

## Jukun-Tiv Crises and Economic Development in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Ethnic conflicts remain a persistent challenge in many societies, particularly in Africa, where historical grievances, political competition, and resource struggles fuel tensions. Nigeria, with its vast ethnic diversity, has frequently experienced violent inter-group rivalries, notably between the Jukun and Tiv ethnic groups in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State. This study examines the impact of the Jukun-Tiv crises on economic development in Wukari, employing Donald Horowitz's ethnic conflict theory as a theoretical framework. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design, collecting data through questionnaires and interviews from a sample of 400 respondents, with 388 valid responses analysed. Findings reveal that recurrent ethnic conflicts have significantly disrupted economic activities, particularly agriculture and trade, leading to loss of livelihoods, destruction of property, and stunted economic growth. The dominance of farmers and traders among respondents emphasised the economic vulnerability of the region to ethnic violence. Furthermore, the study highlighted how political and economic contestations exacerbate tensions, with local elites often manipulating ethnic identities for political gain. The study recommends inclusive governance, economic empowerment programmes, and robust conflict resolution mechanisms as essential strategies for fostering sustainable peace and economic development in Wukari LGA.*

**Keywords:** *Economic development, ethnic crises.*

### Introduction

Societies worldwide, particularly in Africa, have experienced significant inter-group rivalries, often escalating into severe conflicts. Nigeria, with its diverse population of over 200 million people and more than 250 ethnic groups, frequently faces communal crises driven by ethnic, religious, and political divisions (Agbu & Varvar, 2017). The persistence of such conflicts is linked to ethnic rivalries, religious violence, land disputes, boundary demarcations, political elections, and resource conflicts, particularly in the Niger Delta (Mbah & Nwangwu, 2014).

In advanced economies, the United States is notably divided on social unity, with about 70% of Americans acknowledging racial and ethnic conflicts (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). Similarly, China has been accused of human rights violations against Uyghurs in Xinjiang, including mass detentions and cultural suppression (Magaji, 2019; Huntington, 2017). The Chinese government's alleged orchestration of Han migration to Xinjiang has intensified ethnic tensions, further threatening Uyghur cultural identity (Kraxberger, 2015).

Several African countries, including Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda, continue to experience violent ethnic and religious conflicts. Nigeria is no exception, as ethnicity serves as a key factor in mobilization, leading to significant casualties and economic instability (Falola, 2013). Sub-Saharan African nations, such as Sierra Leone, Ivory

Coast, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, remain plagued by insecurity, political instability, and poverty, with weak political institutions failing to enforce peace agreements (Osaretin & Akov, 2018; Ojo, 2010).

Ethnic crises in Nigeria are widespread, as seen in conflicts such as the Tiv/Jukun, Ife/Modakeke, Aguleri/Umuleri, and others across different states (Alimba, 2014). Although Nigeria's ethnic diversity should enhance cultural richness and socio-economic growth, it has instead fueled division and conflict, exacerbated by historical and political factors (Albert, 2019). Wukari Local Government Area in Taraba State exemplifies this tension, as ethnic groups engage in political, economic, and religious struggles, leading to recurrent crises, particularly the long-standing Jukun-Tiv conflict (Shehu, 2018; Dawood, 2019). This conflict, dating back to 1959, has resulted in numerous casualties, property destruction, and displacement (Obboh & Hyande, 2016; Moti, 2010). Ethnic crises remained a global challenge, causing loss of life, economic decline, and long-term socio-political instability (Yecho, 2016). In Wukari, recent conflicts including those involving herders and ethno-religious groups have significantly disrupted socio-economic activities (Taraba Joint Legal Team, 2017; Stavenhagen, 2016). This study, examined the impact of the Jukun-Tiv crises on the economic development of Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Ethnic conflict theory**

Ethnic Conflict Theory, as propounded by Donald Horowitz (1985), posits that ethnic tensions arise from deep-seated historical grievances, competition for resources, and perceived group marginalization. The theory argues that ethnic conflicts are often driven by socio-political and economic factors rather than mere cultural differences. Ethnic groups engage in conflicts to secure political dominance, access to resources, or maintain historical superiority (Horowitz, 1985). This theoretical framework provides a useful lens for examining the recurrent Jukun-Tiv crises in Wukari Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State, Nigeria, and its implications for economic development. The Jukun-Tiv crises are longstanding ethnic conflicts rooted in historical territorial claims, political representation, and access to economic resources such as farmland and trade routes. The Jukun people, who consider themselves the indigenous ethnic group in Wukari, often view the Tiv as settlers who encroach on their land and political space. The Tiv, on the other hand, argue that they have coexisted in the region for decades and deserve equal rights and access to resources. These tensions have frequently escalated into violent conflicts, leading to loss of lives, destruction of property, and displacement of communities (Uchendu, 2020).

The application of Ethnic Conflict Theory to the Jukun-Tiv crises is evident in the competition over land and political power. The struggle for land ownership, particularly for agricultural activities, has heightened tensions between both groups, leading to periodic violence. In economic terms, the crises have significantly hindered development in Wukari LGA. Persistent insecurity disrupts farming activities, which is the mainstay of the local economy, leading to food shortages and loss of livelihood for many families. Additionally, the destruction of markets, schools, and businesses during clashes undermines economic growth and discourages potential investors from engaging in the region (Okeke & Audu, 2018).

Despite its relevance, ethnic conflict theory has faced criticism for its deterministic approach to ethnic relations. Critics argue that the theory overemphasizes historical grievances and identity politics while downplaying the role of political elites in exacerbating conflicts for personal gains. In the case of the Jukun-Tiv crises, some scholars argue that local politicians manipulate ethnic identities to mobilize support and sustain divisions for electoral benefits rather than genuine

communal grievances (Best, 2019). Additionally, the theory does not fully account for the role of external interventions, such as government policies and security agencies, in either mitigating or exacerbating ethnic tensions.

In conclusion, the Jukun-Tiv crises in Wukari LGA exemplify the dynamics of ethnic conflict as explained by Horowitz's ethnic conflict theory. The struggle for land, political representation, and economic dominance fuels the conflict, leading to devastating consequences on economic development. Sustainable peace building efforts, including inclusive governance, economic empowerment programmes, and conflict resolution mechanisms, are essential for mitigating tensions and fostering economic development in the region.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, utilized questionnaires and interviews to collect data on the ethnic conflict between Tiv and Jukun in Wukari Local Government Area (LGA), Taraba State, Nigeria. The survey design was chosen for its ability to capture diverse perspectives from a large population. Wukari LGA, located in Taraba State's North East geopolitical zone, has an adult population of 269,031 according to National Bureau of Statistics (2024) and is predominantly inhabited by the Jukun ethnic group. The area features agricultural, trade, and craft-based economic activities but has faced recurrent communal crises. The study targeted adult men and women from various occupations and religious backgrounds in Wukari LGA. Using Taro Yamane's formula, the sample size was determined to be 400 respondents, with five political wards randomly selected for data collection. A proportional sampling technique was applied to distribute the sample across the selected wards. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and interviews, administered with the help of research assistants. Validation was conducted through expert review, while reliability was tested using the test-retest method and Pearson correlation. For data analysis, responses were coded in SPSS for statistical analysis. The study adhered to ethic of research, ensuring participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and compliance with professional research standards.

### **Result**

Out of the four hundred (400) questionnaires, only three hundred and eighty eight 388 (97%) questionnaires administered on the respondents were completed and used for the analysis while 12 (3%) were not retrieved.

**Table1: Socio- Demographic Attributes of Respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage%
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	259	66.8
Female	129	33.2
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	60	15.5
26-33	130	33.5
34-41	79	20.4
42-49	93	24.0
50 and above	26	6.7
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	113	29.1
Married	232	59.8
Divorced	10	2.6
Widowed	33	8.5
<b>Occupation</b>		
Trader	117	30.2
Civil Servant	49	12.6
Students	30	7.7
Farmer	192	49.5
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Non formal education	105	27.1
Primary	93	24.0
Secondary	131	33.8
Tertiary	59	15.2
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	305	78.6
Islam	68	17.5
Africa Religion	15	3.9

**Source:** Fieldwork, 2024

The majority of respondents were male (66.8%), while females constituted 33.2%. This gender difference may reflect cultural or societal norms that limit female participation in such studies or in public discourse. The largest age group was 26-33 years (33.5%), followed by 42-49 years (24.0%). Younger respondents (18-25 years) made up 15.5%, while those aged 50 and above constituted only 6.7%. This suggests that the study captured the views of a relatively young and economically active population. The implications are that the findings reflect the experiences and perceptions of individuals who are directly involved in economic activities, such as farming and trading, which are critical to the local economy. Married respondents constituted the majority (59.8%), followed by singles (29.1%), widowed (8.5%), and divorced (2.6%). The high percentage of married respondents indicates that the study captured the views of individuals with family responsibilities, who are likely to be more concerned about the economic stability and security of their households. Farmers made up the largest occupational group (49.5%), followed by traders (30.2%), civil servants (12.6%), and students (7.7%). The dominance of farmers and traders highlights the agrarian and commercial nature of the local economy. The implications are that the

findings reflects the economic challenges faced by these groups, such as disruptions to farming activities and trade due to the crises, which are critical to the area's economic development. Respondents with secondary education constituted the largest group (33.8%), followed by those with non-formal education (27.1%), primary education (24.0%), and tertiary education (15.2%). The relatively low level of formal education, particularly tertiary education, may limit the respondents' ability to engage in more complex economic activities or adapt to economic changes caused by the crises. Christianity was the dominant religion (78.6%), followed by Islam (17.5%) and African Traditional Religion (3.9%).

### Jukun-Tiv crisis and economic development

**Table 2: Respondents response on Jukun-Tiv crisis and economic development**

	Yes	No	Not sure
Do you think that Jukun-Tiv crisis affected buying and selling?	234 (60.3%)	144 (37.1%)	10 (2.6%)
Were the markets closed during the crisis?	293 (75.5%)	79 (20.4%)	16 (4.1%)
Does Jukun-Tiv crisis affect inter-city transportation?	284 (73.2%)	95 (24.5%)	9 (2.3%)
Were farmers killed during the crisis?	319 (82.2%)	43 (11.1%)	26 (6.7%)
Did many farmers abandoned their farmland due to the crisis	293 (75.5%)	75 (19.3%)	20 (5.2%)
Do you think that some farm produce wasted in the farmland, as farmers could not access their farmland during the crisis?	261 (67.3%)	103 (26.5%)	24 (6.2%)
Was there food scarcity during the crisis	319 (82.2%)	45 (11.6%)	24 (6.2%)
Was there high cost of food during the crisis?	297 (76.5%)	80 (20.6%)	11 (2.8%)

**Source:** Fieldwork, 2024

The data in table 2 illustrated the significant impact of the Jukun-Tiv crisis on economic activities in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. A majority of respondents (60.3%) agreed that the crisis disrupted buying and selling, suggesting a decline in commercial activities and reduced income for traders. Similarly, 75.5% of respondents confirmed that markets were closed during the crisis, further indicating severe economic stagnation. Inter-city transportation was also negatively affected, with 73.2% acknowledging disruptions, which likely hindered the movement of goods and people, exacerbating economic difficulties. Furthermore, agricultural activities were severely affected, as 82.2% of respondents confirmed that farmers were killed during the crisis, and 75.5% stated that many farmers abandoned their farmlands. This abandonment led to the wastage of farm produce, as noted by 67.3% of respondents, who indicated that crops were left unharvested. Consequently, food scarcity was a major issue, with 82.2% of respondents affirming that there was a shortage of food supplies. This scarcity contributed to a rise in food prices, as 76.5% reported a high cost of food during the crisis.

The finding from the quantitative study aligned with some of the responses of the qualitative participants. One of the participants stated that;

The crisis significantly disrupted trade. Many traders were afraid to go to the market, and some even lost their goods due to violence. Most of the markets were shut down, especially in areas with severe conflict. This made it difficult for people to buy essential goods, food prices skyrocketed because supply was low, and traders had to take extra risks to transport goods (*Female, Age: 53 years, village chief, Jibu ward*).

Another participant narrated that;

Many roads were unsafe due to the violence. Drivers avoided certain routes, and transport fares increased significantly. A lot of crops were left to rot in the fields because farmers could not return to harvest them, because most farmers fled for safety, leaving their farms unattended, which led to reduced food production. Sadly, many farmers lost their lives while working in their fields or trying to protect their farms from attacks (*Male, Age: 33 years, youth leader, Puje ward*).

A 48 year community leader from Avyi ward posited that;

Many people who depended on farming, trading, and transportation lost their jobs because of the insecurity. Several shops and market stalls were burned down, and traders lost their goods due to looting and destruction. Many farmers became financially unstable since they could not sell their produce or plant new crops.

Another interviewee narrated that;

Many people relocated to safer areas, abandoning their businesses and farmlands. Sadly with economic hardship and displacement, some youths turned to crime to survive. Also, the government response was slow, and many affected people did not receive adequate support to rebuild their lives (*Female, Age: 29 years, youth secretary, Rafin Kada ward*).

### **Discussion of findings**

The findings from table 2 indicated that the Jukun-Tiv crisis significantly impacted economic activities, particularly in commerce, transportation, and agriculture. The majority of respondents (60.3%) affirmed that the crisis affected buying and selling. This aligned with a study by Adesoji (2019) suggesting that violent conflicts disrupt local economies by displacing traders and reducing consumer confidence. Conversely, Justino (2012) argued that informal trade persisted despite conflicts, as people adapt to new market conditions. Regarding market closures, majority of the respondents confirmed that markets were closed during the crisis. Market shutdowns during conflicts are widely predictable, Kimenyi and Mbaku (2019) highlighted that economic paralysis in war-torn regions often stems from security concerns and disruptions in supply chains. However, Benson and Kugler (2021) argued that some local economies manage to function through alternative trade routes and underground markets. The crisis also had a severe impact on transportation, with 73.2% of respondents who acknowledged that inter-city transportation was affected. This corroborated findings by Omeje (2005), who noted that road blockades and attacks on travellers are common in ethnic conflicts, impeding mobility and economic exchanges. However, a minority (24.5%) believed transportation was not affected, possibly due to selective or localized disruptions.

The agricultural sector was among the most affected, as 82.2% of respondents who agreed that farmers were killed during the crisis. Similarly, 75.5% reported that many farmers abandoned their



farmlands, leading to reduced agricultural productivity. These findings resonated with a study by Okeke (2020), who emphasized that agrarian conflicts in Nigeria lead to food insecurity due to forced displacement of farmers. On the other hand, some scholars contended that resilience mechanisms, such as community-based peace initiatives, can mitigate long-term agricultural losses (Musa & Ibrahim, 2018).

The crisis also resulted in substantial food wastage, as 67.3% of respondents agreed that farm produce perished due to farmers' inability to access their land. This is consistent with research by FAO (2017), which found that conflict-induced disruptions in farming activities lead to post-harvest losses and heightened food scarcity. Consequently, 82.2% of respondents acknowledged that food scarcity was a major issue during the crisis, with 76.5% also reporting high food prices. These findings align with studies demonstrating that conflicts create inflationary pressures on food commodities by disrupting supply chains and increasing reliance on food imports (Akinyemi, 2019). However, some researchers argue that adaptive farming techniques and external aid can mitigate food crises in conflict zones (Okonkwo & Adeyemi, 2021). Overall, the findings highlighted the detrimental impact of the Jukun-Tiv crisis on economic development, confirming existing literature on conflict-induced economic downturns.

### **Conclusion**

The study has highlighted the profound impact of the Jukun-Tiv crisis on economic development in Wukari Local Government Area. The crisis significantly disrupted commercial activities, transportation, and agricultural production, leading to market closures, abandoned farmlands, and increased food scarcity. The findings emphasize that ethnic conflicts not only result in human casualties but also create long-term economic instability. Addressing these crises requires proactive conflict resolution strategies, strengthened political institutions, and community engagement to foster lasting peace and economic resilience.

### **Recommendations**

The government should establish effective conflict resolution mechanisms, including dialogue and peace committees, to mediate disputes between the Jukun and Tiv communities. Also, law enforcement agencies should be equipped and trained to prevent and respond swiftly to conflicts, ensuring the protection of lives and property. Lastly, government and NGOs should provide financial aid, farming inputs, and business grants to individuals whose livelihoods were disrupted by the crisis.

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