between Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia (Mekonnen & Van Eyssen, 2022; Østebø, 2023), Hindu–Muslim conflicts in India (Ghosh & Kumar, 1991; Kausar, 2006), the conflicts between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland (Fulton, 2002; Ruane, 2021), and the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis (Ambrosio, 2011; Uzer, 2012), among others.

## **Ethical approval**

Ethical approval for the survey conducted in Nigeria was granted by the WZB Berlin Social Science Center Ethics Review Committee (Application No.: 2020/3/101) and the National Health Research Ethics Committee of Nigeria (NHREC).

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## Notes

- 1. Violent conflicts are incidents belonging to any of the following three categories: violence against civilians, battles, and explosions/remote violence.
- 2. To access the Afrobarometer data visit: https://www.afrobarometer.org/.
- 3. For more information on the TRANSMIT project visit: https://www.projekte.hu-berlin.de/en/ transmit.
- 4. Ethnicity and religion overlap to a great extent in the state of Kaduna and Nigeria.
- 5. A characteristic of interreligious conflicts in Kaduna is their high intensity, both in terms of fatalities and the diffusion of violence to other parts of the state. Reprisals are also very common, such that the killing of a Christian or Muslim in one part of the state often triggers reprisals against members of the opposite religious group in other parts of the state, irrespective of whether they had anything to do with the initial provocation. This is due to the high level of entitativity among members of the two groups.
- 6. Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule on October1, 1960
- 7. The TRANSMIT dataset shows that one in six households in Kaduna had been directly affected by some form of violence during the past decade (i.e. 2011–2021).
- 8. The start year of 1997 was used because the ACLED data is available beginning from then. Conflict incidents that occurred after 2020 were excluded to lag the explanatory variable. This mitigates the potential problem of reverse causation since the dependent variable – i.e. expected victimization – is measured in 2021.
- 9. To access the UCDP's Georeferenced Events Dataset, visit: https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/
- 10. To access the GTD dataset, visit: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/
- 11. Similarly, plotting the results of Models 5 and 6, which are based on the UCDP and GTD datasets, reveals a similar pattern (see Figure A1 in the appendix).
- 12. See note 1.

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## Data availability statement

The data and do-files underlying the regression models are available in the Harvard Dataverse: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/6WYTJZ.

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