

State-Led Security Operations Versus Community-Led Mediation Processes in Managing Violent Conflict in Taraba State: A Comparative Discourse

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Abstract

Taraba has witnessed persistent communal violence, often characterized by farmer-herder clashes and ethnic rivalries, leading to significant loss of life, displacement, and socioeconomic disruption. This study presents a comparative discourse on the efficacy of state-led security operations versus community-led mediation processes in managing violent conflicts within Taraba State, Nigeria. The focus is to critically analyze and contrast the approaches, outcomes, and long-term sustainability of these two dominant conflict intervention strategies. Relying on Hybrid Governance Theory and Ex-post facto research design and analysis, the findings indicate that while the community-led approach may lack the immediate coercive power of the state, it offers a more sustainable, inclusive, and culturally sensitive

pathway to lasting peace by fostering local ownership and social cohesion. Thus, paper recommends that the Taraba State government should initiate and implement a more integrated, hybrid conflict management model that strategically combines the necessary security framework provided by the state with the deep-rooted legitimacy and sustainability inherent in community-based mediation.

Keywords: Conflict, Violent Conflict, Conflict Management, State-led Security, Community-led Mediation

Introduction

Violent conflict has become a persistent feature of Nigeria's internal security landscape, particularly in states marked by ethno-religious diversity, competition over land and resources, and weak conflict management institutions. Taraba State, located in Nigeria's North-East geopolitical zone, exemplifies this challenge. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the state has experienced recurrent outbreaks of violent conflict involving farmers and herders, communal and ethnic militias, political actors, and criminal groups. These conflicts have resulted in loss of lives, displacement of populations, destruction of livelihoods, and deepened social fragmentation (Abbass, 2012; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). In response, both state-led security operations and community-led mediation processes have been deployed as key mechanisms for managing and containing violence. However, the effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability of these approaches remain contested.

State-led security operations have traditionally constituted the dominant response to violent conflict in Nigeria. Anchored on the deployment of the military, police, and other paramilitary agencies, these operations are premised on the assumption that

coercive force and law enforcement can deter violence, restore order, and reassert state authority (Albert, 2017). In Taraba State, such interventions have included military task forces, joint security operations, curfews, and emergency deployments during periods of escalated violence. While these measures have at times succeeded in suppressing overt hostilities, scholars argue that they often address symptoms rather than underlying causes of conflict, such as historical grievances, contestations over land ownership, identity politics, and failures of governance (Higazi, 2016; Mustapha, 2014). Moreover, reports of human rights abuses, civilian casualties, and the perceived partiality of security forces have frequently undermined public trust in state-led responses (Amnesty International, 2020).

Against this backdrop, community-led mediation processes have gained increasing attention as alternative or complementary approaches to conflict management. Rooted in indigenous institutions, religious leadership, traditional councils, and civil society initiatives, community-based mechanisms emphasize dialogue, negotiation, reconciliation, and restorative justice (Boege, Brown, & Clements, 2009). In Taraba State, local mediation efforts have involved traditional rulers, elders, faith-based organizations, and peace committees working to de-escalate tensions between conflicting groups and rebuild inter-communal relations. Advocates of this approach argue that community-led mediation enjoys greater legitimacy, cultural resonance, and contextual understanding, thereby enhancing its capacity to address the root causes of conflict and foster sustainable peace (Lederach, 1997; Adetula & Olarinmoye, 2015). Despite the growing policy and scholarly interest in community-led approaches, debates persist regarding their actual effectiveness when compared to state-led security operations. Critics question their ability to manage large-scale violence, confront heavily

armed actors, or operate independently of state authority (Hutchful & Aning, 2004).

This study engages with this debate by offering a comparative discourse on state-led security operations and community-led mediation processes in managing violent conflict in Taraba State. Rather than treating these approaches as mutually exclusive, the study situates them within broader discussions on hybrid security governance and conflict management in fragile and plural societies (Baker, 2010). It interrogates how each approach operates in practice, the conditions under which they succeed or fail, and the implications for long-term peace and social cohesion in the state.

The study which is focused on Taraba State contributes to the growing literature on subnational conflict dynamics in Nigeria, which emphasises the need to move beyond generalised national analyses to context-specific understandings of violence and peacebuilding (Egwu, 2015). The complex social composition, history of communal tensions in Taraba State, and varied conflict management interventions make it a suitable case for examining the interaction between formal state security mechanisms and informal, community-based mediation structures. Ultimately, this comparative discourse seeks to advance policy-relevant insights on how violent conflict can be more effectively managed through balanced and context-sensitive strategies. By critically assessing the outcomes and limitations of both state-led and community-led approaches, the study underscores the necessity of integrating security enforcement with inclusive mediation frameworks that prioritize local ownership, justice, and trust-building. Such an approach is essential not only for Taraba State but also for other conflict-prone regions in Nigeria grappling with similar security and governance challenges.

Statement Problem

Violent conflict remains one of the most pressing governance and security challenges confronting Taraba State, Nigeria. Despite repeated interventions, cycles of communal violence, often rooted in farmer–herder clashes, ethnic rivalries, political contestations, and struggles over land and identity, continue to recur, resulting in loss of lives, displacement, and erosion of social cohesion. In response to these crises, the Taraba State government has relied mainly on state-led security operations, including the deployment of the military and other security agencies, as the primary mechanism for restoring order. However, these interventions have frequently been criticized for their reactive nature, limited sustainability, and tendency to suppress violence without addressing its underlying structural and relational causes.

At the same time, community-led mediation processes, involving traditional rulers, religious leaders, elders, and local peace committees, have emerged as alternative or complementary approaches to managing violent conflict in the state. While these mechanisms are often praised for their cultural legitimacy, local ownership, and emphasis on dialogue and reconciliation, their capacity to manage large-scale or highly militarised violence remains under-examined (Lederach, 1997; Boege et al., 2009). The coexistence of these two approaches has generated tension and ambiguity within Taraba State’s conflict management framework, with no clear empirical consensus on which approach yields more effective, legitimate, and sustainable outcomes.

Existing studies tend to examine these approaches in isolation or focus broadly on Nigeria without sufficient attention to subnational dynamics and context-specific outcomes. Thus, there is dearth of systematic comparative analysis of state-led

security operations and community-led mediation processes in managing violent conflict in Taraba State. This gap limits policy learning and undermines efforts to design integrated conflict management strategies that balance coercive security responses with inclusive, community-based peacebuilding mechanisms. In this regard, this paper is positioned to analyse the operational framework and tactics of state-led security operations and the structure and processes of community-led mediation initiatives through a comparative lens to ascertain the immediate and long-term effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability of both approaches in managing violent conflicts.

Research Questions

This paper interrogates the following research questions:

- i. What has been the trajectories of Communal Conflicts in Taraba State, Nigeria?
- ii. How has State-led security operations enhanced community mediation for sustainable conflict resolution in Taraba State?
- iii. In what ways does community mediation serve as alternative and complementary approach to violent conflict management?

Research Objectives

This paper has been guided by the following Research objectives:

- i. To examine the trajectories of Communal Conflicts in Taraba State, Nigeria.
- ii. To ascertain how State-led security operations has enhanced community mediation for sustainable conflict resolution in Taraba State.

- iii. To determine the ways in which community mediation serve as alternative and complementary approach to violent conflict management.

Methodology

This study adopts Ex-post facto research design to examine the dynamics of state-led security operations and community-led mediation processes in managing violent conflict in Taraba State. Data for the study are drawn primarily from secondary sources to ensure breadth, depth, and secondary data of perspectives. These sources include government white papers and official security reports, which provide insight into state policies, security strategies, and official narratives of conflict management.

Conceptual Clarification

Violent conflict refers to a situation in which individuals, groups, or state actors employ physical force, or the credible threat of force, to pursue incompatible interests, values, or objectives, leading to death, injury, destruction of property, or displacement of populations (Galtung, 1969). It represents an escalation of conflict beyond non-violent disagreement and is characterized by the intentional use of violence as a means of advancing political, economic, social, or identity-based claims. Violent conflict is rooted in a combination of structural conditions such as political exclusion, economic marginalization, weak institutions, and social injustice and immediate triggers, including contested resources, identity polarization, or failures of dispute resolution mechanisms (Collier et al., 2003; Stewart, 2008).

Distinguished from latent or non-violent conflict, violent conflict poses severe threats to human security and state stability, frequently disrupting governance, social cohesion, and development processes (Kaldor, 2012). In sub-national contexts,

violent conflict often reflects the breakdown of traditional mediation systems and the militarisation of local disputes, thereby transforming manageable disagreements into sustained cycles of violence (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009).

State-Led Security Operations (SLSOs) refer to coercive and preventive actions undertaken by officially constituted state security institutions such as the military, police, intelligence agencies, and paramilitary forces to prevent, contain, or suppress threats to public order, territorial integrity, and national security (Buzan, 1991; OECD, 2007). These operations are typically authorized through formal legal and political frameworks and are executed in the name of the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force.

Conceptually, SLSOs are designed to restore order and deter violence through instruments such as patrols, raids, counterinsurgency campaigns, cordon-and-search operations, and emergency deployments in conflict-prone areas (Hills, 2009). They are often deployed in response to violent conflict, insurgency, terrorism, or large-scale communal unrest where the state perceives mediation or non-coercive mechanisms as insufficient.

Community-Led Mediation Processes (CLMPs) are locally driven, non-coercive mechanisms through which community actors facilitate dialogue, negotiation, and reconciliation among parties in conflict, thereby preventing escalation and fostering sustainable peace (Lederach, 1997; Mac Ginty, 2011). These processes are typically led by traditional leaders, elders, religious figures, women's groups, youth representatives, or community-based organizations who possess contextual knowledge, social legitimacy, and moral authority within their communities.

The literature emphasizes that CLMPs are grounded in indigenous norms, customary practices, and shared values, enabling them to address not only immediate disputes but also underlying social relationships and grievances that fuel conflict (Boege et al., 2009). Unlike state-led security responses, CLMPs prioritize consensus-building, restorative justice, and social cohesion, making them particularly effective in managing communal and identity-based conflicts at the local level (Lederach, 1997).

Empirical studies suggest that CLMPs can enhance the durability of peace outcomes by promoting local ownership and trust, especially in contexts where state institutions are weak, mistrusted, or absent (Mac Ginty, 2011; Paffenholz, 2015). However, scholars also caution that community-led mechanisms may reproduce local power hierarchies or exclude marginalized groups if not carefully structured and supported (Boege et al., 2009). Consequently, CLMPs are most effective when they are inclusive and complemented by supportive state policies and broader peacebuilding frameworks (Paffenholz, 2015).

Theoretical Framework: Hybrid Security Governance Theory

Hybrid Security Governance (HSG) theory gained prominence alongside broader debates on hybrid political orders and the “local turn” in peacebuilding, which challenged the assumption that Western-style state institutions were the sole or most legitimate foundations of security and order (Mac Ginty, 2011). Roger Mac Ginty’s work on hybrid peacebuilding contributed conceptually by highlighting how local actors adapt, resist, and reshape externally imposed security and peace frameworks, resulting in hybrid outcomes that blend international, national, and local practices (Mac Ginty, 2011). Most importantly, the theory was most prominently developed and codified by Niagalé Bagayoko, Eboe Hutchful, and Robin

Luckham in 2016. In their seminal 2016 work, “Hybrid security governance in Africa: rethinking the foundations of security, justice and legitimate public authority,” these scholars argued that: State and Informal Systems Intertwine: Instead of viewing security as exclusively state-run, they posit that state and non-state actors (such as customary authorities, militias, religious groups, and private security providers) coexist, interrelate, and “interpenetrate” at various levels. The theory emerged from critiques of state-centric security frameworks that dominated Cold War and early post–Cold War scholarship. The theory

Hybrid Security Governance theory is particularly relevant to studies comparing State-Led Security Operations and Community-Led Mediation Processes. It provides a conceptual lens for understanding how formal security interventions and community-based mechanisms coexist, overlap, and influence conflict management outcomes. Rather than viewing state-led operations and community mediation as mutually exclusive, the theory explains how their interaction, whether cooperative or antagonistic, shapes the effectiveness and legitimacy of conflict management strategies. In subnational conflict settings, Hybrid Security Governance helps explain why sustainable peace often depends on aligning state authority with locally embedded mediation structures, thereby bridging coercive security responses and socially grounded conflict-resolution processes.

Trajectories of Communal Conflicts in Taraba State, Nigeria

Communal and ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba State are longstanding and complex, rooted in diverse social identities, historical grievances, competition over land and political power, and intergroup distrust. Taraba’s multi-ethnic population, reportedly over eighty ethnic groups practicing Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions, creates a fertile context for identity-based mobilisation and recurrent clashes when political

or resource tensions escalate. Studies indicate that disputes often arise over land ownership, political representation, and access to vital resources, resulting in loss of life, property destruction, displacement, and weakened social cohesion. State interventions, both kinetic (military/police) and non-kinetic, have had mixed effects on reducing ethno-religious violence, with calls for proactive engagement that addresses root causes rather than reactive crisis management alone (Tukura, Momodu, & Owonikoko, 2025; Garba, Mutisya, & Ntaragwe, 2022). Extant literature on communal identity politics in Taraba indicates that manipulation of ethnic and religious identities by elites exacerbates tensions, fosters mutual suspicion, and fuels cycles of violence. Land ownership disputes, discrimination, and the absence of sustained reconciliation channels are cited as key drivers of inter-group conflict, suggesting the need for state-supported inclusive dialogue and reconciliation initiatives (Suleiman, Wunti, Adamu, & Yahaya, 2024; Sarki, Kwanneri, & Benjamin, 2025).

In Taraba State, farmer-herder conflict represents a significant dimension of communal violence, reflecting broader nationwide trends. Historically, sedentary crop farmers and nomadic herders maintained symbiotic relationships; however, in recent decades, clashes have escalated as herders' cattle encroach on farmlands, destroying crops and livelihoods. Resource scarcity (land and water), demographic pressures, environmental degradation, and weakened customary conflict-resolution structures are cited as primary causes of these conflicts in Taraba (Omar, 2023). Empirical work reveals serious negative impacts of these conflicts on food security: insecurity and poor management strategies undermine agricultural productivity, exacerbate poverty, and heighten social tensions. Constraints to effective resolution include pervasive insecurity, weak peacebuilding frameworks, and lack of implementation of livestock or land-use

policies (Dabo, Garba, Yakubu, & Abdullahi, 2024, Lamidi, Juta, & Taleat, 2023; Ogbonnaya, 2021).

Military and police interventions are frequently deployed to contain violence in Taraba and similar regions of Nigeria, but scholarship raises critical concerns about their effectiveness and unintended consequences. Critics argue that heavy reliance on coercive force may stabilize scenes temporarily but often fails to address underlying grievances or prevent recurrence of violence, and can even exacerbate tensions by eroding civic trust and creating perceptions of bias or impunity (Ijov, 2025; Bamidele, 2024). Across Nigeria's Middle Belt, shortcomings of state security responses marked by delayed actions, inadequate capacity, and weak institutional coordination have worsened insecurity and undermined public confidence in state authority. These patterns suggest that militarized approaches alone are insufficient for sustainable conflict management (Ijov, 2025).

State-Led Security Operations and Community Mediation: Comparative analysis of the implications for sustainable conflict resolution in Taraba State

State-led security operations (SLSOs) encompass actions undertaken by government security forces, including military, police, and paramilitary units, to suppress active violence, restore public order, and protect citizens and state institutions. These operations are typically justified on the grounds of preserving sovereignty and the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. The deployment of SLSOs is often rooted in legal frameworks that empower the state to intervene decisively when communal violence escalates beyond the capacity of civilian authorities to contain it.

Proponents argue that SLSOs can curb imminent violence and re-establish a minimum level of security required for

political, social, and economic activities to resume. The international peace and conflict literature also situate state security actions within broader frameworks of peacekeeping and stabilization, recognizing that coercive force, when applied judiciously, can create the conditions for subsequent political dialogue and reconciliation (Clayton & Dorussen, 2021). Specifically, mandated peacekeeping operations under the United Nations illustrate how state and international forces may interact with internal security mechanisms to suppress hostilities, protect civilians, and facilitate humanitarian access (Clayton & Dorussen, 2021).

State-led security operations are often assessed on their ability to stop active conflict and stabilize unsafe environments. Evidence from peace and conflict research shows that SLSOs can achieve immediate tactical successes, such as decreasing violence, disrupting insurgent or militant networks, and protecting key infrastructure. In international interventions, peacekeeping missions with strong security mandates have frequently helped create a “security space” that encourages dialogue and negotiation (Clayton & Dorussen, 2021).

However, the efficacy of SLSOs is often contingent on strategic design, rules of engagement, and the perceived legitimacy among local populations. When operations are supported by apparent legal authority and integrated with non-military stabilization approaches, they may achieve a temporary cessation of violence, allowing for humanitarian and governance measures to take effect. According to (Clayton & Dorussen, 2022), common tactics and deployment strategies in SLSOs include:

- **Establishing buffers and cordons:** Security forces create walls of control between warring communities to prevent clashes and protect civilians. These buffers may include

demilitarized zones or rapid-response units deployed along fault lines of conflict.

- **Enforcing disarmament:** The systematic removal of weapons from civilians and non-state actors aims to reduce the immediate capacity for violence. Disarmament is sometimes part of broader peace and security operations (e.g., disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs in post-conflict settings).
- **Mass arrests and checkpoints:** State forces may arrest perceived perpetrators or set up checkpoints to control movement and prevent the mobilization of violent actors. These tactics prioritize order enforcement and deterrence.

Such tactics emphasize physical control and deterrence, but they also reflect assumptions that security and order emerge primarily from force dominance rather than negotiated consent. Despite their utility in specific contexts, Clayton and Dorussen (2021) argue that SLSOs have multiple limitations:

a. High Operational Costs: Mobilizing and sustaining military and police forces is expensive for states. Costs include logistics, training, equipment, compensation, and long-term deployments, which can strain national budgets, particularly in developing countries. High costs may divert resources from essential services that contribute to broader social stability.

b. Human Rights Violations: One of the most potent critiques of SLSOs concerns human rights abuses committed during operations. The use of coercive force can lead to excessive civilian casualties, arbitrary arrests, and abuses by security personnel. Such violations not only harm civilians but also erode trust in the state's ability to protect its citizens.

c. Politicization of Deployment: Security operations are not always neutral. Governments may deploy forces in ways that favor particular political interests or communities, deepening grievances among marginalized groups. When SLSOs are viewed as instruments of political dominance rather than as impartial enforcers of public order, they can intensify communal resentments and fuel cycles of retaliation.

d. Failure to Address Deep-Seated Root Causes: State-led operations focus primarily on symptoms the visible manifestations of violence, rather than structural causes such as socio-economic inequality, political exclusion, or contested resource rights. Without addressing these underlying drivers, violence may recur once forces withdraw or reduce their presence.

e. Security Vacuum After Withdrawal: A well-documented phenomenon in security studies is the vacuum that forms after the withdrawal of state forces. When operations end without establishing sustainable local peace mechanisms or addressing political grievances, communities may revert to violence, causing cycles of instability. This limitation highlights the challenge of aligning security interventions with political and social reconciliation efforts.

State-Led Security Operations are premised on the Weberian notion of the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Through military deployments, police operations, curfews, and disarmament campaigns, SLSOs seek to suppress violence, deter armed actors, and reassert state authority over contested spaces (Weber, 1946; Jackson, 2011). Empirical studies suggest that such operations can be effective in producing immediate outcomes, especially in halting active hostilities and restoring a semblance of public order (Berdal & Keen, 1997). In contexts where violence is driven by heavily armed groups,

insurgents, or criminal networks, the coercive capacity of the state often becomes indispensable, as community-based actors lack the means to counter organized violence.

However, Kaldor, (2012) observed that in many cases, state security operations have been associated with civilian casualties, human rights abuses, and the erosion of trust between communities and the state, particularly where security forces are perceived as partisan or predatory (Hills, 2009). These dynamics often undermine the legitimacy of state interventions and can contribute to cycles of resistance and renewed violence. By contrast, Community-Led Mediation Processes operate from a bottom-up logic that prioritizes legitimacy derived from social embeddedness rather than formal authority. CLMPs are typically led by traditional rulers, councils of elders, religious leaders, or hybrid community institutions that command moral authority within local settings. Their effectiveness lies in their capacity to frame conflicts within shared cultural narratives and to employ restorative practices such as apology, compensation, and reconciliation rituals (Lederach, 1997). Comparative peacebuilding research demonstrates that such processes are particularly effective in managing communal conflicts where parties must continue to coexist and where social interdependence is high (Mac Ginty, 2014).

Mac Ginty, (2011) noted that Community-Led Mediation Processes. CLMPs are vulnerable to elite capture, as traditional and religious leaders may reflect existing power hierarchies and exclude marginalized groups such as women, youth, or minorities (Richmond, 2011). Additionally, community mediation lacks the capacity to confront heavily armed external actors or transnational threats, making it insufficient as a standalone response in high-intensity conflict environments. In such cases, the absence of

state-backed coercive force leaves communities exposed and undermines the durability of mediated agreements.

While state-led security operations offer immediacy and coercive capacity, their long-term effectiveness is constrained by legitimacy deficits and a narrow focus on force. Community-led mediation, though limited in dealing with armed external threats, provides culturally grounded and socially sustainable pathways to peace. A comparative analysis underscores that durable conflict management is most likely to emerge where the state's security role is aligned with, rather than imposed upon, community-based mechanisms of mediation and reconciliation.

Empirical studies on conflict recurrence indicate that militarized interventions are frequently associated with high relapse rates once security forces withdraw or operations are scaled down. Collier et al. (2008) demonstrate that countries emerging from armed conflict face a significant risk of returning to violence within five years, particularly where peace is enforced primarily through coercive means rather than social reconciliation. Similarly, Sambanis (2004) finds that peace settlements backed mainly by military enforcement, without inclusive political and social processes, are less durable. In such contexts, SLSOs may suppress violence temporarily but fail to dismantle the grievances, mistrust, and exclusion that originally fueled conflict.

By contrast, community-based and non-coercive approaches show greater promise in reducing conflict recurrence by strengthening social cohesion. Research on local peacebuilding initiatives indicates that when communities actively participate in dialogue, reconciliation, and restorative justice processes, they are more likely to develop norms and institutions capable of managing future disputes peacefully (Lederach, 1997; Mac Ginty, 2014). CLMPs contribute to what scholars describe as “everyday

peace” the routine practices and relationships that enable coexistence despite past violence (Mac Ginty, 2014). Although such processes may not immediately halt violence on a large scale, they build resilience that reduces the likelihood of renewed conflict over the long term.

Closely linked to these outcomes are issues of legitimacy, trust, and local ownership. One of the most significant drawbacks of State-Led Security Operations is their tendency to erode public trust in state institutions, particularly in contexts where security forces are perceived as abusive, corrupt, or biased. In contrast, Community-Led Mediation Processes tend to reinforce social capital and rebuild inter-group trust by relying on locally legitimate actors and culturally resonant practices. Trust is cultivated through inclusive dialogue, truth-telling, and restorative mechanisms that acknowledge harm and promote accountability without humiliation or force (Zehr, 2002). Because CLMPs are led by actors such as traditional leaders, religious figures, and elders, who are socially embedded, the process itself signals respect for community agency and dignity. This strengthens bonding and bridging social capital, enabling groups previously divided by violence to re-establish cooperative relationships (Putnam, 2000). The issue of local ownership is central to understanding why CLMPs often outperform SLSOs in sustaining peace. Peace processes imposed externally or driven exclusively by state security institutions frequently lack societal buy-in, making them fragile and reversible. Scholars of peacebuilding argue that sustainable peace is unlikely without meaningful participation by those most affected by conflict (Richmond, 2011).

Community Mediation as Alternative and Complementary Approach to Violent Conflict Management

Community-Led Mediation Processes (CLMPs) have emerged as an important conflict-management mechanism in societies where state authority is weak, contested, or distrusted. Unlike coercive security responses, CLMPs are grounded in indigenous institutions and emphasize dialogue, reconciliation, and social repair. Scholars of peacebuilding argue that conflicts rooted in identity, historical grievances, and competition over resources are unlikely to be sustainably resolved through force alone, making community-based mediation a critical avenue for addressing the underlying social dynamics of violence (Lederach, 1997; Mac Ginty, 2011). In practice, CLMPs are implemented through locally recognized leadership structures that command moral and cultural authority. Mediation is often led by traditional rulers, councils of elders, religious leaders, or hybrid bodies combining customary and faith-based actors. In several Nigerian communities, including parts of the Middle Belt and North-East, traditional mediation councils such as the *Achabawa*, emirate councils, or interfaith peace committees have played central roles in facilitating dialogue between conflicting groups. These actors derive legitimacy not from formal legal mandates, but from customary law, religious teachings, and long-standing social norms, which enable them to frame disputes in culturally intelligible ways (Boege et al., 2009). Their embeddedness within the community allows mediators to draw on shared histories, kinship ties, and symbolic rituals such as oath-taking, public apologies, or compensation to foster compromise and restore social equilibrium.

The effectiveness of Community-Led Mediation Processes is best assessed through qualitative indicators rather than narrow security metrics. One key measure is the achievement of genuine

reconciliation, defined as the rebuilding of trust and social relationships between previously antagonistic groups. Research shows that community mediation is particularly effective in addressing the emotional and psychological dimensions of conflict, including fear, resentment, and trauma, which are often ignored by formal state interventions (Lederach, 1997). Closely related is the emphasis on restorative justice, where accountability is pursued through acknowledgment of harm, restitution, and negotiated remedies rather than punitive sanctions. This restorative orientation has been shown to reduce the likelihood of revenge violence and cyclical conflict, especially in close-knit rural communities where long-term coexistence is unavoidable (Zehr, 2002).

Another important metric of effectiveness is socio-economic reintegration. Many CLMPs incorporate agreements that allow displaced persons to return, restore access to land and livelihoods, and reintegrate former combatants into community life. Studies of community-based peacebuilding in Africa indicate that such locally negotiated arrangements contribute to everyday peace by normalizing social and economic interactions and reducing incentives for renewed violence (Mac Ginty, 2014). By directly linking reconciliation with material recovery, CLMPs address both the social and economic drivers of conflict.

The sustainability and legitimacy of CLMPs constitute some of their strongest advantages. Compared to state-led security operations, community mediation processes are relatively low-cost and rely largely on existing social institutions. This makes them particularly suitable for contexts where state resources are limited and external interventions are episodic. More importantly, the high level of community buy-in associated with CLMPs enhances compliance with mediated agreements. Because outcomes are rooted in shared cultural norms and

collective decision-making, they carry moral authority and social pressure that formal state directives often lack (Boege et al., 2009). Legitimacy derived from cultural embeddedness increases the likelihood that agreements will endure beyond the immediate post-conflict period and equips communities with internal mechanisms for managing future disputes.

Despite these strengths, Community-Led Mediation Processes face notable limitations that constrain their overall impact. One persistent challenge is vulnerability to elite capture. Traditional and religious leaders are not neutral actors; they are embedded in local power structures and may be influenced by patronage, ethnic bias, or political interests. This can result in mediation outcomes that favor dominant groups while marginalizing women, youth, and minority communities, thereby reproducing structural inequalities that fuel conflict (Richmond, 2011). Resource constraints further weaken CLMPs, as many community institutions lack the financial and technical capacity to sustain long-term mediation, monitor compliance, or support large-scale reintegration initiatives. Most critically, CLMPs have limited capacity to address conflicts involving heavily armed external actors such as insurgent groups, bandits, or transnational criminal networks. In such contexts, the absence of coercive power leaves communities exposed to renewed violence, undermining the gains of dialogue-based interventions. Scholars therefore caution against romanticizing community mediation as a stand-alone solution, emphasizing instead the need for complementary state security measures capable of neutralizing armed threats (Mac Ginty, 2011).

Conclusion

This study examined the comparative effectiveness of State-Led Security Operations (SLSOs) and Community-Led Mediation Processes (CLMPs) in managing violent conflict in Taraba State,

a context characterized by ethno-religious diversity, competition over land and resources, and recurring communal violence. The findings indicate that while SLSOs have played a critical role in containing outbreaks of violence and restoring short-term public order, their impact has largely been temporary and reactive. Military deployments, curfews, and joint security operations have suppressed active hostilities, but they have not adequately addressed the structural, social, and historical drivers of conflict within the state. In some instances, heavy-handed security responses have further strained relations between communities and the state, contributing to mistrust and weakening the legitimacy of state institutions.

In contrast, Community-Led Mediation Processes have demonstrated stronger potential for fostering long-term peace in Taraba State. By leveraging the authority of traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community elders, CLMPs have facilitated dialogue, reconciliation, and restorative justice at the grassroots level. These processes have been particularly effective in rebuilding inter-group trust, enabling the return and reintegration of displaced persons, and restoring social cohesion in conflict-affected communities. Their cultural embeddedness and reliance on local norms have enhanced legitimacy and compliance, making peace agreements more sustainable over time.

However, the study also shows that CLMPs are not enough on their own in high-intensity conflict situations, especially when violence involves heavily armed actors or external militias. Limitations like elite capture, exclusion of marginalized groups, and insufficient resources restrict their reach and effectiveness. The comparative analysis, therefore, highlights that neither SLSOs nor CLMPs, alone, can offer a full solution to violent conflict in Taraba State.

Recommendations

The study recommends as follows:

Taraba state government should establish a State-Wide Conflict data by developing a digital platform where trained "Community Observers" (traditional rulers, youth leaders, and women) report rising tensions and early warning messages to address the historical and evolving trajectories of conflict in the state.

There is need for the state government to adopt "Civil-Military Peace Liaison" Model by integrating Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Units into all internal security operations to mediate and facilitate peace building.

The state government should establish Local Government Peace and Reconciliation Committees (LGPRCs) with legal backing to enable the people see mediation as a legally recognized alternative to both violence and the slow-moving formal court system.

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