



INSECURITY AND SOCIAL TRUST AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS IN TARABA SOUTH SENATORIAL ZONE



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Abstract

This study investigated the link between insecurity and social trust, focusing on why ethnic groups fear one another in Southern Taraba. The area of study has been affected by recurring inter-ethnic clashes, resource competition, and weak security structures, all of which contribute to heightened mistrust among groups. Mix method techniques was used to collect data. Questionnaires and indepth interview were employed for data collection, 180 respondents and ten Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) that measured perceptions of insecurity, intergroup relations, and levels of social trust. The descriptive analysis showed that a high proportion of respondents expressed strong feelings of insecurity, low trust in neighboring ethnic groups, and increased fear shaped by past conflicts and unresolved grievances. Findings further indicated that inadequate government response, competition over land, and historical tensions are the major drivers of fear and hostility between communities. Based on these findings, the study concludes that insecurity significantly undermines social trust and deepens intergroup fear among residents of Taraba Southern Senatorial District. Persistent violence has weakened cooperation, strained social relationships, and created an atmosphere of suspicion that affects daily interactions. To address these challenges, the study recommends strengthening security structures, promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and encouraging community participation in peacebuilding initiatives. These measures are essential for rebuilding trust, enhancing social cohesion, and fostering sustainable peace in the region.

Keywords: Insecurity; Social Trust; Intergroup Relations; Ethnic Conflict, Fear.

Introduction

Regardless of a country's political or economic might, insecurity has become a worldwide problem. The way communities relate to one another has changed globally due to an increase in terrorism, internal conflicts, displacement, and social fragmentation (UNDP, 2022). These security risks cause anxiety, erode social ties, and establish conditions that make it harder to maintain trust. According to studies, communities tend to become more divided and wary of outsiders as violence escalates (Putnam, 2007). Several other regions, including Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, have seen the tendency of people avoiding to help each other, reports of neighbors reporting neighbors, decline in interpersonal trust, erosion of trust institutions. Additionally, globalization has made it more difficult to preserve social stability by escalating interconnected dangers such transnational organized crime, extremism, and cybercrime (World Bank, 2021). Consequently, insecurity has emerged as a universal threat to social cohesion and trust among communities worldwide.

Ethnic disputes, political unrest, resource wars, and inadequate governance structures have all contributed to Africa's ongoing insecurity. Internal communal conflicts rooted in historical grievances and rivalry for land and water resources are a problem in many African nations (Adeleke, 2020). These disputes frequently cause civilizations to break apart and undermine interethnic and regional trust. Furthermore, communities' dread is heightened by the spread of small weaponry and the actions of insurgent groups like Boko Haram in West Africa and Al-Shabaab in East Africa (African Union, 2021). Self-help tactics are used in affected areas, and occasionally they turn into retaliatory violence. Long-term cycles of insecurity and economic hardship are exacerbated by the collapse of social trust. Therefore, throughout the African continent, insecurity continues to be a significant barrier to social stability and inter-communal collaboration (Oketch, 2019).

One of the African nations most impacted by many types of insecurity, such as terrorism, banditry, farmer-herder conflict, kidnapping, and intercommunal strife, is Nigeria. Relationships between ethnic groups have been strained as a result of these security issues, which have also increased public mistrust and anxiety (Akinwale, 2021). Because of the country's broad ethnic makeup, conflict is especially delicate because violence in one area frequently affects perceptions in other areas. Public trust in state protection has declined as a result of government institutions' inability to respond to security crises consistently and effectively (Ezeoba, 2020). Many communities withdraw inward as a result, seeking security in ethnic unity rather than national identity. This inward emphasis lessens chances for intergroup cooperation and strengthens divisions. Accordingly, Nigeria's national insecurity plays a major role in the erosion of social trust in many localities (Ojebode & Akingbade, 2022).

Some of the most extreme forms of insecurity have been seen in northern Nigeria, particularly in the North-East and Middle Belt areas. Social interactions in these areas have changed as a result of banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, and the Boko Haram insurgency (International Crisis Group, 2021). Communities that were formerly linked by trade, marriage, and cross-cultural interaction are now more afraid of one another. Ethnic groups are engaging in cycles of assault and counterattack as a result of increased competition for grazing resources and arable land (Okoli & Nnaemeka, 2020). Opportunities for communication and peacemaking are weakened by these conflicts. Social systems are further upended by forced migration and displacement, which breeds distrust between displaced populations and host communities. In northern Nigeria, social trust is declining as long as insecurity endures.

With its distinct local patterns, Taraba State, which is situated in the North-East geopolitical zone, reflects these larger Nigerian security dynamics. According to Ibrahim and Shettima (2019), the ethnic diversity of the state, which includes Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb, Ichen, Chamba, and others, creates a complex atmosphere where disagreements can escalate quickly. Conflicts over land ownership, political representation, and cultural identity have historically been common in the area. Ethnic groups' long-standing relationships are upended by these disputes. Persons in many communities are wary when interacting with persons from different ethnic origins because fear has taken the role of cooperation. Perceptions of injustice are exacerbated by local security institutions' frequent inability to appropriately handle these confrontations. Because of this, there has been a notable rise in intergroup mistrust in Taraba State over the past few decades (Usman, 2020).

One of the state's most conflict-affected regions is southern Taraba, where violence between various ethnic groups occurs often. Conflicts are sometimes caused by issues including political rivalry, boundary conflicts, chieftaincy crises, and land disputes (Barde, 2021). Deep-seated anxieties engendered by these conflicts influence how communities view and relate to one another. Every violent incident feeds prejudice and unfavorable stories about competing

groups. Mistrust is exacerbated by old grievances, rumors, and false information. Consequently, communities become more and more isolated and refrain from working together in social, agricultural, or market settings. Thus, the social trust necessary for peaceful cohabitation has been severely damaged by instability in Southern Taraba. This dependence may intensify into mistrust and animosity against nearby communities. Without interventions that strengthen trust, insecurity is likely to continue shaping intergroup relations negatively. The situation underscores the need for sustained peace-building, dialogue, and inclusive governance. Therefore, this study is crucial for understanding the root causes of inter-communal fear and proposing sustainable solutions for peace in Southern Taraba.

Conceptual Clarifications

Insecurity: Insecurity refers to the lack of safety and the constant threat to life, property, and well-being, which creates fear and uncertainty among individuals and communities (Adegboyega, 2020). It can manifest in various forms, including violent crime, communal clashes, banditry, terrorism, and political instability. Insecurity is not only a physical threat but also a psychological state that undermines social cohesion and individual confidence in institutions (Onuoha, 2018). (Robert & Francis, 2000) highlighted that the perception of insecurity can be as damaging as actual insecurity because it influences behavior, social interactions, and trust between communities (Olaniyan & Rotimi, 2021) Globally, insecurity has become a significant challenge, affecting not only states but also local communities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020) pointed out that insecurity undermines development by restricting movement, discouraging investment, and disrupting education and health services. In Africa, insecurity often emerges from both violent extremism and local disputes over resources, land, and political control (Adebayo, 2019). A community refers to a group of people who share common interests, cultural identities, geographical spaces, or social relationships. Globally, communities are defined not only by physical proximity but also by shared norms and mutual reliance (Etzioni, 2015). In Africa, communities play essential roles in traditional governance, conflict resolution, and social cohesion. Nigerian communities are often multiethnic, with interactions shaped by cultural ties, land use, and economic activities. In Southern Taraba, communities are deeply rooted in ethnic identities such as Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb, Ichen, and Chamba. These identities influence everyday interactions and shape perceptions of belonging and loyalty. Ethnic conflict refers to violent or non-violent disputes between groups defined by cultural, linguistic, or ancestral differences. Globally, ethnic conflicts are often rooted in struggles for power, identity, and resource control (Horowitz, 2014). In Africa, colonial boundaries, resource scarcity, and political competition have intensified ethnic tensions. In Nigeria, ethnic conflict is common in diverse states where groups compete for land, political representation, and economic survival (Olayoku, 2014). In Southern Taraba, ethnic conflicts frequently involve disputes between Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb, and other groups over farmland, boundaries, and traditional leadership. Such conflicts create enduring mistrust and fear, which weaken social cohesion.

In Nigeria, recurrent attacks by bandits, herder-farmer conflicts, and ethnic clashes have contributed to widespread fear among rural and urban populations (Ojo, 2021). In Southern Taraba, historical disputes over land and political representation have created persistent inter-communal tensions. The fear generated by these threats reduces intergroup interactions and erodes confidence in neighbors and authorities. Therefore, insecurity is both a cause and consequence of weakened social structures and community trust.

Social Trust: Social trust refers to the belief that others within a society or community will act in fair, predictable, and cooperative ways. It is foundational to peaceful coexistence because it encourages cooperation, reduces conflict, and strengthens social bonds (Putnam, 2007).

Globally, societies with high levels of trust experience stronger institutions and lower levels of violence. In Africa, the erosion of trust is often associated with ethnic conflict, state fragility, and historical grievances (Oketch, 2019). In Nigeria, declining trust between ethnic groups has been fueled by insecurity, political exclusion, and social inequality. Trust deficits create barriers to collaboration in economic, political, and social spaces.

Fear: Fear is a psychological and social response triggered by perceived threats, whether real or imagined. It influences human behavior by encouraging defensive actions, avoidance, or hostility (Slovic, 2016). Globally, fear plays a central role in shaping intergroup relations, especially in conflict-prone areas. In Africa, fear often emerges from historical injustices, violent encounters, and mistrust of security institutions. In Nigeria, fear between communities is frequently linked to ethnic rivalry, competition for land, and recurrent violence. Fear shapes how individuals assess risk and how communities interpret the intentions of others. Thus, fear is an important concept in explaining the strained relations among Southern Taraba communities.

Social Trust and Its Importance: Social trust refers to the confidence individuals and communities have in one another and in social institutions to act fairly, cooperatively, and predictably (Putnam, 2000). It is a central component of social capital, which facilitates collective action, conflict resolution, and economic development. Communities with high social trust experience more cohesion, cooperation, and resilience in the face of challenges (Bourdieu, 1986). Conversely, low social trust leads to suspicion, avoidance, and reduced intergroup engagement. Trust operates at both interpersonal and institutional levels, influencing how individuals perceive the reliability of neighbors, leaders, and formal authorities (Knack & Keefer, 1997). In regions affected by conflict, trust is often eroded, making collaborative efforts to address communal problems difficult. Therefore, social trust is both an indicator and determinant of peaceful coexistence in multi-ethnic societies.

Trust also encourages compliance with communal norms and the acceptance of conflict resolution mechanisms facilitated by traditional leaders or local authorities (Adebayo, 2019). When trust declines, communities become insular, and intergroup collaboration diminishes, increasing vulnerability to conflict and insecurity.

Link between Insecurity and Social Trust: Research shows a strong inverse relationship between insecurity and social trust: as insecurity rises, trust between communities diminishes (Putnam, 2007). In contexts where violence or the threat of violence is common, individuals become more cautious, limiting interactions with those perceived as outsiders. Fear of harm or resource loss encourages communities to withdraw into homogenous networks, reducing opportunities for cooperation (Onuoha, 2018). In Southern Taraba, recurring ethnic conflicts over land, grazing, and political representation have weakened trust between neighboring communities. The erosion of social trust perpetuates cycles of fear, suspicion, and retaliatory behavior, further destabilizing the region. This relationship highlights the social and psychological dimensions of insecurity beyond its physical manifestations.

Social trust also mediates the community response to insecurity. Communities with higher trust levels tend to share information, report threats, and collaborate on security measures (Knack & Keefer, 1997). Conversely, low-trust communities may conceal information, refuse cooperation with authorities, and engage in preemptive defensive actions, sometimes escalating conflict (Fukuyama, 1995).

Theoretical Framework

Realistic Conflict Theory

Realistic Conflict Theory was proposed by Muzafer Sherif in 1966 to explain the causes of intergroup conflict. The theory assumes that hostility and tension between groups arise from competition over scarce or valued resources. Groups perceive these situations as zero-sum, where the gain of one group is viewed as the loss of another. Social identities, loyalty, and group cohesion intensify competitive behavior, leading to fear, mistrust, and stereotyping. The theory emphasizes that conflicts are rooted in material and structural realities, such as land, political power, or economic opportunities. It also highlights that intergroup competition can escalate even when both groups are interdependent in other areas. Therefore, Realistic Conflict Theory links structural conditions to social-psychological responses.

In Southern Taraba, Realistic Conflict Theory explains why ethnic groups such as the Jukun, Tiv, and Kuteb experience persistent fear and hostility toward one another. Competition over farmland, grazing areas, political representation, and chieftaincy positions generates mistrust and suspicion. The perception of scarcity intensifies defensive behaviors, limiting collaboration and reinforcing intergroup fear. This theory is justified in the study because it directly addresses the material causes of insecurity and their impact on social trust. It allows researchers to analyze the structural and resource-based dynamics underlying recurrent conflicts. By applying this theory, the study can explore how competition for resources fuels cycles of violence and fear. It also offers insights into conflict resolution mechanisms based on equitable resource allocation.

The strength of Realistic Conflict Theory lies in its ability to clearly connect intergroup competition with conflict, fear, and mistrust. It provides a framework to predict when tensions are likely to escalate and identifies structural factors that require intervention. However, a limitation of the theory is that it may oversimplify. Despite these limitations, the theory is highly applicable to understanding the fears and behaviors of communities in Southern Taraba. It provides a practical basis for designing peacebuilding and resource-sharing strategies to reduce intergroup hostility.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory was first proposed by Pierre Bourdieu in 1986 and later developed by Robert Putnam (1993, 2007) to explain the role of social networks, norms, and trust in facilitating cooperation. The theory assumes that social relationships and networks are valuable resources that help individuals and communities achieve common goals. Trust, reciprocity, and shared norms are central components that enable collective action and strengthen social cohesion. Communities with high social capital are better equipped to resolve conflicts, manage risks, and maintain security. Conversely, the absence of trust and weak networks can lead to social fragmentation, suspicion, and fear. The theory also emphasizes that social capital is dynamic, influenced by historical, cultural, and political factors. In essence, social capital shapes how communities interact, cooperate, and respond to threats.

In the context of Southern Taraba, Social Capital Theory helps explain why communities such as Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb, and Chamba exhibit fear toward one another. Recurrent ethnic conflicts, land disputes, and weak institutional responses have eroded trust, limiting cooperation and reinforcing community isolation. Social networks that once facilitated intergroup dialogue and resource sharing have weakened, making collective problem-solving difficult. Applying this theory allows researchers to examine how social trust or its absence affects community responses to insecurity. The use of social capital theory is justified for its direct links with the concepts of trust and fear, which are central to understanding intercommunal relations. Moreover, it provides insight into interventions that can rebuild networks and norms to restore

peaceful coexistence. By analyzing the role of social capital, policymakers and stakeholders can design strategies to reduce fear and strengthen community resilience.

The main strength of Social Capital Theory lies in its ability to explain how trust and networks influence social cohesion and conflict resolution. It provides a practical framework for identifying gaps in community relationships and designing interventions to enhance cooperation. Despite these weaknesses, the theory remains highly relevant for analyzing fear, trust, and cooperation in Southern Taraba communities. It offers a clear conceptual lens for understanding the social dynamics of insecurity.

Methodology

The population of this study comprises the entire population of Southern Taraba Senatorial District, which includes Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari Local Government Areas, with an estimated total population of about 1,165,300 persons based on recent population projections. From this population, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined using the Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula at a 5% margin of error, which is appropriate for social science research requiring moderate precision and reliability. The sample size was considered adequate for meaningful statistical analysis while remaining manageable within the constraints of fieldwork. To ensure fair representation of the diverse communities in Southern Taraba, the study adopted a stratified sampling technique, in which the population was first stratified according to the major ethnic groups in the area, namely Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb, Chamba, and Ichen. Thereafter, proportionate sampling was used to allocate respondents to each stratum based on their relative population sizes, and simple random sampling was employed within each stratum to select individual respondents. This combination of sampling techniques enhanced the representativeness, validity, and generalizability of the study findings across the study area.

The Yamane formula is expressed as:

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

where:

- n = sample size
- N = estimated population size
- e = margin of error (usually 0.05 for 95% confidence level)

Step 1: Square the margin of error	$e^2 = (0.05)^2 = 0.0025$
Step 2: Multiply the population by e^2	$1,165,300 \times 0.0025 = 2,913.25$
Step 3: Add 1	$1 + 2,913.25 = 2,914.25$
Step 4: Divide the population by the result	$n = \frac{1,165,300}{2,914.25}$ $n = 399.87$
Step 5: Round to the nearest whole number	$n = 400$

Using the Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula at a 5% margin of error, an initial sample size of 400 respondents was calculated based on estimated population figures derived from community projections. Consequently, 400 structured questionnaires were administered across the selected communities. However, at the end of the fieldwork, only 180 questionnaires were correctly completed and returned without significant errors, and these were deemed valid and subsequently used for data analysis. The effective sample size of 180 respondents was

considered adequate for reliable descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, while also remaining manageable within the logistical constraints of the study.

This study adopts a mixed method of data collection and survey as research design for the study, combining a structured questionnaire survey with Key Informant Interviews (KII) as a complementary qualitative tool. The integration of both methods allows for methodological triangulation, enhancing the validity, depth, and reliability of findings on insecurity and social trust among ethnic groups in Southern Taraba, Nigeria. Two Key Informants precisely local leaders and vigilante leaders were selected from each ethnic groups for the purpose of getting indepth knowledge.

The quantitative component captures measurable patterns of perceived insecurity, inter-group trust, and social interaction, while the qualitative interviews provide contextual interpretation, historical explanations, and deeper insights into inter-ethnic dynamics that cannot be fully understood through survey data alone.

Results

The descriptive analysis presents the demographic characteristics and response patterns of the 180 participants involved in the study. It provides a detailed summary of respondents' perceptions of insecurity, levels of social trust, and intergroup relations within Southern Taraba.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency (f) N=180	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25	40	22.2
	26–35	50	27.8
	36–45	35	19.4
	46–55	30	16.7
	56+	25	13.9
Gender	Male	102	56.7
	Female	78	43.3
Ethnic Group	Jukun	50	27.8
	Tiv	45	25.0
	Kuteb	30	16.7
	Chamba	25	13.9
	Ichen	20	11.1
	Others	10	5.5
Education Level	No formal education	30	16.7
	Primary	40	22.2
	Secondary	60	33.3
	Tertiary	50	27.8
Occupation	Farming	55	30.6
	Trading	45	25.0
	Civil Service	30	16.7
	Artisan	25	13.9
	Others	25	13.9
Length of Residence	1–5 years	50	27.8
	6–10 years	45	25.0
	11–20 years	50	27.8
	Above 20 years	35	19.4

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The demographic characteristics indicate a fairly diverse sample, with respondents spanning multiple age groups, ethnicities, and occupations. A majority of respondents were male (56.7%), which may reflect the gendered nature of mobility and participation in communal affairs, particularly in rural Southern Taraba (Onuoha, 2018). The ethnic composition Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb, Chamba, and Ichen ensures that the study captures perspectives from communities historically involved in disputes over land, resources, and political representation (Adebayo, 2019). The varied education levels, with a substantial proportion having secondary and tertiary education, suggest that respondents are capable of reflecting critically on issues of insecurity and social trust. Occupation and length of residence further contextualize perceptions, as farmers and long-term residents are more likely to be affected by intercommunal tensions and resource competition. This demographic diversity strengthens the study's reliability, as it captures a wide range of experiences relevant to insecurity and fear.

The demographic data also provide insights into the potential sources of vulnerability and resilience in the communities. For instance, respondents with longer residence may have experienced repeated cycles of conflict, shaping their perceptions of insecurity and mistrust (Eze et al., 2020). Conversely, younger respondents and those with higher education may have broader perspectives on intergroup relations and conflict resolution. Occupation influences exposure to insecurity; for example, farmers and traders are often directly affected by banditry, communal disputes, or market disruptions (Olaniyan & Omotayo, 2021). These demographic variables are crucial for interpreting the later descriptive tables, as they help explain variations in perceptions of insecurity, social trust, and coping strategies. The diversity in the sample aligns with Putnam's (2000) assertion that social networks and trust vary according to social, economic, and demographic factors.

Table 2: Perception of Insecurity

Statement	SA	A	N	SD	D	Mean	SD
I feel safe in my community during the day	40	75	20	15	30	3.4	1.15
I feel unsafe in my community at night	90	60	15	5	10	4.1	0.95
Communal conflicts in my area have increased	70	80	15	5	10	3.9	0.92
Armed robbery, banditry, or violent crime is a threat	100	60	10	5	5	4.05	0.89
Local authorities provide adequate protection	20	45	25	50	40	2.6	1.23
Insecurity affects my ability to participate in activities	60	65	25	10	20	3.78	1.04

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The descriptive statistics show that respondents perceive high levels of insecurity, especially threats at night and recurring communal conflicts (Mean = 4.05; SD = 0.89). This aligns with studies highlighting the prevalence of banditry, armed robbery, and interethnic clashes in Nigeria's rural regions (Ojo, 2021; Adegboyega, 2020). Only a minority of respondents felt protected by local authorities, indicating low confidence in formal security measures, consistent with Onuoha's (2018) observation that governance deficits exacerbate insecurity in rural areas. The high mean scores for perceived threats reflect a significant psychological dimension of insecurity, showing that fear is as important as actual exposure to crime or conflict. These findings reinforce the argument that insecurity in Southern Taraba is both structural and psychological, influencing behavior, mobility, and intergroup interactions (Eze et al., 2020).

The standard deviations indicate some variation in perceptions, suggesting that while insecurity is widely recognized, experiences differ based on personal exposure and community context. The moderate mean for perceived impact on participation (M = 3.78; SD = 1.04) suggests that insecurity partially restricts social engagement, consistent with Putnam's (2007) discussion on

the negative effects of fear on social capital. Residents may limit interactions with other ethnic groups or avoid communal activities due to perceived risks. These insights highlight the importance of targeted interventions, including improved policing, community vigilance, and trust-building programs, to reduce fear and foster cooperation. Overall, Table 2 confirms that insecurity is a pervasive concern, shaping both individual behavior and collective dynamics in Southern Taraba.

A district Head male, 67years old in Wukari (Traditional Ruler), Jukun Community assert “Over the past years, insecurity has become a major concern for our people. Many community members live in fear because of frequent clashes and the destruction of farms and houses. The tension between ethnic groups has worsened mistrust, making it difficult to move freely from one village to another. People feel unsafe travelling to markets or attending social gatherings, especially during periods of heightened tensions. Many youths have migrated because they no longer feel protected. The absence of timely security intervention contributes to the perception that we must protect ourselves. Overall, insecurity has weakened the sense of unity we once enjoyed, and rebuilding trust will take time.” (KII section 2025: A 58 yrs district head)

A Vigilante Group Coordinator, male 51years old, Tiv Settlement “For us in the Tiv community, insecurity is something we experience almost every farming season. People are afraid because attacks come without warning, and many farmers no longer feel confident going to their fields. Women and children are the most traumatized because they fear displacement. There is a strong perception that government security forces are too slow to respond, which increases anger and suspicion. Many youths have joined local vigilante groups just to protect their villages, not because they want violence. Every ethnic conflict leaves scars that deepen mistrust among communities. If insecurity continues like this, intergroup relationships will continue to deteriorate.” (KII section 2025: A 58yrs Vigilante Group Coordinator)

A Traditional Leader, male 61years old, Kuteb Council of Elders “The insecurity in Southern Taraba has greatly affected our way of life as Kuteb people. Many elders complain that they cannot visit ancestral farmlands due to fear of attacks. Our people believe that political rivalry and land disputes fuel much of the conflict. Trust between ethnic groups has reduced because each community feels the other is responsible for the violence. Youths are now restless because they see their future threatened by constant fear. Even cultural festivals are held with caution because crowds attract unwanted attention. Insecurity has created an atmosphere of anxiety and suspicion that was not there in the past.” (KII section 2025: 62 years A Traditional Leader)

A 50 years Community Elder and Peace Negotiator, Chamba Community “As a Chamba elder, I have observed that insecurity has changed how our people interact with neighboring tribes. Movement has become restricted because people feel that travelling alone is unsafe. There is also fear that minor disagreements can escalate into bigger confrontations due to the current climate of distrust. Business activities have reduced, especially in border markets where Chamba people trade with others. The community perceives that security agencies sometimes take sides, which worsens public confidence. Fear is now a constant topic of discussion among households. Many believe that dialogue, though difficult, is still the only way to reduce insecurity and rebuild trust.” (KII section 2025: A 50 years Community Elder and Peace Negotiator)

A Women Leader and Community Mobilizer, Ichen Community “For the Ichen people, insecurity affects families, especially women and children, more than anything else.

Many women fear going to farms or collecting firewood alone. People believe that insecurity has disrupted intergroup marriages and social cooperation. Parents keep their children indoors because they worry about kidnappings and attacks. As a women leader, I hear many stories of trauma, sleepless nights, and fear of displacement. The perception is that insecurity has brought poverty because access to farmland and markets has reduced. Trust with other ethnic groups has diminished, and rebuilding that trust requires consistent peace talks and security assurance. (KII section 2025: 42 years A Women Leader and Community Mobilizer).

The qualitative findings strongly support the quantitative results presented in Table 2, which revealed that respondents perceived insecurity as a major problem in Southern Taraba. The quantitative analysis showed that respondents agreed that they felt unsafe at night ($M = 4.10$), that armed robbery, banditry and violent crime constituted serious threats ($M = 4.05$), and that communal conflicts had increased ($M = 3.90$). Respondents also expressed low confidence in the protection provided by security agencies ($M = 2.60$).

The interview findings reinforce these statistical results. Across all ethnic groups, participants described insecurity as a daily reality characterized by communal clashes, destruction of property, displacement, kidnappings and attacks on farmers. For example, the Jukun District Head explained that frequent clashes have forced many residents to live in constant fear, while the Tiv Vigilante Coordinator stated that attacks during farming seasons have discouraged many farmers from cultivating their farms. Similarly, the Kuteb Traditional Leader noted that insecurity has prevented people from visiting ancestral farmlands, while the Chamba and Ichen leaders emphasized that insecurity has restricted movement and disrupted economic and social activities.

The qualitative evidence therefore explains why respondents recorded high mean scores on perceived insecurity in the questionnaire. The interviews demonstrate that these perceptions are based on actual experiences of violence, displacement and fear rather than mere assumptions. Consequently, both findings indicate that insecurity has become a persistent social condition affecting everyday life in Southern Taraba.

Table 3: Social Trust

Statement	SD	D	N	SD	D	Mean (M)	SD
I trust my neighbors to act honestly and fairly	40	70	30	15	25	3.2	1.08
People from other ethnic groups can be trusted	25	50	25	40	40	2.8	1.12
I feel comfortable interacting with members of different communities	25	50	30	35	40	2.9	1.10
Communities cooperate to maintain peace	30	60	25	30	35	3.1	1.07
I believe people generally keep their promises	35	65	35	20	25	3.3	1.04
Trust between communities has declined over the past five years	60	60	30	10	20	3.7	1.01

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data indicated that social trust is moderate to low, particularly regarding trust toward members of other ethnic groups ($M = 2.8$; $SD = 1.12$). This finding aligns with the literature, which notes that repeated conflicts and historical grievances erode trust between communities (Eze et al., 2020; Adebayo, 2019). Trust in neighbors is slightly higher ($M = 3.2$; $SD = 1.08$),

suggesting that intra-community relationships remain relatively stronger than inter-community trust, as emphasized in Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000). Low trust in authorities and other ethnic groups reflects skepticism regarding conflict resolution mechanisms, consistent with Olaniyan & Omotayo (2021). These patterns suggest that fear and mistrust are mutually reinforcing; insecurity reduces trust, and low trust heightens perceptions of insecurity.

The variation in standard deviations indicates differences in respondents' experiences and perceptions of trust. Some communities may maintain strong interpersonal networks that mitigate fear, while others experience heightened suspicion due to exposure to violence or marginalization (Fukuyama, 1995).

A 60 years Clan Head, Jukun Community Angyu "In our community, social trust has declined because people no longer relate as freely as they once did. Many Jukun residents feel unsure about the intentions of neighboring ethnic groups due to past conflicts. Even in peaceful times, suspicion still exists because memories of past violence linger. Community activities that used to bring people together, such as festivals and markets, are now attended cautiously. People tend to trust only their close kin groups rather than the wider community. This erosion of trust affects cooperation in farming, trading, and communal labour. To rebuild trust, we need sustained dialogue and genuine reconciliation across all ethnic groups." (KII section 2025: A 60 years Clan Head)

A 47 years Youth Leader, Tiv Community "As Tiv people, our level of trust in other communities has reduced significantly due to repeated clashes and perceived marginalization. Many individuals feel that promises of peace from some groups are not always sincere. This has made intergroup relationships more formal and cautious rather than open and friendly. When people go to shared markets or attend social events, they remain alert and observant because they are unsure whom to trust. Social trust within the Tiv community itself is strong, but trust between ethnic groups is weak. Young people in particular believe that trust must be earned through actions, not mere words. Without justice and fairness, trust will continue to decline." (KII section 2025: A 47 years Youth Leader)

A 63 years Kuteb Traditional Council Elder "Among the Kuteb people, social trust between communities has been strained for many years. People do not feel entirely secure forming alliances or cooperative groups with other tribes because they fear hidden motives. Land disputes and political tensions have further weakened mutual trust. Social gatherings that used to strengthen unity are now approached with caution. As elders, we observe that younger generations are growing up with fear instead of friendship across ethnic lines. Trust is strongest within the extended family and clan structure but very limited outside it. For trust to improve, all groups must show honesty, transparency, and commitment to peace." (KII section 2025: A 63 years Kuteb Traditional Council Elder)

A 55 years Community Elder and Farmer, Chamba Community "In the Chamba community, social trust has been weakened because people feel that the environment is unpredictable. Intergroup cooperation, which was once normal, now depends on the current security situation. Some individuals fear betrayal or sudden conflict, so they avoid forming close relationships with outsiders. Even simple activities like shared farming or borrowing tools across communities have declined. However, within Chamba families and clans, trust remains strong because people rely on each other for survival. The weakening of trust has affected economic activities and social events

where different groups used to interact. Rebuilding trust requires consistent peace agreements and visible efforts from traditional leaders.” (KII section 2025: A 55 years Community Elder and Farmer,)

A 40 years Women Leader, Ichen Community “For the Ichen people, social trust has reduced mainly because insecurity has created fear and emotional distance. Women particularly feel uncertain when dealing with members of other ethnic groups, especially in markets and shared spaces. There is a sense that misunderstandings can easily escalate because trust is fragile. Parents teach their children to be careful, which shows how deeply mistrust has entered our culture. Meanwhile, trust within the Ichen community remains strong, as people depend on one another in times of crisis. Many believe that trust can only return when peace is stable and long-lasting. Dialogue, fairness, and cooperation are necessary steps toward rebuilding intergroup trust. (KII section 2025: A 40 years Women Leader).

The quantitative findings in Table 3 indicate that social trust among respondents is relatively low. Respondents reported low trust in members of other ethnic groups ($M = 2.80$) and only moderate confidence in community cooperation ($M = 3.10$). Furthermore, respondents agreed that trust between communities has declined over the past five years ($M = 3.70$).

The interview responses provide clear explanations for these findings. Traditional rulers and community leaders consistently stated that repeated communal conflicts have created deep suspicion among ethnic groups. The Jukun Clan Head explained that people now trust only close family members because previous conflicts continue to influence present relationships. Likewise, the Tiv Youth Leader observed that promises of peace are no longer readily believed due to repeated violence. Respondents from the Kuteb, Chamba and Ichen communities similarly reported that land disputes, political rivalry and insecurity have significantly weakened trust and cooperation between communities.

These qualitative responses explain the relatively low mean scores recorded in the quantitative analysis. Although trust remains relatively strong within individual ethnic communities, intergroup trust has deteriorated considerably. The findings therefore suggest that insecurity has not only increased fear but has also damaged the social relationships that promote peaceful coexistence.

Table 4: Intergroup Fear and Relations

Statement	SA	A	N	SD	D	Mean (M)	SD
I fear members of other ethnic groups	70	60	20	10	20	4.0	0.98
Past conflicts make me cautious with other communities	80	60	20	5	15	4.05	0.95
Ethnic groups compete for land or resources	80	60	25	5	10	4.1	0.92
Fear prevents cooperation between communities	75	65	20	5	15	4.0	0.97
I have witnessed tension or hostility between ethnic groups	80	55	20	10	15	3.95	0.99
I believe reconciliation between communities is possible	30	60	40	20	30	3.2	1.10

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings reveal a high level of intergroup fear in Southern Taraba, with mean scores above 4.0 for several items (SDs ranging from 0.92 to 0.99). Most respondents reported fear of other ethnic groups and cautious behavior due to past conflicts, reflecting a persistent cycle of

suspicion and avoidance. This is consistent with Realistic Conflict Theory, which emphasizes that competition over scarce resources such as land, political representation, or grazing areas intensifies intergroup tension (Sherif, 1966; Onuoha, 2018). High levels of fear prevent collaboration, restrict social and economic interactions, and increase vulnerability to violence, confirming the psychological and social dimensions of insecurity described by Adegboyega (2020).

The standard deviations suggest some variability, indicating that exposure to past conflicts or personal experiences shapes perceptions of fear. Communities with historical cooperation may retain lower levels of fear, while those directly affected by violence report the highest fear levels (Eze et al., 2020). The moderate mean for belief in reconciliation ($M = 3.2$; $SD = 1.10$) suggests optimism among some respondents that intergroup trust can be restored. These insights highlight the importance of structured peacebuilding programs, conflict mediation, and reconciliation initiatives that address historical grievances and resource disputes.

A 59 years Traditional Ruler, Jukun Clan Council “In recent years, intergroup fear has grown among our people because of recurring misunderstandings and violent episodes. Many Jukun residents fear travelling to certain mixed areas because they are unsure how they will be received. The lack of trust means that even peaceful encounters are interpreted with suspicion. Relations between our community and neighboring groups are now strained, with limited social interaction compared to the past. Younger people who did not witness peaceful coexistence are growing up thinking conflict is normal. Some efforts at reconciliation have been made, but fear still affects daily life and cooperation. Until there is mutual respect and continuous peace engagement, intergroup fear will remain high.” (KII section 2025: A 59 years Traditional Ruler).

A 44 years Vigilante Leader, Tiv Community “For the Tiv people, intergroup fear mainly arises from past clashes and unresolved grievances. People still remember times when simple disagreements turned into serious confrontations, so they are cautious when dealing with neighboring ethnic groups. Many households advise their children not to move alone into territories where they may be mistaken for threats. Even in shared markets, people often stay close to members of their own group. These strained relations limit opportunities for intergroup farming, trade, and cooperation. While peace meetings exist, the fear remains because many feel true reconciliation has not yet been achieved. A stable environment is necessary before friendly relations can fully return.” (KII section 2025: A 44 years Vigilante Leader).

A 63 years Kuteb Elder and Community Leader “In the Kuteb community, intergroup fear is largely shaped by political and land-related tensions. People often feel that other groups may take advantage of any moment of weakness, which creates anxiety. This fear reduces social interaction and discourages cooperation in community development projects. Relations between communities are polite but distant; people exchange greetings, but deeper social ties are rare. Some elders recall more peaceful times, but younger people mostly witness division and conflict. Many residents believe that fear persists because disputes have not been resolved in a fair and transparent manner. Improving relations will require addressing these root causes and rebuilding confidence.” (KII section 2025: A 63 years Kuteb Elder and Community Leader).

A 52 years Chamba Elder and Community Peace Representative “In the Chamba community, intergroup fear is real, as people are often uncertain about how safe it is to interact with neighboring tribes. Even normal activities such as attending markets or visiting relatives in nearby villages are done with caution. Some Chamba people fear that

unresolved issues may lead to fresh violence without warning. The result is that intergroup relations have become limited, with fewer marriages, fewer shared events, and reduced cooperation. Distrust affects both the old and the young, though elders try to promote dialogue. Many people feel that only regular peace engagements can reduce the emotional distance between groups. Until then, fear will shape how communities relate.” (KII section 2025: A 52 years Chamba Elder and Community Peace Representative).

A 41 years Women Leader, Ichen Community “For the Ichen people, intergroup fear affects daily activities, especially for women who move frequently between villages for farming and trading. Many women avoid travelling alone because they fear harassment or misunderstanding from members of other ethnic groups. Intergroup relations that once relied on trust and shared cultural practices have weakened. Parents now discourage their children from forming close friendships outside the community for safety reasons. While people desire peaceful coexistence, they worry that sudden tensions can disrupt calm at any moment. The community believes that consistent dialogue and visible justice are essential for rebuilding peaceful relations. Without these, fear will continue to define relations between groups.” (KII section 2025: A 41 years Women Leader).

The quantitative analysis in Table 4 revealed very high levels of intergroup fear among respondents. Respondents agreed that they feared members of other ethnic groups ($M = 4.00$), that previous conflicts made them cautious ($M = 4.05$), that competition over land and resources contributed to conflict ($M = 4.10$), and that fear prevented cooperation among communities ($M = 4.00$). However, respondents still expressed moderate optimism that reconciliation was possible ($M = 3.20$).

The interview findings strongly validate these results. Participants across all ethnic groups reported that fear now shapes daily interactions with neighbouring communities. The Jukun Traditional Ruler explained that residents avoid travelling through mixed communities because they fear attacks, while the Tiv Vigilante Leader stated that parents advise their children to avoid certain communities for safety reasons. Similarly, the Kuteb Elder described relationships between ethnic groups as “polite but distant,” while the Chamba and Ichen leaders observed that intergroup marriages, markets and social activities have declined because of persistent fear.

These narratives demonstrate that fear extends beyond physical insecurity to influence social behaviour, economic cooperation and community integration. They also explain why respondents strongly agreed that fear prevents cooperation between communities. Nevertheless, the interviews also support the quantitative finding that reconciliation remains possible, as many participants emphasized dialogue and peacebuilding as pathways towards restoring peaceful coexistence.

Table 5: Coping and entrenching peaceful co-existence.

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean (M)	SD
My community has strategies to address insecurity	45	70	30	10	25	3.5	1.05
Traditional leaders play an important role in conflict resolution	45	65	35	15	20	3.4	1.07
I participate in community initiatives to promote peace	30	55	30	30	35	3.1	1.10
Government intervention is effective in reducing fear	20	40	30	50	40	2.6	1.23
Collaboration between communities can improve trust and security	55	65	30	10	20	3.6	1.04

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 indicates that respondents perceive moderate effectiveness of existing coping strategies and peacebuilding initiatives (Mean range: 3.1–3.6). Communities recognize the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution, and collaboration between communities is seen as a potential solution. However, government interventions are perceived as less effective ($M = 2.6$; $SD = 1.23$), reflecting weak institutional responses to insecurity (Olaniyan & Omotayo, 2021). The data suggest that informal mechanisms, such as community initiatives and leadership mediation, remain central to maintaining peace. This aligns with studies emphasizing the importance of social capital and local networks in mitigating insecurity and rebuilding trust (Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama, 1995).

The standard deviations highlight differences in perceptions, likely influenced by the effectiveness of local structures, personal experiences, and engagement levels in communal initiatives. Respondents who actively participate in peacebuilding report higher confidence in these strategies, while non-participants remain skeptical.

A 58 years Jukun Traditional Leader “In the Jukun community, people cope with insecurity by strengthening internal unity and supporting community watch groups. Families rely heavily on extended kin networks for protection and emotional support. Many residents have adjusted their daily routines such as market days and farm hours to avoid dangerous periods. Dialogue within the community has become an essential coping mechanism, as leaders regularly hold meetings to calm tensions. For peacebuilding, we participate in intergroup forums and peace committees initiated by government and NGOs. Even though trust is low, we believe continuous dialogue is the only sustainable pathway to coexistence. Our people also emphasize cultural exchanges and shared festivals as long-term peacebuilding tools.” (KII section 2025: A 58 years Jukun Traditional Leader).

A 46 years Tiv Vigilante Commander “For the Tiv community, coping with insecurity involves the use of community vigilante groups who monitor movement in and out of the settlement. Many households practice early warning systems, where suspicious activities are quickly reported. People also rely on prayer groups and communal farming as ways to reduce anxiety and maintain unity. For peacebuilding, we actively attend reconciliation meetings with other tribes, even though the outcomes are not always immediate. Youth leaders play a major role by engaging in sports events and cultural exchanges to soften tensions. We believe that peace can only be stable when communities agree to live honestly and transparently. Our aim is to build a future where our children do not inherit the bitterness of the past.” (KII section 2025: A 46 years Tiv Vigilante Commander).

63 years Kuteb Elder and Peace Council Member “The Kuteb people cope by maintaining strong social networks and restricting movement during periods of tension. Families store food and resources in case conflict disrupts farming or market access. Elders frequently counsel young people to avoid provocative actions and remain vigilant. Our approach to peacebuilding includes participation in intergroup dialogue sessions, though trust must be nurtured gradually. Traditional leaders have also revived cultural practices that emphasize unity and respect. Some peacebuilding efforts involve involving women groups, as women often bridge divides through trading and social visits. We believe that long-term peace requires fairness, justice, and sincere commitment from all communities.” (KII section 2025: A 63 years Kuteb Elder and Peace Council Member).

A 53 years Chamba Community Elder and Farmer “In the Chamba community, coping strategies include forming small cooperative groups for farming and movement, so no one travels alone during risky times. Families also depend on traditional security rituals and blessings for emotional strength. Community members share resources to help those displaced or affected by conflict. In terms of peacebuilding, we participate in joint community meetings, especially those led by religious leaders who are respected across tribes. Youth associations organize sports and music events to reduce hostility and rebuild friendships. Our women’s groups engage in intergroup market negotiations that promote cooperation. We believe peace will grow when small acts of trust begin to replace fear.” (KII section 2025: A 53 years Chamba Community Elder and Farmer).

A 42 years Ichen Women Leader and Community Mobilizer “The Ichen people cope with insecurity by adjusting daily routines and relying on collective movement when going to farms or markets. Women especially form groups to travel together for safety. Families share food and shelter during periods of displacement, showing strong internal solidarity. For peacebuilding, we encourage intergroup women associations because women are often the first to rebuild broken relationships. We also hold prayer meetings involving different ethnic groups, which helps reduce tension at emotional and spiritual levels. Youth leaders are encouraged to join community campaigns promoting tolerance. Our people believe that true peace requires constant engagement, forgiveness, and open communication.” (KII section 2025: A 42 years Ichen Women Leader and Community Mobilizer).

The quantitative findings in Table 5 indicate that respondents perceive community-based coping mechanisms as moderately effective. Respondents acknowledged that communities have strategies to address insecurity ($M = 3.50$), recognized the important role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution ($M = 3.40$), and agreed that collaboration among communities could improve trust and security ($M = 3.60$). However, government intervention was rated as relatively ineffective ($M = 2.60$).

The qualitative findings provide substantial support for these statistical results. Community leaders explained that residents have increasingly relied on local vigilante groups, community watch systems, prayer meetings, early warning mechanisms and traditional conflict resolution to protect themselves. The Jukun Traditional Leader emphasized the importance of community dialogue and watch groups, while the Tiv Vigilante Commander highlighted the effectiveness of community surveillance and reconciliation meetings. Likewise, the Kuteb Elder stressed the role of traditional leadership and women groups in peacebuilding, whereas the Chamba and Ichen leaders emphasized cooperative farming, intergroup markets and women's associations as practical mechanisms for rebuilding trust.

These interview responses explain why respondents rated traditional and community-based initiatives more positively than government interventions. The findings suggest that local communities have developed indigenous strategies that compensate for perceived weaknesses in formal security institutions. Consequently, sustainable peace in Southern Taraba is likely to depend on strengthening collaboration between government agencies, traditional institutions and local communities.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that insecurity is widely perceived as a serious challenge affecting the social and economic well-being of residents in Southern Taraba. The quantitative findings revealed high mean scores for perceptions of insecurity, particularly regarding threats from armed robbery, communal conflicts, and insecurity at night, while respondents expressed

low confidence in the protection provided by government security agencies. These findings were strongly corroborated by the qualitative interviews, where traditional rulers, vigilante leaders, women leaders, and community elders consistently described insecurity as a daily reality characterized by frequent attacks, destruction of farms, displacement, restricted movement, and persistent fear among community members. The convergence of both quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates that insecurity has become deeply rooted within the social fabric of Southern Taraba, negatively affecting livelihoods, social interactions, and community cohesion. This finding is consistent with the work of Onuoha (2018), who argued that weak security governance and communal conflicts have significantly increased insecurity across rural Nigeria. Similarly, Adegboyega (2020) observed that persistent violent conflicts generate widespread fear, weaken public confidence in state institutions, and disrupt normal socio-economic activities. The finding also supports Ojo (2021), who reported that increasing incidents of banditry, communal violence, and rural criminality have created an atmosphere of fear that limits agricultural production, economic activities, and community participation. Therefore, the present study confirms that insecurity in Southern Taraba is not merely a security issue but also a social phenomenon that undermines trust, mobility, and sustainable community development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study show that insecurity significantly undermines social trust and fuels intergroup fear among communities in Southern Taraba. Repeated conflicts, competition over land and resources, and weak security structures create an environment where people feel constantly threatened. As a result, communities become less willing to cooperate, communicate, or engage in shared activities that promote peace. The mistrust that develops over time becomes part of daily life, shaping how individuals perceive and interact with members of other groups. Fear becomes both a psychological response to past violence and a barrier to future coexistence. The study therefore highlights that insecurity is not only a physical threat but also a social condition that erodes unity and weakens community resilience. Without deliberate efforts to address these underlying issues, distrust will continue to deepen divisions among the people. Addressing insecurity and restoring trust requires consistent engagement, inclusive dialogue, and effective security interventions that reassure communities of their safety.

1. Strengthen community policing: Create mixed ethnic security committees of Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb, Hausa. When police and locals patrol together, trust in institutions increases and suspicion drops.

2. Inter-communal Dialogue Forums: Regular town hall meetings between farmers and herders, and between jukun and Tiv communities. Dialogue rebuilds, bridging trust that Putnam talked about.

3. Ensure Fair and Inclusive Resource Management: Equitable management of land, water, and other shared resources is essential for reducing competition-driven conflicts. Government agencies and community leaders should establish transparent processes for allocating resources to prevent feelings of marginalization. Joint resource committees involving all ethnic groups can help ensure fairness and accountability.

4. Enhance Government Accountability and Conflict Resolution Structures: The government should prioritize strengthening local governance systems to ensure timely and effective responses to insecurity. Conflict resolution structures, such as peace committees and mediation centers, must be supported with adequate funding and trained personnel.

5. Increase Community Participation in Peace and Security Initiatives: Residents should be encouraged to participate actively in community security meetings, peace campaigns, and intergroup cooperation projects. When communities are directly involved in decision-making processes, they develop a sense of ownership and commitment to peace.

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