

## The Effects of Ethnic Conflict on Trading and Marketing Activities in Southern Taraba Senatorial District, Taraba State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Recurrent ethnic conflicts in Southern Taraba Senatorial District have significantly affected socio-economic stability, prompting this study titled *Ethnic Conflict and Trading Activities in Southern Taraba Senatorial District, Taraba State*. The research investigates the impact of ethnic conflict on trading and marketing activities, with specific objectives to identify the underlying causes of conflict, assess its effects on trade, and propose strategies for sustainable peace. Grounded in the Frustration–Aggression Theory, the study explains how prolonged deprivation, inequality, and perceived injustice serve as catalysts for violent inter-ethnic confrontations. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted, involving 400 respondents selected from a population of 1,520,700 across Wukari, Donga, Ibi, Takum, and Ussa Local Government Areas, using the Taro Yamane formula. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with key informants, including religious and traditional leaders. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses underwent thematic interpretation. The findings indicate that ethnic rivalry, political marginalization, resource competition, and poverty are primary drivers of conflict in the region. Ethnic

violence has significantly disrupted commercial activities through market destruction, loss of merchandise, trader displacement, and inflation in commodity prices. The study concludes that ethnic conflict poses a major threat to economic sustainability in Southern Taraba. It recommends a shift from reactive conflict resolution to proactive prevention by promoting inclusive governance, institutionalized dialogue, and peace education. Additionally, rehabilitating damaged market infrastructure and providing financial support to displaced traders are essential for economic recovery and long-term peacebuilding in the region.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Conflict; Trade Disruption; Southern Taraba; Peacebuilding; Economic Recovery

## Introduction

Ethnic conflict remains one of the most persistent and destructive social challenges undermining peace, economic progress, and human development worldwide. Regions such as the Balkans, Rwanda, Myanmar, and Sudan exemplify how ethnic hostilities disrupt social harmony and impede trade and economic integration (Fearon & Laitin, 2019). These conflicts often destroy markets and infrastructure, displace traders, and erode inter-ethnic cooperation, resulting in long-lasting damage to global trading systems. Similarly, recurrent ethnic tensions in places like Bosnia and Herzegovina, South Sudan, and Myanmar have led to mass displacement, market collapse, and trade disruptions, further destabilising regional economies and livelihoods (Johnson, 2021). Collectively, these instances underscore the profound and far-reaching economic consequences of ethnic conflict across the globe.

Across Africa, ethnic conflicts have become a recurring threat to peace and economic development. The continent's ethno-cultural diversity, while a source of rich heritage, has often been politicised, leading to violent confrontations and social disintegration (Aremu & Owonikoko, 2018). In countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, and Ethiopia, ethnic hostilities have not only resulted in massive human casualties but have also severely disrupted trade networks and market interactions, limiting the movement of goods and services (Mbaku, 2021). The Rwandan genocide of 1994, for example, destroyed the economic base of communities, leading to the collapse of informal and cross-border trading systems that once sustained rural livelihoods (Nkurunziza, 2020). Similarly, in the Horn of Africa, recurring conflicts between pastoral and agricultural groups have disrupted

livestock markets and reduced regional trade integration (Okoth & Yieke, 2019). These regional experiences illustrate how ethnic violence undermines both subsistence and commercial economies, stifling entrepreneurial growth and local market systems.

In Nigeria, ethnic conflicts have become an entrenched feature of the nation's socio-political landscape, with implications for national unity, security, and economic stability. As Africa's most populous and ethnically diverse country, Nigeria has experienced repeated conflicts arising from competition over political power, access to resources, religious identity, and cultural dominance (Adebayo, 2021). Notable ethnic clashes, such as those between the Tiv and Jukun in Taraba and Benue States, the Ife-Modakeke conflict in Osun State, and the recurrent herder-farmer crises across the Middle Belt, have had severe consequences for trade and commerce (Iroegbu & Ojo, 2020). These conflicts often lead to the destruction of markets, loss of goods, and displacement of traders, thus crippling local economies and deepening poverty. According to Omilusi (2019), ethnic conflicts in Nigeria not only disorganise trade networks but also erode social trust and inter-ethnic cooperation, both of which are vital for market exchange and economic growth. The disruption of road transportation, closure of local markets, and the creation of insecurity zones further discourage investment and restrict the free flow of goods and services.

Within Taraba State, ethnic conflict has remained one of the most critical impediments to peace, economic development, and social cohesion. The state's multi-ethnic composition, comprising groups such as the Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb, Chamba, Wurkum, and Ichen, has historically supported vibrant trade and inter-community cooperation; however, persistent disputes over land ownership, political representation, and resource control have increasingly triggered violent confrontations (Akaayar & Ibrahim, 2021). These conflicts have been particularly severe in the Southern Senatorial District, which covers Wukari, Donga, Takum, Ibi, and Ussa Local Government Areas, where markets once served as thriving hubs for agricultural and livestock exchange. Recurrent clashes, especially between the Jukun and Tiv groups, have resulted in the burning of major markets such as the Wukari main market, destruction of road networks linking rural producers to urban consumers, and mass displacement of traders (Ibrahim & Musa, 2023).

The looting of goods, closure of trade routes, and prevailing insecurity seem to have severely undermined trading and marketing activities, potentially forcing many businesses to collapse. As a result, agricultural output has likely declined, transport and

storage costs have increased, and household incomes have diminished, possibly plunging many families into deeper poverty. These developments may collectively represent a significant setback to inter-ethnic economic cooperation and could pose a major obstacle to sustainable development across Southern Taraba.

Despite the recurrence of violent episodes in Southern Taraba, there remains limited empirical research exploring the specific economic consequences of ethnic conflict on trading and marketing systems in the region. Existing scholarship on ethnic conflict in Nigeria has largely emphasised political, religious, and security dimensions (Iroegbu & Ojo, 2020; Omilusi, 2019), with minimal focus on how such conflicts disrupt market interactions and local commerce. As a result, critical questions about the extent to which ethnic violence affects trade networks, the coping mechanisms of affected traders, and the overall impact on household livelihoods remain inadequately addressed. This knowledge gap constrains policymakers and peacebuilding actors from designing interventions that effectively tackle the economic roots of the conflict. Moreover, while government and non-governmental initiatives have prioritised reconciliation and security restoration, limited attention has been paid to rebuilding market infrastructure, supporting displaced traders, or restoring commercial confidence (Atsen & Damkor, 2022).

Consequently, economic recovery in conflict-prone areas has been slow, heightening dependence on aid and increasing household vulnerability. Beyond the immediate loss of property and trade opportunities, the recurring ethnic clashes have eroded inter-ethnic trust, the foundation of commerce, thereby weakening cooperative market relations and discouraging investment. The resulting decline in market participation has pushed many young people toward unemployment, migration, or participation in violent groups, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and instability (Onoja, 2022). Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the effects of ethnic conflict on trading and marketing activities in the Southern Taraba Senatorial District, to provide empirical insights that can guide conflict-sensitive economic policies and peacebuilding strategies aimed at restoring sustainable trade and inter-ethnic coexistence in the region.

## **Literature Review**

Ethnic conflict remains one of the most complex and recurrent challenges affecting socio-economic development globally. It refers to violent confrontations between groups distinguished by ethnic, cultural, or religious identities, often driven by competition over

political power, land, and economic resources (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023). Across many regions, such conflicts have disrupted markets, displaced populations, and weakened intergroup trust essential for stable commerce. According to Stewart (2021), ethnic violence has far-reaching economic consequences, including the destruction of productive assets, the breakdown of trade networks, and the deterioration of local investment climates. These effects are particularly pronounced in agrarian and market-dependent societies, where trading activities constitute the main livelihood source.

Globally, the economic implications of ethnic conflict have been extensively examined in contexts such as the Balkans, the Middle East, and parts of Asia. For instance, Kalyvas (2020) observed that protracted ethnic wars in the Balkans resulted in the destruction of infrastructure, restricted mobility, and the disintegration of inter-ethnic trade relations. Similarly, Collier (2021) found that violent identity-based conflicts in Africa and Asia reduced regional trade volumes by over 50%, largely due to transportation disruptions and loss of business confidence. These findings underscore that ethnic conflict not only destroys physical markets but also erodes the social capital and trust that underpin exchange systems.

Similarly, numerous African studies have demonstrated the significant economic toll of ethnic conflict on market economies. In East Africa, for example, Oucho (2020) reported that recurrent inter-ethnic clashes in Kenya's Rift Valley disrupted agricultural supply chains and forced many traders to relocate, resulting in severe price distortions and food shortages. In Uganda, Muhumuza (2021) found that traders in conflict-prone districts faced recurrent losses from looting, border blockades, and increased transport costs. Similarly, Omotayo (2022) observed that ethnic polarisation in Ethiopia's Oromia region led to the destruction of market centres, reduced investment, and persistent poverty. These studies highlight the structural link between ethnic peace and market functionality in developing economies.

In Nigeria, the dynamics of ethnic conflict and its economic dimensions have received growing attention in recent scholarship. Studies such as those by Omilusi (2019) and Iroegbu and Ojo (2020) emphasised that ethnic conflicts in Nigeria often stem from political exclusion, economic marginalisation, and competition for local resources. However, while these works mainly explore the political and security aspects, few have

examined how these conflicts affect trading and marketing systems. Ajaegbu (2021) revealed that ethnic violence in Kaduna State resulted in the closure of major markets and the relocation of both Christian and Muslim traders to segregated trading zones, thereby reducing intergroup commercial cooperation. Similarly, Onyishi and Okoli (2022) found that in Plateau State, recurrent ethnic clashes led to the destruction of market stalls and transportation barriers that discouraged farmers and traders from attending periodic markets.

In the North-East region, where Taraba State is located, several studies have documented the severe socio-economic disruptions caused by ethnic and communal conflicts. Adeoye (2022) noted that repeated ethnic hostilities in the region had displaced thousands of traders and destroyed local market structures, especially in rural communities. Atsen and Damkor (2022) observed that government and non-governmental interventions in Southern Taraba had focused primarily on peace and reconciliation, while neglecting the reconstruction of damaged market facilities and the economic rehabilitation of displaced traders. This limited attention to economic recovery has slowed post-conflict development and increased dependence on humanitarian aid.

Empirical evidence further shows that the erosion of inter-ethnic trust significantly undermines market stability. Onoja (2022) found that recurrent violence in Taraba State discouraged cross-ethnic trading partnerships and weakened social networks that previously facilitated informal credit and supply chains. The study emphasised that when traders no longer trust one another, markets lose their integrative function, resulting in fragmented economies and rising unemployment. Similarly, Danjuma and Zira (2023) reported that ethnic tensions in Southern Taraba led to reduced market participation among youths, many of whom turned to migration or informal survival strategies. These outcomes underscore that, beyond immediate property destruction, ethnic conflict disrupts the psychological and relational foundations of commerce.

Recent research also highlights the broader developmental implications of conflict-induced trade disruption. According to the World Bank (2023), the loss of local market confidence in conflict-prone areas constrains private investment, reduces household income, and perpetuates cycles of poverty and instability. In Nigeria, the situation is aggravated by weak post-conflict recovery frameworks and inadequate government compensation schemes (Eze & Nwokedi, 2023). Scholars such as Alubo (2022) and Yusuf

and Garba (2023) argue that sustainable peacebuilding must integrate economic rehabilitation through market reconstruction, trader support funds, and trust-rebuilding initiatives.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Frustration–Aggression Theory**

The Frustration–Aggression Theory was originally developed by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer, and Robert Sears in 1939 through their work *Frustration and Aggression*. The theory was later expanded by Leonard Berkowitz (1962, 1989), who argued that frustration creates an emotional readiness for aggression, especially when accompanied by anger and environmental cues that trigger hostile responses. Historically, the theory has been used to explain violent reactions that arise when individuals or groups are prevented from achieving desired goals or when perceived injustices block access to valued resources.

At its core, the theory assumes that aggression is a direct result of frustration caused by goal obstruction. When people or groups feel deprived of opportunities, economic, political, or social, they may channel their anger toward those perceived as responsible. This can lead to direct or displaced aggression, particularly in multi-ethnic societies where historical grievances and inequalities exist (Berkowitz, 1989). The theory suggests that persistent frustration without resolution fosters a buildup of aggression that can manifest as intergroup violence or social unrest.

In the context of this study, the Frustration–Aggression Theory helps explain how ethnic conflict in Southern Taraba arises from perceived marginalisation, unequal access to trading opportunities, and competition over economic resources. When one ethnic group feels excluded from market benefits or political influence, frustration sets in and may escalate into violent clashes, destruction of markets, and displacement of traders. These aggressive outcomes disrupt local commerce, weaken inter-ethnic trust, and deepen poverty (Adewale & Olayemi, 2021).

A major strength of the theory lies in its psychological insight into the connection between deprivation, anger, and aggression, making it relevant for understanding ethnic violence. It also underscores the importance of addressing socio-economic inequalities to prevent conflict. However, its main weakness is that it tends to overgeneralize aggression as the only response to frustration and underestimates structural, political, and cultural factors

that influence conflict dynamics (Okoli & Nwosu, 2020). Despite this limitation, the theory remains valuable for interpreting how unaddressed frustrations among groups in Southern Taraba can escalate into violent conflict that undermines trading and marketing activities.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design to investigate the effects of ethnic conflict on socio-economic activities in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. This design was deemed appropriate because it enabled the collection of objective data from respondents without manipulating any variables, thereby allowing for an accurate description of existing conditions as perceived by the population.

The target population consisted of all adult males and females residing in the Southern Taraba Senatorial District, estimated at 1,071,500. Using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula at a 0.09 level of significance, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined to ensure adequate representation. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select participants across the five Local Government Areas, Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari, to guarantee equitable inclusion of respondents from diverse communities within the district.

A structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for quantitative data collection. The instrument consisted of items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Out of the 400 questionnaires administered, 350 were successfully retrieved and analysed, representing an 87.5% response rate. A mean score benchmark of 2.5 was used for interpretation: mean values above 2.5 indicated a significant effect of ethnic conflict on socio-economic activities, while scores below 2.5 suggested minimal or no effect.

To complement the quantitative data, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with traditional and religious leaders to obtain qualitative insights into the socio-economic implications of ethnic conflict. These interviews provided contextual understanding and enriched the interpretation of quantitative findings.

Data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed to

summarise responses. Lower standard deviation values indicated greater consensus among respondents, while higher values reflected variability in opinions. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative analyses provided a comprehensive understanding of how ethnic conflict affects socio-economic activities in Southern Taraba Senatorial District.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1. Respondents' rating of the Effects of Ethnic Conflicts on Trading and Marketing Activities in Southern Taraba Senatorial District**

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev
A rapid increase in the price of commodities	264	34	35	36	17	4.27	1.18
Destruction of the place, shops and their valuables	264	54	17	35	16	4.33	1.15
Reduction in inter/intra-state demand and supplies of commodities	185	124	14	48	15	4.07	1.11
Difficulty in trading/marketing of perishable goods	281	36	17	34	18	4.37	1.30
Ethnic crises have contributed to rising poverty and hunger in southern Taraba	298	35	0	36	17	4.45	1.23
Migration	229	75	32	31	19	4.20	1.16

Source: field work 2024

Table 1 presents the responses of 400 participants regarding the effects of ethnic conflicts on trading and marketing activities in Southern Taraba Senatorial District. Using a 5-point Likert scale, all items recorded mean scores well above the midpoint of 2.5, indicating a strong consensus among respondents that ethnic conflicts have significantly disrupted commercial and economic activities in the area.

The item with the highest mean score was the statement that “ethnic crises have contributed to rising poverty and hunger in Southern Taraba” (Mean = 4.45, Std. Dev = 1.23). This shows that respondents overwhelmingly believe that recurring conflicts have deepened economic hardship by displacing traders, reducing access to markets, and limiting livelihood opportunities. Closely following this is the perception that “difficulty in trading/marketing of perishable goods” (Mean = 4.37, Std. Dev = 1.30) is a major consequence of ethnic violence, as insecurity and restricted movement prevent timely sales, leading to losses and food spoilage.

Similarly, the item “destruction of marketplaces, shops, and valuables” recorded a high mean score of 4.33 (Std. Dev = 1.15), indicating widespread agreement that physical destruction caused by conflicts has devastated commercial infrastructure and discouraged investment. The statement “rapid increase in price of commodities” (Mean = 4.27, Std. Dev = 1.18) further highlights how supply chain disruptions and reduced trade flows have caused inflation and economic instability within the region.

In addition, respondents agreed that “migration” (Mean = 4.20, Std. Dev = 1.16) is a major effect of ethnic conflict, suggesting that traders and consumers often flee to safer areas, thereby weakening local markets and reducing economic activities. The item with the lowest mean, though still high, was “reduction in inter/intra-state demand and supplies of commodities” (Mean = 4.07, Std. Dev = 1.11), reflecting that insecurity limits trade linkages both within and beyond the region.

The qualitative interviews further corroborate these findings, providing vivid accounts of how such conflicts have devastated local economic life.

A 57-year-old religious leader narrated:

*“Many shops and houses were burned during the ethnic conflict. Both Christian and Muslim traders suffered enormous losses as their sources of livelihood were destroyed. Area boys took advantage of the situation to loot shops and other valuable properties.” (KII/M/57/Traditional ruler/Southern Taraba Senatorial District/06-10-2024).*

Similarly, a 39-year-old respondent recounted his experience during the crisis:

*“Access roads were completely blocked, and all markets and shops were closed. Youths were struggling to buy bread from a nearby bakery across the street. Each time violence erupted, the government imposed curfews, making trading impossible. Vendors and buyers could not operate normally, and many people remained indoors for days, counting their losses.” (KII/M/39/Religious Leader/Southern Taraba Senatorial District/10-10-2024).*

These narratives illustrate the direct economic consequences of ethnic conflict on everyday commerce. Markets become unsafe and inaccessible, transport routes are disrupted, and the destruction of trading spaces discourages both local and inter-state transactions. Consequently, traders face economic hardship, while consumers experience shortages and rising prices of essential goods.

Overall, the combined quantitative and qualitative evidence underscores that ethnic conflict in Southern Taraba Senatorial District has profoundly undermined the stability of trade and marketing systems. It has not only destroyed physical infrastructure but also eroded trust and cooperation among trading communities that are essential for sustainable local commerce.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicate that ethnic conflict in Southern Taraba Senatorial District exerts deep and widespread impacts on trading and marketing activities, undermining both economic stability and social harmony in the region. Data obtained from surveys and key informant interviews reveal that recurrent violent confrontations have resulted in the destruction of market infrastructure, extensive looting of goods, displacement of traders, and severe disruptions in transport routes connecting rural producers with urban markets. These developments have significantly diminished household earnings, heightened poverty, and weakened the bonds of inter-ethnic trust that are essential for sustainable commerce and peaceful community relations.

The observed patterns align with the findings of Ibrahim and Musa (2023), who reported that recurrent ethnic violence in North-Central Nigeria leads to the closure of markets and loss of livelihoods, and Onoja (2022), who found that trade disruptions and displacement in conflict-prone areas significantly reduce household incomes and consumer access to essential goods. Furthermore, the belief among some respondents that economic setbacks following violent clashes are spiritually influenced underscores how cultural interpretations shape people's understanding of insecurity and loss. Collectively, the study concludes that the effects of ethnic conflict on trading and marketing activities in Southern Taraba are not isolated or temporary occurrences but systemic manifestations of insecurity, institutional weakness, and socio-cultural fragmentation. Addressing these challenges requires sustained peacebuilding, economic recovery programmes, and inclusive governance measures that restore trust, rebuild markets, and promote inter-ethnic cooperation for lasting stability.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following measures are recommended to mitigate the negative effects of ethnic conflict on trading and marketing activities in Southern Taraba Senatorial District:

- i. **Promotion of Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Peacebuilding Mechanisms:** Local governments, traditional rulers, and community-based organisations should establish peace committees that foster dialogue among ethnic groups. These committees should mediate disputes before they escalate into violence and promote mutual understanding through periodic peace forums and cultural exchange activities.
- ii. **Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Market Infrastructure:** The Taraba State Government, in collaboration with development partners, should prioritise the rebuilding of destroyed markets, storage facilities, and transport routes. Such infrastructural restoration would facilitate the resumption of normal trading activities and restore confidence among traders and consumers.
- iii. **Enhanced Security Presence in Conflict-Prone Areas:** Security agencies should increase surveillance and patrols along major trade routes and marketplaces, especially in border areas between conflicting communities. A visible and neutral security presence can deter violence and safeguard the movement of goods and people.
- iv. **Integration of Peace Education into Community and School Programs:** Peace education should be incorporated into both formal and informal learning systems to nurture values of tolerance, cooperation, and non-violence, thereby addressing the root causes of ethnic hostilities that disrupt trade and development in Southern Taraba.

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