



# Ethno-Religious Conflict and Economic Change



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Examining the Relationship between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the Death Toll Resulting from Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the relationship between the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and death toll resulting from ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. It analyzes how an increase in economic growth intensifies ethno-religious conflicts, while a decrease in economic growth is associated with a reduction of ethno-religious conflicts. To find the significant relationship between ethno-religious strife and the economic growth of Nigeria, this paper adopts a quantitative research approach using Correlation between the GDP and death toll. Data on death tolls were obtained from Nigeria Security Tracker through the Council on Foreign Relations; GDP data were gathered through World Bank and Trading Economics. These data were collected for the years 2011 to 2019. Results obtained show that ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have a significant positive relationship to economic growth; thus, areas with high poverty rates are more prone to ethno-religious conflicts. The evidence of positive correlation between the GDP and death toll in this research indicates that further research could be carried out to find solutions for these phenomena.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), poverty, death toll, correlation

## **Introduction**

Many countries are going through various conflicts, and in the case of Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts have contributed to the destruction of the country's economic system. The socio-economic development of Nigerian society has been enormously affected by ethno-religious conflicts. The loss of innocent lives contributes to the country's poor socio-economic development through fewer foreign investments that could stimulate economic growth (Genyi, 2017). Similarly, some parts of Nigeria have been in immense conflicts due to poverty; thus, economic instability leads to violence in the country. The country has experienced bizarre situations due to these religious conflicts, which affect peace, stability, and security.

Ethno-religious conflicts in different countries, such as Ghana, Niger, Djibouti, and Côte d'Ivoire, have affected their socio-economic structures. Empirical research has shown that conflict is the primary cause of underdevelopment in developing countries (Iyoboyi, 2014). Hence, Nigeria is one of those countries that faces vigorous political issues along ethnic, religious, and regional divisions. Nigeria is among some of the most divided countries in the world in terms of ethnicity and religion, and has a long history of instability and religious conflicts. Nigeria has been home to multiethnic groups from the time of its independence in 1960; almost 400 ethnic groups live there along with several religious groups (Gamba, 2019). Many people have argued that as ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria decrease, the country's economy will increase. However, closer examination shows that both variables are directly proportional to each other. This paper investigates the relationship between the socio-economic situations of Nigeria and ethno-religious conflicts that result in the deaths of innocent citizens.

The two variables studied in this paper were the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Death Toll. The Gross Domestic Product is the total monetary or market value of the goods and services produced by a country's economy for one year. It is used throughout the world to indicate a country's economic health (Bondarenko, 2017). On the other hand, death toll refers to "the number of people who die because of an event such as a war or an accident" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Therefore, this paper discussed the death tolls resulting from ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, while examining its relationship with the country's socio-economic growth.

## **Literature Review**

### **Ethnicity and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

The religious conflicts that Nigeria has been facing since 1960 remain out of control as the death toll of innocent people increases. The country has an increased insecurity, extreme poverty, and high unemployment rates; thus, the country is far from achieving economic prosperity (Gamba, 2019). Ethno-religious conflicts have a great cost to the economy of Nigeria as they contribute to the fluctuation, disintegration, and dispersion of the economy (Çancı & Odukoya, 2016).

Ethnic identity is the most influential source of identity in Nigeria, and the major ethnic groups are the Igbo living in the southeast region, the Yoruba in the southwest, and the Hausa-Fulani in the north. The distribution of many ethnic groups has an impact on government decision making as ethnic politics has a significant role in the economic development of the country (Gamba, 2019). However, religious groups are creating more troubles than ethnic groups. The two major religions are Islam in the north and Christianity in the south. Genyi (2017)

highlighted that “the centrality of ethnic and religious identities in politics and national discourse in Nigeria has remained conspicuous at every stage in the country’s history” (p. 137). For instance, militants in the north want to implement an Islamic theocracy that practices a radical interpretation of Islam. Hence, the transformation of agriculture and the restructuring of governance may embrace the promise to advance inter-ethnic and interreligious relations (Genyi, 2017).

### **Relationships between Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Economic Growth in Nigeria**

John Smith Will introduced the concept of “plural centric” to understand ethno-religious crisis (Taras & Ganguly, 2016). This concept was adopted in the 17th century, and J. S. Furnivall, a British economist, developed it further (Taras & Ganguly, 2016). Today, this approach explains that a society divided on proximity is characterized by free economic competition and exhibits a lack of mutual relationships. In this case, one religion or ethnic group always spreads the fear of domination. There are diverse views regarding the relationships between economic growth and ethno-religious conflicts. In Nigeria, it is complicated to identify any ethnic crisis that has not ended in religious conflict. Ethnic and religious bigotry is leading to nationalism, where members of each religious group desire authority over the body politic (Genyi, 2017). One of the causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria is religious intolerance (Ugorji, 2017). Some Muslims do not recognize the legitimacy of Christianity, and some Christians do not recognize Islam as a legitimate religion, which has resulted in the ongoing blackmail of each religious group (Salawu, 2010).

Unemployment, violence, and injustice emerge due to the increasing insecurities as a result of ethno-religious conflicts (Alegbeleye, 2014). For example, while global wealth is increasing, the rate of conflicts in societies is also increasing. Nearly 18.5 million people died between 1960 and 1995 as a result of ethno-religious conflicts in the developing countries of Africa and Asia (Iyoboyi, 2014). In terms of Nigeria, these religious conflicts harm the economic and social development of the nation. The sustained hostility between Muslims and Christians has decreased the productivity of the nation and has hindered national integration (Nwaomah, 2011). The socio-economic issues in the country have provoked severe conflicts between Muslims and Christians, which infuse all sectors of the economy; this means that the socio-economic problems are the root cause of religious conflicts (Nwaomah, 2011).

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria block economic investments in the country and are among the leading causes of the economic crisis (Nwaomah, 2011). These conflicts affect the Nigerian economy by creating insecurities, mutual distrust, and discrimination. Religious conflicts minimize the chance of internal and external investments (Lenshie, 2020). The insecurities increase political instabilities and uncertainties that discourage foreign investments; thus, the nation becomes deprived of economic developments. The effect of religious crises spread throughout the country and disrupt social harmony (Ugorji, 2017).

### **Ethno-Religious Conflicts, Poverty, and Socio-Economic Development**

The Nigerian economy is mostly dependent on the production of oil and gas. Ninety percent of the export earnings of Nigeria are from the trade of crude oil. Nigeria had an economic boom after the civil war, which resolved ethno-religious conflicts by decreasing the level of poverty in the country (Lenshie, 2020). Poverty is multidimensional in Nigeria as people became involved in the ethno-religious conflicts in order to gain a livelihood (Nnabuihe & Onwuzuruigbo, 2019). Unemployment is increasing in the nation, and an increase in economic development could

help to minimize poverty. The influx of more money could give citizens a chance to live peacefully in their community (Iyoboyi, 2014). This will also help in building schools and hospitals that will potentially divert the militant youth towards social development (Olusakin, 2006).

There is a conflict of a different nature in every region of Nigeria. The Delta region faces conflicts within its ethnic groups over the control of resources (Amiara et al., 2020). These conflicts have threatened regional stability and have an immensely negative effect on the youth living in that area. In the northern region, there are ethno-religious conflicts and various disputes over individual land rights (Nnabuihe & Onwuzuruigbo, 2019). In the southern part of the region, people are facing multiple levels of segregation as a result of the political dominance of a few groups (Amiara et al., 2020). Therefore, poverty and power contribute to conflicts in these areas, and economic development could minimize these conflicts.

The social and religious conflicts in Nigeria are also due to unemployment and poverty, which have a strong connection and contribute to ethno-religious conflicts (Salawu, 2010). The level of poverty is high in the north due to religious and social conflicts (Ugorji, 2017; Genyi, 2017). Additionally, rural areas have more ethno-religious insurgencies and poverty, which result in businesses moving to other African countries (Etim et al., 2020). This is negatively affecting employment creation in the country.

Ethno-religious conflicts have negative consequences on the economic development of Nigeria, which makes the country less attractive for investments. Despite having vast reservoirs of natural resources, the country is lagging economically due to its internal disturbances (Abdulkadir, 2011). The economic cost of conflicts in Nigeria is enormous as a result of the long history of ethno-religious conflicts. There has been a decrease in inter-ethnic trade trends between the significant tribes, and this trade is the primary source of livelihood for a substantial number of people (Amiara et al., 2020). The northern part of Nigeria is the leading supplier of sheep, onions, beans, and tomatoes to the southern part of the country. However, due to ethno-religious conflicts, the transport of these goods has decreased. Farmers in the north also face rumors of having poisoned merchandise that is being traded to southerners. All these scenarios disturb peaceful trade between the two regions (Odoh et al., 2014).

There is a freedom of religion in Nigeria, which means that there is no one dominant religion. Thus, having a Christian or an Islamic state is not religious freedom because it imposes a specific religion. The separation of state and religion is necessary to minimize internal religious conflicts (Odoh et al., 2014). However, due to the heavy concentration of Muslims and Christians in different areas of the country, religious freedom is not enough to ensure peace (Etim et al., 2020).

Nigeria has abundant natural and human resources, and the country has up to 400 ethnic groups (Salawu, 2010). Nevertheless, the country is facing a massive rate of poverty due to its internal ethno-religious conflicts. These conflicts affect the personal lives of individuals and decrease the Nigerian economic productivity. Ethno-religious conflicts affect every sector of the economy, which makes it impossible for Nigeria to have economic development without controlling social and religious conflicts (Nwaomah, 2011). For instance, social and religious insurgencies have also affected tourism in the country. Nowadays, the number of tourists who visit Nigeria is significantly low compared to other countries in the region (Achimugu et al., 2020). These crises have frustrated the youth and involved them in violence. The rate of youth unemployment is increasing with the rise of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria (Odoh et al., 2014).

Researchers have found that due to human capital, which has prolonged the rate of development, there is a reduced chance for countries to recover from economic doldrums quickly (Audu et al., 2020). However, an increase in asset values could contribute to not only the prosperity of the people in Nigeria, but also minimize mutual conflicts. Making positive changes to economic development can reduce disputes over money, land, and resources significantly (Achimugu et al., 2020).

## Methodology

### Procedure and Method/Theory

This study employed a quantitative research methodology, the Bivariate Pearson Correlation. Specifically, the correlation between the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and death tolls that resulted from ethno-religious crises in Nigeria was examined. The 2011 to 2019 Gross Domestic Product data were collected from Trading Economics and World Bank, while data of Nigerian death tolls as a result of ethno-religious conflicts were collected from the Nigeria Security Tracker under the Council on Foreign Relations. The data for this study were collected from credible secondary sources that are globally recognized. To find the relationship between the two variables for this study, the SPSS statistical analysis tool was used.

The Bivariate Pearson Correlation produces a sample correlation coefficient,  $r$ , which measures the strength and direction of linear relationships between pairs of continuous variables (Kent State, 2020). This means that in this paper the Bivariate Pearson Correlation helped to evaluate the statistical evidence for a linear relationship among the same pairs of variables in the population, which are the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Death Toll. Therefore, to find a two-tailed significance test, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) of the significance test for Correlation are expressed as the following assumptions, where  $\rho$  is the population correlation coefficient:

- $H_0: \rho = 0$  indicates that the correlation coefficient (Gross Domestic Product and Death Toll) is 0; which means there is no association.
- $H_1: \rho \neq 0$  indicates that the correlation coefficient (Gross Domestic Product and Death Toll) is not 0; which means there is association.

### Data

Year	Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	Death Toll
2011	\$410,000,000,000	1096
2012	\$459,000,000,000	3761
2013	\$515,000,000,000	7276
2014	\$568,000,000,000	15600
2015	\$495,000,000,000	12795
2016	\$405,000,000,000	5763
2017	\$376,000,000,000	4618
2018	\$397,000,000,000	6565
2019	\$410,000,000,000	6297

Table 1: Data sources from Trading Economics/World Bank (Gross Domestic Product); Nigeria Security Tracker under the Council on Foreign Relations (Death).

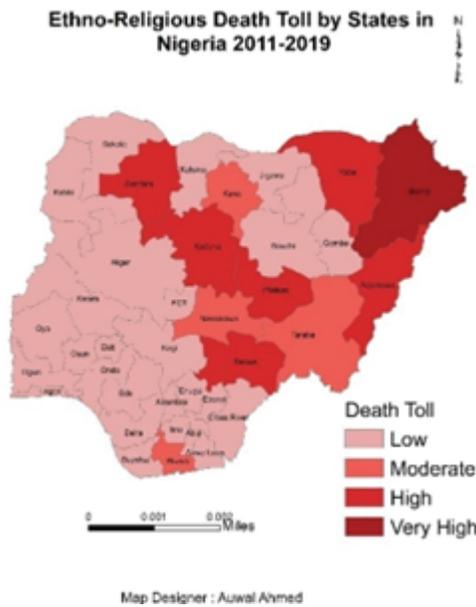


Figure 1.



Figure 2.

Fig 1: Ethno-Religious Death Toll by States in Nigeria from 2011 to 2019

Fig 2: Ethno-Religious Death Toll by Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria from 2011 to 2019

The figures were designed by Auwal Ahmed.

### Results

The correlation results suggested a positive association between the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the number of deaths (APA:  $r(9) = 0.766, p < .05$ ). This means that the two variables are directly proportional to each other; though, population growth might have an impact in one way or the other. Therefore, as the Nigerian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increases, the number of deaths as a result of ethno-religious conflicts also increases (See Table 3 ). The variables data were collected for the years 2011 to 2019.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
GDP	4.4833e+11	6.49423E+10	9
Death	7085.67	4483.135	9

Table 2: This provides an overall summary of the data, which includes the total number of each items/variables, and the mean and standard deviation of Nigerian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and death toll for the number of years used in the study.

Correlations			
	Mean	GDP	Death
<b>GDP</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.766*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.016
	N	9	9
<b>Death</b>	Pearson Correlation	.766*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	
	N	9	9

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Postive correlation between the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Death Toll (APA:  $r(9) = 0.766, p < .05$ ).

This is the actual correlation results. Nigerian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Death Toll data have been computed and analyzed using SPSS statistical software. The results can be expressed as:

1. The Correlation of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with itself ( $r=1$ ), and the number of nonmissing observations for GDP ( $n=9$ ).
2. The Correlation of GDP and Death Toll ( $r=0.766$ ), based on  $n=9$  observations with pairwise nonmissing values.
3. The Correlation of Death Toll with itself ( $r=1$ ), and the number of nonmissing observations for weight ( $n=9$ ).

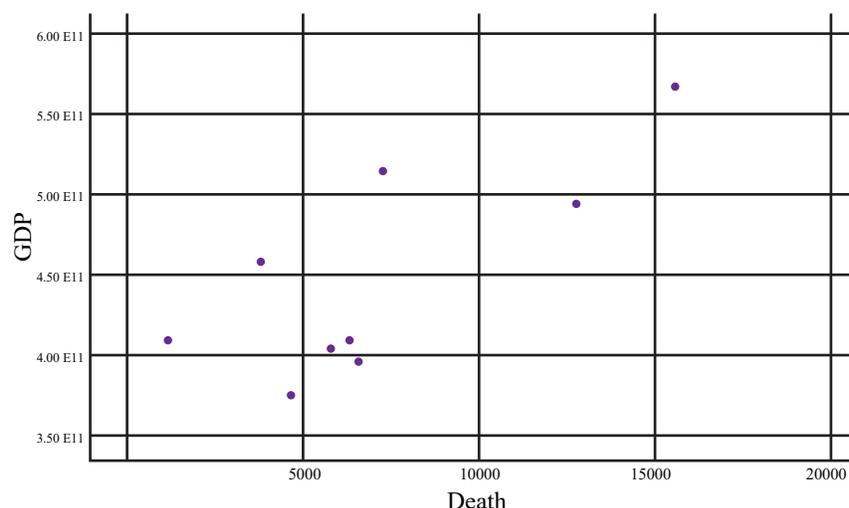


Chart 1. The scatterplot chart shows a positive correlation between the two variables, Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) and Death Toll. The lines created from the data have a positive slope. Therefore, there is a positive linear relationship between the GDP and Death Toll.

### Discussion

Based on these results, it can be concluded that:

1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Death Toll have a statistically significant linear relationship ( $p < .05$ ).
2. The direction of the relationship is positive, which means that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Death Toll are positively correlated. In this case, these variables tend to increase together (i.e., a greater GDP is associated with a greater Death Toll).
3. The R squared of the association is approximately moderate ( $.3 < |r| < .5$ ).

This study investigated the relationship between economic growth as indicated by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and ethno-religious conflicts, which resulted in the deaths of innocent people. The total amount of Nigerian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 2011 to 2019 is \$4,035,000,000,000, and the death tolls from the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) is 63,771. Contrary to the researcher's initial perspective, which was that as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rises the death toll will be reduced (inversely proportional), this study illustrated that there is a positive relationship between socio-economic factors and the number of deaths. This showed that as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increases, the death toll also increases (Chart 2).

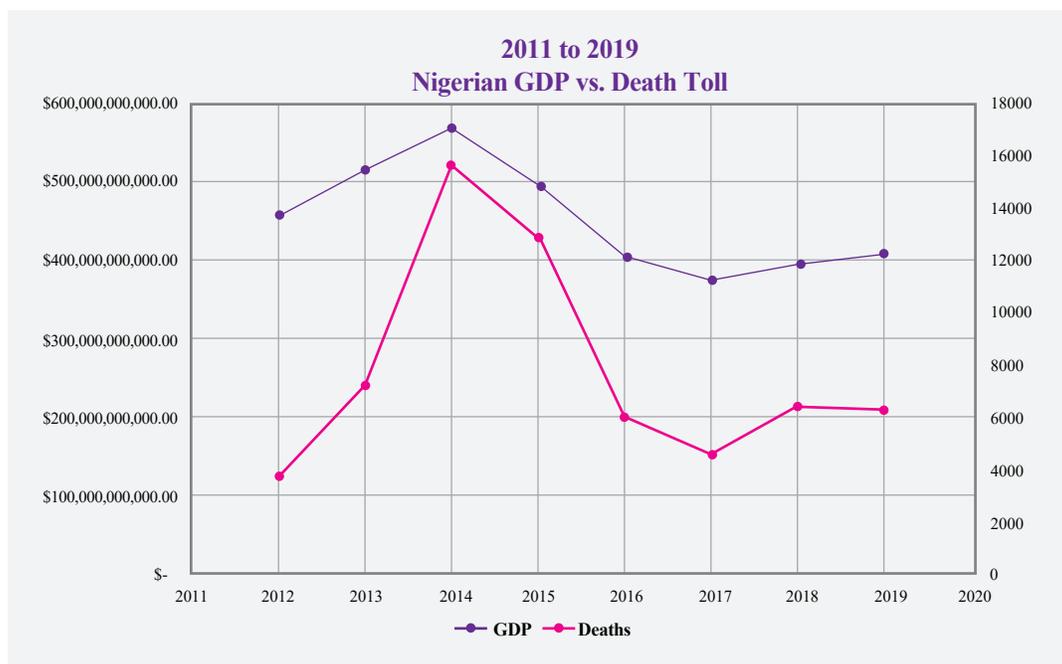


Chart 2: Graphical representation of the directly proportional relationship between the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and death toll of Nigeria from 2011 to 2019. The blue line represents the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and the orange line represents the death toll. From the graph, the researcher can see the rise and fall of the two variables as they move simultaneously in the same direction. This depicts positive Correlation as indicated in Table 3.

The chart was designed by Frank Swiontek.

### **Recommendations, Implication, Conclusion**

This study shows a correlation between ethno-religious conflicts and economic development in Nigeria, as supported by the literature. If the country increases its economic development and balances the annual budget as well as resources among the regions, the possibility of minimizing ethno-religious conflicts could be high. If the government strengthened its policies and controlled the ethnic and religious groups, then the internal conflicts could be controlled. Policy reforms are needed to regulate ethnic and religious affairs of the country, and the government at all levels should ensure the implementation of these reforms. Religion should not be misused, and religious leaders should teach the public to accept each other. The youth should not be involved in violence occurring due to ethnic and religious conflicts. Everyone should get the chance to be part of the political bodies of the country, and the government should not allocate resources based on preferred ethnic groups. The educational curricula should be changed as well, and the government should include a subject on civic responsibilities. Students should be aware of violence and its implication for socio-economic development. The government should be able to attract more investors in the country so that it can overcome the country's economic crisis.

If Nigeria minimizes its economic crisis, there will be greater chances of reducing ethno-religious conflicts. Understanding the results of the study, which indicates that there is a correlation between ethno-religious conflicts and economic growth, future studies could be carried out for suggestions on ways to achieve peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

The leading causes of conflicts have been ethnicity and religion, and the substantial religious conflicts in Nigeria have affected social, economic, and political lives. These conflicts have troubled social harmony in Nigerian societies and made them economically deprived. Violence due to ethnic instabilities and religious conflicts has destroyed peace, prosperity, and economic development in Nigeria.

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