

Kiara Kunnes

3 April 2023

### Reflective Essay for Lang Prize

When I began my honors thesis, I encountered limited previous research, requiring the implementation of creative techniques to answer the question "does the Nigerian government's response to violent conflict exacerbate civilians' fear?" From the beginning, I pieced together various narratives, quotes, and factual data that produced a story with an unanswered question. The question intrigued me because I had previously learned of the strong-arm tactics of the Nigerian government's response to Boko Haram and wondered whether this response was doing more harm than good. To arrive at the answer to the question, I had to combine two data sets to create new measures. Throughout my research, I had to critically synthesize various information to answer a relatively untouched topic.

Discovering no similar research had been done on the civilian response to the Nigerian government's confrontation to Boko Haram's attacks, I knew that an expansive and creative literature review would be required. When I began my initial research of online library databases, my first inclination was to make broad word searches, which generated too many results. So I broke this existing literature into four sections: 1) examples of government repression in multiple countries and its successes and failures; 2) how repression addresses terrorism and instills fear into the civilian population; 3) if specific groups were more likely targeted by government repression; and 4) the importance of studying fear. By splitting up my literature review into sections, I found material on previous research more digestible. I used the four sections of existing research to deduce that the failures of government repression may lead to higher fear

levels and that if certain groups (i.e. non-Muslims or Muslims) were more frequently targeted, they would experience higher levels of fear.

After creating my hypotheses, Dr. Lauren Young, my advisor, helped me identify the datasets that best would address the answers to my questions. No singular dataset addressed my hypotheses. So to address this challenge, I was required to combine a dataset from Afrobarometer with a dataset from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). ACLED compiles location, dates, actors, and deaths from reported violence and protests in each of Nigeria's six geopolitical regions. ACLED codes violent events from national and international sources, including the news media, vetted social media accounts, government and NGO reports, and partner organizations. Afrobarometer collects responses to questions on safety and security, rights and freedoms, supply of democracy, system legitimacy, personal economic conditions, energy and infrastructure, health, education, social services, group identity, gender, and governance.

Possessing the datasets, I still encountered difficulty choosing the method by which to measure my questions. My initial intuition was that government presence paired with civilian fear would work well as a collective measurement but discovered that measuring government presence had built-in biases. For example, if government presence equated to military presence, my results would be disrupted because a high military presence often corresponds with increased violence in an area. Therefore, I could anticipate more fear in those areas, regardless of government presence. Additionally, measuring government presence in the form of services, such as schools, police stations, and post offices, would not correlate with government repression.

After much thought, I decided to answer my hypotheses by comparing the fear levels after government repression and insurgency events that had occurred in the general population and then using the same comparison for non-Muslims and Muslims by running a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions. This data analysis allowed me to provide for all three of my hypotheses, rejecting the null hypotheses.

The research process forced me to think out of the box and look at gaps in the limited existing research that would answer my hypotheses. I had to find information from a wide range of sources to create my hypotheses. Then, I had to think of how to make a measure for my question beyond examining and analyzing an already available dataset. Upon the completion of my thesis, I provided new insight into the Nigerian government's response to Boko Haram, suggesting that its current method of addressing terrorism is not beneficial for all civilians. My thesis outlines that increased civilian fear could lead to decreased distrust in the government, and this decreased trust could hinder counterterrorism efforts by causing people to refuse to give out critical information that could prevent future insurgency attacks. Overall, my results indicate that all nations, beyond Nigeria, should continuously evaluate their approaches to terrorism to ensure that they are not causing more harm in the process.