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ETHNO-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AND CHALLENGES OF HUMAN SECURITY IN NASARAWA STATE

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Abstract
This study investigates ethno-religious violence and its implications for human security in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, from 2013 to 2024. Guided by the Frustration-Aggression Theory, the research examines how identity-based grievances, competition over land and resources and institutional weaknesses contribute to communal violence. Using a mixed-methods research design, data were collected from 400 survey respondents, comprising adult residents drawn from the selected communities in Lafia, Akwanga, and Doma Local Government Areas. In addition, 15 key informant interviews were conducted with traditional rulers, religious leaders, community leaders, security personnel, officials of relevant government agencies and representatives of civil society organisations with knowledge and experience of ethno-religious conflicts in the study areas. Findings show that persistent violence is fueled by structural inequalities such as unequal access to land between Fulani herders and indigenous farmers, limited political representation of minority groups like the Eggon and Alago, disparities in educational and healthcare services, alongside politicised ethnic and religious identities and weak governance. Consequences include displacement, poverty, social fragmentation and restricted access to health, education and security. Although state peace initiatives and humanitarian interventions exist, their effectiveness is constrained by poor coordination and limited inclusivity. The study recommends strengthening local peacebuilding mechanisms, promoting inclusive governance, empowering youth, enhancing interfaith education and establishing community-based early warning systems to improve human security. The study highlights the micro-level impacts of ethno-religious conflict. It further seeks to contribute to the understanding of conflict dynamics and to provide evidence-based strategies for promoting human security in multi-ethnic contexts. The findings of the study are expected to be relevant to policymakers, scholars and development practitioners in Nigeria's Middle Belt by providing evidence to support more effective conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and human security interventions.

Keywords: Ethno-religious violence, Human security, Conflict resolution, Peacebuilding, Structural inequality

Introduction

Ethno-religious violence is a major threat to human security in Nigeria. The country has over 250 ethnic groups and various religious affiliations. This diversity, while potentially a strength, often leads to social fragmentation and violent conflict (Nnoli, 2008; Nlewem, 2017). The mix of ethnicity and religion has created divisions that enable disputes over land, political representation and resource distribution to quickly take on ethno-religious aspects (Okpanachi, 2010). In this situation, human security, defined as

the protection of individuals from serious threats to survival, dignity and livelihood, is greatly at risk. This broader challenge is particularly evident in Nasarawa State, located in Nigeria's Middle Belt, where recurrent ethno-religious violence has had profound implications for human security. The state is home to groups such as the Alago, Eggon, Tiv, Hausa, Fulani and Mada, reflecting the country's broader diversity (Madubuegwu, 2023). However, this diversity has turned Nasarawa into a hotspot for identity-based conflicts. Issues like land ownership, indigeneity and political exclusion have led to violent confrontations that threaten livelihoods and disrupt communal harmony (Ishaq & Shousha, 2021).

Since Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999, political elites have exploited ethnic and religious sentiments, intensifying identity politics (Suberu, 2010; Alemika, 2020). This trend is evident in violent incidents such as the 2001 Tiv–Azara conflict, the 2013 Ombatse militia crisis and ongoing clashes between herders and farmers. These conflicts demonstrate how violence undermines not only physical safety but also access to livelihoods, education and healthcare. The effects of these conflicts are serious and wide-ranging. Agriculture, the backbone of Nasarawa's economy, has faced repeated disruptions. Thousands have been displaced, worsening poverty levels. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) shows that 60.7% of Nasarawa's population lives in multidimensional poverty, with limited access to healthcare, education and jobs. The International Organisation for Migration (2024) reports that ongoing communal violence in Doma, Awe and Keana has caused widespread displacement, diminishing community resilience and exposing displaced individuals to hunger, disease and more insecurity. Researchers argue that recurrent ethno-religious violence in Nigeria constrains sustainable development by increasing unemployment, disrupting economic productivity, discouraging investment and exacerbating poverty and social exclusion among affected communities (Ngwoke & Ituma, 2020; UNDP, 2022).

Historical evidence demonstrates that ethno-religious and inter-communal conflicts have been recurrent features of Nasarawa State's security landscape since its creation in 1996. For instance, the Bassa–Egbura (Igbira) conflict in Toto Local Government Area between 1997 and 1998, which was largely driven by disputes over land ownership and chieftaincy resulted in significant loss of lives, displacement of communities and destruction of property. Similarly, the assassination of the Sarkin Azara, Alhaji Musa Ibrahim, on 12 June 2001 triggered widespread ethnic violence across Awe, Doma, Obi and Keana Local Government Areas, leading to hundreds of deaths and the displacement of thousands of residents. In addition, persistent farmer–herder conflicts across Nasarawa State have continued to undermine livelihoods, agricultural production and community security, thereby reinforcing the state's vulnerability to protracted ethno-religious and communal violence (Nwaneri, 2016; Best, 2004; Ehusani, 2015).

Furthermore, by 2013, ethno-religious violence had already resulted in over 667 deaths and economic losses exceeding ₦2.3 billion (Ugwu & Enna, 2015; Enna, 2014; Okoli & Alelhe, 2014). More recent

events, such as the December 2021 attacks on Tiv farming communities in Lafia, Obi and Awe LGAs, resulted in 20 deaths, 27 injuries and more than 5,000 displaced people. These incidents demonstrate how one triggering event can lead to large-scale violence (Nigerian Humanitarian Situation Report, 2021; Akinola, 2020). While the Nasarawa State Government has provided relief through NASEMA (2021), these responses are mostly reactive and do not tackle the underlying causes of violence. Consequently, the competition for land and natural resources, combined with ethnic and religious rivalries, continues to spark clashes. Peace committees, reconciliation panels and judicial commissions have made recommendations, but many remain unexecuted due to lack of political will and institutional issues. This, in turn, weakens public trust in governance (Yahaya & Husseini, 2019). Also, structural problems such as insecure land tenure, discrimination based on identity and governance failures (Abdulbarkindo & Alupe, 2016), along with targeted violence against vulnerable groups (NCSAN, 2016), further deepen insecurity. As a result, local communities often rely on religious and traditional leaders for mediation, skipping formal state institutions (Bello, 2022).

Although numerous studies have examined ethno-religious violence at the national and regional levels (Ngwoke & Ituma, 2020; Umeh, 2023), relatively few have investigated its local implications for human security in Nasarawa State. This lack of attention obscures the daily realities faced by individuals, families and communities dealing with displacement, loss of livelihoods and weakened social bonds. Understanding these personal experiences is essential to identify the structural and institutional causes of violence and how conflicts undermine dignity and human survival. Given this context, this study aims to carefully examine the nature, causes and effects of ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State from 2013 to 2024, focusing on its impact on human security. By framing the analysis within the concept of human security: freedom from fear, freedom from want and the right to live in dignity. The study also seeks to reveal how identity-based conflicts threaten survival, livelihoods and communal relations while providing insights for context-specific, inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding strategies.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Ethno-Religious Identity

The term ethno-religious refers to identities shaped by the combination of ethnic and religious affiliations. These identities often show up in social interactions and relationships between groups. In diverse societies like Nigeria, these dual identities affect political behaviour, competition for resources and conflict patterns (Adesina & Yusuf, 2022). For instance, the Igbo in southeastern Nigeria are mainly Christian, while the Fulani across West Africa are primarily Muslim. This highlights how ethnic heritage and religious beliefs together shape group identity. Ethno-religious identity represents the strong connection between religious faith and ethnic belonging. In such groups, religion is not just a cultural

aspect; it is a fundamental part of ethnic identity. A notable example is Judaism, which acts as both a religion and an ethnic identity (Arowosegbe & Akinyemi, 2021).

In political science and conflict studies, ethno-religious describes how ethnicity and religion intersect to form group boundaries, social rankings and conflict patterns. This intersection is particularly important in Nigeria, where ethnic and religious identities drive political activity and social division (Ibrahim & Bello, 2023). Nigeria's mix of ethnicities and religions often links specific ethnic groups with particular religious identities. The Hausa-Fulani in the North are mostly Muslim. The Igbo in the Southeast are mainly Christian, and the Yoruba in the Southwest are religiously diverse, with significant Christian and Muslim communities (Onapajo & Murtala, 2021). These connections impact national unity and emphasise social and political divides (Aliyu & Oloyede, 2022).

Research shows that in some areas, religion now plays a stronger role than ethnicity in shaping group unity and conflict. For example, in Northern Nigeria, religious identity often takes precedence over ethnic affiliation in influencing political and social actions (Usman & Eze, 2023). In contrast, among the Yoruba, ethnic identity interacts more easily with religious diversity (Adekunle & Balogun, 2022). Therefore, ethno-religious identity in Nigeria is not fixed or uniform. Its expression changes depending on the region, group and context. Understanding this variability is crucial for examining relationships between groups in areas prone to conflict, like Nasarawa State, where ethnicity and religion are key markers of identity, exclusion and political negotiation.

Ethno-Religious Violence

Ethno-religious violence refers to violent conflict that emerges along the intersecting lines of ethnic and religious identity. Burchardt and Höhne (2021) argue that such violence is often driven by perceived or real threats to group identity, political exclusion, or competition over resources. These tensions are rooted in deep-seated historical grievances and structural inequalities. They further note that religious institutions, beyond serving moral purposes, often act as platforms for political mobilisation and identity assertion, thereby intensifying group hostility. In Nigeria, the merging of ethnic and religious affiliations has transformed local disputes into broader communal conflicts. Okoli, Ugwu, and Arowolo (2022) observe that political actors frequently exploit these identities, escalating tensions and magnifying the scale of violence. Omotola (2023) argues that ethno-religious violence is particularly acute in northern and central states such as Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, and Nasarawa, where recurrent reprisal attacks, mass displacement, arson and killings undermine human security. He further highlights the proliferation of small arms, the rise in kidnapping and the erosion of livelihoods as key consequences. The intersection of ethnic and religious identities has contributed significantly to the complexity of violent conflicts in Nigeria. Rather than existing as distinct sources of tension, ethnicity and religion often interact in ways that reinforce one another, thereby making conflicts increasingly difficult to resolve. Consequently,

disputes that initially arise from ethnic grievances frequently acquire religious dimensions, while conflicts rooted in religious differences may subsequently assume ethnic characteristics (Fawole & Akinola, 2020). This fluid relationship underscores the multifaceted nature of ethno-religious violence and explains why many communal conflicts in Nigeria have become deeply entrenched.

Furthermore, the persistence of these conflicts has been linked to historical and structural factors that continue to shape intergroup relations in contemporary Nigeria. In particular, colonial administrative policies institutionalised the distinction between "indigenes" and "settlers," thereby creating enduring patterns of exclusion and unequal access to political representation, land ownership and public resources. As a result, these structural inequalities have continued to generate communal grievances long after independence. Onuoha (2022) attributes the recurrence of ethno-religious conflicts to these colonial legacies, while Mustapha and Adesoji (2021) contend that the political and legal marginalisation of perceived settler communities often encourages violent resistance when legitimate avenues for justice are unavailable.

Therefore, the continued existence of these structural deficiencies has sustained cycles of mistrust, competition and violent confrontation, particularly within Nigeria's Middle Belt. In this context, Nasarawa State provides a clear illustration of the broader national dynamics. Recurrent clashes involving Tiv, Fulani, Alago, Eggon and Hausa communities reflect the interaction of ethnic identity, religious affiliation, competition over land and political representation and long-standing historical grievances. According to the International Crisis Group (2023), violent incidents recorded between 2013 and 2024 across Obi, Doma, Awe and Lafia Local Government Areas resulted in hundreds of deaths, widespread destruction of property and the displacement of thousands of residents. However, despite the establishment of several commissions of inquiry, peace panels and other conflict-resolution initiatives, violence has persisted, suggesting that the underlying structural drivers remain largely unresolved.

Also, evidence from the CLEEN Foundation (2022) reinforces this position. The national survey reported that 73% of respondents had personally experienced violence within their communities, while 86% had witnessed group-related attacks. The study further identified land disputes (27%), religious differences (26%), ethnic tensions (13%), political rivalries (7%), economic hardship (6%), competition over natural resources (5%) and leadership disputes (5%) as the principal drivers of violent conflict. Similarly, Nasarawa State's strategic location at the intersection of Northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt has further heightened its vulnerability to identity-based conflicts, particularly during politically sensitive periods such as elections (International Crisis Group, 2023). Overall, these findings demonstrate that ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State is driven by a combination of historical, political, economic and socio-cultural factors, thereby justifying the need for a comprehensive assessment of its implications for human security.

Human Security

Human security represents a significant paradigm shift from the traditional state-centric conception of security to a people-centred approach that prioritises the protection and well-being of individuals. Rather than focusing exclusively on territorial integrity and military threats, the concept emphasises safeguarding people from conditions that undermine their survival, dignity and quality of life. Accordingly, scholars have conceptualised human security from different but complementary perspectives. In this regard, human security has been defined as freedom from threats such as violence, hunger, disease and marginalisation that undermine both individual and societal stability (Igbuzor, 2011). Similarly, Asmau and Abdulrasheed (2020) conceptualise human security as protection against physical, psychological and economic harm, emphasising access to food, healthcare, education and sustainable livelihoods as essential components of human well-being. These perspectives broaden the understanding of security beyond military concerns to encompass the conditions necessary for human development.

Additionally, other scholars have highlighted the multidimensional and dynamic nature of human security. Omede (2012) views it as a condition that reflects the capacity of individuals and societies to withstand social, economic and political vulnerabilities. Likewise, Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) identify livelihood security, protection from crime and a sense of social belonging as critical dimensions of human security. In addition, Olabanji and Ese (2014) emphasise emotional and psychological well-being as indispensable elements of human security, while Richard (2012) argues that effective governance and the provision of essential public services are fundamental to strengthening citizens' sense of security and confidence in the state.

Overall, these perspectives demonstrate that human security is a multidimensional concept encompassing physical safety, economic stability, social inclusion, psychological well-being and effective governance. Therefore, understanding the implications of ethno-religious violence requires an examination of how such conflicts threaten these interconnected dimensions of human security, particularly in conflict-prone societies such as Nasarawa State. Furthermore, in conflict-prone areas such as Nasarawa State, recurrent ethno-religious violence undermines multiple dimensions of human security.

Specifically, physical security is threatened through killings, displacement and the destruction of lives and property, while psychological security is eroded by persistent fear, trauma, anxiety and declining trust among communities. Also, economic security is compromised as violent conflicts destroy livelihoods, disrupt agricultural production and commercial activities, destabilise local markets and contribute to food insecurity. Similarly, political security is weakened through social and political marginalisation, the erosion of public confidence in state institutions, weak governance structures and limited access to justice and essential public services. Consequently, the cumulative effects of these insecurities diminish the overall well-being and resilience of the affected populations. Therefore, the

concept of human security provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how ethno-religious violence extends beyond physical destruction to threaten the social, economic, political and psychological well-being of individuals and communities in Nasarawa State.

Factors Responsible for Ethno-Religious Violence in Nasarawa State

The literature indicates that ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State is driven by a complex interaction of political, economic, social and historical factors rather than by a single cause. Accordingly, scholars have identified religious intolerance, socio-economic deprivation, widespread poverty, educational disparities, weak governance, corruption and the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities by political elites as some of the principal drivers of violent conflict (Okolie, 2022; Okoli & Ukwandu, 2022). These factors create conditions of inequality, exclusion and competition that heighten tensions among communities and increase the likelihood of violent confrontations.

Furthermore, the persistence of ethno-religious violence has been linked to unresolved historical grievances, structural inequalities and ideological influences that reinforce divisions among ethnic and religious groups. Such grievances are often sustained by unequal access to political representation, economic opportunities and natural resources, thereby deepening mistrust and perpetuating cycles of violence. Consequently, the interaction of these structural and immediate factors has made ethno-religious conflicts in Nasarawa State increasingly recurrent and difficult to resolve. This suggests that sustainable peace requires interventions that address not only the immediate triggers of violence but also the underlying socio-economic, political, and historical conditions that sustain conflict.

Effects of Ethno-Religious Violence in Nasarawa State

The literature demonstrates that ethno-religious violence has far-reaching consequences for human security, affecting not only the safety of individuals but also the social, economic, and political stability of affected communities. Consequently, the impacts of recurrent violence extend beyond the immediate loss of lives and property to undermine the overall well-being and resilience of society. Socially, ethno-religious violence weakens social cohesion by eroding trust, disrupting long-standing relationships among ethnic and religious groups and fostering fear, suspicion and cycles of retaliation (Aghedo & Osumah, 2019). These outcomes reduce opportunities for peaceful coexistence and make post-conflict reconciliation increasingly difficult. Furthermore, the economic consequences of violent conflict are equally profound. Recurrent attacks disrupt agricultural production, commercial activities, and local markets, destroy infrastructure and livelihoods, discourage investment and increase unemployment and poverty among affected populations (Abimbola & Akinola, 2020). As economic opportunities decline, communities become more vulnerable to insecurity and further conflict.

Similarly, ethno-religious violence has significant political implications. Persistent conflict weakens the legitimacy and effectiveness of government institutions, reduces public confidence in governance, undermines the rule of law and limits the capacity of the state to provide security and essential public services (Adejumobi, 2020). These governance challenges often create conditions that allow violence to recur. Thus, from a human security perspective, the consequences of ethno-religious violence are multidimensional and require comprehensive responses that extend beyond military or security interventions. The human security approach emphasises the protection of individuals from threats to their physical safety, economic well-being, social welfare and political participation (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2019; Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2020). Therefore, addressing the effects of ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State requires integrated strategies that promote sustainable livelihoods, strengthen social cohesion, improve governance, and enhance the overall security and well-being of affected communities.

Efforts to Mitigate Violence

Various interventions have been introduced by government institutions, civil society organisations, development partners, and traditional authorities to mitigate ethno-religious violence in Nigeria, particularly in conflict-prone states such as Nasarawa. At the governmental level, initiatives such as the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) have been designed to reduce farmer–herder conflicts through the promotion of ranching, improved livestock management and sustainable resource use. Furthermore, community-based organisations have implemented peacebuilding programmes aimed at strengthening local capacities for conflict prevention and resolution. For example, ActionAid Nigeria trained approximately 1,600 residents in Nasarawa State in 2021 on peacebuilding, dialogue and community resilience. Similarly, development partners have introduced technology-driven interventions, including Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-based Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) systems, to facilitate timely identification of conflict risks and coordinated responses (USAID, 2022). In addition, religious and traditional leaders have continued to play significant roles by promoting interfaith dialogue, community mediation and reconciliation initiatives across affected communities (Nasarawa State Government, 2023).

However, despite these interventions, the overall effectiveness of violence mitigation efforts has remained limited. Fragmented institutional responses, inadequate coordination among stakeholders, insufficient implementation of policy recommendations and the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities by political elites have continued to undermine peacebuilding initiatives. Consequently, many of the underlying structural drivers of conflict, including competition over land, political exclusion and identity-based grievances, remain unresolved. Although existing interventions have contributed to conflict management in some communities, there is a continuing need for more integrated, inclusive, and

sustainable peacebuilding strategies that address both the immediate triggers and the root causes of ethno-religious violence.

Relevance of the Theoretical Framework to the Present Study

The review of the theoretical literature indicates that Human Needs Theory provides the most appropriate framework for explaining the persistence of ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State. The theory posits that violent conflict is likely to occur when fundamental human needs, including security, identity, recognition, participation and access to essential resources, are persistently denied or inadequately addressed (Burton, 1990). This proposition is particularly relevant to the present study because many of the factors associated with recurrent ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State, such as disputes over land ownership, political exclusion, identity-based discrimination, competition for livelihoods and unequal access to socioeconomic opportunities, reflect unmet human needs. Accordingly, the theory provides a useful framework for examining how the denial of these needs contributes to recurring violence and undermines human security within the study area.

Furthermore, the theory offers a valuable basis for understanding why conventional conflict management approaches have achieved only limited success in many parts of Nasarawa State. Although governments and other stakeholders have established peace panels, commissions of inquiry, mediation initiatives and security operations, violent conflicts continue to recur because many of the structural grievances that generate insecurity remain unresolved. Therefore, Human Needs Theory enables this study to move beyond the immediate manifestations of violence by examining the deeper social, political and economic conditions that sustain conflict and threaten human security. In addition, the present study draws complementary insights from Conflict Theory and Social Identity Theory. Conflict Theory explains how competition over scarce resources, unequal distribution of opportunities and structural inequalities create conditions for violent confrontation among groups. Similarly, Social Identity Theory provides a useful explanation of how ethnic and religious identities influence group perceptions, reinforce in-group and out-group distinctions and contribute to hostility, discrimination and collective violence. These complementary perspectives enrich the analysis by demonstrating that ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State is shaped not only by unmet human needs but also by structural inequalities and identity-based divisions.

Overall, Human Needs Theory serves as the principal analytical framework for this study because it directly addresses the underlying causes of ethno-religious violence and their implications for human security. The complementary application of Conflict Theory and Social Identity Theory broadens the analysis by illuminating the structural and identity-related dimensions of the conflict. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for examining the causes, manifestations

and consequences of ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State between 2013 and 2024, as well as for assessing the implications of the conflict for human security.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design that combined a cross-sectional survey with documentary analysis to examine ethno-religious violence and its implications for human security in Nasarawa State between 2013 and 2024. Guided by Human Needs Theory (Burton, 1990), the design facilitated the systematic collection, analysis and triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data. The cross-sectional survey was used to collect quantitative data from respondents at a single point in time regarding their demographic characteristics, lived experiences and perceptions of ethno-religious violence and its implications for human security. In addition, documentary analysis was employed to examine official reports, policy documents, government publications, commission reports and relevant scholarly literature in order to provide contextual evidence on conflict trends, institutional responses and policy interventions within the study period.

The study was conducted in Lafia, Akwanga and Doma Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Nasarawa State, which were purposively selected due to their history of recurrent ethno-religious crises. These areas are ethnically and religiously diverse, making them critical to understanding the dynamics of violence and its human security consequences. According to the 2006 National Population Census, the three LGAs had a combined population of 583,749, while 2022 projections from the National Bureau of Statistics estimated about 896,700 residents. A sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, based on the 2022 population projection and a 5% margin of error. Proportional sampling distributed the respondents across the LGAs as follows: 227 from Lafia, 77 from Akwanga, and 96 from Doma. In addition, purposive sampling was used to select fifteen (15) key informants comprising traditional rulers, religious leaders, community leaders, security officials, and youth leaders. These participants were deliberately chosen because of their knowledge, experience and direct involvement in issues relating to ethno-religious violence and human security in the study area.

Furthermore**,** cluster sampling was employed to identify the selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) based on the geographical distribution of conflict-affected communities. Thereafter, proportionate sampling was used to allocate the questionnaire sample across the selected LGAs according to their respective population sizes, while purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of key stakeholders capable of providing rich and context-specific information. The combination of these sampling techniques enhanced the representativeness of the quantitative data and the depth of the qualitative findings. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through the administration of structured questionnaires and the conduct of semi-structured key informant interviews. The structured questionnaires were administered to selected residents in the study area by the researcher

with the support of trained research assistants (enumerators), who facilitated questionnaire distribution, guided respondents where necessary and ensured a high retrieval rate. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher with purposively selected key informants, including traditional rulers, religious leaders, community leaders, security officials and youth leaders, to obtain in-depth information on the causes, manifestations and implications of ethno-religious violence for human security in Nasarawa State.

Primary data were collected using two research instruments: a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. A total of 400 structured questionnaires, titled "Questionnaire on Ethno-Religious Violence and Human Security in Nasarawa State (QERVHS)," were administered to selected respondents across the study area. In addition, **a** Semi-Structured Key Informant Interview Guide (SSKIIG) was used to conduct interviews with fifteen (15) purposively selected key informants. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and interviews were audio-recorded with permission before transcription. Secondary data were drawn from scholarly publications, government records, NGO reports, newspapers and archival materials covering the study period.

To ensure validity and reliability, the instruments underwent expert review by three scholars in peace and conflict studies, who evaluated them for clarity, relevance and alignment with research objectives. A pilot test with 30 respondents outside the study area led to minor refinements in wording and sequencing. The reliability of the Questionnaire on Ethno-Religious Violence and Human Security in Nasarawa State (QERVHS) was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82. In line with the benchmark recommended by Nunnally (1978) and Tavakol and Dennick (2011), this coefficient indicates a high level of internal consistency for the instrument. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages with the aid of Microsoft Excel. Also, qualitative data generated through the Semi-Structured Key Informant Interview Guide (SSKIIG) were analysed using thematic analysis. The interview transcripts were coded, categorised, and organised into major themes and sub-themes that reflected the causes, manifestations, implications and conflict resolution strategies associated with ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through data triangulation to enhance the credibility, validity and comprehensiveness of the study's findings.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the quantitative findings obtained from 385 valid questionnaire responses and qualitative evidence from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The results are organised according to the study objectives and integrated with qualitative evidence to strengthen interpretation.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Of the 400 questionnaires administered, 385 were valid for analysis, representing a response rate of 96.25%.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 385)

Variable	Category	Value (n)	%
Gender	Male	235	61.0
	Female	150	39.0
Age	18–45 years	260	67.6
	Above 45 years	125	32.4

Note. Percentages are based on the 385 valid questionnaires.

The findings indicate that males constituted the majority of respondents (61.0%), while females accounted for 39.0%. Respondents aged 18–45 years represented 67.6% of the sample, reflecting the predominance of economically active adults who are more likely to experience or participate in community responses to ethno-religious conflicts. The high response rate and demographic composition provide an adequate basis for examining the drivers and human security implications of ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State.

Drivers of Ethno-Religious Violence

Table 2 Perceived Drivers of Ethno-Religious Violence in Nasarawa State (N = 385)

Variable	Value (n)	%
Religious intolerance	279	72.5
Youth unemployment	270	70.1
Political marginalization	250	64.9

The results identify religious intolerance (72.5%), youth unemployment (70.1%) and political marginalisation (64.9%) as the principal drivers of ethno-religious violence.

These findings suggest that conflict in Nasarawa State is sustained by the interaction of identity-based divisions, socio-economic deprivation and political exclusion. A key informant corroborated this view: "Most peace interventions are reactive and externally imposed. They rarely address our underlying issues or remain long enough to build trust." (KII/Doma, July 2025)

The convergence of survey and interview findings underscores the importance of addressing these structural factors to achieve sustainable peace in Nasarawa State.

Human Security Impacts

Table 3: Perceived Effects of Ethno-Religious Violence on Human Security (N = 385)

Human Security Dimension	Yes	n	(%)	No	n	(%)
Personal safety threatened		262	(68.1)		123	(31.9)
Freedom of movement restricted		245	(63.6)		140	(36.4)
Livelihoods disrupted		230	(59.7)		155	(40.3)

Note. Respondents could identify more than one effect; therefore, percentages do not total 100%.

The findings demonstrate that ethno-religious violence has substantial implications for human security. Threats to personal safety were the most frequently reported consequence (68.1%), followed by restrictions on freedom of movement (63.6%) and disruption of livelihoods (59.7%). Interview evidence reinforces these findings:

"Violence has destroyed normal life. Farming is unsafe, schools shut down and fear controls movement." (KII/Lafia, July 2025)

These findings demonstrate that recurrent ethno-religious violence continues to undermine both personal and economic security across affected communities.

Political and Institutional Security

Table 4: Perceptions of Peacebuilding Actors and Institutional Effectiveness (N = 385)

Variable	Value (n)	%
Religious leaders as key peace actors	289	75.1
Community elders as key peace actors	260	67.5
Peace initiatives rated as very effective	67	17.4

Although religious leaders (75.1%) and community elders (67.5%) were widely recognised as important peace actors, only 17.4% of respondents considered existing peace initiatives to be highly effective. Interview participants attributed this limited effectiveness to weak coordination and fragmented institutional responses.

"Everyone works separately religious leaders, security forces, NGOs. There is no unified peace framework." (KII/Akwanga, July 2025)

The quantitative and qualitative evidence highlights the need for stronger institutional coordination to improve governance capacity and public confidence in conflict management mechanisms.

Summary

This study examined the drivers of ethno-religious violence and their implications for human security in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, using a mixed-methods approach. Analysis of 385 valid questionnaire responses, complemented by Key Informant Interviews, revealed that religious intolerance, youth unemployment and political marginalisation constitute the principal drivers of recurrent violence in the state. The findings further demonstrate that ethno-religious violence has significantly undermined human security by threatening personal safety, restricting freedom of movement and disrupting livelihoods. Although religious leaders and community elders remain central actors in local peacebuilding, existing conflict management mechanisms were generally perceived as fragmented and only moderately effective. Overall, the study highlights the interconnected nature of structural inequalities, governance deficits and identity-based tensions in sustaining violent conflict in Nasarawa State.

Conclusion

The study concludes that ethno-religious violence in Nasarawa State is rooted in a combination of socio-economic deprivation, political exclusion and identity-based grievances, all of which continue to undermine human security. The persistence of these conflicts suggests that existing peacebuilding interventions have been largely reactive and insufficient in addressing the structural conditions that sustain violence. Consequently, sustainable peace will require a shift from crisis response to preventive and inclusive approaches that strengthen governance, promote equitable socio-economic opportunities and encourage active community participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Strengthen inclusive governance: The Nasarawa State Government should promote equitable political representation, transparent land administration and inclusive decision-making processes to reduce grievances associated with exclusion and identity politics.
2. Expand youth economic empowerment programmes: Sustainable employment, vocational training, entrepreneurship support and access to financial opportunities should be prioritised to reduce youth vulnerability to violent mobilization.
3. Institutionalize community-based peacebuilding: Government should strengthen collaboration with traditional rulers, religious leaders, civil society organizations and community peace committees by providing institutional support, capacity building, and sustainable funding for mediation and reconciliation initiatives.
4. Develop integrated conflict early warning and response systems: Community-based early warning mechanisms should be linked with security agencies to facilitate timely conflict prevention, rapid response and coordinated peace interventions.
5. Promote peace education and interfaith dialogue: Educational institutions, religious organisations, and the media should implement continuous peace education programmes and interfaith dialogue initiatives aimed at reducing intolerance, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting peaceful coexistence.
6. Strengthen institutional coordination: Government agencies, security institutions, development partners, and non-governmental organisations should establish a coordinated framework for peacebuilding to improve policy implementation, resource utilisation, and long-term conflict prevention across Nasarawa State.

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