Integrated Survey Report

COUNTERING ETHNO-RELIGIOUS POLARISATION AND REBUILDING CIVIC COHESION IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA



Comprehensive Mixed-Methods Approach

Supported by Ford Foundation

JUSTICE RESEARCH INSTITUTE LTD. GTE
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ACTIVE CITIZEN

Geographical Focus:	Benue State & Plateau State, North-Central Nigeria
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Overview: This master report presents an exhaustive, mixed-methods empirical investigation into ethno-religious polarization, communal insecurity, institutional trust deficits, social cohesion, digital misinformation, and peacebuilding mechanisms across North-Central Nigeria. Sponsored by the Ford Foundation and executed by Justice Research Institute Ltd/Gte (JRI) through a consultancy delivered by Smard Consulting Solutions (SCS), the study evaluates two primary empirical datasets collected simultaneously between late September and early October 2026 across Benue State and Plateau State.

Empirical Foundation: The empirical foundation comprises two integrated methodological streams:

- **Quantitative Master Dataset (N = 2,879):** A fully representative multi-stage probability sample of N = 2,879 adult citizens (1,438 in Benue State and 1,441 in Plateau State) across urban, peri-urban, and rural farming enumeration areas in Makurdi, Guma, Jos North, and Barikin Ladi LGAs, collected via mobile CAPI on KoboCollect with compulsory field validation filters (N = 2,839 finalized for granular statistical modeling).
- **Qualitative Fieldwork Corpus (N = 17 Clusters):** 15 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 9 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) across 17 field clusters, capturing perspectives from traditional rulers, senior Christian and Islamic clerics, civil society leadership (including the Plateau Peace Practitioners Network with 92 member CSOs), local media practitioners, youth psychologists, NSCDC security commanders, and political candidates.

Structural Integration Strategy: To maintain total structural alignment with the survey framework, qualitative findings are integrated directly into core modules combining quantitative cross-tabulations, qualitative inventory tables, high-resolution data conceptual models, verbatim grassroots voices, and actionable policy implications.

Key Empirical Findings

- **Governance Alienation & Identity Balkanization:** Over three-quarters of Plateau State respondents (77.8%) and 60.5% of Benue State respondents evaluate the current state of Nigeria as 'Poor' or 'Very Poor'. In Plateau State, 36.6% experience active tension between their ethnic identity and Nigerian nationhood. Settler identity is concentrated among Muslim populations (26.9% in Plateau State and 25.8% in Benue State), correlating directly with political disenfranchisement and spatial segregation.
- **Institutional Trust Asymmetry:** A profound divide exists between grassroots moral authorities and state enforcement organs. Religious Leaders (Mean = 3.70) and Traditional Rulers (Mean = 3.32) command the highest public trust, whereas formal security bodies (Military: 2.75, Police: 2.71) and democratic federal institutions (Federal Executive: 2.51, INEC: 2.14) face acute trust deficits due to perceived operational extortion and urban disengagement.
- **Insecurity Typologies & Conflict Drivers:** Across the study area, 40.3% of respondents evaluate their communities as 'Unsafe' or 'Very Unsafe', and 61.4% have experienced conflict-induced displacement (including 26.3% currently displaced in Benue State). Qualitative analysis uncovers three distinct conflict drivers: (a) Rural Agrarian Livelihood Collapse & Armed Hinterland Occupation in Benue; (b) Violent Youth Cultism across faith lines in urban

Makurdi (Wadata); and (c) Historical Sectarian Massacres and Misclassified Threat Typologies in Plateau State.

- **Social Cohesion & Inter-Group Friction:** Ethnicity acts as a bridgeable social boundary (67.4% comfortable with inter-ethnic marriage), whereas religion functions as an inflexible line of social distance (55.2% overall, and 61.7% in Plateau State, express discomfort with inter-religious marriage). Unaddressed psychological trauma fuels retaliatory cycles, though structured child play therapy programs (such as the PPPN model in Riyom/Barkin Ladi) demonstrate proven pathways for restoring inter-faith trust.
- **Digital Information Pipeline Risks:** Legacy radio (61.2%) and Facebook (50.5%) dominate news intake. However, 71.4% agree social media has deepened social divisions, with nearly half frequently exposed to religious hate speech (48.3%) and farmer-herder misinformation (48.2%). Unfiltered 'smartphone journalism' and cross-border rumors routinely ignite local panic.
- **Emigration Propensity vs. Youth Hope:** A majority of respondents (55.0% total, reaching 66.1% in Benue State) express a desire to permanently relocate abroad ('Japa'). Despite this exit propensity, 70.3% retain hope that youth-led leadership can transform local communities.

Strategic Policy & Action Roadmap

Action Roadmap: The report outlines a 5-step strategic framework for rebuilding civic cohesion: (1) Accurate Threat Classification & Research-Grounded Security Policy; (2) Courageous Political Will & Enforced Senatorial Equity; (3) Security Decentralization, Rural Redeployment & Drone Surveillance; (4) Institutionalization of Youth Psychosocial Therapy & Digital Media Literacy; and (5) Sustained Multi-Year Donor Funding with Rigorous M&E.

List of Acronyms and Full Meanings

Acronym	Full Meaning	Context in Master Report
AIT	Africa Independent Television	Mainstream television platform evaluated in news consumption surveys.
BSc	Bachelor of Science	Tertiary educational qualification level recorded in demographic profiles.
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria	Apex Christian body involved in interfaith peace dialogue.
CAPI	Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing	Mobile digital data capture methodology using KoboCollect.
CBO	Community-Based Organisation	Grassroots entities engaged in local conflict prevention and community development.
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	Non-governmental organizations engaged in governance and peacebuilding.
DSS	Department of State Services	Primary domestic security and intelligence service evaluated by field communities.
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission	Federal agency evaluated under public institutional trust measures.
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	Qualitative participatory field methodology (9 disaggregated sessions conducted).
FJDP	Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace	Catholic civil society organization implementing interfaith dialogues and field programs.
GPS	Global Positioning System	Geolocation tracking used for validating field enumerator data capture.
HND	Higher National Diploma	Post-secondary technical education credential category.
ICPC	Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission	Federal anti-corruption institution evaluated in public trust profiles.
IDP	Internally Displaced Person / Population	Conflict-displaced individuals residing in camps or host communities.
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission	Federal electoral body evaluated under formal institutional trust metrics.
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province	Non-state armed terrorist group referenced in regional security dynamics.
JNI	Jama'atu Nasril Islam	Peak Islamic organization in Nigeria representing Muslim leadership.
JRI	Justice Research Institute	Lead research institute commissioned to execute the study.
KII	Key Informant Interview	Qualitative in-depth interview method conducted with institutional stakeholders (15 completed).
LGA	Local Government Area	Primary sub-state administrative units surveyed (Makurdi, Guma, Jos North, Barikin Ladi).

M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation	Systematic oversight framework for assessing peacebuilding project impact.
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics	Federal statistical agency providing primary sampling frame enumeration maps.
NC	North-Central	Geopolitical zone of Nigeria comprising Plateau, Benue, and surrounding states.
NCE	Nigeria Certificate in Education	Professional tertiary teaching diploma credential category.
NIREC	National Inter-Religious Council	Joint interfaith body promoting Muslim-Christian dialogue and peaceful coexistence.
NSCDC	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps	Paramilitary security agency evaluated in institutional protection and trust.
NTA	Nigerian Television Authority	State-owned national television broadcast network.
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps	Mandatory post-tertiary national youth service scheme.
OND	Ordinary National Diploma	Tertiary polytechnic diploma qualification category.
PAP	Pre-Analysis Plan	Methodological protocol registered prior to quantitative unblinding.
PCNI	Presidential Committee on the North East Initiative	Federal peacebuilding and rehabilitation committee focal points.
PII	Personally Identifiable Information	Direct personal identification data decoupled from raw survey datasets.
PPPN	Plateau Peace Practitioners Network	Network umbrella of 92 peacebuilding CSOs in Plateau State.
SSG	Secretary to the State Government	Senior executive state cabinet administrative official interviewed during qualitative fieldwork.
USIP	United States Institute of Peace	International institution partnering on peacebuilding initiatives in the region.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

Nigeria's North-Central Zone occupies a significant position in the country's socio-political landscape because of its ethnic, religious, cultural, and economic diversity. The region is home to communities with different historical experiences, belief systems, livelihoods, and patterns of social interaction (Kastfelt, 1994; Ochonu, 2014; Ogbozor & Kemakolam, 2026; Olumba, 2024). Although this diversity provides opportunities for cultural exchange, economic cooperation, and peaceful coexistence, it has also been accompanied by recurring tensions and conflicts in some areas (Nassef et al., 2025). These tensions are particularly evident in disputes over land, access to natural resources, political representation, communal identity, and the relationship between different ethnic and religious groups (Boer, 2003; Sha, 2005; Abdu, 2010). In recent years, the persistence of violent conflicts, the displacement of populations, the destruction of livelihoods, and the weakening of intercommunal relationships have raised important concerns about the conditions necessary for sustainable peace and social cohesion in the region.

Benue and Plateau States provide important contexts for examining these challenges. Both states have experienced different forms of communal tension and violence involving questions of identity, belonging, access to land and resources, security, political inclusion, and relations between farming and pastoralist communities (Akanji et al., 2021; Sha, 2005). In Benue State, tensions involving farmers and pastoralists have frequently been associated with competition over land, agricultural livelihoods, grazing routes, and access to water (Akanji et al., 2021). In Plateau State, communal conflicts have also been shaped by competing claims to land, indigeneity, political representation, the rights of different communities to participate in local governance, and religious differences (Ityavyar & Gundu, 2004). Although the historical circumstances and immediate triggers of conflicts differ between the two states, the interaction of economic pressures, political contestation, social divisions, and insecurity presents a common challenge for peacebuilding.

It is important, however, to recognise that conflicts in these states cannot be adequately explained by ethnicity or religion alone. While ethnic and religious identities may influence how communities interpret and respond to particular events, violent confrontations often emerge from a combination of historical grievances, struggles over resources, perceptions of exclusion, institutional weaknesses, insecurity, and the actions of political and other influential actors. Disputes that initially arise from localised disagreements may acquire broader ethnic or religious meanings when incidents are interpreted as attacks against an entire community. Such interpretations can deepen mistrust, encourage collective blame, and make it more difficult to distinguish between individual responsibility and group identity. Consequently, conflicts that might otherwise be addressed through negotiation and local dispute-resolution mechanisms can develop into wider communal confrontations.

Ethno-religious polarisation is both a consequence of these conflicts and a factor that can contribute to their recurrence. It refers to the widening of social, political, and psychological divisions between groups, often accompanied by mutual suspicion, negative stereotypes, the rejection of opposing viewpoints, and a declining willingness to engage across group boundaries. In highly polarised environments, members of one community may interpret the actions of another primarily through the lens of historical grievances and collective fears. Information about

an incident may therefore be accepted or rejected according to the identity of the person or group associated with it rather than the credibility of the evidence. This situation can undermine trust, restrict constructive dialogue, and weaken the capacity of communities to cooperate in addressing shared security and development challenges.

The contemporary information environment has added another dimension to these challenges. The increasing use of digital communication platforms and social media has expanded opportunities for information sharing, public engagement, and community mobilisation. However, these platforms can also facilitate the rapid circulation of misinformation, disinformation, inflammatory messages, and unverified accounts of violent incidents. Images, videos, audio recordings, and written messages may be circulated without adequate verification, while existing grievances can be reinforced through sensationalist reporting and narratives that portray particular ethnic or religious groups as threats to others. In situations where trust between communities is already weak, such information can heighten fear, encourage retaliatory attitudes, and complicate efforts by community leaders, civil society organisations, and security institutions to calm tensions.

The distinction between misinformation and disinformation is important in understanding this problem. Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information shared without necessarily intending to deceive, whereas disinformation involves the deliberate creation or circulation of false or misleading information to influence perceptions or achieve particular objectives. Both can have harmful consequences in conflict-affected communities, particularly when they reinforce existing stereotypes, distort accounts of events, or create the impression that an entire group is responsible for the actions of particular individuals. Digital platforms may consequently become channels through which local grievances are amplified and translated into wider narratives of victimhood, exclusion, and collective hostility. Nevertheless, the role of digital communication should not be understood in isolation from the underlying political, economic, and historical conditions that make such narratives persuasive.

These challenges have significant implications for community relations, democratic participation, and local peacebuilding. When communities become increasingly polarised, opportunities for dialogue may diminish, public institutions may be perceived as favouring particular groups, and citizens may become less willing to participate in collective decision-making. Community members may also become reluctant to share information across group boundaries or collaborate on common concerns. At the same time, peacebuilding initiatives may face difficulties when their activities are interpreted through partisan or identity-based assumptions. Addressing ethno-religious polarisation therefore requires more than responding to individual incidents of violence. It also requires attention to the social relationships, information networks, institutional practices, and political conditions through which mistrust is reproduced.

Against this background, the research project, Countering Ethno-Religious Polarisation in Nigeria's North-Central Zone (Benue and Plateau States), was undertaken to examine the dynamics of intergroup relations and identify practical approaches to strengthening peaceful coexistence in the two states. The study adopts a community-centred perspective that recognises the importance of understanding conflict from the experiences and perspectives of the people directly affected by it. Rather than treating communities as homogeneous entities, the research considers the different interests, experiences, and perceptions of relevant stakeholders, including

traditional and community leaders, religious institutions, civil society organisations, security agencies, local media, youth groups, women, and political actors.

The fieldwork was designed to explore the historical and contemporary factors contributing to ethno-religious tensions, the ways in which communities understand and respond to conflict, and the influence of information flows on perceptions of other groups. Particular attention was given to the drivers of tension, existing peacebuilding initiatives, the roles of formal and informal leadership, perceived fairness in political representation, and the conditions that either support or undermine trust between communities. The research also considered how misinformation, disinformation, and polarising narratives may affect local relationships and the effectiveness of efforts to prevent or manage conflict. These areas of inquiry were intended to provide a grounded understanding of the challenges facing community engagement and peacebuilding initiatives in Benue and Plateau States.

Ultimately, countering ethno-religious polarisation requires a sustained commitment to addressing both the immediate expressions of conflict and the deeper conditions that allow hostility to persist. This includes strengthening trust between communities, promoting inclusive participation, supporting credible channels of communication, improving access to verified information, and encouraging leaders and institutions to respond fairly and responsibly to emerging tensions. It also requires recognising the agency of local communities and building on existing capacities for dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful dispute resolution. The findings of the research are therefore intended to inform the work of government institutions, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organisations, media practitioners, security agencies, development partners, and community-based peacebuilding actors.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the research are to:

- Identify and map key stakeholders relevant to counter-polarisation and civic engagement interventions across North Central states.
- Develop a granular, contextual understanding of local socio-political dynamics, conflict drivers, and misinformation trends.
- Facilitate inclusive community dialogues and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving diverse stakeholders.
- Track and analyze patterns of misinformation, disinformation, and polarizing narratives across digital and traditional channels.
- Generate periodic, evidence-based reports and actionable recommendations to support project implementation and executive decision-making.

1.3 Scope of the Report

The scope of the report covers the historical, social, political, and economic factors contributing to ethno-religious tensions and conflicts in Benue and Plateau States. It examines intergroup relations, the underlying drivers of conflict, the influence of misinformation, disinformation, and polarising narratives, and the roles of traditional and community leaders, religious institutions, security agencies, civil society organisations, local media, and political actors in either intensifying tensions or promoting peaceful coexistence. The study also assesses existing peacebuilding

initiatives, community dialogue mechanisms, early-warning indicators, and perceptions of fairness in political representation. Data were collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with relevant stakeholders and community members in selected locations in both states. In Benue State, FGDs were held in Agan, Daudu, and Wadata, while in Plateau State, discussions were organised among Christian and Muslim participants across Barikin Ladi and Jos North LGAs. The study is geographical focused on Benue and Plateau States and thematically restricted to understanding the causes, dynamics, and narratives of ethno-religious polarisation, as well as identifying context-specific approaches to strengthening community engagement and sustainable peace.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design Framework

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design to empirically measure, evaluate, and formulate evidence-based interventions against ethno-religious polarisation in Nigeria's North Central Zone, focusing specifically on Plateau State and Benue State. Fieldwork was conducted simultaneously across quantitative and qualitative data streams from September 30 to October 12, 2026.

The convergent parallel design enables real-time triangulation between large-scale probability sample survey data and deep qualitative inquiry. While the quantitative survey generates statistically representative estimates of identity salience, institutional trust, discrimination exposure, and inter-group warmth, qualitative Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) unearth hyper-local conflict drivers, early-warning indicators, community resilience networks, and civic cohesion opportunities.

Table 2.1: Key Methodological Metrics & Executed Scope

Key Methodological Axis	Summary of Methodological Executed Scope
1. Quantitative Component	Multi-stage stratified probability sample achieving N = 2,879 completed household surveys across 4 target LGAs (Makurdi, Guma, Jos North, Barikin Ladi), utilizing mobile CAPI via KoboCollect. Achieved a 42% sample addition over baseline requirements with a 0% rejection rate due to compulsory CAPI validation constraints.
2. Qualitative Component	15 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across 6 key institutional/community sectors, and 9 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) disaggregated by demographic markers across single-identity and mixed-identity settings.
3. Integration & Alignment	Empirical cross-validation framed by a Pre-Analysis Plan (PAP) registered prior to quantitative unblinding to ensure analytical rigor.

2.2 Study Area and Target Population

The study domain covers the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, specifically targeting four Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue State and Plateau State that represent crucial socio-political, security, and demographic flashpoints:

- **Benue State Target LGAs:** Makurdi LGA (Urban mixed-population administrative center; 717 completed surveys) and Guma LGA (Rural/peri-urban agrarian conflict-affected zone; 721 completed surveys).

- **Plateau State Target LGAs:** Jos North LGA (Highly dense urban center with complex ethno-religious segregation; 836 completed surveys) and Barikin Ladi LGA (Peri-urban/rural agrarian and pastoralist conflict zone; 605 completed surveys).

Target Population & Screening Protocol: Nigerian citizens aged 18 years and older residing permanently in selected target LGAs. All field tools incorporated an automated age verification filter (Q0_01), terminating any subject under 18 years of age. Non-Nigerian citizens, short-term visitors (residing in the LGA for under 3 months), and institutionalized individuals were excluded to maintain focus on permanent residential perspectives.

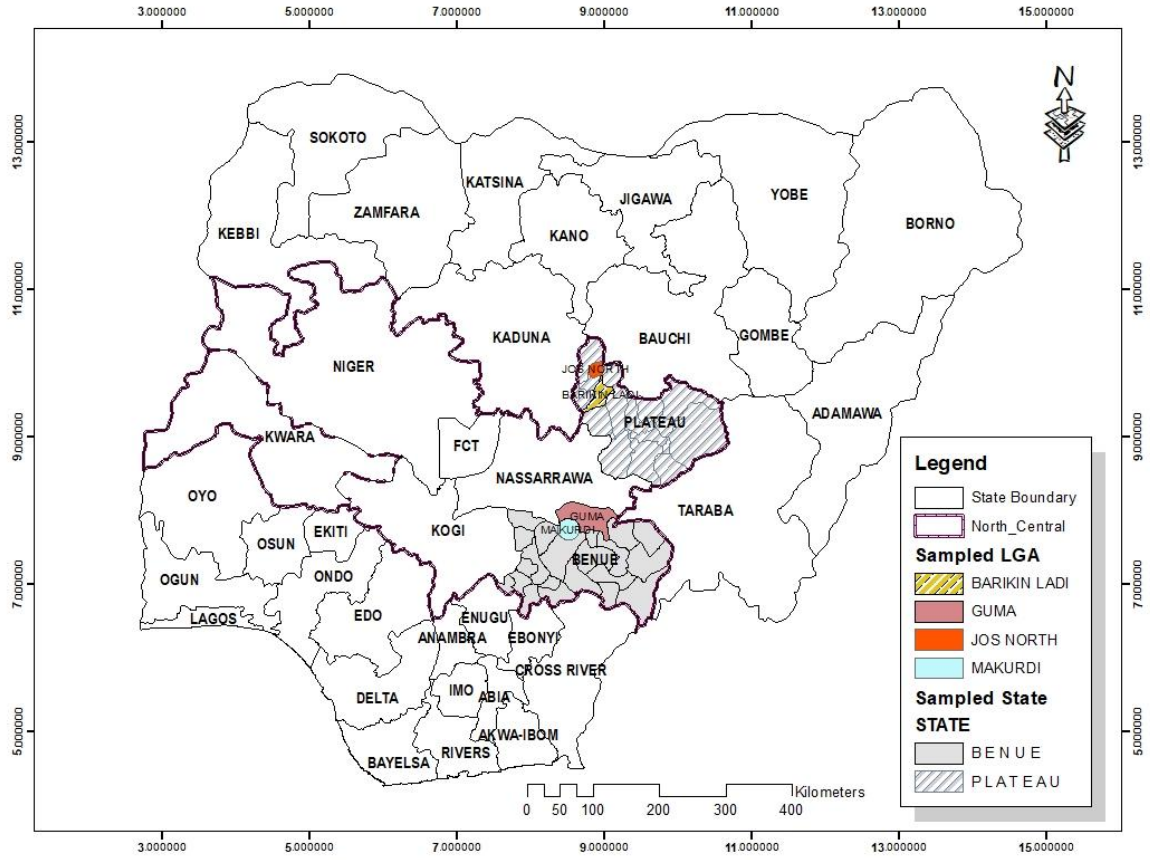


Figure 2.1: Map of Nigeria Showing the Sampled LGAs

Geographical location of sampled field sites across Benue State (Makurdi & Guma LGAs) and Plateau State (Jos North & Barikin Ladi LGAs), illustrating urban administrative centers and rural agrarian conflict corridors.

2.3 Sampling Design and Sample Allocation

2.3.1 Stratified Multi-Stage Probability Sampling

To guarantee state- and LGA-level statistical precision, the quantitative survey utilized a multi-stage stratified probability sampling design. Sampling units were stratified across three primary

intersecting axes: Urbanicity (Urban / Peri-Urban / Rural), Gender (Male / Female), and Religion (Christianity / Islam / Other). National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Enumeration Area (EA) maps served as the primary sampling frame where available. In conflict-affected or displaced communities (e.g., Daudu and Yelewata in Guma LGA) where official EA maps were unavailable or outdated, field teams executed systematic random-walk sampling starting from community landmarks.

2.3.2 Achieved Sample Allocation

The baseline research design targeted a minimum of N = 2,000 respondents (1,000 per state / 500 per LGA), with an expanded operational plan targeting 700 respondents per LGA (~2,800 total). Field teams successfully completed N = 2,879 household surveys (yielding a margin of error of ±1.8% at a 95% confidence level).

Table 2.2: Data Collection Target vs. Achieved Completed Sample Allocation

State	Local Government Area	Planned Target	Achieved Completed Sample
Benue State	Makurdi LGA	700	717 (102.42%)
Benue State	Guma LGA	700	721 (103.00%)
Plateau State	Jos North LGA	700	836 (119.42%)
Plateau State	Barikin Ladi LGA	700	605 (86.43%)
TOTAL	4 Target LGAs Across 2 States	2,800	2,879 (102.82%)

2.4 Data Collection Instruments and Measurement Constructs

2.4.1 Quantitative Survey Structure

The quantitative instrument comprises 11 substantive modules (Sections 0 through 10) incorporating validated psychometric scales, behavioral anchors, and experimental logic:

Table 2.3: Quantitative Survey Substantive Modules and Specifications

Section	Module Title	Key Constructs Measured	Technical & Methodological Specifications
Section 0	Demographics	Age, gender, state, LGA, urbanicity, education, employment, religion, ethnicity, disability status, asset index.	Includes Washington Group Short Set on Disability; 3-item wealth asset proxy index.
Section 1	Identity & Belonging	Nigerian vs. ethnic identity salience (Q1_01), civic membership, cross-faith friendships.	5-point Moreno scale; dynamic piping logic for ethnicity variable (Q0_13).

Section 2	Perception of Nigeria	State trajectory, semantic differential assessments (opportunity, hope, unity, pride, safety).	7-point bipolar semantic differential scale; open-ended descriptor.
Section 3	Trust in Institutions	Granular trust evaluation across 15 public and informal institutions.	Behavioral anchor Q3_02 (actual service sought); trust basis prompt Q3_03.
Section 4	Fairness & Experience	Perceived structural fairness across zones/faiths; personal experience of discrimination.	Multi-select matrix Q4_05; spatial tracking of unfair treatment incidents.
Section 5	Future of Nigeria	Constitutional reform preferences, List Experiment on secessionist support.	Automated Modulo-2 assignment; mandatory list experiment privacy script.
Section 6	Leadership & Representation	Political knowledge (Governor/LGA chair recognition), representation quality.	Civic knowledge filter screen; split-sample logic (Q6_01a/b).
Section 7	Inter-Group Relations	Ethnic warmth thermometer (8 groups), faith thermometer, Bogardus Social Distance.	5-point warmth scale; detailed denominational breakdown.
Section 8	Information Sources	Consumption frequency across 15 media platforms, political content sharing, misinformation resilience.	Incorporates Generative AI tools and AI chatbots as a distinct media intake category.
Section 9	Your Future	5-year outlook comparisons (personal vs. national), relocation/emigration preparation behaviors.	Behavioral items distinguish abstract migration aspirations from concrete steps.
Section 10	What You Appreciate	Open-ended appreciation of national resilience, cross-ethnic group admiration, sources of hope.	Positively framed module; generates text assets for peacebuilding campaign content.

2.4.2 Qualitative Data Collection Framework

Field teams expanded qualitative elite mapping to conduct 15 Key Informant Interviews (250% of original target) across 6 functional institutional sectors. Interviews lasted 40–75 minutes, achieving 100% written informed consent.

Table 2.4: Completed Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) by Sector Category

KII Sector Category	Target Informants / Sector Focus	Completed KIIs
Government Establishments	Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Ministry of Internal Security, State Peacebuilding focal points.	3
Traditional & Religious Bodies	Paramount Chiefs/Emirate Council representatives; Senior Christian (CAN) and Islamic (JNI) clerics.	4
Civil Society Organisations	Executive Directors of leading peacebuilding, governance, and inter-group dialogue CSOs.	3
Media Practitioners	Senior Editors and investigative journalists from key regional broadcast and print outlets.	2
Security & Peacebuilding	NSCDC State Commanders, PCNI focal points, and USIP partner leads.	2
Youth & Women Leadership	State Youth Council leadership, Chairpersons of Interfaith Women Networks.	1
TOTAL COMPLETED KIIs	Across 6 Institutional & Community Sectors	15

A total of 9 Focus Group Discussions (exceeding the baseline target of 6) were conducted across contrasting single-identity and mixed-identity settlement contexts: 3 FGDs in Benue State (Agan single-identity, Daudu displacement settlement, Wadata mixed-identity urban) and 6 FGDs in Plateau State disaggregated by demographic cohorts (Muslim Men, Muslim Women, Christian Men, Christian Women, Male Youth, Female Youth).

2.5 Field Governance, Capacity Building, and Personnel Deployment

Operational governance was led by a Central Research Directorate (Research Lead and Data Manager) overseeing dedicated Plateau State and Benue State Research Units (State Coordinators, LGA Supervisors, 20 Enumerators, FGD Moderators, and KII Interviewers). Prior to field

deployment, State Coordinators mapped stakeholders across 8 functional sectors into a master database. Field personnel underwent a mandatory 2-day training workshop covering CAPI navigation, List Experiment privacy scripts, Do No Harm protocols, and field pilot simulations.

2.6 CAPI Technical Implementation and Quality Assurance

Quantitative survey administration transitioned completely to mobile CAPI via KoboCollect. All core survey items were configured as mandatory fields, resulting in zero survey rejections due to item non-response (>20% threshold). Embedded skip patterns and ethnicity piping logic eliminated contradictory data entries, while passive GPS coordinate capture verified enumerator presence at designated sampling clusters. Supervisors executed call-back and physical accompaniment back-checks on 20% of completed surveys per enumerator weekly.

2.7 Empirical Fieldwork Realities, Challenges, and Mitigations

Fieldwork execution encountered real-world operational challenges in conflict-affected communities, which were addressed through adaptive field protocols:

Table 2.5: Field Operational Challenges, Empirical Manifestations, and Adaptive Mitigations

Field Operational Challenge	Empirical Manifestation in Field	Adaptive Mitigation Executed
Questionnaire Length & Fatigue	Respondents in Makurdi, Guma, and Jos complained that the multi-section CAPI survey was lengthy and time-consuming.	Enumerators worked in paired teams to encourage respondents, share administration burden, and offer flexible session pacing.
Suspicion & Incentive Expectations in IDP Zones	In Daudu and Yelewata (Guma LGA), residents expressed suspicion regarding photo capture and some withdrew when informed no money was provided.	Enumerators conducted courtesy visits with traditional and religious leaders prior to field entry, securing community buy-in and waiving mandatory photography where requested.
High Logistical Costs & Zero Power Grid	In Yelewata, transport/feeding expenses exceeded daily allowances, and zero electrical power was available to charge digital survey tools.	Field supervisors mobilized portable power banks for continuous CAPI operation and reallocated logistics reserves.
Stakeholder Availability for Elite KIIs	High-level political, security, and traditional leaders had tight schedules, overstretching the initial survey timeline.	KII interviewers extended engagement hours and conducted flexible follow-up sessions across Makurdi and Jos.
Urban Gated Access & Reluctance	Urban residents in Makurdi and Jos North were initially reluctant to open doors to field personnel.	Teams leveraged local supervisor networks and local language fluency to explain JRI's non-partisan research mission.

2.8 Ethical Compliance and Conflict Sensitivity

Informed consent was formally logged in KoboCollect (Q_CONSENT_01) for all 2,87h9 survey respondents and manually documented for all KII and FGD sessions. Participation was strictly voluntary. Direct personally identifiable information (PII) was removed from the raw quantitative dataset. KII and FGD audio files and transcripts were decoupled from participant names and assigned unique alphanumeric codes. Facilitators maintained Do No Harm principles, de-escalating sensitive topics during mixed-identity FGDs. Field supervisors retained autonomous authority to pause or relocate field operations during local security incidents.

2.9 Data Processing and Analytical Roadmap

Post-fieldwork data processing followed data ingestion on October 12, 2026. Raw KoboCollect data underwent missing value audits, variable cleaning, and post-hoc ethnicity harmonization into SPSS, Stata, and CSV formats. To ensure inter-rater reliability, 20% of open-ended ethnicity entries underwent independent double-coding. Statistical modeling included difference-in-means estimations for Section 5 List Experiments and Cronbach's Alpha internal scale consistency tests. All 15 KII and 9 FGD audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English for thematic framework analysis. Quantitative findings were specifically presented using frequency tables and charts. Wordcloud and direct quotes were used for some qualitative findings.

CHAPTER THREE: DATA PRESENTATION AND EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Respondent Demographics & Socio-Economic Profile

The quantitative survey captures a representative adult population (18+ years) across urban, peri-urban, and rural enumeration areas in Benue and Plateau States. Socio-economic parameters reveal structural variations in education, employment, and religious composition that directly influence community vulnerability and conflict exposure.

Table 3.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Participants (N = 2,879)

Demographic	Category / Option	Benue State	Plateau State	Total
Age Distribution	18–21 years	10.60%	8.40%	9.50%
	22–25 years	13.40%	13.70%	13.50%
	26–30 years	22.50%	24.10%	23.30%
	31–35 years	19.20%	18.90%	19.00%
	36–40 years	14.60%	17.60%	16.10%
	40+ years	19.70%	17.30%	18.50%
Gender	Female	42.60%	41.20%	41.90%
	Male	57.40%	58.80%	58.10%
Religious Affiliation	Christian	86.60%	52.20%	69.40%
	Muslim	10.50%	46.20%	28.40%
	Traditional / Other	1.50%	0.60%	1.00%
	Prefer not to say	1.40%	1.00%	1.20%
Indigene / Settler	Indigene	78.00%	66.20%	72.10%
	Settler / Non-indigene	17.80%	19.60%	18.70%
	Mixed / Both	3.30%	12.30%	7.80%
	Not sure	1.00%	1.90%	1.40%
Highest Education	Primary	19.50%	10.30%	14.90%
	Secondary	50.60%	37.80%	44.20%
	OND / NCE	12.90%	26.20%	19.60%
	BSc / HND	14.70%	22.10%	18.40%
	Postgraduate	2.40%	3.50%	2.90%
Employment Status	Farmer	33.90%	14.00%	23.90%
	Self-employed	28.50%	37.50%	33.00%
	Employed (Formal)	13.60%	18.70%	16.20%
	Student	14.30%	14.00%	14.20%
	Unemployed	9.00%	11.60%	10.30%
	Herder / Pastoralist	0.10%	1.20%	0.70%

The demographic data highlights a structural socio-economic rift between the two states. In Benue State, 33.9% of respondents are agrarian farmers whose primary livelihood is directly threatened by crop destruction and armed displacement. In Plateau State, higher educational attainment

(51.8% tertiary) coincides with intense urban self-employment (37.5%), creating a volatile environment where educated, yet underemployed youth become susceptible to political mobilization.

Across the total sample (N = 2,879), young adults aged 26–30 form the single largest demographic block at 23.3%, while individuals aged 18–35 collectively account for 65.4% of all surveyed participants. The age distribution shows remarkable consistency across both states, with Benue recording 65.6% and Plateau recording 65.2% youth representation. In analytical terms, this variable establishes a prominent 'youth bulge' in North Central Nigeria, serving as a critical metric for assessing youth-specific socio-economic vulnerabilities, employment demands, civic engagement, and emigration inclination.

Male participants represent 58.1% of respondents, while female participants account for 41.9%. This ratio remains uniform across state boundaries (57.4% male in Benue vs. 58.8% in Plateau), reflecting field-enumeration access patterns in local household settings while providing a vital foundation for gender-disaggregated security analysis.

Across the study area, Christians constitute 69.4% and Muslims constitute 28.4% of respondents, but this variable highlights the sharpest structural divergence between the two states. Benue State is predominantly Christian (86.6% Christian vs. 10.5% Muslim), whereas Plateau State features a closely balanced multi-religious demographic (52.2% Christian vs. 46.2% Muslim). Within the survey framework, this variable is pivotal for measuring inter-faith social cohesion, tracking religious trust gaps, and explaining why localized civic disputes in Plateau quickly adopt religious dimensions compared to resource-driven disputes in Benue.

3.2 State, Religion & Indigene-Settler Identity Dynamics

Cross-tabulating religious affiliation with indigene/settler identity reveals deep historical and spatial fault lines across the North-Central region. While indigenous identity provides constitutional privileges and local socio-cultural dominance, settler classification perpetuates political disenfranchisement and spatial balkanization.

Table 3.2: State, Religion and Indigene-Settler Identity Cross-Tabulation

State	Religion	Indigene Rate	Settler Rate	Mixed Identity	Sample Size (N)
Benue State	Christian	80.70%	16.50%	2.00%	1,245
Benue State	Muslim	62.90%	25.80%	10.60%	151
Benue State	Traditional / Other	54.50%	18.20%	13.60%	22
Plateau State	Christian	77.80%	12.90%	8.60%	752
Plateau State	Muslim	53.50%	26.90%	16.50%	666
Plateau State	Traditional / Other	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	8

Key Quantitative Takeaway: In Plateau State, nearly a quarter of Muslim respondents (26.9%) self-identify as settlers, while 16.5% report a mixed indigene-settler heritage. In Benue State, Muslims represent a 10.5% minority, among whom 25.8% identify as settlers. Indigene identity aligns strongly with the dominant Christian demographics in both states (80.7% in Benue, 77.8%

in Plateau), while settler and mixed-identity statuses are markedly higher among Muslim and minority faith populations.

Figure 3.1: Conceptual Word Cloud on Spatial Balkanization & Identity Tension



Qualitative visualization highlighting recurring field concepts: 'Mono-Religious Enclaves', 'Indigene Certificate Exclusion', 'Voting Bank Exploitation', 'Physical Segregation', and 'Executive Identity Framing'.

3.2.1 Spatial Balkanization & Political Framing

Qualitative evidence demonstrates that executive political declarations and historical conflict cycles have transformed shared geographical settlements into physically balkanized religious enclaves.

> *"Way back then, if you went to communities, it was more of a collective settlement. But now, you see a particular religion living in a specific place... Where it used to be everybody together, now settlements are separated by religious divide."*
>
> **— KII Senior Religious Figure, Plateau State**

> *"When one of the former Governors [allegedly] declared Plateau a 'Christian state', it deepened religious politics... Residential living has become completely polarized — 'this is a Muslim area, this is a Christian area.' Even travelers passing through Plateau face extreme danger simply for passing through."*
>
> **— KII, Plateau State**

> *"Elected politicians abandon campaign promises and avoid constituents once in office. In Makurdi, non-indigenous ethnic groups vote massively, but after elections, politicians view them as visitors or disturbances and withhold democratic dividends."*
>
> **— KII, Makurdi-Benue State**

Theoretical Discussion: The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates that 'indigene' and 'settler' labels in Nigeria function as structural mechanisms of exclusion. The 26.9% settler identification among Plateau Muslims and 25.8% among Benue Muslims correlates directly with feeling politically voiceless and spatially unsafe.

Policy Framework: Actionable Implications: State Houses of Assembly in Benue and Plateau must enact legislative reforms granting equal residency rights and public service access to long-term residents (10+ years), decoupling basic citizenship rights from ancestral indigene certificates.

3.2.2 Sense of Belonging, Identity Tension & National Governance Evaluation

The quantitative survey measures civic alienation, tension between ethnic and national identity, and public evaluation of Nigeria's current governance.

Table 3.3: Identity, Sense of Belonging, and National State Ranking

Survey Statement / Item	Response Level	Benue	Plateau	Total
Feel Fully Belong in Nigeria	Completely (5)	58.10%	49.30%	53.70%
	Mostly (4)	19.10%	29.80%	24.50%
	Moderately / Low (1–3)	22.80%	20.90%	21.80%
Accepted in Community of Residence	Completely (5)	60.60%	44.00%	52.30%
	Mostly (4)	17.60%	35.40%	26.50%
	Moderately / Low (1–3)	21.80%	20.60%	21.20%
Tension Between Ethnic & Nigerian Identity	Yes	21.10%	36.60%	28.90%
	No	78.90%	63.40%	71.10%
Evaluation of Current State of Nigeria	Very Poor	35.60%	43.00%	39.30%
	Poor	24.90%	34.80%	29.90%
	Average	21.80%	15.30%	18.50%
	Good / Excellent	17.70%	7.00%	12.30%

The empirical data uncovers a striking psychological paradox in North Central Nigeria: while aspirational national loyalty remains resilient, localized identity friction actively erodes daily civic cohesion. Over three-quarters of respondents affirm a strong sense of national belonging, with 78.2% feeling completely or mostly Nigerian, and high community acceptance (78.8%). However, this overarching patriotic sentiment masks deep sub-surface fractures, particularly in Plateau State, where complete community acceptance falters at just 44.0%, and an alarming 36.6% of respondents experience acute tension between their ethnic identity and Nigerian nationhood. This contrast demonstrates that while national identity persists as a unifying ideal, localized ethno-religious polarization continuously destabilizes daily social integration and community trust.

Compounding this identity friction is an overwhelming crisis of civic disillusionment, as citizens across both states voice profound dissatisfaction with the country's governance and socio-economic trajectory. A staggering 69.2% of respondents evaluate the current state of Nigeria negatively as either "Poor" (29.9%) or "Very Poor" (39.3%), reflecting deep-seated frustration with persistent insecurity, economic hardship, and institutional failure. Discontent reaches a boiling point in Plateau State, where combined negative evaluations surge to 77.8%, leaving a meager 7.0% of residents holding a positive outlook on the nation's condition. Such widespread dissatisfaction highlights how state fragility risks fracturing national unity, pushing citizens away from the state and toward defensive ethno-religious enclaves for security and survival.

Ultimately, the findings reveal a stark sub-regional divergence between Benue and Plateau states, showing that neighboring territories navigate conflict and state-society relations through vastly different socio-political realities. Benue State maintains a higher baseline of social anchoring, marked by stronger complete community acceptance (60.6%), lower ethnic-national identity

tension (21.1%), and more than double Plateau's positive national evaluation rate (17.7%). In contrast, Plateau State emerges as an epicenter of structural strain, burdened by spatial segregation, intense identity friction, and deep civic alienation. Restoring stability to North Central Nigeria therefore requires policy interventions that move beyond blanket regional solutions to address the distinct identity frictions and governance deficits unique to each state

Key Quantitative Takeaway: Over three-quarters of Plateau respondents (77.8%) and 60.5% of Benue respondents rate the current state of Nigeria as 'Poor' or 'Very Poor'. In Plateau State, 36.6% experience active tension between their ethnic identity and Nigerian citizenship, compared to 21.1% in Benue.

3.2.3 IDP Ruin & Performative State Response

Qualitative focus groups in displacement settlements illustrate that negative governance evaluations stem directly from physical insecurity, economic collapse, and unfulfilled government promises.

> *"Our livelihood has been destroyed, we don't have shelter, no food to eat and we are just suffering, we want people to come to our aid."*
>
> **— Female Displaced Farmer, FGD 1 (Agan Settlement, Benue State)**

> *"Our government operates a 'tokenistic' framework — talking the talk without walking the talk. Academic blueprints and research reports generated by universities end up shelved... In Turkey, people talk briefly and focus entirely on execution; in Nigeria, we talk 1,000 times and nothing changes."*
>
> **— KII Civil Society Expert, Jos, Plateau State**

3.3 Institutional Trust Profiles & Protection Actors

Public trust across 12 federal, state, and informal institutions demonstrates a profound divide between grassroots authority figures and formal state enforcement bodies (Table 3.4).
Table 3.4: Trust on State and Non-State Institution

Table 3.4 illustrates a pronounced structural deficit in institutional trust across Benue and Plateau states, characterized by a sharp dichotomy between highly trusted informal/community entities and deeply distrusted formal state institutions. At the top of the spectrum, non-state and moral authority figures command the highest public confidence, led by Religious Leaders (Mean of 3.70; high trust at 63.80% in Benue and 57.10% in Plateau) and Traditional/Community Leaders (Mean of 3.32), followed by community-level Vigilante/Security Groups (3.19) and Civil Society Organisations (3.02).

Conversely, formal federal and democratic organs occupy the bottom of the scale, shaded in deep red to signify critical trust deficits. Electoral and legislative bodies rank lowest of all, with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recording a overall law (mean of 2.14) and high trust by 10% in Plateau and 12.60% in Benue, followed by the National Assembly (mean of 2.35), the Federal Government/Presidency (2.51), and the Judiciary (2.62). Even formal security agencies such as the Nigerian Military (2.75) and Police Force (2.71), fail to reach a neutral threshold score of 3.00, demonstrating that citizens overwhelmingly rely on local, informal governance structures rather than national institutions for security, justice, and societal leadership.

Table 3.4: Trust in State and Non-State Institutions Across Evaluated Sectors

Institution / Entity	Benue High	Plateau High	Benue Mean	Plateau Mean	Overall Mean
Religious Leaders	63.80%	57.10%	3.82	3.58	3.7
Traditional / Community Leaders	50.20%	38.60%	3.48	3.17	3.32
Vigilante / Security Groups	44.50%	34.20%	3.29	3.09	3.19
Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)	35.60%	28.80%	3.08	2.97	3.02
State Government	38.10%	29.90%	3.12	2.8	2.96
The Media	24.60%	19.90%	2.86	2.72	2.79
Nigerian Military	29.80%	24.10%	2.76	2.74	2.75
Nigeria Police Force	28.50%	24.20%	2.73	2.7	2.71
The Judiciary / Courts	17.90%	13.60%	2.65	2.6	2.62
Federal Government / Presidency	18.20%	13.90%	2.58	2.44	2.51
National Assembly	15.30%	11.80%	2.38	2.32	2.35
INEC	12.60%	9.60%	2.21	2.08	2.14

A comparison between the two states reveals that Plateau State suffers from a consistently more severe erosion of institutional trust across the category measures Across all 12 entities, Benue State records higher mean scores and greater proportions of "High" trust responses than Plateau State. For instance, high trust in State Government stands at 38.10% in Benue (Mean: 3.12) compared to just 29.90% in Plateau (Mean: 2.80), while high trust in traditional leadership drops from 50.20% in Benue to 38.60% in Plateau. This cross-state gap underscores Plateau's acute civic alienation and deeper institutional weariness, driven by decades of recurring ethno-religious conflict, spatial segregation, and perceived political exclusion. The overall findings highlight an urgent governance crisis: while local socio-religious structures serve as the primary anchors of community resilience, public confidence in democratic institutions and the federal state has eroded to critically low levels.

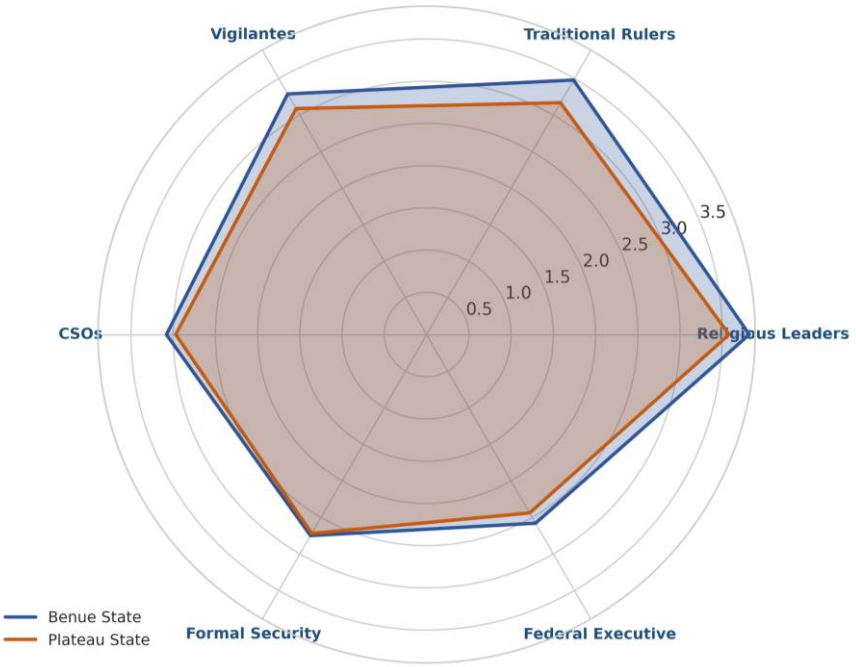


Figure 3.2: Institutional Trust Radar Asymmetry: Grassroots vs. Formal State

Radar chart illustrating extreme public confidence in Religious Leaders (Mean 3.70) and Traditional Rulers (3.32), juxtaposed against structural trust collapse in Electoral Organ INEC (2.14), Federal Executive (2.51), and Police (2.71).

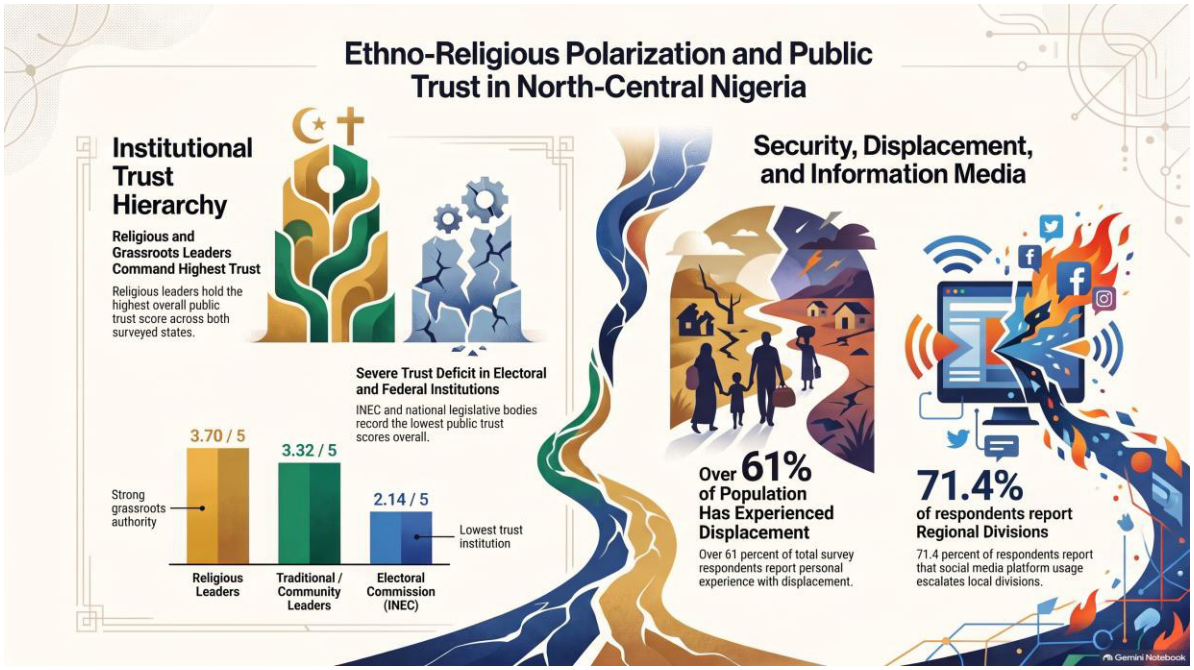


Figure 3.3: Ethno-Religious Polarization and Public Trust

3.3.1 Operational Extortion & Tactical Failure

Focus group discussions in Benue explain the low trust scores assigned to formal security forces, citing direct extortion and financial exploitation.

> *"When security personnel (army, and DSS) came, they arrested our people and 200,000 Naira was paid per head before they were released. And sometimes we organize and protect in Agan here before we sleep."*
>
> **— Displaced Respondent, FGD 1 (Agan Settlement, Benue State)**

> *"Government will bring security personnel and dump them here without taking proper care of them. The enemy will then start to use money to make them work for their interest... corruption is one thing that is fueling this crisis."*
>
> **— Displaced Respondent, FGD 2 (Daudu Settlement, Benue State)**

Tactical Constraints: A security person interviewee provides tactical context, noting that Benue's hinterland features mountainous, rugged terrain where security forces face constant ambush risks. He recommends deploying modern technology including coordinate-guided drones and constructing rural access roads.

Institutional Synthesis: The trust hierarchy reveals a fundamental structural mismatch: the institutions with the highest legal authority and weaponry (Military, Police, Federal Executive) possess the lowest public legitimacy, while those with minimal formal state budgets (Religious & Traditional Leaders) hold the highest moral authority.

Reform Roadmap: Actionable Implications: Security agencies must establish transparent anti-corruption oversight mechanisms to eliminate field extortion. Formal security sector reform should integrate traditional and religious leaders into localized hybrid security committees, combining formal enforcement with grassroots legitimacy.

3.4 Security Experiences, Insecurity & Drivers of Conflict

3.4.1 Community Safety & Displacement Data

Quantitative safety metrics demonstrate pervasive insecurity and widespread displacement exposure across both states.

Table 3.5: Community Safety Perception & Displacement Exposure History

Security Dimension	Category / Option	Benue	Plateau	Total
Community Safety Perception	Very Safe	13.80%	19.20%	16.50%
	Somewhat Safe	34.40%	30.20%	32.30%
	Neutral	11.50%	10.50%	11.00%
	Somewhat Unsafe	23.10%	13.60%	18.40%
	Very Unsafe	17.20%	26.60%	21.90%
Displacement Experience	Never Displaced	38.80%	38.50%	38.60%
	Currently Displaced	26.30%	8.90%	17.60%
	Displaced > 1 Year	14.00%	10.10%	12.00%
	Displaced 1–12 Months	9.00%	13.00%	11.00%
	Displaced < 1 Month	3.90%	18.00%	11.00%

Table 3.5 highlights a severe, widespread human security and displacement crisis across the region, where 61.40% of all respondents have experienced conflict-induced displacement at least once in their lives (leaving only 38.60% who have never been displaced) and 40.30% feel unsafe in their local communities. While aggregate safety perceptions appear almost identical between the two states, a deeper look at the granular breakdown reveals contrasting security dynamics. In Plateau State, fear is heavily polarized and acute, with 26.60% rating their community as "Very Unsafe", compared to 17.20% in Benue. Benue State respondents report a higher concentration in the "Somewhat Unsafe" category (23.10% vs. 13.60% in Plateau), reflecting pervasive, lingering insecurity tied to rural agrarian conflicts and land disputes.

The displacement metric further uncovers two distinct structural conflict profiles: a chronic, protracted displacement crisis in Benue State versus acute, volatile displacement shocks in Plateau State. In Benue, more than 1 in 4 residents (26.30%) are currently displaced from their homes, and an additional 14.00% were displaced for over a year, pointing to long-term Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camp settlements and persistent farmland loss. In contrast, Plateau State records a much lower current displacement rate (8.90%), but a massive 18.00% experienced recent displacement within the last month (compared to just 3.90% in Benue). This sharp spike in recent displacement in Plateau illustrates sudden ethno-religious flare-ups and rapid community evacuations. Consequently, policy responses must be tailored differently: Benue requires long-term IDP camp decongestion, land access recovery, and rural economic rehabilitation, whereas Plateau requires rapid-response conflict de-escalation, inter-faith dialogue, and localized security policing

Key Quantitative Takeaway: A total of 40.3% of Benue respondents and 40.2% of Plateau respondents evaluate their communities as 'Unsafe' or 'Very Unsafe'. Across the entire sample, 61.4% have experienced conflict-induced displacement, with 26.3% currently displaced in Benue State.

The research identifies hotspot, temporal dimension and type of the conflict (Table 3.6). Across 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue and Plateau States, conflict dynamics range across Critical (High), High, Medium-High, and Medium threat levels, driven by competing land use, ethnic rivalries, and organized criminal activity. In Benue State, Guma and Gwer West represent the most acute security risks (Critical High), where intense farmer–herder clashes, village raids, and transit ambushes peak during dry-season pastoral migration (November–March) and rainy-season crop maturation (June–August). Other key Benue LGAs—such as Agatu, Logo, Ukum, and Katsina-Ala—face sustained High threat levels from rural settlement attacks, forced displacement, and local militia banditry, while peri-urban zones like Makurdi and riverine areas like Buruku experience seasonal friction over boundary encroachments and grazing access.

In Plateau State, Critical High vulnerabilities are concentrated in Mangu, Bokkos, and Bassa, where inter-communal clashes, nocturnal village raids, and retaliatory violence spike during the farming season (May–September) and transhumance periods. Rural Plateau LGAs including Barkin Ladi, Riyom, Wase, and Kanam experience persistent High to Medium-High risks tied to cattle rustling, land tenure disputes, illegal mining, and seasonal bandit incursions. Meanwhile, urban hubs such as Jos North and Jos South display trigger-based ethno-religious volatility tied to political events, illustrating a dual regional conflict profile: seasonal agrarian-pastoral warfare in rural agricultural belts and trigger-sensitive identity clashes in urban centers.

At a broader structural level, the geographical concentration of these hotspots across Benue and Plateau highlights how localized resource competition intersects with wider governance deficits, economic disruption, and humanitarian strain. The severity of threats in major agricultural hubs—such as Guma, Gwer West, Mangu, Bokkos, and Bassa—directly undermines regional food security and drives mass internal displacement across North Central Nigeria. Furthermore, the interplay between predictable seasonal agricultural dynamics (November–March transhumance and May–September cultivation) and trigger-based urban volatility (e.g., Jos North) demonstrates that peacebuilding and security responses must be multi-pronged. Sustainable mitigation requires proactive early-warning mechanisms timed to seasonal migration corridors, community-based dispute resolution, formal grazing and land management frameworks, and strengthened law enforcement presence in high-risk rural axes.

Table 3.6: Spatio-temporal Distribution of the Conflict

State	LGA	Primary Hotspot Communities / Axes	Dominant Conflict Type	Threat / Vulnerability Level	Peak Seasonal Vulnerability
Benue	Guma	Tse-Anekpa, Gbajimba, Yelwata, Umenger, Udeni	Farmer–Herder Clashes & Village Raids	Critical (High)	Nov – Feb & Jun – Aug
	Gwer West	Naka, Agagbe, Tse-Sugh, Bunaka, Sengev	Transit Ambushes & Herder Attacks	Critical (High)	Nov – Mar
	Agatu	Egba, Okokolo, Ayila, Ologba, Aila	Communal Land & Pastoral Clashes	High	Dec – Mar
	Logo	Anyiin, Ayilamo, Chembe, Ukembegyev	Rural Village Raids & Forced Displacement	High	Nov – Feb
	Ukum	Zaki-Biam, Kyado, Borikyo, Sankera axis	Herder Clashes & Local Militia/Banditry	High	Year-round (Peak: Dec-Feb)
	Makurdi	Agan, Fiidi, Mbamar, Modern Market axis	Peri-urban Land Disputes & Herder Incursions	Medium-High	Nov – Jan
	Gwer East	Ikpayongo, Aliade, Mbakpa, Mase	Communal Boundary & Farm Clashes	Medium	Mar – May (Planting)
	Katsina-Ala	Katsina-Ala town, Yooyo, Utange	Banditry, Targeted Attacks & Grazing Clashes	High	Year-round
	Buruku	Tyowanye, Binev, Mbaatyo	Riverine Grazing Friction & Farm Damage	Medium-High	Dec – Feb
Plateau	Mangu	Mangu Town, Sabon Gari, Mangun, Bungha, Halle	Inter-communal Clashes & Village Attacks	Critical (High)	May – Sep (Farming Season)
	Bokkos	Bokkos rural, Mushere, Daffo, Sha, Hurti	Farmer–Herder Clashes & Night Raids	Critical (High)	Nov – Feb & Planting
	Bassa	Kwall, Miango, Jebbu Miango, Irigwe axis	Ethnic Violence & Herder Clashes	Critical (High)	Year-round (Peak: Planting)
	Barkin Ladi	Heipang, Ropp, Kuru, Fan, Foron	Cattle Rustling, Land Occupation & Raids	High	Nov – Mar
	Riyom	Jol, Bachit, Rim, Bachi	Herder-Farmer Clashes & Boundary Disputes	High	Nov – Feb
	Jos North	Dutse Uku, Nassarawa Gwong, Gangare, Ali Kazaure	Urban Ethno-Religious Riots & Tensions	High	Trigger-based (Elections/Incidents)
	Jos South	Bukuru, Gyel, Kuru, Zawan	Communal Clashes & Targeted Attacks	Medium-High	Trigger-based
	Wase	Wase Town, Bashar, Kadarko, Saluwe	Illegal Mining Clashes & Banditry	High	Year-round
	Kanam	Dengi, Kantana, Garga	Banditry Incursions & Kidnapping	Medium-High	Nov – Feb

Based on the qualitative results election period, particularly in Plateau State is associate with conflict and tension as can be observed in Figure 3.3

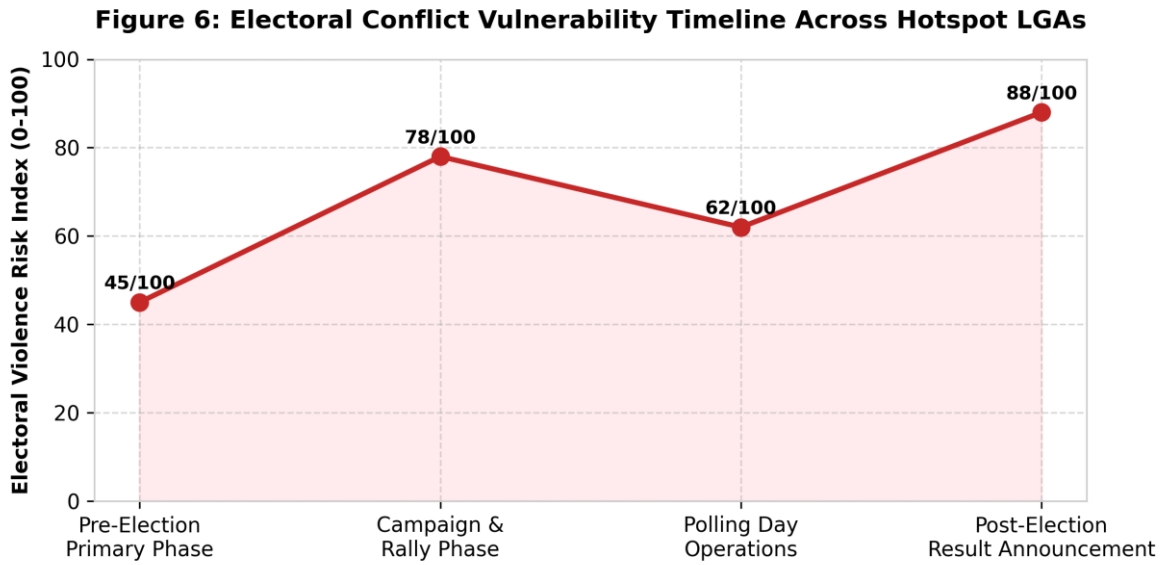


Figure 3.3: Electoral Conflict Vulnerability Timeline Across Hotspot LGAs

Figure 3.3 portrays electoral Violence Risk Index (0–100) across four sequential phases of the election cycle in high-risk Local Government Areas (LGAs). The timeline shows that electoral conflict vulnerability follows a double-peak pattern, starting at a baseline during party primaries, surging during public campaigns, dipping on voting day due to security presence, and reaching its highest threat level during post-election result announcements

This has been aptly captured by a religion capture by a religious figure Plateau State where he states that:

> *"It is during the crisis that they will use money and tell you security vote. It is during the crisis that also the boys too in the crisis are also getting money. So once there is no crisis, they will not release money. So, there must be a crisis.*
>
> **— KII, Religious Leader, Plateau State**

3.4.2 Unpacking Three Distinct Conflict Drivers

Figure 3.3 is qualitative evidence revealing three distinct primary conflict drivers operating across the region.

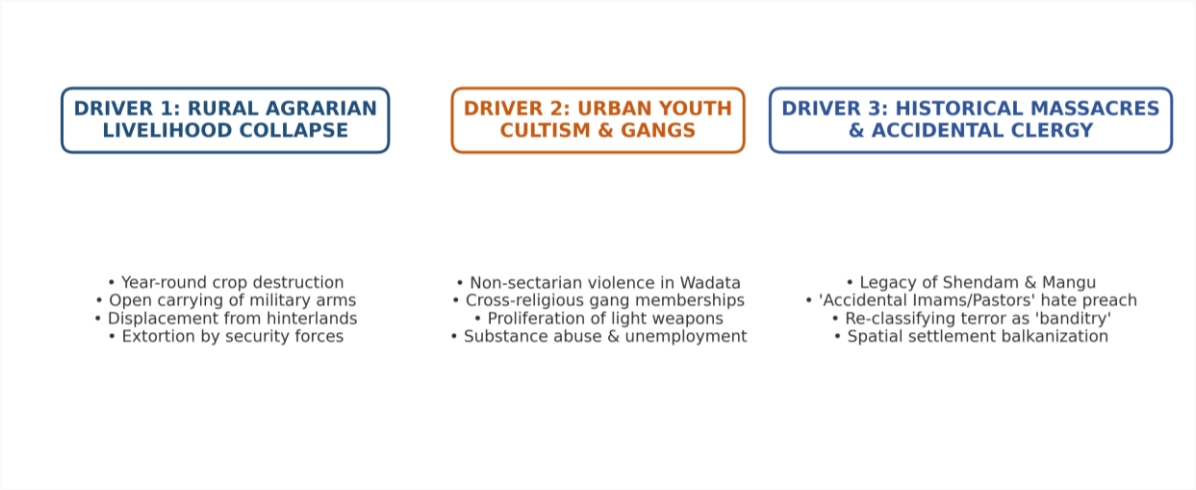


Figure 3.4: Triangulated Conflict Drivers Matrix Across Benue & Plateau States

Analytical matrix mapping three distinct conflict typologies: Rural Agrarian Land Occupation (Benue Hinterlands), Urban Violent Youth Cultism (Makurdi Wadata), and Sectarian History & Misclassified Terror/Banditry (Plateau State).

Driver 1: Rural Agrarian Livelihood Collapse & Armed Occupation (Benue Hinterlands). Displaced farmers in Daudu note that herder-farmer interactions transformed from seasonal grazing into permanent armed occupation of rural farming hinterlands.

> *"Before now, we did not see this kind of behavior, the herders use to come here during dry season and when it was raining season, they will all go back for us to farm, but now, they stay here all year-round destroying crops and killing people."*
>
> **— Participant, FGD 2 (Daudu Settlement, Benue State)**

Driver 2: Urban Violent Youth Cultism (Makurdi Urban). In urban Makurdi, respondents emphasize that inter-group violence is non-sectarian and driven entirely by armed youth cult groups spanning religious lines.

> *"I have lived in this community for more than 30 years but the major problem here is cultism, we don't have religious or ethnic issues here... both the Christian and Muslim can be in the same cult group and kill each other."*
>
> **— Participant, FGD 3 (Wadata Settlement, Makurdi)**

Driver 3: Historical Sectarian Massacres & Misclassified Threats (Plateau State). Institutional experts critique government re-classification of existential ethno-religious attacks as generic 'banditry'.

> *"Government classification of conflicts in the North Central area is out of step with current trends. Terms like 'unknown gunmen', 'bandits', 'armed herders' misdiagnose existential threats... Indications point to religious violence, yet government classifies it as 'banditry'. Faulty classification leads to ineffective response mechanisms."*
>
> **— KII Peacebuilding Expert, Jos, Plateau State**

Conflict Synthesis: Misdiagnosing conflict drivers severely undermines peacebuilding efforts. Treating agrarian land displacement in Benue, youth cultism in urban Wadata, and historical sectarian massacres in Plateau as identical 'banditry' leads to ineffective, blanket security responses. **Policy Framework:** Actionable Implications: Federal security authorities must adopt localized threat classification systems. Benue hinterlands require dedicated agrarian protection units; urban centers need anti-cultism youth rehabilitation schemes; and Plateau State requires strict regulatory oversight of religious preaching to curb extremist clergy.

3.5 Social Cohesion, Inter-Group Trust & Integration

3.5.1 Social Cohesion Metrics

Quantitative social cohesion indicators highlight significant inter-group distance, particularly regarding inter-religious marriage.

Table 3.7: Social Trust, Ethnic Integration, and Inter-Religious Marriage Comfort

Social Indicator / Item	Response Category	Benue	Plateau	Total
Trust People of Different Religion	High / Full Trust	15.00%	25.90%	20.50%
	Moderate Trust	42.10%	41.60%	41.90%
	Low / No Trust	42.70%	32.40%	37.60%
Trust People of Different Ethnicity	High / Full Trust	19.40%	29.70%	24.60%
	Moderate Trust	46.50%	52.40%	49.50%
	Low / No Trust	34.10%	17.90%	26.00%
Comfort Marrying Different Ethnicity	Comfortable	65.40%	69.30%	67.40%
	Uncomfortable	24.40%	15.00%	19.70%
Comfort Marrying Different Religion	Comfortable	38.90%	25.10%	32.00%
	Uncomfortable	48.70%	61.70%	55.20%

The survey result reveals a fundamental structural dichotomy in North Central Nigeria: while ethnicity acts as a bridgeable social boundary, religion functions as an inflexible identity line. Across both states, respondents demonstrate high openness to ethnic integration, with 67.40% comfortable with inter-ethnic marriage and 74.10% expressing moderate-to-high trust in other ethnic groups. Conversely, inter-religious dynamics are defined by deep social distance; 55.20% of respondents reject inter-religious marriage, and 37.60% report low or no trust in individuals of different faiths. This sharp contrast indicates that civic life and economic interactions readily cross ethnic divides, but religious identity strictly governs intimate personal relationships, community alignment, and existential security perceptions.

Comparative analysis between the two states highlights distinct socio-political dynamics that demand localized intervention strategies. Plateau State exhibits an acute sectarian paradox: it records strong inter-ethnic cohesion (with low inter-ethnic distrust at just 17.90%) alongside the highest resistance to inter-religious integration (61.70% uncomfortable with inter-faith marriage), reflecting decades of recurrent faith-based conflict in urban centers like Jos. Benue State, by contrast, displays higher generalized religious mistrust (42.70% low trust) alongside double the inter-ethnic friction of Plateau (34.10% low trust), driven by resource-based agrarian disputes that simultaneously inflame ethnic and religious identities.

Key Quantitative Takeaway: Over half of respondents overall (55.2%), reaching 61.7% in Plateau State, express discomfort with inter-religious marriage, whereas 67.4% are comfortable with inter-ethnic marriage.

3.5.2 Trauma, Psychosocial Interventions & Interfaith Defense

Qualitative evidence shows that unaddressed psychological trauma solidifies inter-group hostility, while structured civil society interventions demonstrate pathways for trust restoration.

> *"Youth join communal conflict due to deep-seated bitterness, trauma, and stigma from past attacks... Trauma acts as a mental trigger where youth view conflict as a coping mechanism."*
>
> **— KII Psychologist, Makurdi**

> *"We finished an intervention on psychosocial therapy for children affected by conflict in Riyom and Barkin Ladi... These children became friendly across the two divides. During Christmas, children visited friends across religious lines whom they previously feared."*
>
> **— KII Plateau Peace Practitioners Network (PPPN)**

> *"Born and raised in Benue, we live as one family in Wadata. I have Christian brothers living in my house under my care... In Wadata, we protect everyone and do not allow outsiders to instigate crisis."*
>
> **—Islamic Cleric, Wadata**

Taken together, the three quotations reveal that countering ethno-religious polarisation requires an integrated approach that combines psychological healing, early intervention among children and young people, and the strengthening of community relationships. While unresolved trauma and historical grievances can deepen hostility and encourage retaliatory attitudes, psychosocial interventions can help restore trust and reduce fear, while inclusive community leadership can reinforce solidarity and discourage the manipulation of ethnic and religious differences. The findings therefore suggest that peacebuilding initiatives in Benue and Plateau States should extend beyond immediate security responses and conflict mediation to include trauma-informed psychosocial support, intergroup activities for children and youth, community dialogue, and the active involvement of religious and traditional leaders. These measures should also be accompanied by efforts to address the underlying causes of conflict, including perceived injustice, insecurity, and unresolved grievances. Ultimately, sustainable peace depends not only on preventing violence but also on creating conditions in which individuals and communities can recover from past experiences, rebuild relationships, and develop a shared commitment to peaceful coexistence.

3.6 Media, Information Channels & Social Media Dynamics

3.6.1 Media Consumption & Hate Speech Dataset

News consumption data underscores the dominant role of legacy radio and digital platforms in shaping public perceptions.

Table 3.8: Primary Information Channels & Social Media Hate Speech Exposure

Media & Information Dimension	Category / Platform	Benue	Plateau	Total
Primary News Source	Radio	64.20%	58.10%	61.20%
	TV (Channels, NTA, AIT)	42.10%	51.30%	46.70%
	Facebook	48.50%	52.40%	50.50%
	WhatsApp Groups	35.20%	41.00%	38.10%
	Friends / Family	38.90%	31.20%	35.10%
	TikTok	12.40%	18.60%	15.50%
	X (Twitter)	9.10%	14.20%	11.70%
Media Portrayal Fairness	Mainstream Media Fair to NC	31.40%	24.80%	28.10%
Social Media Division Impact	Social media Made Division Worse	68.50%	74.20%	71.40%
Encountered Hate Speech	Religious Hate Speech (Often)	38.50%	58.10%	48.30%
Encountered Misinformation	Farmer-Herder Misinfo (Often)	45.10%	51.20%	48.20%

Radio remains the dominant news source across North Central Nigeria (61.20%), driven by strong rural dependence in Benue State (64.20%), while social platforms, led by Facebook (50.50%) and WhatsApp (38.10%) have outpaced traditional television (46.70%) in overall audience reach. Media consumption patterns highlight a key regional disparity: Plateau State exhibits higher overall digital and visual engagement, with Facebook (52.40%) and TV (51.30%) outperforming radio, whereas Benue relies more heavily on traditional radio broadcasts and informal word-of-mouth networks among family and friends (38.90%).

Public trust in mainstream national media is critically low across both states, with only 28.10% of respondents believing national reporting treats the region fairly, creating an information vacuum that amplifies digital polarization. A vast majority (71.40%) reports that social media has deepened socio-political divisions, driven by high exposure to farmer-herder misinformation (48.20%) and widespread religious hate speech—a issue particularly severe in Plateau State (58.10% compared to 38.50% in Benue).

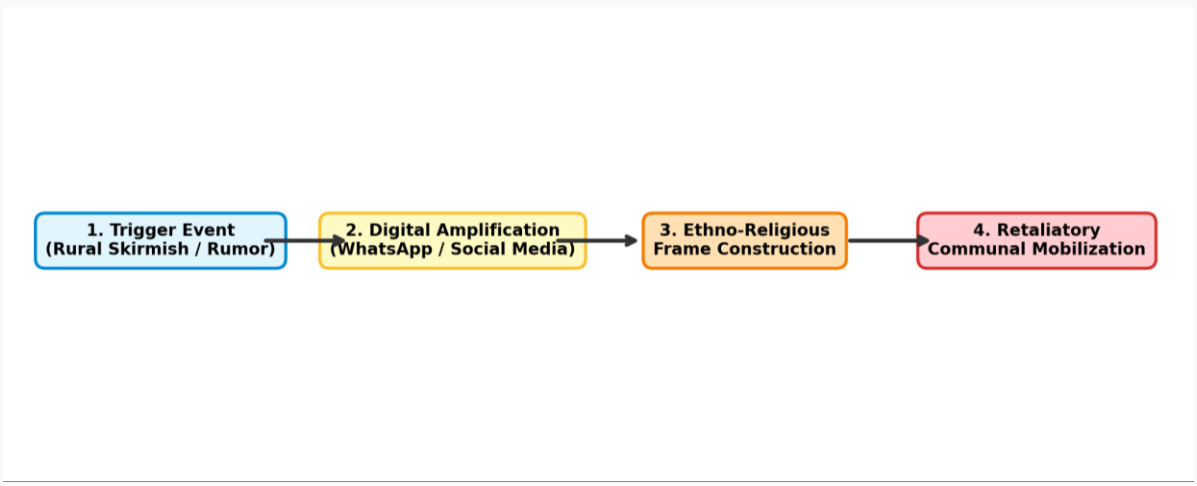


Figure 3.5: Information Ecosystem & Digital Escalation Risks Diagram

Flowchart illustrating how unverified local incidents transition into viral social media hate speech, cross-border rumor generation, and physical retaliatory attacks.

Digital communication technologies have reshaped conflict dynamics in North-Central Nigeria. Unverified social media posts, manipulated images, and incendiary voice notes shared on instant messaging platforms directly catalyze physical retaliatory attacks.

Table 3.9: Channels of Misinformation Dissemination & Conflict Impact Frequency

Digital Platform / Medium	Primary Content Disseminated	Estimated Impact on Violence Escalation	Frequency of Misinformation
WhatsApp Closed Groups	Incendiary Voice Notes & Fake Alerts	Very High (Primary Vector)	Daily / Real-Time
Facebook Pages & Posts	Manipulated Images & Ethno-religious Rumors	High	Continuous
TikTok & Short Videos	Hate Songs & Provocative Clips	Moderate to High	Increasing
Radio & Local FM Stations	Partisan Political Speeches	Moderate	Periodic

Table 3.9 highlights the potential role of both digital and traditional communication channels in spreading misinformation and reinforcing ethno-religious polarisation in the region. WhatsApp closed groups appear particularly important in the reported information environment because voice notes, fabricated security alerts and unverified accounts of attacks can circulate rapidly among members of trusted social networks. Such messages may generate fear, provoke retaliatory reactions and encourage individuals to act before the information has been independently verified. Facebook can further amplify these narratives by making inflammatory content accessible to wider audiences, while manipulated images and rumours may reinforce existing stereotypes and deepen mistrust between communities.

The increasing use of TikTok and other short-video platforms presents an additional concern because emotionally charged videos, hate songs and decontextualised footage can communicate provocative messages quickly and in easily shareable formats. Where such content portrays one

ethnic or religious group as a threat to another, it may strengthen hostile perceptions, particularly among young people already exposed to conflict-related grievances. Traditional media, including local radio stations, also influence public perceptions through political commentary and reports of security incidents. Although their potential impact depends on editorial practices and audience reach, partisan or inadequately verified broadcasts may reinforce existing divisions. As noted by one of the participants.

> *"A single viral voice notes on WhatsApp claiming that a community is being invaded can mobilize hundreds of armed youths within 30 minutes, even if the rumor is entirely fabricated."*
>
> **— KII Informant — Youth Civil Society Leader, Jos**

3.6.2 Smartphone Journalists & Cross-Border Misinformation

Qualitative interviews with local media practitioners trace how unverified digital content escalates offline violence.

> *"In rural areas, information spreads through market squares, beer parlours, church groups, and traditional town criers... On social media, many in Benue believe owning a phone makes them a journalist without training, competing to post unverified claims first."*
>
> **— Ukan Kurugh, Online Journalist & Media Consultant, Makurdi**

> *"For example, in Otukpo LGA, after two Fulani elders were killed... posts originated from Sokoto, Borno, and Zamfara claiming Tiv and Idoma declared outright war, escalating tensions before security intervened."*
>
> **— Ukan Kurugh, Media Consultant, Benue State**

3.7 Future Outlook, Emigration ('Japa') & Actionable Policy Framework

3.7.1 Emigration Propensity & Hope Data

Quantitative survey projections indicate a strong emigration drive alongside lingering hope in youth-led community transformation.

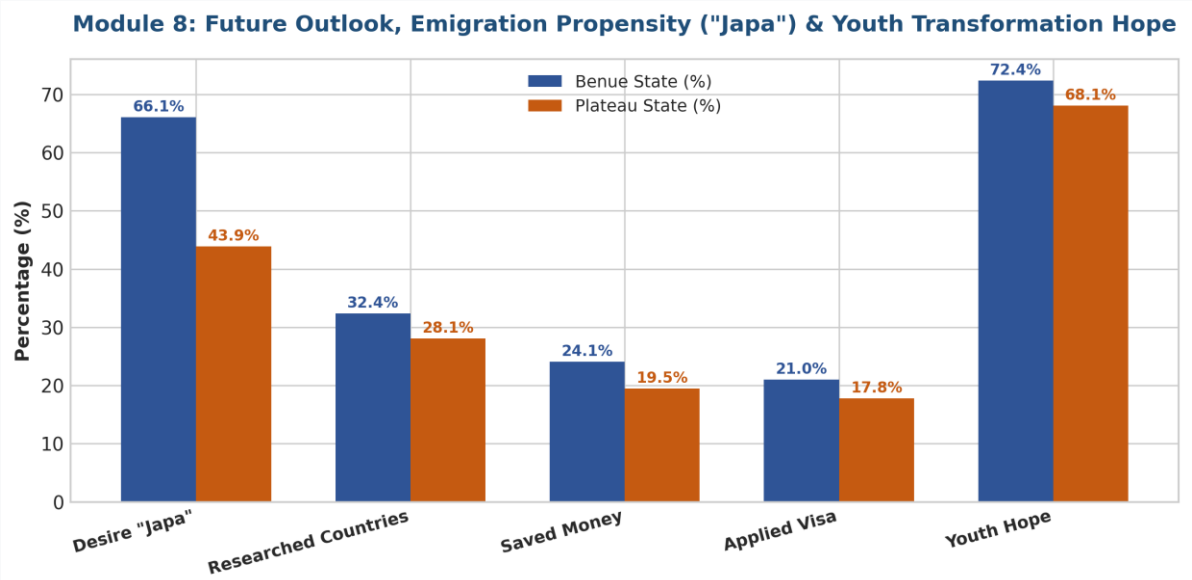


Figure 3.6: Emigration Propensity ('Japa') & Hope in Youth Transformation Chart

Bar chart contrasting high permanent emigration intent (55.0% total; 66.1% Benue) against strong resilient hope in youth-led community transformation (70.3% total).

The survey data reveals a pronounced desire for permanent emigration across North Central Nigeria, with 55.0% of respondents expressing an intent to relocate abroad—a sentiment significantly more acute in Benue State (66.1%) than in Plateau State (43.9%). This high ambition translates into operational steps for a substantial segment of the population: nearly a third (30.3%) have actively researched destination countries, 21.8% have begun saving money, and nearly one in five (19.4%) have applied for passports or visas. However, a notable gap between desire and execution remains, as 38.0% of total respondents (reaching 44.8% in Plateau) have taken no practical steps toward leaving, underscoring severe financial and logistical barriers that constrain mobility despite strong push factors. The markedly higher desire and active mobilization in Benue point to severe localized socio-economic strain and security fatigue, driving citizens to view international exit ("japa") as their primary path to security and economic advancement.

A compelling sociological paradox emerges when comparing emigration intent with community outlook: robust faith in demographic potential coexists alongside deep skepticism toward structural peacebuilding. An overwhelming majority of respondents (70.3% total; 72.4% in Benue and 68.1% in Plateau) remain hopeful that local youth will transform their communities, indicating that social capital and generational agency remain resilient. Conversely, optimism declines sharply regarding systemic conflict mitigation, with fewer than half believing general tensions will ease (48.9%) and only 43.9% expressing hope for a resolution to farmer-herder conflicts—a figure that drops to 39.2% in Plateau. This stark divergence indicates that while citizens retain strong confidence in grassroots civic potential, chronic disillusionment with formal security frameworks and institutional conflict resolution directly feeds the impetus to emigrate.

Key Quantitative Takeaway: A majority of respondents (55.0% total, reaching 66.1% in Benue State) express a desire to permanently relocate abroad ('Japa'). However, 70.3% retain faith that youth leadership can transform local communities.

3.7.2 Actionable 5-Step Peacebuilding Roadmap

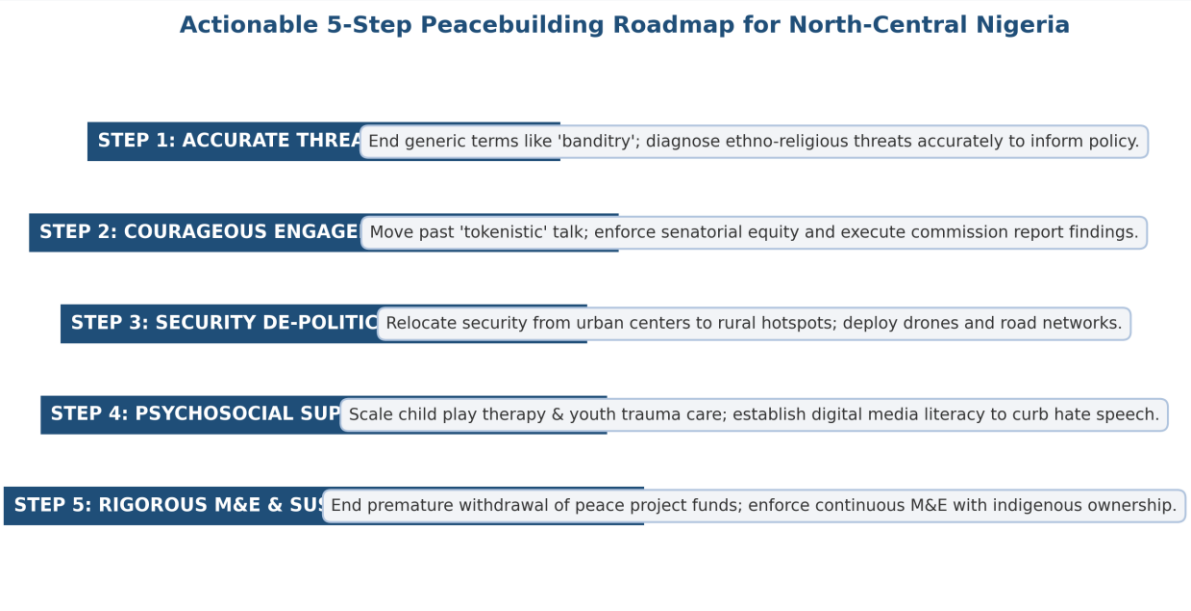


Figure 3.7: Actionable 5-Step Peacebuilding Action Framework Roadmap

Step-by-step strategic roadmap: Step 1: Threat Classification; Step 2: Courageous Engagement; Step 3: Security De-Politicization & Drone Surveillance; Step 4: Psychosocial Therapy & Media Literacy; Step 5: Sustained Multi-Year Funding & M&E.

Strategic Framework: Synthesizing empirical quantitative survey data with expert qualitative recommendations (Sheikh Prof. Khalid, Dr. Kwaghchimin, Nanakali, Ukan Kurugh, Dr. Chaihemba), this chapter articulates a 5-step strategic roadmap:

Step 1: Accurate Threat Classification & Research-Grounded Policy: State and federal security organs must eliminate generic terms ('banditry') that misdiagnose ethno-religious violence, utilizing evidence-based research reports to inform executive decisions.

Step 2: Courageous Engagement & Political Will: Executive leadership must move past performative talk shops. Governors must enforce senatorial equity and implement historical commission recommendations.

Step 3: Security De-Politicization & Operational Reform: Security agencies must station personnel directly in rural farming hotspots rather than safe urban centers, construct access roads, deploy surveillance drones, and eliminate extortion.

Step 4: Institutionalization of Youth Psychosocial Support & Media Literacy: Governments and CSOs must scale proven child play therapy models and youth trauma care, while conducting digital media literacy training.

Step 5: Rigorous Monitoring & Evaluation and Sustained Funding: Peacebuilding projects must transition away from short-term donor cycles, enforcing continuous M&E frameworks that ensure long-term community ownership.

CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Introduction & Contextual Framework

This chapter synthesizes the core empirical findings to articulate their strategic, political, security, and psychological implications. It concludes with a diagnostic assessment of civic cohesion in the North-Central zone and presents an actionable, multi-stakeholder roadmap for institutional reform, security realignment, interfaith dialogue, digital media regulation, and grassroots peacebuilding.

■ SUMMARY OF CORE EMPIRICAL METRICS

- Governance Alienation: 77.8% (Plateau) & 60.5% (Benue) rate Nigeria's state as Poor or Very Poor.
- Identity Tension: 36.6% in Plateau experience active tension between ethnic and national identity.
- Security Deficit: 40.3% feel unsafe; 61.4% of total sample has experienced conflict displacement.
- Trust Asymmetry: Religious Leaders (3.70) & Traditional Chiefs (3.32) vs. Military (2.75), Police (2.71), & INEC (2.14).
- Digital Exposure: 71.4% state social media worsen division; 48.3% regularly encounter religious hate speech.
- Emigration ('Japa'): 55.0% total desire to relocate permanently abroad (66.1% in Benue State).

4.2 Strategic & Policy Implications

4.2.1 Socio-Political Implications of Identity Balkanization & Governance Alienation

The empirical data demonstrates that ethno-religious identity in North-Central Nigeria has been progressively weaponized by political elites, driving structural alienation from the Nigerian state. In Plateau State, 26.9% of Muslim respondents self-identify as settlers, while 16.5% report mixed indigene-settler heritage, compared to 77.8% of Christians who hold indigene status. In Benue State, Muslims constitute a 10.5% minority, among whom 25.8% identify as settlers. Qualitative data reveals that this statistical divergence reflects the physical 'balkanization' of communities into mono-religious enclaves. Furthermore, 77.8% of respondents in Plateau State evaluate the state of Nigeria as 'Poor' or 'Very Poor', alongside 60.5% in Benue State, creating an acute legitimacy crisis.

4.2.2 Security & Tactical Operations Implications

Security perceptions across the two states highlight widespread vulnerability (40.3% feel unsafe; 61.4% experienced displacement). Qualitative fieldwork uncovers three distinct security dynamics: (a) Rural Agrarian Displacement in Benue hinterlands due to armed land occupation and security extortion (₦200,000 paid per head for release); (b) Urban Gang Violence & Youth Cultism in Makurdi (Wadata) operating across religious lines; and (c) Official Threat Misclassification in Plateau State, where misdiagnosing religious attacks as generic 'banditry' leads to ineffective security responses.

4.2.3 Institutional Trust Profiles & Protective Authority Asymmetry

The quantitative survey establishes a stark divide in public trust between grassroots authorities and formal state institutions. Citizens rely primarily on religious leaders (Mean: 3.70) and traditional rulers (Mean: 3.32) for governance and mediation, while formal enforcement bodies—including the Military (2.75), Police (2.71), Federal Executive (2.51), and INEC (2.14)—face structural trust deficits.

4.2.4 Social Cohesion, Psychosocial Trauma & Inter-Group Friction

Social cohesion metrics reveal significant inter-religious friction (55.2% uncomfortable with inter-religious marriage; 37.6% low trust across faiths). Qualitative data indicates that unaddressed psychological trauma solidifies inter-group hostility. However, structured civil society interventions—such as child psychosocial play therapy conducted by PPPN in Riyom and Barkin Ladi LGAs—demonstrate that targeted behavioral programs can rebuild trust among conflict-affected children.

4.2.5 Informational Ecosystem & Digital Escalation Risks

A significant majority (71.4%) agree that social media has worsened social divisions, driven by high exposure to religious hate speech (48.3%) and farmer-herder misinformation (48.2%). Untrained 'smartphone journalists' routinely amplify local incidents into broader sectarian panics.

4.2.6 Socio-Economic Outlook & Emigration ('Japa') Intentions

Over half of respondents (55.0% overall, 66.1% in Benue) express a desire to permanently relocate abroad, driven by economic stagnation and security fatigue. Nevertheless, 70.3% retain hope that youth leadership can transform local communities.

4.3 Conclusion

The empirical and qualitative evidence leads to five core conclusions:

- **Politicization of Identity & Spatial Balkanization:** Conflict in Benue and Plateau States is rooted in the political manipulation of indigene-settler distinctions and religious affiliation, converting mixed settlements into segregated enclaves.
- **Divergent Security Typologies:** Security challenges vary significantly by locale: rural Benue experiences agrarian displacement; urban Makurdi faces youth cultism across faith lines; and Plateau suffers from long-standing retaliatory cycles and misclassified threats.
- **Institutional Legitimacy Gap:** A profound legitimacy gap separates informal moral authorities (religious/traditional leaders) from formal state enforcement bodies (military, police, electoral organ).
- **Digital Informational Pipeline Risk:** Unverified digital reporting and cross-border rumors accelerate conflict escalation, turning local disputes into regional sectarian crises.
- **Unaddressed Trauma vs. Youth Resilience:** Persistent insecurity drives high emigration intent (Japa'), yet strong widespread hope in youth leadership highlights an opportunity for targeted peacebuilding interventions.

4.4 Actionable & Multi-Stakeholder Recommendations

4.4.1 Policy, Legislative & Governance Reforms

- **Accurate Threat Classification:** Federal authorities must accurately classify security threats, abandoning generic terms like 'banditry' to ensure targeted security responses.
- **Legislative & Political Equity:** State assemblies and executive governors must implement binding policy frameworks ensuring equitable political representation and resource distribution across senatorial zones.
- **Institutionalizing Research Blueprints:** Executive leaders must implement recommendations from historical commissions of inquiry and academic research reports.

4.4.2 Security Sector Decentralization & Operational Realignment

- **Redeployment to Rural Hotspots:** Security agencies (Army, Police, NSCDC) must relocate operational units from secure urban centers to vulnerable rural hinterlands to protect agrarian communities.
- **Technology & Hinterland Infrastructure:** Construct rural access roads and deploy drone surveillance technology to prevent ambushes and monitor armed movements.
- **Anti-Corruption & Welfare Controls:** Enforce strict anti-corruption measures to eliminate extortion in conflict zones and improve logistical welfare for deployed personnel.

4.4.3 Community-Led Peace Architecture & Interfaith Coexistence

- **Empowering Traditional Institutions:** Grant formal dispute-resolution authority to traditional rulers and kindred heads, strengthening early warning mechanisms.
- **Strengthening Interfaith Platforms:** Expand grassroots interfaith platforms (NIREC, JNI, CAN) and regulate unaccredited 'accidental clergy' who incite congregational hatred.
- **Scaling Psychosocial Interventions:** Replicate child psychosocial play therapy programs (such as the PPPN Riyom/Barkin Ladi model) across conflict-affected areas.

4.4.4 Information Ecosystem, Digital Peacebuilding & Media Literacy

- **Digital Media Literacy Initiatives:** CSOs and educational institutions should conduct digital media literacy workshops for youth to curb social media hate speech.
- **Periodic Grassroots Town Halls:** Organize periodic town hall meetings featuring religious leaders, traditional rulers, youth representatives, and human rights groups, culminating in signed peace communiqués.

4.4.5 Youth Empowerment, Mental Health & Program Sustainability

- **Integrated Trauma & Substance Recovery:** Establish trauma recovery and substance abuse rehabilitation centers in conflict-affected LGAs.
- **Sustained Multi-Year Funding & M&E:** International donors must commit to multi-year program funding with rigorous M&E frameworks, preventing premature project exits.

Table 4.1: Multi-Stakeholder Implementation Matrix for Rebuilding Civic Cohesion

Stakeholder Group	Primary Priority Action	Target Outcome
Federal & State Governments	Enforce political equity; accurately classify threats; implement commission reports.	Rebuild state legitimacy; eliminate indigene-settler political exclusion.
Security Agencies (Army, Police, NSCDC)	Relocate personnel to rural hotspots; deploy surveillance drones; curb extortion.	Protect agrarian livelihoods; restore security trust.
Traditional & Religious Rulers	Strengthen early warning mediation; regulate unaccredited clerics; preach unity.	Early conflict de-escalation; combat sectarian incitement.
Civil Society & Peace Networks (PPPN, FJDP)	Scale child play therapy; establish periodic town halls with signed communiqués.	Heal inter-generational trauma; foster inter-community trust.
Media & Online Journalists	Enforce journalistic verification; conduct youth digital media literacy.	Eliminate viral social media rumors and hate speech.
Donors & Research Institutes (Ford, JRI)	Provide multi-year funding; enforce M&E; ensure local project ownership.	Ensure sustainable peacebuilding; prevent project collapse.

APPENDIX A

COMPREHENSIVE QUALITATIVE FIELDWORK REGISTRY

This appendix provides an exhaustive synthesis index of all 17 qualitative field sources (3 Focus Group Discussions and 14 Key Informant Interviews) collected across Benue and Plateau States between September and October 2026.

Table A.1: Comprehensive Qualitative Fieldwork Registry & Synthesis Index (17 Sources)

Source ID & Cluster	Informant / Stakeholder	Primary Theme / Topic	Key Findings & Empirical Insights
FGD 1 — Agan Settlement	Female Christian IDPs (10)	Agrarian Livelihood Ruin	Crop destruction since 2014; security extortion (₦200,000/head); absolute destitution.
FGD 2 — Daudu Settlement	Male Christian IDPs (12)	Armed Herder Occupation	Shift from seasonal grazing to year-round occupation; operational security compromise.
FGD 3 — Wadata Cluster	Urban Mixed Males (8)	Youth Cultism & Gangs	Conflict driven by cultism across religious lines; lack of basic urban infrastructure.
KII 4 — FJDP Catholic	Dr. Valentine Kwaghchimin	Interfaith Dialogues & Threat Classification	Targeting faith sites; critiques official re-classification of terror as generic 'banditry'.
KII 5 — Media / Journalist	Ukan Kurugh	Digital Misinformation Risks	Unfiltered citizen journalism; Otukpo cross-border rumor escalation; town hall need.
KII 6 — Islamic Cleric	Mallam Dada (M. Abubakar)	Urban Coexistence & Rumors	Harmonious Wadata living; mosque peace preaching; traditional chief inclusion role.
KII 7 — Political Candidate	Hon. Godwin Edward Unum	Political Disenfranchisement	Non-indigenes used as voting banks; Benue South Zone C marginalization; equity needed.
KII 8 — Traditional Ruler	Chief Simon Gondotov	Early Warning Mediation	Wurukum Council inclusion of non-indigenes; early dispute settlement; asset needs.
KII 9 — Youth Psychologist	Dr. Moses Chaihemba	Trauma & Substance Abuse	Bitterness fueling youth violence; Yelewata NPA program premature defunding.
KII 10 — Security (NSCDC)	Tyoga Nornhwange	Hinterland Security Logistics	Rugged terrain ambush risks; surveillance drone need; neutral deployments.
KII 11 — Elohim Foundation	Dr. Victoria Daaor	8-Year Community Dialogue	Empowering female peacebuilders; prioritizing dialogue over armed retaliation.
KII 12 — Youth Leader	Hon. Tersoo Agabo (Aga50)	Community Vigilante Protection	Youth form vigilantes to defend homes from invaders; need formal empowerment.
KII 13 — Senior Christian Leader	Rev. Dr. Akpen Leva	Interfaith & Territorial Defense	Cordial JNI relations; preaching reconciliation; land sale warnings.

KII 14 — PPPN President	Nanakali (Relieve & Hope)	Child Play Therapy & Balkanization	92 CSOs network; play therapy in Riyom/Barkin Ladi; PPBA clearinghouse.
KII 15 — CAN Chairman, 19 Northern States and FCT	Rev. Dr. Yakubu Pam	52 Root Causes of Conflict, Youth Peace Ambassadors, Interfaith 'Peace Cells' & Institutional Integrity	**Integrity over Religious Facades:** Good governance depends on righteousness, integrity, and institutional strength rather than religious posturing; warned against 'conflict entrepreneurs' who profit from security vote allocations
KII 16 — JNI Secretary Gen.	Sheikh Prof. Khalid Abubakar	50-Year History & 5-Step Plan	Transition to polarized living; 'accidental clergy'; 5-step action plan.
KII 17 — Youth Field Note	Dr. Moses Chaihemba	Inter-Generational Conflict	Unemployment & trauma; pre/post implementation evaluation needed.
KII 18 — FJDP Field Note	Dr. Valentine Kwaghchimin	4 Inter-State Clusters	Border dialogues; ISWAP terror expansion; non-state shadow actors.
FGD 19—FOMWAN Field Note	Muslim Women's Association	Indigene-settler identity, marginalization, economic loss, pulpit regulation, youth segregation	Political appointments deeply unfair to non-indigenes/Muslims. Women relegated to minor 'women leader' titles or 'floor members' without real authority on peace committees
FGD 20 — WOWICAN Field Note	Christian Women's Association	Community fragmentation, politics, land disputes, prayer/faith defense, displaced person returns.	Inter-communal land disputes driven by population growth and land competition.
FGD Clusters *(Barikin Ladi & Jos North LGAs)* — *20*	Disaggregated Demographic Cohorts across 6 sessions: • Muslim Men • Muslim Women • Christian Men • Christian Women • Male Youth • Female Youth	Spatial Segregation, Historical Traumas, Inter-Faith Social Distance & Youth Mobilization	Spatial Balkanization: Breakdown of historical mixed settlements into physically segregated religious enclaves ("Muslim areas" vs. "Christian areas") following recurring conflict cycles and political rhetoric[11][12]. • Inter-Religious Social Distance: Deep social friction, with 61.7% expressing discomfort with inter-religious marriage alongside unaddressed psychological trauma that triggers youth retaliatory violence[10][13]. • Psychosocial Interventions: Successful civil society pathways through child play therapy (PPPN model in Riyom/Barkin Ladi), which successfully restored friendly cross-faith interaction among conflict-affected children
KII 2 — 21 Senior Media Editor *(Jos North, Plateau State)*	Pama Khasmi — Senior Editor, *The Nigerian Standard Newspaper*	Digital Misinformation, Sensational Bloggers &	Unprofessional Digital Platforms: Emerging bloggers and social media users post gore, fake news,

		Information Handler Peace Training	and hate speech for attention (e.g., recycling old Bachama conflict videos and framing them as recent Mangu attacks)
KII 3 — 22 Political Party Official *(Plateau State)*	Political Party Official — Executive Member, Plateau State Political Party	Historical Electoral Skewing, Geopolitical Zoning & Systemic Governance Reforms	Structural Recommendations: Recommends national constitutional reforms based strictly on population/landmass, returning to regional/cabinet government autonomy, and joint cross-party political, traditional, and religious engagement

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