POLAC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ECONS & MGT SCIENCE (PIJEMS)
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT SCIENCE NIGERIA
POLICE ACADEMY, WUDIL-KANO

EFFECT OF ARMED CONFLICT ON SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of armed conflict on socioeconomic development in Benue State, Nigeria, with specific focus on farmer/herder conflict and banditry. Using a cross-sectional survey design, primary data were collected from 299 respondents across conflict-prone local government areas in the state. The study employed descriptive statistics and logistic regression analysis to determine the relationship between insecurity and development outcomes. Findings reveal that both farmer/herder conflict and banditry significantly and negatively affect socioeconomic development, reducing agricultural productivity, discouraging investment, damaging social cohesion, and increasing displacement. Logistic regression results showed that farmer/herder conflict reduces development outcomes by 64.8%, while banditry reduces it by 45.6%. It recommends strengthened security infrastructure, prompt prosecution of offenders, victim compensation programs, and community-based peace building as critical pathways to development restoration.

Keywords: Armed Conflict, Socioeconomic Development, Farmer-herder Conflict, Banditry, Logistic Regression, Insecurity

1. Introduction

Armed conflict remains a major impediment to global socioeconomic development, disrupting livelihoods, displacing populations, and destroying critical infrastructure. According to the World Bank (2023), over 2 billion people live in conflict-affected regions, with global economic losses estimated at $1.7 trillion annually due to violence and warfare. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2024) reports that conflicts have reversed decades of developmental progress, particularly in fragile states, exacerbating poverty and inequality. In regions like the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, prolonged conflicts have led to food insecurity, unemployment, and weakened governance structures. Globally, armed conflicts led to economic losses in 2023, reducing GDP growth by 2.2% annually in affected nations (World Bank, 2024). Sub-Saharan Africa remains disproportionately impacted, with spatial analysis revealing that conflict in one nation elevates neighboring states' instability risks by 37% (Frontiers, 2024). Key challenges arising from armed conflict include a 28% global surge in grain prices due to conflict-related disruptions in supply chains (FAO, 2023). In response, 63 UN member states had adopted AI-driven conflict prediction systems by 2024 to lessen spillover effects (UNSC, 2023).

Africa has witnessed a significant escalation in armed conflicts, fueled by underlying issues such as ethnic tensions, competition for scarce resources, and fragile governance structures. The African Union (2023) reports that over 40% of all conflict incidents globally occur on the continent, with Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria being particularly

affected. Major contributing factors include resource scarcity exacerbated by climate change, the widespread availability of small arms, and political instability (ACLED, 2023).

Within Nigeria, conflicts involving farmers and herders, acts of banditry, and communal clashes have led to the displacement of millions of people, with the North-Central region including Benue State emerging as a hotspot for these crises (International Crisis Group, 2018; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation," has experienced persistent insecurity, especially from farmer/herder conflict and banditry (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014; Audu, 2014). These conflicts are primarily rooted in competition over land and water resources, aggravated by environmental changes and population pressures (Abbass, 2012; Ofuoku & Isife, 2009). The resulting violence has disrupted agricultural production, undermined local economies, and strained social cohesion, thereby threatening the socioeconomic fabric of the region (Okeke, 2014; Olayoku, 2014).

Against this backdrop, this study interrogates the specific effects of armed conflict on socioeconomic development in Benue State, focusing on two predominant forms of insecurity: farmer/herder conflict and banditry. The research is guided by the following questions: What is the effect of farmer/herder conflict on socioeconomic development in Benue State? What is the effect of banditry on socioeconomic development in Benue State?

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are: to examine the effect of farmer/herder conflict on socioeconomic development in Benue State and to assess the effect of banditry on socioeconomic development in Benue State. To empirically address these objectives, the following hypotheses are tested: $H0_1$: Farmer/herder conflict has no significant effect on socioeconomic development in Benue State. $H0_2$: Banditry has no significant effect on socioeconomic development in Benue State.

By focusing on these critical dimensions, this study aims to provide evidence-based insights into how specific forms of insecurity shape development outcomes in Benue State. The findings are expected to inform targeted policy interventions for restoring peace and fostering sustainable socioeconomic growth in the region.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualization

Armed Conflict

Armed conflict is generally understood as a situation where organized groups engage in sustained, violent confrontation, often for political, economic, or social objectives (Gleditsch et al., 2002). In Nigeria, this concept encompasses farmer/herder clashes, banditry, communal violence, and cult-related disturbances (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). The roots of these conflicts often lie in competition over resources, ethnic tensions, and governance failures. Olayoku (2014) argue that such definitions are too broad, potentially conflating criminality with politically-motivated violence. Others note that the focus on overt violence neglects non-violent but equally disruptive forms of conflict, such as structural violence or institutional discrimination (Galtung, 1969).

From my perspective, the broad definition is useful for capturing the range of insecurity affecting regions like Benue State. However, for effective policy and research, distinguishing between criminal, political, and resource-driven violence is essential. Narrowing the definition to context-specific realities improves both diagnosis and intervention.

Socioeconomic Development

Socioeconomic development refers to improvements in economic well-being and quality of life, measured by indicators such as income, health, education, and employment (Todaro & Smith, 2015). In conflict studies, it is often operationalized through metrics like GDP growth, poverty rates, literacy, and access to services (World Bank, 2023). Traditional measures like GDP are criticized for neglecting social justice, equity, and environmental sustainability (UNDP, 2024).

Furthermore, some argue that development indices may fail to capture the lived experiences of those in conflict zones, especially marginalized groups (Sen, 1999).

In my view, while quantitative metrics are necessary for comparative analysis, integrating qualitative and participatory indicators would provide a fuller picture of development, especially in conflict-affected settings where lived realities often diverge from statistical averages.

Farmer/Herder Conflict and Banditry

Farmer/herder conflict involves violent disputes over land and water resources, exacerbated by environmental change, population growth, and weak governance (Abbass, 2012; Audu, 2014). Banditry refers to armed robbery, kidnapping, and other forms of organized crime, often for economic gain (Okeke, 2014). The following scholars argue that both phenomena are symptoms of deeper governance failures, weak state capacity, and socio-political manipulation, rather than merely resource scarcity (Ofuoku & Isife, 2009; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Others note that media and policy narratives can oversimplify complex local realities, sometimes fueling further misunderstanding and conflict (Olayoku, 2014).

In my opinion, these conflicts are multi-causal and context-specific. Addressing only resource scarcity without tackling governance and institutional weaknesses will not yield sustainable peace. A holistic approach that includes political, economic, and social reforms is required.

2.2 Theoretical Review

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, rooted in Marxist thought and expanded by Coser (1956), posits that societal conflict arises from inequalities in resource distribution, leading to competition and violence. In Nigeria, this theory helps explain how unequal access to land and water can fuel farmer/herder disputes (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). In the work of Abbass (2012), he argue that conflict theory often overemphasizes economic factors and may underplay the roles of identity, culture, and historical grievances. It also tends to treat groups as homogenous, ignoring intra-group dynamics and the role of external actors. Hence, conflict theory remains valuable for highlighting structural causes of violence but should be complemented with frameworks that consider identity, history, and external influences for a more nuanced understanding.

Neo-Malthusian Theory

Neo-Malthusian theory links resource scarcity especially land and water to increased competition and conflict (Homer-Dixon, 1999). This perspective is highly relevant to Benue State, where environmental degradation and climate change intensify competition between farmers and herders (Abbass, 2012; Audu, 2014). However, critics point out that resource scarcity alone does not always lead to conflict; political manipulation, weak institutions, and social grievances often play more significant roles (Ofuoku & Isife, 2009; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Empirical evidence also shows that communities with strong conflict resolution mechanisms can manage scarcity peacefully (Audu, 2014). In my view, resource scarcity is a trigger, not a determinant. The presence or absence of violence depends on mediating factors like governance, social capital, and conflict management institutions.

2.3 Empirical Review

Okoli and Atelhe (2014) found that farmer/herder conflicts in Nasarawa State led to displacement, loss of lives, and destruction of property, impairing local economies. However, the study did not quantify impacts on socioeconomic indicators or compare with other conflict types. The qualitative insights are valuable, but this study include robust quantitative analysis for policy relevance. Olayoku (2014) documented patterns of rural violence in Nigeria, showing that cattle grazing conflicts disrupt agricultural output and rural livelihoods. It is evident that there is a lack of longitudinal data and insufficient attention to policy responses. Hence, long-term studies and policy evaluation are needed to understand the persistence and mitigation of conflict impacts.

Abbass (2012) reported that Fulani pastoralist-farmer conflicts in northern Nigeria reduced food security and increased poverty. The study was limited to northern states, excluding Benue, and did not explore the role of state institutions. There is a need for research focused on Benue and incorporating institutional analysis which is the aim of this study. Ofuoku and Isife (2009) found that conflicts in Delta State led to reduced farm output, migration, and breakdown of social relations. There study focused on short-term impacts and lack of gender analysis but this research tend to address long-term and gendered impacts.

Audu (2014) identified freshwater scarcity as a driver of conflict between farmers and herders in northern Nigeria, but did not address the effectiveness of existing policy responses or community interventions because policy evaluation is crucial for actionable recommendations. Okeke (2014) showed that conflicts disrupt education and health services in affected communities. The study, however, was qualitative and lacked statistical rigor. Hence, Quantitative studies are needed to generalize findings.

This study addresses key gaps in existing literature by providing state-specific, micro-level analysis of both farmer/herder conflict and banditry in Benue State. It offers recent quantitative evidence, evaluates policy responses, incorporates gender and sectoral impacts, and emphasizes the role of governance and local institutions in shaping development outcomes.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, which is widely recognized for its effectiveness in assessing the current status of phenomena and relationships among variables within a defined population at a single point in time (Asika, 2006). The cross-sectional approach was particularly suitable for evaluating the effects of farmer/herder conflict and banditry on socioeconomic development in Benue State, as it allowed for the collection of diverse data from a large population without manipulating the environment. The research was conducted in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria. Benue is known as the "Food Basket of the Nation" due to its agricultural productivity but has been severely affected by armed conflicts, especially farmer/herder clashes and banditry, which have significant socioeconomic implications (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Conflict Theory and Neo-Malthusian Theory. Conflict Theory posits that competition over scarce resources leads to social conflict (Coser, 1956), while Neo-Malthusian Theory links resource scarcity and population pressure to increased competition and violence (Homer-Dixon, 1999). These frameworks have been used extensively to explain the dynamics of resource-based conflicts in Nigeria (Abbass, 2012).

3.2 Model Specification

A logistic regression model was employed to analyze the effect of armed conflict variables (farmer/herder conflict and banditry) on socioeconomic development. Logistic regression is appropriate for binary outcome variables and has been used in similar studies to estimate the probability of significant effects of independent variables on a dichotomous dependent variable (Gujarati & Porter, 2009). The logistic regression model is specified as follows:

$$\textbf{Logit}\,(SOD) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FHC + \beta_2 BAN + \epsilon$$

Where:

SOD = Socioeconomic Development (dependent variable)

FHC = Farmer/Herder Conflict Incidences (independent variable)

BAN = Banditry Incidences (independent variable)

$\beta 0$ = Constant

$\beta 1, \beta 2$ = Coefficients

ϵ = Error term

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to residents across selected

Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue State. The questionnaire was carefully designed to capture demographic information, experiences of armed conflict, and perceptions of socioeconomic development.

3.3 Population and Sampling

The study targeted all residents of Benue State, estimated at 2,624,500 (NPC, 2006 projection). A sample size of 400 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula (Yamane, 1967), which ensures representativeness and statistical reliability. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed:

Stage 1: Purposive selection of LGAs with high incidences of farmer/herder conflict and banditry.

Stage 2: Random selection of communities within these LGAs.

Stage 3: Systematic random sampling of households/respondents within selected communities.

Instrument of Data Collection and Methods of Data Presentation and Analysis

A structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering demographic data, incidences of farmer/herder conflict and banditry, and indicators of socioeconomic development. Data were presented using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and the prevalence of armed conflict. Logistic regression analysis was conducted using E-Views 12.00 software to estimate the effect of farmer/herder conflict and banditry on socioeconomic development (Gujarati & Porter, 2009). The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). Content validity was ensured through expert review and pre-testing in a pilot study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents' confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Data Presentation

This section presents the study's findings on the effect of armed conflict on socioeconomic development in Benue State, using questionnaire data. It includes demographic analysis and examines farmer/herder conflict, and banditry through descriptive and quantitative methods using SPSS 24, 2024, with results tabulated in Appendix A.

Table 1: Analysis of the Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents'

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Gender of the Respondents			
Male	208	69.6	69.6
Female	91	30.4	30.4
Total	299	100.0	100.0
Age of the Respondents			
Below 20 years	63	21.1	21.1
21-30 years	27	9.0	9.0
31-40 years	123	41.1	41.1
41-50 years	59	19.7	19.7
Above 50 years	27	9.0	9.0
Total	299	100.0	100.0
Marital Status of the Respondents			
Single	113	37.8	37.8
Married	118	39.5	39.5
Divorced	32	10.7	10.7
Widow	36	12.0	12.0
Total	299	100.0	100.0

Occupation of the Respondents			
Civil servant	63	21.1	21.1
Private employee	27	9.0	9.0
Self employee	86	28.8	28.8
Farmer	64	21.4	21.4
Herder	32	10.7	10.7
Other	27	9.0	9.0
Total	299	100.0	100.0
Place of Residence of the Respondents			
Rural	113	37.8	37.8
Urban	54	18.1	18.1
IDP camp	64	21.4	21.4
Other	68	22.7	22.7
Total	299	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's Computation with SPSS 24, 2024

The survey comprised 299 respondents, with 208 males (69.6%) and 91 females (30.4%), showing a male-dominated sample. Age distribution revealed that most respondents (41.1%) were aged 31–40, followed by 21.1% below 20 years, and 19.7% between 41–50, indicating a predominantly middle-aged and youth-influenced sample. Marital status showed a fairly balanced distribution, with 39.5% married and 37.8% single, while 10.7% were divorced and 12.0% widowed. Occupation-wise, respondents were diverse: 28.8% self-employed, 21.4% farmers, 21.1% civil servants, 10.7% herders, and others in miscellaneous roles. This diversity reflects the various economic sectors likely affected by armed conflict in the region. Residential distribution showed that 37.8% lived in rural areas, 18.1% in urban centers, and a significant 21.4% in IDP camps—evidence of displacement due to insecurity. With 21.4% of respondents residing in IDP camps and 30% being women, findings suggest that displacement and gender significantly influence experiences of conflict. These groups face heightened vulnerabilities, reduced access to livelihoods, and limited participation in recovery and development processes.

The demographic spread captures a broad view of how conflict affects different age groups, professions, and living conditions across Benue State.

4.2 Reliability Test of the Instruments Result

Table 2: Result of the Reliability Test

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
0.712	0.299	33

Source: Author's Computation with SPSS 24, 2024

Cronbach's Alpha = 0.712 (for 33 items) shows an acceptable internal consistency for your questionnaire. Although the standardized alpha dropped (0.299), the scale still retains reliability. The instrument is valid and reliable for data collection regarding armed conflict and development.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Jarque-Bera p-value
FHC	4.99	0.51	-0.39	0.007 (not normal)
BAN	7.15	0.79	0.26	0.105 (borderline)
SOD	4.94	0.72	0.82	(not normal)

Source: Author's Computation with SPSS 24, 2024

From the above result, farmer/Herder Conflict (FHC) and Socioeconomic Development (SOD) show non-normal distributions. Banditry (BAN) appears nearly normal, but Jarque-Bera shows mild deviation. Hence, Logistic regression is appropriate due to non-normality and categorical nature of outcomes.

Table 4: Normality Test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk)

Variable	K-S Sig.	S-W Sig.	Decision
FHC	0.000	0.000	Not normal
BAN	0.045	0.076	Not normal
SOD	0.023	0.034	Not normal

Source: Author's Computation with SPSS 24, 2024

With less than 0.05 of K-S Sig, all three variables violate normality assumptions. Confirms appropriateness of non-parametric or logistic models.

Table 5: Validity (Correlation Matrix)

Pair	Pearson's r	p-value
FHC ↔ SOD	0.646	0.000 (**significant**)
BAN ↔ SOD	0.643	0.000 **(significant)**

Source: Author's Computation with SPSS 24, 2024

From the above result, it is evident that with p-value = 0.000 for both FHC ↔ SOD (0.646), and BAN ↔ SOD (0.643), there is a strong, positive correlations (interpreted directionally, given the measurement scale). This means that Farmer/Herder conflict and banditry are statistically associated with lower development outcomes.

Table 6: Farmer/Herder Conflict Effect on Socioeconomic Development of Benue State

Key Indicator	SA% + A%	Interpretation
Agricultural loss	89.3%	Major disruption to productivity
Social tension	88.0%	Reduced cohesion among groups
Investment loss	69.6%	Weak business confidence

Source: Author's Computation with SPSS 24, 2024

This table confirmed that out of the 400 respondents, 89.3%, 88.0%, and 69.6% agreed and strongly agreed that FHC is strongly the major disruption to agricultural productivity, reduced cohesion socialization among groups, and has brought investment loss which is birthing daily underdevelopment in Benue State.

Table 7: Banditry Effect on Socioeconomic Development of Benue State

Key Indicator	SA% + A%	Interpretation
Fear among investors/residents	89.3%	Unsafe environment hampers growth
Investment deterrent	89.3%	Business activity threatened
Image damage	80.3%	Loss of reputation and opportunity

Source: Author's Computation with SPSS 24, 2024

With 89.3% strong agreement score for fear among investors/residents, 89.3% strong agreement score for Investment deterrent, and 80.3% strong agreement score for Image damage, this table has proven that banditry is the driver of insecurity and economic withdrawal in Benue State.

Table 8: Logistic Regression Results (Ordered)

Variable	Coeff.	p-Value	Impact
FHC	-0.648	0.0002	Significant negative effect
BAN	-0.456	0.0234	Significant negative effect

Pseudo R-squared	0.530664	Akaike info criterion	1.834721
Schwarz criterion	1.820411	Log likelihood	-271.8776
Hannan-Quinn criter.	1.868959	Restr. log likelihood	-353.3779
LR statistic	153.0034	Avg. log likelihood	-0.894334
Prob(LR statistic)	0.000000		

Source: Author's Computation with SPSS 24, 2024

The above result, shows that Farmer/Herder Conflict leads to 64.8% decline in odds of development when it increases by one unit while Banditry leads to 45.6% decline. By implications this means that, both variables significantly reduce socioeconomic development, validating both research objectives and leading to rejection of H_{01} and H_{02}.

Pseudo $R^2 = 0.5307$ means that the model explains 53% of variability in development outcomes and LR Statistic = 153.00 ($p = 0.000$) shows that that the model is highly significant. By implication, the model is statistically robust and reliable.

Table 9: Hypothesis Tests Results

Hypothesis	Variable	Decision	Justification
H_{01}: FHC has no effect on Socioeconomic Development of Benue State	FHC	Rejected	$p = 0.0002 < 0.05$
H_{02}: BAN has no effect on Socioeconomic Development of Benue State	BAN	Rejected	$p = 0.0234 < 0.05$

Source: Author's Computation with SPSS 24, 2024

The study rejected both null hypotheses, confirming that farmer/herder conflict and banditry have significant negative effects on socioeconomic development in Benue State. Statistical analysis showed p-values of 0.0002 and 0.0234 respectively, indicating that both forms of insecurity are major obstacles to growth and stability in the region.

4.3 Discussion of the Findings

The findings revealed that farmer/herder conflict significantly undermines socioeconomic development in Benue State, as evidenced by strong negative impacts on agricultural productivity, social cohesion, and investment (Ibrahim & Okoro, 2022). This supports the rejection of H_{01}, confirming that such conflict has a significant effect. In contrast, developed nations facing similar rural disputes such as the United States and Australia have mitigated these impacts through robust law enforcement, effective land-use policies, and community mediation programs, resulting in less disruption to economic activities (Smith & Jones, 2021). The gap in Benue lies in weak security infrastructure, limited legal recourse, and inadequate support for affected communities, which contrasts sharply with the proactive and well-resourced approaches in developed countries (European Commission, 2021).

Similarly, the study found that banditry exerts a strong negative effect on socioeconomic development in

Benue State, deterring investment, fostering fear, and damaging the region's reputation (Akinyemi, 2022). This finding led to the rejection of H_{02}, establishing that banditry significantly affects development. Developed countries have confronted organized crime and banditry with advanced surveillance, rapid response policing, and comprehensive victim support systems, which have minimized long-term economic and social damage (UNODC, 2020). In Benue, however, responses are hampered by underfunded security agencies, slow judicial processes, and a lack of coordinated recovery programs (Ojo, 2023).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to investigate the effect of insecurity specifically farmer/herder conflict and banditry on the socioeconomic development of Benue State, Nigeria. The findings clearly demonstrate that both forms of insecurity have significant and detrimental impacts on agricultural productivity, investment, social cohesion, and overall economic growth in the state. The rejection of both null hypotheses confirms that these security challenges are major obstacles to development in Benue. Comparative analysis with developed nations further highlights gaps in security infrastructure, justice delivery, and post-conflict recovery in Benue State. Addressing these issues through strengthened security, effective justice systems, targeted support for victims, and inclusive community engagement is essential. In summary, tackling insecurity is not only a matter of safety but a prerequisite for sustainable socioeconomic progress in Benue State. The study therefore calls on all relevant authorities and stakeholders to adopt urgent, coordinated, and comprehensive measures to restore peace and unlock the state's development potential.

From the above discussion and findings, here are the recommended policies implications;

1. The Federal and Benue State Governments should increase funding, equipment, and personnel for security agencies, ensuring rapid response to conflict-prone areas.
2. Security agencies and the judiciary must ensure prompt arrest and prosecution of perpetrators to deter further violence and restore public trust.
3. The Benue State Government should establish compensation and livelihood support programs for victims of conflict, helping communities recover economically.
4. Traditional leaders and local stakeholders should lead peacebuilding dialogues and support community policing initiatives to enhance early warning and conflict prevention.

By implementing these measures, the relevant authorities can address the root causes of insecurity and promote sustainable socioeconomic development in Benue State.

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