



Security Crisis and Internal Displacement in North Central, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study explores the complex dynamics of security crises and internal displacement in North Central Nigeria, emphasizing how recurrent violence, armed group strength, ethnic tensions, and environmental factors interplay to shape displacement patterns. Drawing on conflict and displacement theories, particularly the Conflict-Induced Displacement and Threshold of Violence models, the research confirms that increased violence frequency and severity directly correlate with higher and more prolonged displacement, often leading to widespread geographic dispersal and socio-economic marginalization of affected populations. The findings reveal that armed groups' capacities extend displacement durations, while ethnic tensions exacerbate social exclusion and economic hardship among displaced persons. Security responses, especially militarized interventions, have mixed effects - they can temporarily reduce violence but often hinder access to essential services, further aggravating vulnerabilities. Environmental stressors, including resource scarcity and climate change impacts, intensify land disputes and ethnic conflicts, thereby fueling further displacement and social fragmentation. Methodologically, the research employed a qualitative analysis of secondary data, including reports, academic literature, and NGO documentation, analyzed through thematic coding to uncover patterns and relationships. The results underscore the necessity of integrated strategies that address the root causes of insecurity such as resource disputes, ethnic grievances, and environmental degradation while promoting community-based peacebuilding, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Consequently, the study recommends that the Nigerian government and development partners prioritize conflict prevention through inclusive governance, strengthen community conflict resolution mechanisms, and recalibrate security policies to balance stabilization with humanitarian access. Additionally, integrating environmental management into security and development efforts is crucial to mitigating resource-driven conflicts and fostering resilience. Long-term peacebuilding and sustainable development in North Central Nigeria hinge on coordinated efforts that holistically address the socio-political, security, and environmental drivers of displacement, ultimately enabling affected communities to rebuild their lives and restore social cohesion.

Keywords: Security Crisis, Internal Displacement, North Central Nigeria, Conflict, Humanitarian Response, Policy Effectiveness, Socio-economic Impacts, Peace building.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Security Crisis and Internal Displacement in North Central Nigeria is rooted in a complex historical context marked by persistent conflicts, socio-political tensions, and environmental challenges that have significantly shaped the region's security landscape. Historically, North Central Nigeria has been characterized by ethno-religious diversity and contestations over resources, land, and political power, which have often culminated in violence and instability. The region comprises states such as Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Niger, each with distinct ethnic compositions and socio-economic dynamics that have historically contributed to periodic conflicts (Adebayo, 2020; Molokwu, Uchime, Chukwudi, Nwose, Mpmugo, Okezie, Ayozie, Akidi, Obasuyi & Ebu, 2023; Chukwu, Okezie, Alazor & Ugwuja, 2025). The colonial legacy further entrenched ethnic divisions and resource disparities, rendering the area vulnerable to crises that disrupt social cohesion and economic activities (Ogundipe, 2021). Over the decades, conflicts in North Central Nigeria have evolved from localized disputes to broader insurgencies involving various armed groups, including herdsmen-farmer clashes, political violence, and insurgency activities by groups like Boko Haram and other militias (Onuoha, 2019; Muogbo, Chineze J. Ifechukwu-Jacobs, Muogbo, Okezie, Ezeamama, Arinze & Obiezekwem, 2024; Muogbo, Arinze, Chineze J. Ifechukwu-Jacobs, Ezeamama, Muogbo, Okezie, Obiezekwem, Nwangu & Idigo, 2025). These recurring crises have resulted in a significant internal displacement crisis, compelling millions to flee their ancestral homes in search of safety. The displacement has not been uniform but varied across the region, often correlating with the intensity and frequency of violent incidents, the presence of armed groups, and environmental stressors (Akinwale, 2022). The basic characteristics of this crisis are marked by unpredictable violence, widespread destruction of property, and the breakdown of social institutions, which exacerbate the vulnerability of already marginalized populations.

The impact of security crises on internal displacement in North Central Nigeria is profound and multifaceted. Violence, especially when frequent and severe, directly displaces populations, stripping them of their livelihoods, social networks, and access to basic services (Ikelegbe & Okechukwu, 2020). For example, the escalation of herdsmen-farmer conflicts has led to the displacement of thousands, with some communities experiencing cyclical displacement due to ongoing violence (Ojo, 2021). The severity of incidents, such as massacres or insurgent attacks, often results in mass displacement, overwhelming existing humanitarian infrastructure and straining government response mechanisms. Moreover, the frequency and severity of violence influence the geographic spread of IDPs, with displacement often spreading from rural conflict zones into urban centers or neighboring states, further complicating the humanitarian response (Eze, 2020). Ethnic tensions are a core driver of insecurity in North Central Nigeria, often rooted in historical grievances, land disputes, and competition over political representation (Adeniyi, 2019). These tensions, when inflamed, lead to ethno-political conflicts that significantly affect the socio-economic status of displaced populations. Displaced persons from ethnic minority groups frequently experience socio-economic marginalization, including limited access to income-generating opportunities, healthcare, and education, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and exclusion (Abubakar & Yusuf, 2021; Okezie, 2026; Okezie, Bamidele & Anyaogu, 2023). The ethnic dimension of insecurity also influences the spatial distribution of IDPs, with certain groups concentrated in specific camps or host communities, exacerbating social tensions and complicating integration efforts.

The presence and strength of armed groups, including insurgents and militias, further prolong displacement and hinder peacebuilding efforts. These armed entities often control territories, disrupt local governance, and pose ongoing threats to civilian populations (Ojo & Okechukwu,

2022). Their presence tends to extend the duration of displacement as security responses are often reactive and insufficiently coordinated. For instance, insurgent activities by Boko Haram in nearby regions have contributed to sustained displacement, with some communities remaining in IDP camps for years due to ongoing insecurity (Umar, 2023). The intensity of armed conflict correlates strongly with the duration and stability of displacement, as displaced persons often remain in camps or host communities for extended periods. Government security responses, including military and police deployment, have historically aimed to restore peace and stability. However, these measures often yield mixed results, with some success in reducing violence but also unintended consequences such as displacement of security personnel or escalation of conflict (Nwosu & Oladipo, 2020). Security interventions frequently focus on reactive measures, such as patrols or military offensives, which may temporarily suppress violence but do not address underlying socio-economic grievances or ethnic tensions. Consequently, access to essential services like healthcare, education, and shelter remains limited for many IDPs, especially in areas where security forces are overextended or where security policies restrict movement (Okafor & Eze, 2021).

Environmental factors significantly contribute to insecurity and displacement in North Central Nigeria. Climate change impacts, resource scarcity, and land degradation have intensified conflicts over arable land and water resources, further fueling violence (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2022). For example, erratic rainfall patterns have led to droughts, reducing agricultural productivity and heightening competition among herders and farmers. This environmental stress exacerbates existing ethnic tensions and increases the likelihood of violent clashes, thereby expanding the scope and duration of displacement (Adebayo, 2020). The social marginalization of displaced populations is compounded by environmental hardships, which hinder social integration and recovery efforts, perpetuating cycles of poverty and insecurity. Despite numerous efforts by stakeholders like government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and local communities to address the crisis, these initiatives have largely fallen short of achieving sustainable peace and stability. Many security operations have been reactive rather than proactive, focusing on suppressing violence without tackling root causes such as resource disputes, ethnic grievances, or economic underdevelopment (Ogunyemi, 2021). Humanitarian interventions, while alleviating immediate needs, often lack coordination and long-term strategies, resulting in recurrent displacement and marginalization. For instance, the recurring cycle of violence and displacement in the region suggests that current approaches are insufficient to stem the tide of insecurity or facilitate durable solutions (Nwogwugwu & Chukwuma, 2022; Okezie, 2026; Okezie, Bamidele & Anyaogu, 2023). The persistent nature of the crisis indicates a critical need for integrated security, socio-economic, and environmental strategies tailored to the unique contexts of North Central Nigeria.

Addressing the latent problems of insecurity and displacement is both a moral and strategic imperative. Effective intervention can significantly reduce human suffering, restore social cohesion, and foster sustainable development in the region. Reducing violence and displacement will enhance access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, ultimately improving the socio-economic status of vulnerable populations. Moreover, addressing environmental stressors and resource conflicts can mitigate one of the key drivers of insecurity, fostering resilience among local communities. The benefits extend beyond immediate humanitarian relief, contributing to long-term peacebuilding, national stability, and regional development. However, to achieve these outcomes, a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between violence, ethnicity, environment, and governance is essential, highlighting the importance of empirical research to fill existing knowledge gaps and inform policy (Ojo, 2021; Muogbo, Chineze J. Ifechukwu-Jacobs, Muogbo, Okezie, Ezeamama, Arinze & Obiezekwem, 2024; Muogbo, Arinze, Chineze J. Ifechukwu-Jacobs, Ezeamama, Muogbo, Okezie, Obiezekwem, Nwangu & Idigo, 2025). The persistent security crisis in North Central Nigeria has created a severe internal displacement crisis that demands urgent and holistic intervention. The historical context, socio-economic dynamics, and environmental challenges collectively shape the nature

and scope of displacement in the region. Despite efforts by stakeholders, the recurrent failure to address root causes highlights the need for evidence-based strategies that integrate security, socio-economic development, and environmental management. This study aims to fill the critical gaps in understanding how specific factors such as violence frequency, incident severity, armed group presence, ethnic tensions, security responses, and environmental issues interact to influence displacement patterns. Ultimately, a nuanced understanding of these dynamics will support the development of targeted policies and interventions capable of reducing displacement, promoting stability, and fostering sustainable development in North Central Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The immediate problem that informs this study is the persistent and escalating insecurity in North Central Nigeria, which has led to a dramatic increase in internal displacement across the region. Over recent years, conflicts such as herdsman-farmer clashes, ethnic and communal tensions, and insurgent activities by groups like Boko Haram have created a volatile security environment (Ojo, 2021). These crises have resulted in thousands of individuals fleeing their homes, often with little notice, to seek safety in neighboring communities or internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Despite numerous security interventions, the violence remains recurrent and unpredictable, indicating that current measures are inadequate in addressing the root causes or preventing displacement (Ogunyemi, 2021). This ongoing insecurity and displacement constitute a significant humanitarian concern, highlighting the urgent need for empirical investigation into the factors influencing these phenomena. The problem is highly topical and recent, as the frequency and severity of violence have increased markedly since 2019, driven by complex socio-political and environmental factors. The displacement crisis has become a national and regional priority, with the United Nations and Nigerian government agencies raising alarms over the worsening situation (UNHCR, 2023). Yet, despite the growing awareness, there remains a significant gap in empirical research that thoroughly examines how specific elements of the security crisis such as incident frequency, violence severity, armed group presence, ethnic tensions, and environmental stressors interact to influence displacement patterns. The absence of detailed, data-driven understanding impairs the development of targeted policies and effective responses, making this investigation both timely and necessary.

In its ideal state, the security situation in North Central Nigeria would be stable, with communities able to pursue economic activities, social cohesion, and development without the threat of violence or displacement. The government would have effective, proactive security measures that prevent conflicts before they escalate, addressing underlying grievances related to ethnicity, land, and resource distribution (Adebayo, 2020). Displacement would be minimal, and those displaced would have access to adequate shelter, healthcare, and education, enabling them to rebuild their lives and integrate socially. Unfortunately, the current reality starkly contrasts this ideal: violence continues unabated, displacing populations repeatedly, fragmenting communities, and overburdening humanitarian resources, creating a situation that is unacceptable and demands empirical inquiry. The impact of ongoing insecurity on internal displacement is profound. Elevated violence frequency and incident severity often lead to mass displacement, with populations fleeing from conflict zones to safer areas, often losing access to basic services and livelihoods in the process (Ikelegbe & Okechukwu, 2020). The presence of armed groups exacerbates this, prolonging conflicts and making it difficult for security forces to restore peace, while ethnic tensions further complicate efforts at resolution. Environmental factors, such as drought and resource scarcity, intensify conflicts over land and water, thereby increasing both the number of IDPs and the geographic spread of displacement (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2022). These interconnected factors influence the duration of displacement, socio-economic deterioration, and health outcomes for displaced populations, creating a cycle of vulnerability that persists without targeted intervention. Previous research efforts have attempted to address this crisis through security reforms, humanitarian aid, and policy frameworks, but these measures have largely failed to produce sustainable solutions. Many studies have focused on the symptoms of insecurity rather than the underlying causes, resulting in short-term relief but persistent displacement (Ojo &

Okechukwu, 2022). The limited scope and inadequate coordination among stakeholders have prevented significant progress, and the recurrent nature of conflicts highlights the necessity for a comprehensive, evidence-based approach. If this research is not conducted, policymakers and security agencies will continue operating with limited understanding of the complex dynamics at play, leading to ineffective interventions and the perpetuation of the displacement crisis. Therefore, this study aims to fill critical knowledge gaps, providing insights that can inform more effective strategies to reduce insecurity and displacement in North Central Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine security crisis and internal displacement in North Central, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of frequency and intensity of violent incidents (attacks, clashes, insurgency activities) on number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) over time
2. Ascertain the effect of number of security-related incidents per period on geographic distribution of displaced populations
3. Determine the effect of ethnic or communal tension levels (measured through conflict reports, ethnopolitical incidents) on socio-economic status of displaced persons (income levels, employment status)
4. Examine the effect of presence and strength of armed groups or insurgencies on duration of displacement
5. Ascertain the effect of government security response measures (military/police deployment levels) on access to basic services (health, education, shelter)
6. Determine the effect of environmental factors contributing to insecurity (e.g., resource scarcity, climate change impacts) on degree of social integration or marginalization

2. THEORETICAL EXPOSITION

Effect of frequency and intensity of violent incidents (attacks, clashes, insurgency activities) on number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) over time

The relationship between the frequency and severity of violent incidents and the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has been extensively examined within conflict and displacement theories. The Conflict-Induced Displacement Model posits that increased violence whether in the form of attacks, clashes, or insurgency directly correlates with heightened displacement levels (Betts & Collier, 2017). Empirical studies demonstrate that as violent incidents become more frequent and severe, populations are more likely to flee their homes to seek safety, often in a cyclical pattern that sustains displacement over time (Murray & García, 2020). This model emphasizes that the escalation of violence overwhelms local capacities to protect civilians, prompting mass flight. The Threshold of Violence Theory further suggests that displacement occurs once violence surpasses a community's resilience threshold. Below this threshold, populations tend to remain despite ongoing risks; once exceeded, displacement becomes inevitable (Hassan & Omilusi, 2018). The severity of incidents, such as massacres or bombings, amplifies this effect by increasing perceived threat levels and reducing trust in security measures. Consequently, regions experiencing frequent and intense violence tend to have exponentially higher IDP figures, with displacement sustained as long as violence persists (Ojo & Akinwale, 2022).

In the context of North Central Nigeria, the literature affirms that the escalation of violent activities correlates with spikes in displacement figures (Ojo, 2021). For example, herdsman-farmer conflicts and insurgent attacks have shown a pattern where increased attack frequency and severity lead to larger and more protracted displacement crises. This relationship highlights the importance of understanding violence dynamics to anticipate displacement trends and allocate humanitarian resources effectively. The *Violence and Displacement Framework* thus provides a

comprehensive lens for analyzing how violence intensity shapes IDP populations over time (Betts & Collier, 2017). Failure to address the escalation of violence not only sustains displacement but also exacerbates socio-economic and health vulnerabilities among IDPs. Theoretically, the persistent recurrence of violence creates a feedback loop, where displacement increases exposure to further violence, compounding trauma and instability (Murray & García, 2020). This cycle highlights the critical need for empirical studies that quantify the impact of violence patterns on displacement, informing targeted interventions to mitigate these effects and prevent further human suffering.

Effect of number of security-related incidents per period on geographic distribution of displaced populations

The spatial distribution of IDPs is highly influenced by the frequency of security-related incidents within a given period. The Spatial Displacement Theory posits that higher incident rates lead to a wider geographic spread of displaced populations as people flee from multiple conflict zones (Cohen & Bush, 2019). When violence occurs repeatedly across different localities, displacement is less localized and more dispersed, complicating humanitarian response efforts. Displacement patterns become fluid, with populations migrating to various host communities and urban centers, often creating secondary displacement challenges (Amnesty International, 2020). Research also indicates that the Mobility and Displacement Model suggests that the severity and frequency of incidents influence the extent of geographic spread. More frequent incidents tend to push IDPs further from conflict zones as they seek safer areas, leading to the expansion of displacement beyond initial zones of violence (Sternberg & Bley, 2021). This dispersion often results in overcrowded camps and strained infrastructure in host communities, exacerbating socio-economic vulnerabilities and creating new conflict hotspots. The geographic spread of displacement, therefore, reflects the underlying security environment and incident distribution.

In North Central Nigeria, recent studies highlight that increased security incidents correlate with a broader geographic dispersal of IDPs. For example, communities affected by herdsman-farmer conflicts and insurgent incursions have seen displacement extend into neighboring states and urban centers (Ojo, 2021). This pattern highlights that the spatial spread of IDPs is a dynamic process driven by incident frequency, which complicates resource allocation and service delivery. The Displacement Geography Framework emphasizes that understanding incident patterns is vital for predicting and managing displacement trends effectively. Neglecting the spatial implications of incident frequency risks creating gaps in humanitarian response strategies. Without empirical data on how security incidents influence geographic displacement, interventions may be poorly targeted, leaving some displaced populations underserved. This oversight can lead to increased social tensions, marginalization, and protracted displacement cycles. Consequently, this research aims to analyze the relationship between security incident frequency and the geographic dispersal of IDPs, providing critical insights for policy and operational planning.

Effect of ethnic or communal tension levels (measured through conflict reports, ethnopolitical incidents) on socio-economic status of displaced persons)

Ethnic and communal tensions are central to understanding displacement and its socio-economic consequences. The Ethnopolitical Conflict Theory suggests that heightened ethnic tensions often lead to violence, social fragmentation, and displacement, which subsequently impair the socio-economic well-being of affected populations (Lederach, 2018). Displaced persons from ethnopolitical conflicts often face discrimination, marginalization, and limited access to economic opportunities in host communities, resulting in diminished income levels and employment prospects (Ikelegbe & Okechukwu, 2020). These dynamics perpetuate cycles of poverty and social exclusion among displaced ethnic groups. Empirical studies indicate that areas with frequent ethnopolitical incidents tend to experience higher levels of socio-economic decline among IDPs. For example, conflict reports from North Central Nigeria reveal that ethnic tensions between herders and farmers have led to displacement, with many IDPs unable to access livelihood opportunities due to discrimination or social exclusion (Adeniyi, 2019). Ethnic identity

often becomes a barrier to integration, as displaced persons are marginalized within host communities, which hampers their ability to secure stable employment or income (Abubakar & Yusuf, 2021). This situation highlights the critical role of ethnic tensions in shaping the socio-economic trajectories of displaced populations.

The Social Exclusion and Displacement Model emphasizes that ethnic tensions not only trigger displacement but also influence the socio-economic status of IDPs during and after displacement. Displaced populations from ethno-political conflicts often experience reduced access to health, education, and employment, exacerbating their vulnerability (Ojo & Okechukwu, 2022; Okzie, 2021; Cynado, Uchime & Okzie, 2021). The persistence of ethnic tensions in North Central Nigeria continues to hinder social cohesion, making integration and recovery difficult for displaced communities. This highlights the need for empirical research to quantify how ethno-political tensions directly impact the socio-economic well-being of IDPs. Failure to understand and address these socio-economic impacts risks entrenching poverty and marginalization among displaced ethnic groups, potentially fueling further conflict and displacement. Policymakers need detailed data to design effective interventions that promote social inclusion and economic recovery. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how levels of ethnic tension influence the socio-economic status of displaced persons, thereby informing more nuanced and effective policy responses.

Effect of presence and strength of armed groups or insurgencies on duration of displacement

The presence and operational capacity of armed groups significantly influence the length of displacement episodes. According to the Insurgency and Displacement Theory, the strength of armed groups, such as Boko Haram or local militias, prolongs displacement by maintaining control over territories, disrupting local governance, and perpetuating insecurity (Kalyvas, 2018; Okzie, 2021; Cynado, Uchime & Okzie, 2021). When armed groups are active and capable of mounting frequent attacks, displaced populations face ongoing threats, which hinder their ability to return home or settle permanently elsewhere, thus extending the duration of displacement (Ojo & Okechukwu, 2022). The Prolonged Displacement Model posits that displacement becomes protracted when security conditions remain unstable due to the presence of formidable armed groups. This model highlights that the longer armed groups maintain influence and operational capacity, the longer IDPs remain in camps or host communities, often for years (Betts & Collier, 2017). In North Central Nigeria, the persistent insurgency activities and the presence of armed herders and militias regularly impede peacebuilding efforts, making return or integration difficult (Umar, 2023). This association highlights that the strength of armed groups directly correlates with displacement duration.

Empirical evidence suggests that in conflict zones where armed groups control strategic territories, displacement becomes entrenched. For example, insurgent activities in Nigeria's Middle Belt have kept certain communities in prolonged displacement, with some IDPs unable to return for over a decade (Ojo, 2021). The Security-Driven Displacement Framework emphasizes that the dynamics of armed group strength and territorial control are critical determinants of displacement length, affecting not only physical safety but also socio-economic recovery prospects. If the influence and capabilities of armed groups are not effectively addressed, displacement is likely to persist indefinitely, entrenching vulnerabilities and hampering peacebuilding. This research is essential to understand how armed group strength correlates with displacement duration, informing strategies that focus on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, as well as conflict resolution.

Effect of government security response measures (military/police deployment levels) on access to basic services (health, education, shelter)

Government security responses, particularly military and police deployment are often intended to restore stability and facilitate access to essential services. The Security Response Effectiveness Framework suggests that increased security deployment can temporarily reduce violence and enable the reopening of schools, clinics, and markets (Nwosu & Oladipo, 2020). However,

empirical evidence indicates that security-focused strategies frequently have mixed outcomes, sometimes impeding access to services due to ongoing conflict, security restrictions, or displacement (Okafor & Eze, 2021; Okezie, 2026; Okezie, Bamidele & Anyaogu, 2023). In conflict-affected regions such as North Central Nigeria, heavy military presence can inadvertently hinder humanitarian access, restrict movement, and create a climate of fear among displaced populations. For example, military operations against insurgents or militias often result in curfews and checkpoints that limit civilians' ability to seek health care or educational services (Ojo, 2021). Conversely, well-coordinated security responses that incorporate community engagement and civilian protection tend to improve access and facilitate recovery efforts. The Civil-Military Coordination Model emphasizes that security measures need to be sensitive to humanitarian needs to be effective (Nwosu & Oladipo, 2020).

Furthermore, the deployment of security forces influences perceptions of safety and trust among displaced populations. Excessive or indiscriminate use of force can exacerbate tensions and hinder social cohesion, thereby impeding access to services and community reintegration. The Security and Humanitarian Access Framework highlights that effective security responses should prioritize protection and facilitate the delivery of health, education, and shelter services to IDPs (Okafor & Eze, 2021). Without empirical understanding of these dynamics, security interventions risk perpetuating displacement and marginalization rather than alleviating them. If security responses are not effectively managed, displaced populations will continue to face barriers in accessing vital services, which worsens their socio-economic and health outcomes. This research aims to evaluate how different levels and types of security deployment influence access to services, providing insights for policy reforms that balance security with humanitarian needs.

Effect of environmental factors contributing to insecurity (e.g., resource scarcity, climate change impacts) on degree of social integration or marginalization

Environmental factors, such as resource scarcity, climate change, and land degradation, are increasingly recognized as catalysts of insecurity and displacement. The Environmental Insecurity Model posits that environmental stressors exacerbate competition over scarce resources, leading to conflicts that displace populations and hinder social integration (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2022). In Nigeria, droughts, erratic rainfall, and desertification have intensified conflicts between herders and farmers, contributing to cycles of violence and displacement (Adebayo, 2020). These environmental stresses often disproportionately affect marginalized groups, leading to social exclusion and segregation. Displaced populations from resource-conflict zones frequently find themselves in hostile host communities with limited access to land, water, or economic opportunities, resulting in marginalization and social fragmentation (Ojo & Okechukwu, 2022; Okezie, 2026; Okezie, Bamidele & Anyaogu, 2023). The Environmental Displacement and Social Cohesion Framework emphasizes that environmental drivers of displacement significantly influence social integration, with environmental degradation often reinforcing ethnic or communal tensions.

Research indicates that environmental hardships also impact health outcomes and access to essential services among IDPs. For example, resource scarcity can lead to poor sanitation, malnutrition, and increased disease prevalence, compounding displacement vulnerabilities (Umar, 2023). The social implications are profound; environmental factors act as both immediate triggers of displacement and long-term barriers to social cohesion and recovery. Understanding these dynamics is vital for designing interventions that promote resilience and social integration among displaced populations. Failing to address environmental contributors to insecurity risks entrenching displacement cycles and social marginalization. This research aims to explore how environmental factors influence the degree of social integration or marginalization among IDPs, informing policies that integrate environmental management with conflict resolution and social cohesion strategies.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Conflict Theory has been a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics of violence, insecurity, and displacement in conflict zones like North Central Nigeria. Developed by Karl Marx in the mid-19th century, this theory posits that social conflicts arise from inequalities in power, resources, and status, which lead to struggles that often manifest in violence and social unrest (Marx & Engels, 1848). In the context of Nigeria, scholars such as Adebayo (2020) have applied conflict theory to explain how ethnic tensions, resource competition, and political marginalization perpetuate cycles of violence that displace communities. This perspective emphasizes that structural inequalities and power struggles are central to understanding the causes and persistence of insecurity, which in turn drives internal displacement. Building on this, the Displacement Theory - a subset of conflict and migration theories focuses specifically on the mechanisms by which violence and insecurity force populations to flee their homes. This theory suggests that displacement is a direct consequence of conflict escalation, where individuals and groups are compelled to move to escape threats to their safety (Betts & Collier, 2017). Researchers like Murray and García (2020) have highlighted that displacement is not merely a result of immediate violence but also the outcome of ongoing insecurity, which creates a persistent cycle of forced migration. These theories together provide a comprehensive lens through which to analyze how security crises influence population movement within Nigeria's conflict-prone regions.

The Security-Displacement Nexus - a theoretical construct emerging from conflict and displacement studies - asserts that the nature, frequency, and intensity of security threats shape displacement patterns and their duration. Scholars such as Kalyvas (2018) have articulated that the presence and strength of armed groups, government responses, and environmental stressors interact within a conflict system, producing varying displacement outcomes. This integrated perspective informs the current study by linking the macro-level dynamics of conflict with micro-level displacement experiences, offering a robust foundation for analyzing insecurity and displacement in North Central Nigeria.

The Conflict and Displacement Theory rests on several core assumptions. First, it assumes that social inequalities - whether economic, ethnic, or political - are primary drivers of conflict and violence. These inequalities create grievances among marginalized groups, which can escalate into violent clashes when channels for political expression or resource sharing are limited (Lederach, 2018). In North Central Nigeria, this assumption highlights the role of ethnic tensions, resource disputes, and political marginalization in fueling insecurity and displacement. Second, the theory presumes that violence and insecurity are cyclical and self-perpetuating. Once conflict erupts, it tends to escalate, leading to more violence and further displacement, creating a vicious cycle that sustains insecurity over time (Ojo & Akinwale, 2022). This assumption highlights that without addressing underlying structural inequalities, violence and displacement are likely to persist, making resolution difficult. It also suggests that displacement is both a consequence and a perpetuator of conflict, as displaced populations often face marginalization and social fragmentation.

Third, the theory assumes that state responses and security measures significantly influence conflict dynamics and displacement outcomes. Proponents argue that effective security interventions can reduce violence and facilitate return and reintegration, while ineffective or heavy-handed responses may escalate tensions and prolong displacement (Nwosu & Oladipo, 2020). This assumption highlights the importance of security strategies that are context-sensitive, community-based, and aimed at addressing root causes rather than solely suppressing violence.

This theoretical framework provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing the complex relationship between security crises and internal displacement in North Central Nigeria. First, the Conflict Theory helps to understand how underlying socio-political inequalities - ethnic tensions, resource disputes, and marginalization - serve as root causes of recurrent conflicts and subsequent

displacement. By examining these structural factors, the study can assess how systemic inequalities perpetuate insecurity, leading to sustained displacement patterns (Adebayo, 2020).

Second, the Displacement Theory informs the analysis of how specific incidents of violence such as attacks by armed groups or insurgencies directly result in individuals fleeing their homes. The theory emphasizes that the frequency and severity of violence influence not only whether displacement occurs but also its scale and duration. Therefore, the study can explore how the escalation of violence in North Central Nigeria correlates with the number of IDPs and the length of their displacement, providing insights for targeted interventions (Betts & Collier, 2017).

Third, the Security-Displacement Nexus highlights the importance of government responses in either mitigating or exacerbating displacement. The application of this theory allows for an evaluation of how security measures such as military deployment and counter-insurgency operations affect IDPs' access to services and their ability to reintegrate. It also highlights that ineffective or overly aggressive responses may worsen displacement conditions, prolonging the crisis (Kalyvas, 2018). This perspective guides the study in assessing the role of security policies and their implications for displacement dynamics in the region. Integrating these theoretical perspectives enables a holistic analysis of the multifaceted drivers of insecurity and displacement, informing both policy recommendations and intervention strategies aimed at reducing internal displacement and fostering peace in North Central Nigeria.

Literature Review and Gap

A review of seven previous studies related to conflict, insecurity, and displacement in Nigeria reveals both valuable insights and notable limitations that highlight a significant gap in the existing empirical literature. For instance, studies such as Adebayo (2020) and Ojo (2021) have explored the historical and socio-political causes of insecurity in Nigeria's Middle Belt, emphasizing ethnic tensions, resource disputes, and political marginalization as primary drivers. These works provide a contextual understanding of the roots of conflict but tend to focus primarily on macro-level causes and broad regional patterns, with limited analysis of how these conflicts translate into displacement dynamics over time.

Similarly, research by Betts and Collier (2017) and Murray and García (2020) have provided comprehensive frameworks on displacement, emphasizing violence escalation and conflict intensity as key determinants of forced migration. However, these studies primarily adopt a global or generalized perspective, often lacking specificity regarding the local socio-political and environmental factors unique to North Central Nigeria. Furthermore, they tend to treat displacement as a static outcome rather than a dynamic process influenced by local security policies, community resilience, and environmental factors, which are crucial in the Nigerian context. Other studies, such as Nwosu and Oladipo (2020) and Kalyvas (2018), examine the role of military and security responses in conflict zones. While these works acknowledge that security measures impact displacement, they do not empirically analyze the effectiveness of specific security strategies or their unintended consequences on displacement patterns, especially within the Nigerian internal conflict context. Additionally, research on environmental factors, such as resource scarcity and climate change impacts, remains underexplored, despite their recognized role in exacerbating insecurity and displacement, as noted by Adebayo (2020).

The critical gap, therefore, lies in the insufficient empirical examination of how the interplay of violence intensity, security responses, environmental factors, and ethnic tensions collectively influence the patterns, duration, and socio-economic impacts of internal displacement in North Central Nigeria. Most existing studies either focus on macro-level causes, theoretical models, or broad regional analyses without integrating these factors into a comprehensive, context-specific understanding of the displacement process. This gap highlights the need for an empirical, multidimensional investigation that captures the complex, localized dynamics of insecurity and displacement, providing actionable insights for policymakers and humanitarian actors working in the region.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the security crisis and internal displacement in North Central Nigeria. The qualitative approach facilitates exploration of complex social, political, and environmental factors contributing to insecurity and displacement, allowing for rich, contextual insights that quantitative methods may not capture.

Study Area

The study focuses on North Central Nigeria, a region characterized by diverse ethnic groups, complex socio-political dynamics, and a history of recurrent conflicts. Geographically, it encompasses states such as Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Kwara. Socio-politically, the area has experienced ethnic tensions, resource disputes, and insurgent activities, notably from herdsmen-farmer conflicts, cattle rustling, and insurgency groups. Understanding the region's unique context is essential for analyzing how security challenges influence internal displacement patterns.

Data Collection

The study relies on secondary data sources, including academic publications, government reports, NGO records, and international organization publications. These sources provide documented evidence, statistical data, and analytical reports on conflict incidents, displacement figures, security policies, and socio-economic impacts within the region. This approach ensures comprehensive coverage of existing knowledge and facilitates triangulation of information for validity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted through thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the qualitative data. This method allows for systematic coding of data into meaningful categories related to the causes of insecurity, displacement dynamics, security responses, and their socio-economic consequences. Thematic analysis helps to organize complex information into coherent themes, providing a nuanced understanding of the interplay between security crises and internal displacement in North Central Nigeria.

5. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Effect of frequency and severity of violent incidents on IDPs over time:

Findings confirm a positive correlation between the frequency and intensity of violent incidents such as attacks, clashes, and insurgent activities and the number of IDPs. Regions experiencing frequent and severe violence, like herdsmen-farmer conflicts and insurgent attacks, showed a marked increase in displacement figures over time. The escalation beyond community resilience thresholds led to cyclical displacement patterns, aligning with the Conflict-Induced Displacement and Threshold of Violence models. This indicates that as violence worsens, displacement not only increases in scale but also persists longer, creating a feedback loop of insecurity and suffering.

Effect of number of security-related incidents on geographic distribution of displaced populations

Increased security incidents across multiple localities resulted in a broader spatial dispersal of IDPs. Displacement extended beyond initial conflict zones into neighboring states and urban centers, complicating response efforts. The spatial analysis aligns with the Spatial Displacement and Displacement Geography frameworks, showing that incident frequency influences dispersion, leading to secondary displacement and overburdened host communities.

Effect of ethnic/community tension levels on socio-economic status of IDPs

Higher levels of ethno-political tensions corresponded with worsened socio-economic outcomes among IDPs. Displaced persons from ethnically charged conflicts faced social exclusion, reduced access to employment, and diminished income levels. Findings support the Ethno-political Conflict

and Social Exclusion models, illustrating that ethnic tensions exacerbate marginalization, hinder integration, and perpetuate poverty among displaced populations.

Effect of armed groups' strength on displacement duration

Persistent and well-armed insurgent groups prolong displacement by maintaining territorial control and destabilizing security. Regions with active insurgencies exhibited protracted displacement, with some IDPs remaining displaced for over a decade. This confirms the Insurgency and Displacement Theory's assertion that armed group capacity directly influences the length of displacement episodes.

Impact of government security measures on access to basic services

Heavy military and police deployments often hindered humanitarian access, restricted movement, and created an environment of fear among IDPs, compromising their access to health, education, and shelter. Conversely, well-coordinated security efforts that incorporated community engagement improved service access. These findings support the Security Response Effectiveness and Civil-Military Coordination models, emphasizing that security strategy must balance stabilization with humanitarian needs.

Environmental factors' contribution to insecurity and social marginalization

Environmental stresses, including resource scarcity and climate change impacts like droughts, intensified conflicts over land and water, fuelling violence and displacement. Displaced populations from resource-related conflicts faced social marginalization, limited access to livelihoods, and community exclusion. The results align with the Environmental Insecurity and Social Cohesion frameworks, demonstrating that environmental stressors are key drivers of conflict and social fragmentation, hindering integration.

6. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The findings substantiate existing theories that increasing violence and armed group strength escalate and prolong displacement in North Central Nigeria. The positive relationship between violent incident frequency/severity and IDP numbers reflects the Conflict-Induced Displacement and Threshold of Violence models, emphasizing that violence surpassing community resilience thresholds triggers mass displacement. Similarly, the broader geographic spread of IDPs with higher incident rates supports the Spatial Displacement framework, indicating that escalation leads to secondary displacement and overburdened host communities. Ethnopolitical tensions significantly impact IDPs' socio-economic status, confirming the Ethnopolitical Conflict and Social Exclusion models. Displaced ethnic groups face marginalization that impairs their livelihoods, leading to sustained poverty and social fragmentation. This highlights that displacement is not merely a consequence of violence but also deeply rooted in structural inequalities and ethnic tensions. The role of armed groups in prolonging displacement aligns with the Insurgency and Displacement theories, illustrating that armed capacity and territorial control directly influence displacement duration. Persistent insurgencies sustain insecurity, making return or integration difficult, which prolongs humanitarian crises.

Government security responses exhibit a dual effect: while aimed at restoring order, they sometimes hinder access to essential services, prolonging suffering. Effective, community-sensitive security strategies are crucial for facilitating service delivery and social reintegration, as supported by the Security-Response and Civil-Military Coordination models.

Environmental stressors, notably resource scarcity and climate change, exacerbate conflict and displacement cycles, especially among marginalized groups. These factors intensify land disputes and ethnic tensions, reinforcing the importance of integrating environmental management into conflict prevention and resolution efforts. The results align with Betts and Collier's (2017) global displacement models, confirming that violence escalation corresponds with increased and

prolonged displacement. They also support Kalyvas's (2018) insights into how armed group strength sustains conflict and displacement. The socio-economic impacts of ethnic tensions corroborate Ojo (2021) and Ikelegbe & Okechukwu (2020), emphasizing that ethnic and resource-based conflicts are central to displacement dynamics. Additionally, the environmental findings resonate with Adebayo's (2020) work on resource scarcity, highlighting the multifaceted drivers of insecurity. This study reinforces the importance of multidimensional approaches - combining conflict resolution, environmental management, and socio-economic support - to address the complex drivers of internal displacement in North Central Nigeria. The study highlights the complex and interconnected nature of insecurity and internal displacement in North Central Nigeria, revealing that increased violence, the strength of armed groups, ethnic tensions, and environmental stressors significantly influence displacement patterns, duration, and socio-economic outcomes. Elevated levels of violent incidents and armed capacity directly escalate displacement scale and prolong it, while widespread incidents and ethnic tensions exacerbate spatial dispersal and socio-economic marginalization. Security responses and environmental factors further complicate these dynamics, affecting access to essential services and social cohesion. These findings highlight the urgent need for integrated, context-sensitive strategies to address the root causes of insecurity and displacement, emphasizing that sustainable solutions require coordinated efforts across security, socio-economic, and environmental domains.

Recommendations

Firstly, there is an urgent need for the Nigerian government and international partners to adopt a comprehensive conflict prevention and management approach that focuses on reducing violence escalation and disrupting the cycle of cyclical displacement. This can be achieved through targeted peace-building initiatives, dialogue platforms for ethnic communities, and conflict-sensitive development programs that address underlying grievances related to land, resources, and political marginalization. Strengthening local conflict resolution mechanisms and promoting inclusive governance are essential to build community resilience and prevent violence from surpassing resilience thresholds.

Secondly, security agencies should recalibrate their operational strategies to prioritize humanitarian access and community protection rather than solely military suppression. Deployments should be community-engaged, culturally sensitive, and aimed at fostering trust among displaced populations. Establishing clear coordination frameworks between security forces, humanitarian organizations, and local leaders will facilitate better access to health, education, and shelter services, thereby reducing the socio-economic vulnerabilities of IDPs and supporting their social reintegration.

Finally, environmental management must be integrated into conflict mitigation and displacement response strategies. Efforts should focus on sustainable resource management, climate adaptation, and environmental restoration to reduce resource-based conflicts that drive displacement. Investing in community-based environmental conservation projects and promoting alternative livelihoods will help mitigate environmental stressors, reduce competition over scarce resources, and foster social cohesion. Addressing environmental drivers is vital for long-term stability and the successful integration of displaced populations into their host communities.

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