

## **Migration, Identity Politics and Violence in Taraba State - Nigeria**

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### ***Abstract***

*The study focuses on migration, identity politics and violence in Taraba State. The objective is to foster unity among the ethnic groups within the State. The paper looks at the reasons for the creation of Taraba State which include the desire for fair distribution of resources of the State, development and to bring government closer to the people. It follows by concise history of the relations between the various ethnic groups in order to ascertain their choice for living together in Taraba State. Adopting historical approach by relying on oral interview and extant literatures, findings reveal that the presence of elitist class and the existence of bourgeois among the various ethnic groups instigated politics of identity in the State. Taraba State comprises diverse ethnic groups and where an ethnic group desires to resuscitate her socio-political organization and another group within same political society intends to retain or maintain status quo always result in violent conflict. Ethnic politics in the State has been exacerbated by the perception that politics is the major medium in which socio – economic and political resources available in the state could be controlled. Thus, the paper is an attempt to analyse the impact of the politics of identity in Taraba State, with particular reference to ethnic, religious and communal identities. The study is significant because it exposes the danger of politics of identity. The study concludes that good governance and politics of inclusion is a path way to prosperous Taraba State and Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Identity Politics, violent Conflict, democracy, election, Good governance*

### **Introduction**

The study is motivated by the apparent intractability of ethnic identity politics in Taraba State which was a negation of the promise made by the committee for the creation of the State that the ethnic groups will not “find it difficult to work with each other having been together in mutual respect for so long” (Memorandum for the creation of Taraba State out of Gongola State, 1981, p.2). Yet few months after the State was created, identity politics dominated the political atmosphere which

culminated in violent conflicts. The study is part of an attempt at explaining the above puzzle that is the factor(s) for the ethnic groups not peacefully co-existed as envisage.

In Nigeria, there are several areas of ethnic identity violence which have been the result of several years of inter-ethnic conflicts emanating from the nature of inter-group relations that the people living together or having close contact have evolved base on the prevailing economic and socio-political circumstances that formed part of the processes of their historical development. In Taraba State, the intermittent ethnic identity politics leading to violence have resulted in destructions of lives and property with widespread effects beyond the State. The history of ethnic identity politics characterized by violence has been a recurrent decimal in the State.

Given the ethnic diversity nature of the State and high consciousness about identity and the mobilization for its defence, this study argues that it has implications for nation building. Furthermore, as a State that is rightly described as the 'Nature Gift to the Nation' because of its abundance natural (agriculture) and human resources, with food crops, cash crops and fruits trees available, violence has implications for national food security. In addition, the continued identity political violence is a threat to the survival of Nigeria's democracy. For example, in Plateau State because of violent conflicts involving the ethnic groups, the 2003 general election was placed on hold in some areas and finally a State of Emergency was imposed in May 2004, the elected Governor was suspended for six months and replaced with a retired Army General with all democratic indices put aside (Alubo, 2011). Apart from protecting democracy which is one of the significant of this study, it is also relevant in terms of national peace and security so that Nigeria should not dissolve into ethnic enclaves like Somalia.

The ethnic groups considered in this study are the major ethnic groups who incidentally constitute the major political actors in the State. Mumuye, Fulani and Jukun-Kona are the ethnic groups that dominated the political struggles in the Northern part of the State. In the Southern part, the Jukun, Chamba, Kuteb and Tiv feature in the ethnic emancipation struggle and were involved in the violent conflicts that ensued.

Taraba State was created in 1991 from the defunct Gongola State during the military administration of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. The State derives its name from one of the three major rivers within the area. It covers a land area of 56,400 square kilometers. According to the 2006 population census figures released by the National Population Commission (NPC), Taraba State has population figures of two million, three hundred thousand, seven hundred and thirty six people (2,300,736). Taraba State lies roughly between longitude 6030<sup>0</sup> and 9036<sup>0</sup> East of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude 90 10<sup>0</sup> 50<sup>0</sup> North of the Equator. (Darius on a Rescue Mission, A Compendium of Achievements, 2016) It is bounded by Bauchi and Gombe States in the north-east and Adamawa State in the east and by Plateau State in the north-west. The State is further bounded to the west by both Nasarawa and Benue States, while it shares international boundary with the Republic of Cameroun to the south and south-east (Memorandum for the creation of Taraba State out of Gongola State, 1981).

There are over eighty (80) indigenous ethnic groups in Taraba State each with its distinct historical and cultural heritage. Some of these ethnic groups are Jukun, Ichen, Mumuye, Kuteb, Chamba, Wurkum, Mambilla, Kaka, Kambu, Yandang, Jenjo, Kunini, Lo, Ndola, Bandawa, Munga and Bambuka, it was through migration that all these groups arrived their present abode in Taraba State. Therefore, we shall proceed to explain the movements of these ethnic groups.

### **Migration of People to the area of Study**

All ethnic groups domicile in Taraba State has history of migration from another place to their present abode. The most important of these migrations of the ethnic groups according to Hamman (2007) was the movement of the Jukun from the Lake Chad basin to the present Taraba State. The Jukun arrived in the Benue valley (an area which include the whole of present Taraba State) and established an empire known as Kwararafa which flourished from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. During these periods the Hausa traders also migrated into Kwararafa Empire and developed trading relations with the Jukun and other groups thereby linking the area with the Hausa States. Beside the Hausa traders that moved to Kwararafa Empire, some Hausa people were captives of the various raids carried out by the leaders of Kwararafa on the Hausaland in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries (Hamman, 2007). A remarkable feature of this phenomenon is that the offspring of these traders/captives transformed to a new identity known as Abakwariga presently found in major towns particularly in Southern part of Taraba State. The Abakwariga speak Jukun language fluently but retain the Hausa form of dressing as their identity and they played significant roles in the identity politics of Taraba State as we shall soon see in this paper.

Mumuye is one of the earliest groups to have moved into present Taraba State, they inhabit the north-east part of the State, with some of their population being in Adamawa State. The name Mumuye was given to them by their neighbour the Fulani, their own name for themselves being Shoyazin (Hamman, 2007). Another group was the Wurkun. Similarly, the name Wurkun was given to them by their neighbour the Jukun to depict their territory. Wurkun in Jukun language means 'people of the hills'. The term Wurkun was the contrast to the Wurbo a Jukun clan which means 'people of the water' (Hamman, 2007).

The next group worthy of mention is the Fulani. The first group of the Fulani to appear in the present Taraba State was the group called Kiri who had been established in the area before the Jihad of Uthman Danfodio. Hamman (2007) says that the Fulani Kiri under the leadership of Modibbo Hammarwa migrated from Mali to the Lake Chad area and finally moved to Muri a settlement established by the Jukun in present Taraba State.

Chamba is another group that later moved to the Taraba area in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, similarly, the Jenjo also moved in around the same time i.e 18<sup>th</sup> Century from Lamurde in the present Numan Local Government area of Adamawa State. The various groups that are found in Taraba State moved to the area at different times, and we may not be able to capture them all because they are many and may detain and derail our focus. The intention of this section on migration in this study is to proof a point that as far as Taraba State is concerned all the ethnic groups have traditions that linked them with area outside their present abode, however some groups can be said to be earlier immigrants while others later immigrants.

The common feature of the groups in the area which have defined the people was the case of internal migration which involved the movement of communities from one place to another. It was this movement within the area of Taraba State that shapes the identity and the history of our area of study. We shall gloss over the nature of the movements to afford us the understanding of the peopling of Taraba State.

Jukun is one of the ethnic groups that spread and found in several Local Government areas of Taraba State due to internal migration. The riverine clan of the Jukun known as Wanu and Wurbo occupied the Benue and Taraba valleys. They are found in Ibi, Gassol, Bali, Wukari and Jalingo

Local Government areas. Other Jukun clans namely Ekpan/Kpanzun and Jibu are found in Takum and Donga Local Governments area in Southern part of the State. In the same vein, Jibu clan of the Jukun also domicile in several settlements in Bali and Serti Local Government areas. The Bakundi and Kam clans of the Jukun settled in great number in Gassol Local Government area and Jukun Kona as a group is found in Jalingo, Ardo Kola and Gassol Local Government areas.

The Mumuye that initially settled in Yorro later dispersed to other places and at present found in Zing, Yorro, Jalingo, Gassol and Ardo Kola. Other ethnic groups with wide distribution in many Local Government is the Chamba, the group is found in Donga, Takum, Wukari and Bali Local Government areas the same is the case of the Fulani pastoralists who are found in almost all Local Government areas with the urban concentrated in Jalingo and Sardauna.

The Kuteb is concentrated in Takum and Ussa, while the Ichen groups is spread within the Local Governments areas of the Southern part of the State namely Wukari, Takum, Donga, Ibi and Ussa. Few other ethnic groups have specific areas of concentration, for instance Ndola is concentrated in Kurmi, Jenjo and Nyandan are based in Karim Lamindo while Mambilla and Kaka ethnic groups are concentrated in Saruana Local Government areas.

The Tiv though have Benue State as their home, they have settled in Taraba State in places like Wukari, Takum, Ibi, Bali, Gassol, Serti and others. The Tiv are believed to have originated from somewhere on the Bamenda Plateau in the Cameroun in a place called Swem. According to Makar, (1975) the population of the people increased enormously that the area could no longer accommodate them. The area was unsuitable for cultivation and the people required more suitable area for farming to help produce sufficient foodstuff. The Tiv spread out crossed the Katsina-Ala River and settled on the northern bank of the river which brought them in close contact with the Jukun and Chamba and subsequently living together in the same territory of present Taraba State. The Tiv people settled in undeveloped open bushes and their pattern of scatter home settlements did not evolve into a concentrated community as they had many farmsteads settlements scattered in the bushes in several areas of Taraba State Local Governments with few settled in urban areas.

Most of the ethnic groups did not occupy contiguous territory, but were spread over different areas and between lived other groups. There were high level of social integration of the different groups and most worthy of note was the Jukun socio-political influence on most of the ethnic groups before the interjection of the process of interaction by the colonial rule (Meek, 1931). The people continued in different forms of relations which were peculiar to them even before the creation of Taraba State that brought them in close political administration.

### **Creation of Taraba State**

The agitation for the creation of Taraba State out of defunct Gongola State was championed by prominent citizens and politicians from the State. A joint meeting of the members of the Legislative bodies (Senate, House of Representative and House of Assembly) from the affected areas was held at Mutum Biyu on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1979, at which an agreement was reached to make a formal request to the National Assembly for the creation of Taraba State. Those in attendance were Senator Iliya Galiya Audu the Senator representing Wukari District which comprised Wukari, Sardauna, and Takum Local Government areas and Senator Luka Zanya Zing representing Muri District which comprised Jalingo, Karim Lamido, Bali and Zing Local Government areas. Others in attendance were all the House of Representative from the proposed Taraba State. They were:

S/N	NAMES	CONSTITUENCY
1	Hon. Abdulkadiri Lanko	Sawa- Jalingo
2	Hon. B.M Mabramajen	Karim-Lamido
3	Hon. David Hitler Gbaaondo	Takum
4	Hon. James M. Nzalaak	Sardauna
5	Hon. Agya Agbujoro	Wukari
6	Hon. Dahiru Hamman Liman	Bali
7	Hon. Dominic Vontih Y	Zing
8	Hon. D.B. Kamai	Jalingo
9	Hon. David Saraso *	Ganye
10	Hon. Hassan Gambo*	Mayo Belwa

**Source:** Memorandum for the creation of Taraba State out of Gongola State, December, 1981

The various meetings that were later held gave birth to Taraba State Movement (TASMO) with the following Local Governments Wukari, Takum, Bali, Sarduana, Jalingo, Karim Lamido, Zing, Mayo - Belwa, Ganye and Gamayo District of Numan Local Government. The last three (Mayo-Belwa, Ganye and Numan) later pulled out due to pressure from their areas. On 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1981, Senator Iliya Audu, a Senator, representing Wukari and Sardauna Area, led a delegation of traditional rulers and Emirs of proposed Taraba State and presented a demand for the creation of Taraba State to the National Assembly.

The members of the movement for the creation of the state cited underdevelopment of the area due to the Gongola State government neglect as one of the reasons for their agitation. It should be noted that after the State creation exercise of 1976, the Federal Military Government (FMG) stressed the need to avoid a proliferation of States, which will make nonsense of the exercise. The FMG stated that from experience, the more States were created the more the problem of ethnic agitation heightened, which resulted from bad governance at the State level. It, therefore, enjoined all State governments in the country to promote even development within their respective States in order to allay the fear of ethnic minority groups. The FMG also stressed the need for fairness and justice in all public affairs and urged the State governments to distribute all resources at their disposal in an equitable manner based on Local Government Units, with special attention given to more backward areas (Hembe, 2003).

Indeed, the above issues stressed by the FMG exacerbated the agitation for the creation of a new State out of Gongola State. It was claimed that certain very vital infrastructural and economic projects were cited in the Northern Zone with complete disregard to the Southern parts of the State. Social amenities such as health and educational facilities were politicized and concentrated in the Northern part of Gongola State. The deliberate policy by the Gongola State government of favouring one section of the State to the detriment of the other, led to the agitation for the creation of Taraba State. Thus, frustration, disillusionment, lack of feeling of belonging to the State and slow pace of development, both intellectually and infrastructural, exacerbated the agitation for the creation of the State to cater for the need of the Southern part of Gongola State. Due to the complication of the constitutional process to State creation, the dream was not to be until the Second Republic under President Shehu Shagari was ousted by a military junta led by General Muhammadu Buhari in 1983.

The issue of creation of State re-opened during General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida military junta. There was no longer a united front to create Taraba State out of Gongola State. There were three fronts agitating for a State out of Gongola State. One front requested for the creation of Taraba State with capital in Wukari. Another movement agitated for the creation of Muri State with capital

in Jalingo. The third front canvassed for the creation of Sarduana State with capital in Mubi. On 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1991, the Federal Military Government created Taraba State with capital at Jalingo.

The people especially the civil servants left Yola the capital, of defunct Gongola State to Jalingo the capital of Taraba State. Top among the civil servants was Obadiah Ando, who was the Secretary to the Government of Gongola State. He was redeployed to Taraba State and occupied the same position. The people of different ethnic groups settled down in Jalingo and embarked on structural development by erecting houses and other business ventures and also acquired lands for their personal residences setting the stage for a new form of ethnic interaction in the young State.

### **Identity Politics and Violence**

It is imperative to note that during the movement for the creation of Taraba State, the members of the Taraba State Movement vouched that the ethnic diversity of the State would be harnessed for the development of the State. The concluding paragraph of the letter of request for the creation of Taraba State by the Taraba State Movement as submitted to the National Assembly on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1981 states that:

Definitely the proposed Taraba State will be a mini Nigeria when created. Her variety of people, her interwoven cultural patterns, her fertile vast land, her endowed natural resources will usher in yet another socio-cultural attributes that will remain interesting to students of sociology. But definitely neither the Fulani, nor the Jukun or the Chamba will find it difficult to work with each other having being together in mutual respect, trust and religio-cultural diversity for so long (emphasis added)

Soon after the creation of the State, the various ethnic groups coiled into their ethnic cocoon to the detriment of the desired development of the area and the fear of ethnic domination became the dominant feature of the relations of the various ethnic groups that composed Taraba State. The atmosphere was characterized by fear of domination and suspicions and distrust among the ethnic groups.

The first Military Administrator who functioned as the Governor and supervised the governance of the State was Navy Captain Ambrose Adeyemi Afolahan who took charge from August when the State was created to 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1992. The administration was concerned with putting the administrative apparatus of the newly created State in order. Government equipment and personnel that were move from Yola the defunct Gongola State capital were resettled and put in its proper position for it to function optimally.

The people, mostly civil servants particularly from the Southern part of the State settled down in Jalingo the State capital and embarked on structural development by erecting houses and other business ventures. During the field research, those interviewed from the southern part of the State assert that as the people from other part of the State particularly southern part continued to acquire lands from landlords that were mostly Mumuye for building of their personal residences, the people from the Northern part of State particularly the Mumuye and Fulani elites exhibited fear of possible domination by those from Southern Taraba. Greater number of interviewees said the massive in-flow of people from the southern part of the State to Jalingo the headquarters made the Fulani and Mumuye uncomfortable. The Mumuye in particular hired writers to incite the Jukun and other

group of Southern part of the State, through slanderous and disgraceful publications, labeled them as unproductive, bellicose, lazy race and financial swindlers. One of such publications was the one-by-one Anthony Tashoba in the Hotline Newsmagazine of May 10<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>, 1993 where he accused the Jukun of “seizing land” from the Mumuye to build houses in Jalingo. According to him:

The Jukun are doing away with millions of naira all in the name of contracts in Taraba State. They are displacing the Mumuye from their fatherland, erecting fantastic mansions. This Jukun ugly specter of kleptomania must stop (Adda, 1993).

He further added that the Jukun are “politically irrelevant and of no significant economic burdens”. This ethnic identity was as a result of fear of ethnic domination and struggle for ethnic emancipation at the toddler age of Taraba State. Our interviewee Samuel Adda a Jukun said that people fear Jukun because they cannot compete favourable with them. To buttress his point he referred to a statement of a former Military Administrator of Taraba State Commissioner of Police Edores Oyakhire in This Day Newspaper of 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1997 where he observed that “Taraba State has a mini Nigeria attribute of a relatively higher concentration of better educated and developed Jukun South as against the north where the capital is situated”.

The state was created on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1991 and democratic government started with the election of Reverend Jolly Tavoro Nyame as elected Executive Governor during the two party system namely Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) during the aborted Third Republic. The election of Nyame of Mumuye ethnic group as Governor and the Deputy Governor Samuel Danjuma Gani of Jukun ethnic group of SDP did not go down well with some ethnic groups of the State. In Jalingo the headquarters, the outcome of the election coupled with the massive inflow of the Jukun from the southern part of the State cause panic on the Fulani who had been dominating the other ethnic groups of the area. According to Rev. Jolly Nyame:

Just within this short period... there have been serious clashes in the State... the reason for this instability in the State is not far fetch. First, some people did not like the idea of Taraba State being created. Second, there are those who feel that since the State has been created it is their birthright to rule and no any other person... Third, there is a particular individual who feels, he ought to have been the Governor of the State (Analyst, Vol.8, No.1, 1993)

Our respondents mostly from the Southern part of Taraba State domiciled in Jalongo town stated that the massive movement of the Jukun to Jalingo resuscitated and rekindled the kinship bond with the Jukun - Kona found in Jalingo town and its environs. The Jukun - Kona felt marginalized by the Fulani ruling group of Jalingo. Therefore, the presence of a large number of Jukun who moved into Jalingo town following the creation of Taraba State and possible alliance with their kindred the Jukun- Kona did not augur well with the Fulani ruling aristocracy in Jalingo. The kinship bond between the people of Wukari, Donga and Takum area with the Jukun - Kona of Jalingo exacerbated fear and created tension in Jalingo town. Between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1992, Jalingo the State capital was engulfed in what was officially referred to as civil disturbances. The disturbances started as a result of misunderstanding between Christian and Muslim students of Government Secondary School, Jalingo, but by the time it was quelled, it had spread beyond Jalingo metropolis into the surrounding villages. The Taraba State Governor, Reverend Jolly Tavoro

Nyame, set up a Judicial Commission of inquiry into the disturbance. The commission was headed by Justice Paul Adamu Galumje

The commission of inquiry into the disturbance finished its assignment, identified the remote and the immediate causes of the disturbance, mentioned persons directly and indirectly involved, and made recommendations to the State government. However, events following the disturbance and some memorandum to the commission of inquiry supported the view that some ethnic groups in Jalingo fear that the increasing number of the Jukun might bring about their dominating the political space of the State. The Jukun were alleged to have instigated the Jukun - Kona to widen the scope of the crisis beyond Jalingo metropolis. Our interviewees mostly the Fulani corroborated a document by Omar and Saliba (2003) alleged that the people of Wukari area felt that they were robbed of the State capital and governorship and so were out to destabilize the administration of Reverend Jolly Tavoro Nyame, a Mumuye man from the Muri Emirate.

During the field research, many of the respondents interviewed (mostly Jukun) unanimously disagreed with this position and pointed out that the administration of Reverend Jolly Tavoro Nyame was a joined ticket with Mr. Samuel Danjuma Gani, a Jukun man as a Deputy Governor. Therefore, it is against common sense for the people to destroy the administration they helped to bring to power, and which they were part of the structure. In addition, the political party through which Nyame rose to become the Governor, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), had its stronghold in Southern Taraba dominated by the Jukun. They alleged that rather it was the Fulani that were scheming to destabilize the State because their brother Dr. Ahmed Jalingo of National Republican Convention (NRC) that contested for governorship of the State against Nyame lost. The factor responsible for the Jalingo civil disturbance was the fear of ethnic domination and perception of the Fulani that they were born to rule. Fear of ethnic domination was the dominant feature in the relations between the various groups that formed Taraba State. The fear and conflict are in line with Group Conflict Theory, which explains the causes of rivalry and struggle for power among the various groups.

The Southern part of the State was also engulfed in dirtiest identity politics accompanied by protracted violence at the same period. Information collected by the researchers during field work in Wukari town indicated that the identity politics has been the bane of relations between the various groups since 1987. In 1987, there was a zero political party election into the office of Chairman of Local Government Council in Nigeria. In Wukari Local Government, the Jukun, Tiv and the Hausa ethnic groups were embroiled in the struggle for power at the Local level. The ethnic groups planned to outwit one another to grab power and at the end of the day there emerged the Tiv/Hausa political alliance against the Jukun.

Many of the respondents interviewed (mostly Tiv) said that the cause of the Tiv/Hausa political alliance was the refusal of the Jukun candidates for the Local Government Chairmanship position to pick a Tiv as a running mate. The Tiv people rally and overwhelmingly supported one Danladi Shehu, a Hausa man who had a Tiv man named Shinya Abako as his running mate (Akombo, 2005). Below is the table showing the candidates for the Chairmanship election of 1987 and the votes.

**Election Results in Wukari LGA in 1987**

S/N	Name	Ethnic Group	Votes obtained
1	Danladi Shehu	Hausa	31,205
2	Andrew Sallah Tsokwa	Jukun	28,958
3	Samuel Tsovini Adda	Jukun	16, 884
4	Yahaya Habu Fari	Abakwariga	9,310
4	Atoshi Gambo Zaku	Jukun	3, 002
6	James Babanya Orume	Jukun	2,525

**Source:** Atoshi, G.A. (1992). *The Story of the Jukun /Tiv Crisis: Why and How they Happened*, Wukari, Amune Press.

Our respondents (mostly Jukun) overwhelmingly attributed the victory of Danladi Shehu who has his father a Kanuri and mother a Jukun to the support he got from the Tiv Therefore, the mutual trust among the ethnic groups in the area eroded as each desire for power and political domination intensified. Information collected by the researchers among the Jukun of Wukari and corroborated with data documented by Agbu (1992) indicated that Danladi Shehu during his tenure as Chairman of Wukari Local Government Council promised the Tiv farmland which would be seized from the Jukun and given to them. Furthermore, he promised not merely seizing Jukunland alone, but dethroning or humiliating the Aku Uka the Jukun paramount ruler. To match his words with action, Danladi Shehu usurped the power of the traditional council to organize an annual fishing festival at Ibi known as Nwunyo festival by announcing a date contrary to the one announced by the Jukun traditional ruler that was responsible for the organization of the festival. Investigation carried out among the Jukun shows that this kind of act was disrespect to the paramount ruler of the Jukun and by implication a threat to their existence as an ethnic group. Majority of our respondents among the Jukun stated that this and similar acts of humiliation to the status of their King became imperative for them to unite and actively participate in party politics in order to protect their identity otherwise through political maneuver their identity would be thrown out of existence.

This was the background to the phenomenon that fueled the ember of ethnic politics which snowballed into violence when Taraba State was created. After the creation of Taraba State, during the two-party system namely the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP). The ethnic groups of Southern part of the State became separated along the party line. They became divided and pitched their political tents with the different parties. In Wukari Local Government area a majority of the Jukun belong to the SDP while the greater proportions of the Hausa and Tiv people were in NRC. In the Local Government council election that took place in Wukari Local Government area, Samuel Tsovini Adda, a Jukun of the SDP won the election.

This was the first time a Jukun was elected as the Chairman of Wukari Local Government Council. The Jukun realized that holding a political position is tantamount to identity preservation and protection. They believed that holding a political position is equal to protecting their identity and they also realized that allowing too many aspirants/candidates from the Jukun would be capable of splitting their votes with the consequence upon losing the election. This, they realized, after they took critical assessment of the above stated 1987 chairman election results. When the results of all the Jukun candidates were put together, it became clear that if it were just one candidate from the Jukun, Danladi Shehu would not have won. Consequently, they vowed that they would always work hard to present consensus candidate in every electable position. By this statement it shows that the Jukun want their identity to be above all else in the area hence they desired to dominant the political space within Wukari Local Government Area.

The Tiv on the other hand also insisted on their identity to be noticeable in Wukari as summarized by Avav and Myegba (1992) thus:

It is imperative to remind the Jukun that the Tiv of Wukari do not have any place outside Wukari that they can boast of. Yes, there is Tivland in Benue State. Unfortunately, the Tiv Wukari and indeed, Taraba State have no claim thereto... Therefore, the only way to avert further antagonism between these two tribes is to cultivate the share spirit of oneness, predicated not on argument of perceived fatherland, in exclusive terms but on the realities that it is impossible to throw out the Tiv even where history did not err.

This is a clear issue of ethnic recognition and identity preservation as the Jukun's demand for instance did not deny or prevented the Tiv living on the land but for them to recognize the suzerainty of the Jukun ruler and for them to desist from claiming equal status.

During the field work in Wukari, our Jukun interviewees stated that the demand of the Tiv to be well represented in Wukari Traditional Council was an affront on the identity of the Jukun. The traditional council is the embodiment of the Jukun culture and identity and the Chairman of the council the Aku Uka is the custodian of the tradition of the Jukun. Therefore, bringing the Tiv in the Jukun traditional council is like bastardizing the sacredness of the tradition which it supposed to preserve. A Tiv interviewee on this issue said that the non-inclusion of the Tiv in the Wukari Traditional Council means down grading their status of being in the area for long. So, to the Jukun, the cause of violent conflict in Wukari area was the attempt by the Tiv to be equal with the Jukun in status in term of party politics and traditional administration. The Tiv interviewees see the factor of the violent conflict as Jukun attempt to coerce them (Tiv) to accepting their suzerainty.

Another Tiv interviewee in Central Part of Taraba State pointed out that one of the factors for the violent conflicts is about a deliberate attempt by the Government of the State in collaboration with Jukun traditional rulers to erase Tiv identity by renaming some Tiv villages in Jukun language (Research interview, February, 2026). For example, the government of Taraba State under the leadership of Darius Dickson Ishaku (a Jukun) changed the name of Dan Anacha in Gassol Local Government Area to Kwararafa. A majority of Tiv respondents considered this act as an attempt to erase their identity to that particular settlement. They explained that Dan Anacha is specie of yam which they introduced and cultivate in the town and its environs and the name depict their identity as people of the town.

Responding the Jukun interviewed considered the change of the name as a restoration of Jukun instinct, humanity, identity and correction of their history considering the fact that Kwararafa was one of the oldest kingdoms in Nigeria. A letter published in the (Leadership Newspaper, Wednesday October, 19, 2016) with the title "Why it is Kwararafa and not Dan Anacha" succinctly captures the opinion of the Jukun thus:

Let it be made clear that we are not against the inhabitants of the town, not even the Tiv people with whom we have the highest regard and developed age-long ties... the decision taken has no ulterior motive of ethnic

undercurrents: rather it is aimed at the resuscitation of the people's identity which over the years settlers sought to kill and bury, but collective resistance has kept alive.

The reason for the change of the name of the town from Dan Anacha to its former name Kwararafa was for identity resuscitation, thus, the Jukun strived to revive their identity and the Tiv pushed to maintain their identity and this single factor was enough to triggered violent conflict that led to destruction of lives and property. The conflict was avoidable because the name Dan Anacha could have been allowed to continue as the name of the town and on the other hand the new name Kwararafa could be accepted by all and sundry, but for the contest over identity of the ethnic group violent conflict erupted.

In furtherance with the resuscitation of the Jukun identity in the State, the government created Chiefdom for Kwararafa area and made a Jukun as the headman. Jukun villages such as Tella, Bodel and others constituted part of the Chiefdom. The Jukun interviewed in Tella and Kwararafa towns said this was a correction of misnomer which placed them under Fulani ruler of Gassol town. The Fulani interviewed said this act was a total disregard to their authority in the area and were not happy with the development. Consequently, the Gassol Emirate Council dragged the Taraba State government and the Kwararafa Chiefdom to court to contest the veracity of the creation of the Chiefdom. In addition, the Jukun respondents alleged that the Fulani oligarchy in Gassol sponsored and instigated some disgruntle elements in the area to attack Jukun villages within the Chiefdom.

Historically, Kwararafa was the first home of the Jukun in the Middle Benue region and it was after the decline of its power couple with dynasty struggles that the people dispersed to form several settlements elsewhere. In 1837, the Fulani from their base in Muri Emirate extended their rule southward which resulted in the control of Gassol which was populated by Wurbo clan of the Jukun who lived on the bank of the river Benue for fishing activities (Hamman, 2007). However, it should be noted that the Wurbo – Jukun domiciled in Gassol were subjects of the Jukun ruler at Wukari and this shows that the people and the area became part of the Fulani rule when they were forced to enter what was called *amana* with the Fulani warriors/marauders seeking to form a territory to establish their rule (Hamman, 2007). On the strength of this history, the Jukun see the creation of Kwararafa Chiefdom by the Taraba State government in 2018 as a resuscitation of their identity as Jukun which was lost during the Fulani marauding more than a century ago. To the Fulani the creation of Kwararafa Chiefdom for the Jukun was a sort of truncating their ethnic identity placed over some people. This is another clear case of identity resuscitation and identity sustenance that was a factor in the violent conflicts in Taraba State.

Takum Local Government Area presents another theater of violent conflict associated with identity issue. The Local Government is located in the Southern part of the State and endowed with many ethnic groups including Jukun, Kuteb, Chamba, Lufum, Pa'ati, Tikari, Jidu, Nama, Dama and Gbaya (Emma-Lawson and Akombo, 2010). Following long years of interactions, the Jukun way of life influenced most of the groups living in the Local Government area particularly those living in Takum town, and before the end of colonial rule all the groups have been subsumed into Jukun culture leading to a new appellation known as Jukun-Chamba for the non-Jukun groups. In other words, the term Jukun-Chamba was used to address other ethnic groups that have been submerged into the Jukun group. Even the Kuteb domiciled in the town had been galvanized into the Jukun culture and like other groups could speak only Jukun language. In this area, the Jukun became a supra-identity for the people, therefore setting the stage for identity contestation between the Jukun

and her new form conglomerate against the Kuteb mostly from the surrounding villages of Takum town.

The 1992 Local Government Council election provided a platform for the manifestation of politics of identity in Takum Local Government Area. Like in Wukari Local Government Area, the majority of the Jukun/Chamba belonged to Social Democratic Party (SDP), while the Kuteb and Tiv belonged to National Republican Convention (NRC). The NRC candidate Dr. Andokari Shaki of Kuteb ethnic group who had Tiv man as a running mate won the Takum Council's election. Our interviewees majority of whom were Kuteb and Tiv unanimously said that the victory of the Kuteb backed by the Tiv which came through a normal process of election did not pleased the Jukun/Chamba who fear that the two groups would use their numerical strength to continue to dominate them politically. Incidentally during field interviews, none of the Jukun/Chamba respondents directly mentioned the fear of political domination in Takum Local Government area but events that unfolded soon gave credence to the fear of domination theory.

The incidence that follows Kuteb victories on the Local Government Council elections of 1992 and 1996 was the creation of a new Local Government area known as Ussa out of Takum Local Government area purportedly for the Kuteb. The curving of a new Local Government area out of Takum Local Government area was as expected lauded and applauded, however when the boundary of the new Local Government area was re-drawn six months after it was created, it shows that contrary to the norms, ethnic grouping became the determining factor in the boundary demarcation. The boundary of Ussa Local Government area was influenced not by land contiguity but ethnic consideration, so that the Local Government area bisects Takum Local Government Area. By this Takum Local Government exists in two separate segments with Ussa Local Government Area in between.

Majority of our respondents among the Kuteb said this was calculated to deny them claim over Takum town which is their ancestral home, and the Chamba ethnic group that is the last to arrive in the present Southern part of Taraba State wants to dominate two Local Government areas namely Donga and Takum, and that the Chamba have manoeuvre and displaced the Ichen from Donga and have turned to Takum which they vowed to resist (Research interview February, 2026). The Kuteb insisted that the Chamba are 'privilege minority' that for some reasons were privilege to have an elitist that used their position to erase Kuteb identity in Takum at the same time promote Chamba identity not only in Takum but Taraba State as a whole. The Chamba respondents stated that their ancestors founded Takum town when the Kuteb were dwelling on the hills and therefore they must be identified as a major group in Takum. They stated further that documented evidences showed justifiably that the Chamba ruled Takum for about eighty – four years, from 1830 to 1914 when the last Chamba Chief, Yamusa was deposed for slave trade, and the first Kuteb chief, Amadu, was appointed.

The responses from both sides in the conflicts provided sufficient evidences to conclude that ethnic identity politics is a strong factor responsible for the violent conflicts in Takum Local Government Area. The Kuteb desired to be identified with Takum just as Jukun to Wukari and Chamba to Donga, so they question why the Chamba that are less in number compare to Jukun and Kuteb claimed two Local Governments Areas. The Chamba group is less in number compare to the Jukun and Kuteb but blessed with elites and so leverage on that to ensure their identity placed above other groups. The crisis in Takum was not about land that had been occupied and adequately owned by the inhabitants, the crisis was about politics which control is tie to group identity. There were Kuteb clans domiciled in the town namely Likam and Akente, these groups have been assimilated into the

Jukun/Chamba identity and so were not a threat to the Chamba as the Kuteb in the villages. This is a clear example of the degree attached to identity in the area, the Kuteb within the town were accommodated and tolerated for accepted Jukun/Chamba identity while the Kuteb of the villages were resented for upholding Kuteb identity.

The demise of the paramount ruler of Takum (Ukwe Takum, a Kuteb) in 1996 threw up a new phase of ethnic identity contest in Takum and exacerbating the lingering ones. We do not intend to detain us with the history of the emergence of Kuteb as the sole ruler of Takum, however, it should be noted that it has been so since 1914. When the traditional stool was vacant, information the researchers collected from among the Chamba in Takum said that they 'agreed in principle' that the throne should be alternated between the Chamba and Kuteb. The Kuteb respondents utterly disagreed with the position of the Chamba on the ground that Donga is for Chamba, Wukari for Jukun therefore Takum should belong to Kuteb. Therefore, the reason adduce for the Kuteb Chieftaincy of Takum is for them to be at equal status with the Jukun and Chamba and to show that each group (Jukun, Chamba and Kuteb) controls a Local Government in Southern part of Taraba State. The tension continues to generate heat and in 2024 the State government under the leadership of Agbu Kefas created three Chiefdoms in Takum town, for Jukun, Kuteb and Chamba and this act seems to be a time bomb as the solution is still far from sight.

### **Governance and Identity Politics**

With the commencement of the present democratic dispensation in 1999, Reverend Jolly Nyame was elected as Governor of Taraba State under the platform of People's Democratic Party (PDP). He ruled the State for eight (8) years and in governance or in terms of good governance only four Local Government areas out of sixteen (16) were connected to the national grid. Governor Nyame was from the Northern part of the State and at the end of his tenure there was serious succession battle as many jostle to take over the governance of the State. The central issue in determining the next Governor was not credibility or competence but the identity of the candidate. The people from the northern part of the State wanted the power to be retained in their area and so presented a candidate to succeed Nyame. At the same time people from other regions preferred a situation where power be shifted to another region. At the end of fierce political intrigues, Pharmacist Danbaba Danfulani Suntai of the Central Senatorial zone assumed power as the Governor of the State after the elections that took place in 2007.

On 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2012, Governor Suntai was involved in a plane crash and in the early hours of the incidence it was rumoured that he was dead. The rumour of his death was followed by chaos and jubilation in some parts of the State. In some quarters in Jalingo town, the jubilation came from the youths who were mostly engaged in the business for using motorcycles as taxis commonly known in Taraba State as *achaba* and the governor had banned the use of the motorcycles in Jalingo town a move to check insecurity in the area. So, when the youths heard that the Governor was dead, the motorcyclists took to the streets to rejoice (Bello, 2016)

Information collected in Jalingo town by the researchers showed that identity politics came out clearly in the scene because some people were happy that the death of Governor Suntai would make way for a Muslim that was his deputy to become Governor of the State (Research field work, February 2026). On the other hand, information gathered from the Christians showed that they were sad with the incidence involving the Governor Suntai and prayed fervently for him to survive so that the State should not be governed by a Muslim. Twenty-one days after the Suntai's crash, the Deputy Governor was announced the Acting Governor in keeping with the mandate of the law,

bitter politics characterized by religious identity and promotion took the stage in the State. The reason for or against the Deputy Governor Garba Umar was not on capability or suitability but on religious identity. The Muslim community overwhelmingly supported him because he was a Muslim and wish that he assumes the seat as the Governor which would have made him the first Muslim Governor of Taraba State and to demonstrate that they are part and parcel of the political administration of the State. The Christians on the other hand were not ready to let go their dominant position in the political administration of the State and vowed to maintain the status quo. The quantum of politics of identity that took place in the State following the air crash that involved the Governor is better imagined than to describe. There were violent conflicts in some Local Government Areas of Southern part of the State due to support or opposition to the position of the Deputy Governor which turn to Acting Governor.

In addition, politics during this period revolved around the idea of power shift to Southern Senatorial Zone of the State in 2015. In the political history of the State, the Northern Senatorial Zone had ruled for ten years, the Central Senatorial Zone where Suntai hailed from had ruled Taraba State for eight years. The Southern Senatorial Zone has not ruled the State. The politicians from the Southern Senatorial Zone feared that the Acting Governor who hails from the Northern Zone could use the power of incumbency to frustrate the arrangement for power shift. The two issues were religion and regional identity seriously became a clog in the wheel of good governance in Taraba State during this period.

The election of Arch. Darius Dickson Ishaku as Governor in May 2015, seems to mark the triumph of religious and regional identity because he was a Christian and from the Southern Senatorial Zone. On assumption of office, he recognized that conflicts had bedeviled the State and therefore he popularized a slogan 'Give me peace and I will give you development', and for eight years governed the State on what he called 'lean resources' (Compendium of achievements, 2016)

## **Conclusion**

The creation of Taraba State brought with it intermittent communal clashes and soon the State became the most volatile in the country when nearly the whole State was engulfed in one form of ethnic clash or the other. These conflicts engulfed major towns like Jalingo, Zing, Lau, Wukari, Ibi, Takum and others. There were political manipulations, intrigues, scheming and machinations by the different group to play one group against the other with the sole intent of dislodging the political control of each other. For instance, it was alleged that the Chamba met in Dakka Bali Local Government area on 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1997 to form a political agenda to take effective control of politics of Taraba State. The meeting culminated in the formation of an association known as Chamba Federation of Nigeria with proposed headquarters in Takum. The creation of Ussa LGA out of Takum LGA and the total curving out of all Kuteb villages out of Takum to Ussa was done to achieve the ethnic agenda (Jonah, 1992).

The study attempted to show a typical situation whereby the political elites manipulated the ethnic identity to meet their own selfish interest. The political elites deliberately disempowered the people so as to perpetually maintain their position of power. As rightly pointed out neither the Fulani, nor the Jukun or the Chamba and Mumuye found it difficult to work with each other having being together in mutual respect, trust and religio-cultural diversity for so long, but for the elitist class who use politic of identity to acquire political power and remind in power.

The restoration of ethnic identity as in renaming towns to its former original name is to show that our history lives with us and cannot be said to be dead, and second, for an ethnic group to be awakened to the reality of the trend in the society is a norm because change is constant in life. The study has shown that there are the restoration camp and the retaining camp i.e those who want to change the status quo and those who wanted the status quo maintained. Our position as researchers in this field is not to pass judgment but to create understanding on how the two opposing perspectives have been a strong factor for the outbreak of violence in Taraba State. Our position is also to show that the violence that emanated from these factors begat a social issue which is poverty in Taraba State.

The people of Taraba State did not enjoy good governance since the State was created and the majority of them are rural dwellers whose main pre-occupation are farming and allied activities. There are no adequate feeder roads to enable them move their farm produce from the source to the markets. During the rainy season, the water erosion became a serious nightmare to the rural dwellers and the governments failed to provide all needed amenities for their economic empowerment. The people that assumed power through identity politics could not be expected to provide good governance to the people of Taraba State and have performed below expectations and this is one factor responsible for abject poverty in Taraba State which we need an in-depth research to thoroughly exhume with the intent to create understanding to the people for the betterment of the State and the Country as a whole.

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