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## **THE EFFECTS OF INSURGENCY ON THE SOCIAL LIFE OF BENUE NORTH WEST SENATORIAL CONSTITUENCY**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the historical multifaceted impact of insurgency on the social lives of the people of Benue North West Senatorial Constituency of Benue State, Nigeria. Employing a mixed-methods approach, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that insurgency has profoundly disrupted the social and religious lives of the community members, leading to displacement, loss of lives and property, economic instability and heightened religious tensions. Additionally, the study elucidates how the insurgency has engendered fear and mistrust among religious groups, exacerbated interfaith conflicts, and challenged traditional social structures. Furthermore, it highlights the resilience and coping mechanisms adopted by the community amidst the turmoil, including community solidarity, religious resilience, and adaptive strategies. The study underscores the urgent need for holistic intervention strategies that address not only the immediate security concerns but also the underlying socio-economic and religious grievances to foster peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development in the region.

**Key Words: Insurgency, Social Life, Benue North West Senatorial Constituency.**



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<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

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## **Introduction**

The Devastating Impact of Insurgency on the Social life of the People of Benue North West Senatorial Constituency is an examination of the consequences of insurgency on the social and religious life of the people of Benue North West. The Benue North West Senatorial Constituency, a region once renowned for its rich cultural heritage and harmonious coexistence among diverse ethnic and religious groups, has been ravaged by the scourge of insurgency. The incessant attacks by armed groups have left an indelible mark on the socio-religious fabric of the constituency, threatening to unravel the very essence of its communal identity. The crisis has not only resulted in significant human suffering, displacement, and loss of lives but also eroded the trust and understanding that once existed among the people.

According to Abdul, the Spread of insurgency has led to the collapse, of social, cultural, and religious foundations that once held it together now under severe strain (25). The desecration of sacred spaces, disruption of religious practices, and erosion of cultural identity have become commonplace, leaving the people in a state of perpetual fear, anxiety, and uncertainty.

The aim of this research is to explore the devastating impact of insurgency on the social life of Benue North West Senatorial Constituency, examining the complex dynamics of this crisis and its far-reaching consequences for communal harmony, cultural heritage, and religious coexistence. By investigating the root causes, manifestations, and effects of this crisis, this study aims to contribute to the development of effective strategies for conflict resolution, community engagement, and socio-religious revitalization in the constituency.

## **Insurgency in Nigeria with Particular Reference to Benue North West**



Publication Date: September 20, 2025  
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has grappled with various forms of insurgency over the past decades. The emergence and spread of insurgency in Nigeria can be attributed to a complex relationship of historical, socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. According to Kwaya understanding these elements is crucial for devising effective strategies to combat insurgency, foster peace and stability in the country (43).

According to Abdul, the Benue North-West Senatorial Constituency comprising Guma, Makurdi, Gwer East, Gwer West, and three other LGAs has, over the past two decades, emerged as one of the most volatile zones in the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. This conflict, which began as a struggle over land and resources, has escalated into a major insurgency-like crisis, characterized by persistent violence, killings, destruction of property, and mass displacement of rural populations (56).

The native people, who dominate Benue North-West, have historically been agrarian, depending largely on farming for subsistence and economic survival. On the other hand, Fulani herders traditionally practiced transhumant cattle grazing, moving across the Sahel and savannah regions in search of pasture. During the pre-colonial period, interactions were mostly peaceful, with farmers and herders engaging in systems of mutual exchange farmers provided crop residues for cattle, while herders supplied milk and manure. However, colonial boundary demarcations, coupled with changes in population and land use patterns, disrupted these arrangements, sowing the seeds of conflict (62).

As Nigeria's population grew, demand for land increased the expansion of farmlands into traditional grazing routes led to tensions. Sporadic clashes began to occur between farmers and Fulani herders, especially during the dry season when competition for water and grazing fields was most intense. From the early 2000s, the conflict transformed from localized disputes into large-



Publication Date: September 20, 2025  
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

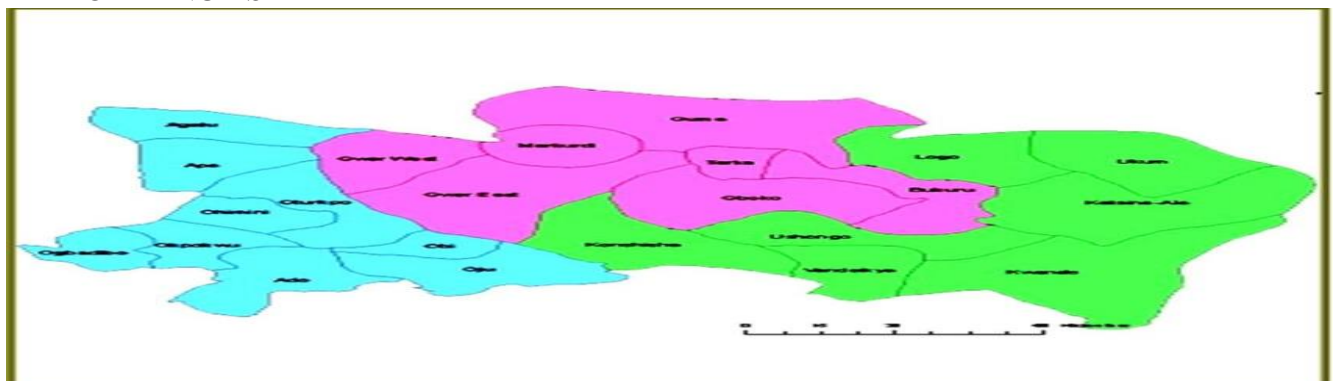
scale violent attacks. Armed herder militias increasingly invaded communities, burning villages, destroying farmlands, and displacing thousands. The weaponization of the conflict was linked to broader national insecurity, the proliferation of small arms, and the weakening of state security institutions (Idowu 78).

### **The Impacts of Insurgency on the Social life of the people of Benue North West**

According to Onuoha, Benue State is located in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria and Benue North-West senatorial constituency also known as Zone B, has seven local governments which include Buruku, Gboko, Tarka, Guma, Makurdi, Gwer and Gwer West. This region has been significantly affected by insurgency and conflict over the past two (2) decades, especially Guma, Makurdi, Gwer and Gwer West which is the scope of the research. The state, known for its agricultural productivity and cultural diversity, has experienced disruptions primarily due to clashes between Fulani herdsman and local farming communities (57).

Understanding the comprehensive implication of insurgency is essential for devising effective strategies to mitigate its effects and support the affected communities in their recovery and resilience effort (Idowu 62).

MAP OF BENUE STATE





Publication Date: September 20, 2025  
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

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## Effects on Social Life

**Displacement and Migration:** Frequent attacks by insurgents have forced many residents of Benue North-West to flee their homes, leading to significant displacement and migration. This has resulted in the creation of numerous internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, which are often overcrowded and under-resourced (Ndubisi 97). Displacement disrupts community life and economic activities, causing loss of livelihoods for many. Farmers, who constitute a majority of the population, have been unable to tend to their fields, leading to food insecurity and economic hardship.

**Destruction of Property and Infrastructure:** Insurgent attacks have led to the widespread destruction of homes, schools, healthcare facilities, markets and Religious institution. The rebuilding of these infrastructures is slow and often hampered by ongoing insecurity (102). The destruction of infrastructure not only affects immediate living conditions but also hampers long-term development and economic recovery efforts.

**Breakdown of Social Cohesion:** Insurgency has strained social relationships and trust within communities. The fear of being accused of collaborating with insurgents has led to suspicion and division among community members. Traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and social cohesion have been undermined, weakening the social fabric of the affected communities (Adeyemi 125).

**Implication on Education:** The conflict has disrupted educational activities, with many schools being closed or destroyed. Teachers and students have been displaced, leading to a significant



Publication Date: September 20, 2025  
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

---

decline in educational attainment. The interruption of education affects the future prospects of children and youths, limiting their opportunities for personal and professional development (130).

**Erosion of Cultural Heritage:** According to Ukasi Insurgency has disrupted traditional cultural practices and ceremonies, which are vital for maintaining the cultural identity of the people of Benue North-West. Fear and insecurity have led to the abandonment of festivals, rituals, and other cultural events (98). The displacement of communities has resulted in the loss of intangible cultural heritage, as traditional knowledge and practices are not being transmitted to younger generations.

**Alteration of Livelihood:** The traditional livelihoods of farming and animal husbandry have been severely affected by the insurgency. The disruption of these activities has forced people to seek alternative means of survival, often leading to the abandonment of traditional practices and skills. The loss of livelihoods has also impacted the social structures and roles within communities, as individuals and families struggle to adapt to new economic realities (103).

**Increased Insecurity:** The ongoing insurgency has led to a general state of insecurity in Benue North-West. The presence of armed groups and frequent attacks have made it difficult for security forces to maintain law and order.

The insecurity has also hindered humanitarian efforts as aid workers face threats and obstacles in delivering assistance to affected communities (Lawal 90).

## Effects on Religious Life

**Disruption of services:** This endless insurgency has led to the disruption of religious services and gatherings, as people now afraid of attending service due to safety concerns. This has also created



Publication Date: September 20, 2025  
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

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impact on the ability of religious institutions to carry out their normal activities and provide spiritual support to their communities (Ningxin 11).

Damage to religious buildings: Insurgency has result in the damaging and destruction of religious buildings, such as churches, Mosque and other religious houses. This has disrupt religious services and force communities to find alternative worship spaces (13).

Restrictions on religious freedom: Insurgency has led to restrictions of religious freedom, with certain religious groups being targeted or persecuted. This has result in discrimination and harassment of individuals based on their religious beliefs.

**Displacement of religious communities:** Insurgency has force people to flee their homes and seek refuge in other areas, disrupting religious communities and traditions. This has resulted in the loss of religious practices and rituals that are important to the identity of a community (Amaza15).

### **The Anti-Grazing Bill and Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict in Benue State**

According to Ortom, the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Bill (also called Anti-Grazing Bill) was initiated by Benue State Executive Council and passed into law by the Benue state house of assembly on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, 2017. The governor of Benue state Ortom publicly gave assent to the bill a fortnight later. Its enforcement began on 1<sup>st</sup> of November, 2017. Prior to its enforcement, a six-month awareness period was given to sensitize the citizens of the state and other concerned stakeholders on demerits of open grazing. The implications of establishing well equipped and certified ranches in line with global best conducts of animal rearing were enunciated. The law prohibits non-mechanized transport of livestock within the state, cattle rustling, and possession of firearms in duly certified ranches, open grazing of livestock (124). It



Publication Date: September 20, 2025  
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

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sets penalties for such offences ranging from monetary compensation to specific jail terms. It also authorizes the auction sale of any livestock engaging in open grazing if the owner fails to reclaim such within seven days. The proceeds of such sales are to be remitted into government coffers.

Ortom in his work noted that, the enactment of a law in 2017 prohibiting open grazing led to the exodus of herders from Benue state who could not sustain their traditional way of life, leading to an intensification of armed clashes between herders and farmers. The resulting violence has displaced almost 500,000 people from their homes, according to the International Organization for Migration, with many settling in camps across Benue North-west senatorial constituency (130).

## **Conclusion**

According to Homer the devastating impact of insurgency on the social life of Benue North West Senatorial Constituency has been profound and far-reaching. This research has demonstrated that the crisis has not only resulted in significant human suffering, displacement, and loss of lives but also eroded the trust, understanding, and harmony that once existed among the diverse ethnic and religious groups in the constituency. The insurgency has severely strained the social, cultural, and religious foundations of the community, threatening the very essence of its communal identity. The desecration of sacred spaces, disruption of religious practices, and erosion of cultural identity have become commonplace, leaving the people in a state of perpetual fear, anxiety, and uncertainty.

In the direction of restore peace, rebuild social cohesion, and revitalize the socio-religious fabric of Benue North West Senatorial Constituency, this paper recommends a multidimensional approach that incorporates: Ultimately, addressing the devastating impact of insurgency on the





Publication Date: September 20, 2025  
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

socio-religious fabric of Benue North West Senatorial Constituency requires a collective effort from all stakeholders, including government, community leaders, religious organizations, and civil society. Through working together, we can rebuild a more harmonious, inclusive, and resilient community, where diverse ethnic and religious groups can coexist peacefully and thrive.

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Publication Date: September 20, 2025  
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

### ORAL INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

S/No	Name	Designation	Religion/ Denomination	Age	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1	Revd. Samuel Iornenge,	Pastor	Christian	56	Segev:	5/5/2025
2	Alhaji Suleiman Abdul	Imam	Muslim	43	Gbajimba	7/5/2025
3	Veronica Verhemba	House Wife	Traditionalist	35	Anshima	10/6/2025
4	Chief Akpe Ajon	Leader	Christian	68	Nyiti	7 /07/2025
5	John Akawe	Farmer	Traditionalist	68	Jebu	10/07/2025
6	Cecilia Ama- Ber	Trader	Christian	35	Jimba	15/08/2025
7	Akambe Iorbee	Chief Priest	Traditionalist	52	Mbabwuandi	20/08/2025
8	Terkula Ahenekaa	Farmer	Christian	48	Uvir	8/08/2025
9	Ngudoo Akure	Trader	Christian	52	Akete	10/08/2025
10	Ahember Akuma	Student	Christian	25	Makurdi	16/08/2025