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Analysis of the Underlying and Proximate Drivers of Land Conflicts in Post-Conflict Gulu City, Northern Uganda

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Abstract
Land conflicts are increasingly common in rapidly urbanising post-conflict cities, where rising land demand interacts with weak governance and evolving tenure systems. This study examined the underlying and proximate drivers of land conflicts and how socio-economic and demographic characteristics influence the likelihood of experiencing the drivers in post-conflict Gulu City, Northern Uganda. A mixed-methods approach was employed, and data were obtained from 416 households using household surveys, 36 key informant interviews, and 06 focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 with descriptive statistics and logistic regression, while qualitative data were thematically analysed. Most (72.6%) respondents identified inadequate formal land registration as the underlying driver, while 82.2% cited rising land demand as a proximate driver. The analysis for this study relied heavily on self-reported data, which may be affected by recall bias. The study demonstrated that level of education, land ownership arrangements, religion, land size, and displacement histories significantly shape respondents' likelihood of experiencing underlying and proximate drivers of land conflicts, notably loss of customary land tenure custodians, corruption, rising materialism and greed, fraudulent practices, rising land demand, urban expansion, and population growth. The findings demonstrated that increasing competition for land, coupled with inadequate formalisation of land ownership, continues to undermine tenure security and fuel land conflicts in post-conflict Gulu City. It, therefore, recommends that policymakers prioritise affordable and accessible formal land registration systems alongside strengthened urban land-use planning to manage rising land demand and reduce land conflicts in post-conflict Gulu City.

Introduction
Urbanisation is among the most transformative global trends, with over half of the world's population living in cities and urban populations projected to reach 6 billion by 2045 (UN-Habitat, 2022). While cities drive over 80% of global economic activity, limited urban land access and land grabbing increasingly fuel conflicts, undermining land management and urban development (World Bank,

2023). Scholars in sub-Saharan Africa contend that land conflicts are driven by a complex interplay of underlying and proximate factors. Identified underlying drivers include institutional weakness, poor coordination, limited community participation, economic pressure, and unequal land distribution (Alsafy et al., 2025; Gyan, 2025; Lucian & Semindu, 2025). Meanwhile, proximate drivers encompass inheritance conflicts, inadequate compensation, conflict entrepreneurs, political marginalisation, and corruption, all of which directly trigger land-related conflicts (Kimengsi & Awah, 2021; Locke et al., 2021; Obala, 2022).

Urban land conflicts in Uganda persist despite legal and institutional frameworks governing land (Afrobarometer & Ssenkumba, 2024; Goodfellow et al., 2024). In urban areas, these conflicts have contributed to forced evictions, loss of livelihoods, encroachment on ecosystems, prolonged court cases, and urban poverty (Bidandi & Williams, 2020; Goodfellow et al., 2024). They commonly manifest through boundary conflicts, land grabbing, overlapping claims, and fraudulent transactions, reflecting weaknesses in land governance systems (Afrobarometer & Ssenkumba, 2024). In Northern Uganda, land conflicts are heightened by post-conflict dynamics following the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency. Gulu City has experienced rapid urban expansion, population growth, land commercialisation, and pressure on customary land systems, intensifying land conflicts. Existing studies in Northern Uganda mainly focus on rural settings, emphasising customary tenure, inheritance, and boundary conflicts, as well as political influence over land access (Apecu & Tabitha, 2022; Atwagala, 2021; Omodo, 2023; Nakayi, 2023; Leeuwen et al., 2023). Urban land conflicts remain insufficiently examined, particularly in rapidly growing post-conflict cities such as Gulu.

Empirical and knowledge gaps remain regarding the drivers of land conflict in Gulu City, particularly the distinction between underlying and proximate drivers, and the influence of socio-economic and demographic characteristics on perceptions of these drivers. Accordingly, this study addressed two questions: (1) What underlying and proximate drivers significantly influence land conflicts in Gulu City, and (2) Which socio-economic and demographic characteristics predict these drivers. This study contributes by distinguishing between underlying and proximate drivers of land conflict, integrating political economy theory with quantitative modelling, and providing evidence from a post-conflict urban setting. It further identifies patterns of vulnerability among residents to inform land governance reforms and urban planning in Gulu City.

Theoretical Framework

The political economy provides a powerful framework for understanding how land conflicts in Gulu City are shaped by the interaction between economic interests, political power, and social relations. It emphasises that land is not merely an economic asset but also a source of power, identity, and livelihood. This theory was considered appropriate for this study because it offers a suitable platform for analysing the social relations centred on land and urban livelihoods and exposing how power relations benefit particular categories, such as political leaders and investors, over others (Adam, 2020; UNDRR, 2022).

Scholars have used political economy to understand land-related conflicts in society. For example, Bakonyi (2021), demonstrated land access challenges among displaced populations influenced by power and social relations. Nakanwagi (2022) noted that land rights sensitisations in Uganda are based on political connections among households, while those with limited connections remain vulnerable to land-related conflicts. In some instances, political economy has been used in land distribution between different groups and individuals in urban society and in land administration (Collord et al., 2021; Moreda, 2023).

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Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study is situated within the broader context of post-conflict recovery, rapid urbanisation, population growth, increasing land commercialisation, and rising pressure on land resources in Gulu City. These create conditions that shape land ownership, access, and conflict. Within this context, the framework assumes that respondents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics influence perceptions of the underlying and proximate drivers of land conflicts. It further assumes that underlying drivers create enabling conditions that facilitate proximate drivers. Hence, land conflicts in Gulu City are understood as outcomes of the interaction between structural and immediate drivers operating within the broader socio-economic and institutional context. (Figure 1).

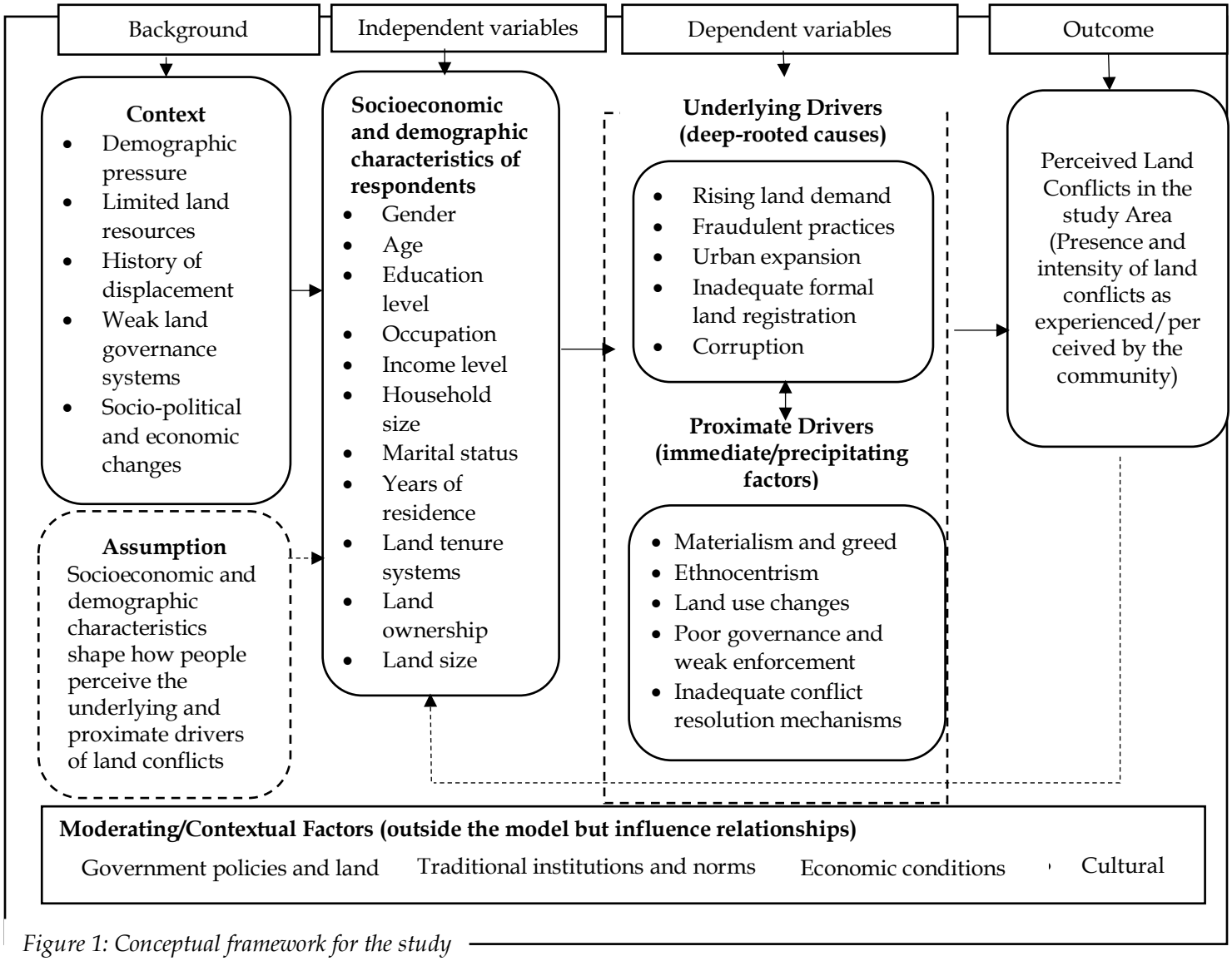

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the study

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Study Area

This study was conducted in Gulu City, Northern Uganda (Figure 2), a post-conflict urban centre and the region's commercial and administrative hub. The city is located at 2°46'54.0"N and 32°17'57.0"E, covers approximately 222 km², with a total household population of 227,465 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Gulu was selected due to its post-conflict history, having been the epicentre of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency (1987–2006), which led to mass displacement and long-term disruptions in land tenure systems (Kazibwe, 2023). The city is rapidly urbanising and cosmopolitan, hosting diverse ethnic groups and migrants from neighbouring countries (Kalyango, 2018; UBOS, 2024). These dynamics have intensified competition over land, making Gulu City an appropriate case for examining urban land conflicts.

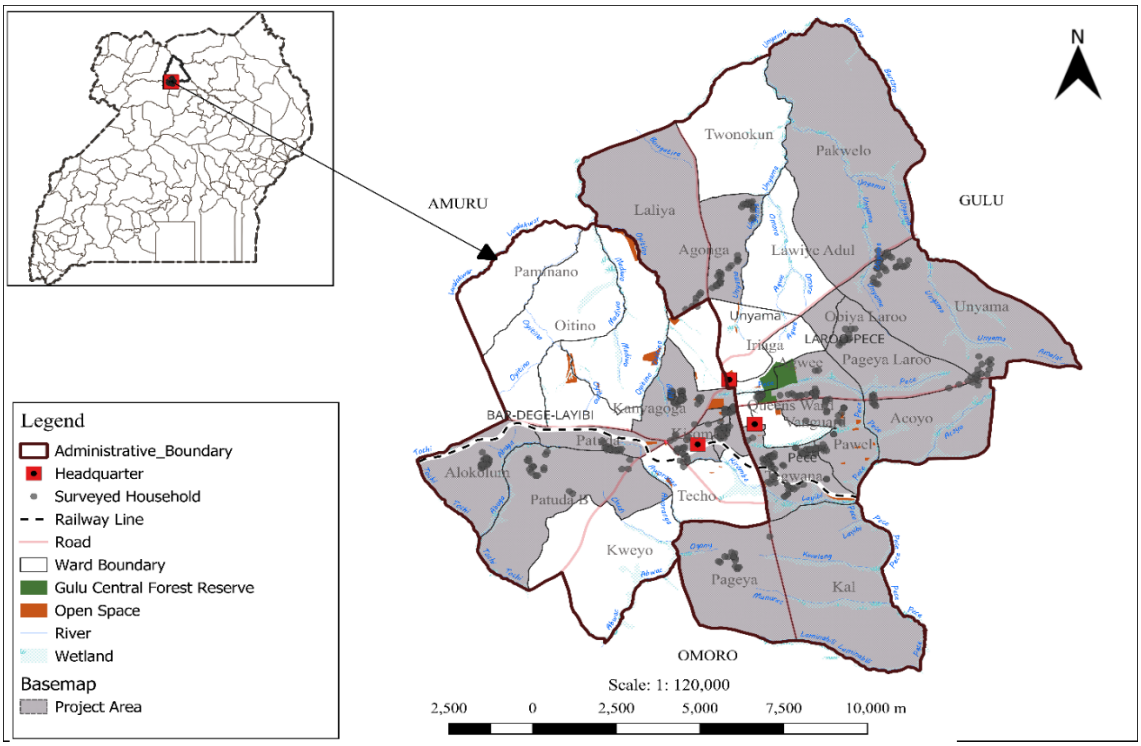

Figure 2: Gulu City Map showing the study areas (source: author)

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design, which aligns well with the pragmatic philosophy. This choice was made because it enables both a mixed-methods approach involving quantitative and qualitative analysis, and enables data collection from a defined population at a single point in time (Islam 2022). The study combined exploratory and descriptive perspectives, which allow for both statistical analysis and contextual study, enhancing the depth and validity of findings (Babbie, 2013).

Sampling Technique and Sample Size Determination

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select wards in Gulu City. In total, seventeen (17) wards were selected, comprising eleven (11) from nineteen (19) from the Laroo-Pece Division and six (6) from thirteen (13) from the Bardege-Layibi Division. The sample size was calculated from the total

household population of 197,356 in Gulu (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016) using Yamane's simplified formula at a 95% confidence level and ±5% precision ($p \leq 0.05$) (Kothari, 2004). The formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} \quad \text{.....Equation 1.}$$

$$n = \frac{197,356}{1 + 197356(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{197,356}{1 + 197356(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{197,356}{1 + 493.39}$$

$$n = \frac{197,356}{494.39}$$

Hence: n=399 sampled households

where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the precision level. The sample size was increased from 399 to 416 respondents to cater for potential non-response and incomplete data. The sample size was proportionately distributed across the seventeen (17) wards. Respondent categories were legally adult women and men aged 18 years and above, considered mature enough to participate in the study. The households were selected through systematic random sampling to reduce bias, with a sampling interval of every 10th household. To triangulate the survey data, purposive sampling techniques were employed to select participants for Key informant interviews (KIIs) and Focus group discussions (FGD) based on knowledge and experience in the community about land governance and conflict dynamics until data saturation was reached (Creswell et al., 2007).

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data from primary sources using household surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). Household survey data were obtained through face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire administered by the researcher and trained research assistants. An interview guide containing semi-structured questions was used to obtain qualitative data. The questionnaire was developed using the KoboCollect toolbox, a free open-source digital data collection platform, and administered using smartphones. The survey questionnaire was pre-tested on forty (40) respondents in Agwee ward, Laroo-Pece division, which was not part of the studied wards and improved based on the experience of the pre-test. To ensure data quality control, field assistants were trained to avoid misinterpreting questions and to assess whether measurements are consistent (reliability) and accurate (validity). Due to the sensitivity of urban land conflicts, the six research assistants hired were selected for maturity, over 20 years old, and good command of English and the local language.

Key informants were thirty-six (36) participants selected from the two Divisions of Gulu City (20, Laroo-Pece and 16, Bardege-Layibi Division). They included government officials (10), civil society organisations (5), traditional leaders (4), religious leaders (3), and local council leaders (14). Interviews were conducted face-to-face at locations convenient to the participants based on their knowledge of the study topic. Six FGDs were conducted with residents to capture community perspectives on the drivers of land conflicts. The FGDs comprised three separate groups of 6–12 participants for men,

women, and youth in each Division to ensure diverse perspectives. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded; where recording was declined due to topic sensitivity, detailed notes were taken.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the household surveys were exported from KoboCollect, cleaned, and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages on drivers of land conflicts. Binary logistic regression analysis was applied to identify the socio-economic and demographic characteristics that influence drivers of land conflicts. The model fit diagnostics indicated acceptable goodness of fit, as evidenced by non-significant Hosmer-Lemeshow tests ($p>0.05$), and Nagelkerke R square ranged from 0.051 to 0.154, indicating limited but meaningful explanatory capacity of the models. Statistically significant omnibus tests were observed for corruption in land administration ($p<0.049$), population growth ($p<0.046$), and urban expansion ($p<0.003$). The limited model significance across most outcomes may partly reflect restricted variability in responses, as a large proportion of respondents reported the presence of land conflict drivers. Despite this, several predictors showed statistically significant associations with selected drivers as reflected in the odds ratios and confidence intervals.

The general formula of the model is:

$$\text{In}\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \ldots + \beta_k X_k \quad \text{..... Equation 2}$$

Where:

$\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right)$ = odds of an event occurring,
In = natural logarithm (log-odds),
β_0 = intercept (constant term),
$\beta_1, \beta_2, \ldots, \beta_k$ = regression coefficient,
$X_1, X_2, \ldots, X_k$ = independent variables (predictors).

Qualitative data from key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) were analysed using thematic content analysis. Interviews conducted in English and Acholi were manually transcribed by listening to the recordings and typing them into Word documents. The transcribed documents were subsequently uploaded into Taguette, a free and open-source qualitative data analysis tool, where coding was performed. The generated codes were exported to Microsoft Excel for further organisation and analysis. Thematic content analysis was then applied to identify patterns and develop themes related to the underlying and proximate drivers. The findings were presented using a thick description approach, incorporating verbatim quotes to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices. To ensure context and confidentiality, each quote was accompanied by a brief description of the informant's general work position, the data collection method, and the data collection year.

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards involving human participants. Prior ethical clearance was obtained from the Makerere University College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Research and Ethics Committee (CAES-REC; registration number CAES-REC-2024-101) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST; registration number SS3531ES). Further permission was obtained from the Gulu City Clerk's office to access the City officials. Prior to data collection, verbal informed consent was obtained from all survey respondents and interviewees after clearly explaining the purpose, procedures, and voluntary participation. Participation was entirely anonymous, and no personal identifiers were collected.

Respondents' confidentiality regarding their responses and their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence were assured.

Results

Underlying Land Conflicts Drivers

The most frequently cited underlying drivers were inadequate formal land registration (72.6%) and rising materialism and greed (70.2%). (Table 1).

Table 1: Underlying Land Conflicts Drivers

Variable	Frequency (n=416)	Percent (%) of cases
Customary land inheritance practices	220	52.9
Conflict-induced displacement (LRA)	251	60.3
Inadequate formal land registration	302	72.6
Corruption in land administration	277	66.6
Political interference in land administration	232	55.8
Fragmentation of communal land	204	49.0
Loss of customary land tenure custodians	231	55.5
Erosion of customary land tenure systems	245	58.9
Rising materialism and greed	292	70.2

Source: Household Survey, 2024

Narratives from KIIs further corroborate the quantitative findings. Participants emphasised that inadequate formal land registration created opportunities for land grabbing. For example, one religious leader noted that:

> *Land belonging to Muslim community in Obiya-Highland was acquired by Gulu municipal authority to construct a rehabilitation centre for the LRA returnees in 2010. This land was vacant and lacked formal land title documentation which led to the acquisition without consultation or compensation. (KII, Religious leader, 2024).*

Rising materialism and greed were highlighted as conflict drivers by a local council official.

> *Materialistic act and greed are common among family members and politicians. In families, some uneducated or unemployed youths illegally sell family land to acquire items like Motorcycle for transportation business "boda-boda". Politicians use their power and connections to acquire vacant public or private land for personal gain. (KII, Local Leader, 2024).*

Proximate Land Conflicts Drivers

The most frequently cited proximate driver was increased land demand (82.2%), followed by fraudulent land transactions (76.4%). (Table 2).

Table 2: Proximate Land Conflicts Drivers

Variable	Frequency (n=416)	Percent (%) of cases
Rising land demand	342	82.2
Population growth	263	63.2
Conversion of land to build-up uses	237	57.0
Urban expansion	292	70.2
Household poverty levels	294	70.7
Fraudulent land transaction	318	76.4
Infrastructural development	274	65.9

Source: Household Survey, 2024

Narratives from KII and FGD further corroborate the quantitative findings on the proximate drivers. A local leader noted that land commercialisation, previously uncommon under customary tenure systems, has increasingly contributed to conflicts.

> *Residents owning customary land tenure have learnt that if you sell land, you get money something which was not there before LRA war causing land conflicts among family members. Actually, customary land was gifted to others for settlement and farming a culture that has disappeared today. (KII, Local Leader, 2024).*

Participants explained that everyone wants land for numerous purposes and acquires it fraudulently through illegal ways and by forging land documents.

> *My family entrusted our dependant with the land document to facilitate tap water connection. But after my husband passed on, the dependant forged the land document with claim he bought the land from my late husband he almost evicted us from this place. (Female, FGD, Bardege-Layibi Division, 2024).*

Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics Influencing Land Conflicts Drivers in Gulu City

Underlying Land Conflicts Drivers

Primary education level was significantly less associated with perceived inadequate land registration as a driver. (Table 3).

Attaining secondary education was significantly less associated with identifying corruption in land administration. In contrast, Muslims and those with joint land ownership with spouses had a higher association with corruption.

Owning land with immediate family members had higher association with political interference as a driver.

Earning wages was significantly less associated with the loss of customary tenure among custodians. Meanwhile, primary, secondary, tertiary, and those who jointly owned land with immediate family members had significant higher association with loss of customary tenure custodians.

Primary, secondary, and tertiary education were all more strongly associated with the erosion of customary tenure.

Joint land ownership with spouses and with a history of displacement were significantly associated with rising materialism and greed.

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Table 3: Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics Influence in Predicting Underlying Land Conflicts Drivers

Predictors	Inheritance OR (CI)	p	Displacement OR (CI)	p	Land registration OR (CI)	p	Corruption OR (CI)	p	Political interference OR (CI)	p	Fragmentation OR (CI)	p	Loss of custodians OR (CI)	p	Erosion OR (CI)	p	Materialism and greed OR (CI)	p
Female	1.302 (0.838-2.023)	0.240	1.087 (0.696-1.696)	0.714	0.778 (0.476-1.271)	0.316	(0.517-0.834 1.346)	0.458	1.384 (0.886-2.160)	0.153	0.765 (0.494-1.183)	0.228	1.121 (0.717-1.755)	0.616	0.909 (0.580-1.424)	0.677	0.931 (0.573-1.514)	0.775
31-59	0.991 (0.559-1.758)	0.976	0.711 (0.394-1.282)	0.256	0.917 (0.483-1.740)	0.790	0.801 (0.426-1.506)	0.490	0.600 (0.331-1.086)	0.091	0.771 (0.437-1.362)	0.370	0.733 (0.406-1.324)	0.303	0.889 (0.492-1.607)	0.889	0.744 (0.388-1.427)	0.374
60+	0.515 (0.228-1.167)	0.112	0.723 (0.314-1.664)	0.446	1.035 (0.412-2.603)	0.941	0.433 (0.182-1.030)	0.058	0.595 (0.257-1.377)	0.225	1.072 (0.476-2.412)	0.867	0.936 (0.400-2.188)	0.879	0.761 (0.330-1.753)	0.761	0.474 (0.195-1.156)	0.101
Contract	0.997 (0.415-2.396)	0.994	2.023 (0.834-4.907)	0.119	0.694 (0.255-1.895)	0.477	0.743 (0.286-1.925)	0.540	0.597 (0.247-1.441)	0.251	0.432 (0.179-1.038)	0.061	1.388 (0.574-3.357)	0.467	1.812 (0.750-4.378)	0.186	0.541 (0.208-1.404)	0.207
Self-employed	1.594 (0.676-3.760)	0.287	1.566 (0.673-3.643)	0.297	0.882 (0.332-2.343)	0.800	0.761 (0.306-1.897)	0.558	0.486 (0.208-1.135)	0.096	0.561 (0.240-1.310)	0.181	1.666 (0.707-3.925)	0.243	1.929 (0.821-4.535)	0.132	1.100 (0.428-2.828)	0.843
Business	0.597 (0.334-1.069)	0.083	0.884 (0.493-1.583)	0.678	0.912 (0.481-1.729)	0.778	1.046 (0.564-1.940)	0.887	1.273 (0.715-2.266)	0.262	1.439 (0.814-2.544)	0.211	0.574 (0.316-1.042)	0.068	0.928 (0.516-1.668)	0.802	0.958 (0.510-1.798)	0.893
wages	0.648 (0.252-1.667)	0.368	0.944 (0.365-2.445)	0.906	1.072 (0.380-3.021)	0.896	0.805 (0.304-2.131)	0.662	0.767 (0.299-1.968)	0.301	0.872 (0.340-2.235)	0.776	0.356 (0.137-0.923)	**0.034***	0.920 (0.352-2.402)	0.864	1.844 (0.612-5.553)	0.277
Primary	1.188 (0.555-2.542)	0.657	0.692 (0.316-1.513)	0.356	0.386 (0.151-0.984)	**0.046***	0.520 (0.220-1.229)	0.136	0.719 (0.326-1.587)	0.414	1.365 (0.634-2.941)	0.427	2.947 (1.331-6.522)	**0.008***	1.309 (0.606-2.827)	0.493	0.814 (0.357-1.853)	0.623

Secondary	1.102 (0.512-2.373)	0.804	0.884 (0.401-1.948)	0.759	0.504 (0.194-1.310)	0.160	0.347 (0.146-0.827)	**0.017***	0.635 (0.287-1.405)	0.262	1.685 (0.778-3.649)	0.186	2.613 (1.178-5.793)	**0.018***	1.496 (0.687-3.257)	0.310	0.853 (0.372-1.957)	0.708
Tertiary	1.735 (0.738-4.079)	0.207	1.195 (0.494-2.888)	0.692	0.440 (0.157-1.235)	0.119	0.407 (0.158-1.063)	0.066	0.631 (0.264-1.510)	0.301	1.710 (0.728-4.016)	0.218	2.983 (1.238-7.189)	**0.015***	1.401 (0.592-3.316)	0.443	1.673 (0.644-4.345)	0.290
Inherited	1.023 (0.599-1.747)	0.932	1.163 (0.675-2.004)	0.586	1.377 (0.756-2.508)	0.295	1.635 (0.905-2.954)	0.104	0.600 (0.346-1.039)	0.068	0.942 (0.554-1.603)	0.827	0.778 (0.452-1.339)	0.365	1.110 (0.644-1.913)	0.708	1.332 (0.731-2.424)	0.349
Customary	2.042 (0.991-4.211|)	0.053	1.755 (0.865-3.559)	0.119	0.640 (0.274-1.493)	0.302	1.224 (0.575-2.605)	0.600	1.771 (0.862-3.637)	0.120	1.238 (0.614-2.499)	0.551	1.203 (0.590-2.453)	0.612	1.654 (0.813-3.367)	0.165	0.593 (0.251-1.403)	0.234
Jointly owned with spouse	0.910 (0.536-1.546)	0.727	1.082 (0.634-1.846)	0.772	1.165 (0.646-2.103)	0.612	1.867 (1.024-3.401)	**0.041***	1.350 (0.790-2.307)	0.273	0.894 (0.529-1.511)	0.675	0.873 (0.513-1.486)	0.618	1.166 (0.682-1.991)	0.575	2.097 (1.139-3.861)	**0.017***
Owned with immediate family members	1.361 (0.707-2.621)	0.356	1.103 (0.569-2.140)	0.771	1.118 (0.541-2.313)	0.763	0.741 (0.374-1.468)	0.391	1.965 (1.004-3.847)	0.049	0.673 (0.351-1.291)	0.234	2.205 (1.108-4.388)	**0.024***	1.406 (0.715-2.762)	0.323	1.334 (0.655-2.715)	0.427
Anglican	0.783 (0.462-1.327)	0.363	0.752 (0.443-1.276)	0.290	1.172 (0.648-2.120)	0.599	1.497 (0.844-2.653)	0.167	0.937 (0.550-1.596)	0.811	1.028 (0.607-1.741)	0.917	0.774 (0.453-1.321)	0.347	0.617 (0.363-1.050)	0.075	0.903 (0.506-1.613)	0.731
Muslim	0.586 (0.240-1.430)	0.241	1.364 (0.538-3.459)	0.513	0.733 (0.293-1.830)	0.505	7.324 (1.619-33.140)	**0.010***	1.474 (0.597-3.637)	0.400	1.032 (0.433-2.461)	0.943	1.061 (0.438-2.573)	0.895	0.493 (0.204-1.191)	0.116	0.801 (0.298-2.151)	0.660
Pentecostal	0.733 (0.430-1.251)	0.255	0.950 (0.552-1.636)	0.854	1.181 (0.646-2.160)	0.589	1.323 (0.750-2.336)	0.334	1.110 (0.646-1.907)	0.705	1.296 (0.763-2.203)	0.337	1.365 (0.789-2.361)	0.265	0.839 (0.488-1.443)	0.525	0.657 (0.367-1.176)	0.158

Married	0.902 (0.547-1.488)	0.687	0.783 (0.471-1.301)	0.345	0.885 (0.511-1.532)	0.661	0.931 (0.550-1.577)	0.791	1.145 (0.692-1.893)	0.598	0.858 (0.524-1.405)	0.543	0.688 (0.412-1.149)	0.153	0.768 (0.462 - 1.275)	0.308	0.668 (0.387-1.153)	0.147
Displacement	1.459 (0.772-2.757)	0.244	1.062 (0.561-2.013)	0.853	1.381 (0.682-2.797)	0.370	0.785 (0.406-1.517)	0.471	0.636 (0.337-1.198)	0.161	1.319 (0.707-2.458)	0.384	1.057 (0.556-2.009)	0.865	1.051 (0.559 - 1.974)	0.878	2.106 (1.017-4.360)	**0.045***
Job opportunity	0.935 (0.512-1.708)	0.827	0.862 (0.469-1.585)	0.634	1.672 (0.849-3.293)	0.137	1.223 (0.633-2.364)	0.549	0.730 (0.397-1.342)	0.311	1.045 (0.575-1.900)	0.884	0.940 (0.509-1.734)	0.842	1.667 (0.892 - 3.114)	0.109	0.892 (0.468-1.697)	0.727
Business opportunity	0.841 (0.437-1.618)	0.604	0.949 (0.489-1.841)	0.877	1.112 (0.548-2.258)	0.769	1.163 (0.563-2.404)	0.684	0.891 (0.459-1.729)	0.733	1.347 (0.702-2.585)	0.371	0.639 (0.331-1.235)	0.183	0.772 (0.402 - 1.484)	0.438	2.010 (0.930-4.340)	0.076
5+ people	1.121 (0.687-1.828)	0.648	1.347 (0.822-2.208)	0.238	0.730 (0.417-1.279)	0.271	1.666 (0.989-2.808)	0.055	1.439 (0.877-2.363)	0.150	1.061 (0.652-1.726)	0.812	0.690 (0.418-1.138)	0.146	0.918 (0.558 - 1.510)	0.918	1.484 (0.871-2.531)	0.147
5+ plots	0.861 (0.439-1.686)	0.661	0.816 (0.415-1.602)	0.554	0.835 (0.403-1.732)	0.628	0.834 (0.412-1.686)	0.613	1.340 (0.668-2.687)	0.410	1.139 (0.585-2.220)	0.701	0.939 (0.473-1.865)	0.858	1.548 (0.760 - 3.156)	1.548	1.067 (0.502-2.265)	0.866
10+ years	2.266 (0.612-8.397)	0.221	0.520 (0.124-2.176)	0.371	1.085 (0.263-4.480)	0.910	0.247 (0.029-2.073)	0.198	0.698 (0.182-2.679)	0.601	0.780 (0.220-2.764)	0.701	2.098 (0.581-7.580)	0.258	2.453 (0.645 - 9.323)	2.453	0.668 (0.129-3.449)	0.630

Note: Predictor reference set to the first Category (RC); Sex =Male, Age=18-30, Main occupation=Employed, Major income source= Salary, Education level= No-formal education, Mode of land acquisition= Purchased, Land tenure system= Freehold, Ownership arrangement= Individually owned, Religious affiliation= Catholic, Marriage category= Not married/ Settlement history= Ancestral, Household size= Less than five people, Land size= Less than five plot, Year settled= Less than 10 years, Odd Ratio (OR), CI=Confidence Interval at 95%, Significant at p≤0.05*

Proximate land conflicts drivers

Joint land ownership with spouses and with a history of displacement were significantly more strongly associated with rising land demand. However, Pentecostal faith was less associated with rising land demand. (Table 4).

Respondents aged 31-59 years had a lower association with population growth. In contrast, owning five or more plots of land and holding land under customary tenure were significantly more strongly associated with population growth.

Females had a significantly lower association with urban expansion. Displacement, settlement, and the Anglican faith were more strongly associated with urban expansion.

Aged 60 years and above, and having a primary education, had a significantly higher association with fraudulent land transactions.

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Table 4. Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics Influence in Predicting Proximate Land Conflicts Drivers

Predictors	Rising land demand OR (CI)	p	Population growth OR (CI)	p	Conversion to build-up uses OR (CI)	p	Urban expansion OR (CI)	p	Household poverty OR (CI)	p	Fraudulent OR (CI)	p	Infrastructure development OR (CI)	p
Female	0.749 (0.414-1.354)	0.339	0.998 (0.627-1.589)	0.995	0.931 (0.655-1.588)	0.931	0.534 (0.320-0.891)	**0.016***	0.670 (0.412-1.091)	0.107	1.120 (0.665-1.885)	0.671	1.499 (0.945-2.378)	0.085
31-59	0.902 (0.412-1.979)	0.798	0.477 (0.247-0.921)	**0.028***	0.138 (0.870-2.726)	0.138	1.219 (0.653-2.276)	0.535	0.824 (0.427-1.587)	0.562	1.298 (0.672-2.508)	0.437	1.510 (0.839-2.716)	0.169
60+	1.015 (0.350-2.943)	0.978	0.560 (0.228-1.379)	0.207	0.797 (0.492-2.520)	0.797	1.035 (0.419-2.559)	0.940	0.700 (0.287-1.711)	0.435	3.325 (1.195-9.257)	**0.021***	1.119 (0.483-2.592)	0.793
Contract	0.951 (0.240-3.776)	0.943	0.832 (0.335-2.064)	0.691	0.190 (0.233-1.337)	0.190	0.525 (0.188-1.462)	0.217	1.513 (0.580-3.949)	0.398	0.861 (0.265-2.795)	0.803	1.134 (0.464-2.774)	0.783
Self-employed	0.708 (0.190-2.633)	0.606	0.915 (0.379-2.211)	0.844	0.926 (0.446-2.432)	0.926	0.729 (0.268-1.985)	0.537	1.116 (0.452-2.753)	0.812	0.333 (0.111-1.003)	0.051	0.936 (0.397-2.210)	0.881
Business	0.674 (0.305-1.488)	0.329	0.918 (0.498-1.693)	0.784	0.352 (0.426-1.356)	0.352	1.538 (0.823-2.876)	0.177	1.265 (0.678-2.363)	0.460	1.833 (0.953-3.523)	0.069	1.559 (0.861-2.822)	0.142
wages	6.778 (0.776-59.236)	0.084	0.648 (0.245-1.712)	0.381	0.577 (0.295-1.974)	0.577	2.519 (0.874-7.259)	0.087	1.004 (0.368-2.737)	0.994	2.595 (0.810-8.312)	0.108	0.876 (0.339-2.261)	0.784
Primary	1.212 (0.485-3.030)	0.681	1.991 (0.903-4.388)	0.088	0.881 (0.486-2.317)	0.881	0.666 (0.275-1.613)	0.368	1.093 (0.487-2.451)	0.830	2.831 (1.184-6.768)	**0.019***	0.916 (0.400-2.095)	0.835

Secondary	1.150 (0.454-2.916)	0.768	1.592 (0.723-3.508)	0.249	0.259 (0.293-1.392)	0.259	0.562 (0.230-1.371)	0.205	1.245 (0.547-2.834)	0.602	1.715 (0.734-4.009)	0.213	0.643 (0.282-1.467)	0.294
Tertiary	2.039 (0.664-6.267)	0.214	0.911 (0.381-2.176)	0.833	0.474 (0.309-1.725)	0.474	1.670 (0.596-4.678)	0.329	0.995 (0.400-2.477)	0.991	2.076 (0.795-5.419)	0.136	1.058 (0.422-2.652)	0.905
Inherited	2.108 (0.998-4.452)	0.051	1.662 (0.937-2.949)	0.082	0.866 (0.558-1.634)	0.866	1.453 (0.790-2.672)	0.230	0.965 (0.534-1.744)	0.905	1.150 (0.614-2.154)	0.662	1.238 (0.706-2.170)	0.456
Customary	0.575 (0.199-1.663)	0.307	2.267 (1.108-4.639)	**0.025***	0.479 (0.636-2.619)	0.479	1.072 (0.478-2.401)	0.866	1.372 (0.644-2.922)	0.412	0.945 (0.403-2.211)	0.895	1.030 (0.488-2.175)	0.938
Jointly owned with spouse	2.260 (1.037-4.922)	**0.040***	1.083 (0.618-1.899)	0.781	0.695 (0.528-1.531)	0.695	1.617 (0.882-2.964)	0.120	1.159 (0.641-2.095)	0.626	1.153 (0.611-2.175)	0.660	0.970 (0.557-1.691)	0.915
Owned with immediate family members	1.027 (0.448-2.353)	0.950	0.723 (0.361-1.448)	0.360	0.534 (0.635-2.402)	0.534	1.794 (0.851-3.782)	0.124	0.869 (0.428-1.765)	0.699	1.082 (0.498-2.348)	0.842	0.694 (0.353-1.363)	0.289
Anglican	0.542 (0.273-1.007)	0.080	0.750 (0.431-1.303)	0.307	0.079 (0.366-1.056)	0.079	1.992 (1.068-3.715)	**0.030***	0.400 (0.400-1.226)	0.212	0.764 (0.417-1.400)	0.384	0.758 (0.438-1.314)	0.323
Muslim	1.129 (0.299-4.263)	0.858	0.827 (0.331-2.066)	0.684	0.577 (0.323-1.877)	0.577	2.340 (0.794-6.895)	0.123	0.745 (0.745-7.423)	0.145	1.145 (0.411-3.190)	0.796	1.385 (0.506-3.795)	0.526
Pentecostal	0.431 (0.218-0.852)	**0.016***	0.994 (0.566-1.748)	0.984	0.291 (0.439-1.280)	0.291	1.221 (0.669-2.227)	0.515	0.543 (0.543-1.753)	0.935	1.588 (0.803-3.139)	0.183	0.804 (0.462-1.402)	0.442

Married	0.965 (0.511-1.823)	0.913	1.179 (0.704-1.976)	0.531	0.490 (0.723-1.966)	0.490	0.685 (0.392-1.197)	0.184	0.730 (0.730-2.117)	0.424	1.176 (0.656-2.107)	0.586	0.839 (0.496-1.420)	0.513
Displacement	2.493 (1.022-6.080)	**0.045***	0.694 (0.367-1.315)	0.263	0.906 (0.511-1.814)	0.906	2.195 (1.027-4.694)	**0.043***	0.486 (0.486-1.903)	0.911	2.025 (0.908-4.516)	0.085	1.062 (0.552-2.043)	0.856
Job opportunity	2.173 (0.899-5.254)	0.085	1.712 (0.897-3.266)	0.103	0.643 (0.472-1.589)	0.643	0.633 (0.329-1.217)	0.170	0.471 (0.471-1.776)	0.792	1.974 (0.936-4.166)	0.074	1.243 (0.664-2.328)	0.497
Business opportunity	1.301 (0.566-2.993)	0.536	1.611 (0.803-3.231)	0.180	0.642 (0.443-1.652)	0.642	1.719 (0.802-3.684)	0.164	0.308 (0.308-1.263)	0.189	1.115 (0.531-2.341)	0.774	1.794 (0.871-3.694)	0.113
5+ people	1.395 (0.734-2.654)	0.310	1.230 (0.733-2.065)	0.434	0.831 (0.646-1.722)	0.831	1.281 (0.740-2.215)	0.376	0.740 (0.427-1.281)	0.282	0.982 (0.551-1.750)	0.952	1.191 (0.717-1.977)	0.500
5+ plots	1.005 (0.412-2.451)	0.991	2.181 (1.012-4.699)	**0.047***	0.251 (0.341-1.324)	0.251	0.521 (0.251-1.084)	0.081	2.163 (0.962-4.863)	0.062	1.004 (0.458-2.201)	0.993	1.032 (0.512-2.079)	0.930
10+ years	1.795 (0.322-9.996)	0.505	0.965 (0.245-3.793)	0.959	0.582 (0.180-2.621)	0.582	0.840 (0.187-3.776)	0.820	0.479 (0.092-2.490)	0.381	0.665 (0.129-3.435)	0.626	1.617 (0.449-5.823)	0.462

Note: Predictor reference set to the first Category (RC); Sex =Male, Age=18-30, Main occupation=Employed, Major income source= Salary, Education level= No-formal education, Mode of land acquisition= Purchased, Land tenure system= Freehold, Ownership arrangement= Individually owned, Religious affiliation= Catholic, Marriage category= Not married/ Settlement history= Ancestral, Household size= Less than five people, Land size= Less than five plot, Year settled= Less than 10 years, Odd Ratio (OR), CI=Confidence Interval at 95%, Significant at p≤0.05*.

Discussion

Underlying land conflict drivers

Inadequate formal land registration and rising materialism and greed emerged as major underlying drivers of land conflicts. Limited formal registration among customary landowners increases tenure insecurity and the risk of conflict, consistent with evidence that only a small proportion of customary land in Uganda is formally registered (LANDnet, 2022). Rising materialism and greed suggest that land is increasingly being commodified, thereby motivating land-grabbing, fraudulent sales, and boundary encroachment. Similar studies associate greed among elites and state actors with weakened livelihoods, social cohesion, and sustainable urban development (Alhassan et al., 2021).

Proximate land conflict drivers

Rising land demand and fraudulent land transactions were the most prominent proximate drivers. Increasing scarcity and commercialisation of urban land intensify competition and speculative practices, particularly among economically and politically powerful actors. Comparable findings show that growing land demand fuels encroachment and fraudulent transactions (Cheng et al., 2022; Mugizi & Matsumoto, 2020), with implications for tenure security and livelihoods among vulnerable urban residents.

Socio-economic and demographic influences on land conflict drivers

Education significantly influenced perceptions of land conflict drivers. Educated respondents were less likely to report inadequate formal registration and corruption, possibly reflecting better awareness of land administration procedures and laws, while uneducated residents remain vulnerable to tenure insecurity (Joireman, 2018). Corruption was more likely to be reported by Muslim respondents and those with joint spousal ownership, suggesting differential exposure to land administration processes. Corruption in land administration reinforces structural inequalities and enables land grabbing by politically connected actors (EJA, 2020; Mathiba, 2021).

Joint family ownership increased the likelihood of reporting political interference, loss of customary custodians, materialism, and rising land demand, indicating that collective ownership systems are more vulnerable to external pressures. Similarly, respondents with displacement histories were more likely to identify materialism, rising land demand, and urban expansion, reflecting how post-conflict displacement disrupted customary tenure systems and intensified land competition (Kamau et al., 2023)

Age, sex, religion, and land size also shaped perceptions of proximate drivers. Elderly respondents were more likely to report fraudulent land transactions, women were less likely to identify urban expansion, and customary landowners with larger holdings were more likely to report population pressure. These findings suggest unequal exposure to land conflict risks and highlight the need for socially inclusive land governance interventions. Studies attributed fraudulent land practices primarily to weak enforcement of land laws, economic hardship, and the pursuit of quick financial gains (Ugonabo & Ugochukwu, 2019).

Limitations

The analysis for this study relied heavily on self-reported data, which may be affected by recall or social desirability bias, particularly regarding sensitive issues such as corruption, greed, or fraudulent land transactions. The study was cross-sectional, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships

between drivers of land conflicts over time. The focus on Gulu city may limit the generalisability of the findings to other urban contexts with different land tenure systems and histories.

Conclusion

The study concludes that land conflicts in Gulu City are shaped by a combination of underlying and proximate drivers. Inadequate formal land registration and rising materialism and greed constitute the dominant underlying drivers, while rising land demand and fraudulent land transactions emerged as the most prominent proximate drivers. The findings further reveal that socio-economic and demographic characteristics, particularly level of education, land ownership arrangements, religion, land size, and displacement histories, significantly influenced the likelihood of experiencing these drivers of land conflicts. Overall, the persistence of land conflicts in Gulu City reflects the interaction between weak land governance systems, rapid urbanisation, and post-conflict socio-economic transformations.

The study recommends strengthening formal land registration, particularly for customary land, to improve tenure security and reduce conflicts. Land governance institutions should enhance transparency and accountability to kerb corruption and fraudulent transactions, while urban planning authorities should regulate land markets and urban expansion to minimise speculative land practices. Public awareness programmes on land rights and registration procedures are also necessary, especially for vulnerable groups, including displaced households and customary landowners.

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