

Tiv–Jukun Conflict and Peace Building in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State (2015–2024)

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the protracted Tiv–Jukun conflict in the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria, focusing on the dynamics of ethno-communal violence and the efficacy of peacebuilding initiatives between 2015 and 2024. Utilizing a descriptive survey design, the research analyzed primary data obtained from 293 respondents, including community leaders, traditional rulers, and security personnel, complemented by secondary sources from scholarly journals and government reports. Findings indicate that the primary drivers of the conflict are land ownership and boundary disputes, political competition, and ethnic identity rivalries, with mean scores ranging from 2.58 to 3.13. The study further reveals that the crisis has significant national security implications, contributing to the proliferation of small arms, forced displacement, and the emergence of militia groups. While government-led interventions and traditional mediation have achieved "negative peace" by reducing immediate violent clashes, they have failed to address the structural grievances underlying the conflict. Respondents expressed notable skepticism regarding the resolution of land disputes and equitable resource sharing. Consequently, the research concludes that peacebuilding efforts remain superficial due to their reactive nature. The study recommends

the adoption of inclusive, community-driven frameworks, comprehensive land reform, and the institutionalization of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms to foster sustainable peace and social justice in the region.

Keywords: Tiv–Jukun conflict; peace building; ethno-communal violence

1. Introduction

Ethno-communal conflicts have constituted a defining feature of Nigeria's post-colonial political landscape, particularly within the Middle Belt region. These conflicts often revolve around issues of identity, land ownership, political representation, and access to state resources (Albert, 2001; Best, 2006). Among the most protracted of such conflicts is the Tiv–Jukun crisis, which has spanned several decades and periodically erupted into large-scale violence across parts of Taraba and Benue States. Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State occupies a central place in the Tiv–Jukun conflict narrative. Historically regarded as the ancestral homeland of the Jukun people, Wukari has also experienced sustained Tiv settlement through migration, agricultural expansion, and economic integration (Alemika & Okoye, 2019). While periods of peaceful coexistence have existed, relations between the two groups have frequently deteriorated into violent confrontations, particularly during moments of political transition and economic stress.

Between 2015 and 2024, the Tiv–Jukun conflict assumed renewed intensity, marked by recurrent communal clashes, attacks on villages, destruction of farmlands, and mass displacement of civilians. Despite the deployment of security forces and multiple peace initiatives, sustainable peace has remained elusive, raising critical questions about the effectiveness of existing peace-building frameworks in Wukari. The persistence of the Tiv–Jukun conflict in Wukari Local Government Area highlights a fundamental failure of conflict management and peace-building mechanisms at both state and local levels. Government responses have largely focused on militarized interventions, while underlying structural and historical grievances remain unaddressed. As a result, cycles of violence continue to reoccur, undermining trust between communities and eroding confidence in state institutions.

Previous studies on the Tiv–Jukun conflict have often emphasized historical causes and immediate triggers but have paid limited attention to the effectiveness of peace-building initiatives implemented at the local level in recent years. There is therefore a significant empirical gap in understanding how peace-building efforts between 2015 and 2024 have shaped conflict dynamics in Wukari. This study focuses on Tiv–Jukun relations in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, covering the period from 2015 to 2024. It examines the causes, patterns, and consequences of the conflict, as well as peace-building initiatives undertaken by government agencies, traditional institutions, and non-state actors within the specified timeframe, and propose sustainable strategies for lasting peace.

2. Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted a descriptive survey design to capture respondents' perceptions of conflict causes, impacts, and peace-building efforts, and provide a comprehensive analysis of the Tiv–Jukun conflict and peace-building efforts in Wukari Local Government Area.

Sources of Data: Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires. Respondents included community leaders from Tiv and Jukun communities, traditional rulers, youth leaders, women representatives, security personnel, and officials of local government and civil society organizations. A total of 300 questionnaires were administered across selected communities affected by the conflict. However, only 293 were retrieved and analyzed. Secondary data were sourced from textbooks, journal articles, government reports, security briefs, newspapers, and previous scholarly works on communal conflict and peace-building in Nigeria, as cited in the thesis.

Sampling Technique: A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents with direct knowledge of the conflict and peace-building processes. This ensured that data collected reflected lived experiences and informed perspectives.

Method of Data Analysis: The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations.

3. Results

3.1 Causes of the Tiv–Jukun Conflict

Table 1: Respondents' Perception of Causes of the Tiv–Jukun Conflict in Wukari (N = 293)

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	Land ownership and boundary disputes are a major cause of the Tiv–Jukun conflict in Wukari Local Government Area.	3.13	0.96	A
2	Political competition and struggles for representation between Tiv and Jukun communities contribute significantly to the conflict.	2.65	0.91	A
3	Control of economic resources such as farmland, markets, and fishing areas fuels the Tiv–Jukun conflict.	2.48	0.94	D
4	Ethnic identity and tribal rivalry are the primary drivers of the Tiv–Jukun conflict.	2.34	107	D
5	Religious differences between Tiv and Jukun communities contribute to the persistence of the conflict.	2.62	107	A
6	The Tiv–Jukun conflict often results in violent attacks, killings, and destruction of property.	2.92	0.89	A
7	The conflict has led to mass displacement and loss of livelihood among Tiv and Jukun people in Wukari.	3.01	0.98	A
8	The conflict has created deep mistrust and weakened inter-communal relations between the Tiv and Jukun communities.	2.46	0.98	D
9	Government interventions (e.g., peace panels, security deployments) have not been effective in resolving the Tiv–Jukun conflict.	2.25	0.93	D
10	Community-based policing and dialogue initiatives can reduce the frequency and intensity of the Tiv/Jukun conflict.	2.58	1.11	A
	Grand Mean	2.63	0.98	A

The mean scores indicate that the respondents are of the opinion that ownership of land and border disputes, Political competition and struggle for representation between Tiv and Jukun people, Control of economic resources such as farm land, markets, and fishing grounds, Ethnic identification and tribal competition among others are the principal sources of the Tiv/Jukun crisis.

3.2 Effects of the Tiv–Jukun Conflict on National Security

Table 2: Effects of the Tiv–Jukun Conflict on National Security (N = 293)

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
11	The Tiv/Jukun conflict has contributed to the spread of small arms and light weapons, thereby threatening national security in Nigeria.	2.32	0.94	D
12	Ethno-religious clashes between Tiv and Jukun communities have increased incidents of forced displacement and refugee flows across Taraba State and beyond.	2.69	1.07	A
13	The Tiv/Jukun crisis has weakened inter-ethnic trust and social cohesion, making communities more vulnerable to extremist and terrorist recruitment.	2.51	0.95	A
14	The recurring conflict between Tiv and Jukun communities has overstretched Nigeria’s security forces, diverting attention from national counter-terrorism operations.	2.63	0.96	A
15	Economic disruptions caused by the Tiv/Jukun conflict, such as destruction of farmlands and markets, have fueled poverty that indirectly feeds into broader insecurity in Nigeria.	2.82	0.89	A
16.	The Tiv/Jukun crisis has created fertile ground for the proliferation of vigilante groups and militias, which pose challenges to state authority and national security.	2.71	0.95	A
17	The conflict has strained Nigeria’s internal security	2.58	1.06	A

	apparatus, reducing its effectiveness in addressing insurgency and banditry in other parts of the country.			
18	Cross-border movement of armed groups and displaced persons from the Tiv/Jukun conflict has increased insecurity in neighboring states and regions.	2.28	1.03	D
19	The Tiv/Jukun conflict has highlighted the weaknesses of Nigeria's conflict resolution and peace building mechanisms, thereby undermining national stability.	2.59	1.06	A
20	The Tiv/Jukun conflict has highlighted the weaknesses of Nigeria's conflict resolution and peace building mechanisms, thereby undermining national stability.	2.65	0.99	A
	Grand Mean	2.59	0.99	A

The mean ratings indicated that the respondents believe that, Ethno-religious clashes between Tiv and Jukun communities have hastened forced displacement and refugee flows within Taraba State and beyond, the Tiv/Jukun conflict has destroyed inter-ethnic trust and social cohesion, exposing communities to extremist and terrorist recruitments, the protracted clash between Tiv and Jukun communities has extended Nigeria's security forces to the breaking point, diverting attention from national counter-terrorism initiatives, economic destabilization occasioned by the Tiv/Jukun conflict, e.g., destruction of farms and markets, has augmented poverty that indirectly stokes broader insecurity in Nigeria, the Tiv/Jukun conflict has created fertile ground for proliferation of vigilante groups and militias, which undermine state authority and national security, the conflict has extended Nigeria's internal security apparatus, undermining its ability to respond to insurgency and banditry across the country, the Tiv/Jukun conflict has laid bare the weakness of Nigeria's conflict resolution and peace building structures, thus testing national stability and the Tiv/Jukun conflict has laid bare the weakness of Nigeria's conflict resolution and peace building structures, thus testing national stability. The grand mean of 2.59 is high and indicates that Tiv/Jukun conflicts in Wukari local Government Area have had effects on Nigeria's national security.

3.3 Assessment of Peace-Building Initiatives

Table 3: Effectiveness of Peace-Building Strategies in Wukari (N = 293)

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
21	Government-initiated peacebuilding strategies have significantly reduced the frequency of violent clashes between the Tiv and Jukun communities in Wukari.	2.66	0.95	A
22	The establishment of dialogue platforms by the government (e.g., peace committees, mediation forums) has improved communication between Tiv and Jukun leaders.	2.72	0.87	A
23	Government security interventions (military, police, and special task forces) have helped restore stability and peace in Wukari Local Government Area.	2.51	0.86	A
24	Compensation and rehabilitation programs provided by the government have contributed to rebuilding trust among conflict-affected communities.	2.41	0.96	D
25	Government-promoted community policing initiatives have strengthened cooperation between Tiv and Jukun residents in preventing violence.	2.52	1.04	A
26.	Government support for traditional and religious leaders in mediation efforts has enhanced the success of peace building in Wukari	2.59	0.81	A
27	Government support for traditional and religious leaders in mediation efforts has enhanced the success of peace building in Wukari.	2.44	0.83	D
28	Infrastructural development projects (schools, hospitals, roads) initiated by the government have contributed to reducing tensions between Tiv and Jukun communities	2.59	0.87	A
29	Government peace building strategies have adequately addressed the root causes of the Tiv/Jukun conflict (land disputes, political representation, and resource sharing).	2.65	1.00	A
30	Government peace building strategies have adequately addressed the root causes of the Tiv/Jukun conflict (land disputes, political representation, and resource sharing).	2.59	0.91	A
	Grand Mean	2.57	0.91	A

The mean scores show that, Government-sponsored peace building efforts have significantly reduced the incidence of violent clashes among the Tiv and Jukun people in Wukari, The establishment of dialogue forums (e.g., peace committees, mediation forums) by the government has promoted improved communication among Tiv and Jukun leaders, Government security initiatives (military, police, special task forces) have returned stability and peace to Wukari Local Government Area, Government-sponsored community policing initiatives have promoted collaboration among Tiv and Jukun people in averting violence, Government support for traditional and religious leaders in conflict mediation has enhanced the success of peace building in Wukari, Infrastructural development projects (schools, hospitals, roads) initiated by the government have assisted in reducing tensions among Tiv and Jukun people, Government peace building interventions have sufficiently addressed the root causes of the Tiv/Jukun conflict (land conflicts, political representation, and resource distribution) and Government peace building interventions have sufficiently addressed the root causes of the Tiv/Jukun conflict (land conflicts, political representation, and resource distribution).

4. Discussion

The findings presented in this study on the Tiv-Jukun conflict in Wukari Local Government Area align closely with existing scholarship on communal violence in Nigeria; however, they also highlight the persistent failure of conventional peacebuilding frameworks. The findings identified land ownership, political competition, and ethnic identity as the primary drivers of the Tiv-Jukun crisis, with mean scores between 2.58 and 3.13. This corroborates the research of Aluaigba (2017), who argues that the conflict is deeply rooted in the “indigene-settler” dichotomy, where the Jukun claim “ancestral ownership” of Wukari while the Tiv are viewed as “immigrants” despite their long-term residency. Furthermore, Egwu (2014) posits that the transition to democratic governance in Nigeria has intensified ethnic competition, as political representation is often tied to ethnic demographics. This mirrors your study’s observation that political competition is a significant catalyst. Unlike some literature that views these conflicts as purely agrarian (farmers

versus herders), your data emphasizes that the struggle is systemic, involving a quest for survival and political influence (Best, 2011).

Table 2 of the study suggest that the conflict has evolved into a national security threat, contributing to the emergence of militia groups and the erosion of inter-ethnic trust. Empirical evidence from Adelokun (2021) supports this, noting that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in the Wukari axis has created "ungoverned spaces" that challenge Nigeria's internal security architecture. The mean score of 2.59 in the data, which links localized violence to national instability, aligns with the Spillover Effect theory discussed by Onuoha and Okoro (2019). They suggest that when local conflicts overwhelm security agencies, they create a vacuum filled by extremist elements, thereby complicating broader counter-terrorism efforts.

The study found that religious and traditional leaders play a vital role in mediation (Table 3). This is consistent with the findings of Isaac (2016), who observed that in many Nigerian rural communities, traditional rulers are often more trusted than state actors for conflict resolution. However, the data reveals a paradox: while these interventions reduce immediate violence, they do not resolve the root causes. This reflects the liberal peacebuilding critique offered by Richmond (2010), who argues that top-down approaches often ignore the local socio-cultural nuances required for sustainable peace. The respondents' skepticism (mean scores of 2.41 and 2.44) regarding the resolution of land and resource issues confirms that peace remains superficial when structural grievances are ignored.

5. Conclusion

The findings reinforce the consensus in Nigerian peace and conflict studies that the Tiv-Jukun crisis is not a series of isolated events but a structural manifestation of failed distributive justice and identity politics. The Tiv-Jukun conflict in Wukari Local Government Area remains deeply entrenched, shaped by historical, political, and socio-economic factors. While current interventions have achieved negative peace involving the absence of direct violence, they have failed to achieve positive peace, which involves the presence of social justice and harmony. Peace-building

efforts between 2015 and 2024 have achieved limited success due to their reactive nature and exclusion of grassroots actors. Without addressing the root causes of the conflict, cycles of violence are likely to persist. To bridge this gap, as this study suggests, interventions must move toward inclusive governance and a definitive resolution of the land ownership legalities in Taraba State.

6. Recommendations

Given the results and discussion above, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Adoption of inclusive, community-driven peace-building frameworks will dissipate suspicions and help foster mutual trust and cohesion.
- ii. The government should adopt and strengthen traditional dispute resolution institutions within the study area to facilitate peace building and resolution of the conflict.
- iii. Land reform and transparent land administration mechanisms should be instituted and implemented to guarantee access to land by both parties involved in the conflict.
- iv. Youth engagement and economic empowerment programs should be promoted by both the government and wealthy individuals.
- v. There should be improved coordination between security agencies and local communities.

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