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Nigerians worried about violent clashes, praise government efforts to address armed extremism

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 199 | Oluwole Ojewale and Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye

Summary

Over the past several years, Nigeria has been plagued by various forms of violence, most prominently those linked to violent extremism in the Northeast and communal conflicts between herders and farmers in the central and southern zones. Analysts have attributed the deterioration of security in Nigeria to a wide range of causes, including weak or exploitative governance systems (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2017), inequality and injustice, ethno-religious conflicts, porous borders, rural-urban drift, poverty, and unemployment (Abdu & Okoro, 2016).

Bombings, kidnappings, and intimidation by Boko Haram have killed more than 20,000 people and led to the displacement of about 2.6 million others (Daily Nation, 2018). Violent conflicts between nomadic herders and farmers over the use of land and water, destruction of farms, and theft of livestock (Relief Web, 2017) have also increased in recent years, killing an estimated 2,000-3,000 people since 2016 (Africa News, 2018) and costing the country at least \$14 billion in potential revenues annually due to the loss of crops and livestock in Nigeria's rich agricultural zone (Mercy Corps, 2015). Benue and Plateau states in North Central Nigeria have been worst hit by these herder-farmer clashes.

The Nigerian government has made widely reported inroads in the fight against armed extremism, including recovering some local government territories previously under Boko Haram control in the Northeast (Telegraph, 2016) and helping free captives (Punch Nigeria, 2016). The president has also taken some steps to end the herder-farmer conflicts – including deploying special forces and ordering the Inspector General of Police to relocate to Benue – although critics complain he's done too little (Toromade, 2018) and affected communities have resorted to self-protection and the formation of ethnic militia (Amaza, 2018).

Afrobarometer's latest survey indicates that Nigerians praise government and military efforts to fight violent extremism but report relatively high levels of fear and personal experience of such violence. They see extremist groups as receiving support from a wide variety of sources in the government, military, and extremist organizations abroad, and they believe that the most effective steps the government can take to fight their activities are to strengthen the economy as well as the military response.

Most Nigerians are also concerned about the herder-farmer conflicts, and only about half think the government has been effective in preventing or resolving them.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 35 countries in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015,

and Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer national partners in Nigeria, CLEEN Foundation and Practical Sampling International, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adult Nigerians between 26 April and 10 May 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Nigeria in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

■ Worried about violence:

- One in 10 Nigerians (11%) say they have personally experienced extremist violence during the past two years, in addition to 25% who say they have feared such violence. Both fear and experience of extremist violence are most common in the North East and North Central zones.
- Even larger proportions say they have experienced or feared violence by people in the neighbourhood/village or at political events.
- Seven in 10 Nigerians say they are “very concerned” (48%) or “somewhat concerned” (23%) about the violent conflicts between farmers and herders.

■ Extremist violence:

- International extremist groups are most widely blamed for supporting violent extremist groups in the country. But most Nigerians believe that domestic terror groups are receiving support from a wide range of influential sources, including at least “some” senior government leaders, members of the National Assembly, members of the military, local government officials, and traditional leaders.
- Citizens believe the main reasons why people join extremist groups are unemployment (cited by 31% of respondents) and poverty (27%).
- Three-fourths of Nigerians say the government has been “somewhat effective” (39%) or “very effective” (35%) in addressing the problem of armed extremists in the country.
- Large majorities “agree” or “strongly agree” that the army keeps the country safe from insurgents (83%), gets necessary training to defend and protect the country (82%), and operates in a professional manner (77%).
- Nigerians say the best ways for the government to effectively address the problem of armed extremists are to improve the economy/create jobs and to strengthen the military response.

■ Herder-farmer violence:

- About half (53%) of Nigerians say the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” in preventing or resolving violent community conflict, while almost as many (46%) rate the government's efforts as “fairly bad” or “very bad.”

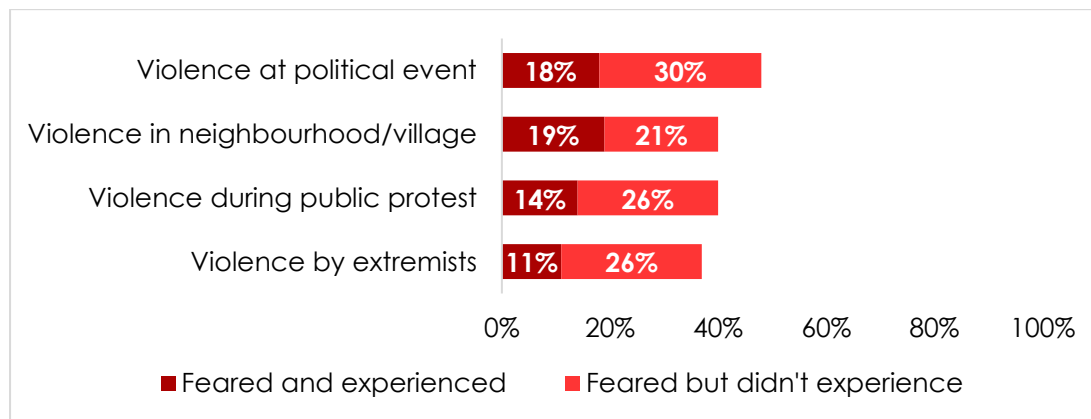
Fear and insecurity in Nigeria

As roadside bombings, suicide attacks, and kidnappings continue with alarming frequency (Kazeem, 2017), Nigerians express considerable fear and experience of violence. One in 10 Nigerians (11%) say they experienced extremist violence during the two years preceding the survey. The survey question asked whether respondents had “actually personally

experienced" extremist violence during that time, but even if some respondents may have interpreted this broadly (e.g. considered extremist violence experienced by others in their families or communities), their responses reflect an intense public consciousness of extremist violence in the country. In addition, one in four (25%) say they feared such violence but did not experience it (Figure 1).

Even larger proportions of the population report experiencing or fearing other forms of violence: 40% say they experienced or feared violence during a public protest, 40% in the neighbourhood or village, and 47% at a political event.

Figure 1: Fear and experience of violence | Nigeria | 2017



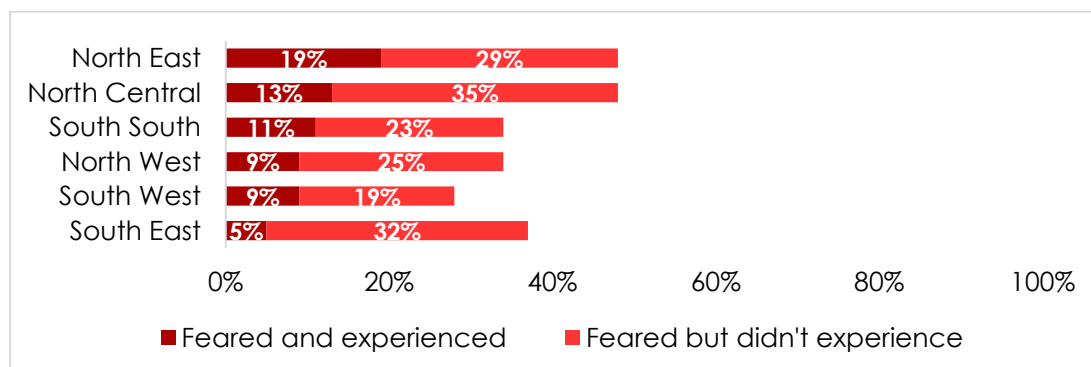
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether, in the past two years, you have ever personally feared any of the following types of violence? [If yes:] Have you actually personally experienced this type of violence in the past two years?

- Violence among people in your neighbourhood or village
- Violence at a political rally or campaign event
- Violence occurring during a public protest or march
- An armed attack by political or religious extremists

(Note: Due to rounding, the total for combined categories (such as the proportion who feared and/or experienced violence) may differ by 1 percentage point from the sum of the sub-categories.)

The fear and experience of extremist attacks are most widespread in the North East and North Central zones, main sites, respectively, of Boko Haram and herder-farmer attacks. In both, 48% of respondents are affected, with up to one in five residents in North East (19%) reporting that they experienced extremist violence during the previous two years (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Fear and experience of extremist violence | by zone | Nigeria | 2017

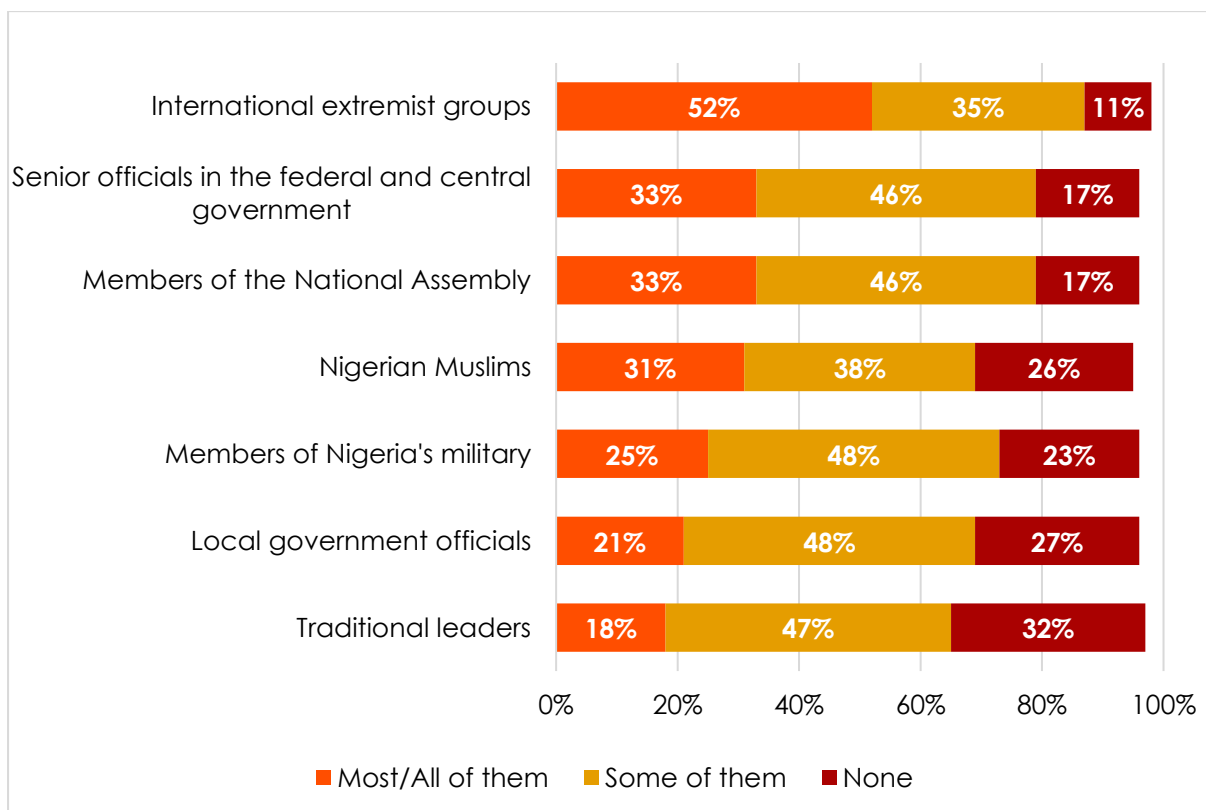


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether, in the past two years, you have ever personally feared any of the following types of violence? [If yes:] Have you actually personally experienced this type of violence in the past two years: An armed attack by political or religious extremists?

Views on armed extremism

The ability of violent extremist groups to survive and operate, often using sophisticated vehicles, weapons, and ammunitions, adds urgency to the question of who funds their activities. Afrobarometer's latest survey shows that more than half (52%) of Nigerians believe that "most" or "all" international extremist groups are involved in supporting and assisting extremist groups in the country. But most Nigerians also think that extremist groups in the country are receiving support from a wide range of other sources, including at least "some" senior officials in the federal and central government (cited by 79% of respondents), members of the National Assembly (79%), members of the military (73%), local government officials (69%), Nigerian Muslims (69%), and traditional leaders (65%) (Figure 3).

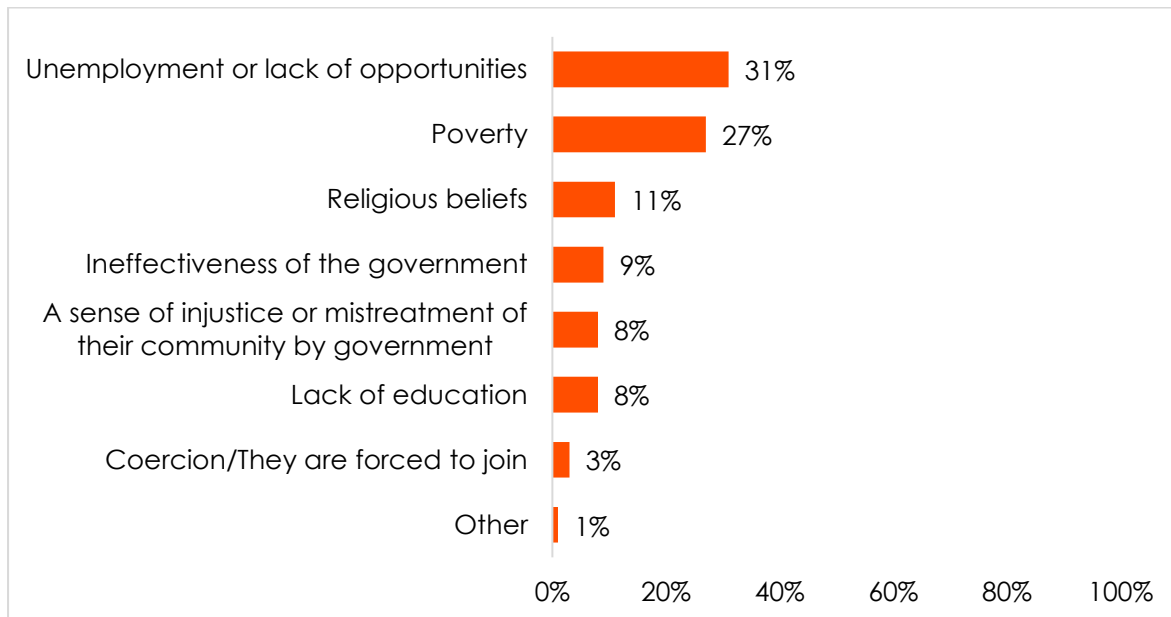
Figure 3: Who supports extremist groups? | Nigeria | 2017



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

The main reasons why Nigerians join extremist groups, according to survey respondents, are unemployment (31%) and poverty (27%) (Figure 4). This mirrors Aghedo and Osumah's (2012) assertion that "members of Boko Haram are mostly uneducated, school drop-outs, jobless youth, political thugs and students from low economic backgrounds" and that "its membership is largely driven by socioeconomic deprivation, a sense of injustice, marginalization, and human insecurity." Contrary to often-assumed links between Boko Haram and religious fanaticism, only about one in 10 citizens (11%) say Nigerians join extremist groups because of their religious beliefs. Very few (3%) believe citizens are coerced to join these groups.

Figure 4: Reasons why Nigerians join extremist groups | Nigeria | 2017

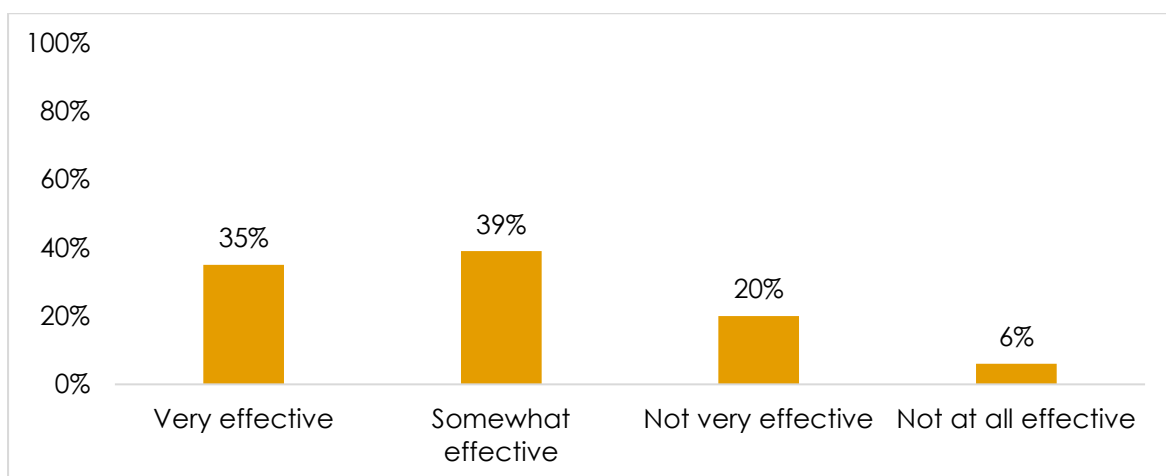


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what is the main reason why some Nigerians join extremist groups?*

Government efforts to address extremist violence

The Nigerian government has introduced a variety of measures to strengthen its fight against armed extremism, including the deployment of special troops (Bloomberg, 2017), relocation of the military command center to the heartland of Boko Haram (Africa News, 2017), and the establishment of camps for internally displaced people due to extremist violence (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017). Three-fourths of Nigerians praise these efforts, saying the government has been “somewhat effective” (39%) or “very effective” (35%) in addressing the problem of armed extremists in the country (Figure 5). About one-quarter describe the government as “not very effective” (20%) or “not at all effective” (6%) in this regard.

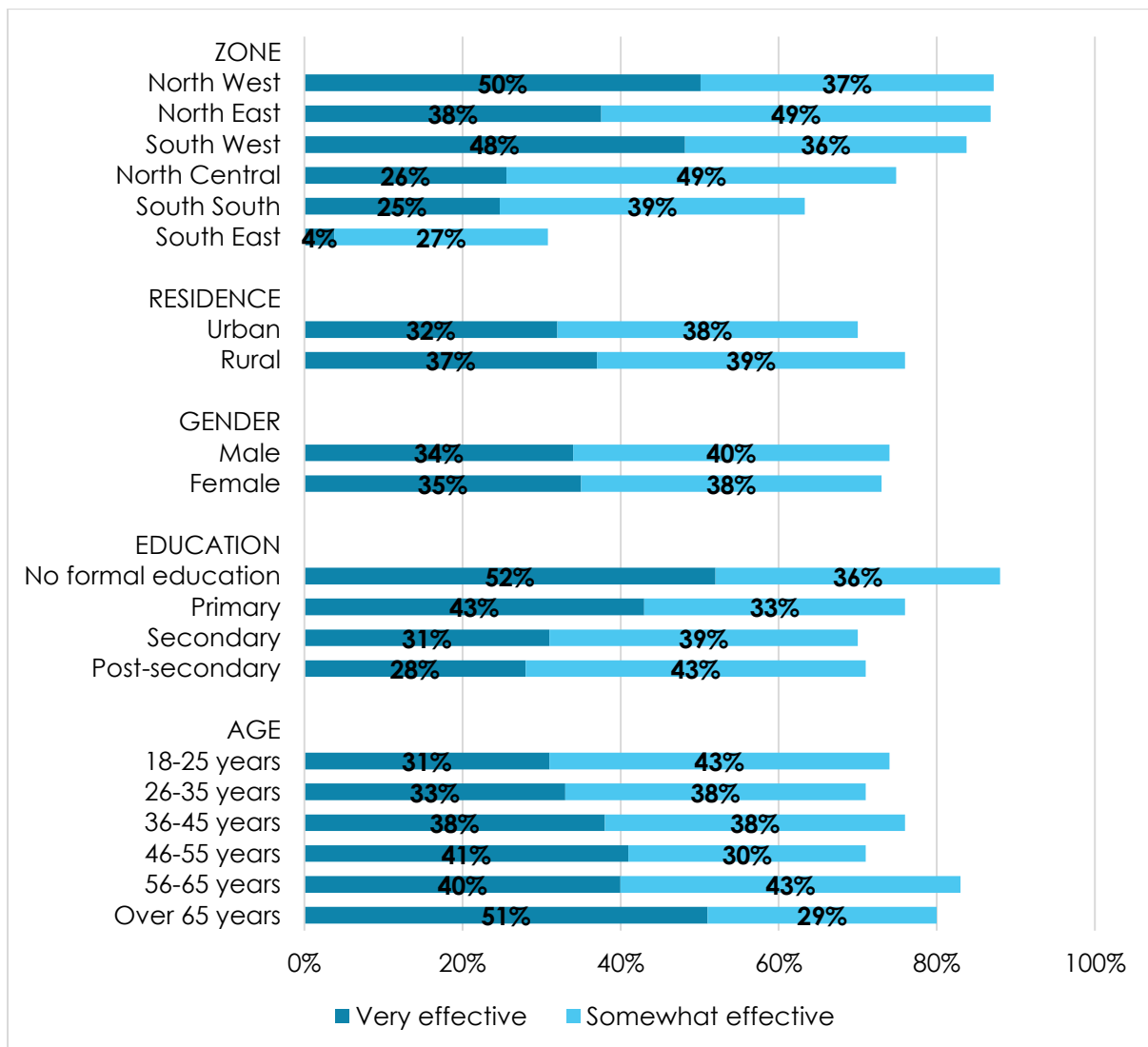
Figure 5: Government efforts in fighting armed extremist groups | Nigeria | 2017



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

The view that the government's efforts have been effective in fighting armed extremist groups is shared by at least 70% across genders, urban-rural locations, age groups, and education levels, and is particularly common (80% or more) among the elderly and those without formal education (Figure 6). This view is also shared by at least 75% of residents in the North West, North East, South West, and North Central zones. But in the South East zone, where Buhari scored the fewest votes in the 2015 presidential elections, only 31% see the government as effective in this fight, while 68% say it is "not very effective" or "not at all effective."

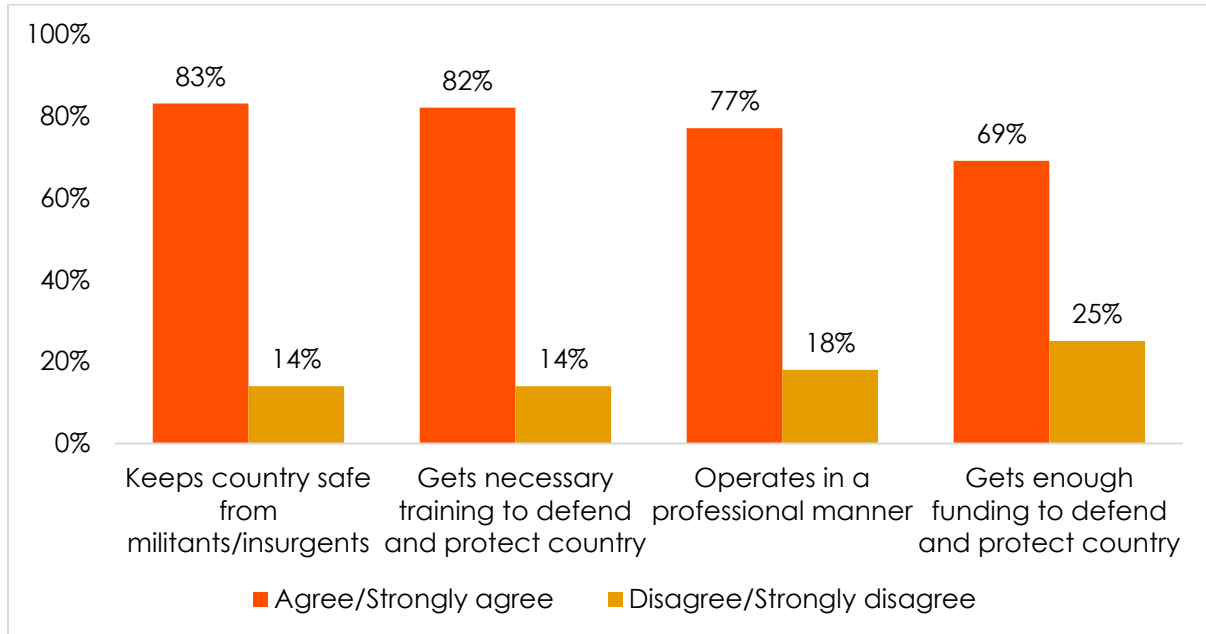
Figure 6: Government efforts in fighting armed extremist groups | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2017



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

More broadly, most citizens praise the army's efforts in ensuring security in the country. Large majorities "agree" or "strongly agree" that the army keeps the country safe from insurgents (83%), operates in a professional manner (77%), and gets necessary training (82%) and enough funding (69%) to defend and protect the country (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Performance of the army | Nigeria | 2017

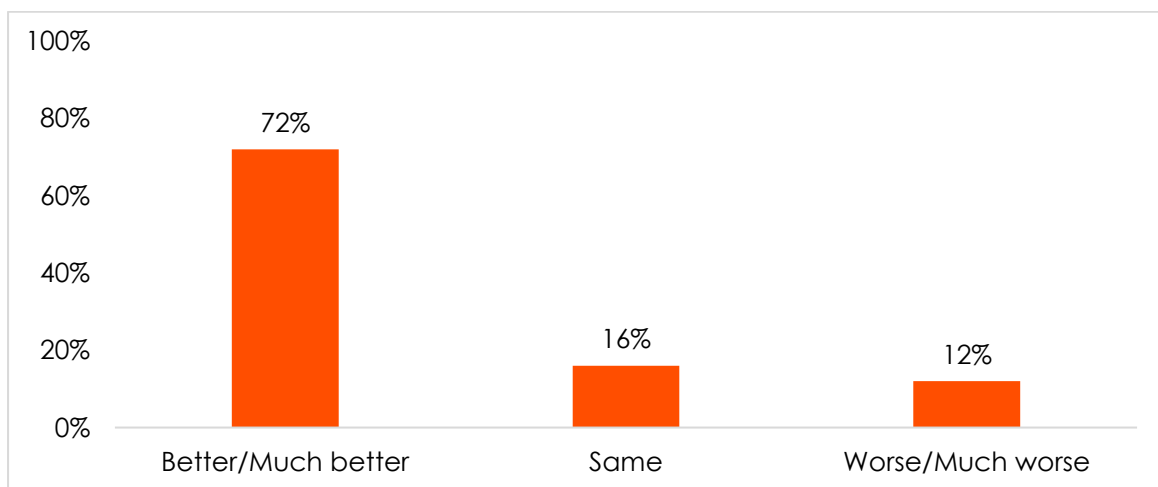


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, or you have not heard enough to say?

- The Nigerian army keeps our country safe from threats of insurgencies and militants.
- The Nigerian army operates in a professional manner.
- The army gets the training it needs to be able to defend and protect our country.
- The army gets enough funding to be able to defend and protect our country.

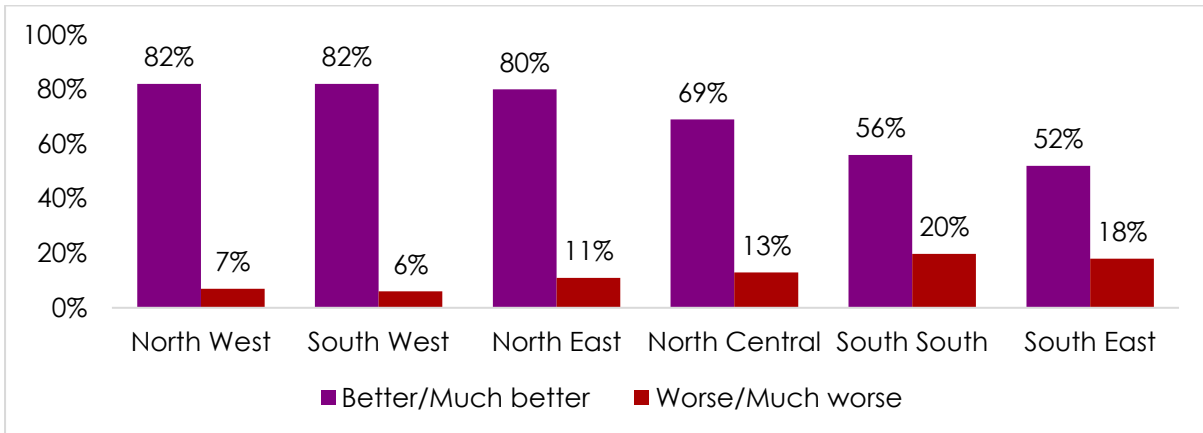
Confirming positive public assessments of the government's and army's performance, seven in 10 Nigerians (72%) say the armed forces are handling the insurgency in the North East part of the country "better" or "much better" than a year ago (Figure 8). This notion is most predominantly held in the North West (82%), South West (82%), and North East (80%) zones (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Armed forces performance in handling insurgency compared to a year ago | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents were asked: How would you rate the performance of the Nigerian armed forces in handling the insurgency in the North Eastern part of the country compared to 12 months ago?

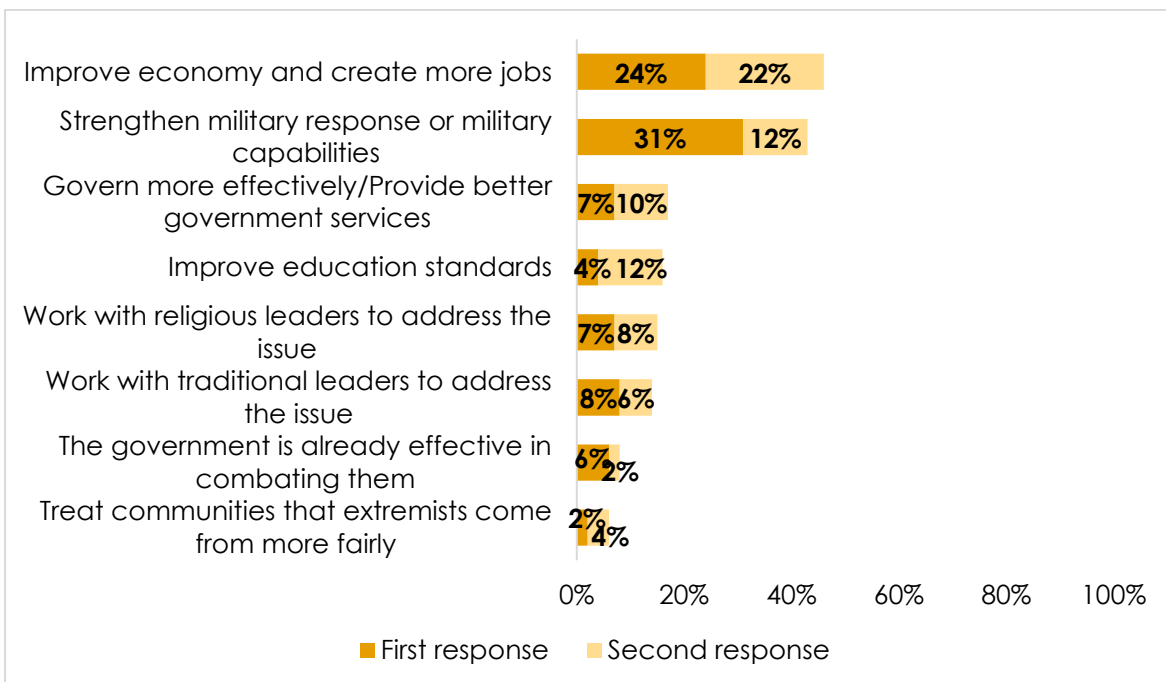
Figure 9: Armed forces performance in handling insurgency compared to a year ago | by zone | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents were asked: How would you rate the performance of the Nigerian armed forces in handling the insurgency in the North Eastern part of the country compared to 12 months ago?

Nigerians say the best ways for the government to effectively address the problem of armed extremists are to improve the economy/create jobs and to strengthen the military response or military capabilities (Figure 10). A stronger military is the most frequent first response (31%, compared to 24% calling for economic improvement); combining the two responses allowed per person, economic improvement edges out the military response, 46% to 42%. About one in six respondents recommend more effective governing/better government services and improving education standards, followed by working with religious and traditional leaders to address the problem.

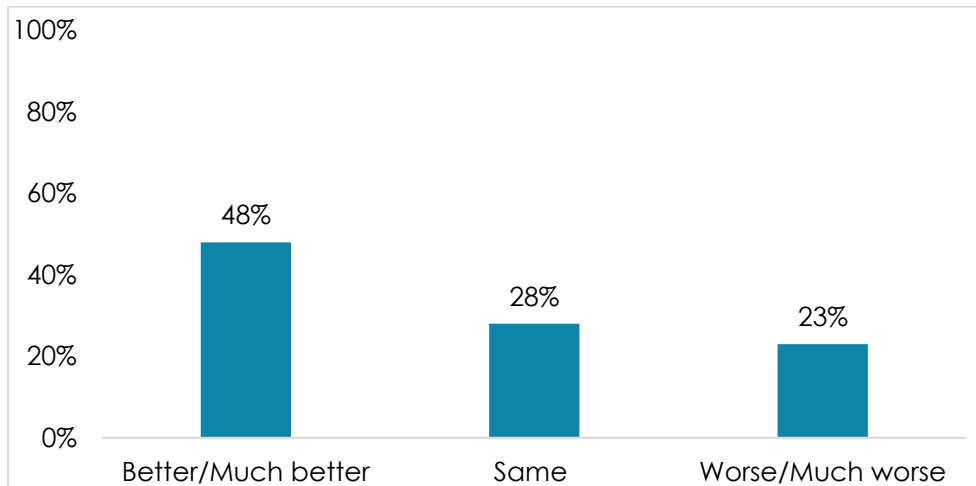
Figure 10: Most effective ways of addressing the problem of armed extremists | Nigeria | 2017



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

In spite of high performance rating for the government and the army in their fight against violence, especially extremism, only about half (48%) of citizens say their personal safety from crime and violence is better than a year ago (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Personal safety from crime and violence compared to a few years ago
 | Nigeria | 2017

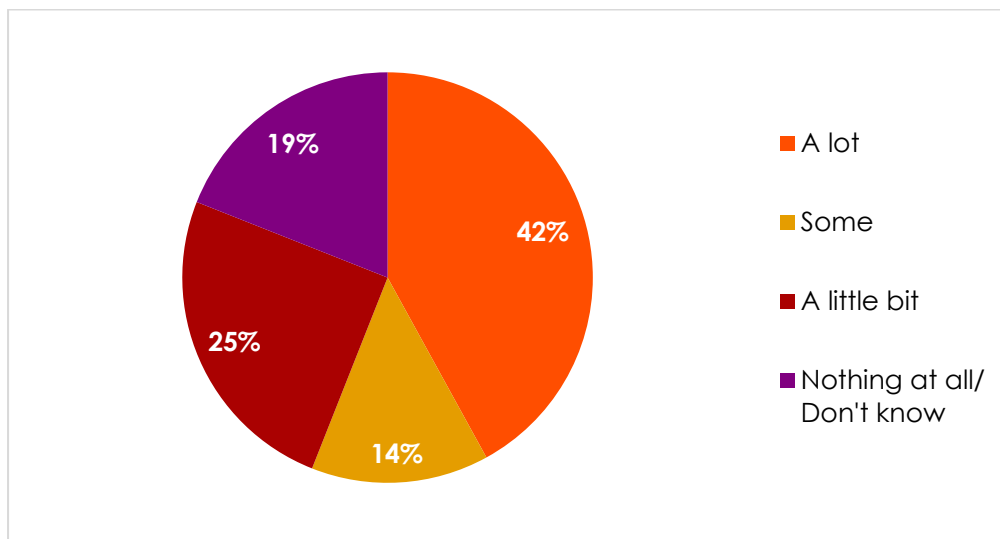


Respondents were asked: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Your personal safety from crime and violence?

Conflicts between herders and farmers

In recent years, conflicts between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and sedentary agrarian communities in the central and southern zones have become widespread and deadly, further threatening the country's security and stability. Most Nigerians are aware of the conflicts and killings: 81% say they have heard at least "a little" about them, including 42% who have heard "a lot" (Figure 12).

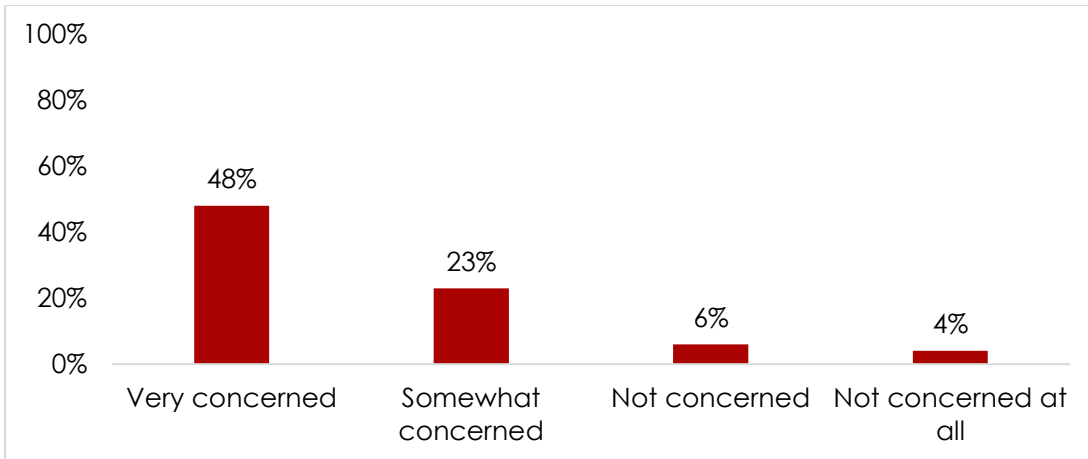
Figure 12: Public awareness of conflicts between farmers and herders | Nigeria
 | 2017



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you heard about the conflicts between farmers and herdsman in this country?

Aside from the deaths and displacement of thousands, the clashes between herders and farmers have reportedly led to a drastic reduction in food production in the area (Amaza, 2018) – a source of widespread anxiety among the citizenry. The survey indicates that seven in 10 Nigerians are “very concerned” (48%) or “somewhat concerned” (23%) about these conflicts (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Public concern about conflicts between farmers and herders | Nigeria | 2017

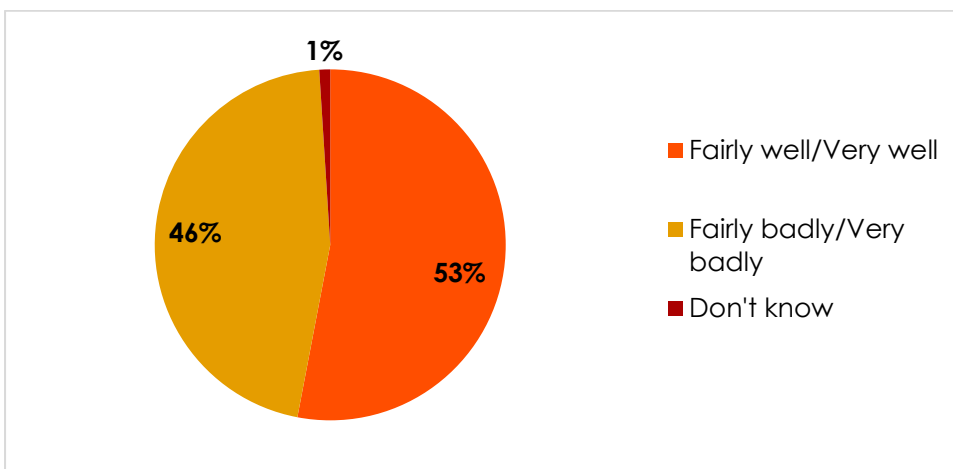


Respondents were asked: How concerned are you about the conflicts between farmers and herdsman?

Despite some government efforts to resolve herder-farmer conflicts, some citizens and civil society organizations say the administration has not invested as much effort in addressing this issue as it has in fighting violent extremism (International Crisis Group, 2018).

In line with this, Nigerians are almost evenly split on how well the government is performing in preventing or resolving violent community conflict. A slight majority (53%) say it is performing “fairly well” or “very well,” while 46% rate its efforts as “fairly bad” or “very bad” (Figure 14).

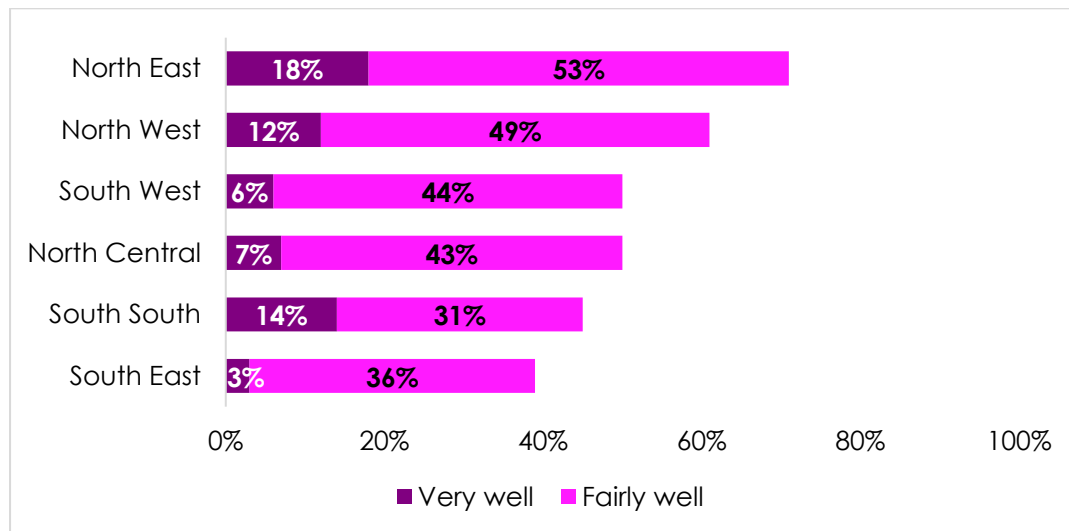
Figure 14: Government performance in preventing or resolving violent community conflict | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Handling preventing or resolving violent community conflict?

Again the notion that government is performing well is most common in the North East (71%) and North West (61%) zones and least common in the North Central zone (51%), which is hardest hit by these conflicts, and the South South (44%) and South East (39%) zones, into which the conflicts have spilled over (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Government performance in preventing or resolving violent community conflict | by zone | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Handling preventing or resolving violent community conflict?

Conclusion

Despite gains in the fight against extremist and communal violence, Nigerians express high levels of fear and concern. It behooves the government to adopt a multidimensional approach in dealing with such security threats. The state should invest in modern methods of policing and intelligence gathering to strengthen the capacity of security personnel to prevent, mitigate, and respond to acts of violence. But beyond that, it is imperative that the government give equal priority to building strong local economies with job opportunities, especially for youth. This will reduce the pool of unused labour that feeds violent groups.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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