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Regional Differences in Support for Secession Among Members of the Igbo Ethnic Group in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Although members of the Igbo ethnic group generally express strong support for the secession of Nigeria's Eastern Region to establish the Republic of Biafra, there is a noticeable gap in studies examining whether Igbos living in the Eastern Region (i.e., the proposed territory of Biafra) exhibit greater support for secession than those living outside of it. This study uses regression analysis to examine data from Rounds 7 and 9 of the Afrobarometer survey, revealing that individuals residing in the Eastern Region indeed express significantly stronger support for secession than those living outside of it. This heightened support might be because residents of Eastern Nigeria rely on the region for their livelihoods, making them less inclined to support a united Nigeria. Furthermore, they may lack robust social connections with people from other ethnic groups outside of the Eastern Region. Consistent with this explanation, regression analysis also shows that Igbos living in the Eastern Region are more hesitant than those living outside of it to have people from different ethnic groups as neighbors.

Introduction

Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria has had a turbulent history marked by violent interethnic conflicts. One of the most significant of these conflicts was the Biafran War, also known as the Nigerian Civil War, which occurred between 1967 and 1970. During this period, members of the Igbo ethnic group, who are indigenous to Nigeria's Eastern Region, attempted to secede from the country to form the Republic of Biafra.¹ Their decision to secede was driven by the 1966 pogrom, during which Igbos living outside the Eastern Region—particularly in the Northern Region—were systematically targeted and killed due to a coup perpetrated by a group of Igbo soldiers. The pogrom, which resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Igbos, prompted their mass exodus back to their eastern homeland.² The three-year civil war between Biafran forces and the Nigerian military resulted in approximately two million deaths, the majority of which occurred on the Biafran side, primarily due to starvation caused by a blockade imposed by the Nigerian military.³

Although the Biafran War is more than 50 years in the past, many Igbos still feel aggrieved, perceiving continued socioeconomic and political marginalization by the federal government in postwar Nigeria.⁴ As Luke Amadi and his coauthors write, “[T]he absence of a president of Igbo ethnicity and Igbo incumbents in top political offices in Nigeria in more than 50 years since the civil war remains an issue partly accounting for separatist protest.”⁵ Since Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999, neo-Biafran

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groups agitating for the reestablishment of the defunct Republic of Biafra have emerged. Most prominent among these groups is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement, whose leader, Nnamdi Kanu, has been in the custody of Nigerian security agencies since 2021, charged with treasonable felony. The Nigerian government has taken a forceful approach toward these groups, even labeling IPOB as a terrorist organization.⁶ Nigeria's former president, Muhammadu Buhari, in a tweet, had condemned pro-Biafra agitations in the Eastern Region, saying that those who engaged in these were ignorant of the horrors caused by the Biafran War, and promised to "treat them in the language they understand."⁷ This sparked outrage among Nigerians, who considered the president's words insensitive, especially because he had fought on the side of the Nigerian army during the Biafran War. Twitter deleted the tweet, ruling that it violated its terms of service. In retaliation, the Nigerian government imposed a seven-month ban on Twitter.⁸

In February 2024, a group known as the Biafra Republic Government in Exile (BRGIE) announced the commencement of a self-referendum to actualize the sovereign state of Biafra.⁹ BRGIE is a splinter group of IPOB; its leader and self-proclaimed prime minister, Simon Ekpa, was a broadcaster for Radio Biafra, IPOB's media arm. A report on BRGIE's website asserts that 50 million votes were cast online between February and November 2024, with 99.95% supporting secession.¹⁰ However, the spokesperson for IPOB has discredited the referendum, insisting that only IPOB's leader, Nnamdi Kanu, can call for a referendum.¹¹ Suffice it to say that Simon Ekpa, who resides in Finland, is currently in the custody of Finnish authorities on suspicion of inciting violence in Nigeria. The Nigerian government, which is seeking Ekpa's extradition, has declared him wanted on charges of terrorism and incitement of violence.¹²

Over the years, Biafra-related conflicts have shifted from predominantly nonviolent forms, such as protests, to increasingly violent confrontations, including battles and violence against civilians.¹³ Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)¹⁴ reveal that between 1997 and 2024, Nigeria experienced 637 conflict incidents involving at least one Biafra-related group. These incidents resulted in a total of 1,141 fatalities. In 2024 alone, 135 Biafra-related conflicts were recorded—the highest number in any year since 1997. These incidents caused 264 fatalities, marking 2024 as the deadliest year for Biafra-related conflicts during this period.

Despite the Nigerian government's condemnation of neo-Biafran groups and its insistence that Nigeria must remain united, support for secession remains high among members of the Igbo ethnic group. Indeed, data from Afrobarometer¹⁵ reveal that more than 70% of Igbos either "strongly agree" or "agree" that Nigeria's Eastern Region should be allowed to secede—equivalent to three out of every four Igbos (see [Figure 1](#)). In contrast, less than 35% of all the other ethnic categories (i.e., Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, and ethnic minorities) and the Nigerian population as a whole adopt this stance.¹⁶ Furthermore, a recent study has found that compared to members of the other major ethnic categories, the Igbo have the weakest sense of national belonging and the strongest sense of ethnic identification.¹⁷

The Igbo, known for their individualistic, competitive nature and exceptional entrepreneurial skills, have a long-standing tradition of migrating from their eastern homeland to other parts of Nigeria in search of economic opportunities, particularly in trade and commerce.¹⁸ Barth Chukwuezi notes that entrepreneurship among Igbos

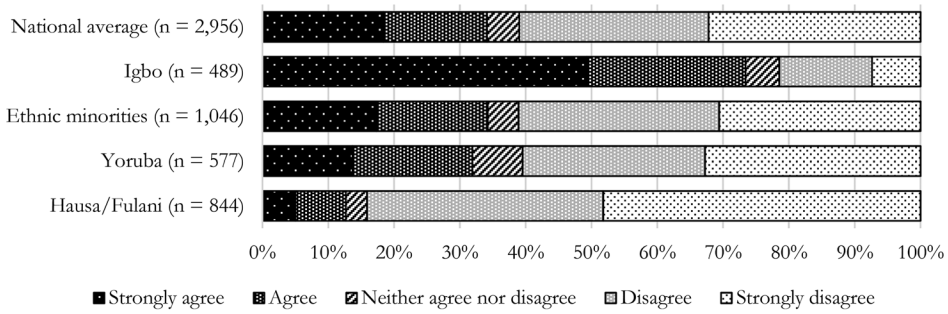


Figure 1. Ethnic distribution of support for secession among Nigerians.

Note. The figure illustrates the distribution of support for secession among the Nigerian population as well as the country's major ethnic categories. The ethnic minority category includes individuals who belong to other ethnic groups besides the major three (i.e., Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, and Yoruba). The y-axis shows the number of respondents drawn from across Nigeria as well as those belonging to the respective ethnic categories, while the x-axis displays the percentage of respondents across different levels of support for secession. The figure is derived from pooled data covering the Afrobarometer Rounds 7 and 9 surveys, conducted in 2017 and 2022, respectively.

“is related to a strongly developed pattern of ties between rural and urban kin, circulatory migration, and investment flows.”¹⁹ Although Igbo already had an entrepreneurial culture prior to the Nigerian Civil War,²⁰ the aftermath of the war was crucial to the development of Igbo entrepreneurship. After the war ended, Igbo were systematically excluded from civil service and government positions, leading to their economic marginalization.²¹ This exclusion pushed many Igbo toward the private sector, where they focused on trade and commerce. Barth Chukwuezi has also observed that “In the first instance, their [i.e., the Igbo] entry into trade was a survival strategy which, over time, proved lucrative and afforded capital accumulation.”²² Highlighting the Igbo’s resilience and grit, Emmanuel Nnadozie notes that they “have risen from the rubble and devastation of the Biafran war to quickly rebuild their society, including its institutions and infrastructure, and migrate once again to different parts of Nigeria and Africa, engaging in trading and manufacturing.”²³ Furthermore, a high population density and the infertility of the land, which makes it unsuitable for crop agriculture, have further driven emigration from the Eastern Region.²⁴

The Igbo are indigenous to Nigeria’s Eastern Region, while the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani are primarily native to the Western and Northern Regions, respectively. In Figure 2, Panel A reveals that 19% of the Igbo population live outside the Eastern Region. In comparison, only 6% of the Yoruba live outside the Western Region (Panel B), and just 2% of the Hausa/Fulani live outside the Northern Region (Panel C). The higher percentage of Igbo residing outside their Eastern homeland highlights their tendency to migrate to other parts of Nigeria in search of economic opportunities. However, despite their outward migration, most Igbo continue to maintain strong ties to their eastern homeland by establishing businesses and building homes there as a form of risk diversification. This desire to mitigate risk by investing in their homeland stems from the events following the Biafran War, when Igbo properties outside the Eastern Region were seized under the Abandoned Property Decree.²⁵

Although several studies have explored the demand for secession made by neo-Biafran groups,²⁶ none, to my knowledge, has examined whether members of the Igbo ethnic

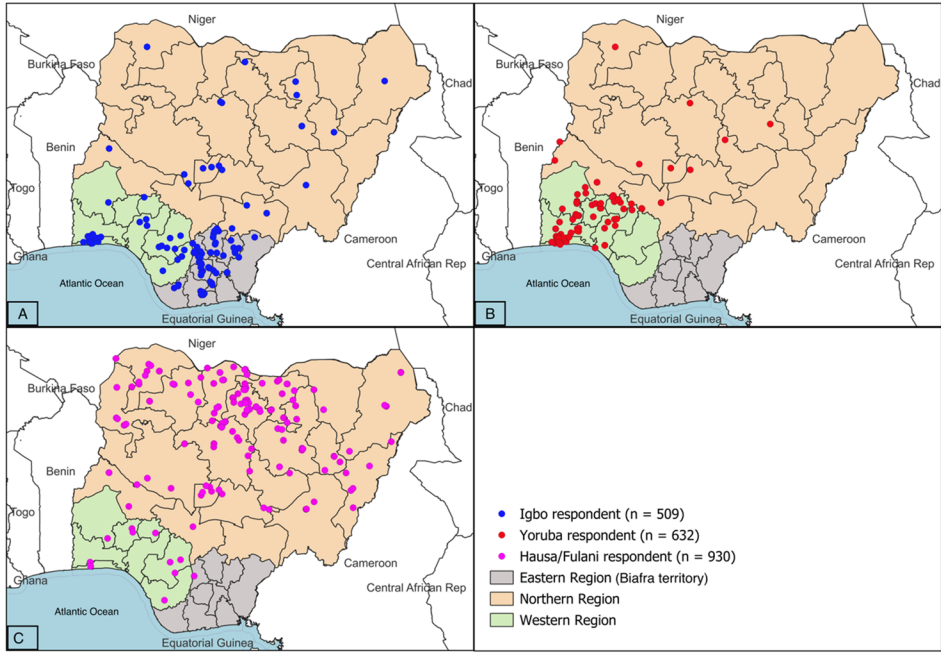


Figure 2. Ethnic distribution of respondents across Nigeria’s three major regions.
Note. The figure illustrates the administrative boundaries of Nigeria’s three major regions—the Eastern, Western, and Northern Regions—along with the distribution of respondents from the three major ethnic groups: Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, and Yoruba. The data are drawn from Rounds 7 and 9 of the Afrobarometer survey, conducted in 2017 and 2022, respectively.

group residing within the proposed Biafran territory (i.e., in the Eastern Region) are more supportive of secession than those living outside it (i.e., in the Northern and Western Regions).²⁷ Furthermore, no study has investigated how region of residence influences Igbo’s openness toward people of different ethnic groups, that is, their willingness to have people from a different ethnic group as neighbors. Combining data from Rounds 7 and 9 of the Afrobarometer surveys, conducted in 2017 and 2022, this study seeks to fill these gaps. Studying these relationships is crucial because the Igbo population may not be unified in its support for secession—while some may favor it, others may not. For example, Igbo’s living outside the Eastern Region may be less likely to favor secession than those residing within it, as their livelihoods are tied to areas outside Biafran territory and secession could jeopardize these. Furthermore, lower support for secession among those outside Biafra may stem from the strong social networks they have established with non-Igbo’s—networks they may be unwilling to abandon if secession were realized.

The regression results reveal significant differences in attitudes among Igbo’s based on their region of residence. Igbo’s residing within Biafran territory are more likely to support secession than those living outside it. Furthermore, Igbo’s living outside Biafran territory are more open to having neighbors from different ethnic groups than their counterparts within Biafran territory. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing the heterogeneity among members of the Igbo ethnic group when studying their attitudes toward secession, rather than viewing them as a homogeneous unit.

Beyond the Nigerian case, these results highlight the importance for scholars studying ethnic conflicts to look beyond broad ethnic labels, as individuals within the same ethnic group can hold significantly different views.

The remainder of this study is structured as follows: the next section introduces the data, defines the variables used to estimate the regression model, presents the summary statistics, and specifies the model's general form. Regression results are then presented and discussed, followed by a summary of the findings and conclusion.

Data and methodology

This study draws on data from Rounds 7 and 9 of the Afrobarometer surveys, conducted in Nigeria in 2017 and 2022.²⁸ I included only data from these rounds in the analysis, as they contained the relevant question regarding support for secession. Afrobarometer employs probabilistic sampling, ensuring a representative sample of Nigeria's population that covers all 36 states plus the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). In each round, 1,600 respondents were interviewed, yielding a total of 3,200 observations. However, this study only focuses on a subset of the data, specifically respondents who belong to the Igbo ethnic group ($n=509$). This group makes up 16% of the total sample. The respondents, all aged 18 and older, had a nearly even gender distribution, with a male-to-female ratio of 49:51.

Operationalization of the variables

Dependent variables

Support secession. This variable measures the degree to which respondents support secession. It was derived from the question, "The Indigenous People of Biafra or IPOB, should be given the right to secede from the federation?"²⁹ The responses were measured on a scale with five ordinal categories ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). I treated "don't know" and "refused to answer" responses as missing observations. This rule was applied to all variables derived from the Afrobarometer survey.

Figure 3 shows that Igbos living outside Biafran territory are generally less supportive of secession than those living within it. While 77% of Igbos in Biafra either "strongly agree" or "agree" with secession, only 61% of those outside the region share this view. Conversely, 32% of Igbos living outside Biafra either "strongly disagree" or "disagree" with secession, compared to just 19% of those within Biafra—showing a 13-percentage point difference.

Ethnic hostility. This variable measures respondents' willingness to have people from different ethnic groups as neighbors. It was derived from the question, "For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbors, dislike it, or not care: People from other ethnic groups?" The responses were measured on a scale with five ordinal categories ranging from 1 (strongly like) to 5 (strongly dislike).³⁰

Figure 4 shows that Igbos living within Biafran territory are generally more hostile toward people of different ethnic groups than their counterparts living outside the

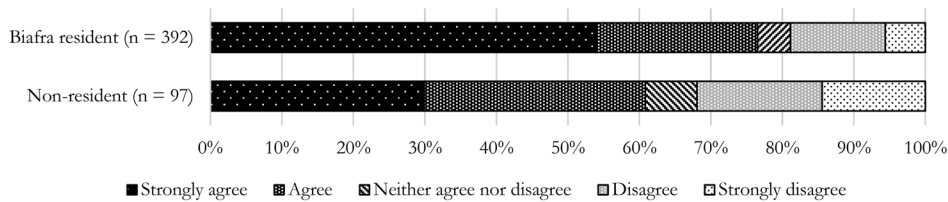


Figure 3. Support for secession among Igbos living within and outside the Biafran territory.
Note. The figure illustrates the distribution of support for secession among Igbo respondents, comparing those living within Biafran territory to those residing outside it. The y-axis shows the number of respondents inside and outside Biafra, while the x-axis displays the percentage of respondents across different levels of support for secession. The figure is derived from pooled data covering the Afrobarometer Rounds 7 and 9 surveys, conducted in 2017 and 2022, respectively.

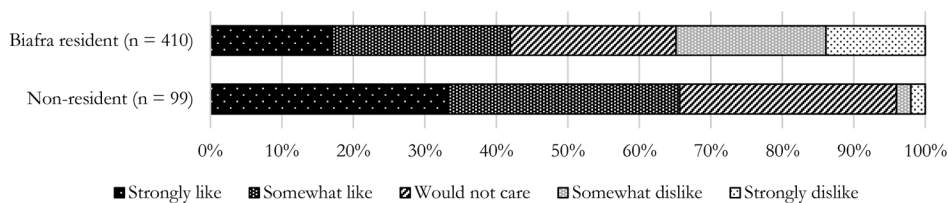


Figure 4. Hostility toward ethnic outgroups among Igbos living within and outside the Biafran territory.
Note. The figure illustrates the distribution of hostility toward ethnic outgroups among Igbo respondents, comparing those living within Biafran territory to those residing outside it. The y-axis shows the number of respondents living inside and outside Biafra, while the x-axis displays the percentage of respondents across different levels of hostility toward ethnic outgroup members. The figure is derived from pooled data covering the Afrobarometer Rounds 7 and 9 surveys, conducted in 2017 and 2022, respectively.

region. Specifically, only 42% of Igbos within Biafra would “strongly like” or “somewhat like” having neighbors from different ethnic groups, whereas this figure rises to 66% for Igbos living outside Biafra—a significant difference of 24 percentage points. The contrast is also stark at the opposite end: 35% of Igbos living in Biafra either “strongly dislike” or “somewhat dislike” the idea of having neighbors from another ethnic group, while this sentiment is expressed by only 4% of Igbos outside the region.

Explanatory variable

Residence in Biafra. This is a binary variable coded as 1 for Igbos living in Biafran territory (i.e., Eastern Nigeria) and 0 for those residing outside the Eastern Region, such as in Nigeria’s Northern or Western Regions. Among the 509 Igbo respondents, 79% live within Biafran territory, while the remaining 21% reside outside it.

Control variables

Deprivation index. This index captures how frequently respondents and their households have lacked basic necessities, such as food, water, and other essentials, over the past year. It is based on responses to the following question: “Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: (a) Gone without food to eat? (b) Gone without enough clean water for home use? (c) Gone without medicines or medical

treatment? (d) Gone without enough fuel to cook your food?” The responses were measured on a scale with five ordinal categories ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (always). The deprivation index was derived by summing the ordinal values assigned to the various responses across all four items, resulting in a score that ranges from 0 to 16. The four items exhibited strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha statistic of 0.86. Poverty can foster support for secession by allowing opportunistic leaders to exploit the grievances of the impoverished to further their secessionist agendas, particularly when these individuals feel marginalized in comparison to other culturally defined groups.³¹

Nighttime light. This variable serves as a proxy for economic growth, measuring the average annual nighttime light intensity within the local government area (LGA) where respondents live.³² The nighttime light index ranges from 0 to 63, with higher values indicating greater levels of economic activity. The variable is lagged: for observations in the Round 7 survey conducted in 2017, the measurement is from 2016, while for observations in the Round 9 survey conducted in 2022, the measurement is from 2020. The extended lag in the latter case is because the most recent available nighttime light data were from 2020. Relevant statistics for the LGAs were calculated using QGIS software, as the raw nighttime light data are gridded. Nighttime light is widely recognized as a reliable proxy for economic activity, particularly when detailed subnational accounting data are unavailable.³³ Economic growth has been shown to influence support for secession. For example, when a region experiences higher economic performance than others, its population may push for secession.³⁴

Infant mortality. This variable serves as a proxy for human development at the community level. Specifically, it measures the number of children younger than one year, per 1,000 live births, who died in 2015 within the LGA where the respondents reside. This variable represents the community's inability to fulfill essential survival needs, such as access to food, clean drinking water, and healthcare services. The raw data were sourced from the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) database at Columbia University.³⁵ QGIS software was used to derive the relevant statistics for the LGAs, as the raw infant mortality dataset is in gridded format.

Demographic covariates. This includes the respondents' age and gender, with age measured in years and gender coded as 1 for males and 0 for females.

Table 1 presents the summary statistics for the variables discussed.

Analytical technique

To examine how residence in Biafran territory relates to support for secession and hostility toward people of a different ethnic group, I consider a model of the following general form:

$$\gamma_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 \text{Residence in Biafra}_i + \beta_2 \Lambda'_i + \mu_i \quad (1)$$

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for Igbo respondents.

Variable	Total observations	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Support secession*	489	3.939	1.331	1	5
Ethnic hostility	509	2.737	1.282	1	5
Residence in Biafra	509	0.806	0.396	0	1
Age	509	33.501	12.377	18	80
Male (ref.: female)	509	0.489	0.5	0	1
Deprivation index	509	5.316	4.456	0	16
Nighttime light	505	9.017	12.975	0	57.985
Infant mortality rate	505	95.572	8.034	78.135	100

* Indicates the dependent variable.

In this equation, γ_i is the dependent variable measuring Respondent i 's support for secession or willingness to have people of a different ethnic group as neighbors, while Λ'_i is a vector of control variables outlined in the section "Control variables." The term α_0 denotes the intercept, and β_1 and β_2 represent the coefficients of the explanatory and control variables, respectively. Last, μ_i is the error term. Given the ordinal nature of the dependent variable, an ordered logit regression was used to estimate the model. A benefit of this approach is that it makes it possible to determine the association between the explanatory variable and each category of the dependent variable.

Results and discussion

Regional differences in support for secession among Igbos

Table 2 presents the results of ordered logit models examining how residence in Biafran territory (i.e., Eastern Nigeria) relates to support for secession. In Model 1, which considers only residence in Biafra, the coefficient is positive and statistically significant at the 1% level. This indicates that members of the Igbo ethnic group living in Biafran territory are more inclined to support secession than those residing outside it. This heightened support among residents of Biafra may stem from the fact that their livelihoods are primarily based in this region, meaning that secession from Nigeria poses little threat to their economic stability. Additionally, their residence suggests a limited social network beyond Biafra, which may further strengthen their commitment to secession. Conversely, Igbos living outside Biafra are likely to be less supportive of secession, as their primary sources of income are situated outside the territory. For these individuals, secession could jeopardize their livelihoods and disrupt established social networks, which they may be unwilling to sacrifice.

In Model 2, which incorporates control variables related to respondents' demographic attributes and household deprivation, residence in Biafra maintained a positive coefficient and remained statistically significant at the 1% level. However, none of the control variables reached statistical significance. Model 3 further confirms the robustness of the main findings, even after including objective control variables measured at the communal level that proxy for economic growth and human development. None of these objective control variables reached statistical significance. In Model 4, a dummy variable for the survey year was included. The year 2022 had a positive coefficient and was significant at the 5% level. This indicates that, compared to the reference

Table 2. Ordered logit models regressing support for secession on residence in the Biafran territory.

Support secession [†]	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Residence in Biafra	0.893*** (0.201)	0.846*** (0.203)	1.182*** (0.293)	1.197*** (0.284)
Age		0.004 (0.007)	0.004 (0.007)	0.002 (0.007)
Male (reference: female)		0.258 (0.171)	0.264 (0.172)	0.317* (0.178)
Deprivation index		0.03 (0.02)	0.024 (0.02)	−0.009 (0.024)
Nighttime light (LGA)			0.001 (0.007)	−0.001 (0.007)
Infant mortality rate (LGA)			−0.021 (0.016)	−0.019 (0.015)
Year				
2017 (reference)				
2022				0.531** (0.213)
Intercept 1	−1.874*** (0.229)	−1.51*** (0.329)	−3.309** (1.396)	−3.085** (1.369)
Intercept 2	−0.618*** (0.183)	−0.249 (0.299)	−2.066 (1.382)	−1.829 (1.353)
Intercept 3	−0.332* (0.18)	0.038 (0.293)	−1.773 (1.379)	−1.533 (1.349)
Intercept 4	0.745*** (0.181)	1.122*** (0.297)	−0.691 (1.381)	−0.444 (1.351)
Year dummy	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	489	489	485	485
Pseudo R²	0.015	0.019	0.021	0.026
Log pseudolikelihood	−632.285	−629.533	−621.589	−618.42
AIC statistic	1274.57	1275.067	1263.178	1258.839
BIC statistic	1295.532	1308.606	1305.019	1304.865

Robust standard errors are in parentheses. [†] Indicates the dependent variable. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. All models are estimated using ordered logit (ologit) regression.

AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; LGA = local government area.

year of 2017, support for secession among the Igbos has increased in 2022. In this model, the indicator for gender became statistically significant at the 10% level, suggesting that, compared to women, men are more likely to support secession.

To illustrate the magnitude of the association between residence in Biafran territory and support for secession, the predicted probabilities from the baseline model (i.e., Model 1) are presented in Figure 5. A quick look at the figure reveals that the association between residence in Biafran territory and support for secession is largest on the “strongly agree” response category of the dependent variable. Specifically, individuals living in Biafran territory are 22 percentage points more likely than those living outside of it to select the “strongly agree” response category when asked about their support for secession. Conversely, living in Biafran territory decreases the likelihood of selecting the “strongly disagree” response category by 6 percentage points. Notably, with the exception of the “strongly agree” category, the associations between the explanatory variable and each category of the dependent variable is negative.

Regional differences in hostility toward ethnic outgroups among Igbos

Table 3 presents the results of ordered logit regression models examining the correlation between residence in Biafran territory and hostility toward people from different

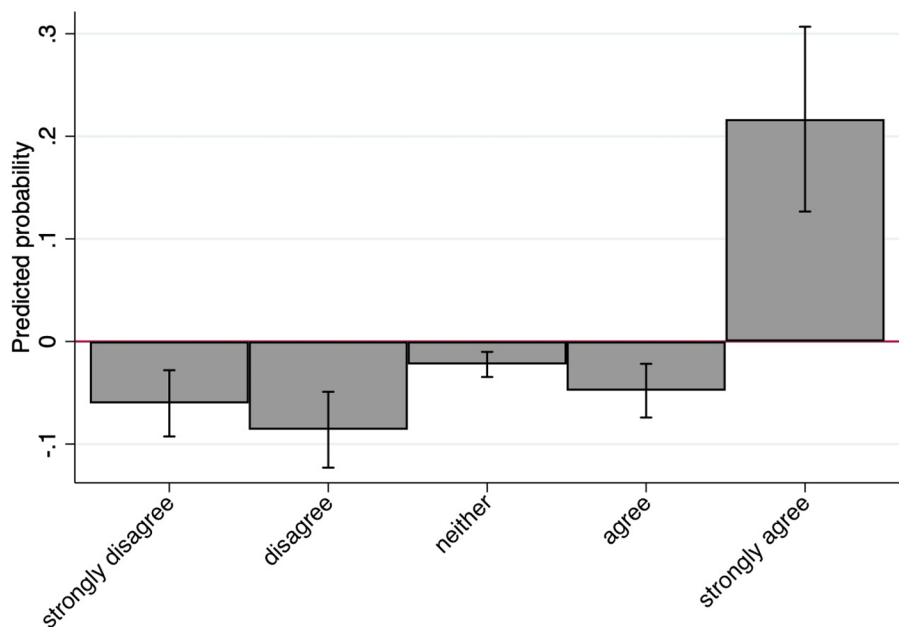


Figure 5. Predicted probabilities showing the magnitude of the association between residence in the Biafran territory and support for secession.

Note. This figure, which is based on the baseline model (i.e., Model 1 in Table 2), illustrates the association between residence in Biafran territory and the five categories of the dependent variable that assesses respondents’ support for secession. Confidence intervals are set at the 95% level.

ethnic groups, measured by the willingness to have such individuals as neighbors. In Model 1, which only considers residence in Biafra, the coefficient is positive and statistically significant at the 1% level. This suggests that Igbos living in Biafran territory are more likely to exhibit hostility toward people from other ethnic groups than their counterparts living outside the region. In other words, Igbos living outside Biafra are more open to having neighbors from different ethnic backgrounds than those living in Biafra. This finding supports the earlier argument made in this section, which posits that Igbos living outside Biafra are more likely to have developed strong social networks with individuals from other regions—networks they may be unwilling to sacrifice if secession were realized.

Model 2 demonstrates that the main result remains robust even after controlling for respondents’ demographic characteristics and socioeconomic factors, none of which proved to be significant. In Model 3, where objective control variables for economic growth and human development were introduced, residence in Biafra maintained a positive coefficient, though its significance level dropped to 10%. Notably, the infant mortality rate had a positive coefficient and was significant at the 1% level, suggesting a positive association between lower economic development and hostility toward people from different ethnic groups. Model 5 confirms that the main result holds even after accounting for the survey years. The positive coefficient for 2022 indicates that ethnic hostility was higher in 2022 compared to the reference year, 2017.

To illustrate the magnitude of the association between residence in Biafran territory and hostility toward people from different ethnic groups, I plotted the predicted

Table 3. Ordered logit models regressing hostility toward ethnic outgroup members on residence in the Biafran territory.

Ethnic hostility [†]	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Residence in Biafra	1.109*** (0.178)	1.137*** (0.18)	0.524* (0.273)	0.551** (0.273)
Age		−0.008 (0.006)	−0.008 (0.006)	−0.009 (0.006)
Male (reference: female)		−0.167 (0.165)	−0.163 (0.166)	−0.132 (0.167)
Deprivation index		−0.004 (0.019)	0.001 (0.02)	−0.027 (0.023)
Nighttime light (LGA)			0.008 (0.006)	0.007 (0.006)
Infant mortality rate (LGA)			0.051*** (0.016)	0.053*** (0.016)
Year				
2017 (reference)				
2022				0.448** (0.191)
Intercept 1	−0.548*** (0.166)	−0.886*** (0.277)	3.534** (1.416)	3.829*** (1.42)
Intercept 2	0.731*** (0.161)	0.399 (0.269)	4.843*** (1.427)	5.147*** (1.431)
Intercept 3	1.818*** (0.16)	1.489*** (0.266)	5.947*** (1.438)	6.254*** (1.442)
Intercept 4	2.984*** (0.198)	2.659*** (0.292)	7.122*** (1.448)	7.438*** (1.454)
Year dummy	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	509	509	505	505
Pseudo R²	0.02	0.022	0.029	0.032
Log pseudolikelihood	−784.704	−783.176	−771.742	−769.056
AIC statistic	1579.408	1582.352	1563.485	1560.111
BIC statistic	1600.571	1616.212	1605.73	1606.582

Robust standard errors are in parentheses. [†] Indicates the dependent variable. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. All models are estimated using ordered logit (ologit) regression.

AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; LGA = local government area.

probabilities from the baseline model (i.e., Model 1) in Figure 6. A quick look at the figure reveals that the association between residence in Biafra and ethnic hostility is largest on the “strongly like” response category of the dependent variable. Specifically, Igbos living in Biafra are 17 percentage points less likely than those outside the region to select the “strongly like” response category when asked about their willingness to have neighbors from different ethnic groups. In contrast, residing in Biafra increases the likelihood of choosing the “strongly dislike” response category by 11.3 percentage points.

Conclusion

Using survey data representative of Nigeria’s Igbo population, this study examined the correlation between residence in the proposed Biafran territory (i.e., Nigeria’s Eastern Region) and support for secession. Regression analysis revealed that Igbos living in Biafran territory exhibit greater support for secession than those residing outside it. This heightened support may stem from the fact that individuals in Biafran territory depend on the area for their livelihoods and lack strong social connections with members of other ethnic groups outside the region. Conversely, those living outside Biafran territory might be less supportive of secession, as it poses a threat to their livelihoods and could disrupt the social networks they have established, which they

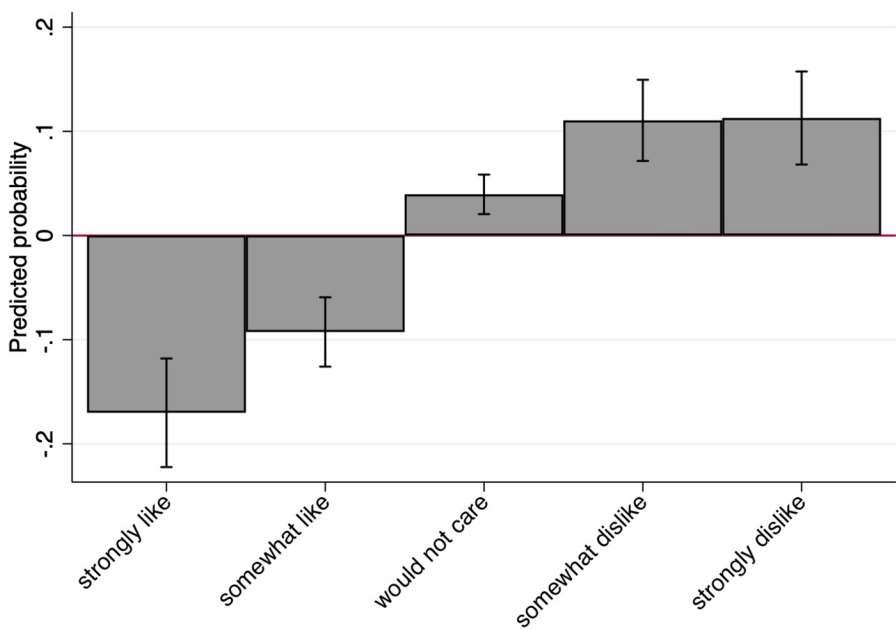


Figure 6. Predicted probabilities showing the magnitude of the association between residence in Biafran territory and willingness to have neighbors of a different ethnic group.
Note. This figure, which is based on the baseline model (i.e., Model 1 in Table 3), illustrates the association between residence in Biafran territory and the five categories of the dependent variable that assesses respondents' willingness to have people of a different ethnic group as neighbors. Confidence intervals are set at the 95% level.

might be reluctant to abandon should secession occur. Reflecting this dynamic, the regression analysis also revealed that, compared to people living within Biafran territory, those living outside it are more willing to have neighbors of a different ethnicity. These results indicate that, despite sharing a common ethnic identity, members of the Igbo ethnic group exhibit significant differences in their support for secession. To better understand these attitudes, researchers need to account for regional differences when studying the Igbo population.

If the Nigerian government intends to maintain a united Nigeria, it might consider adopting a nonviolent approach by engaging in dialogue with these groups to better understand their grievances. This is particularly important because, despite the government's aggressive approach to neo-Biafran movements, these groups have gained increasing support over the years among both Igbo and non-Igbo populations. For instance, while 70% of Igbo supported the secession of the Eastern Region in 2017, this figure rose to 77% by 2022. Similarly, support for secession among non-Igbo populations increased from 23% in 2017 to 30% in 2022. This trend may be attributed to the government's heavy-handed approach, which attracts sympathy for these groups and lends some credibility to their claims of government brutality, maltreatment, and marginalization.

This study also highlights the potential for intergroup contact to reduce ethnic salience and foster intergroup trust. In his classic book entitled *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport observed that when members of different cultural groups lived separately with little or no contact, intergroup differences were exaggerated, often leading to prejudice. He recommended intergroup contact as a means of fostering intergroup

trust.³⁶ Similarly, a recent study by Surulola Eke in Nigeria found that contact between conflicting ethnoreligious groups reduces the perception of threat, thereby lowering the likelihood of intercommunal violence.³⁷ His study further revealed that direct contact between group members is not always necessary. If the leaders of the conflicting groups are seen by their followers as engaging in dialogue, this can influence their subordinates' attitudes, fostering in them the belief that the outgroup is not as threatening as they had imagined. This aligns with the earlier suggestion that the Nigerian government should prioritize nonviolent strategies and promote dialogue.

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Data availability statement

The data and do-files underlying this study are available in the Harvard Dataverse: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/MRJDGH>.