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Conflict Mediation: Examining Government Communication Strategies toward Peaceful Co-existence in North-Central Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is not an exception to the endemic conflicts that plague the African continent. Amidst a variety of conflicts, including political, ethnic, religious, and communal ones, the nation, as well as other advocacy organisations and INGOs, have collaborated and operated independently to promote peaceful coexistence. In light of the foregoing, this study was conducted to evaluate the communication strategies used by the government in North Central geopolitical zone in relation to regional conflict mediation efforts. Accordingly, the study recorded 94.6 percent response rate following the retrieval of the 600 questionnaires administered to the respondents. Results demonstrated that the government had adopted several conflict mediation techniques. Some of the strategies mentioned are media relations, public relations, peacebuilding communication, community connections, traditional institutions approach, and religious organisation approach. Findings further indicated a high level of use of communication in conflict mediation while showing that the employment of techniques has led to reduced tensions and peaceful cohabitation among others. The researchers concluded that communication techniques are useful tools for conflict resolution and recommended their continuous adoption and application in comparable circumstances.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human civilisation is characterised by conflict because of the relationships and connections between individuals, which frequently lead to arguments and conflicts. Disputes typically involve two or more parties who came to a disagreement as a result of pursuing conflicting aims and objectives. Al-Rawashdeh and Al-Majali (2017) provide support by characterising conflict as a competitive phenomenon in which two or more people strive for the same goal, making it challenging to satisfy one party's requests. It is now widespread in human civilisation and can be regarded as natural, but it has a

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bad reputation because of its tendency to lead to conflict and bloodshed (Doss et al., 2023). Essentially, conflict in human civilisation can result in various forms of destructive violence.

According to Cuppen (2018), conflicts can be caused by opposing interests, expectations, or values, and it can also extend to other more general concerns about social cohesiveness, trust in institutions, local democracy, and protracted cases involving regional, national, or international players. This suggests that conflicts are the result of incompatible viewpoints, beliefs, and goals among people who live together. Violent confrontations between and among the parties to the conflict situations may result from these incompatibilities taking on complex and dynamic dimensions. If a conflict degenerates into violence, the ensuing devastation may result in the upheaval of social and economic structures, destruction of property, bodily harm (such as fatalities), and chronic trauma for those affected. In some parts of the world, unresolved conflicts can also result in long-term instability in the affected regions. This has been observed in various parts of Africa and the Middle East.

There are reports of conflict scenarios all over the African continent, with Boko Haram's violent extremism spreading from Nigeria to other nearby nations, particularly the Lake Chad region, and the growth of armed non-state actors (Adeleke, 2023). Conflicts of similar impact are also reported in Burkina Faso (Yeboah & Aikins, 2024) and the Central African Republic (Baleta, 2023; Guenard, 2024). There have also been documented instances of violent conflict in East and Horn of Africa, including human rights violations in various regions that have killed thousands of civilians in Ethiopia and Sudan, abductions and killings of dozens in Kenya, and other dimensions of the conflicts in South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Eritrea (Hassan, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2025). The foregoing provides background of conflicts in the African continent.

Some of the documented instances of conflicts in Nigeria include the fanaticism of Boko Haram, the murdering spree of robbers, farmer-herder conflicts, and isolated incidents of violence brought on by chieftaincy disputes in different communities throughout the nation. Nigeria is ranked as the eighth least peaceful country in the world by the 2024 Global Terrorism Index, indicating that violent conflicts are still occurring (Tuki, 2024). On account of the economic impact on Nigeria and the lingering nature of the Niger Delta disturbances, conflicts resulting from resource distribution and control have always been evident in the nation. According to Tanko (2021), Nigeria is confronted with insecurity issues that can be linked to various conflicts. These issues can be summed up in five primary threats: Jihadism, oil resource-related militancy, separatist insurgency, banditry and kidnapping, and farmer-herder conflicts.

Nigeria's North Central geopolitical zone serves as both a political and a geographic boundary. It includes the Federal Capital Territory as the seventh state, along with Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Niger. The area is not new to conflicts as Ojewale (2021) reports that violent clashes have been recorded in different areas in the zone. According to Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Nwofor (2024), competition for fresh water and land resources is the main cause of the region's perpetual violent clashes. Furthermore, the researchers note that the violent conflicts between farmers and herders have been documented in communities of the North Central states of Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi, and Plateau. The situation in Niger State is more severe since economic inequality also fuels violent conflicts which culminate in multifaceted poverty and economic disruptions (Abimbola et al., 2023). At different points in history, violent conflicts on different levels have also been recorded in Kwara (Akinnusi et al., 2019; Azeez et al., 2024; Luqman, 2010) and the FCT (Ajadi, 2023; Anyadike, 2023).

In order to guarantee peaceful coexistence in society, the government and other stakeholders are prepared to attempt mediation and reconciliation in light of the complex conflicts and the varied effects. The Central Bank of Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Justice's Department of Citizens' Rights, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the official Complaints Commission (PCC), and the National Industrial Court are the official bodies in Nigeria tasked with mediating and resolving conflicts and disputes (Mmeje, 2023). These governmental organisations are tasked with settling conflicts that relate to business, social and even private sector. The institutions perform different tasks to make certain

that disputants or parties to conflicts have the opportunity to meet and engage in short- and long-term discussions about reconciliation. Communication, therefore, is one of the most important parts of the process.

Based on the aforementioned, the government's use of communication strategies is seen as essential. Things can spiral out of control if the fault lines are ignored and no communication is leveraged for mediation. As a result, Abiodun (2021) points out that human contact is still a crucial means of resolving conflicts or even making already challenging circumstances worse, which can have detrimental effects. It implies that, depending on how it is used, communication in a disagreement situation can either be a force for good or bad. As a result, a careful use of communication is necessary, particularly when handling disputes of a collective nature. Building trust, encouraging understanding and facilitating discourse between the parties, making sure that communication is clear and succinct, and utilising non-verbal cues while demonstrating empathy for victims are a few examples of such communication strategies. In Nigerian conflict mediation, these techniques have been used at various points (Babatope & Olanipekun, 2017). Therefore, the researchers relying on descriptive survey research design evaluated the communication strategies used by the government to mediate in disputes in North Central Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The effects of conflicts on society are catastrophic. Based on this understanding, interested parties and constituted authorities typically use various dispute resolution strategies. Hunger brought on by insecurity is just one of the numerous unfathomable and unimaginable outcomes that could arise from protracted conflicts without intervention (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2024), destruction of property at the social and human level and deaths (Biekpe, 2024), and overall regression of the countries from political, economic, and social dimensions (Nkabane, 2022). These various aspects of conflict's effects show how important it is to avoid confrontation at all costs. When disputes are unavoidable, the most important course of action must be to toe the path of peaceful resolution through discourse/dialogue (communication).

It is more practical for concerned authorities to resist the urge to overlook any scenario that has the potential to escalate into a full-scale conflict, given the social, economic, and political instability aspects of the catastrophic effects of conflicts on nations. The aforementioned suggests that in order to prevent disputes from escalating, mediation and settlement are essential. Existing research findings demonstrated the importance of communication in attempts at conflict mediation (Adejimola, 2020; Amiara, 2018; Ogbu, 2017; Okai et al., 2014). However, this study empirically evaluated the government's communication methods adopted for conflict mediation in North Central Nigeria because of the on-going condition of conflict in Africa, and Nigeria specifically. This study addresses the population gap identified in previous studies.

1.2 Research Questions

- 1) What is the current state of communal conflict mediation efforts of the government towards resolving conflicts in North Central Nigeria?
- 2) What is the extent of government conflict mediation efforts toward resolving conflicts in the region?
- 3) What is the level of influence of government conflict mediation on peace building in the region?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the fact that human societies are never completely free from conflict and disagreements, issues surrounding conflict have attracted attention and research focus throughout history. The efforts and tactics of mediation are the primary focus of some researchers/scholars. Nonetheless, this study adopted a methodology that takes into account government communication strategies in attempts to mediate inter-

communal conflicts in a region of Nigeria. Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Nwofor (2024) state that the most troubling and frequent conflicts in Nigeria's six geopolitical zones are those involving farmers and herders. In essence, Nigeria is dealing with conflicts that impact its entire territory. The focus of this study was to examine the use of conflict communication strategies to address the numerous conflicts reported in Nigeria.

Nnabuihe (2024) shows that Nigerian has seen innumerable clashes throughout the years, with opposition from the country's minority groups serving as a major motivator. While the researcher recognised the centrist form of federalism that encourages the majority ethnic groups to dominate the others, other researchers attributed the conflict to socio-economic factors like the competition between farmers and herders for land resources (Ajodo-Adebanjoko & Nwofor, 2024), poverty and inequality (Abimbola et al., 2024), and ethnic and religious factors (Atuluku et al., 2023; Okibe, 2022; Ngwoke & Ituman, 2020). In line with findings of a study conducted by Usoro et al. (2014), one of the main causes of conflict in Nigeria is the sense of alienation. The implication is different factors that range from socio-political to ethno-religious, are to blame for the varying degrees of conflict observed throughout the nation. The findings of these studies open up further angles to explore such as the specific use of communication strategies to address the issues which is the focus of this current study.

Nevertheless, governments in different parts of Nigeria have undoubtedly worked hard to settle disputes in their domains. According to Familugba and Adedayo (2020), the Nigerian government has worked hard to settle disputes within the nation using different methods, including localised strategies. The establishment of panels is one of the various moves of the Nigerian government to resolve disputes amongst communities (Nwaogwugwu & Dabelema, 2019). The Nigerian government also recognised mediation as a crucial tool for fostering relationships and resolving disputes in the nation (Adom & Ugal, 2025). Dialogue has also been investigated as a mediation technique for resolving conflicts within communities in the West African region (Okai et al., 2014). In Nigeria, several panels or commissions of enquiry have been instituted to mediate disputes between parties at the local, state, or even federal levels. These initiatives included various levels of contact between and among the conflicting parties. The population gap occasioned by findings of these researches provides a rationale for this current study based on its focus on North Central Nigeria.

It is imperative to state that these scholarly opinions and perspectives reveal the condition of government conflict mediation procedures to be on track as such efforts are deemed reactive and not proactive. Due to the nation's recurrent disputes, panels and commissions of enquiry are typically established whenever there is a conflict and typically outlive their usefulness. Additionally, researchers have demonstrated that the nation's community conflicts are recurrent (Aboh et al., 2023; Fadeyi & Adamu, 2023; Fadeyi & Abdullahi, 2019; Okoli & Ukwandu, 2021) and the larger African region (Yemane & Borowy, 2023). Given the numerous environmental effects and factors like the competition for limited resources like land and water, conflicts are still common (Olademo et al., 2021; Orhero, 2020; Zubairu & Agba, 2023). Despite the extraordinary efforts of successive governments to stop the trend and establish a peaceful environment for all citizens, the situation continues to be unsettling. Among the strategies the government explored are communication and conflict resolution strategies.

The nation's conflict resolution policies have been greatly impacted by these government initiatives. For instance, through the amnesty programme, the establishment of the Niger Delta Ministry, and associated interventions, the Yar'Adua administration reportedly used alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to address the Niger Delta militancy (Orhero, 2020). These initiatives, which are today seen as effective tactics, assisted in reducing tensions in the region. On the other hand, findings of a study by Olademo et al. (2021) showed that, despite government initiatives, disputes continue to arise due to inadequate implementation of conflict resolution strategies. Abacha's actions in the Ife-Modakeke wars and Obasanjo's administration's resolution of the Arogbos Ijaw-Ugbollaji conflict present yet another example of Nigeria's previous administrations' coercive and destructive conflict management style (Orhero, 2020). These might have had an instant effect on the wave of violence that accompanied the

conflicts, but they had a negative effect because of the brittle peace and the fact that these conflicts keep reoccurring in the same places. Though a significant study bordering on an important conflict in Nigeria, the study provides a justification for further enquiry into related conflicts which is the main crux of this current study based on its focus on conflicts in regions outside the South West of Nigeria.

Additionally, researchers have shown empirical evidence in relations to conflict mediation in Nigeria. Abimbola et al. (2023) showed that higher rates of violence can be associated with greater levels of deprivation, including inequality and poverty. The researchers came to the conclusion that in order to reduce inter-communal disputes and foster peaceful coexistence in the North Central geopolitical zone, socioeconomic imbalances must be addressed. These include fair resource distribution, inclusive economic growth, and improved access to social services. On the grounds that both the current study and the one under evaluation concentrate on the North Central region of Nigeria, they are comparable geographically. The particular variables examined in each study account for the differences between them. While poverty and inequality are important factors for the topic under consideration, the primary focus of this study is government communication tactics. This provides a justification considering that the current study has its focus on conflict communication in Nigeria.

Olademo et al. (2021) determined the causes of the violence between the Share and Tsaragi communities in the North Central state of Kwara through a mixed-method study. Examining solutions that had already been implemented to address the problems was a major objective of the study. Some of the crucial elements that influence conflicts in the regions are problems like religious prejudice, the non-implementation of government white papers, communal conflicts resulting from land and boundary disputes, and the unwillingness of disputants to accept peace. On the one hand, the betrayer and enemy tag were identified as key variables in the conflicts, and on the other, the indigene and settler dichotomy. The study's conclusions demonstrated the ineffectiveness of government mediation efforts due to the lack of terms of implementation, which is a major contributing element to the nation's perpetual conflicts. One of the biggest problems is that the government has not adopted the fire brigade method or the white paper. The researchers came to the conclusion that several tiers provided remedies that were considered useless since they were not native to African culture. The specific focus is where the current study differs from the one being reviewed. The current study is about select North Central states, whilst the former is focused on communities in Kwara. This is an indication of the need to bridge knowledge and population gaps through a broader angle to the enquiry as seen in this study.

In a related study, Maikasuwa et al. (2024) focused on Sanga LGA in Kaduna State in an effort to comprehend the role of traditional institutions in conflict resolution and prevention in Nigeria. The researchers showed that the conventional institution-oriented approach to mediating communal disputes in the region was a method that placed emphasis on peaceful coexistence. However, the findings study demonstrated that the success of the conventional strategies implemented to resolve conflicts in the region was adversely affected by elements which include political, religious, and economic difficulties. The researchers examined constitutional provisions to support the traditional institutions' involvement in conflict resolution through recommendations. The study under consideration is comparable to the present one in evaluating conflict mediation method, but it differs in that it focused exclusively on the conventional institution-oriented approach rather than government communication tactics.

Another study by Abdulsalam et al. (2020) had focus on the maintenance of democracy and examined the functions of traditional rulers in conflict mediation in Kwara State. The results demonstrated that the rulers' traditional institutions are essential in resolving disputes in a way that promotes democratic stability through peace initiatives. The study's conclusion is that traditional leaders who are well-versed in local problems that impact both individuals and social groupings may be able to mediate disputes in an amicable manner. The researchers suggested that traditional rulers should get involved in order to address the concerns of community members. The focus on communal conflict resolution mechanisms is what unites the study under review and the current one, but the studies' specific

geographic scopes differ as the focus is on different communities. Therefore, the population gap provides the justification for this current study.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The interest-based relational approach model and conflict transformation theory serve as the theoretical foundation for this study. The interest-based relational approach is a win-win model of conflict resolution that aims to address the underlying needs and interests of all parties to a dispute rather than focusing on their demands and positions (Usman et al., 2025). The model is based on the fundamental ideas of Fisher et al. (1991), who proposed that the theory is centred on four main areas. These tenets emphasise the need for focusing on interests rather than individual viewpoints in the negotiation or mediation process. As a result, the researchers highlighted that these areas are: 1) the emphasis on interests rather than the stances of the conflicting parties; 2) the theory's separation of individuals from the issues; 3) its emphasis on potential solutions and mutual benefits; and 4) the emphasis on cooperation and communication.

According to this model, it is critical to consider the unique characteristics of each party involved in a dispute while offering the necessary support to prevent becoming overly committed to one perspective (Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). According to the researchers, there are certain guidelines that must be followed in order to resolve conflicts using the interest-based relational approach. These guidelines include: 1) making sure that positive relationships are prioritised; 2) keeping people apart from problems; 3) paying attention to the interests that are being presented; 4) listening before speaking; 5) outlining the facts; and 6) collaboratively exploring available options. This theory provides the theoretical framework for this study to support the government's selection of certain communication strategies for settling communal disputes in a few states within the North Central geopolitical zone.

The conflict transformation theory serves as this study's second theoretical framework. One of the main proponents of this theory is J. P. Lederach (Botes, 2001). The theory is based on Lederach's belief that resolving a dispute requires more than just rhetoric that verges on resolution and that the conflict's underlying causes must be addressed in a way that transforms it (Lederach, 1995). On the basis of the concept's multidimensionality, the theorist also clarified that conflict transformation might have four aspects. Accordingly, rule transformation, structural transformation, actor transformation, and issue transformation are the four dimensions that the researcher identified. In the process of resolving conflicts, these four are essential. The conflict transformation theory serves as the foundation for this study because of its analysis, which backs the use of communication techniques to promote mediation and promote unity in Nigeria.

3. METHOD

This study's research design is quantitative. It is predicated on a thorough analysis of the communication strategies used by the government to mediate disputes in some states of North Central Nigerian. The descriptive survey research design was deemed suitable for assessing respondents' opinions regarding the implementation of communication strategies in the area of Nigeria prone to conflict. Residents of the area referred to as the North Central zone made up the study's population. As a result, the researchers purposively selected specific states deemed to be "hotbeds" in the zone based on their knowledge/understanding of the kind of disputes that occur there. Based on their observations and the information that is currently available, the researchers concluded that the region has some conflict-prone locations. This led to the selection of Jos North (Plateau State), Eggon (Nasarawa), and Agatu (Benue State) as the study's specific areas in focus. According to National Population Commission data, there are 1,039,200 people living in the three towns.

Using the Australian Sample Size calculator, a sample of 600 people was selected from the population for the study. This was accomplished through specific computation parameters, including the population size (1, 039, 200), the confidence level (95%), the standard error (0.02041), the relative standard error

(4.08), the upper (0.54000), lower (0.46000), the confidence interval (0.04). To select the respondents in the study area, a simple random sampling procedure was employed. This was after the purposive selection of Agatu, Eggon, and Jos North from Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau respectively.

Questionnaire was this study's instrument of data collection. The instrument covered aspects such as the current state of communal conflict mediation efforts in Nigeria, the extent of the effort, and level of influence. The instrument was designed to include 12 items covering demographic areas and questiona that addressed the specific objectives of the study. It was created using a Likert scale: Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Indifferent = 3; Strongly disagree = 2; Disagree = 1. Experts from the department of mass communication at Glorious University Ogwa in Edo State, Nigeria, employed face validity to assess the instrument's applicability/validity. Furthermore, 0.932 was the result of the reliability test conducted using Cronbach's alpha. This test was carried out to determine the internal consistency of the set of items included in the survey instrument of data collection.

As part of the method of data collection for this study, the researchers adopted the in-person administering of copies of questionnaire to the respondents. The researchers relied on the assistance of two research assistants to accomplish the task of questionnaire distribution and retrieval. In accordance with research ethics, respondents were informed of their rights, including voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study at any point in time, and they were also assured of protection of their identity in the accompanying ethical statement form. The SPSS Version 26 was used for data analysis upon appropriate coding of the data collection instrument. Descriptive statistical method using percentages and frequency distribution was used to analyse the survey data.

4. FINDING & DISCUSSION

Findings from the survey are presented in the figures below. This was done in line with the specific research question

4.1 Research Question 1:

What is the current state of communal conflict mediation efforts of the government towards resolving conflicts in North Central Nigeria?

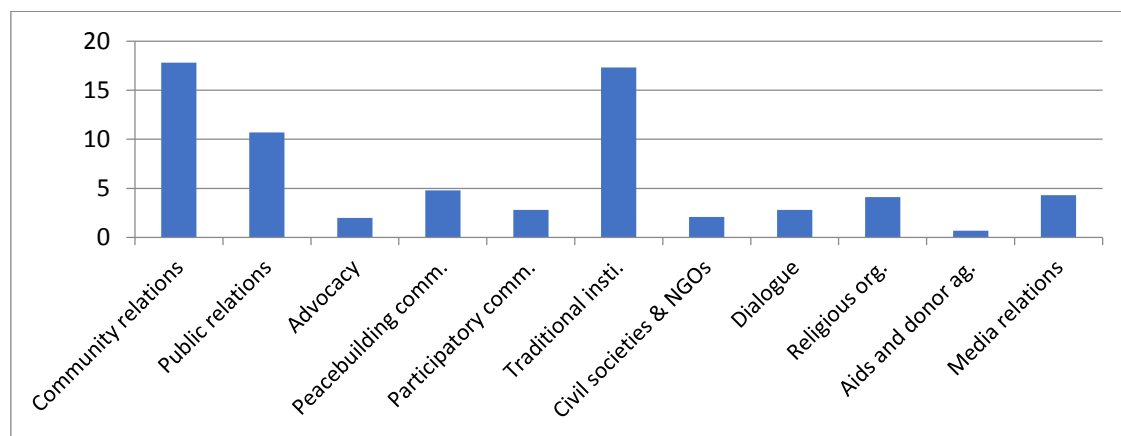


Fig. 1. Conflict communication strategies used by government in North Central Nigeria (Source: Survey, 2025)

Figure 1 data illustrate the current condition of conflict mediation, indicating that many strategies are being actively employed in the region to achieve enduring peace. The figure contains data that show that the strategies include, among other, media relations, community interactions, and religious, and

traditional institutions. The use of community relations and the traditional institution are prominent among the pool of strategies used to ensure lasting peace in the North Central region of Nigeria.

4.2 Research Question 2:

What is the extent of government conflict mediation efforts toward resolving conflicts in the region?

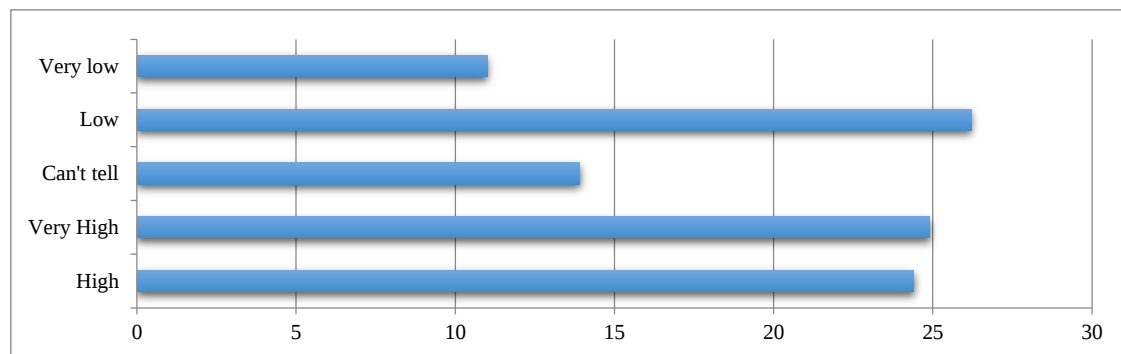


Fig. 2. The extent to which government uses communication for communal conflict mediation (Source: Survey, 2025)

Figure 2 data show that respondents believe that communication is widely used in their community for conflict settlement. The perception of 24.9 percent of respondents and another 24.4 percent of them serve as evidence for this result. Accordingly, such efforts taken are greatly appreciated as means to resolve conflict – hence, the greater level of adoption among states in the North Central Nigeria. This is also an indication of the recognition of the unique nature of the zone and the need for lasting solution to the myriad of problems.

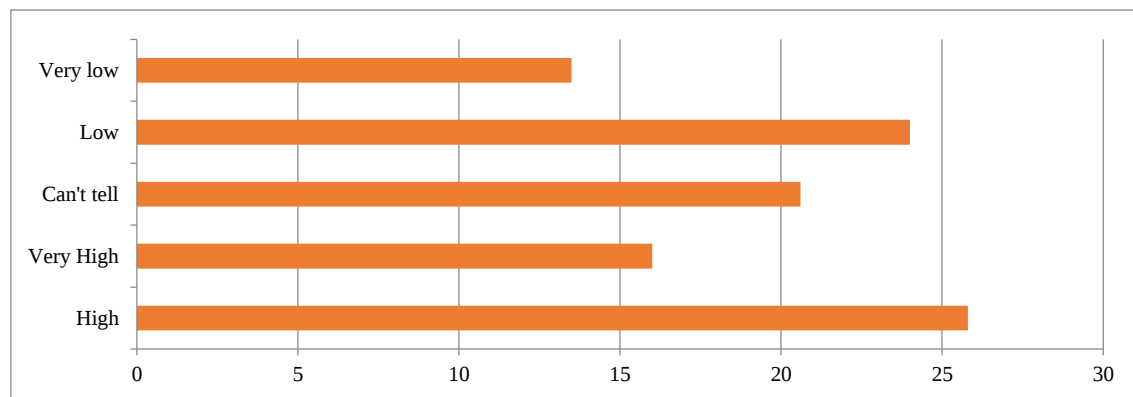


Fig.3. Extent of active participation in government-sponsored communal conflict mediation (Source: Survey, 2025)

Figure 3 data depict that a notably high percentage of respondents participated in government-created forums for communal dispute settlement. This was determined by 25.8 percent of respondents that indicated that they highly participated in programmes and initiatives created by government as part of efforts to resolve conflicts in the North Central of Nigeria. A significant number represented by 16 percent respondents indicated the extent of participation was very high. To put it simply, they actively participated in the programmes and events and avenues that the government created and activated for promoting peace among communities in the region.

4.3 Research Question 3:

What is the level of influence of government conflict mediation on peace building in the region?

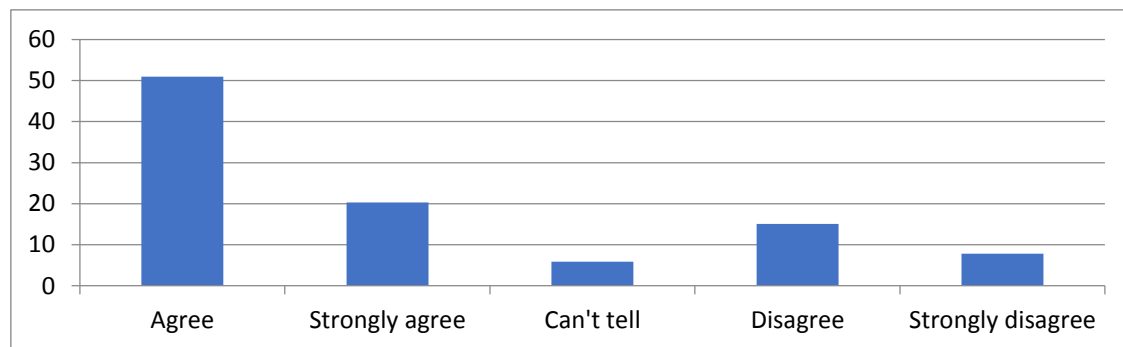


Fig. 4. Conflict communication of government has influenced decision to cohabit peacefully with people (Source: Survey, 2025)

The data in Figure 4 show that the majority 50.9 percent respondents who are members of the affected communities agreed to cohabit based on their exposure to the conflict communication initiatives initiated by government toward resolving conflicts. This is indicative of the influence of the various communication strategies for conflict mediation adopted to address challenges in the North Central region of Nigeria.

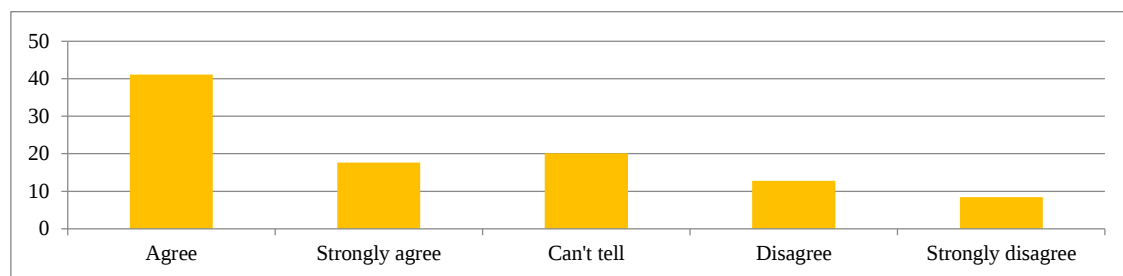


Fig.5. Tensions are reduced in my community because of conflict communication of government (Source: Survey, 2025)

As seen in figure 5, 41.1 percent agreed while 17.6 percent respondents strongly agreed that the tensions arising from conflicts are reduced due to the communication of government in the geopolitical zone and this based on the opinion of the majority of the respondents. This further buttresses the influence of the communication strategies adopted by the appropriate authorities as part of efforts to resolve the myriad of conflicts that have over the years plagued communities in the North Central region of Nigeria.

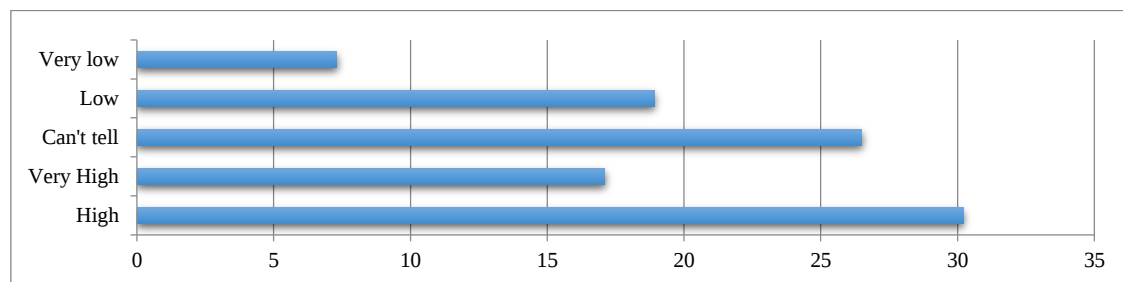


Fig. 6. Extent government conflict communication reduced conflict (Source: Survey, 2025)

Figure 6 data suggest that conflict may have decreased based on the government's communication strategies for conflict mediation in states of North Central Nigeria. Accordingly, 30.2 percent respondents indicated that the extent was high while 17.2 percent said it was very high. This is an indication that the use of communication as part of the strategies to reduce conflict in the region has yielded significant result over time.

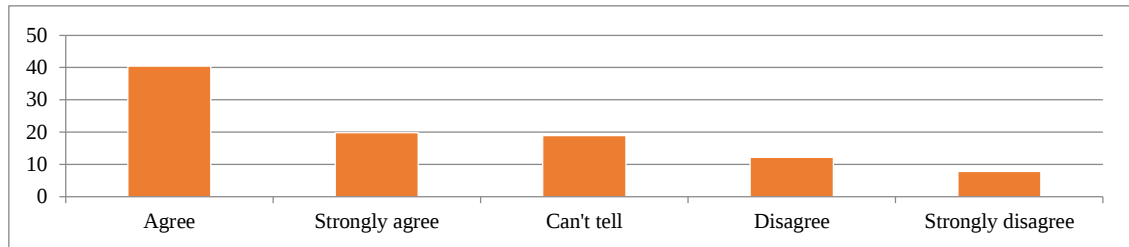


Fig. 7. Conflict communication of government enhanced inter-ethnic cooperation in North Central Nigeria Source: Survey, 2025

Figure 7 data show that 40.4 percent respondents agreed to the notion of conflict communication leading to a situation of enhanced inter-ethnic cooperation in the North Central region. This implies that government-adopted communication strategies for conflict mediation have improved inter-ethnic cooperation among the ethnic groups in the North Central states of Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau.

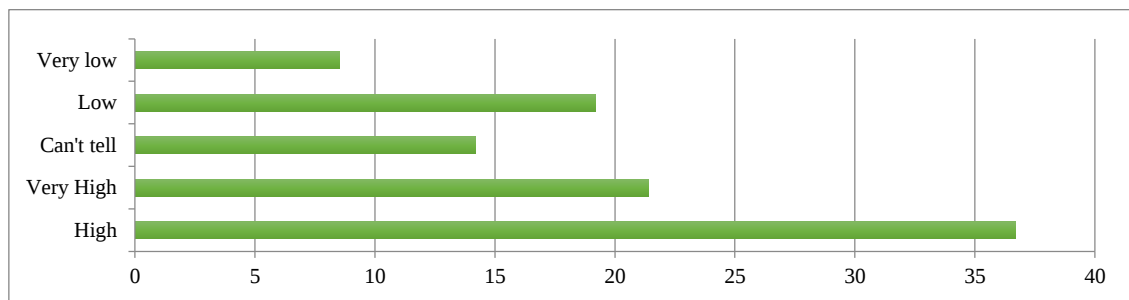


Fig.8. Extent conflict communication of government in North Central enhanced inter-ethnic cooperation (Source: Survey, 2025)

Figure 8 above illustrates how government communication initiatives geared at conflict mediation greatly improved inter-ethnic cooperation among the region's diverse ethnic groups. Data in the figure show that 36.7 percent respondents expressed the notion that conflict communication to a high extent enhanced inter-ethnic cooperation among communities in the North Central region of Nigeria.

It is important to note that this study was conducted to evaluate government communication strategies for conflict resolution in the North Central states of Plateau, Nasarawa, and Benue and findings of the survey showed that communication is actively used in the zone to resolve issues. As a result, the study as shown in figure 1 demonstrated that a number of well-known strategies were employed – some of which include public relations, community relations, media relations, conventional institution approach, and religious organisation approach. Previous research, like the ones conducted by Aleshinloye and Orolade (2020), Igben and Timiyan (2023), and Ngwu et al. (2020), have demonstrated the application of comparable communication techniques in diverse but comparable conflict situations across Nigeria.

Additionally, the study showed how widely communication techniques are used in the zone to mediate conflicts amongst communities. There was a high degree of communication in the zone, as evidenced by the field survey data, which showed responses from 24.9 percent (very high) and 24.4

percent (high). In their study, Igbashangev and Ogunyemi (2022) also showed that the government has made concerted efforts to leverage communication to address the numerous conflicts that have long afflicted parts of Northern Nigeria. On the other hand, studies such as Asemah (2009), Ogwezi and Umukoro (2018), and Ushie (2021) have demonstrated that public relations strategies were used insignificantly as a conflict mediation technique in various regions of Nigeria. This suggests that the government might not respond to conflict situations consistently and fairly. Although the response might work in some circumstances, it might not work in others. This is also a negation of the postulation of both conflict transformation theory and interest-based relational approach model on addressing underlying factors responsible for conflict which can only be tackled with total adoption of specific strategies such as PR.

On the basis of the evaluation of strategies used in various conflict scenarios and contexts in North Central Nigeria, the study's primary focus is the impact of the communication approach. The study demonstrated the importance of communication strategies. Findings showed that citizens actively engaged in government conflict mediation programmes. Additionally, findings demonstrated how the communication techniques affected their determination to live in harmony with others in the same neighbourhood. This is predicated on the idea that 20.3 percent of respondents strongly agreed with the proposition, while 50.9 percent just simply agreed. In a related study, Chimaroke (2002) also showed that the use of a participatory approach to conflict mediation previously resulted in truce agreements between disputing groups. In a study, Abiodun and Salama (2023) showed that communities that are approached for resolution can choose to live together while putting aside their disagreements.

Based on the perceptions of 41.1 percent and 8.4 percent who strongly agreed with the idea, the survey also showed that the adoption and use of communication strategies reduced conflicts in some communities. As a result, some communities have witnessed relative reduction in conflict situation. The study demonstrated that the extent of the conflict resolution is high. The consequence of the foregoing is that the government used communication to address problems, such as the root causes of conflicts, in order to lower tensions and find solutions. This is in line with the conflict transformation theory's tenet that conflicts should be addressed at their core – identifying the underlying factors and addressing each.

Additionally, results of this study demonstrated that the use of communication techniques for conflict mediation in the North Central region of Nigeria improves interethnic cooperation. Findings revealed that the likelihood of such cooperation being improved through communication is high. According to the results of a study by Saleh (2022), different faith-based groups in Nigeria used mediation efforts to actualise peaceful coexistence. In many regions of Nigeria and the African continent, researchers like Dyikuk and Edeh (2022), Kariuki (2015), and Ntem (2022) have also demonstrated the use of diverse communication strategies to promote inter-ethnic collaboration. This demonstrates how communication can be used to promote positive relationships, which is supported by the interest-based relational approach model's construct that prioritises maintaining positive relationships between and among disputants.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, constituted authorities in North Central Nigeria have explored a variety of strategies, including community relations, religious groups/institutions, as well as the traditional institutions, all of which this study has shown to be successful in mediating conflicts. The many ethnic groups in the North Central region of Nigeria have been able to coexist peacefully as a consequence of the use of communication in certain conflicts. The extent of the adoption of the communication strategies for the purpose of conflict mediation is significant. However, there are still some reported cases of conflict in other parts of the region, indicating that there are multi-dimensional factors responsible for the conflict. This also explains the complex nature of the conflicts in the region. Therefore, the researchers suggest continuous evaluation of specific communication strategies and engagement for conflict resolution in

North-Central Nigeria. It is also suggested that further studies delve into salient factors that may fuel conflicts in the region that makes communication strategies to have limited effects.

This study through its findings provides insights in relations to the adoption of communication strategies in Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau states in the North Central region of Nigeria. On account of the focus on the region, it addressed the population gap occasioned by existing and similar studies. Furthermore, the practical implication is that the findings of this study can be relied upon as base to take concrete steps to explore the strategies in different conflicts seen across the Nigerian federation. Therefore, the following recommendations are made in accordance with the results and conclusion:

1. Members of the community and interested organisations should continue to explore communication, particularly dialogue and community relations, to negotiate and find long-term solutions to problems resulting from conflicts that are common in Nigeria and throughout the African continent.
2. In our climes, stakeholders should seek effective ways to adopt and use communication as channels to resolve conflict situations even in seemingly difficult circumstances as seen in terror-related conflicts and other violent encounters.
3. Since Nigeria continues to experience conflict in different parts of the country, future studies should focus on the use of specific conflict communication strategies. For example, researchers can devote attention to exploring the use of advocacy, religious organisation or traditional institution as strategies for conflict mediation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Oluwatobi Enitan Modeyin and Kelvin Inobemhe conceptualised the central research idea of the study, carried out the research, wrote and revised the article. Wisdom Iheanyichukwu Okezie provided the theoretical framework. Kelvin Inobemhe anchored the review, revisions and approved the article submission.

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