

# EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNAL CONFLICT MEDIATION IN THE NORTH CENTRAL GEOPOLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** Conflict situations are endemic in the African continent, and Nigeria is not an exception. Plagued with different types of conflicts that ranged from political to ethnic, religious, and communal, the country and different advocacy groups and INGOs have worked in synergy and separately to ensure peaceful coexistence. In respect of the foregoing, this study was conducted to assess the communication strategies adopted by government in the North Central geopolitical zone toward conflict mediation in the region. The researchers relied on a survey research design using questionnaires distributed to 594 respondents. The study recorded a 94.6% response rate, and findings showed government to have used different strategies for communal mediation. Some of the strategies identified are community relations, traditional institutions approach, public relations, peacebuilding communication, media relations, and religious organisation approach, among others. It also demonstrated a high level of use of communication in conflict mediation while showing that the use of strategies has led to reduced tensions and peaceful coexistence among others. The researchers concluded that communication strategies are effective means to mediate in conflict and recommend their continuous use in similar situations.

**Keywords:** Communication, Government, Media, Mediation, Strategies

## INTRODUCTION

Conflict is common in human society due to the interrelationship and interconnectedness among people, which often result in disagreements and confrontations. This is an indication that conflicts usually involve two or more parties that have reached a position of disagreement due to the pursuit of opposing goals and objectives. Al-Rawashdeh and Al-Majali (2017) lent credence by describing conflict as a competitive phenomenon whereby two or more persons aim at the same thing, making it difficult to meet the demands of one party. It is now common in human society and can be considered natural, but for its propensity to result in war and violence, it is associated with a negative connotation (Doss, Airth & Pisano, 2023). In essence, conflict in human society can lead to destructive violence at different levels.

According to Cuppen (2018), conflicts may arise on account of conflicting values, interests, or expectations and can also extend to other broader issues related to social cohesion, trust in institutions, local democracy, and prolonged cases involving regional, national, or global players. This implies that conflicts are consequences of incompatible opinions, beliefs, and objectives among humans who co-habit. These incompatibilities may assume complex and dynamic dimensions, leading to violent clashes between and among parties to the conflict situations. In the event, a conflict situation turns violent, the devastating impact that follows

may culminate in disruption of economic and social systems, property damage, physical harm (as in loss of lives) and long-term trauma for victims of the conflict. Conflicts left unresolved can also lead to long-term instability in certain regions of the world. This has been seen in the case of the Middle East, and different parts of Africa.

Conflict situations are reported across the African continent with proliferation of armed non-state actors and violent extremism by Boko Haram spreading from Nigeria to other neighbouring countries especially the Lake Chad region (Adeleke, 2023). Conflicts of similar impact are also reported in Burkina Faso (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2024; Yeboah & Aikins, 2024) and the Central African Republic (Baleta, 2023; Guenard, 2024). In the East and the Horn of Africa, there were also reported cases of violent conflict, including human rights abuses from different parts which resulted in the death of thousands of civilians in Ethiopia and Sudan and the abduction and killing of dozens in Kenya and other dimensions of the conflicts in South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Eritrea (Hassan, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2025). The foregoing is to establish the background of conflicts in different parts of the African continent.

In consideration of the severity of the violence and the duration of hostilities, one conclusion can be reached, and this is the possibility of a number of factors being responsible for the conflicts across the continent. For instance, Nshom (2017) observed that the conflicts cannot be viewed from the social psychological perspective, such as prejudice alone, but must be given a holistic consideration by looking at social and economic factors that may have led to a particular conflict because of the complexity of the continent and on the grounds that there could be intertwined causes of conflict. According to Matsinhe (2022), governance of natural resources remains a prominent catalyst for conflicts in Africa even in the face of the multidimensional and complex history behind the extreme violence across different countries on the continent. The impacts are devastating, and a report also revealed that over 630 million children and their mothers have been displaced across the world owing to the nature of violent conflicts (Adeyanju et al., 2025). Africa is no exception, as extremism and violent conflicts continue to be a source of concern.

In Nigeria, the Boko Haram extremism, the bandits' killing spree, and the farmer-herder conflicts as well as the pockets of violence arising from chieftaincy tussles in various communities across the length and breadth of the country are some of the recorded cases of conflict situations. Tuki (2024) lent credence to the assertion that Nigeria continues to see violent conflicts, with the 2024 Global Terrorism Index report ranking the country as the eighth least peaceful country in the world. Conflicts arising from resource allocation and control have always been glaring in the country considering the lingering nature of the Niger Delta disturbances and the economic impact on the Nigerian nation. Accordingly, Tanko (2021) observed that Nigeria is faced with insecurity problems that can be traced to different conflict situations, which can be summarized as five basic threats which include oil militants, separatist insurgency, banditry and kidnapping, farmer-herder clashers and Jihadism.

The North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria is both a geographical delineation and a political zone. It comprised six states which include Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger and the seventh being the Federal Capital Territory. The area is not new to conflicts as Ojewale (2021) reported that violent clashes have been recorded in different areas in the zone. Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Nwofor (2024) also revealed that violent clashes between farmers and herders have been recorded in parts of the North Central states of Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi and Plateau with competition over fresh water and land resources are the major factors responsible for the perennial violent situations in the area. In Niger state, the situation is on a different level as economic disparities also result in violent conflicts in different parts leading to multidimensional poverty economic disruptions (Abimbola et al., 2023). Violent conflicts on

different levels have also been recorded in Kwara (Akinnusi et al., 2019; Azeez et al., 2024; Luqman, 2010) and the FCT (Ajadi, 2023; Anyadike, 2023) at different points in time.

Faced with the multidimensional conflicts and their multifaceted impact, government and other stakeholders are poised to make efforts at mediation and reconciliation as part of measures to ensure peaceful coexistence in society. Nigeria's public institutions charged with conflict/dispute mediation and resolution are the public complaints commission (PCC), national human rights commission (NHRC), national industrial court, federal ministry of justice's department of citizens' rights, and the Central Bank of Nigeria (Mmeje, 2023). These institutions of government are charged with mediating in disputes that range from industrial to communal and even personal. Their functions are multifaceted, taking on different tasks to ensure that disputants or parties to disputes get to sit and discuss toward reconciliation on both short- and long-term basis. This implies that communication is a crucial aspect of the process.

From the foregoing, the use of communication strategies by the government is considered as crucial. Ignoring the fault lines and not engaging in mediation through dialogue can make things degenerate into chaos. Accordingly, Abiodun (2021) noted that human communication remains an important avenue or channel for dispute resolution or even worsens an already difficult situation resulting in negative results. The implication is that communication within the context of a dispute can be a force for good or evil depending on the application. Therefore, careful application of communication strategies is required especially while dealing with conflicts of a communal nature. Such communication strategies may include but not limited to promoting understand and facilitating dialogue between the parties, building trust, ensuring concise and clear communication and leveraging on non-verbal cues while showing empathy to victims. These strategies have been activated at different times in conflict mediation efforts in Nigeria (Babatope & Olanipekun, 2017). This study, therefore, assessed communication strategies deployed by the government for conflict mediation in North Central Nigeria.

### ***Statement Of the Problem***

Conflicts have a devastating impact on society. It is based on this knowledge that constituted authorities and interested stakeholders usually take on different approaches to resolve conflicts. Prolonged conflicts without intervention could result in many unthinkable and unimaginable consequences, including hunger resulting from insecurity (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2024), deaths and destruction of property at the social and human level (Biekpe, 2024), and overall regression of the countries in economic, social, and political dimensions (Nkabane, 2022). These different dimensions of the impacts of conflict are indicative of the need to prevent conflicts at all costs. In situations where conflicts become inevitable, peaceful resolution through dialogue (communication) must be the most significant option.

Considering the social, economic, and political instability dimensions of the devastating impacts of conflicts on nations, it becomes expedient that concerned authorities refuse the temptation to ignore any situation that could develop into a full-scale conflict. The foregoing is an indication that conflict mediation and resolution are crucial to ensure that conflicts are not prolonged. Previous studies have established the need for communication in conflict mediation efforts (Adejimola, 2020; Amiara, 2018; Ogbu, 2017; Okai et al., 2014). However, due to the continuous state of conflict in Africa and Nigeria in particular, this study empirically assessed the communication strategies of the government toward conflict mediation in North Central Nigeria.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the state of communal conflict mediation efforts of the government towards resolving conflicts in North Central Nigeria
2. Ascertain the extent of government conflict mediation efforts toward resolving conflicts in the region.
3. Determine the influence of government conflict mediation on peace building in the region.

### ***Government Communication Strategies***

The concept of government strategic communication is treated here in the component's "government" and "communication strategies." Government as a concept is broad, but as used here, it is used to refer to the authority that sets rules for society to function. This is in line with the conceptualisation of the concept according to Enders et al (2023), who described government as the authority that sets rules for a society. On a related note, Brogan (2025) described government as that political system by which a community or country is regulated and administered. The political system is arranged in such a way that actions are organised through plans and taken to solve societal issues. For instance, the government ensures law and order through control, direction, and command, among other administrative functions. In the same vein, actions organised through plans by the government can also help quell chaotic situations in a community or country at large.

Communication strategy is about plans followed toward achieving communication goals (Meiners et al., 2023). The authors further note that communication strategies serve as a blueprint for communicating with one another. Another conceptualisation of the concept showed that communication strategies could be verbal and non-verbal techniques through which communication effectiveness is enhanced, and breakdowns in communication are overcome (Aoyama et al., 2023). The researchers identified rapport and gestures (interpersonal strategies), speech accommodation, code-switching, and attitudinal resources in the form of tolerance and patience as communication strategies required to navigate cultural and linguistic differences in diverse communication encounters and settings. This implies that the strategy developed for effective communication involves a careful consideration of some factors, including culture and language, and acknowledging these means that the communication encounter may produce desired results.

Government communication strategies, therefore, refer to the plans by a constituted authority to achieve the desired communication outcomes or goals. The government may be intentional about communication goals, and so strategies are leveraged to develop and convey the messages, build awareness, and launch campaigns toward certain initiatives. With such strategies, the government can take control during crises and ensure that listeners across different demographics understand the same message when conveyed (Content Works, 2024). Government communication strategy encompasses stages from planning to implementation and evaluation and refers to the main values and objectives of government communication, which sets out the shared communication model through which information about change and progress can be made available to the public (Jamalullail et al., 2023). As applied in this study, communication strategies are such communication plans to address communal conflict situations in the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

### ***Communal Conflict Mediation***

Communal conflict mediation refers to a structured process where a neutral third party facilitates negotiation and dialogue between parties in a dispute in the most peaceful manner possible and promotes reconciliation, ensuring trust is returned and showing mutual respect to all parties involved. Adom and Ugal (2025) averred that in both Western and traditional societies, mediation involves a third party that leverages the confidential process of mediation to assist parties toward reaching a solution that is mutually agreeable to all. On their part, Anene and Duru (2019) explained that mediation is an intervention that is non-coercive and involves mediator(s), otherwise known as a “third party,” whose main task is to take actions to reduce or bring conflict to a situation of peaceful settlement of all parties to the dispute. Paul (2023) referred to mediation as a structured interactive process where specialised negotiation and communication techniques are applied by an impartial third party.

As an important alternative dispute resolution measure, mediation is concerned with efforts through which negotiations between and among disputants are facilitated to help them resolve disagreements. For clarification, communal conflicts refer to conflicts that arise from non-state groups with similar or the same communal identity (Bello & Awa, 2020). Conflict situations also require some form of intervention for peace not to become elusive to a particular community or geographical location. Accordingly, Usman et al (2025) state that alternative dispute resolutions save cost and time, result in satisfaction and effective issue resolution with parties expressing happiness at the outcome, improve and sustain cordial relationships between and among parties to the conflict, and also maintain the privacy of parties against litigation. Furthermore, the researchers stated that ADR also provides platforms for less confrontational dispute resolution measures with unique control and flexibility.

Communal mediation is also known as community mediation. In community conflict mediation, Sanpietro (2021) noted that communities are offered a forum in which conflicts can be resolved through the process of addressing those underlying issues that led to escalations in the first instance. The researchers considered mediation as a quick route to ensure improved communal and collaborative relationships at the lowest ebb of society, where persons are able to cohabit in peace. Serious mediation efforts have been taken by the government and other interested stakeholders, and it is on this note that they are considered critical in the eventual resolution of conflict situations (Elfverson, 2019). In different parts of Nigeria, governments at different levels usually take steps to mediate in conflict toward a peaceful resolution of the issues that caused the situation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Issues around conflict have generated attention and research focus from time immemorial, largely due to the nature of human societies, where there never exists a situation of absolute absence of conflict and disputes. Some researchers are mainly focused on mediation efforts and strategies. However, this study takes on an approach that considers the communication strategies of the government in communal conflict mediation efforts in a part of Nigeria. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a foundation for literature in this study with conflict in society and Nigeria, examining the government's approach to such conflicts and the success story or otherwise before delving into the crux of this study. According to Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Nwofor (2024), across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, conflicts are rife, and the ones between herders and farmers are most common and worrisome. This is an indication that Nigeria is faced with a conflict challenge that affects its length and breadth.

Nnabuihe (2024) also observed that the country has witnessed countless number of conflicts that span a number of years, with resistance from the minority groups in the nation being a strong driver. Whereas the researcher identified the centrist form of federalism that promotes a dominance of the majority ethnic groups over the rest, other researchers adduced

the conflict to socio-economic factors such as struggle for land resources between farmers and herders (Ajodo-Adebanjoko & Nwofor, 2024), poverty and inequality (Abimbola et al., 2024), and ethnic and religious factors (Atuluku et al., 2023; Okibe, 2022; Ngwoke & Ituman, 2020). A study by Usoro et al (2014) also revealed the feeling of alienation as a major source of conflict in Nigeria. This implies that various reasons are responsible for the different levels of conflicts seen in different parts of the country, and these range from ethno-religious to socio-political.

No doubt, governments in various areas of Nigeria have made significant efforts to resolve conflicts in their domain. Familugba and Adedayo (2020) showed that the government of Nigeria has made significant efforts to resolve conflicts in the country through various mechanisms, including the use of indigenous strategies and techniques. One of the several strategies the government has attempted to mediate in communal conflict in Nigeria is through the intervention of setting up panels (Nwaogwugwu & Dabelema, 2019). Mediation through different avenues was also identified as a critical measure by the government of Nigeria to build relationships and address conflicts in the country (Adom & Ugal, 2025). Across the West African region, dialogue has also been explored as a mediation strategy for communal conflict mediation (Okai et al., 2014). In Nigeria, several commissions of enquiry or panels have been set up to reconcile parties to a conflict, whether in the communities, at the state level or even at the national level. These efforts involved communication between and among parties to the conflicts at different levels.

These scholarly positions and perspectives demonstrate the state of government conflict mediation strategies to be on course as they are known to be reactive and not proactive. Panels and commissions of enquires are usually instituted whenever there is a conflict and such usually outlive their relevance due to recurring conflicts in the country. Studies have also showed the recurring nature of communal conflicts in the country (Aboh et al., 2023; Fadeyi & Adamu, 2023; Fadeyi & Abdullahi, 2019; Okoli & Ukwandu, 2021) and the larger African region (Yemane & Borowy, 2023). Conflict situations remain endemic in view of the many environmental impact coupled with considerations such as the struggle for lean resources in form of Land and water (Olademo et al., 2021; Orhero, 2020; Zubairu & Agba, 2023). This remains a disturbing situation for successive governments who have made phenomenal efforts to stem the tide and create a peaceful atmosphere for all citizens. Communication and conflict mediation strategies are some of the measures explored by the government.

Such efforts of government have had significant impact on conflict resolution measures in the country. The administration of Yar'Adua reportedly utilised alternative dispute resolution mechanism to address the Niger Delta militancy through the amnesty programme, creation of the Niger Delta Ministry and related intervention (Orhero, 2020). These efforts now considered as impactful strategies helped douse tensions in the area. In contrast, findings from a study also demonstrated that though there have been interventions by government; the conflicts are recurring because of imperfect enforcement of the conflict resolution strategies (Olademo et al., 2021). There is another challenge of coercive and unconstructive conflict management pattern by successive administrations in Nigeria with the Abacha's interventions in the Ife-Modakeke conflicts and Obasanjo's administration solution to the Arogbo Ijaw-Ugbollaji crises (Orhero, 2020). These may have had immediate impact on the spate of violence that accompanied the conflicts but have negative effect due to the fragile peace and the recurring nature of such conflicts in affected areas.

Researchers also conducted some empirical studies on conflict mediation in Nigeria. A study conducted by Abimbola et al (2023) based on survey of residents in select states of North Central Nigeria (Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau) revealed that increased occurrences of conflicts can be linked to higher levels of deprivations such as inequality and poverty among the people. The researchers concluded that equitable resource distribution, inclusive economic growth, and

enhanced access to social services are some of the socio-economic disparities that need to be addressed toward mitigating communal conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence in the geopolitical zone. The study under review and this current one are similar due to their geographical focus on the North Central region of Nigeria. The difference between the studies stems from the specific variables tested. For the study under review poverty and inequality are critical variables while this study is mainly concerned with communication strategies utilised by government.

A mixed-method study conducted by Olademo et al (2021) was an attempt to identify factors responsible for the conflict between Share and Tsaragi communities in North Central state of Kwara. The study also sought to examine interventions previously activated to resolve the crises. Issues such as the communal clashes arising from land and boundary disputes, religious biases, non-implementation of government white paper, and reluctance of disputants to embrace peace are some of the critical factors that affect conflicts in the areas. This is also related to the indigene and settler dichotomy on one hand, and the betrayer and enemy tag on the other that were identified major factors to the conflicts. Findings of the study showed that interventions by government to mediate in conflicts are defective in terms of enforcement and that failure is a primary factor for recurring conflicts in the country. The government's failure to implement white paper and fire brigade approach are major challenges. The researchers concluded that different tiers offered various interventions alien to the African culture and were deemed ineffective. The difference between the study under review and this current one is that of the specific focus. While the former is based on communities in Kwara, the latter is about select states in North Central.

A related study was conducted by Maikasuwa, Sani and Ibrahim (2024) in which the researchers attempted to understand the place of traditional institutions in conflict resolution and prevention in Nigeria with focus on Sanga LGA of Kaduna State. Findings of the study demonstrated that conflict mediation strategy that emphasised peaceful coexistence was the traditional institution-oriented strategy adopted to mediate in communal conflict in the area. The study, however, showed that factors such as economic, religious and political challenges negatively altered the effectiveness of the traditional measures put in place to address conflicts in the area. Through recommendations, the researchers canvassed constitutional provisions to strengthen the roles of traditional institutions in conflict mediation. With the evaluation of conflict mediation strategy, the study under review is similar to the current one but differ based on its narrow-focus on the traditional institution-oriented strategy as opposed to this study's focus on government communication strategies.

A study on the roles played by traditional rules in conflict mediation in Kwara State was another conducted by Abdulsalam, Olokooba, Okafor and Adika (2020) in which the researchers laid emphasis on the sustenance of democracy. Findings showed that the traditional institutions through the rulers play crucial roles in conflict resolution in a way that fosters democratic stability through peace initiatives. Conclusion drawn from the study is that traditional rulers with good knowledge of local issues that affect individuals and social groups may have the capacity to facilitate effective conflict resolution. The researchers recommended that rulers must be engaged to address the concerns of community members. The focus on communal conflict resolution mechanisms is the common denominator between the study under review and this current one. However, the studies differ in specific geographic scope as it communities of focus.

### ***Theoretic Framework***

This study is anchored on the interest-based relational approach model and the conflict transformation theory. The interest-based relational approach is a win-win-oriented model of

conflict resolution that seeks to address underlying interests and needs of all parties to a dispute rather than a focus on their demands and position (Usman et al., 2025). The model has foundations set on the key principles with emphasis on the focus on interests rather than individual positions in the negotiation or mediation process and these foundations are based on Fisher et al (1991) who suggested that the theory is focused on four primary areas. Accordingly, the scholars identified these areas as: 1) the focus on interests rather than the positions taken by parties to the conflict; 2) that the theory separates people from the problems; 3) its emphasis on mutual gains and creative options; and 4) the focus on collaboration and communication.

On account of this model, it is important to take cognizance of the individual differences of parties to a conflict while providing the required assistance to avoid being too entrenched in a fixed position (Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). It has been provided that conflicts can be resolved with the application of the interest-based relational approach, however, some rules are to be observed, and these, according to Thomas and Kilmann (1978) are 1) to ensure that priority is given to good relationships; 2) to separate people from problems; 3) to pay proper attention to interests being presented; 4) to first, listen, before talking; 5) to set out the facts; 6) to jointly explore available options. This theory is applied to this study to provide justification for government's choice of certain communication strategies toward resolving communal conflicts in select states of North Central geopolitical zone.

The second theoretical framework for this study is the conflict transformation theory. The J. P. Lederach has been identified as one of the major proponents of this theory (Botes, 2001). The theory rests on the foundation of Lederach's argument that finding a solution to conflict situation is beyond mere rhetoric that borders on resolution and that the root cause of the conflict must be addressed in a manner that it is transformed (Lederach, 1995). Furthermore, the theorist explained that there may be four dimensions to conflict transformation on the grounds that the concept is multidimensional. The four dimensions identified by the scholar rule transformation, structural transformation, actor transformation and issue transformation. These four are critical in the conflict resolution process. This study is anchored on the conflict transformation theory based on its analysis that supports the use of communication strategies to foster mediation and achieve cohesion in Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is a survey. It is based on an elaborate study of the government's communication strategies adopted for conflict mediation in select states of North Central Nigeria. The survey research was considered appropriate to gauge the perceptions of respondents as to the application of the strategies toward finding peace in the conflict-prone region. The population of the study comprised residents in the geographical location known as the North Central zone. Accordingly, the researchers relied on their knowledge of the nature of conflicts in the zone to select areas considered "hotbeds" in the zone. By the foregoing, the researchers imply that there are some conflict-prone areas in the region based on available information and observation. This yielded Agatu (Benue State), Eggon (Nasarawa), and Jos North (Plateau State) as the specific focus for the study. Data from the National Population Commission showed that the three towns have 1, 039, 200 inhabitants.

A sample was taken from the population using the Australian Sample Size calculator to arrive at 600 as the sample for the study. This was achieved by keying certain calculation parameters such as confidence level (95%), population size (1, 039, 200), confidence interval (0.04), upper (0.54000), lower (0.46000), standard error (0.02041), relative standard error (4.08). This implies that 600 is the sample size. However, due to the subtraction of 6 persons from the size on account of the larger study's design to include the individuals in the in-depth interviews (qualitative data), the researchers arrived at 594 as the final sample size for this

study. A multistage sampling technique was utilised to arrive at the final sample units that include respondents in the area of study. These stages involved the use of purposive sampling in the first and second stages to arrive at a selection of Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau from the list of 6 in the zone and a selection of Agatu, Eggon, and Jos North from the selected states. The questionnaire is the instrument of data collection for this study. It was designed with the aid of a Likert scale for ease of coding, and a sample of one of the questions being (Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Indifferent = 3; Strongly Disagree = 2; Disagree = 1). Face validity was used to determine the suitability of the instrument, and this was done by experts in the Department of Mass Communication, Glorious University, Ogwa, Edo State, Nigeria. A test-retest method was conducted at a 14-day interval to determine the reliability. The result of the test showed a coefficient of .75 implying that it was reliable. The instrument of data was personally administered to the respondents in the study area with the aid of 2 research assistants. In line with research ethics, respondents were informed of their rights, including voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study at any point in time. They were also ensured of the protection of their identity in the ethical statement provided. SPSS Version 26 was relied upon for the analysis of the data after appropriate coding.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1:** What are the crisis communication strategies used by governments in North Central Nigeria for communal conflict mediation?

| Variable/Parameter                    | Frequency | Per cent<br>[ %] | Valid Percent<br>[ %] | Cumulative<br>Percent [%] |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Community relations                   | 100       | 17.8             | 17.8                  | 27.2                      |
| Public relations                      | 80        | 10.7             | 10.7                  | 71.0                      |
| Advocacy                              | 11        | 2.0              | 2.0                   | 2.0                       |
| Peacebuilding<br>communication        | 27        | 4.8              | 4.8                   | 58.5                      |
| Participatory<br>communication        | 16        | 2.8              | 2.8                   | 53.7                      |
| Traditional<br>institution approach   | 97        | 17.3             | 17.3                  | 98.8                      |
| Civil societies and<br>NGOs approach  | 12        | 2.1              | 2.1                   | 6.9                       |
| Dialogue approach                     | 16        | 2.8              | 2.8                   | 46.1                      |
| Religious<br>organisation<br>approach | 23        | 4.1              | 4.1                   | 80.6                      |
| Aids and donor<br>agencies approach   | 4         | .7               | .7                    | 4.8                       |
| Media relations                       | 24        | 4.3              | 4.3                   | 50.9                      |
| Total                                 | 562       | 100.0            | 100.0                 |                           |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data in Table 2 demonstrated the state of conflict mediation, showing that there is active use of different strategies in the area to find lasting peace. As seen in the table, the strategies range from community relations to media relations, religious and traditional institution approaches, among others.

**Table 2:** The extent to which the government uses communication for communal conflict mediation in your community

| Variable/Parameter | Frequency | Percent<br>[ %] | Valid Percent<br>[ %] | Cumulative<br>Percent [%] |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| High               | 137       | 24.4            | 24.4                  | 37.9                      |
| Very high          | 140       | 24.9            | 24.9                  | 89.0                      |
| Can't tell         | 76        | 13.5            | 13.5                  | 13.5                      |
| Low                | 147       | 26.2            | 26.2                  | 64.1                      |
| Very low           | 62        | 11.0            | 11.0                  | 100.0                     |
| Total              | 562       | 100.0           | 100.0                 |                           |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As in Table 2 above, respondents are of the notion that the use of communication for conflict mediation in their area is high. This is demonstrated based on the perception of 24.9 percent of respondents, in addition to another 24.4 percent of them.

**Table 3:** To what extent have you actively participated in government-sponsored communal conflict mediation efforts?

| Variable/Parameter | Frequency | Percent<br>[ %] | Valid<br>Percent<br>[ %] | Cumulative<br>Percent [%] |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| High               | 145       | 25.8            | 25.8                     | 46.4                      |
| Very high          | 90        | 16.0            | 16.0                     | 86.5                      |
| Can't tell         | 116       | 20.6            | 20.6                     | 20.6                      |
| Low                | 135       | 24.0            | 24.0                     | 70.5                      |
| Very low           | 76        | 13.5            | 13.5                     | 100.0                     |
| Total              | 562       | 100.0           | 100.0                    |                           |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 data showed a significantly high rate of participation among respondents in communal conflict mediation forums created by the government. In essence, they were actively involved in the avenues the government created for peace.

**Table 4:** The crisis communication of the government has influenced my decision to accept to cohabit peacefully with people in my community

| Variable/Parameter | Frequency | Percent<br>[ %] | Valid<br>Percent<br>[ %] | Cumulative<br>Percent [%] |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Agree              | 286       | 50.9            | 50.9                     | 50.9                      |
| Strongly agree     | 114       | 20.3            | 20.3                     | 92.2                      |
| Can't tell         | 33        | 5.9             | 5.9                      | 56.8                      |
| Disagree           | 85        | 15.1            | 15.1                     | 71.9                      |
| Strongly disagree  | 44        | 7.8             | 7.8                      | 100.0                     |
| Total              | 562       | 100.0           | 100.0                    |                           |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data in Table 4 showed that members of the affected communities agreed to cohabit based on their exposure to the crisis communication initiated by the government toward conflict mediation.

**Table 5:** Tensions are reduced in my community because of the crisis communication of the governments in North Central

| Variable/Parameter | Frequency | Percent<br>[ %] | Valid<br>Percent<br>[ %] | Cumulative<br>Percent [%] |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Agree              | 231       | 41.1            | 41.1                     | 41.1                      |
| Strongly Agree     | 99        | 17.6            | 17.6                     | 71.5                      |
| Undecided          | 113       | 20.1            | 20.1                     | 100.0                     |
| Disagree           | 72        | 12.8            | 12.8                     | 53.9                      |
| Strongly disagree  | 47        | 8.4             | 8.4                      | 79.9                      |
| Total              | 562       | 100.0           | 100.0                    |                           |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As seen in Table 13, tensions arising from conflicts are reduced due to the communication of the government in the geopolitical zone, and this is based on the opinion of the majority of respondents.

**Table 6:** To what extent has the crisis communication of the governments in North Central reduced conflict?

| Variable/Parameter | Frequency | Percent<br>[ %] | Valid Percent<br>[ %] | Cumulative<br>Percent [%] |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| High               | 170       | 30.2            | 30.2                  | 30.2                      |
| Very high          | 96        | 17.1            | 17.1                  | 92.7                      |
| Undecided          | 149       | 26.5            | 26.5                  | 75.6                      |
| Low                | 106       | 18.9            | 18.9                  | 49.1                      |
| Very low           | 41        | 7.3             | 7.3                   | 100.0                     |
| Total              | 562       | 100.0           | 100.0                 |                           |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data in Table 6 imply that conflict may have reduced based on the communication strategies adopted by the government toward conflict mediation in select states of North Central Nigeria.

**Table 7:** The crisis communication efforts of the government have enhanced inter-ethnic cooperation in North Central

| Variable/Parameter | Frequency | Percent<br>[ %] | Valid Percent<br>[ %] | Cumulative<br>Percent [%] |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Agree              | 227       | 40.4            | 40.4                  | 40.4                      |
| Strongly Agree     | 111       | 19.8            | 19.8                  | 73.3                      |
| Undecided          | 106       | 18.9            | 18.9                  | 100.0                     |
| Disagree           | 74        | 13.2            | 13.2                  | 53.6                      |
| Strongly disagree  | 44        | 7.8             | 7.8                   | 81.1                      |
| Total              | 562       | 100.0           | 100.0                 |                           |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The implication of the data in Table 7 above is that inter-ethnic cooperation among the ethnic groups in the North Central states of Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau is enhanced through communication strategies adopted by the government toward conflict mediation.

**Table 8:** To what extent has the crisis communication of the governments in North Central enhanced inter-ethnic cooperation in North Central?

| Variable/Parameter | Frequency | Percent<br>[ %] | Valid Percent<br>[ %] | Cumulative<br>Percent [%] |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| High               | 206       | 36.7            | 36.7                  | 36.7                      |
| Very high          | 120       | 21.4            | 21.4                  | 91.5                      |
| Undecided          | 80        | 14.2            | 14.2                  | 70.1                      |
| Low                | 108       | 19.2            | 19.2                  | 55.9                      |
| Very low           | 48        | 8.5             | 8.5                   | 100.0                     |
| Total              | 562       | 100.0           | 100.0                 |                           |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As demonstrated in Table 8 above, inter-ethnic cooperation among the various ethnic groups in the region is highly enhanced through the communication efforts of the government aimed at mediating in conflicts.

## DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to assess government communication strategies to address conflicts in the North Central states of Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau. Based on result from the field trip, this study demonstrated that there is active utilisation of communication as part of efforts to address conflicts in the zone. Accordingly, the study showed that several strategies utilised prominently among the ones utilised are community relations, public relations, traditional institution approach, media relations, and religious organisation approach, among others. Earlier studies such as the ones conducted by Aleshinloye and Orolade (2020), Igben and Timiyan (2023), and Ngwu et al (2020) also showed the use of similar communication strategies in different yet similar conflict scenarios in various parts of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study also demonstrated the extent of the use of communication strategies for communal conflict mediation in the zone. As seen in the data from the field survey, responses captured by 24.9 percent (very high) and 24. 4 percent (high) are evidence that there was a high level of communication in the zone. Igbashangev and Ogunyemi (2022) also showed in their study that the government has devoted efforts to the use of communication to address the myriads of conflicts that have plagued the North of Nigeria for a long period of time. In contrast, researchers have also shown that there was insignificant use of public relations as a conflict mediation strategy in different parts of Nigeria. This implies that there may be no uniform and equal reaction to conflict situations by the government. While the response might be effective in some situations, it may be the same in others.

The influence of the communication strategy is the main crux of this study as it is based on an assessment of strategies utilised in different conflict situations and contexts in North Central Nigeria. The study showed in Tables 4 – 8 that there is a great influence of communication strategies. Respondents showed that they actively participated in conflict mediation initiatives of the government in order to anticipate genuine responses as to the influence of such measures on them. Relatedly, they also demonstrated that the communication strategies influenced their resolve to cohabit peacefully with people in the same area. This is based on the notion of 50.9 percent of the respondents who agreed and 20.3 percent who strongly agreed to the notion. Chimaroke (2002), in a similar study, also demonstrated that communities in dispute have agreed to a truce in the past on account of the utilisation of a participatory approach to conflict mediation. Abiodun and Salama (2023) also found in a study that communities approached for resolution can also opt to cohabit, setting aside their differences.

The study also revealed that tensions are reduced in communities on the grounds of the adoption and utilisation of communication strategies, and this is based on the perception of 41.1 percent and 8.4 percent who strongly agreed to the notion. This has led to the overall reduction in conflict situations. In respect of the extension, the foregoing is achieved; the study showed that it is high. The implication of the foregoing is that the government deployed communication to address issues, including the underlying cause of conflicts, to bring about reduced tensions and a solution to the conflict situations. This aligned with the conflict transformation theory's construct of paying close attention to addressing the root causes of conflicts.

Findings also showed that inter-ethnic cooperation is enhanced by virtue of the utilisation of communication strategies for conflict mediation in the North Central region of Nigeria. On the extent of the possibility of such cooperation as enhanced through communication, findings of the study demonstrated that it is high. Findings from a study conducted by Saleh (2022) aligned with the foregoing that various faith-based groups used mediation efforts to ensure peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Researchers such as Dyikuk and Edeh (2022), Kariuki (2015), and Ntem (2022) have also shown the use of various communication strategies to foster inter-ethnic cooperation in different parts of Nigeria and the African continent. This is an indication that communication can be used to foster good relationships, as espoused in the interest-based relational approach model's construct of ensuring that priority is given to ensuring good relationships between and among disputants.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the use of communication strategies as a means to mediate in conflict situations is well documented in both research and practice. In North Central Nigeria, the government has explored different measures that ranged from community relations to the use of religious organisations and traditional institutions – all of which are deemed effective in conflict mediation. The use of communication in specific conflicts in the central part of Nigeria has resulted in ensuring peaceful coexistence of the various ethnic groups in the zone. In line with the findings and conclusions, the recommendations are that:

1. Stakeholders must continue to explore more effective ways to deploy communication to resolve conflict situations, even in seemingly difficult circumstances, as seen in terror-related conflicts and other violent encounters.
2. Community members and interested organisations must continue to leverage the power of communication, especially the dialogue and community relations aspects, to negotiate and find lasting solutions to issues arising from communal and other types of conflicts common in the African continent and Nigeria in particular.

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