RE-OCCURRENCE OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN JOS NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Ethno-religious conflicts are a recurring global issue, including in Nigeria. These conflicts often arise from a complex mix of social, political, and economic factors, leading to significant unrest and tension in affected communities. The recurrence of such conflicts highlights deep-seated societal divisions, fueled by historical grievances, ethnic and religious differences, and competition for resources. In Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria, repeated violence has resulted in loss of lives, displacement, and social disruption. Understanding the root causes and factors perpetuating these conflicts is crucial for developing effective peace strategies. This study investigates the recurrent ethno-religious conflicts in Jos North LGA, examining socio-political and economic contributors to these tensions. Grounded in the relative deprivation and conflict transformation theories, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews (IDI and KII) from 398 adult respondents and 16 key informants, including traditional leaders, police, military personnel, NSCDC personnel, religious leaders, community-based organizations, and youth group representatives. Quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Product and Service Solution(SPSS), and qualitative data were transcribed and thematically organized. Findings reveal that ethnicity, nepotism, and corruption significantly hinder conflict resolution, with 52.4% of respondents identifying ethnic divisions as

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the primary challenge. Despite recognizing potentially effective strategies like community policing and educational programs on tolerance, deep-rooted issues and resource mismanagement persist. The study concludes that ethno-religious conflicts in Jos North continue due to significant barriers such as ethnicity, nepotism, and corruption. It emphasizes the need to understand the interplay between historical grievances and socio-economic disparities sustaining violence. Recommendations include enhancing community engagement, promoting tolerance education, and addressing corruption to foster trust and cooperation among diverse groups.

Keywords: Ethno-religious conflict, Jos North, Nigeria, community policing, corruption

Introduction

Conflict is an inherent issue in human societies, often resulting from political, economic, and social instability linked to poor governance and exacerbated ethnic or religious differences (Oluwaseun, 2023). Since the return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999, the country has become a hotspot for violent conflicts, manifesting in various forms such as political, ethnic, and religious disputes, with significant repercussions for the nation and its citizens. Ethno-religious conflicts, particularly in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, have disrupted the socio-economic fabric of local communities, highlighting the complex interplay of factors driving these tensions. Globally, ethno-religious conflicts arise from historical grievances, power struggles, and resource disparities, as seen in regions like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, and Myanmar. These examples emphasize the urgent need to address such conflicts to promote peaceful coexistence.

Within Nigeria, a nation characterized by ethnic and religious diversity, these conflicts have hindered development, particularly in Plateau State, where the interplay of ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic factors has led to cycles of violence and instability. Jos North serves as a microcosm of Nigeria's ethno-religious landscape, with its diverse ethnic and religious groups, including the Hausa, Berom, Muslims, and Christians. While this diversity enriches the community, it has also been exploited by vested interests, resulting in violent clashes. These conflicts illustrate how minor incidents can escalate due to underlying historical and socio-political tensions, complicating efforts toward peace. The economic implications of ethno-religious conflicts are felt both regionally and nationally, with Nigeria's economy suffering from reduced foreign investment and growth.

Plateau State, once known for its agricultural productivity, has experienced setbacks as businesses shutter and farmlands remain unused, impacting local livelihoods. This economic decline particularly affects the youth, who may turn to extremist ideologies in the absence of opportunities. Understanding and addressing the complexities of ethno-religious conflicts is essential for fostering sustainable peace. Previous research, such as that by Adetola (2019), highlights the role of economic

disparities, while Johnson (2020) emphasizes political manipulation in exacerbating tensions. The proposed research aims to explore these conflicts' multifaceted nature and economic consequences, identifying viable solutions through inclusive governance, equitable resource allocation, and interfaith initiatives to promote dialogue and cooperation among diverse communities in Jos North.

By examining the nature, strategies to mitigate and challenges in policing this menace, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding this complex issue. Moreover, the study's focus on identifying practical solutions aligning with the global, national, and regional efforts to curb the destabilizing effects of ethno-religious conflicts. This research also aims to promote harmonious public coexistence, resilience, and prosperity within Jos North local government area and beyond.

The study was guided by the following objectives; to find out the challenges faced by the strategies put in place to curb the re-occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria.To determine measures to mitigate the re-occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria.

Literature
Nature of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are deeply tied to the country's complex socio-political history, marked by colonial legacies and the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities by political elites. Nigeria's diversity, with over 250 ethnic groups and two major religions—Christianity and Islam—has often been exploited as a source of division. Marginalization in political representation, access to resources, or recognition of identity fuels these conflicts, particularly in the Middle Belt region, which includes Plateau, Benue, and Nasarawa states. According to Oluwatosin (2023), political actors frequently manipulate ethnic and religious identities to gain support, creating tensions that can escalate into violence.

A key example of this dynamic is the conflict in Jos, Plateau State, which has been a flashpoint for violence since the early 2000s. The conflict is often portrayed as religious, with clashes between Christian ethnic groups like the Berom and the predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani. However, Johnson (2020) notes that these tensions are deeply intertwined with disputes over land ownership, political control, and resources. The indigene-settler dichotomy further complicates the conflict, as "indigenous" groups claim ownership of land and political offices, while "settlers," who have lived in the area for generations, feel marginalized. Similar dynamics are seen in the Tiv-Jukun conflict in Benue and Taraba states, where land disputes and historical grievances are manipulated by political actors for personal gain (Adamu,2018).

Another dimension of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria is the Boko Haram insurgency, which, although initially focused on rejecting Western education, has

evolved into an ethno-religious struggle. Boko Haram's attacks on Christian communities and its push for Sharia law have amplified religious tensions, particularly in northern Nigeria. As Johnson (2020) points out, Boko Haram's activities have deepened divisions between Nigeria's Christian south and Muslim north, highlighting how extremist violence can further exacerbate existing ethno-religious tensions. Similarly, the rise of clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farming communities in the Middle Belt also reflects how economic disputes over land have taken on religious and ethnic dimensions, as noted by Chukwuma, &Adeleke, (2022).

Strategies put in place to tackle ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau state

Several strategies have been implemented to address ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State, focusing on peacebuilding and community engagement. One key approach has been interfaith dialogue, facilitated by organizations like the Plateau Peace Practitioners Network (PPPN) and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD). These initiatives promote conversations between Christian and Muslim communities to foster understanding and tolerance, with religious leaders playing a vital role in mediation. According to Adamu, (2018), such dialogue is critical in addressing misconceptions and reducing tensions among the groups involved. Another significant strategy is the establishment of peace committees, such as the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA). Formed in 2016, the PPBA has been instrumental in mediating disputes and promoting long-term reconciliation efforts. These committees, which include local leaders and community representatives, work to implement community-driven peace initiatives.

Studies by Aliyu (2020) have noted the success of the PPBA in reducing violent outbreaks by fostering dialogue and community participation. Security interventions also play a critical role in managing ethno-religious conflicts in the state. The Special Task Force (STF), known as *Operation Safe Haven*, has been deployed to maintain peace and prevent the escalation of violence. While the presence of security forces has helped stabilize volatile areas, scholars like Nwaobi, (2021) caution that militarization can sometimes escalate tensions, especially when security forces are perceived as biased. Additionally, community-based initiatives such as youth and women empowerment programs have been crucial in addressing the socio-economic root causes of conflict. By providing vocational training and creating economic opportunities, these initiatives aim to reduce poverty and unemployment, which are often linked to violence. Adamu (2018) highlights how these programs help reduce youth involvement in conflict, creating a foundation for lasting peace in Plateau State.
Challenges hindering measures addressing ethno-religious conflictsin Nigeria
Efforts to reduce ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are significantly hindered by corruption. It creates mistrust in communities and diverts resources intended for peacebuilding, weakening conflict resolution initiatives. Nwaobi (2021) highlights how corruption leads to the misappropriation of funds meant for public services,

fueling poverty and unrest that perpetuate conflict. When local authorities and security personnel are perceived as corrupt, public confidence declines, undermining community engagement and security efforts (Nwaobi,2021). Mismanagement of peacebuilding funds further exacerbates conflicts by depriving communities of essential services and infrastructure (Johnson, 2020).Ethnic divisions also pose a challenge to conflict resolution efforts. Adamu, Ibrahim, & Usman, (2023) explains that Nigeria's complex mix of religion and ethnicity often intensifies tensions, making peacemaking difficult.

Ethnic loyalties frequently override efforts at communication and collaboration, increasing the risk of violence even in minor disputes (Afolabi, 2019). Varshney (2002) adds that the politicization of ethnicity by elites strengthens grievances, complicating peace efforts.Nepotism further exacerbates these challenges, undermining fairness and inclusivity in governance. Uche (2020) found that nepotism fuels marginalization, especially in ethnically diverse regions, making it harder for the government to implement conflict resolution strategies. Nepotism fosters patronage networks, resulting to inequality and unrest, which alienate marginalized communities and disrupted peace efforts (Smith, 2021).

Finally, inadequate funding and insufficient training for security personnel hinder peacebuilding efforts. Okeke (2017) highlights how limited resources prevent the government from addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty and unemployment, while Adewale, (2021) notes that unequal service distribution heightens tensions. Additionally, Adedayo (2020) found that poorly trained security forces are often ill-equipped to manage ethno-religious conflicts, leading to ineffective conflict resolution.

Theory

This study adopts two major theories as theoretical framework, the relative deprivation theory and conflict transformation theory.

Relative Deprivation Theory, developed by Ted Gurr (1970), explains how perceived inequalities between groups lead to conflict. When individuals or groups feel disadvantaged compared to others, particularly in terms of resources, political power, or social status, feelings of frustration and injustice can arise. This often leads to collective action or violence as marginalized groups seek to address these grievances. In Jos North, where ethnic and religious divisions are prominent, perceived economic and political exclusion fuels tensions and violence. This theory is relevant as it helps explain why conflicts persist in the region, as marginalized groups continue to feel deprived and excluded (Gurr, 1970).

Conflict Transformation Theory, as proposed by Adebayo, et al. 2022), emphasizes addressing the root causes of conflict through long-term structural and relational change. Instead of merely resolving immediate disputes, the theory focuses on transforming underlying issues such as inequality, injustice, and historical grievances. In Jos North, this theory would promote inclusive dialogue, governance

reforms, and economic equity to address the systemic conditions driving ethno-religious conflicts. Lederach's approach is crucial for sustainable peacebuilding, as it aims to reshape relationships and social structures that fuel recurring violence (Lederach, 2003).

Methods

The Jos North Local Government Area in Plateau State, Nigeria, is recognized for its diverse ethnic and religious communities, stunning landscapes, and historical importance. This region has been marked by ethno-religious conflicts largely driven by identity differences and struggles for political power, significantly affecting social cohesion and economic progress. This study employs a survey design, incorporating both questionnaires and interviews for data collection, and adopts a cross-sectional and descriptive approach. With a population of approximately 1,001,000, the sample includes 398 respondents, with 382 providing quantitative data and 16 participating in qualitative interviews. Participants were selected through multi-stage cluster sampling and purposive sampling techniques, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, police and military personnel, and youth groups. Data collection methods include questionnaires and interview guides, supported by trained research assistants during the fieldwork process. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, while qualitative data were thematically categorized and enriched with direct quotations from participants.

Results

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Sex		
Male	263	68.8
Female	119	31.2
Age		
18-23	10	2.6
24-29	20	5.2
30-34	56	14.6
35-39	160	41.9
40-44	115	30.1
45 and above	13	3.4
Marital Status		
Single	109	28.5
Married	207	54.2
Divorce	36	9.4
Widow	21	5.5
Separated	9	2.4
Religion		
Islam	206	53.9
Christianity	176	46.1
Traditional religion	0	0.0
Others	0	0.0
Ethnic Group		
Islam	206	53.9
Christianity	176	46.1
Traditional religion	0	0.0
Others	0	0.0
Highest educational attainment		
Primary	10	2.6
Secondary	171	44.8
Tertiary	165	43.2
Non formal	36	9.4
Others	0	0.0
Occupation		
Student	27	7.1
Artisan/craft	30	7.9
Unemployed	138	36.1
Others	0	0.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

The survey results indicates that majority of the respondents are male. This is attributed to the nature of the study area where femalesare restricted from participating in socioeconomic and political activities. **Majority of the respondents are between the age of 35-39 years implies that most of them are adult.** The marital status indicates that majority of the respondents are married because most of them are grown adult within the age of **35-39 years.** 53.9 of the respondents are Muslims while 46.1% are Christians. This indicates that majority of the respondents are Muslims. **Majority of the respondents are Hausa/Fulani. This is attributed to the fact that they are dominant population in the study. Majority of** the respondents where virtually close to 92% of the respondents have formal educational qualification. For the occupational distribution of the respondents,**majority of the respondents are unemployed.**

Table 2: Awareness of the   challenges faced in implementing strategies to prevent the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflicts Jos North Local Government

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	361	94.5
No	21	5.5
Total	**382**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2reveals that 94.5% of the respondents are aware of thechallenges associated with the strategies implemented to prevent the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflicts Jos North Local Government while 5.5% are not aware. This suggests that majority of the respondents recognized the obstacle faced by the existing conflicts mitigating strategies in the study area.

This suggests a high level of awareness among community members about the difficulties in fully implementing conflict resolution strategies.

A traditional leader remarked:

> *Most people are aware that implementing these strategies is not without challenges, particularly when it comes to funding and political will*(**Traditional Leader 1, Male, 61**)

A government official echoed this view:

> *The public understands that while progress has been made, there are still significant hurdles to overcome, especially in terms of corruption and ethnic tensions*(**CBO Member 1, Male, 32)**

This indicates a general consensus that while people recognize the challenges, they are still hopeful for the success of the strategies.

Table 3: Challenges faced i n applying strategies to prevent the reoccurrence of ethno - religious conflicts Jos North Local Government

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Corruption	73	19.1
Ethnicity	200	52.4
Nepotism	94	24.6
Culture of impunity	15	3.9
Inadequate training personnel	0	0.0
Total	**382**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 presents the challenges faced by the strategies put in place to curb the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflicts Jos North Local Government where 19.1% revealed that corruption is the challenge, 52.4% revealed ethnicity as the challenge, 24.6% mentioned nepotism as the challenge while 3.9% reported culture of impunity as the challenge. Majority of the respondents revealed that e**thnicity is the major** challenge faced in applying the strategies put in place to curb the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflicts Jos North Local Government.

The majority of respondents believe that ethnic divisions are the biggest challenge to implementing peace strategies. A traditional leader commented:

> *Ethnic loyalties continue to divide communities, making it difficult for any strategy to fully take root*(**Traditional Leader 2, Male, 59)**

Nepotism and corruption were also seen as major challenges. A CBO Member stated:

> *Nepotism in political appointments leads to resentment and distrust, making it harder for communities to accept the strategies being put in place*(**CBO Member 2/Male/35).**

Overall, most respondents agree that the current strategies particularly inclusive governance and youth engagement are effective in curbing the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflict in Jos North. However, significant challenges, primarily ethnic divisions and corruption, hinder the full success of these strategies. While there is hope for lasting peace, addressing these deep-rooted issues remains critical.

Measures used to mitigate the re-occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts in Jos North local government area, Plateau State, Nigeria

Table 4: proper and timely training of the security personnel will help in curbing the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflict in Jos North

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	167	43.7
No	215	56.3
Total	**382**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 4 shows that 43.7% of the respondents believed that proper and timely training of the security personnel will help in curbing the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflict in Jos North while 56.3% didn't believed. This indicates that majority of the respondents believed that proper and timely training of the security personnel will not help in curbing the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflict in Jos North.

This division suggests skepticism about the effectiveness of training alone. A security personnel mentioned:

> Training is important, but it must be followed by practical application in the field **(Military Officer 2/Operation Safe Heaven /Male/54)?**

A religious leader commented:

> Proper training could enable security forces to handle these complex situations better **(Religious Leader 1/Male/Muslim/56).**

In all, opinions were divided on the impact of proper and timely training for security personnel in curbing ethno-religious conflicts. Many respondents acknowledged that enhanced training is crucial for effectively managing local tensions, yet they emphasized that training alone would not suffice. Building trust between communities and security forces was deemed equally important, with some respondents expressing skepticism that mere training could bridge the existing gaps in confidence and cooperation.

Table 5: Adequate funding will boost the security agencies eff orts to tackle the reoccurrence of these conflicts

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	199	52.1
No	183	47.9
Total	**382**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 5 shows that 52.1% of the respondents believed that adequate funding will boost the security agencies efforts to tackle the reoccurrence of these conflicts while 47.9% didn't believed. This indicates that majority of the respondents believed that adequate funding will boost the security agencies efforts to tackle the reoccurrence of these conflicts.

This suggests that many view funding as critical to improving security effectiveness. One respondent explained:

> Without adequate funding, agencies struggle to provide the necessary services to communities **(CBO Member 2/Male/35).**

A church owner added:

> If security agencies had the right funding, they could more effectively prevent conflicts before they escalate **(Religious Leader 1/Male/Christian/58).**

A consensus emerged among respondents that adequate funding is essential for improving the effectiveness of security agencies in addressing conflicts in Jos North. Many pointed out that insufficient resources significantly hamper the capabilities of these agencies, leading to ineffective interventions. However, some cautioned that funding must be strategically allocated and managed to make a meaningful impact, highlighting the need for accountability in the use of financial resources to ensure they benefit community safety initiatives.

Table 6: Effective strategies/measures to mitigate the reoccurrenceof the conflict

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strengthening Community Policy	93	24.3
Fostering educational program on tolerance	89	23.3
Advocating for fair media reporting	74	19.4
Joint community project/youth empowerment	70	18.3
No response	56	14.6
Total	**382**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 6 presents the effective strategies/measures to mitigate the reoccurrence of the conflict where 24.3% of the respondents revealed that **strengthening community policy is the strategy, 23.3% said fostering educational program on tolerance, 19.4% said advocating for fair media reporting, 18.3% said joint community project/youth empowerment while 14.6% of the respondents did not respond.**

This indicates that majority of the respondents believed that strengthening community policy is the main effective strategies/measures to mitigate the reoccurrence of the conflict.

One respondent explained:

> Community policing helps build trust and a sense of security within neighborhoods **(Military Officer 1/Operation Rainbow /Male/46).**

A local leader noted:

> Educational programs are essential to foster understanding and tolerance among different groups **(Traditional Leader 1/Male/59).**

Another religious leader commented:

> Joint projects bring people together and help break down barriers **(Religious Leader 1/Male/Muslim/56).**

Respondents identified several effective strategies for mitigating conflicts, with a focus on strengthening community policing as a means to build trust between security forces and local residents. Educational programs promoting tolerance were deemed vital for long-term peace, alongside fair media reporting that shapes public perceptions positively. Additionally, initiatives for youth empowerment and joint community projects were highlighted as ways to foster collaboration and understanding, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious society.

Discussion of findings

The respondents' demographic data shows a diverse population, with the majority being male (68.8%) and aged 35-39 (41.9%). A significant portion is married (54.2%), reflecting familial responsibilities. Religiously, most identify as Muslim (53.9%) while Christians make up 46.1%. Ethnically, 36.1% are Hausa/Fulani, followed by Berom (28.8%) and Afizere (12.8%). This diversity underscores the complexity of the Jos North area and its vulnerability to ethno-religious tensions. Despite high educational attainment (44.8% with secondary and 43.2% with tertiary education), unemployment remains high at 36.1%. The findings also indicate that the majority of respondents (94.5%) are aware of the challenges faced by the strategies implemented to curb ethno-religious conflicts in Jos North. Ethnicity is seen as the largest challenge (52.4%) in implementing peace strategies, followed by nepotism (24.6%) and corruption (19.1%). Ethnic divisions continue to dominate local dynamics, hindering the effectiveness of conflict resolution efforts.

Respondents acknowledged that while there have been attempts to address these

challenges through community policing, educational programs on tolerance, and joint community projects, significant obstacles such as trust deficits, resource mismanagement, and political manipulation persist. Additionally, opinions on solutions like the proper training of security personnel and increased funding were mixed, with many pointing to the need for deeper, more structural changes in governance and community relations to truly mitigate the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflicts in the area. The findings of this study align closely with the literature on ethno-religious conflicts in Jos North. Respondents identified ethnicity (52.4%) as the major challenge in implementing peace strategies, which is consistent with existing studies that emphasize the role of ethnic divisions and political manipulation in exacerbating tensions. This supports Adamu, Ibrahim,& Usman, (2023) assertion that political elites exploit ethnic identities for personal gain, and Johnson (2020) focus on the indigene-settler dynamic as a key driver of conflict.

Additionally, challenges such as corruption (19.1%) and nepotism (24.6%) found in the study reflect the broader literature, where Nwaobi (2021) and Afolabi (2019) similarly argue that these factors undermine conflict resolution efforts. Moreover, while strategies such as community policing (24.3%) and educational programs on tolerance (23.3%) were recognized by respondents as effective, these align with BeJohnson (2020) emphasis on interfaith dialogue and Adamu's (2018) advocacy for youth empowerment as critical for peace building. However, despite these efforts, deeply entrenched ethnic divisions and systemic corruption persist as barriers to lasting peace, underscoring the need for structural reforms as highlighted in both the findings and the literature.

Conclusion

This study underlines the persistent nature of ethno-religious conflicts in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that ethnicity, nepotism, and corruption are major obstacles to effective peace-building efforts, aligning with existing literature that emphasizes the role of political manipulation, historical grievances, and socio-economic disparities in fueling such conflicts. Ethnicity was identified as the largest challenge, reflecting the deeply entrenched divisions within the community, a dynamic consistent with the indigene-settler tensions highlighted in earlier research. Although strategies like community policing, educational programs on tolerance, and joint community projects have been recognized by respondents as potentially effective, the deep-rooted nature of these challenges, compounded by resource mismanagement and political influences, continues to undermine the implementation of sustainable conflict resolution measures. The study thus reinforces the view that while progress has been made, significant barriers remain in addressing the underlying causes of violence and instability in the region.

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