Socio-Demographic Predictors of Peace Building Outcomes and Communal Harmony in Nigeria: An Empirical Study

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Abstract
This study analyses the potential of socio-demographic parameters as essential instruments for peace building and encouraging peaceful coexistence in Nigeria, a nation distinguished by ethnic diversity, religious plurality, and socio-economic inequality. Despite the ubiquity of conflict originating from these diversities, limited work has examined how socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, education, employment status, and ethnicity, can serve as drivers of peace. A descriptive correlational methodology was employed, utilising Taro Yamane's formula to determine an appropriate sample size. Data were collected from 396 individuals residing in conflict-prone areas ofIkare-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. Using one survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews, the study analysed the predicted influence of age, education, work status, and ethnic bias on peaceful coexistence. Findings demonstrated that age and educational level strongly predict peaceful coexistence, whereas job status did not exhibit a significant independent effect. Notably, ethnic bias was found to be a significant predictor of peaceful coexistence, indicating that lower levels of ethnic bias are associated with a greater predisposition toward peace. The results also revealed that older adults are more inclined to prefer non-violent techniques, such as community discourse and mediation, underscoring their strategic value in peace projects. Collectively, the socio-demographic variables evaluated accounted for 61.1% of the variance in predicting peaceful coexistence among the study participants. The study suggests that integrating socio-demographic factors into peace building policies and conflict resolution tactics reduces ethnic bias, enhances community relations, and boosts the sustainability and effectiveness of peace initiatives in Nigeria.
Keywords: Socio-Demographic Factors, Peace Building, Peaceful Coexistence, Conflict-Resolution, Ikare-Akoko

Introduction

Nigeria, a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse nation, has faced persistent conflicts that threaten its peaceful coexistence and economic stability. Its socio-demographic factors, including levels of education, ethnic plurality, religious diversity, marital status, gender differences, and economic disparities, characterise its population (Nnabuihe, 2019). If not properly managed, these factors can contribute to conflicts and escalate civil wars. Demography is a highly dynamic field of study that shapes the fundamental characteristics of a society, thereby influencing the causes of conflict and the broader dynamics of international relations (Kugler, 2017). However, demographic factors can also serve as essential tools for peace building when harnessed effectively.

Demographic factors refer to characteristics such as marital status, gender, education level, age, ethnicity, place of residence, and employment status, all of which influence individuals' attitudes and decisions regarding various interventions and behaviours (Women's Studies International, 2023). While the concept of demographic factors is not new in academia, as it has been widely discussed as a potential cause of conflict (Hessel, 2019), most existing literature primarily focuses on its role in shaping human behaviour, particularly violent behaviour. Several scholars, including Côtéand Mitchell (2018), Kugler (2017), and Chukwu et al. (2024), have highlighted the significant impact of demographic factors on human behaviour, especially in the area of conflict. However, there is limited literature specifically exploring the potential of socio-demographic factors as a tool for peace building. Therefore, this paper examines the interplay between socio-demographic factors and peace building, emphasising the need for their strategic integration in conflict resolution and national development.

According to Johan Galtung, *"peace is what we have when creative conflict transformation takes place non-violently"* (cited in Schmid, 2000:58). Similarly, Akpuru-Aja (2007), cited in Nwosu (2021) defines peace as a relative condition of a security-friendly atmosphere that frees people from fears and dangers of losing their inalienable rights to life while guaranteeing progressive order and stability in individual and group relations. Likewise, Ojo and Oyebode (2018), drawing from Galtung's (2012) and Richmond's (2012) perspectives, argue that a society is not necessarily peaceful merely because it holds a monopoly on the application of force to repel violence. Rather, peace is ensured through the availability of functional, institutionalised structures that prevent violence in physical, psychological, structural, and cultural terms by promoting sustainable development, inclusiveness, productive governance, and mutually reinforcing social structures. Meanwhile, Kugler (2017) explains that demographic dynamics are directly linked to unrest, which can generate democratic movements or conflicts, as observed across the Middle East and much of sub-Saharan Africa. However, in contrast, social demography can serve as a crucial tool for understanding fundamental societal changes. When effectively explored, it can be instrumental in analysing the political and security patterns of a nation, as well as in fostering peace building and peaceful coexistence through conflict resolution strategies.

Ethnicity / Cultural Diversity and Peace Building
Nigeria comprises over 250 ethnic groups, each with distinct cultural values and traditions, making the country inherently heterogeneous. This diversity sometimes leads to ethnic bias, which can be a source of division and conflict in a cross-cultural and multicultural nation like Nigeria. However, ethnicity and cultural diversity also present opportunities for cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Policies that promote inter-ethnic collaboration and cultural tolerance can help reduce ethnic tensions and foster national unity. Scholarly literature underscores the importance of inclusive dialogue and active participation in peace building within multicultural settings (Ramirez & Shannon, 2018, cited by Odu, 2024). Engaging representatives from diverse cultural backgrounds in peace building and decision-making processes ensures that the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders are considered. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to peace initiatives, enhancing their effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Additionally, promoting intercultural understanding and empathy plays a crucial role in building trust and fostering cooperation among diverse communities (Ramirez & Shannon 2018, cited by Odu 2024)

Age Grade and Peace building
The relationship between war and demographics (specifically age) reveals that countries with a high population of young people are far more likely to experience civil war and conflict than those with a larger aged population. Younger age structures facilitate political mobilisation and recruitment into extremist organisations and insurgencies, especially when combined with a weak economy (Laipson, 2007). However, if the age-grade system is effectively harnessed, it can serve as a crucial tool for peace building. In Igboland, the age-grade system is a well-structured, time-tested social institution designed to facilitate conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the maintenance and enhancement of interpersonal and intergroup relationships (Chiedozia, 2021). This conclusion is supported by various scholars, including Widjaja (2001), who found that the age-grade system has significantly contributed to promoting peaceful coexistence in communities. Chiedozia (2021) further emphasised in his findings that among the Ohafia community in Igboland, one of the most prominent social mechanisms for peace building is the age-grade system, known as *"Nde Uke."* Age grades in Ohafia have historically played and continue to play vital roles in fostering peace and harmony through crime prevention, law enforcement, and community welfare development (Chiedozia, 2021).

Education and Peaceful Coexistence
Education is a vital tool for fostering critical thinking, tolerance, and social responsibility. Accessible and inclusive education can bridge socio-economic gaps, reduce prejudice, and equip individuals with the skills to resolve conflicts. Ojo & Oyebode (2018) define education as the process through which a change in the behaviour of individuals or groups is achieved through teaching and learning. In other words, education serves as a means

of organising, preserving, modifying, and transmitting a society's history, values, ideas, and norms from one generation to another, with the deliberate intent of shaping attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions within that social group. Furthermore, peace education programs in schools can help instil values of peaceful coexistence and a non-violent mind-set, fostering harmony within any given social environment.

Economic Disparities and Peace Building
Economic development and peace building are among the most pressing global challenges (Mohammed, 2023). Economic development contributes to peace by alleviating poverty, generating employment, and creating opportunities for all societal groups. Studies have shown that unemployment and poverty are significant drivers of conflict in Nigeria. However, economic empowerment programs, job creation initiatives, and social welfare policies can help mitigate tensions and promote social stability. Conversely, peace building fosters a stable environment that enables economic growth to thrive.

Methodology
The study employed a mixed-methods research design to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches for the collection of primary and secondary data. This method was adopted because it enables a comprehensive exploration of the research problem by integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were gathered from randomly selected participants, and a descriptive correlational design was adopted to investigate the relationship between demographic factors, including age, job status, education level, and ethnic bias. The statistical population comprised randomly selected residents of Ikare-Akoko, Ondo State. With a total estimated population of approximately 128,596, based on figures from Nigeria's last national census conducted in 2006 (City-fact, 2019). Given the impracticality of covering the entire population, Taro Yamane's formula was applied to determine an appropriate and statistically reliable sample size.

Taro Yamane's Formula

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where (e = 0.05 level of significance, N = Total population: n = Desired sample)

Substituting
N = 128,596: e = 0.05: 1 = Constant

$$n = \frac{128,596}{1 + 128,596(0.05)^2}$$

$$= 399.63 = 400 \text{ (by approximation)}$$

As a result, a sample of 400 participants was randomly selected to ensure representativeness and facilitate the generalizability of the findings. Data were collected through a survey, with questionnaires administered to 350 respondents from communities prone to communal conflict. In-depth interviews were also conducted with an additional 50 respondents to complement the qualitative data. Participation criteria required individuals to be residents of Ikare-Akoko. All participants provided informed consent and were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality of responses was assured. After excluding incomplete questionnaire responses, data from 392 participants were analysed using SPSS 21.0. through a multiple linear regression analysis.

Result and Discussion
The research investigated "Social demographic factors as a tool for peace building in Nigeria." Specifically, it was designed to examine how socio-demographic factors (Age, education, job status, and ethnicity) predict peaceful coexistence.

Table 1: Showing the preferred choice of peace building strategies by age group

Age	Peace Building Strategies				
	Mediation	**Community Dialogue**	**Confrontation**	**Military intervention**	**Adjudications**
18 – 25 (n= 131)	16% (21)	16% (21)	45% (59)	15% (19)	8% (11)
26 -39 (n= 128)	23% (30)	32% (41)	30% (39)	7% (9)	7% (9)
40 Above (n= 133)	30% (40)	51% (67)	5% (7)	7% (9)	7% (10)
Education Level					
No- Education	10%	10%	38%	32%	10%
Primary / Secondary Edu	10%	15%	34%	36%	5%
Tertiary Education	35%	40%	6%	10%	9%

*Source: Field Survey, 2024. *n number of participants in each age group.*

Table 2: Multiple Linear Regression showing the predictive influence of social-demographic factors on Peaceful coexistence among residents of conflicting communities in Ikare-Akoko

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*Sig.*	*t*	*F*	*R²*	*P*
Age	0.10	0.23	0.13	.031	-0.44			
Education	0.01	0.06	0.54	.001	2.37	22.48	.611	<0.01
Job Status	0.01	0.05	0.01	.675	0.11			
Ethnic Bias	-0.46	0.23	-0.33	.041	-1.99			

Source: Field Survey (2024)   ***Note***: $**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05$

Discussion of Findings

The current study investigated whether socio-demographic factors such as age, educational qualification, job status, and ethnicity could predict peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution strategies among residents of heterogeneous communities in Ikare-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. The results, as presented in Table 1, show the percentage distribution of preferred peace building strategies by age group and education level. The data revealed that the middle-aged (26-39 years old) and older age groups (40+ years old and above) prefer community dialogue (51%), while confrontation is more common among the younger population, indicating that older individuals are more inclined toward non-violent and peaceful conflict resolution than their younger counterparts. These age groups should, therefore, be given more prominent roles in peace building and conflict resolution efforts, such as community mediation, dialogue facilitation, and mentorship programs that aim to guide youth toward non-violent alternatives.

Likewise, the study's findings, presented in Table 1, revealed that Educational qualification influences peace building preferences. Participants with tertiary education qualifications predominantly prefer community dialogue (40%) as their preferred choice of peace building strategies. In contrast, confrontation (38%) and military intervention (36%) are most preferred by participants with no education and primary/secondary education, respectively. The results suggested that residents with higher educational attainment correlate with a stronger

inclination towards peaceful coexistence among the study population. Therefore, this group should be given a prominent role in the peace building process and programs aimed at making informed decisions.

Meanwhile, the results of the multiple linear regression, presented in Table 2, revealed the predictive influence of social-demographic factors on Peaceful coexistence among residents of conflicting communities. The results revealed that age significantly and independently predicts peaceful coexistence among the studied participants, accounting for 13% of the variance ($\beta = 0.13$; $t = 0.44$; $p < 0.05$). This result suggests that as residents' age increases, their intention for peaceful coexistence also increases. The results are in agreement with Claassen's (2014) survey, "Who participates in communal violence? "Survey evidence from South Africa on how socio-demographic (**Age**, Gender and educational qualifications) variables influenced the 2008 nationwide wave of anti-immigrant riots and communal violence in South Africa. Claassen (2014) in the study observed that most of the participants of the violence are within the middle age of 35years but below 40 years. These confirmed the correlational effect of socio-demographic variables on peace building strategy in mitigating communal conflict. Likewise, the statistical analysis results revealed that participants' **educational qualification** significantly and independently predicts peaceful coexistence among residents in heterogeneous communities in Ondo State, accounting for **54%** of the variance *($\beta = .54$; $t = 2.37$; $p < 0.01$),* indicating that the higher the level of educational attainment of the participants, the greater the inclination toward peaceful coexistence. However, **job status** does not significantly predict peaceful coexistence independently among residents in heterogeneous communities in Ondo State *($\beta = .01$; $t = 0.11$; $p > 0.05$).* This result aligns with the findings of Rubab and Yousuf (2022), who stated that education should be employed to reduce violent behaviour, as it is essential for changing people's attitudes towards conflict resolution and promoting a peaceful culture.

Furthermore, the statistical analysis results revealed that **ethnic bias** was found to **negatively** and significantly predict peaceful coexistence among the study participants, accounting for **33%** of the variance *($\beta = -.33$; $t = -1.99$; $p < 0.05$),* implies that higher levels of ethnic bias are associated with lower intentions for peaceful coexistence. Conversely, stronger intentions for peaceful coexistence are linked to lower levels of ethnic bias. This result is in agreement with the findings of Sotiropoulou (2002), who concluded that ethnic superiority and biases did play an important role in Yugoslavia's conflict.

Finally, the joint analysis from the multiple regression revealed that the socio-demographic factors **jointly and significantly** predict peaceful coexistence among residents in heterogeneous communities in Ondo State, accounting for **61.1%** of the total variance *($F = 22.48$; $R^2 = 0.611$; $p < 0.01$).*

Conclusion
This study highlights the crucial role that socio-demographic factors play in shaping peace building dynamics and promoting peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. According to the results of this study, factors such as age, education, and economic status not only influence individual attitudes toward conflict but also determine their willingness to engage in peace-promoting activities. The study revealed that recognising and incorporating these demographic realities into peace building frameworks, either independently or collectively, would significantly improve the effectiveness and sustainability of peace building process interventions in Nigeria. Meanwhile, age (middle-aged and older adults) in particular, emerges as a key driver of peace among the studied participants due to their demonstrated interest in peaceful coexistence; however, engaging and empowering the youth remains crucial for long-term stability. Most importantly, Peace building in Nigeria must move beyond generic interventions and embrace a more targeted, inclusive, and demographic-sensitive approach; only then can lasting peace and harmonious coexistence be achieved across the nation's diverse communities. The study suggests that integrating socio-demographic facts into peace building policies and conflict resolution tactics reduces ethnic bias, enhances community relations, and boosts the sustainability and effectiveness of peace initiatives in Nigeria.

Recommendation
In line with the findings of this study, it is strongly recommended that:
  i.   Engage Older and Middle-Aged Adults in Community-Based Peace building Roles: Given their strong preference for non-violent conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence, middle-aged and older individuals should be actively involved in structured peace building initiatives. Government agencies, NGOs, and local councils should appoint them as **community mediators, dialogue facilitators, and peace mentors**, particularly in areas prone to conflict.
  ii. Promote Peace Education and Awareness Campaigns Among Less-Educated Populations:Since individuals with lower educational attainment are more likely to support confrontational or militaristic conflict resolution methods, targeted peace education programs should be introduced at the grassroots level. These should include **community workshops, adult literacy programs, and radio sensitisation campaigns** to promote non-violent values and conflict resolution skills.
  iii. Implement Policies and Programs to Reduce Ethnic Bias and Promote Social Cohesion:Considering the negative impact of ethnic bias on peaceful coexistence, there is a need for deliberate **inter-ethnic dialogue forums, inclusive community projects, and cultural exchange programmes** to foster mutual respect and reduce ethnic stereotypes and prejudices in heterogeneous communities.
  iv. Adopt Demographic-Sensitive Peacebuilding Frameworks in Policy Design:Peacebuilding interventions should be tailored to reflect the socio-demographic realities of specific communities. Policymakers should integrate **age, education, and ethnic composition** into the design and implementation of conflict resolution strategies, ensuring inclusivity and relevance for maximum impact and sustainability.

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