

## ETHNOLINGUISTIC STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THE INSURGENCY CRISIS IN NORTH EAST NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of ethnolinguistic strategies in addressing the Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria through a detailed survey analysis. The research seeks to quantify the impact of the insurgency, evaluate the influence of ethnolinguistic factors, and assess the effectiveness of counterinsurgency measures. The survey included a sample of 500 respondents with a demographic profile showing 60% male, 30% Kanuri, and 24% Hausa participants. Key findings reveal that 80% of respondents experienced loss of lives, 70% reported destruction of property, and 76% noted significant displacement, reflecting severe humanitarian consequences. The analysis also showed that 84% attribute the insurgency to religious extremism, while 76% cite poverty and unemployment as contributing factors. Ethnolinguistic influences were deemed significant by 70% of respondents, with 30% believing these factors play a large role. Regarding government counterinsurgency efforts, 50% of respondents rated them as ineffective or very ineffective, indicating widespread dissatisfaction. Challenges in implementing ethnolinguistic strategies include lack of support (70%), ethnic mistrust (64%), and inadequate resources (60%). The study highlights the importance of ethnolinguistic considerations, with 76% supporting dialogue between ethnic groups and 68% advocating for local language use in peace initiatives. The findings underscore the need for a more nuanced approach that integrates ethnolinguistic strategies into counterinsurgency efforts. Recommendations include enhancing community engagement, incorporating local languages, and increasing government support and resources. This approach aims to address both the direct and indirect effects of the insurgency, offering a pathway to more effective and sustainable conflict resolution in North East Nigeria.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ethnolinguistic Strategies, Conflict resolution, Insurgency, Counterinsurgency, North-East, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and among its most diverse with over 400 ethnolinguistic group (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013). The country is affected by

several conflicts based on overlapping ethnic religions, political and regional divisions including over resources in the Niger Delta, Christian – Muslim divides in the middle of the country, and most recently, the rise of Islamic groups in the north, most importantly, Boko Haram [Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013] The Nigerian North-East region occupies the Sudano-Sahelian-Savannah belt on the southern fringes of the Sahara Desert. The area is most affected by desertification and land degradation. Nicholson *et al.* (1998) described this zone as the most “ecologically unstable” in the world.

The conflict has claimed over 20,000 lives, significantly destroyed physical infrastructure, disrupted social services, and dislocated social cohesion among the people (World Bank, 2016). With almost 2.3 million people becoming either internally displaced, refugees in other countries, or community returnees, the Boko Haram insurgency becomes the single largest cause of displacement across the Lake Chad Basin (UNHCR, 2017). The insurgency crisis in North East Nigeria, primarily driven by Boko Haram and its splinter factions, has evolved into one of the most pressing security challenges in the region. Since its emergence in 2009, Boko Haram has orchestrated a campaign of violence, targeting civilians, government institutions, and security forces, which has resulted in the displacement of millions and the destabilization of entire communities (Agbiboa, 2013). The group's ideological underpinnings are rooted in a complex interplay of religious extremism, socio-economic marginalization, and political grievances, making the conflict deeply entrenched and difficult to resolve (Onuoha, 2014).

The current insurgency in Nigeria is driven by two economic forces – one local, the other external. On the domestic front the economy has over the years sustained a large pool of marginalised citizens who benefit little from the natural resources of the country. A series of social and political issues have intermingled with an initial economic condition to ensure that this segment of society remains at the fringes of the economic system (Kwanashie 2013, p.146). The activities of the Boko Haram sect have created an atmosphere of siege and desolation in most parts of northern Nigeria (UK Home Office 2016, p.11). While poverty and economic marginalisation do not automatically result in insurgency, evidence from history suggests that the existence of this marginalised sector provides ample manpower for insurgency (Kwanashie 2013, p.146).

According to Adetiloye (2014) Insurgency is not a Nigerian problem, it is a global problem. Nor is it an exclusively Islamic problem. Extremists are to be found in all regions. Our central thesis is that the increasing salience of Islamist terror may be explained by the unique experiences of Arab-Muslim societies and how religion has often been deployed as a weapon of political struggle. Globalization and the technologies associated with the increasing internationalization of production, capital and markets has facilitated the capacity of terror groups to mobilize, network and implement their violent projects across nations and communities. It should be emphasized here that Boko Haram is not bent on attacking western interest in spite of its attack of the UN Headquarters in Abuja in August 2011. It is purely a Nigerian phenomenon. This is because Boko Haram believes that politics in northern Nigeria has been seized by a group of corrupt, false Muslims. Thus, from their mode of operations, it seems that Boko Haram is interested in waging war against the afore-



mentioned and the Federal Republic of Nigeria generally, to create a “pure” Islamic state ruled by Sharia law.

However, one of the less explored dimensions of the insurgency is the ethnolinguistic context within which it operates. North East Nigeria is a region characterized by significant ethnolinguistic diversity, with ethnic groups such as the Kanuri, Hausa, Fulani, and numerous smaller communities coexisting within a shared geographical space (Mustapha, 2014). These groups not only speak different languages but also maintain distinct cultural practices, social norms, and historical narratives, which can influence their interactions with one another and with external actors, including the Nigerian state and insurgent groups. The Boko Haram insurgency has been particularly effective in exploiting ethnolinguistic divisions to further its objectives. For example, the Kanuri-speaking population, which predominates in Borno State, has been identified as both a recruitment base for the group and a target of its ideological messaging (Mohammed, 2014). In contrast, other ethnic groups in the region may view Boko Haram’s agenda with suspicion or outright hostility, depending on how they perceive the group’s actions and its impact on their communities (Zenn, 2018). This ethnolinguistic divide has implications for both the spread of the insurgency and the effectiveness of counterinsurgency strategies.

Given the significant role that ethnolinguistic factors play in the dynamics of the conflict, it is crucial to incorporate these considerations into any effort to address the insurgency. Traditional counterinsurgency approaches, which often prioritize military and security responses, may fail to achieve lasting peace if they do not adequately account for the region’s ethnolinguistic complexities. As such, there is a growing recognition among scholars and practitioners that a more nuanced approach, one that integrates ethnolinguistic strategies into the broader counterinsurgency framework, is necessary to effectively combat the insurgency and foster long-term stability in North East Nigeria (Maiangwa, 2017). This research seeks to explore how ethnolinguistic strategies can be leveraged to address the insurgency crisis in North East Nigeria. By examining the role of language and ethnic identity in both the perpetuation of the conflict and the potential avenues for resolution, this study aims to provide insights into how a deeper understanding of the region’s cultural and linguistic landscape can contribute to more effective and sustainable counterinsurgency efforts.

### **Statement of the problem**

The ongoing insurgency crisis in North East Nigeria, primarily driven by Boko Haram, has persisted despite various counterinsurgency efforts by the Nigerian government and international partners. While much attention has been focused on military strategies, there has been relatively little consideration of the ethnolinguistic dimensions of the conflict. The region’s complex ethnolinguistic landscape, characterized by diverse ethnic groups and languages, plays a significant role in the dynamics of the insurgency, influencing both the recruitment strategies of insurgents and the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations. The failure to integrate ethnolinguistic considerations into counterinsurgency efforts has likely contributed to the persistence of the conflict. This study seeks to address this gap by



exploring how ethnolinguistic strategies can be leveraged to improve the effectiveness of counterinsurgency efforts and contribute to lasting peace in the region.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- (i) To examine the role of ethnolinguistic factors in the recruitment and operational strategies of Boko Haram in North East Nigeria.
- (ii) To analyze the perceptions and responses of various ethnolinguistic groups in North East Nigeria to the Boko Haram insurgency and the government's counterinsurgency measures.
- (iii) To explore the potential for integrating ethnolinguistic strategies into current counterinsurgency efforts in North East Nigeria.
- (iv) To assess the impact of traditional governance structures, informed by ethnolinguistic identities, on conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the region.
- (v) To identify the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing ethnolinguistic strategies in counterinsurgency operations.

### **Significance of the study**

This study is significant for several reasons:

- (i) The research will contribute to the academic discourse on counterinsurgency by highlighting the importance of ethnolinguistic factors, which have often been overlooked in favor of more conventional military and political strategies.
- (ii) The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for policymakers, helping them to design more effective and culturally sensitive counterinsurgency strategies that take into account the ethnolinguistic diversity of North East Nigeria.
- (iii) For practitioners involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, this research offers practical recommendations on how to leverage ethnolinguistic dynamics to foster cooperation, reduce tensions, and build trust among diverse communities in North East Nigeria.
- (iv) By addressing the ethnolinguistic aspects of the insurgency, the study has the potential to improve the lives of those affected by the conflict, particularly by reducing violence, promoting dialogue, and supporting sustainable peace initiatives.
- (v) The study will help bridge the gap between academic research and real-world application, providing a framework for integrating ethnolinguistic considerations into broader peacebuilding and development efforts in conflict-affected regions.



## Research questions

The following research questions were raised for answering:

- (i) How do ethnolinguistic factors influence the recruitment and spread of the Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria?
- (ii) What are the perceptions of different ethnolinguistic groups in North East Nigeria regarding the Boko Haram insurgency and the government's counterinsurgency efforts?
- (iii) How can ethnolinguistic strategies be integrated into existing counterinsurgency efforts to enhance their effectiveness?
- (iv) What role do traditional governance structures, informed by ethnolinguistic identities, play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in North East Nigeria?
- (v) What challenges and opportunities exist in implementing ethnolinguistic strategies in counterinsurgency operations in North East Nigeria?

## Research hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- (i) H1: Ethnolinguistic factors significantly influence the recruitment and spread of the Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria.
- (ii) H2: The perceptions of different ethnolinguistic groups regarding the Boko Haram insurgency and the government's counterinsurgency efforts vary significantly.
- (iii) H3: Integrating ethnolinguistic strategies into counterinsurgency efforts will enhance the effectiveness of these operations.
- (iv) H4: Traditional governance structures, informed by ethnolinguistic identities, play a crucial role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in North East Nigeria.
- (v) H5: The implementation of ethnolinguistic strategies in counterinsurgency operations faces significant challenges, but also presents opportunities for improving peace and security in the region.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Study area

The study was conducted in North East Nigeria, a region comprising six states: Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, and Taraba. This region is the epicenter of the Boko Haram insurgency and is characterized by a diverse ethnolinguistic composition, including ethnic groups such as the Kanuri, Hausa, Fulani, Shuwa Arabs, and several smaller groups. The region's complex social and cultural landscape, along with its historical socio-economic challenges, makes it a critical area for studying the interplay between ethnolinguistic factors

and insurgency dynamics. The study was focus particularly on Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, which have been most affected by the insurgency.

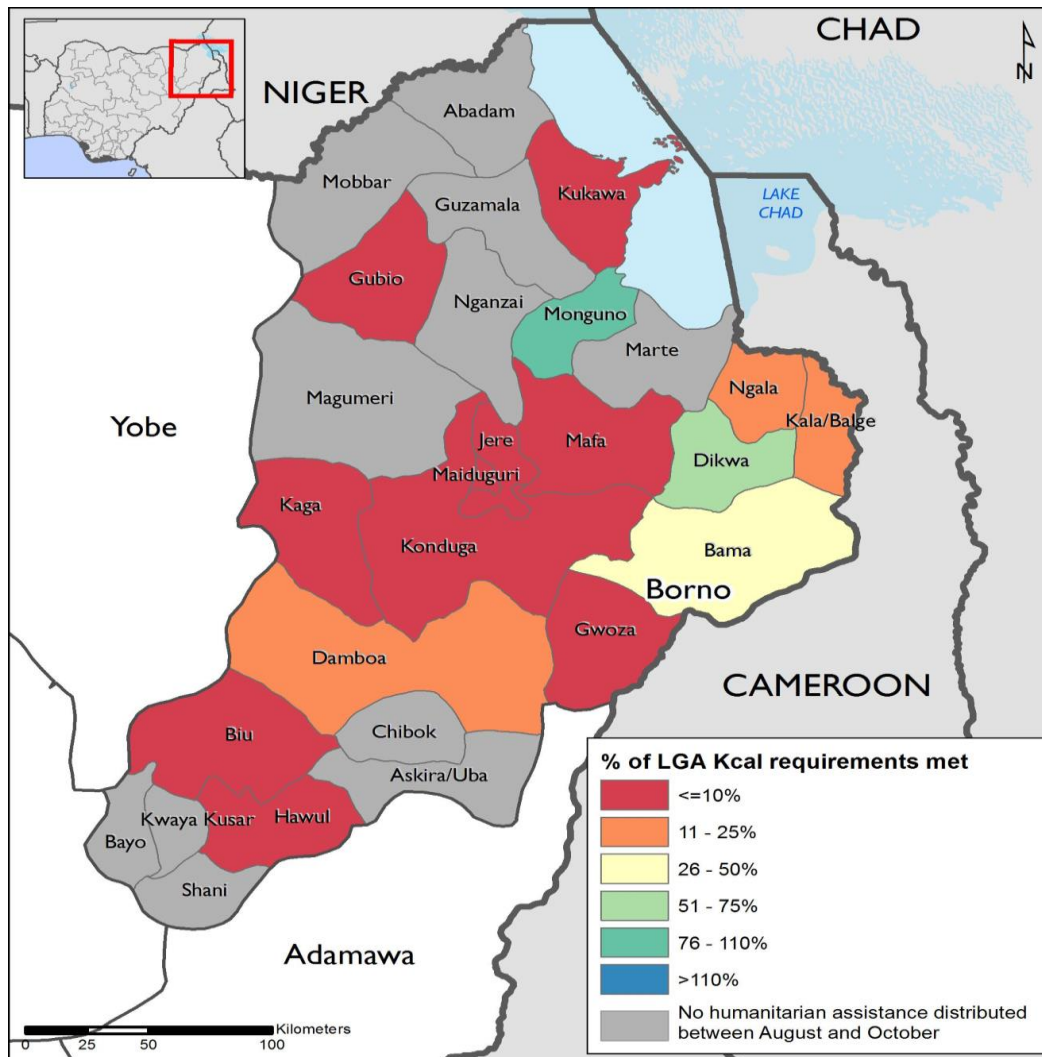


Figure 1: Map of North East Nigeria

Source: Blench, (2019)

### Research design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The rationale for this design is to capture the depth of ethnolinguistic dynamics (qualitative) while also quantifying the extent and patterns of these dynamics (quantitative) across the affected areas.

In-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant observations were conducted to gather detailed insights into the perceptions, experiences, and roles of various ethnolinguistic groups in the insurgency and counterinsurgency efforts.



Surveys were administered to a larger sample to gather data on the prevalence of certain attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to ethnolinguistic factors and the insurgency. This allows for statistical analysis and generalization of findings to the broader population in the study area.

### **Method of data collection**

#### **Primary data collection:**

Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from a sample of residents in the selected states. The questionnaire includes sections on demographic information, ethnolinguistic identity, experiences with the insurgency, and perceptions of counterinsurgency efforts.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including community leaders, security officials, religious leaders, and former insurgents. These interviews will explore their perspectives on the role of ethnolinguistic factors in the conflict and potential strategies for peacebuilding.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was organized with different ethnolinguistic groups to gather collective views and discuss the challenges and opportunities for integrating ethnolinguistic strategies into counterinsurgency efforts.

The researchers engaged in participant observation in selected communities to observe the everyday interactions and practices that reflect the ethnolinguistic dynamics at play in the region.

#### **Secondary data collection:**

The study also involve the review of relevant documents, including government reports, academic publications, media articles, and reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international agencies involved in the region.

### **Sample and sampling techniques**

The study target residents of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, with a focus on communities directly affected by the insurgency. The sample population includes individuals from various ethnolinguistic groups, ages, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds to ensure diversity and representativeness.

The sample size for the quantitative survey was determined using Cochran's formula for sample size calculation in large populations. The qualitative component involve purposive sampling, with at least 30 key informants and 6 focus group discussions (each consisting of 8-10 participants) across the three states.



### **Sampling techniques:**

For the quantitative survey, a stratified random sampling technique was employed. The population was stratified based on ethnicity and language groups, ensuring proportional representation of each group in the sample.

For in-depth interviews and FGDs, purposive sampling was used to select participants who are knowledgeable about the ethnolinguistic dynamics and the insurgency. This includes community leaders, local government officials, and individuals directly affected by the conflict.

This technique was used to identify and recruit former insurgents and other hard-to-reach individuals who may not be accessible through other sampling methods.

### **Data analysis**

The survey data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their responses to survey questions. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests and logistic regression, was employed to examine the relationships between ethnolinguistic factors and perceptions or experiences of the insurgency.

The qualitative data from interviews, FGDs, and observations will be analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis involves coding the data to identify patterns and themes related to the role of ethnolinguistic factors in the insurgency and counterinsurgency efforts. NVivo software was used to assist in the organization and analysis of qualitative data.

### **Ethical considerations**

Given the sensitive nature of the study, particularly in a conflict-affected region, ethical considerations is paramount. The following measures were taken:

All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Written or verbal consent was obtained before participation.

The confidentiality and anonymity of participants was strictly maintained. Data was anonymized to prevent the identification of individuals, particularly those who may be at risk of harm due to their participation.

The study was designed to avoid any potential harm to participants, including psychological distress or social repercussions. Care will be taken to ensure that discussions during interviews and FGDs do not exacerbate existing tensions or conflicts.

### **Limitations of the study**

The volatile security situation in some parts of North East Nigeria may limit access to certain areas, potentially affecting the comprehensiveness of the data collection.



Given the sensitive nature of the topics under investigation, there is a risk of response bias, with participants providing socially desirable answers rather than their true opinions or experiences.

The diversity of languages in the region may pose challenges in communication. To address this, the study employs local interpreters where necessary and ensures that survey instruments are translated into the relevant local languages.

This methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the role of ethnolinguistic factors in the insurgency crisis in North East Nigeria and to explore how these factors can be leveraged in developing more effective counterinsurgency strategies.

To analyse data on ethnolinguistic strategies for addressing the insurgency crisis in North East Nigeria, several statistical methods were employed, depending on the nature of data and the specific research questions or hypotheses. However, we adopted the descriptive statistics which we found relevant to the study.

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics involve summarizing and organizing the data to provide an overview of the sample characteristics. Measures such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and frequency distribution can be used to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents, their perceptions, and experiences related to the insurgency (Field, 2013).

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Demographic distribution/characteristics of respondents reflecting ethnic groups and primary languages of the communities in the North-East Nigeria**

Variable	Frequency (n = 500)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	300	60.0
Female	200	40.0
<b>Age</b>		
18-24 years	100	20.0
25-34 years	150	30.0
35-44 years	120	24.0
45-54 years	80	16.0
55 years and above	50	10.0
<b>Ethnic Group</b>		

Kanuri	150	30.0
Hausa	120	24.0
Fulani	100	20.0
Shuwa Arab	70	14.0
Other	60	12.0
<b>Primary Language</b>		
Kanuri	150	30.0
Hausa	140	28.0
Fulfulde	120	24.0
Arabic	50	10.0
Other	40	8.0

The demographic distribution shows that the majority of respondents are male (60%), which may reflect the higher involvement of men in public discourse and activities in the region. The age distribution indicates that most respondents are between 25-34 years (30%) and 35-44 years (24%), suggesting that the study captures the views of a predominantly working-age population. The ethnic composition reveals a significant presence of Kanuri (30%) and Hausa (24%) respondents, which aligns with the ethnolinguistic makeup of the region. The high percentage of Kanuri speakers (30%) suggests that this group is likely to be heavily impacted by the insurgency, given their geographical concentration in Boko Haram-affected areas. The educational background is diverse, with a substantial number of respondents having secondary (30%) and tertiary education (24%), which could influence their perspectives on the insurgency.

**Table 2: Intense impact of Boko Haram insurgency on the community in the North-East Nigeria**

Impact	Frequency (n = 500)	Percentage (%)
Loss of lives	400	80.0
Destruction of property	350	70.0
Displacement of people	380	76.0
Disruption of education	300	60.0
Economic hardship	450	90.0
Other (e.g., social unrest)	100	20.0

The results indicate that the Boko Haram insurgency has had intense impact on communities in North East Nigeria. A vast majority of respondents report experiencing loss of lives (80%), destruction of property (70%), and displacement of people (76%), highlighting the severe human and material toll of the conflict. The disruption of education (60%) and economic hardship (90%) further underscore the widespread destabilization caused by the insurgency, affecting not only immediate security but also long-term community development and livelihoods. These findings suggest that any intervention strategy must address both the direct and indirect consequences of the insurgency.

**Table 3: Attributed reasons for the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East Nigeria**

Reason	Frequency (n = 500)	Percentage (%)
Religious extremism	420	84.0
Poverty and unemployment	380	76.0
Ethnic and cultural conflicts	300	60.0
Political marginalization	250	50.0
Corruption and bad governance	370	74.0
Other	50	10.0

The respondents attributed the Boko Haram insurgency primarily to religious extremism (84%), followed by poverty and unemployment (76%), and ethnic and cultural conflicts (60%). This suggests that while religious motivations are seen as the most significant factor driving the insurgency, socio-economic issues like poverty also play a critical role. The significant mention of political marginalization (50%) and corruption (74%) indicates a perception that governance failures have exacerbated the insurgency. These results highlight the complexity of the insurgency, with multiple overlapping causes, and suggest that any effective counterinsurgency strategy must be multifaceted, addressing both ideological and socio-economic factors.

**Table 4: Extent to which Boko Haram insurgency is influenced by ethnolinguistic factors**

Response	Frequency (n = 500)	Percentage (%)
Not at all	50	10.0
To a small extent	100	20.0
To a moderate extent	150	30.0

To a large extent	120	24.0
To a very large extent	80	16.0

The results show that a significant proportion of respondents believe ethnolinguistic factors play a role in the insurgency, with 30% indicating a moderate extent, and 24% and 16% suggesting a large or very large extent, respectively. This implies that ethnolinguistic identities are seen as contributing to the dynamics of the conflict, potentially influencing both the insurgents' recruitment and the community's response. Only a small percentage (10%) believe that ethnolinguistic factors are not at all influential, indicating that these considerations should not be overlooked in designing counterinsurgency measures.

**Table 5: Effectiveness of Government counterinsurgency efforts**

Response	Frequency (n = 500)	Percentage (%)
Very ineffective	100	20.0
Ineffective	150	30.0
Neutral	120	24.0
Effective	100	20.0
Very effective	30	6.0

The majority of respondents view the government's counterinsurgency efforts as ineffective, with 30% rating them as ineffective and 20% as very ineffective. Only a minority (26%) consider these efforts to be effective or very effective. This suggests widespread dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the insurgency, possibly due to perceived inadequacies in addressing the root causes of the conflict or in providing security. These findings imply that there may be a need for a reassessment and restructuring of current strategies to improve their effectiveness, potentially by incorporating more localized, ethnolinguistic considerations.

**Table 6: Importance of ethnolinguistic identity**

Importance Level	Frequency (n = 500)	Percentage (%)
Not important	30	6.0
Slightly important	70	14.0
Moderately important	120	24.0
Very important	180	36.0
Extremely important	100	20.0

Ethnolinguistic identity is important to the respondents, with 36% considering it very important and 20% extremely important. This strong identification with ethnolinguistic groups suggests that any intervention in the insurgency must be sensitive to these identities to gain community support. The importance placed on ethnolinguistic identity also indicates that conflicts or alliances within and between ethnolinguistic groups could significantly influence the success of counterinsurgency strategies.

**Table 7: Perceived Challenges in Implementing Ethnolinguistic Strategies**

Challenges	Frequency (n = 500)	Percentage (%)
Lack of government support	350	70.0
Ethnic mistrust and suspicion	320	64.0
Inadequate resources and funding	300	60.0
Resistance from insurgent groups	280	56.0
Other	50	10.0

The results reveal several key challenges to implementing ethnolinguistic strategies in counterinsurgency efforts. The most significant challenge is the lack of government support (70%), followed by ethnic mistrust and suspicion (64%), and inadequate resources (60%). Resistance from insurgent groups (56%) is also a considerable obstacle. These findings suggest that while ethnolinguistic strategies may be beneficial, their implementation is hampered by systemic and contextual challenges, particularly the need for stronger government commitment and resource allocation, as well as efforts to build trust between different ethnolinguistic communities.

**Table 8: Suggested ethnolinguistic strategies for addressing the insurgency**

Strategy	Frequency (n = 500)	Percentage (%)
Promoting dialogue between ethnic groups	380	76.0
Incorporating local languages in initiatives	340	68.0
Engaging local media in multiple languages	300	60.0

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Empowering traditional leaders	320	64.0
Other	40	8.0

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The respondents support various ethnolinguistic strategies for addressing the insurgency, with promoting dialogue between ethnic groups (76%) and incorporating local languages in peace initiatives (68%) being the most favored. Engaging local media in multiple languages (60%) and empowering traditional leaders (64%) are also seen as effective strategies. This suggests that respondents believe in the potential of culturally sensitive, localized approaches to mitigate the insurgency. The support for these strategies indicates a preference for inclusive, community-driven interventions that recognize and leverage the region's ethnolinguistic diversity.

## DISCUSSION

This study was set out to undertake an ethnolinguistic analysis of solving the Insurgency crisis in the North – East. The need and justification of the study was based on recent statistics on the killing, kidnappings, and havocs caused by Boko Haram by the abysmal destruction of lives and properties (Adegbite, 2013). The demographic profile, which shows a predominance of male respondents and a significant representation of the Kanuri ethnic group, aligns with the findings of several studies on the region. For instance, Falode (2016) notes that men in North East Nigeria are often more directly involved in the socio-political activities of their communities, which might explain their higher representation in surveys. The significant proportion of Kanuri respondents is also consistent with their geographical concentration in Borno State, a major epicenter of the Boko Haram insurgency (Higazi, 2013). The role of age demographics is crucial, as younger populations, particularly those in the 18-34 age bracket, are more likely to be affected by unemployment and radicalization, factors that have been linked to the insurgency (Botha & Abdile, 2014).

The widespread reporting of loss of lives, destruction of properties, and displacement mirrors the extensive documentation of the humanitarian crisis in the region. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2021) reports similar impacts, noting that millions have been displaced, and thousands of lives have been lost due to the insurgency. The disruption of education and economic hardship is also well-documented. According to Maiangwa et al. (2012), the insurgency has led to the closure of schools and a breakdown of economic activities, contributing to a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment that perpetuates the conflict.

The respondents' emphasis on religious extremism and socio-economic factors as drivers of the insurgency reflects the conclusions of scholars like Onuoha (2014) and Adesoji (2010). These studies highlight how Boko Haram has exploited religious narratives to recruit members while also capitalizing on widespread poverty and unemployment. The significant mention of political marginalization and corruption echoes the arguments made by Okereke (2018), who posits that the perceived exclusion of certain groups from political and economic power fuels resentment and provides fertile ground for insurgency.



The belief that ethnolinguistic factors contribute to the insurgency aligns with the work of Mustapha (2014), who argues that ethnic identities in Nigeria are deeply intertwined with political and economic inequalities. This ethnolinguistic dimension is particularly relevant in the context of Boko Haram, where the group's rhetoric often exploits ethnic divisions to further its agenda (Higazi, 2013). The perception that these factors influence the insurgency underscores the need for any counterinsurgency strategy to consider the complex interplay between ethnic identity and conflict.

The widespread perception of the government's counterinsurgency efforts as ineffective is supported by several studies. Campbell (2014) and Felbab-Brown (2018) criticize the Nigerian government's approach for being overly militarized and lacking in strategic coordination. These authors argue that the failure to address underlying socio-economic issues and the heavy-handedness of military operations have alienated local populations, making it difficult to win hearts and minds. The dissatisfaction expressed by the respondents suggests a need for a more holistic approach that integrates security measures with socio-economic development and community engagement.

The importance placed on ethnolinguistic identity by respondents reflects broader societal trends in Nigeria, where ethnic and linguistic identities play a crucial role in social and political life (Mustapha, 2006). According to Suberu (2001), these identities are often mobilized in conflicts, making them both a potential source of division and a key factor in peacebuilding efforts. The emphasis on ethnolinguistic identity in the survey suggests that successful counterinsurgency strategies must be culturally sensitive and inclusive, recognizing the diverse identities of the region's inhabitants.

The challenges identified in implementing ethnolinguistic strategies, such as lack of government support and ethnic mistrust, are consistent with findings in the literature. For instance, Akinola (2015) notes that ethnolinguistic strategies in conflict zones often face resistance due to entrenched mistrust between different ethnic groups and the central government's reluctance to fully embrace decentralized, culturally sensitive approaches. This underscores the need for building trust and ensuring that any ethnolinguistic strategy is supported by adequate resources and political will.

The preference for strategies like promoting dialogue and incorporating local languages aligns with successful conflict resolution approaches in other contexts. According to Paffenholz et al. (2010), inclusive dialogue that involves local communities and acknowledges their cultural and linguistic identities is essential for sustainable peace. The support for engaging local media and empowering traditional leaders also reflects the findings of Ejiogu (2011), who argues that traditional institutions and media play crucial roles in shaping public opinion and mobilizing communities in Nigeria. These strategies suggest that respondents recognize the value of leveraging local knowledge and cultural assets in counterinsurgency efforts.

The discussion when viewed alongside existing research, highlights the complexity of the Boko Haram insurgency and the multifaceted nature of the response required. The findings underscore the importance of integrating ethnolinguistic considerations into counterinsurgency strategies and the need for a more inclusive, community-driven approach



to address the underlying causes of the conflict. The challenges identified also point to the necessity of political commitment and resource allocation to ensure the successful implementation of these strategies.

## **SUMMARY**

This study investigates ethnolinguistic strategies for addressing the Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria. The research focuses on understanding the impact of the insurgency, the role of ethnolinguistic factors, and the effectiveness of current counterinsurgency efforts. Key findings from the study reveal that the insurgency has led to significant loss of lives, property destruction, and displacement. Ethnolinguistic factors, including ethnic identity and language, play a substantial role in the dynamics of the conflict. Despite the perceived importance of these factors, current government counterinsurgency efforts are largely viewed as ineffective, and significant challenges exist in implementing ethnolinguistic strategies. Recommendations include promoting dialogue between ethnic groups, incorporating local languages in peace initiatives, and engaging traditional leaders.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the study's finding, the following recommendations were made:

- (i) Foster dialogue between different ethnic groups to build trust and understanding. Initiatives should focus on addressing grievances and finding common ground among communities affected by the insurgency.
- (ii) Develop and implement counterinsurgency communication strategies that utilize local languages to effectively reach and engage affected communities. This approach will enhance the understanding of messages and strategies at the grassroots level.
- (iii) Empower traditional leaders to play a more active role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Their influence and local knowledge can be instrumental in bridging gaps between insurgents and communities.
- (iv) The government should increase support for ethnolinguistic strategies by allocating sufficient resources and funding. This includes supporting local initiatives and ensuring that strategies are culturally sensitive and well-implemented.
- (v) Implement socio-economic development programs that address poverty, unemployment, and marginalization, as these are significant drivers of insurgency. Improved economic conditions can reduce recruitment into extremist groups.
- (vi) Focus on building trust between the government and local communities. Collaborative efforts that involve community members in decision-making processes can enhance the effectiveness of counterinsurgency measures.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study highlights the complex interplay between ethnolinguistic factors and the Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria. The findings underscore that while ethnolinguistic





strategies hold potential for addressing the insurgency, they are currently hindered by challenges such as lack of government support, ethnic mistrust, and inadequate resources. The effectiveness of counterinsurgency efforts is compromised by these issues, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach. Addressing both the direct and indirect impacts of the insurgency through ethnolinguistic strategies can enhance the likelihood of achieving sustainable peace and stability in the region.

## IMPLEMENTATIONS

The following implementations were highlighted to guide the study:

- (i) Develop and implement policies that incorporate ethnolinguistic considerations into counterinsurgency strategies. This includes drafting guidelines for effective communication in local languages and ensuring that policies are sensitive to the diverse ethnic composition of the region.
- (ii) Invest in training programs for government officials, security personnel, and community leaders on ethnolinguistic issues and conflict resolution. These programs should focus on enhancing cultural competence and effective community engagement.
- (iii) Support and fund community-based initiatives that promote dialogue and collaboration between ethnic groups. Initiatives could include local peace committees, community forums, and joint development projects.
- (iv) Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of ethnolinguistic strategies. Regular assessments will help identify challenges, measure progress, and make necessary adjustments to improve effectiveness.
- (v) Collaborate with international organizations and NGOs that have experience in conflict resolution and ethnolinguistic interventions. These partners can provide technical support, resources, and best practices.
- (vi) Ensure adequate funding and resources are allocated to support ethnolinguistic strategies. This includes investing in infrastructure, communication tools, and community development programs that align with the identified needs of the region.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationship that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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