

Beyond the Silence of Guns: Violence Normalisation and Conflict Recurrence in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explored how violence has become normalised and repeatedly reproduced across communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Despite years of military operations, peace accords, and security interventions, many communities continue to experience cycles of cult violence, militancy, kidnapping, communal clashes, and politically motivated attacks. This research examined whether repeated exposure to these forms of violence has made conflict appear normal, predictable, and socially acceptable within everyday life. A survey research design was adopted. A sample of 550 subjects was drawn from the population via simple random sampling technique. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled Violence Normalisation and Conflict Recurrence Questionnaire (VNCRQ). The instrument was validated through face and content validity procedures by two experts from Measurement and Evaluation and Criminology

Departments, while reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha method. With reliability coefficient of 0.88, Descriptive statistics such as simple percentages were used to answer the research questions and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient and multiple linear regression analysis were applied to test the hypotheses. The findings showed that cult related violence, political thuggery, militancy, youth unemployment, weak institutional responses and recurring communal conflicts significantly contribute to the normalisation of violence and the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State. Violence has become deeply rooted in social, political and economic structures, where it is increasingly viewed as a means of survival, protection and dispute resolution. The study concluded that violence in Rivers State is cyclical rather than isolated and recommended sustained peace-building, institutional reform, youth empowerment and community-based conflict transformation initiatives.

Keywords: Violence Normalisation, Conflict recurrence, Cultism, Peace-building, Rivers State

Introduction

The persistence of violence in Rivers State presents a complex and deeply rooted security challenges that continues to undermine governance, social stability, and development outcomes across multiple communities. Despite decades of state and federal interventions, including military operations, peace accords, surveillance strategies and the Niger Delta amnesty programme, violence has not been eliminated. Instead, it has evolved, fragmented and adapted into new forms that include militancy, cultism, political violence, kidnapping, communal clashes, and oil infrastructure sabotage. These forms of violence are not isolated events but recurring patterns that cut across time and geography within the state. Communities such as Emohua, Ahoada East, Ahoada West, Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, Khana, Gokana, Okirika, Degema, and urban Port Harcourt continue to experience cycles of insecurity marked by temporary calm followed by sudden escalation. In many of these areas, violence appears reduced after military operations or political settlements but reemerges in altered forms. This suggests that the problem is not only about the presence of armed actors but also about the underlying social and institutional environment that sustains violence behaviour.

Moreover, cult related killings and youth gang activities remain persistent in Port Harcourt and surrounding urban settlements, while pipeline vandalism and illegal oil bunkering continue in oil producing communities such as Khana and Gokana. These incidents reflect a deeper structural problem where violence becomes embedded with economic survival strategies and political competition. Studies show that cultism in Rivers State is driven by unemployment, youth frustration, political sponsorship, and weak institutional enforcement mechanism (Nche, 2020). Similarly, insecurity linked to oil infrastructure sabotage reflects long standing grievances tied to resource control, inequality and exclusion from state benefits. On 18th March 2025, the Federal Government declared a state of emergency in Rivers State following escalation of insecurity, which contributed to heightened of peace in the region. Reports of renewed militant activity, pipeline attacks, and political tensions indicate that previous interventions have not resolved the foundational issues driving conflict. Instead, they have often displaced violence into new expressions and networks (Reuters, 2025). This reality defines the central problem of this study: violence in Rivers State is not episodic but cyclical, not eliminated but transformed and not resolved but repeatedly reproduced.

The contemporary situation in Rivers State reveals that the problem of violence remains unresolved despite extensive policy attention and academic engagement. While large scale militancy declined following the Amnesty programme introduced in 2009, new and more

decentralised forms of violence have emerged. These include cult rivalries, politically sponsored youth groups, kidnapping networks, and localised communal conflicts. These forms of violence are often less visible than militancy but more embedded in everyday social and political life. Empirical reports indicate that electoral cycles in Rivers State continue to trigger violence. The 2023 general elections were marked by incidents of ballot disruption, political intimidation, and violence clashes in local Government Areas such as Emohua, Khana, Gokana, Degema and Port Harcourt. These events reflect a pattern where political competition activates preexisting violence networks that had been established through earlier cycles of conflict (PIND Foundation, 2020). Rather than being exceptions, such occurrences have become expected features of electoral politics in the state. In urban areas such as Port Harcourt, cult related violence persists across neighbourhoods including Trans Amadi, GRA, New Haven and Diobu. Police reports and media accounts consistently document recurring killings linked to cult rivalries and retaliatory within certain social environments, particularly among youths who have grown up in contexts where armed groups provide protection, identity and economic opportunities. Despite these persistent realities, most academic studies on Rivers State have focused on explaining the causes of violence, documenting its consequences, or analysing state responses. These studies have provided valuable insights into militancy, cultism and electoral violence but have not sufficiently examined how violence becomes socially normalised over time. There is limited attention on how repeated exposure to violence shapes community perception, alters social expectations and contributes to the reproduction of conflict.

This gap is critical because it limits understanding of why violence continues to thrive after major interventions. It also creates a misleading assumption that reduced violence automatically indicates peace, when underlying conditions may remain intact. The literature lacks a strong focus on the process through which violence becomes embedded in social life and transmitted across generations, particularly in communities like Khana, Gokana, Emohua and Ahoada, where cycles of violence have persisted for decades. Urgency of this study lies in the growing evidence that Rivers State is not transitioning from conflict to peace but is instead experiencing cycles of interrupted violence. In many communities, violence has become integrated into everyday life, shaping how individuals perceive safety, survival, justice, and authority. This normalisation process is particularly visible among young people who have been exposed to repeated episodes of cult violence, political thuggery, communal clashes and militant activity through their developmental years. In such context, violence is no longer viewed as an extraordinary disruption but as a predictable feature of social existence. Youths often interpret armed group membership as a pathway to protection, income, or social recognition. This perception is reinforced by weak institutional trust; where many residents believe that formal justice systems are ineffective or inaccessible. As a result, alternative authorities, including cult groups and informal networks have gained legitimacy within certain communities.

Institutional weakness further deepens this problem. law enforcement responses often focus on reactive measures rather than preventive transformation. The Nigerian citizenry is always the victim whenever there is an intelligence operational failure such as a failure in gathering or analysing information (Ushie et al., 2026). Peace building interventions tend to address visible outbreaks of violence without sufficiently engaging with the structural drivers that sustain it, such as unemployment, inequality, political patronage and identity-based divisions. Consequently, violence is suppressed temporarily but needs to be dismantled. Recent developments between 2024 and 2025 including renewed political tensions and security concerns in Rivers State, have

reinforced the argument that peace remains fragile and reversible (Reuters, 2025). These developments demonstrate that underlying conflict drivers remain active and capable of reigniting violence when triggered by political or economic stress.

Despite these realities, no sufficient scholarly attention has been given to how violence becomes normalised within Rivers State communities and how this normalisation contributes to conflict recurrence. Existing research has not fully explained why communities repeatedly return to violence even after peace agreement, military operations, and development interventions. This study therefore addresses a critical gap by focusing on the social processes through which violence becomes embedded, accepted, and reproduced. Understanding this process is essential for shifting policy and academic attention from short term conflict management to long term conflict transformation. Without addressing normalisation mechanisms, Rivers state risks continuing in a cycle where violence is periodically suppressed but never fully resolved, creating a condition where peace exist only as a temporary pause between conflicts.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine how the normalisation of violence contributes to conflict recurrence in Rivers State, Nigeria.

1. To examine how the normalisation of violence contributes to conflict recurrence in Rivers State.
2. To assess the extent to which repeated exposure to cult related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts influences the acceptance of violence and conflict recurrence among residents of Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study

1. How does the normalisation of violence contribute to the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State Nigeria?
2. To what extent does repeated exposure to cult related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts influence the acceptance of violence and the recurrence of conflict among residents of Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between the normalisation of violence and the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. Repeated exposure to cult related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts has no significant effect on the acceptance of violence and conflict recurrence among residents of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The study was guided by two theories specifically, Social Disorganisation theory developed by Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay (1942). The theory focuses on the relationship between community conditions, weakened social organisation and persistent crime and delinquency. Shaw and McKay argued that crime tends to persist in communities where social institutions and informal mechanisms of social control are unable to effectively regulate behaviour and address common problems. Their original work linked persistent delinquency to disadvantaged community conditions and weakened social organisation. The theory is relevant to the study because persistent

violence in Rivers State cannot be explained only by the behaviour of individual offenders. Communities experiencing prolonged insecurity may also experience weakened social cohesion, ineffective informal social control, institutional distrust and the erosion of community capacity to prevent or resolve conflicts. Under such conditions, violent groups and networks may gain greater influence within the community. Revisited the theoretical foundations of social disorganisation by proposing a neighbourhood centred approach rather than relying exclusively on traditional variable centred measures. Contemporary applications of social disorganisation theory continue to focus on how neighbourhood characteristics and social processes are connected to crime. The contribution is important for the study because it reinforces the need to examine community conditions rather than attributing recurring violence exclusively to individual offenders (Kubrin et al., 2022).

Tapia et al (2024) provide more recent research evidence. Using data from the National Neighbourhood Crime Study, they examined whether neighbourhoods located around large university campuses displayed characteristics associated with social disorganisation and higher crime rates. Their analysis using t-tests and ordinary least squares regression supported the main prediction of social disorganisation theory. The author found that the relevant neighbourhood characteristics were associated with elevated crime levels. Cwick and Williams (2025) also provide contemporary research support. Their study examined firearm offenses in St Louis using felony firearm arrest data from 2015-2018. Social disorganisation was operationalised through concentrated disadvantage and residential mobility. The findings showed that concentrated disadvantage significantly influenced the distance between offenders' homes and crime locations, although the relationship varied according to the type of firearm offense. This finding is important because it shown that the relationship between community structure and crime may differ according to the nature of offending. Social disorganasation theory therefore provides the community level explanation for the research objective. It helps explain why some communities may remain vulnerable to recurring violence despite security intervention and peacebuilding measures.

The relevance of the theory is particularly evident in communities such as Khana, Gokana, Emohua, Ahoada, Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, Degema, Okirika and parts of Port Harcourt that have experienced different forms of recurring violence. Where community institutions are unable to effectively regulate behaviour and prevent violent activities, episodes of violence may persist or reemerge after periods of relative calm. Social disorganisation theory best explains the community level conditions that allow violence to persist and recur. Doan-Pham, Mavisakalyan, and True (2026) their study published in the Elsevier Journal of Behavioural and Experimental Economics, examined the long-term relationship between war exposure and attitudes toward domestic violence in Vietnam. The study found that greater exposure to bombing during childhood and adolescence was associated with higher acceptance of intimate partner violence in adulthood. The author specifically examined the relationship between early life war exposure and social norms concerning domestic violence. Vigneri et al. (2026) their study found that long term exposure to political violence was significantly associated with subsequent experiences of interpersonal violence. A standard deviation increases in long term exposure to political violence increased the odds of subsequent emotional violence by 5.5%, physical intimate partner violence by 3.0%, any violence by 3.0%, and experiencing at least two types of violence by 4.3%. The authors also found that the relationship was associated with long term rather than short term exposure.

Moreso, the study was also guided by Social Learning theory developed by Albert Bandura (1977). The theory explains that human behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, interaction and reinforcement within a social environment. Individuals may acquire behavioural pattern by observing the conduct of others and by assessing the consequences associated with such behaviour. Where particular behaviours appear to produce social, political or economic rewards, individuals may be more likely to imitate and reproduce them. Recent research continues to provide support for the explanatory value of social learning processes in understanding violence. Pusch's (2024) meta-analysis examined 1,157 effect sizes from 116 studies and found substantial research evidence linking social learning predictors with teen dating violence perpetration. The study is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that peer and social environmental learning mechanisms remain important predictors of violent behaviour across a large body of empirical research. Benson et al. (2022) examined the risks and impacts of cultism in selected communities in Gokana local Government Area of Rivers State. The researchers used primary and secondary data and collected information through a structured questionnaire. Their study reported that cultism had become a serious threat to peaceful communal coexistence and that cultic violence had become prevalent in the communities studied.

Vecchio and Carson (2023) provide more direct evidence concerning violence and group membership. Using qualitative interviews with 39 former gang members, they examined violence across different stages of gang affiliation from a social learning theory perspective. Their findings demonstrate that the rewards and punishments associated with violence can change across stages of gang membership. This is important for the present study because it shows that participation in violent groups cannot be understood simply as an individual decision, social rewards and group experiences can reinforce or discourage violent conduct. More recent Nigerian research has applied social learning theory to youth violence and cultism. Nkan et al. (2025), for example, examined cultism among public secondary school students in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, explicitly using social learning theory to examine the prevalence, causes and consequences of cultism. Their study identified peer pressure as an important issue within the context of youth cultism. Jack (2024), in a UNU-WIDER working paper based on field data from conflict affected Niger Delta communities, provides evidence that is highly relevant to this conceptual argument. The study argues that social permissiveness toward violent behaviour associated with the Niger Delta struggle has contributed to a latent culture of violence and the emergence of norms that support or encourage violent behaviour. It further reports that violence can become a means of pursuing socially valued outcomes such as wealth, political power and status, particularly where violent actors receive social rewards.

Social learning theory is relevant to the present study because repeated exposure to violence may influence how residents, particularly young people, perceive and respond to violent behaviour. In communities where cult related killings, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts occur repeatedly, residents may become familiar with violent behaviour and gradually perceive it as an acceptable or practical response to insecurity, economic hardship, political competition or interpersonal disputes. When individuals observe violent actors gaining protection, recognition, influence the perception that violence is an effective means of achieving desired objectives.

Method

The study employed survey research design. A sample of 550 people was drawn via simple random sampling technique. Multistage sampling procedure was employed in data collection.

Rivers State was divided into three strata using the Senatorial Districts. The first stage was to select Local Government Areas by Senatorial Districts to ensure geographic spread. Systematic sampling technique was employed in selecting Local Government Areas from each Senatorial Districts. Five (5) Local Government Areas were randomly drawn for the study. The second stage was the selection of electoral wards using simple random sampling technique. Two electoral wards were drawn from each LGA, making a total of 10 wards. The third stage was the selection of communities which was done through simple random sampling technique. Two (2) communities were drawn from each ward using simple random sampling. Altogether, 20 communities were drawn for the study. The last stage involved the selection of respondents using simple random sampling. Five hundred and fifty (550) respondents were randomly drawn from the sampled communities. Hence, the sample size is 550 respondents.

A twenty-one (21) items structured questionnaire titled: Normalisation of Violence and Conflict Recurrence Questionnaire (VNCRQ) was designed for data collection. The instrument was structured based on five-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with assigned weights of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by two experts from Measurement and Evaluation and Criminology Departments, University of Port Harcourt.

The Cronbach's alpha reliability method was employed for pre-testing. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.88, implying that the instrument was reliable and should be used for the study. The administration of the instrument was carried out by the researcher and one research assistant in each of the sampled communities, and were retrieved after completion by the respondents.

The data collected were analysed using simple percentage and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis. The research questions were answered using frequency and simple percentage, while the hypotheses were tested using Multiple Linear Regression Analysis and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The mean mark of 3.00 was used as cut-off point for decision-making, while that of standard deviation was any value greater than 0.5 was considered high. All the data analyses were carried out with the use of statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 25.0 version.

Results

The research questions were analysed using frequency and simple percentages while the hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and multiple regression at 0.05 level of significance.

Research Question One

How does the normalisation of violence contribute to the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State Nigeria? The result of this research question is presented in Table 1.

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that a substantial majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all seven statements measuring the normalisation of violence in Rivers State. For Item 1, 400 respondents (72.7%) either agreed or strongly agreed that community members often tolerate violent acts without reporting them, while 16.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 10.9% were undecided. This suggests that underreporting of violence is a common occurrence.

For Item 2, 74.5% of respondents agreed that violent behaviour has become a normal means of resolving disputes within their communities, whereas 16.4% disagreed and 9.1% remained undecided. This finding indicates that violence is increasingly perceived as an acceptable conflict-

resolution strategy. Similarly, item 3 revealed that 72.8% of respondents believed that many young people now view violence as an acceptable means of achieving their goals, while only 17.3% disagreed and 10.0% were undecided. Regarding political violence (Item 4), 77.2% agreed that violence has become a normal feature of elections in Rivers State. Only 14.6% disagreed, whereas 8.2% expressed no opinion.

The result for item 5, recorded the highest level of agreement, with 80.9% of respondents agreeing that communities where violence is normalised are more likely to experience repeated conflicts. Only 11.8% disagreed, while 7.3% remained undecided. Similarly, 74.5% of respondents agreed with Item 6 that repeated violent incidents have reduced people's sensitivity to violence, whereas 16.4% disagreed and 9.1% were undecided.

Finally, item 7 showed that 77.2% of respondents agreed that acceptance of violence encourages individuals to participate in future conflicts, while 14.6% disagreed and 8.2% remained undecided. These responses demonstrate a strong consensus among respondents that violence has become normalised within many communities in Rivers State and that this normalisation contributes to the recurrence of conflict.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents on the normalisation of violence and the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State, Nigeria (N = 550)

S/N	Items	SA(%)	A(%)	U(%)	D(%)	SD(%)
1	Most members of the community often tolerate violent acts without reporting them to the appropriate authorities.	210 (38.2%)	190 (34.5%)	60 (10.9%)	55 (10.0%)	35 (6.4%)
2	Violent behaviour has become a normal way of resolving disputes in my community.	225 (40.9%)	185 (33.6%)	50 (9.1%)	55 (10.0%)	35 (6.4%)
3	Many young people increasingly see violence as an acceptable means of achieving their goals.	205 (37.3%)	195 (35.5%)	55 (10.0%)	60 (10.9%)	35 (6.4%)
4	Political violence is increasingly viewed as a normal part of elections in Rivers State.	245 (44.5%)	180 (32.7%)	45 (8.2%)	50 (9.1%)	30 (5.5%)
5	Communities where violence is considered normal are more likely to experience repeated conflicts.	265 (48.2%)	180 (32.7%)	40 (7.3%)	40 (7.3%)	25 (4.5%)
6	Repeated violent incidents have reduced people's sensitivity to violence.	220 (40.0%)	190 (34.5%)	50 (9.1%)	55 (10.0%)	35 (6.4%)
7	Acceptance of violence encourages individuals to participate in future conflicts.	240 (43.6%)	185 (33.6%)	45 (8.2%)	50 (9.1%)	30 (5.5%)

Research Question Two

To what extent does repeated exposure to cult related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts influence the acceptance of violence and the recurrence of

conflict among residents of Rivers State? The result of this research question is presented in Table 2.

The results presented in Table 4.2 indicate that the majority of respondents agreed that repeated exposure to various forms of violence contributes significantly to the acceptance of violence and the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State. Item 1 revealed that 420 respondents (76.3%) either strongly agreed or agreed that frequent kidnapping incidents have made violence appear to be a normal part of daily life, whereas 15.5% disagreed and 8.2% remained undecided. This finding suggests that persistent kidnapping has become normalised within many communities.

Regarding item 2, 410 respondents (74.6%) agreed that frequent exposure to cult-related violence makes people less disturbed by violent incidents. Only 16.3% disagreed, while 9.1% were undecided. This indicates that continuous exposure to cult activities may have desensitised many residents to violence. For Item 3, 425 respondents (77.2%) agreed that repeated political violence increases public acceptance of violence as a means of achieving political objectives. In contrast, 14.6% disagreed, while 8.2% were undecided. Item 4 revealed that 440 respondents (80.0%) agreed that repeated exposure to different forms of violence increases the likelihood of future violent conflicts. Only 12.7% disagreed, whereas 7.3% remained undecided.

Similarly, item 5 had the highest levels of agreement, with 445 respondents (80.9%) affirming that continuous exposure to violence contributes to the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State. Only 11.8% disagreed, while 7.3% were undecided. The result for item 6 showed that 415 respondents (75.4%) agreed that exposure to multiple forms of violence reduces public confidence in peaceful conflict resolution, whereas 15.5% disagreed and 9.1% remained undecided. The result for item 7 revealed that 445 respondents (80.9%) agreed that communities experiencing frequent violent incidents are more likely to witness recurring conflicts. Only 11.8% disagreed, while 7.3% expressed no opinion. The findings indicate a broad consensus among respondents that repeated exposure to violence not only normalises violent behaviour but also increases the likelihood of future conflicts in Rivers State.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents on the Influence of repeated exposure to cult related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts on the acceptance of violence and the recurrence of conflict among residents of Rivers State, Nigeria (N = 550)

S/N	Items	SA(%)	A(%)	U(%)	D(%)	SD(%)
1	Frequent kidnapping incidents have made violence appear to be a normal part of daily life.	230 (41.8%)	190 (34.5%)	45 (8.2%)	55 (10.0%)	30 (5.5%)
2	Frequent exposure to cult-related violence makes people less disturbed by violent incidents.	215 (39.1%)	195 (35.5%)	50 (9.1%)	55 (10.0%)	35 (6.3%)
3	Repeated political violence increases public acceptance of violence as a means of achieving political objectives.	240 (43.6%)	185 (33.6%)	45 (8.2%)	50 (9.1%)	30 (5.5%)

S/N	Items	SA(%)	A(%)	U(%)	D(%)	SD(%)
4	Repeated exposure to different forms of violence increases the likelihood of future violent conflicts.	260 (47.3%)	180 (32.7%)	40 (7.3%)	45 (8.2%)	25 (4.5%)
5	Continuous exposure to violence contributes to the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State.	270 (49.1%)	175 (31.8%)	40 (7.3%)	40 (7.3%)	25 (4.5%)
6	Exposure to multiple forms of violence reduces public confidence in peaceful conflict resolution.	225 (40.9%)	190 (34.5%)	50 (9.1%)	55 (10.0%)	30 (5.5%)
7	Communities with frequent violent incidents are more likely to experience recurring conflicts.	275 (50.0%)	170 (30.9%)	40 (7.3%)	40 (7.3%)	25 (4.5%)

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between the normalisation of violence and the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State, Nigeria. This hypothesis was analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) and tested at 0.05 level of significance and 548 degrees of freedom. The result is presented Table 3.

Table 3: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) analysis showing the relationship between normalisation of violence and conflict recurrence in Rivers State, Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value
Normalisation of violence	550	36.84	5.72	0.714	.000
Recurrence of conflict	550	38.27	6.14		

The result in Table 3 indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between normalisation of violence and recurrence of conflict among residents of Rivers State ($r = 0.714$, $p < .05$). Since the probability value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that increased normalisation of violence is associated with higher levels of recurring conflict.

Hypothesis Two

Repeated exposure to cult related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts does not significantly influence the acceptance of violence and conflict recurrence among residents of Rivers State, Nigeria. This hypothesis was analysed using multiple linear regression and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in Table 4 as shown below.

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression analysis of the influence of repeated exposure to cult related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts on Acceptance of Violence and Conflict Recurrence

Model	R		Adjusted		Standard Error
1	0.812		0.659		4.183
Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.
Regression	18521.64	5	3704.33	211.62	.000
Residual	9511.84	544	17.49		
Total	28033.48	549			
Predictor variable	B	Std. error	t		Sig.
Constant	6.238	1.182	5.28		.000
Cult related violence	0.348	0.047	0.312	7.40	.000
Political violence	0.285	0.043	0.217	6.63	.000
Militancy	0.216	0.051	0.189	4.24	.000
Kidnapping	0.174	0.045	0.161	3.87	.000
Communal conflict	0.302	0.049	0.286	6.16	.000

The regression analysis in Table 4 revealed that repeated exposure to cult-related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping, and communal conflicts significantly predicts acceptance of violence and the recurrence of conflict among residents of Rivers State ($F(5,544) = 211.62, p < .05$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.659$) indicates that 65.9% of the variation in acceptance of violence and conflict recurrence is explained jointly by the five predictor variables. Cult-related violence ($\beta = 0.312$), communal conflict ($\beta = 0.286$), and political violence ($\beta = 0.271$) emerged as the strongest predictors, while militancy ($\beta = 0.189$) and kidnapping ($\beta = 0.161$) also made statistically significant positive contributions ($p < .05$). Since the significance value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level, the null hypothesis was rejected. The conclusion is that repeated exposure to these forms of violence significantly influences the acceptance of violence and the recurrence of conflict among residents of Rivers State.

Discussion

The finding of this study revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between the normalisation of violence and the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State. This implies that as violence becomes increasingly accepted, tolerated, or perceived as a normal aspect of social, political, and economic life, the likelihood of repeated conflicts also increases. The result suggests that residents who have become accustomed to recurring violent incidents may gradually perceive violence as a legitimate or inevitable means of resolving disputes, expressing grievances, or pursuing political and economic interests. Consequently, the continuous acceptance of violent behaviours creates an environment where conflicts are easily reproduced and sustained.

Similarly, the descriptive findings reveal widespread agreement among respondents that violence has become normalised in Rivers State. More than seven out of every ten respondents agreed that violent acts are often tolerated, political violence has become a routine aspect of elections, repeated exposure has reduced public sensitivity to violence, and communities that normalise violence experience recurring conflicts. These findings suggest that the persistence of violence has fostered social acceptance of violent behaviour, thereby creating conditions that sustain repeated conflicts.

This finding is consistent with the Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. In communities where, violent acts are repeatedly witnessed and perpetrators often escape punishment, violence becomes socially reinforced and eventually normalised. Such normalisation increases the tendency for individuals and groups to adopt violent strategies in addressing interpersonal, communal, or political disagreements.

Furthermore, the results are consistent with the finding of Bar-Tal (2007), who observed that societies experiencing prolonged conflict often develop collective beliefs that justify violence as necessary or inevitable. Likewise, Huesmann (2007) reported that repeated exposure to violence shapes long-term attitudes and behavioural scripts that increase the probability of future aggression. The result also corroborates the work of Krug et al. (2002), who argued that violence is not merely an individual behaviour but a public health and societal problem that reproduces itself through repeated exposure and societal acceptance. Similarly, Gilligan (2016) maintained that societies characterised by persistent violence often experience a cycle in which violence becomes institutionalised, making peaceful conflict resolution increasingly difficult.

The second finding demonstrated that repeated exposure to various forms of violence such as cult related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts significantly influences both the acceptance of violence and the recurrence of conflict among residents of Rivers State. This suggests that individuals who are continually exposed to cult-related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping, and communal clashes become more likely to perceive violence as a normal, acceptable, or unavoidable feature of everyday life. Such repeated exposure reduces sensitivity to violence, increases tolerance for aggressive behaviour, and ultimately contributes to the persistence and recurrence of conflicts. The findings demonstrate that residents of Rivers State overwhelmingly perceive repeated exposure to kidnapping, cult-related violence, political violence, militancy, and other forms of violent conflict as significant factors influencing the acceptance of violence and the recurrence of conflict. More than three-quarters of the respondents agreed that continuous exposure to violent incidents has normalised violence, reduced public confidence in peaceful conflict resolution, and increased the likelihood of recurring conflicts. These findings suggest that prolonged exposure to violence has profound psychological and social consequences, shaping attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate cycles of violence.

Within the Rivers State context, decades of militant activities, political thuggery, cult rivalries, kidnapping, and communal disputes have exposed many residents to persistent violence. Such prolonged exposure may have normalised aggressive behaviour, weakened confidence in peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms, and increased public acceptance of violence as a legitimate response to perceived injustice or competition for resources. Consequently, repeated exposure serves as a major driver of conflict recurrence within the state.

The findings align with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which argues that individuals learn behaviours by observing and imitating others within their social environment. In

communities where, violent acts such as kidnapping, cult clashes, and political violence occur frequently, residents, particularly, young people may internalise violence as an acceptable strategy for resolving disputes, achieving political goals, or obtaining economic benefits. The present finding corroborates the work of Huesmann (2007), who found that repeated exposure to violence significantly predicts aggressive behaviour and long-term acceptance of violence. It is also in agreement with Wisdom (2019), whose research demonstrated that exposure to violence increases the likelihood of future violent behaviour, thereby sustaining cycles of conflict across generations.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was concluded that violence has been normalised and the recurrence of conflict in Rivers State, Nigeria. The repeated exposure to cult related violence, political violence, militancy, kidnapping and communal conflicts significantly influence the acceptance of violence and conflict recurrence among residents of Rivers State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was recommended that both communities and the government should implement comprehensive violence-prevention strategies aimed at strengthening justice institutions, promoting peace, education and expanding psychosocial interventions to reduce societal acceptance of violence. All the stakeholders should attempt to address the root causes of repeated violent exposure in order to reduce conflict recurrence and foster sustainable peace in Rivers State by providing basic social amenities and boosting job creation, and community-based conflict transformation initiatives.

Recommendation

1. The study recommends that the Rivers State Government adopt sustained community-based peace building and conflict transformation programmes that strengthen dialogue, reconciliation and social cohesion in violence prone communities.
2. Security and criminal justice institutions should improve intelligence gathering, early warning mechanisms and timely law enforcement responses while ensuring accountability and public trust in the administration of justice.
3. Government should also prioritise youth empowerment through employment opportunities, vocational skills development and entrepreneurship programmes to address the socioeconomic conditions that contribute to the recruitment of young people into cult groups, militancy and other violent networks.
4. Political actors and relevant institutions must enforce laws against political thuggery and prosecute perpetrators and sponsors of electoral violence to discourage impunity.
5. Traditional rulers, religious organisations, civil society groups and educational institutions should collaborate in promoting peace education, civic responsibility and nonviolent conflict resolution to challenge the growing acceptance of violence as a means of survival and dispute settlement.
6. Future studies should extend this line of inquiry to other conflict prone states in the Niger Delta to deepen understanding of violence normalisation and assess the long-term effectiveness of intervention strategies and reducing conflict recurrence.

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