

A Decade of Horror: Understanding the Complexities of Conflict and Insecurity in North-central Nigeria through the Lens of Stakeholders

Musibau Olabamiji Oyebo

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution
National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja.

Corresponding author: olabamijioyebode@yahoo.com

Abstract

The issue of violence and insecurity in north-central Nigeria have remained pervasive. This study examines the intricacies of conflict and insecurity in northcentral Nigeria. The study is pinned on grievance theory of social movement. The study adopts the survey method to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. A questionnaire was administered on 400 respondents and fourteen key informant interviews were conducted. Findings revealed that indigene/settler divide ($\bar{x}= 3.64$), economic survival resulting in contestation for scarce resources ($\bar{x}=3.64$), individual memories of community membership and identity ($\bar{x}= 4.17$), manipulation of ethnic cleavages by political and economic elite ($\bar{x}= 4.21$), multi-religious environment ($\bar{x}=3.67$), inequitable distribution of state patrimony ($\bar{x}= 3.86$), retaliatory spirit ($\bar{x}= 4.17$) and criminality for pecuniary benefits ($\bar{x}= 4.00$) are the causes of the crises. Farmers and herders ($\bar{x}= 3.81$), terrorist-spillover ($\bar{x}= 3.41$), unemployed youths ($\bar{x}= 2.83$), conflict entrepreneurs ($\bar{x}= 4.26$) and criminals ($\bar{x}= 4.21$) are the perpetrators of violence in the area. Guerilla warfare ($\bar{x}=4.28$), banditry ($\bar{x}= 4.21$), cattle rustling ($\bar{x}= 4.15$), reprisal attacks ($\bar{x}= 4.13$) and arson ($\bar{x}= 4.16$) are tactics used to perpetrate violence. Militarisation ($\bar{x}= 2.95$), enactment of new laws ($\bar{x}= 2.85$), setting up of commissions and panels of enquiries ($\bar{x}= 2.98$) and prosecution of offenders ($\bar{x}= 2.85$) have not been effective. Humanitarian interventions ($\bar{x}= 3.64$), community vigilante groups ($\bar{x}= 3.64$) and facilitated dialogues ($\bar{x}= 3.67$) are working. While better policing is required, peacebuilding initiatives including non-kinetic methods like negotiation and provision of alternative economic valves are recommended to tackle divergent interests and address the underlying issues.

Keywords: conflict; elite; insecurity; law; retaliatory spirit

Introduction

In the last few years insecurity and conflict have pervaded most states of north-central Nigeria. Scholars and news media have documented the spate of violence in the zone. For instance, Amadi et al. (2019) reveal in their study that herders' attacks and reprisals by farmers alone have become complex and resulted in killing of hundreds of people, disruption of rural livelihoods, and unimaginable disempowerment of the rural populace in northcentral zone of Nigeria. Amnesty International (2020) reports that at least 1,126 villagers were killed by bandits from January to June 2020 in some parts of northcentral and northwest of Nigeria. Ojewale (2021a) notes that within a period of ten years, 1,412 incidents of conflict and 7,399 deaths across the north central states of Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Kwara and the Federal Capital Territory were reported.

Incidences in specific states have been reported. It is reported that over 5,000 people were killed in Benue within seven years (Punch, 2023). Residents of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria are now living in constant anxiety due to safety concerns as the whole area is under siege of kidnappers (Vanguard News, 2024a). A growing wave of insecurity has tainted the once serene, safe and peaceful atmosphere that defined the FCT in the past, striking fears into the hearts of its residents (Thisday, 2024). Vanguard News (2024b) raises alarm that business revenue in Abuja is down by 33% due to insecurity.

Also, Kwara State has gotten her own dole of insecurity incidences. Eight suspects were arrested by the police in Kwara State over alleged kidnapping, murder, ritual killing, exhuming of buried corpses, removing and trading in human parts in Ilorin and environs in Kwara State (Vanguard News, 2018). Kogi State has been the flash point of kidnapping and armed robbery for several years. Conflicts in Kogi State have also precipitated destruction of human lives, humanitarian crises and extensive damage to physical and agrarian structures (Ibrahim & Ahmed, 2021). Conflict and insecurity in the state have also resulted in psychological trauma as a consequence of breakdown of law and order in some communities. Ethnic rivalry is the bane of security in Nasarawa State.

Okoli and Ukwandu (2021) conclude that the ethno-primordial cleavages provide veritable pretexts for the prevalence of opportunistic communal conflicts. Indigene-settler conflict has virtually turned into shreds the social fabrics of some Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State. Criminal organisations often thwart social and economic activity by attacking homes, markets, banks, churches, and social events in Nasarawa State (Ojo et al. 2024). In another development, bandits have forced residents to flee some towns and villages in Niger State leading to unprecedented insecurity and humanitarian crisis in the last few years (Etebom, 2022). Hamza et al. (2022) also assert that banditry and insurgency are twin phenomena that threaten and jolt residents of rural communities in Niger State. For instance, suspected bandits reportedly killed 21 persons, including the village head, in Madaka, a village in the Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State (Premium Times, 2024).

On July 9th, 2023, over 100 people were murdered in Mangu and Riyom Local Councils of Plateau state by terrorists! Punch (2024) also reports that 40 people were killed and many houses burnt in Plateau community attack by suspected bandits in May of 2024. From a broader perspective, Akinyetun et al. (2023) contend that incidences of attacks by unknown gunmen have challenged government's monopoly of force and have painted Nigeria as a fragile state. Since the 2000s perverse herders' attacks on rural farmers have led to decline in food production and flight of many rural dwellers who are now crammed up into IDP camps (Amadi et al. 2019). This has led to high prices of food items in the market in all parts of Nigeria.

The complexity of the conflicts and issues of insecurity in northcentral Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa has led to misrepresentation by public commentators, jaundiced reportage in the news media and lopsided findings by researchers. With regards to herder-farmer conflict, the problem is succinctly put by Moritz (2010) when he avers that researchers often draw inferences from contradictory accounts, incomplete information, and partial observations which are regularly changing.

Literature review

Violent conflicts have become daily occurrence in Nigeria. In particular, experiences in the last one decade have painted the northcentral as the most incendiary hotspot in the recurrent discourse on rural violence and insecurity relating to sectarian struggle (Amadi et al. 2019). Okoli and Ukwandu (2021: 81) opine that those communal conflicts "have been both dynamic and opportunistic, often feeding into the existing primordial and structural fault lines to assume multiple complications." Thus, the situation in northcentral is reflective of ethnic struggle and protection of homeland. In this light, Igwe (2024) posits that lack of shared national values and identity results in narrow identity of 'I am Hausa', 'I am Fulani', 'I am Yoruba', 'I am Igbo'.

The different nationalities in northcentral Nigeria continue to contest ownership of some communities in the area. In most states of the zone social identification, ethnic categorization and political crisis are easily discernible and seen along multi-religious and multi-ethnicity identity dilemma. Immediate causes of violence in northcentral Nigeria according to Amadi et al. (2019) also include quest for pastures by herders for their cattle and forceful dispossession of farmers of their land which they also rely on for subsistence farming. Arguably, dialectic struggle between herdsman and farmers for survival will result in violence. Johnson (2022) posits that herder-farmer conflict is a phenomenon about struggles over the control of economically viable lands. Herders-farmer conflict frequency, the use of sophisticated weapons and the bizarre nature of prosecution have raised great concern among Nigerians (Erondu & Nwakanma 2018).

Herder-farmer conflict has become more worrisome as a week nearly passes without news media reportage of fatal clashes between herders and farmers in different parts of northcentral zone of Nigeria. In a nutshell, herder-farmer conflict is contestation in form of resource competition, mostly based on contested land use for grazing and crop cultivation as well as access to water. Apart from contestation for resources, other immediate factors which are mutually reinforcing according to Ojewale (2021b) are proliferation of criminal groups, hate speech based on parochial nationalism, rising political intimidation of the opposition by the ruling party, rising population pressure, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and open grazing. Adverse climatic conditions have become vital contributing factors in recent time (Sule, 2021).

Exogenous factors include rising conflict entrepreneurship, proliferation of arms in the Nigerian polity, infiltration by Islamist militants and political manoeuvring by national politics and over-militarisation of the public space. Governments' attitude and inability to provide security for the people also create inequalities that spark grievances. Rightly put, Ajala (2020) avers that ungoverned spaces and incapacity of government employees to manage conflicts contribute to insecurity in the zone. The Nigerian authorities have been found to display gross incompetence and a total disregard for people's lives in their response to attacks and even worsen state of insecurity by arresting people who dare to ask for help (Amnesty International, 2020).

The impact of rural violence in many states of northcentral Nigeria is devastating. Since most of these attacks are carried out in rural areas, Amnesty International (2020) opines that attacks pose threats to food security and fuels impunity. Attacks have equally caused unprecedented massive displacement of persons in the affected states leading to humanitarian crisis in urban centres. These conflicts have exacerbated joblessness, unemployment, dearth of investment and consequential poverty. Violent conflicts in rural areas in Nigeria have also had profound effects on communities as they have strained social bonds, disrupted economic activities, and created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty (Odozi & Oyelere, 2019). The conflict and general insecurity environment in these states have led to criminalisation. According to Accord (2024), criminalisation occurs when conflict actors engage in criminal activities, such as kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking, and drug trafficking to perpetuate their desire to sustain fighting.

Theoretical Framework

Grievance theory of social movement is adopted for this study. According to Collier and Hoeffler (2000) most rebellions are premised on the pursuit of a cause or deprivation which is

often expressed in either objective or subjective grievance. Objective grievance which is salient to this study can be distinguished into inter-group hatred, political exclusion and vengeance (Opp, 1988). Distorted history results in inter-group hatred especially where it has to do with contestation for socio-economic space. Political exclusion results from settler-indigene dichotomy or a situation where the poor are marginalized from the political process (Hirshleifer, 1991). Vengeance is usually a product of protracted social conflict that has resulted in loss of lives, property and human psychological wellness. Most unknown gunmen groupings are motivated by the desire to revenge atrocities committed during a previous conflict.

However, the question as to whether grievance leads to formation of social movement or not has generated divergent views in literature. In Finkle and Rule's (1986) relative deprivation theory, it is assumed that grievances lead to more political participation. On the contrary, MacCarthy and Zald (1977), who are resource mobilization theorists, argue that grievances are ubiquitous and cannot explain social movement participation, thus, relegating it to secondary factor in political participation. In the same vein Hardin (1982), arguing from the perspective of a collective action theorist, posits that grievances for collective good that has not been provided cannot act as incentive for collective action. Notwithstanding the foregoing, resource mobilisation theorists have strengthened argument as to the relevance of grievance in social movement participation but that their effects depend on social structure. Walsh (1981) opines that it is only when grievances provide opportunities for participation that they lead to social movement participation. In line with the latest argument, the spate of violence perpetrated by groups in northcentral Nigeria can be understood from the prism of grievance and social movement participation as means of cashing in on opportunities provided by social inequalities, government ineptitude and weak security architecture of the state to make demands or engage on self-help.

Methodology

Research Design: This research employs a survey design to collect data from both qualitative and quantitative sources. While the quantitative data were obtained through a questionnaire, qualitative data were obtained through Key Informant Interviews.

Area of the Study: Northcentral Nigeria is one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. It consists of six states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) namely Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau and FCT.

Sample Population: The estimated population of the six states engaged in the study in 2023 is 36,655,737. The sample size was obtained using the Research Advisor (2006) of 95.0% Confidence Level & 0.05 Degree of Accuracy/Margin Error extracted from the table as stated below. Since the study population ranges between 10,000,000 and 100,000,000, the sample size for the study is 384 approximated to 400.

Required Sample Size Calculation

Confidence = 95.0%

Confidence = 99.0%

Percentage size	Degree of Accuracy/Margin of Error				Degree of Accuracy/Margin of Error			
	0.05	0.035	0.025	0.01	0.05	0.035	0.025	0.01
10,000,000	384	784	1536	9594	663	1354	2653	16560
100,000,000	384	784	1537	9603	663	1354	2654	16584

Source: The Research Advisors (2006)

Sampling Techniques: The study used stratified, purposive and random sampling techniques. The first stage involved stratified technique used to represent each of the six states selected for the study.

The second stage involved purposive selection of one local government area in each of the seven

Some documented forms and locations of violent attacks in Northcentral Nigeria

This sub-section provides evidences of violent attacks in many communities of Benue, Federal Capital Territory, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau States.

Table 1. Forms and locations of violent attacks in Northcentral Nigeria

	Incidents	Places	States	Dates of Reports	Sources
1	About 70 persons murdered	Umogidi, in Otukpo, Apa and Agatu local government areas	Benue	April 7th, 2023	Leadership news
2	Again, Gunmen Attack IDPs Camp, Kill 40	LGED Primary School in Ngbian, Nyiev Ward of Guma local government area	Benue	April 9th, 2023	Leadership news
3	Unknown gunmen kill 4	Mbachon and Mbagbe communities in Turan, Yaav Council Ward, Kwande Local government area	Benue	May 12th, 2024	Daily Post
4	Unknown Gunmen Kill 2, Abduct Others	Obbo- Ayegunle- Osi Road in Ekiti local government area	Kwara	June 5th, 2022	Leadership
5	Gunmen Kill Local Chief, Abduct 3 Others	Iwo Community in Isin Local Government Area	Kwara	May 17th, 2023	Leadership
6	Unknown gunmen murder medical doctor in Kwara, abduct daughter	Kanbi area, in Moro Local Government Area	Kwara	Decsember 22 nd , 2023	Vanguard
7	Bandits abducted 27 students from Government Science Secondary School.	Kagara local government	Niger	February 18 th , 2021	reliefweb
8	Again 136	Salihu Tanko	Niger	June 3 rd ,	Premium Times

	pupils abducted	Islamiyya Tegin, Rafi		2021	
9	Communal clashes leave at least one person dead	Mokwa	Niger	May 2 nd 2018	Crisis 24
10	Communal clash: 11 dead, houses razed, many displaced	Keana in Keana Local Government Area	Nasarawa	June 27 th 2024,	Vanguard
11	Kidnappings, killings put Nasarawa on edge	Toto Local Government Area	Nasarawa	January 30 th 2021	Daily Trust
12	A series of conflicts has been experienced in Nasarawa State starting from 2017	Obi, Doma, Keana and Awe local government areas o	Nasarawa	September 2 nd 2020	reliefweb
13	Disquiet as terror attacks on Abuja, M-Belt towns continue	Zuma community in Bwari Area Council	Federal Capital Territory	Januay 4 th 2024	Vanguard
14	Insecurity: 12 killed, 139 abducted as robbers, kidnapers lay siege to FCT communities	22 communities, cutting across the six area councils of FCT	Federal Capital Territory	October 7 th 2023	Daily Trust
15	One chance' robbery attacks rise in Abuja, and 'police are not helpful'	Ogbomosho Street, Area 8, Garki.	Federal Capital Territory	May 21 st 2019	International Centre for Investigative Reporting
16	Busload of passengers kidnapped	Okene	Kogi	July 4 th 2024	Premium Times
17	Farmer-herder conflict goes fatal	Igalamela/Odolo, Ibaji/Ofu local governments	Kogi	May 10 th 2016	ScienceDirect.com
18	2 Killed, 70 Houses Burnt Communal Clash	Oturpo-Ojile and Ochi-Ibadan under Ankpa local government area	Kogi	January 2 nd 2024	Leadership
19	Thirty people	Mangu local district	Plateau	January	Aljazira

	killed in latest herder violence			25 th 2024	
20	5 killed in Plateau community as Police foils kidnap attempt in another	Jos East local government area	Plateau	July 23 rd 2022	Vanguard
21	Nigeria: Armed bandits kill dozens	Kanam Local Government Area	Plateau	April 12 th 2022	Vatican News

Presentation, analysis and discussion of data

RQ 1: What are the causes and triggers of recurrent violence in northcentral Nigeria?

Table 2. Causes and triggers of recurrent violence in Northcentral Nigeria

S N	Constructs	Strongly Agree (SA)		Agree (A)		Undecided (UD)		Disagree (D)		Strongly Disagree (SD)		Mean \bar{x} m	Std. Deviation std
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%		
1	Indigene/settler divide	39	10.9	22	62.2	45	12.6	34	9.5	17	4.8	3.64	.96167
2	Economic survival resulting in contestation for scarce resources	23	6.4	23	66.1	52	14.6	41	11.5	5	1.4	3.64	.82027
3	Individual memories of community membership and identity	79	22.1	26	72.2	18	5.0	-	-	-	-	4.17	.49315
4	Manipulation of ethnic cleavages by political and economic elite	113	31.7	21	59.9	24	6.7	6	1.7	-	-	4.21	.63686
5	Multi-religious environment	154	43.1	51	14.3	10	28.6	38	10.6	12	3.4	3.67	.85239
6	Inequitable distribution of state patrimony	67	18.8	22	62.2	21	5.1	47	13.2	-	-	3.86	.87014

7	Retaliatory spirit	79	22.1	260	72.2	18	5.0	-	-	-	-	4.17	.49315
8	Criminality for pecuniary benefits	44	12.3	283	79.3	24	6.7	6	1.7	6	1.7	4.00	.58538

Source: Field work 2024

Table 2 reveals that 72.1% of the respondents agreed that indigene/settler divide is a major cause and triggers of violence in the northcentral region of Nigeria. A \bar{x} score of 3.64 shows a strong agreement among respondents and SD .96167 shows the opinions are not significant in dispersion thus the minimal variation. Interviewees observed that existence of multiple primordial cleavages in the area and submitted that:

Our ethnic differences have created an enabling ambience for volatile inter-group relations and identity contestations

We fight because they want to erase our tribe from the earth.

This finding corroborates Nlewem (2018) assertion that socio-ecological dialectics of north-central zone characterised in indigene/settler divides, exhibited in sentiments and prejudices, has accentuated contestation for political, economic and physical spaces. A total of 70.5% agreed that economic survival resulting in contestation for scarce resources triggers conflict and insecurity. A \bar{x} of 3.64 shows a strong agreement among respondents and SD .82027 shows the opinions are not significant in dispersion thus the minimal variation. Interviewees affirmed that:

Our existential needs in this agrarian area are largely dependent on land which we use for farming and herding and that competition for land ownership is fierce among us.

Earlier studies have identified inequitable distribution of resources as a major trigger of the conflicts in the zone (Accord, 2024; Adisa & Adekunle, 2010). Individual memories of community membership and identity were notorious causes of insecurity among 94.3% of respondents. A \bar{x} score of 4.17 shows high level of agreement while SD .49315 reveals low variation in responses. Interviewees assert that:

Ethnic fears and fears of annihilation by disparate groups have further accentuated persistent recourse to violence among us

These strangers came here and wanted to take over our land. Our forefathers will not forgive us if we fail to secure our homeland

In an earlier study, Olumba (2022) identifies individual memories of community membership transmitted through historical representation of in-group and out-group as major determinant in the formation of collective identity and behaviour in the zone. A total of 91.6% of respondents opined that manipulation of ethnic cleavages by political and economic elite has prolonged the conflict. A \bar{x} score of 4.21 shows a strong agreement among respondents and SD .63686 indicates the opinions are low in variation. In line with this, interviewees submit that:

Elites who want political power have often had recourse to the guise of nationalism to cry foul of marginalisation in governance structure.

This finding corroborates Okoli and Uhembe (2014) finding that politicisation of ethnic differences and elite manipulation of the poor have resulted in hate sentiments against out-group members in northcentral zone of Nigeria. A total of 57.4% of respondents agreed that multi-religious environment contributed to growing insecurity and conflict. A \bar{x} score of 3.6

shows a great agreement while SD .85239 suggests low variation in responses. Interviewees said:

The enemies usually trample on our religious belief and we often prove to them that our religion is sacred

This finding corroborates Nwala (2023); Akov (2017) and Moritz (2010) assertions that the use of religion for the manipulation of other differences, politicisation of religion and ethno-religious identity construction among other factors exacerbate clashes in Nigeria's North-central zone of Nigeria. Inequitable distribution of state patrimony earned 81% among respondents with a \bar{x} of 3.86 and SD .87014. Thus, inequitable distribution of resources accounts for grievances exhibited in violence. An interviewee stated that:

We feel that the state government cares for only the city dwellers. We do not have good roads and pipe borne water. The schools that our children go have no teachers and good building. We care for ourselves. We will continue this struggle until government cares for us.

In the light of this finding, Orhero (2019) and Nwagbosa (2012) have earlier argued that economic deprivation and inequitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalities by successive state and federal governments lead to frustration and desperation among the youths especially the lower-class leading them to embrace anomie. Retaliatory spirit was identified as a factor among 94.3% of the respondents. This factor had a \bar{x} of 4.17 and SD .49315 suggesting high agreement and marginal variation in responses. Majority of the interviewees vowed that

Anytime they kill our people, our desire is to kill many as retaliation.
 As long as they kill our people and animals, we will kill more of them through surprise attacks

Attah et al. (2020) have earlier found that retaliatory spirit is dominant in the psyche of all the parties to the conflict. This spirit of vengeance has become part of the socialisation process among different ethnic groups in the area. Criminality for pecuniary benefits is seen to be a strong factor among 91.6% of the respondents. A \bar{x} of 4.00 and SD .58538 affirm this as a general opinion. An interviewee stated that:

The last time they came, they took our belongings and money. Those ones that came were of different tribes. They were not our regular enemies

Earlier study posited that criminals including bandits, kidnappers and armed robbers have invaded the zone for economic gain (Nwala (2023). These greedy individuals hide under the conflicts in the area to unleash mayhem on innocent citizens, kill and maim and cart away their belongings.

RQ 2: Who are the actors of violence in Northcentral Nigeria?

Table 3. Actors of violence in Northcentral Nigeria

S N	Construct	Strongly Agree (SA)		Agree (A)		Undecided (UD)		Disagree (D)		Strongly Disagree (SD)		\bar{X} M	Std. Deviation
		Friq.	%	Friq.	%	Friq.	%	Friq.	%	Friq.	%		
1	Farmers and	3	9.2	257	72.0	39	10.9	23	6.4	5	1.4	3.81	.74280

	herders	3											
2	Terrorists' spillover	23	6.4	74	20.7	48	13.4	200	56.0	12	3.4	3.41	.99528
3	Unemployed youths	160	44.8	67	18.8	91	25.5	28	7.8	11	3.1	2.83	1.02394
4	Conflict entrepreneurs	122	34.2	218	61.1	8	2.2	7	2.0	2	.6	4.26	.65181
5	Criminal elements	87	24.4	258	72.3	12	3.4	-	-	-	-	4.21	.48356

A total of 81.2% of the respondents agreed that farmers and herders are main actors in the conflict and insecurity incidents. A \bar{x} of 3.81 and SD .74280 suggest strong agreement and low variation in responses. An interviewee stated that:

Farmers and herders act as individuals and groups to pursue existential needs which are largely dependent on landownership especially in rural areas

According to Johnson (2022) and Adisa & Adekunle (2010), the need for survival has strengthened their resolve to continue to defend their claim to land which they both contest for farming and gracing. Terrorists who spill-over from northeast are seen by 27.3% as actors in the crisis. A \bar{x} of 3.41 and SD .99528 indicates high agreement on this as well as low variation in response. An interviewee stated that:

The terrorists who we identify as natives of northeast Nigeria regroup as bandits here to foment trouble in our rural areas; exploiting and subjugating innocent citizens to a reign of terror.

A total of 95.3% of the respondent agreed that conflict entrepreneurs accentuate insecurity in the region. A \bar{x} of 4.26 and SD of .65181 point to general opinion. Attah et al. (2020) affirm that since 2016 up to the present, northcentral Nigeria conflicts have turned badly lethal as a result of purported infiltration by foreign mercenaries. Shadow parties like retired military officers and Jihadists have become conflict promoters in the area for different personal gains. Also, conflict entrepreneurs like gunrunners, food suppliers and miners have contributed to the festering insecurity in order to be able to make fortunes. Criminal elements are seen by 96.7% of the respondents as actors in the conflict. A \bar{x} of 4.21 and SD .48356 corroborates general agreement and low variation in responses. This finding aligns with Nwala's (2023) position that states in the northcentral Nigeria harbour bandits, kidnappers and all categories of criminals amidst ethno-religious and political crises.

RQ 3: What are the strategies deployed in the violent incidences in Northcentral Nigeria?

Table 4: Strategies employed in the violent incidences in Northcentral Nigeria

SN	Construct	Strongly Agree (SA)		Agree (A)		Undecided (UD)		Disagree (D)		Strongly Disagree (SD)		\bar{X} m	Std Deviation Std.D
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
1	Guerilla warfare	113	31.7	232	65.0	12	3.4	-	-	-	-	4.28	.52044
2	Banditry	113	31.7	214	59.9	24	6.7	6	1.7	-	-	4.21	.63686

3	Cattle rustling	74	20.7	271	75.9	6	1.7	6	1.7	-	-	4.15	.51717
4	Reprisal attacks	67	18.8	272	76.2	18	5.0	-	-	-	-	4.13	.46891
5	Arson	69	19.3	283	79.3	-	-	5	1.4	-	-	4.16	.47182

Guerilla warfare mechanisms are scored by 86.7% of the respondents as strategies employed in the crises in the northcentral. A \bar{x} of 4.2 and SD .52044 suggest general agreement and marginal variation. An interviewee stated that:

These enemies who are called unknown gunmen ambush us, carry hit-and-run attacks on our villages

This finding aligns with Hamza et al. (2022) who aver that guerilla warfare mechanisms have been employed by different actors who used forested rural areas. In view of the unconventional strategy, state security agencies have not been able to gather enough security information to develop professional intelligence to predict attacks and nib them in the bud. Probably, this is while the actors in those conflicts have been euphemistically tagged as “unknown gunmen”. To call a spade, a spade, they are ethnic actors who pursue the act of vengeance as a demonstration of balance of terror (Akinyetun et al. 2023).

A total of 91.6% of the respondents opine that banditry pervades the region. With a \bar{x} score of 4.21 and SD .63686 the disparity in variation is low. An interviewee stated that:

Banditry is another technique employed in the zone to aggravate insecurity. The bandits are suspected to be Boko Haram insurgents who were forced out northeast.

According to Etebom (2022), the bandits seem to have formed a network that is spread across states. Cattle rustling scored 96.6% among the respondents. A \bar{x} of 4.1 and SD .51717 suggest low variation in responses. Cattle rustling is used to weaken the financial resources of herders and even punish them for ravaging farmers’ crops (Johnson, 2022). In return, herdsman kill and maim residents of the area where their cattle are stolen.

Reprisal attacks are seen as regular happening that heightened tension in the area by 95% of the respondents. The \bar{x} of 4.13 shows high agreement while SD .46891 suggests clustered opinion. A n interviewee recalled that:

One fateful night, armed attackers stormed our village on motorcycles; shot sporadically at people, set houses on fire, stole cattle, carried away our farm produce and abducted some villagers for ransom.

Erondu & Nwakanma (2018) opine that reprisal attacks are neither random nor spontaneous, but predictable. Amnesty International’s (2020) survey also reveals that among other states, the attacks in Plateau and Benue are well coordinated. Arson is said to be a tactic of violence in northcentral region by 98.6% of the respondents. A \bar{x} of 4.16. Suggests high agreement and SD .47182 shows little variation. As noted by European Union Agency for Asylum (2019), arson is carried out by (armed) herdsman on farmers’ communities or by farmers’ armed groups on pastoralist communities for the purpose of revenge on a continuous basis. It is often alleged that the purpose of arson is land grabbing by herders, for grazing activities after the natives have deserted the place. The villagers either flee to IDP camps or urban centres where they constitute problems as hangers-on, street urchins or beggars.

RQ 4: How effective are the crisis management techniques deployed so far to arrest violence in North-central Nigeria?

Table 5 Effectiveness of crisis management techniques deployed in arresting violence in North-central Nigeria

SN	Construct	Strongly Agree (SA)		Agree (A)		Undecided (UD)		Disagree (D)		Strongly Disagree (SD)		\bar{X} m	Std Deviation Std.D
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
1	Militarization of the area	57	16.0	46	12.9	78	21.8	17	49.3	-	-	2.95	1.12340
2	Enactment of new laws	38	10.6	51	14.3	102	28.6	15	43.1	12	3.4	2.85	1.5696
3	Humanitarian interventions	23	6.4	236	66.1	52	14.6	41	11.5	5	1.4	3.64	.82027
4	Setting up of commissions and panels of enquiries	18	5.0	120	33.6	68	19.0	14	39.2	11	3.1	2.98	1.02757
5	Establishment of community and vigilante groups	39	10.9	222	62.2	45	12.6	34	9.5	17	4.8	3.64	.96167
6	Prosecution of offenders	38	10.6	51	14.3	102	28.6	15	43.1	12	3.4	2.85	1.5696
7	Facilitated dialogues	154	43.1	51	14.3	102	28.6	38	10.6	12	3.4	3.67	.85239

Militarization of the area is scored low as a measure to arrest violence as only 28.9% of the respondents favoured its effectiveness. A \bar{x} of 2.95 suggests negative score and SD 1.12340 shows high variation in responses. An interviewee raised alarm thus:

These military officers are only here to earn government allowances and extort us. Anytime there are reprisal attacks, they are nowhere to be found. We see them as collaborators with our enemies. They don't even allow the police to do their work

This finding aligns with Nwala's (2023), Aina's (2023) and Etebom's (2022) affirmations that deployment of huge security operatives and overreliance on special operation forces have merely militarised the zone while failing to ensure peace and stop threats to human security. In the assessment of measures so far taken to address insecurity and conflicts in northcentral Nigeria, Johnson (2022) opines that most of the methods hitherto employed are state-centric and kinetic and exclude communities and critical stakeholders' participation. Enactment of new laws was popular as a mechanism among only 24.9%. This suggests it is not working. A \bar{x} of 2.85 shows it is not favourable and SD 1.5696 suggest high dispersion in responses. An interviewee contended that:

Government policies and new laws have tended to be discriminatory showing government bias in favour of some groups. No open grazing law without provision of alternative platforms for rearing animals, for instance, has been seen to target herders who have no other means of livelihood. The herders have, thus, vehemently opposed this law and frustrated its intent.

Opposition of some states to the establishment of Rural Gracing Area (RUGA) initiative of the Federal Government has been virulent. This was erroneously presented to the populace as a ploy to create Fulani colonies across the country or 'Fulanise' Nigeria. Humanitarian interventions are favoured a by 72.5% as a working technique in managing the crises in the northeast. A \bar{x} of 3.64 corroborates this stance and SD .82027 shows there is no wide variation in responses. Humanitarian interventions employed include taking victims to IDP camps, providing food and daily needs as well as training them in handiwork and sundry skills. There have also been furtive peacebuilding efforts carried out by NGOs involving the people. However, most of the actors in the conflicts have rarely bought into the peacebuilding initiatives.

Only 38.6% of the respondents agreed that setting up of commissions and panels of enquiries has yielded positive outcomes. A \bar{x} of 2.98 is rarely favourable and SD 1.02757 suggest dispersed opinion. In many instances, government has set up commissions and panels of enquiries, however, the political will to implement their recommendations is not there (Igwe, 2024). The reports of the panels have largely been swept under the carpet.

Establishment of community and vigilante groups is favourably scored by 73.1% of the respondents. A \bar{x} of 3.64 confirms this general view and SD .96167 shows minor variation. Prosecution of offenders is seen to work among only 24.9%. A \bar{x} of 2.85 shows unfavourable disposition to it and SD 1.5696 shows high variation in response. A respondent stated that:

In cases where hoodlums were apprehended and taken to the law courts, improper prosecution has led to criminals coming back to unleash more terror on our people. Our enemies even boast of having big people in government who are helping them out during prosecution.

Facilitated dialogues is said to be working by 57.4%. A \bar{x} of 3.67 is favourable and SD .85239 shows low variation in response. Attah et al. (2020) have earlier proposed the imperative of non-kinetic measures including facilitated dialogue.

Conclusion

The insecurity matters in northcentral include kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery and cattle Rustling. Other types are herder-farmer, communal, ethnic and religious conflicts. Thus, aggression and violence in various communities in the northcentral Nigeria have become endemic. Causes of violence in the zone have been traced to indigene/settler divide, economic survival, and individual memories of identity, manipulation of ethnic cleavages by political and economic elite and multi-religious environment. Others are inequitable distribution of state patrimony, retaliatory spirit and criminality for pecuniary benefits.

Actor in the conflict are herders, farmers, ethnic-nationalists, unemployed youths, conflict merchants and criminals who cash-in on weak state security architecture and pliable traditional authorities to perpetrate horrendous inhuman acts. Ripple effect of Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast of Nigeria has also been felt by citizens who are kidnapped for ransom, besieged by bandits and robbed of their properties. Kinetic measures largely taken to resolve the conflicts without transformation of actors and issues result in the return of conflicts in spiral of cycle. Insecurity in northcentral Nigeria is amorphous because of reprisal attacks concealed in banditry and unknown gunmen exploits. Unfortunately, the end to the crisis is not at sight because of the pretention of all stakeholders.

Recommendation

The way forward in resolving the conflicts and insecurity in the north-central of Nigeria is to embrace peace-building options that are non-kinetic.

- i. To engage local capacities for peace management and conflict resolution. Peace-building addresses structural forms of injustice and violence, as well as the underlying cultures, histories, and root causes of violence. In order to solve the problem of contestation for agricultural space between farmers and herders, acceptance of RUGA scheme settlement by state governments is seen as a way out.
- ii. The RUGA settlements can be extracted from forest reserves and national parks across the federation. Truth commission and probable compensation to victims is another viable peace-building technique that can bring about reconciliation of conflicting parties in the zone. People who have lost sources of income and have taken arms as alternative to sustenance can be re-orientated, deradicalized and rehabilitated through economic empowerment.
- iii. Also, creating associations which include all stakeholders so that the parties can live and develop together. Through such associations, loans can be advanced to farmers and herders to start up destroyed agricultural enterprises.
- iv. Community based peace-building may redefine security management with emphasis on the role of community in participating actively in finding durable solutions. It is also suggested that co-operative farming like the Ubuntu model is adopted. As a way forward, non-violent activism is recommended including collective approaches, co-construction and inclusive programmes.
- v. To discover criminal cells and aerial bombardment with dragnets around forested rural communities will restore hope of innocent citizens and guarantee human security in all facets of existence.

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