

Evaluating Security Administration in the Management of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Yala LGA, Cross River State

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Abstract

This study evaluates security administration in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The persistence of ethno-religious tensions in Nigeria has continued to undermine peace, stability, and local development, particularly in border and multi-ethnic communities such as Yala. Using a survey research design, the study examines the effectiveness of security institutions in conflict prevention, response, and resolution. Data were collected from 150 respondents comprising community members, traditional leaders, and security personnel. Findings reveal that security administration plays a significant role in mitigating ethno-religious conflicts through early warning mechanisms, peace enforcement, and inter-agency coordination. However, challenges such as poor intelligence sharing, limited manpower, political interference, and weak community trust significantly constrain effectiveness. The study concludes that while security administration is essential in managing ethno-religious conflicts, its effectiveness depends on coordination, legitimacy, and community participation. It recommends improved intelligence systems, community policing integration, and enhanced collaboration with traditional institutions.

Keywords: Security administration, Ethno-religious conflict, Conflict management

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Background to the Study

Ethno-religious conflicts remain one of the most persistent and destabilising security challenges in Nigeria and across many African states. These conflicts, often rooted in ethnic identity, religious differences, competition over land resources, political exclusion, and historical grievances, have consistently undermined peace, governance, and socio-economic development (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014; Onuoha, 2017). Empirical studies have shown that ethno-religious violence in Nigeria has resulted in large-scale displacement, loss of lives, destruction of infrastructure, and long-term mistrust among communities (Okoli, 2016; Salihu, 2019). In Nigeria's Middle Belt and border regions, including Cross River State, ethno-religious tensions are often intensified by demographic diversity and competition over scarce resources. Yala Local Government Area, which shares boundaries with Benue State, is particularly vulnerable due to its ethnic heterogeneity and religious plurality. Studies have linked similar border communities to recurring cycles of communal violence driven by land disputes, political representation struggles, and identity-based mobilisation (Onuoha, 2017; Eze, 2017).

Empirical evidence suggests that weak security administration significantly contributes to the persistence of ethno-religious conflicts. Alemika (2013) argues that Nigeria's security institutions are often reactive rather than preventive, with limited capacity for early warning and conflict prevention. Similarly, Ebo (2007) observes that inadequate institutional coordination and poor intelligence sharing reduce the effectiveness of conflict management strategies. In many rural communities, delayed responses by security agencies have allowed minor disputes to escalate into full-scale violence (Salihu, 2019). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that the absence of strong local governance structures worsens conflict outcomes. Okafor (2007) and Ray (2003) highlight the importance of traditional institutions in mediating disputes and maintaining social cohesion in African societies. However, their roles are often underutilised within formal security frameworks, leading to governance gaps at the grassroots level.

Empirical studies in Nigeria also reveal that community trust in security agencies remains relatively low, largely due to perceptions of bias, corruption, and inefficiency (Okiro, 2017). This lack of trust reduces cooperation between citizens and security personnel, thereby weakening intelligence gathering and early warning systems necessary for conflict prevention (Eze, 2017).

Comparative research across African contexts further supports these findings. In Kenya, inter-ethnic violence in pastoral communities has been linked to weak state presence and ineffective local policing structures (Ruteere & Pommerolle, 2003). In South Sudan, fragile security institutions have struggled to manage identity-based conflicts, resulting in prolonged instability (Rotberg, 2004). These comparative cases highlight the broader challenge of security governance in multi-ethnic societies. In Nigeria specifically, empirical studies show that ethno-religious conflicts are often triggered by political manipulation and competition for resources. Okoli (2016) identifies political elites as key actors who sometimes exploit

ethnic and religious divisions for electoral gains. Similarly, Onuoha (2017) notes that environmental stress, population pressure, and weak governance structures contribute to recurring cycles of violence in affected regions.

Despite the extensive literature on ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, there remains a significant gap in empirical studies focusing specifically on how security administration at the local government level influences conflict management outcomes. Most studies focus on national or regional perspectives, leaving local dynamics underexplored, particularly in areas such as Yala LGA. This study therefore evaluates security administration in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State, with emphasis on coordination mechanisms, institutional capacity, community engagement, and response effectiveness. By situating the study within both Nigerian and broader African empirical contexts, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how local security governance shapes conflict outcomes in plural societies.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the presence of formal security institutions in Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts continue to persist, particularly in rural and semi-urban communities where state presence is often weak and inconsistent. These conflicts have remained a major threat to peace, stability, and development, resulting in loss of lives, displacement of households, destruction of property, and disruption of socio-economic activities (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014; Onuoha, 2017). In many affected areas, including Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State, recurring tensions between ethnic and religious groups have continued to undermine peaceful coexistence and local governance.

Empirical studies indicate that security agencies in Nigeria often adopt a reactive rather than preventive approach to conflict management. This means that intervention typically occurs after violence has escalated, rather than through early warning and preventive mechanisms (Alemika, 2013; Eze, 2017). Furthermore, poor coordination among security institutions, weak intelligence gathering systems, and limited community engagement have significantly reduced the effectiveness of security administration in managing ethno-religious conflicts (Salihu, 2019; Onuoha, 2017). These institutional weaknesses create gaps that allow minor disputes to escalate into full-scale communal violence.

In Yala LGA, these challenges are compounded by its border location, ethnic diversity, and religious plurality. The area has experienced repeated cycles of communal tensions, often linked to land disputes, identity struggles, and political competition. The absence of strong early warning systems and weak collaboration between security agencies and local stakeholders has further worsened the situation. Although several studies have examined ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, most focus on national or regional dimensions, leaving a significant empirical gap at the local government level, particularly in Cross River State. There is limited research on how security administration operates in managing conflicts in Yala LGA, and how effective existing strategies are in preventing recurrence and sustaining peace.

This study therefore addresses this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of security administration in managing ethno-religious conflicts in Yala Local Government Area.

Table 1: Selected Ethno-Religious Conflict Incidents in Yala LGA (Illustrative Empirical Profile)

Year	Community Area	Type of Conflict	Main Causes	Impact/Outcome
2012	Okpoma axis	Ethnic clash	Land boundary dispute	Deaths, displacement, property destruction
2015	Yache community	Religious tension	Religious misunderstanding & mobilisation	School closure, fear, population displacement
2017	Okuku–Ishibori belt	Communal violence	Land ownership dispute	Injury cases, economic disruption
2019	Yala North settlements	Ethno-political conflict	Political representation struggle	Burning of houses, displacement of families
2021	Border communities (Benue–Yala axis)	Farmer–herder conflict	Grazing land competition	Loss of lives, farming disruption
2023	Multiple villages	Ethno-religious tension	Youth mobilization and misinformation	Security deployment, curfew in some areas

The table highlights recurring patterns of ethno-religious and communal conflicts in Yala Local Government Area over time. A major observation is that most conflicts are rooted in land disputes, identity differences, political competition, and resource-based tensions. The consequences consistently include loss of lives, displacement of people, destruction of property, and disruption of economic activities, particularly agriculture which is the major livelihood in the area. The recurrence of these conflicts across different years suggests that security responses have not effectively addressed the underlying causes of violence. Instead, interventions appear largely reactive, focusing on crisis containment rather than long-term prevention and reconciliation. This reinforces the argument that weaknesses in security administration contribute to the persistence of ethno-religious conflicts in Yala LGA.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Assess the role of security administration in conflict prevention in Yala LGA.
2. Examine the effectiveness of security response mechanisms in ethno-religious conflicts.
3. Investigate the relationship between security coordination and conflict management outcomes.
4. Identify challenges affecting security administration in Yala LGA.

Literature Review

Security administration refers to the institutional coordination of security agencies such as the police, civil defence, military, and intelligence services in the prevention and management of conflicts. It involves intelligence gathering, early warning systems, rapid response mechanisms, and inter-agency cooperation aimed at maintaining peace and order. Alemika (2013) argues that effective security administration in Nigeria depends largely on intelligence-led policing, institutional accountability, and public trust.

Recent empirical studies show that weak coordination among security agencies continues to limit proactive conflict prevention in Nigeria. Eze (2017) observes that poor intelligence sharing between agencies reduces the capacity to detect and prevent early stages of ethno-religious violence. Similarly, Salihu (2019) finds that fragmented security responses often lead to delayed interventions, allowing conflicts to escalate in rural communities. Comparative African studies also confirm that weak institutional coordination is a major driver of insecurity in plural societies, particularly in Kenya, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (Rotberg, 2004; Ruteere & Pommerolle, 2003).

Ethno-religious conflicts are violent confrontations rooted in ethnic identity, religious differences, political competition, and resource struggles. Okoli and Iortyer (2014) explain that such conflicts are often intensified by historical grievances and socio-economic inequality. Onuoha (2017) further notes that these conflicts are particularly prevalent in Nigeria's Middle Belt and border regions due to overlapping ethnic and religious identities. Recent empirical literature highlights that ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have remained persistent despite multiple policy interventions. A 2023 study by Adenuga et al. confirms that over 2,800 ethnic-related violent incidents have occurred in Nigeria since the return to democracy, with thousands of fatalities and widespread displacement. These conflicts are often triggered by land disputes, political exclusion, and competition for scarce resources (Okoli, 2016). In Yala LGA specifically, such dynamics are reinforced by its proximity to Benue State and its ethnically diverse composition.

Security response mechanisms involve operational strategies used by security agencies to contain ongoing violence and restore order. These include deployment of personnel, curfews, intelligence response units, and peace enforcement operations. Eze (2017) notes that rapid deployment and coordinated action can significantly reduce the spread of violence during ethno-religious crises.

However, empirical evidence indicates that response effectiveness in Nigeria is often undermined by logistical constraints, inadequate manpower, and poor infrastructure. Onuoha (2017) argues that delayed intervention by security agencies allows conflicts to escalate beyond control. Furthermore, rural communities such as Yala often experience slower response times due to difficult terrain and limited security presence. This pattern reflects broader governance challenges in Nigeria's security architecture (Alemika, 2013).

Coordination in security administration refers to the collaboration among security agencies, traditional institutions, and community stakeholders in managing conflict situations. Salihu (2019) emphasises that lack of coordination leads to duplication of roles, inefficiency, and poor conflict resolution outcomes. Empirical studies show that integrated security systems improve peacebuilding outcomes by enhancing intelligence sharing and response efficiency. Bayley (2005) argues that collaborative policing frameworks that include community actors increase legitimacy and effectiveness in conflict-prone environments. In Nigeria, however, weak institutional synergy continues to undermine conflict management efforts, particularly at the local government level (Ebo, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Conflict Management Theory, which posits that conflict is a natural and inevitable feature of plural societies but can be managed effectively through strong institutions, communication, negotiation, and structured governance systems. The theory emphasises that conflicts are not inherently destructive; rather, their outcomes depend on how institutions respond to them. Empirical studies support this theoretical position by showing that effective conflict management systems reduce the intensity and recurrence of ethno-religious violence. For example, Skogan (2006) highlights that community-based conflict resolution improves trust and reduces escalation of violence in diverse societies. Similarly, Bayley (2005) argues that policing systems that integrate community participation are more effective in preventing conflict escalation than purely centralised models.

In the Nigerian context, Conflict Management Theory explains how security administration functions as a stabilising mechanism through enforcement, mediation, and collaboration with community actors. However, Alemika (2013) and Onuoha (2017) observe that weak institutional capacity, poor coordination, and lack of trust undermine this stabilising role. Recent empirical evidence from conflict-prone areas in Nigeria shows that when security institutions fail to manage early disputes, these often escalate into large-scale ethno-religious violence (Salihu, 2019; Okoli, 2016). Applied to Yala Local Government Area, the theory suggests that effective conflict management depends on timely intervention, strong institutional coordination, and inclusion of traditional and community stakeholders. Without these, security administration becomes reactive rather than preventive, thereby increasing the likelihood of recurring ethno-religious conflicts.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design conducted in Yala Local Government Area, Cross River State. The population included residents, traditional leaders, youth representatives, and security personnel. A sample of 150 respondents was selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis to test relationships between variables at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results/Findings

This section presents the empirical results of the study based on data collected from 150 respondents in Yala Local Government Area. The analysis is presented using descriptive statistics (biodata) and inferential statistics (Pearson Product Moment Correlation) to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level.

Table 2: Biodata of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	88	58.7
	Female	62	41.3
Age	18–30 years	42	28.0
	31–45 years	66	44.0
	46 years and above	42	28.0
Occupation	Civil servants	38	25.3
	Farmers	54	36.0
	Traders	40	26.7
	Security personnel	18	12.0

The bio-data shows that both male and female respondents were adequately represented, ensuring gender balance in the study. Most respondents fall within the economically active age bracket (31–45 years), indicating informed responses on security issues. The dominance of farmers and traders reflects the rural and semi-agrarian nature of Yala LGA, making the sample highly relevant for assessing ethno-religious conflict and security administration dynamics.

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Security administration has no significant relationship with conflict prevention in Yala LGA.

Table 3: Security Administration and Conflict Prevention

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Security Administration & Conflict Prevention	150	0.72	0.000	Reject H ₀₁

The result shows a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.05$) between security administration and conflict prevention. This implies that improved coordination, intelligence gathering, and institutional capacity significantly enhance the prevention of ethno-religious conflicts in Yala LGA. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between security response mechanisms and conflict reduction in Yala LGA.

Table 4: Security Response Mechanisms and Conflict Reduction

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Security Response & Conflict Reduction	150	0.68	0.000	Reject H ₀₂

The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.68$) indicates a strong positive relationship between security response mechanisms and conflict reduction. This means that timely deployment of security personnel and coordinated response strategies significantly reduce the escalation of ethno-religious violence in Yala LGA.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between coordination among security agencies and conflict management effectiveness.

Table 5: Security Coordination and Conflict Management

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Security Coordination & Conflict Management	150	0.75	0.000	Reject H ₀₃

The result reveals a very strong positive relationship ($r = 0.75$) between coordination among security agencies and effective conflict management. This suggests that collaboration between police, civil defence, traditional leaders, and community actors significantly improves peacebuilding outcomes in Yala LGA.

Hypothesis Four

H₀₄: Community engagement has no significant relationship with ethno-religious conflict management.

Table 6: Community Engagement and Conflict Management

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	Decision
Community Engagement & Conflict Management	150	0.69	0.000	Reject H ₀₄

The result shows a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.69$) between community engagement and conflict management effectiveness. This implies that when communities actively participate in security processes, reporting, and dialogue, ethno-religious conflicts are significantly reduced.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that security administration plays a significant role in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in Yala Local Government Area. The results of hypothesis one revealed a strong positive relationship between security administration and conflict prevention ($r = 0.72, p < 0.05$). This implies that effective coordination of security institutions, intelligence-led policing, and institutional responsiveness significantly reduce the likelihood of conflict escalation. This finding aligns with Alemika (2013), who argues that security effectiveness in Nigeria depends largely on institutional capacity, public trust, and preventive policing strategies. It also supports Eze (2017), who emphasises that intelligence sharing enhances early detection of conflict triggers and improves preventive outcomes.

Similarly, the study found a strong relationship between security response mechanisms and conflict reduction ($r = 0.68, p < 0.05$). This suggests that timely deployment of security personnel and coordinated operational responses are essential in limiting the spread of ethno-religious violence. This finding corroborates Salihu (2019), who observed that rapid and coordinated security interventions significantly reduce the duration and intensity of violent conflicts in Nigeria. However, Onuoha (2017) cautions that delays in response and inadequate logistics often undermine these gains, especially in rural and hard-to-reach communities such as Yala LGA.

The third hypothesis revealed the strongest relationship in the study between security coordination and conflict management effectiveness ($r = 0.75, p < 0.05$). This finding highlights that inter-agency collaboration among the police, civil defence, military, and community stakeholders is critical for sustainable peace. This is consistent with Bayley (2005), who argues that collaborative policing systems improve legitimacy and operational efficiency. It also supports Rotberg (2004), who notes that weak coordination among state institutions is a key characteristic of fragile security systems in developing societies.

Furthermore, the study found that community engagement has a significant positive relationship with conflict management ($r = 0.69, p < 0.05$). This indicates that when communities are actively involved in security processes, through reporting mechanisms, dialogue, and collaboration with security agencies, ethno-religious conflicts are more effectively managed. This finding supports Skogan (2006), who emphasises that community participation strengthens informal social control and improves policing outcomes. It also aligns with Anam (2020), who stresses that grassroots participation enhances both security and sustainable community development outcomes in Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that security administration is most effective when it is inclusive, coordinated, and community driven. However, persistent structural weaknesses such as poor logistics, weak intelligence systems, and limited trust between citizens and security agencies continue to constrain optimal performance.

Policy Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have several important policy implications for security governance in Nigeria.

1. The strong role of coordination suggests the need for more integrated security architecture at the local government level. Policy frameworks should prioritise inter-agency collaboration through joint operational commands and shared intelligence systems to reduce institutional fragmentation.
2. The importance of community engagement implies that security policies must move beyond state-centric approaches to include community-based security governance structures. Strengthening community policing frameworks and formalising community participation in security decision-making will improve trust and intelligence flow between citizens and security agencies.
3. The significance of rapid response mechanisms highlights the need for improved logistical support, mobility, and technological investment in rural security operations. Government policy should prioritise the decentralisation of security resources to ensure timely intervention in conflict-prone communities such as Yala LGA.
4. The study underscores the need for institutional reforms aimed at enhancing accountability, professionalism, and transparency within security agencies. This will reduce public mistrust and improve cooperation in conflict prevention and management.

Conclusion

The study concludes that security administration plays a crucial and statistically significant role in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State. The empirical evidence shows that conflict prevention, response mechanisms, coordination, and community engagement are all critical determinants of effective conflict management. However, the effectiveness of security administration remains constrained by structural and operational challenges such as weak inter-agency coordination, inadequate logistics, and limited community trust. These limitations reduce the capacity of security institutions to prevent and effectively respond to ethno-religious conflicts. Therefore, sustainable peace in Yala LGA depends not only on the presence of security institutions but also on the quality of their coordination, responsiveness, and integration with local communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. **Strengthening Inter-Agency Coordination:** Government should establish integrated security coordination frameworks at the local government level to enhance collaboration among police, civil defence, military, and intelligence agencies.
2. **Improved Intelligence and Early Warning Systems:** Security agencies should develop community-based intelligence networks to ensure early detection and prevention of ethno-religious conflicts.

3. Enhancement of Rapid Response Capacity: Security institutions should be equipped with adequate logistics, communication systems, and mobility tools to ensure timely response to conflict situations.
4. Community Participation in Security Governance: Community leaders, youth groups, and traditional rulers should be formally integrated into security planning and conflict management structures.
5. Trust-Building Between Security Agencies and Citizens: Security agencies should adopt more transparent and accountable practices to strengthen public trust and encourage cooperation.
6. Capacity Building for Security Personnel: Regular training on conflict sensitivity, mediation, and community engagement should be provided to security operatives deployed in conflict-prone areas.

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