



CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: GOVERNANCE FAILURES, SECURITY CHALLENGES, AND POLICY RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts in Nigeria have persisted across ethnic, religious, political, and resource-based lines, raising concerns about the capacity of governance structures to manage diversity and maintain national stability. This paper examines the link between governance failures, evolving security challenges, and the effectiveness of policy responses in addressing conflicts in Nigeria. The problem addressed lies in the recurring nature of violent conflicts despite the existence of legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms designed to promote peace and security, suggesting gaps in implementation, coordination, and accountability. The paper adopts a doctrinal and qualitative approach, relying on legal analysis of relevant statutes and constitutional provisions, review of national security and policy documents, and examination of selected case studies such as the Niger Delta crisis, farmer-herder clashes, and insurgency in the North-East. Findings indicate that weak institutions, corruption, political exclusion, and poor service delivery contribute significantly to conflict escalation, while security responses are often reactive and fragmented. The analysis also reveals that policy measures suffer from limited enforcement, inadequate community engagement, and insufficient integration of traditional conflict resolution systems. The paper recommends strengthening institutional capacity, promoting transparency and inclusive governance, enhancing coordination among security agencies, and integrating community-based approaches into formal frameworks. It further suggests sustained policy implementation, improved intelligence systems, and reforms aimed at addressing socioeconomic inequalities as pathways toward reducing conflict and promoting long-term stability in Nigeria. The paper ended with recommendations and conclusions that aims to resolve conflict crisis in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: *Armed Conflict, Conflict, Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution and State Fragility.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts in Nigeria have remained a recurring feature of the country's socio-political landscape, reflecting deep-seated structural and governance-related challenges. Since independence, Nigeria has experienced various forms of conflict, including ethno-religious violence, political and electoral disputes, insurgency in the North-East, militancy in the Niger Delta, and recurrent farmer-herder clashes across several regions.¹ These conflicts are often linked to issues of weak governance, poor resource distribution, corruption, and limited state capacity to enforce the rule of

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¹ E E Osaghae, *Crippled Giant Nigeria Since Independence* (London Hurst & Company, 1998) 10.



law.² The persistence of such crises raises fundamental concerns about the effectiveness of Nigeria's governance institutions and security architecture in managing diversity and addressing grievances. Despite the existence of constitutional provisions, statutory regulations, and institutional frameworks aimed at conflict management, violent confrontations continue to escalate, leading to loss of lives, displacement of populations, and economic disruption.³ This situation highlights a disconnect between policy formulation and implementation, as well as the inability of existing mechanisms to respond proactively to emerging threats. The research problem therefore centers on the apparent failure of governance systems to prevent and manage conflicts effectively, alongside the growing complexity of security challenges that strain institutional responses.⁴ These concerns necessitate a critical examination of how governance deficiencies contribute to conflict dynamics and how policy responses can be strengthened to achieve sustainable peace and stability.

Against this background, the primary objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between governance failures, security challenges, and conflict persistence in Nigeria, with a view to assessing the adequacy of existing policy responses. Specifically, the paper seeks to identify the major forms and drivers of conflicts in Nigeria, analyze the extent to which governance deficits such as corruption, political exclusion, and weak institutions contribute to these conflicts, and evaluate the effectiveness of current security and policy frameworks in addressing them. In line with these objectives, the paper is guided by key research questions: What are the predominant causes and patterns of conflicts in Nigeria? How do governance failures influence the emergence and escalation of these conflicts? To what extent have security strategies and policy interventions addressed the root causes of conflicts? What gaps exist within Nigeria's legal and institutional frameworks for conflict management, and how can they be addressed? By addressing these questions, the paper aims to contribute to ongoing discourse on conflict resolution and governance reform in Nigeria, while providing policy-relevant recommendations for improving security and promoting national cohesion.⁵

2 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.1 Armed Conflict

Armed conflict refers to sustained violent confrontation involving organized groups or states where the use of weapons results in significant casualties, destruction, and disruption of social order. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)⁶ defines armed conflict as situations of protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a state. *Kaldor*⁷ further conceptualizes armed conflict as part of “new

² C Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Washington DC Brookings Institution, 1996) 32.

³ A L Imobighe, *Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria* (Ibadan Spectrum Books, 2003) 13.

⁴ J I Elaigwu, *The Politics of Federalism in Nigeria* (Jos Aha Publishing, 2007) 12.

⁵ A Adebayo, 'Ethnicity, Religion and National Integration in Nigeria' [2010] 5(2) *African Journal of Political Science* 45.

⁶ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *How is the Term Armed Conflict Defined in International Humanitarian Law?* (2008).

⁷ M Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2012).



wars,” characterized by fragmented violence involving state and non-state actors, identity politics, and criminal networks. In Nigeria, armed conflict manifests in forms such as insurgency, militancy, communal clashes, and terrorism, often driven by governance deficits, socioeconomic inequality, and weak security institutions. Scholars like *Oyeniya*⁸ argue that armed conflicts in Nigeria are sustained by competition over resources, exclusionary politics, and historical grievances. These conflicts typically result in loss of lives, displacement of populations, and destruction of infrastructure, thereby weakening state authority and deepening insecurity. Consequently, armed conflict in Nigeria represents a complex interplay of structural and immediate triggers that challenge peace and stability.

Armed conflict refers to a situation involving the use of organized armed force between states or between governmental authorities and organized armed groups within a state. It usually arises where there is prolonged violence resulting in casualties, destruction of property and disruption of public order. According to the International Committee of the red Cross (ICRC), armed exists whenever there is resort to armed force between states or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a state. This definition was adopted by the international Criminal Tribunal for the former *Yugoslavia* (ICTY) in the celebrated case of *Prosecutor v Dusko Tadic*, where the Tribunal held that an armed conflict exists whenever there is a resort to armed force between states or prolonged armed violence between governmental authorities and organized groups.⁹

2.2 Conflict

Conflict, in scholarly discourse, refers to a situation of incompatibility, disagreement, or struggle between individuals, groups, or states arising from perceived or actual differences in interests, values, needs, or access to resources. *Coser*¹⁰ defines conflict as a struggle over values and scarce resources in which the aims of the opposing parties are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals, thereby emphasizing its functional and structural dimensions within society. Similarly, *Galtung*¹¹ expands the concept by distinguishing between direct, structural, and cultural conflict, arguing that conflict is not only manifested in physical violence but also embedded in social structures that produce inequality and exclusion. In the Nigerian context, conflict is often understood as a product of deep-seated ethnic, religious, political, and economic divisions that are intensified by governance deficits and competition for limited state resources. Scholars such as *Imobighe*¹² argue that conflicts in plural societies like Nigeria are frequently rooted in identity politics and unequal access to power, which create persistent tensions among groups. Conflict is therefore not merely

⁸ A Oyeniya, ‘Ethno-Religious Conflicts and State Security in Nigeria’ (2011) 20(2) *African Security Review* 67.

⁹ (Jurisdiction Appeal) ICTY-94-1-AR72 (2 October 1995) 70.

¹⁰ L A Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York, Free Press, 1956).

¹¹ J Galtung, ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research’ [1969] 6(3) *Journal of Peace Research* 167.

¹² A L Imobighe, *The Nigerian Military in National Security Management* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2003).



an aberration in social systems but a recurring condition shaped by historical, institutional, and socioeconomic factors. According to *Wallensteen*,¹³ conflict becomes particularly pronounced when parties perceive incompatibility in their goals and are unable to resolve differences through established institutional mechanisms. In Nigeria, the breakdown of such mechanisms often results in violent expressions of grievances, especially where state institutions are weak or lack legitimacy. Consequently, conflict in this paper is understood as a dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomenon that reflects both structural inequalities and governance failures, manifesting in various forms such as ethno-religious violence, insurgency, and communal clashes. This conceptualization provides a foundation for analyzing the interaction between governance systems, security challenges, and policy responses in Nigeria's conflict environment.

2.3 Conflict Management

Conflict management refers to the range of processes, strategies, and institutional arrangements aimed at limiting the negative effects of conflict and preventing its escalation into violence. It focuses not necessarily on eliminating conflict, but on regulating it in a manner that reduces destruction and preserves social order. According to Burton,¹⁴ conflict management involves addressing the underlying human needs that generate conflict, such as security, identity, and recognition, rather than merely suppressing outward expressions of disagreement. In a similar vein, *Wallensteen*¹⁵ describes conflict management as the systematic efforts by states, institutions, or third parties to control the intensity of conflict and guide it towards peaceful resolution through negotiation, mediation, or arbitration. In the Nigerian context, conflict management has evolved through formal and informal mechanisms, including governmental security interventions, judicial processes, traditional mediation, and community-based reconciliation systems. *Imobighe*¹⁶ argues that effective conflict management in plural societies like Nigeria requires a balanced integration of state authority and indigenous conflict resolution structures, given the limitations of formal institutions in addressing deeply rooted grievances. Conflict management is therefore not a one-time intervention but a continuous process that seeks to stabilize relationships among conflicting parties while addressing triggers that may lead to renewed violence. In practice, however, Nigeria's conflict management efforts are often constrained by weak institutional coordination, limited trust in state agencies, and inadequate attention to structural causes of conflict such as inequality and political exclusion.¹⁷ As a result, many interventions tend to focus on containment rather than transformation of conflict conditions. This conceptual understanding positions conflict management as a critical component in examining how governance failures, security challenges, and policy responses interact within Nigeria's broader conflict environment.

¹³ P Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution* (London, Sage Publications, 2015) 12.

¹⁴ J Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention* (London, Macmillan, 1990) 5.

¹⁵ P Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution* (London, Sage Publications, 2015) 8.

¹⁶ A L Imobighe, *Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Spectrum Books, 2003).

¹⁷ C Obi, 'Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta' [2010] 109(437) *African Affairs* 245.



2.4 Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution refers to the processes and mechanisms aimed at addressing the root causes of disputes and achieving a sustainable settlement acceptable to all parties involved. It goes beyond managing or containing conflict by seeking to eliminate the underlying tensions that give rise to violence or disagreement. According to *Deutsch*,¹⁸ conflict resolution involves cooperative problem-solving approaches where parties work towards mutually beneficial outcomes through communication, negotiation, and understanding. According to *Kriesberg*, conflict resolution is the process through which conflicting parties attempt to find acceptable solutions to disputes and eliminate the underlying causes of disagreement.¹⁹ Similarly, *Fisher and Ury*²⁰ emphasize principled negotiation as a key method of resolving conflicts, focusing on interests rather than positions to reach durable agreements. In the Nigerian context, conflict resolution is implemented through formal judicial systems, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and traditional reconciliation practices, although effectiveness varies due to institutional weaknesses. Conflict resolution encompasses both litigation and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms such as arbitration, mediation, conciliation and negotiation. The objective is not merely to put an end to the disputes but also to preserve relationships and ensure justice between parties. In Nigeria, ADR has become an important means of resolving disputes due to delays associated with conventional courts processes.²¹ *Imobighe*²² notes that successful conflict resolution in plural societies requires inclusiveness, fairness, and legitimacy to ensure compliance and long-term peace. Thus, conflict resolution is essential in transforming hostile relations into cooperative engagement within Nigeria's diverse socio-political environment. It promotes social stability, peace and development in the society. Effective conflict resolution mechanisms help reduce violence, encourage cooperation and strengthen the rule of law. It is therefore essential aspect of human interaction and governance.

2.5 Governance

Governance is central to understanding the persistence of conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in relation to institutional performance and the capacity of the state to manage competing interests. Governance is commonly defined as the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources, including the mechanisms through which citizens and groups articulate their interests and mediate their differences. According to the World Bank, governance is defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development.²³ This emphasizes the effective utilization of resources for development and role of governmental institutions in promoting development. Governance may be classified into political governance, economic governance and corporate

¹⁸ M Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

¹⁹ L Kriesberg, *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution* (2nd edn, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2003) 3.

²⁰ R Fisher and W Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981).

²¹ C W Moore, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict* (3rd edn, Jossey-Bass 2003) 15.

²² A L Imobighe, *Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2003).

²³ World Bank, *Governance and Development* (World Bank 1992) 1.



governance. Political governance concerns decision making and policy implementation within the state, while economic governance relates to the management of national resources and economic policies. While corporate governance on the other hand, deals with the systems and processes by which companies and institutions are directed and controlled. Kaufmann, Kraay, and Zoido-Lobaton²⁴ conceptualize governance in terms of accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption, thereby linking it directly to state performance and legitimacy. Scholars such as Ake²⁵ argue that the failure of governance structures to promote equitable development and political inclusion undermines state legitimacy and fuels grievances among marginalized groups. Poor governance weakens public trust and reduces the state's capacity to respond effectively to security challenges, making conflict both more likely and more difficult to resolve. Governance deficits manifested through corruption, exclusionary politics, and weak institutional frameworks have contributed to state fragility, thereby creating conditions conducive to conflict escalation. In essence, governance is fundamental to national development because it ensures order, justice, accountability and the effective administration of public institutions for the benefit of society.

2.6 State Fragility

State fragility, refers to the inability of a state to perform core functions such as maintaining security, delivering basic services, and upholding the rule of law. It refers to the condition in which a State lacks the capacity, legitimacy or authority to effectively perform its fundamental responsibilities to its citizens. According to Rotberg,²⁶ a fragile state is one where government institutions are weak, ineffective, or lack the authority to control territory and provide public goods, often resulting in heightened vulnerability to internal conflicts. The concept of state fragility has attracted scholarly attention in international relations, political science, and development studies because fragile states often experience persistent poverty, insecurity, and social unrest. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), fragility is the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks.²⁷ In Africa and other developing regions, state fragility is commonly associated with bad governance, ethnic tensions, corruption, unconstitutional changes of government, and weak democratic institutions. Scholars have also explained state fragility from the perspective of legitimacy and effectiveness. Robert argues that a state becomes a fragile state when it cannot provide essential political goods such as security, education, healthcare, infrastructure and an effective legal system to its people.²⁸ The effects of fragility are far-reaching because they hinder sustainable development and threaten both national and international peace and security. Consequently, strengthening institutions, promoting good

²⁴ D Kaufmann, A. Kraay and P. Zoido-Lobaton, 'Governance Matters' (1999) World Bank Policy Research Working Paper.

²⁵ C Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1996).

²⁶ R I Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

²⁷ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *States of Fragility* (OECD, 2022) 15.

²⁸ R I Robert, 'The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention and Repair' (Princeton University press 2004) 3.



governance, and ensuring accountability are often regarded as necessary measures for addressing state fragility.

3 OVERVIEW OF CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

3.1 Historical Context of Conflicts

Conflicts in Nigeria are deeply rooted in historical processes that have shaped the structure of the state and patterns of social relations. The colonial amalgamation of diverse ethnic and religious groups in 1914 created a fragile foundation for national unity, as pre-existing identities were subsumed under an artificial political arrangement without adequate integration mechanisms. Scholars such as *Osaghae*²⁹ argue that the colonial administration entrenched divisions through indirect rule and uneven development, thereby institutionalizing ethnic consciousness and competition for power. Following independence, political instability, military interventions, and contested elections further intensified these divisions, culminating in the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), which remains a defining moment in the country's conflict history. According to *Falola*,³⁰ post-war Nigeria continued to experience tensions due to inequitable resource distribution, weak governance, and the centralization of power, which often marginalized certain groups. The return to democratic rule in 1999 did not eliminate these challenges, as new forms of conflict emerged alongside existing ones, reflecting persistent governance failures and socio-economic disparities. Best contends that the recurrence of violent conflicts in Nigeria is linked to unresolved historical grievances, identity politics, and the inability of state institutions to effectively manage diversity and enforce justice.³¹ This historical trajectory demonstrates that conflicts in Nigeria are not isolated events but are embedded in long-standing structural and institutional deficiencies.

3.2 Major Conflict Types in Contemporary Nigeria

In contemporary Nigeria, conflicts manifest in several interconnected forms, each driven by distinct yet overlapping factors. Ethno-religious conflicts remain prevalent, particularly in the Middle Belt and Northern regions, where competition over political representation and identity differences often lead to violence; *Kukah*³² attributes these conflicts to politicized religion and the manipulation of ethnic identities by elites. Insurgency and terrorism, most notably the Boko Haram crisis in the North-East, have introduced a new dimension of insecurity, with *Onuoha*³³ emphasizing that state weakness, poverty, and ideological extremism contribute to the persistence of such movements. Farmer-herder conflicts have also escalated in recent years, largely due to environmental pressures, population growth, and competition over land and water resources; *Okoli and Atelhe*³⁴ highlight

²⁹ E E Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998).

³⁰ T Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998).

³¹ S G Best, *Conflict and Peace Building in Plateau State, Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2007).

³² M H Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993).

³³ F C Onuoha, 'Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria' (2012) *African Security Review* 21(2) 134.

³⁴ A C Okoli and G. A. Atelhe, 'Nomads Against Natives: A Political Ecology of Herder/Farmer Conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria' [2014] 4(2) *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 76.



that the absence of effective land governance frameworks has intensified these clashes. Resource-based conflicts, particularly in the Niger Delta, are driven by grievances over environmental degradation and perceived exploitation of oil wealth, with *Ikelegbe*³⁵ noting that the failure to equitably distribute resources and address local concerns has fueled militancy and unrest. These conflict types are further compounded by weak security institutions and inadequate policy responses, resulting in cycles of violence that undermine national stability. The convergence of these dynamics underscores the complexity of Nigeria's conflict landscape and the need for comprehensive and context-sensitive approaches to conflict management.

4 GOVERNANCE FAILURES AS DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

Governance failures remain a major driver of conflicts in Nigeria, particularly through weak institutions and deficits in the rule of law. Institutions are expected to provide stability, enforce laws, and ensure accountability; however, where they are ineffective or compromised, they create conditions for disorder and violence. North³⁶ defines institutions as the “rules of the game” that shape political, economic, and social interactions, and when these rules are weak or inconsistently applied, they undermine public confidence and compliance. In Nigeria, institutional weaknesses are evident in the inability of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to effectively prevent or address grievances, thereby encouraging impunity. *Ojo*³⁷ argues that the selective application of justice and delays in judicial processes contribute to widespread distrust in the legal system, which in turn fuels conflict as individuals and groups resort to self-help measures. The absence of a strong rule of law, as noted by *Okoth-Ogendo*,³⁸ creates an environment where power is exercised arbitrarily, often to the detriment of vulnerable populations. This institutional fragility not only weakens state authority but also emboldens non-state actors, including militias and insurgent groups, to challenge state legitimacy. Consequently, conflicts are sustained by the failure of governance systems to provide credible and effective mechanisms for dispute resolution and justice administration.

In addition to institutional weaknesses, corruption and political exclusion significantly contribute to the escalation of conflicts in Nigeria. Corruption, defined by Transparency International³⁹ as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, distorts governance processes and diverts resources meant for public welfare, thereby deepening socio-economic inequalities. *Ake*⁴⁰ contends that corruption undermines development and erodes state legitimacy, creating grievances that often manifest in violent confrontations. Political exclusion further intensifies these tensions, as

³⁵ A. Ikelegbe, “Oil, Resource Conflicts and the Post Conflict Transition in the Niger Delta Region” (2010) *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 12(3) 90.

³⁶ D C North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁷ E O Ojo, “The Rule of Law and Governance in Nigeria” (2014) *Journal of African Law* 58(1) 112.

³⁸ H W O Okoth-Ogendo, “Constitutions without Constitutionalism: Reflections on an African Political Paradox” (1993) *African Political Science Review* 1(1) 65.

³⁹ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index* (2019).

⁴⁰ C Ake, *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa* (Dakar CODESRIA, 2000).



marginalized groups perceive themselves as being systematically denied access to power and resources. *Suberu*⁴¹ notes that the concentration of political power among dominant groups fosters resentment and competition, particularly in a plural society like Nigeria. Poor service delivery, including inadequate access to healthcare, education, and infrastructure, reinforces feelings of neglect and marginalization among citizens, which can trigger protests and violent resistance. According to World Bank⁴² reports, the inability of governments to meet basic needs weakens the social contract between the state and its citizens, increasing the likelihood of conflict. Electoral violence also remains a persistent issue, with elections often characterized by fraud, intimidation, and clashes between rival groups. *Omotola*⁴³ argues that flawed electoral processes undermine democratic legitimacy and contribute to political instability, as aggrieved actors resort to violence to contest outcomes. These interconnected governance failures create a cycle in which conflict becomes both a symptom and a consequence of ineffective governance, highlighting the need for systemic reforms to promote accountability, inclusion, and stability.

5 SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

5.1 Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) remains a significant driver of insecurity and violent conflict in Nigeria. The easy availability and circulation of these weapons have increased the intensity and frequency of armed confrontations involving insurgent groups, militias, and criminal networks. *Aning*⁴⁴ argues that the widespread diffusion of SALWs across West Africa has transformed local disputes into deadly conflicts by enhancing the capacity for violence. In Nigeria, factors such as weak arms control mechanisms, corruption, and the spillover effects of regional conflicts have contributed to the uncontrolled spread of weapons. This proliferation not only sustains ongoing conflicts but also undermines disarmament efforts and weakens state authority.

5.2 Weak Security Architecture

Nigeria's security architecture is characterized by institutional inefficiencies, poor coordination, and limited operational capacity, which collectively hinder effective conflict management. The multiplicity of security agencies, coupled with overlapping mandates, often leads to rivalry and weak intelligence-sharing. *Onuoha*⁴⁵ notes that the absence of a coherent and integrated national security strategy reduces the effectiveness of responses to emerging threats. Challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of modern equipment, and corruption further weaken the capacity of

⁴¹ R T Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001).

⁴² World Bank, *World Development Report: Governance and the Law* (2017).

⁴³ J S Omotola, 'Elections and Democratic Transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic' (2010) *African Affairs* 109(437) 535.

⁴⁴ K Aning, 'The Anatomy of Ghana's Secret Diplomacy: Small Arms and Regional Security' (2005) *African Security Review* 14(1) 45.

⁴⁵ F C Onuoha, 'Nigeria's Security Challenges and the Crisis of Development' [2011] 6(2) *African Journal of Political Science* 23.



security institutions. Consequently, responses to security threats are often reactive rather than preventive, allowing conflicts to escalate before meaningful intervention occurs.

5.3 Border Porosity and Transnational Threats

The porous nature of Nigeria's borders significantly contributes to the complexity of its security challenges by enabling the movement of arms, insurgents, and transnational criminal networks. Nigeria shares extensive borders with neighbouring countries that are difficult to monitor effectively, creating opportunities for illicit activities. *Buzan*⁴⁶ observes that weak border control in fragile states facilitates the operations of transnational actors, thereby undermining national security. In Nigeria, insurgent groups such as Boko Haram have exploited these vulnerabilities to establish cross-border linkages, making containment efforts more difficult. This situation highlights the need for strengthened regional cooperation and improved border management systems.

5.4 Humanitarian and Internal Displacement Issues

Persistent conflicts in Nigeria have generated severe humanitarian challenges, particularly in the form of internal displacement. Large numbers of people have been forced to flee their homes due to insurgency, communal violence, and environmental pressures. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre,⁴⁷ Nigeria is among the countries with the highest number of internally displaced persons globally. These displacement crises place considerable strain on government resources and host communities, while also creating conditions for further instability, including poverty and social tension. *Adesoji*⁴⁸ argues that inadequate support for displaced populations can deepen grievances and contribute to prolonged cycles of conflict. The humanitarian dimension of Nigeria's security challenges therefore underscores the need for comprehensive and inclusive policy responses.

6 POLICY RESPONSES TO CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

6.1 Government Policy Frameworks and Interventions

Government responses to conflicts in Nigeria have largely been anchored on constitutional provisions, national security policies, and sector-specific interventions aimed at restoring peace and stability. The 1999 Constitution (as amended) provides the legal foundation for maintaining internal security and public order, while policy instruments such as the National Security Strategy and various peace building initiatives guide state action. According to *Adebayo*,⁴⁹ government interventions in conflict situations often reflect a reactive posture, with emphasis placed on containment rather than addressing structural causes. Programs such as the amnesty initiative in

⁴⁶ B Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder Lynne Rienner, 1991).

⁴⁷ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *Global Report on Internal Displacement* (2022).

⁴⁸ A Adesoji, 'The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria' (2010) *Africa Spectrum* 45(2) 95.

⁴⁹ S Adebayo, 'Governance and Conflict Management in Nigeria' [2013] 20(1) *Journal of Peace Studies* 56.



the Niger Delta were introduced to reduce militancy and restore oil production, reflecting attempts at negotiated settlement and reintegration of combatants.

6.2 Role of Security Agencies

Security agencies in Nigeria, including the military, police, and intelligence services, constitute the front-line response to violent conflicts. Their mandate includes law enforcement, counter-insurgency operations, and maintenance of public order. However, scholars such as Hills⁵⁰ argue that institutional inefficiencies, poor coordination, and trust deficits between security agencies and civilians limit their effectiveness. In several conflict zones, particularly in the North-East, military operations have been deployed to combat insurgency, yet these efforts have been constrained by inadequate intelligence and logistical challenges. The reliance on force-based approaches has also raised concerns about human rights violations, which in turn affect community cooperation with security institutions.

6.3 Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms have increasingly been adopted as part of Nigeria's conflict management strategy, particularly in commercial disputes and inter group conflicts. ADR methods such as arbitration, mediation, and negotiation provide non-adversarial means of resolving disputes outside formal court systems. According to Nwankwo,⁵¹ ADR enhances access to justice by reducing delays and promoting mutually acceptable outcomes. The Arbitration and Conciliation Act provides the legal framework for such mechanisms, encouraging parties to resolve disputes in a less confrontational manner. However, the limited integration of ADR into broader conflict management frameworks restricts its impact in large-scale violent conflicts.

6.4 Community-Based and Traditional Approaches

Community-based and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms remain important in Nigeria, especially in rural areas where customary institutions retain legitimacy. Traditional rulers, elders, and community leaders often mediate disputes based on customary norms and restorative justice principles. Imobighe notes that these indigenous systems are often more accessible and culturally relevant than formal institutions, thereby enhancing their acceptance among local populations.⁵² Despite their effectiveness in some contexts, these mechanisms face challenges such as lack of formal recognition and limited coordination with state institutions, which reduces their overall influence in national conflict management.

6.5 Role of Regional and International Actors

Regional and international actors have also contributed to conflict management in Nigeria through diplomatic engagement, peacekeeping support, and humanitarian assistance. ECOWAS has been involved in promoting regional stability through early warning systems and conflict prevention

⁵⁰ C Hills, *Policing Africa: Internal Security and the Limits of Liberalization* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

⁵¹ C Nwankwo, 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Access to Justice in Nigeria' [2016] 18(2) *Nigerian Law Journal* 102.

⁵² A L Imobighe, *Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2003).



frameworks. According to Francis,⁵³ regional cooperation enhances collective security responses to transnational threats in West Africa. International organizations such as the United Nations and humanitarian agencies provide support in areas affected by insurgency and displacement, particularly in the North-East. These external actors complement national efforts, although coordination challenges and sovereignty concern sometimes limit their effectiveness.

7 ASSESSMENT OF POLICY EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of policy responses to conflicts in Nigeria presents a mixed picture of achievements and persistent limitations. On the one hand, certain interventions have recorded measurable progress in reducing violence and stabilizing affected regions. For instance, the Presidential Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta contributed to a decline in militant activities and improved oil production, as ex-combatants were demobilized and reintegrated into society.⁵⁴ Similarly, military operations against Boko Haram have reclaimed territories and weakened the group's territorial control in the North-East, while regional cooperation under ECOWAS and support from international partners have enhanced early warning and humanitarian response mechanisms.⁵⁵ These developments suggest that coordinated policy and security efforts can yield positive outcomes when adequately implemented. However, despite these gains, significant gaps remain in the overall effectiveness of conflict management strategies in Nigeria. Many policies are characterized by weak implementation, limited sustainability, and poor coordination among institutions. As noted by Obi,⁵⁶ peace building initiatives often fail to address underlying structural issues such as inequality, corruption, and political exclusion, which continue to fuel grievances. Furthermore, security responses tend to prioritize militarized solutions over preventive and community-based approaches, resulting in temporary suppression rather than lasting resolution of conflicts. The lack of continuity in policy execution, coupled with inadequate monitoring and evaluation frameworks, further undermines long-term impact. Additionally, insufficient integration of local actors and traditional institutions into formal policy structures limits the inclusiveness and legitimacy of interventions. Consequently, while Nigeria has recorded some progress in managing specific conflict situations, the persistence of violence indicates that existing policy frameworks remain insufficiently aligned with the root causes of insecurity and governance failures.

8 CONCLUSION

Conflicts in Nigeria remain a persistent feature of the country's socio-political landscape, shaped by the interaction of governance failures, security weaknesses, and evolving policy responses. The analysis in this paper shows that these conflicts are not isolated incidents but are deeply rooted in structural conditions such as weak institutions, corruption, political exclusion, and uneven

⁵³ D J Francis, 'Peace and Conflict in West Africa' (2009) *African Security Review* 18(1) 34.

⁵⁴ W Z Aghedo, 'Winning the War, Losing the Peace: Amnesty and the Political Economy of the Niger Delta Conflict' (2013) *African Security* 6(3) 208.

⁵⁵ F C Onuoha, 'Countering Terrorism in Nigeria: Lessons from Boko Haram' (2014) *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies Report*.

⁵⁶ C Obi, 'Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta' (2010) *African Affairs* 109(437) 245.



development. Security challenges, including the proliferation of small arms, porous borders, and inadequate institutional coordination, have further intensified the scale and complexity of violent incidents across different regions. While government interventions, military operations, and peace building initiatives have recorded some achievements, particularly in containing insurgency and reducing militancy in certain areas, these gains have not translated into lasting stability. This is largely due to the limited focus on addressing underlying socioeconomic and governance-related drivers of conflict. Policy responses have often been reactive, fragmented, and insufficiently coordinated across relevant institutions, resulting in recurring cycles of violence. The paper also highlights that alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, community-based approaches, and regional cooperation efforts remain underutilized or weakly integrated into national frameworks. Consequently, the persistence of conflict in Nigeria reflects a gap between policy intentions and practical outcomes. Sustainable peace will therefore depend on strengthening governance structures, improving security coordination, promoting inclusive development, and embedding preventive and community-oriented strategies into national conflict management systems. Without addressing these foundational issues, efforts at conflict resolution will continue to yield limited and temporary outcomes rather than enduring stability.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends the following:

i. Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Rule of Law

There is need to reinforce the capacity of key governance institutions such as the judiciary, legislature, and anti-corruption agencies to ensure accountability and effective service delivery. Judicial reforms should focus on reducing delays in court processes, improving access to justice, and ensuring consistency in the application of laws. Law enforcement agencies require improved training, adequate funding, and modern equipment to enhance operational efficiency. Strengthening the rule of law will reduce impunity and rebuild public confidence in state institutions. When institutions function effectively and transparently, grievances that often lead to conflict are less likely to escalate into violence.

ii. Enhancing Security Coordination and Intelligence Sharing

Nigeria's security architecture requires improved coordination among the military, police, intelligence services, and paramilitary agencies. Establishing a unified national security framework will reduce duplication of efforts and improve response time to emerging threats. Intelligence gathering and sharing should be prioritized through advanced technological systems and inter-agency cooperation. Security personnel also need continuous training in conflict-sensitive operations and community engagement. A shift from reactive to preventive security strategies will reduce the frequency of violent outbreaks. Strengthened coordination will also limit operational gaps that are often exploited by insurgent and criminal groups across different regions of the country.



iii. Promoting Inclusive Governance and Socioeconomic Development

Addressing the root causes of conflict requires deliberate efforts to promote inclusive governance and equitable resource distribution. Policies should ensure fair representation of diverse groups in political and administrative structures to reduce feelings of marginalization. Investment in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and employment generation will reduce poverty-driven violence and social frustration. Development programs should prioritize conflict-prone regions to address long-standing inequalities. When citizens perceive fairness in governance and access to opportunities, the likelihood of grievances escalating into conflict is reduced. Socioeconomic inclusion strengthens national cohesion and supports long-term stability across different communities in Nigeria.

iv. Integrating Community-Based and Preventive Peace building Mechanisms

Conflict management strategies should incorporate traditional institutions, religious leaders, and community-based organizations into formal peace building frameworks. These actors often possess local legitimacy and can mediate disputes before they escalate into violence. Establishing early warning and early response systems at community levels will improve timely intervention in potential conflict situations. Dialogue platforms should also be strengthened to encourage communication among conflicting groups. Integrating local structures with formal security institutions enhances trust and cooperation. Preventive peace building reduces reliance on military responses and supports sustainable resolution of disputes through locally accepted and culturally relevant mechanisms.