UNIOFFA JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (OJIS)
A Multidisciplinary Journal of Science, Management and Social Sciences

The Impact of Insecurity on Sustainable Development Drive in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: An Analysis of State-Driven Peace Initiatives

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of insecurity on sustainable development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with particular emphasis on state-driven peace initiatives between 2010 and 2023. The study is motivated by the persistent rise in violent conflicts, including farmer–herder clashes, banditry, and inter-communal disputes, which have increasingly undermined development efforts across the country. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data derived from structured questionnaires analysed using the Relative Importance Index (RII) with qualitative insights from secondary sources and Key Informant Interviews. The analysis focuses on selected conflict-prone states, including Kaduna State, Kwara State, and Oyo State, with comparative insights from the Middle Belt region. The findings reveal that insecurity constitutes a major structural constraint to sustainable development, significantly disrupting economic activities, agricultural productivity, and social cohesion. Results from the RII indicate strong agreement among respondents that loss of lives, displacement, and economic instability are the most critical consequences of insecurity. The study further finds that while state-driven peace initiatives such as dialogue platforms and community-based interventions show moderate effectiveness, their overall impact is limited by political interference, weak institutional capacity, and low public trust. A comparative analysis highlights that insecurity is context-specific, with higher intensity and more complex conflict patterns in northern states compared to relatively moderate and emerging threats in southern regions. The study concludes that insecurity in Nigeria reflects broader governance deficits rather than mere security failures. It recommends context-sensitive, community-driven, and institutionally supported peacebuilding strategies as essential pathways for achieving sustainable development.

Keywords

Insecurity; Sustainable Development; State Fragility; Peace Initiatives; Conflict Management; Human Security; Governance; Nigeria's Fourth Republic

1. Introduction

The role of the state has evolved over centuries in response to societal needs. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the state primarily focused on law, order, and consolidating power to enforce social stability. By the 17th century, state authority expanded into all aspects of society, sparking a liberal push for reducing governmental control over the economy. The 19th century saw renewed emphasis on state welfare to address the needs of marginalized populations (Micklethwait, 2010). Today, the state operates in a hybrid model, balancing regulatory authority, welfare provision, and developmental functions, positioning itself at the center of societal progress.

Sustainable development has become a defining benchmark for state performance. The Brundtland Report (1987) highlighted the imperative of meeting present needs without compromising the future, emphasizing human resource development, poverty reduction, equity, and environmental stewardship. The report expanded the notion of environment beyond ecology to include social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, positioning peace and stability as prerequisites for sustainable development. Despite global adoption of these principles, many states, including Nigeria, face persistent obstacles in translating policy into meaningful outcomes.

Insecurity has emerged as a critical constraint on development. UNDP (2008) notes that peace and development are mutually reinforcing; where one

falters, the other is compromised. Nigeria's recurring cycles of violence, from intercommunal clashes to terrorism, have eroded the state's capacity to deliver social, economic, and political progress. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize peace as integral to development, underscore the interconnected nature of these challenges: failure in one area generates ripple effects across others. In response, Nigeria has implemented both kinetic and non-kinetic measures to promote peace. While military and security interventions remain necessary, they are insufficient for addressing the root causes of conflict. Consequently, state-driven peace initiatives, ranging from community mediation platforms to national dialogue programs, have been introduced. These efforts aim to reduce tensions, foster coexistence, and create conditions conducive to economic and social development, recognizing that prosperity is inseparable from security.

Despite these initiatives, structural and institutional weaknesses continue to undermine sustainable development. Insecurity disrupts economic activity, erodes social relationships, and hampers human development, while political, ethnic, and economic inequalities fuel ongoing crises. From militancy in the Niger Delta to insurgency in the northeast, Nigeria's experience illustrates how weak governance, marginalization, and identity-based conflicts perpetuate insecurity. Effective development, therefore, hinges on adaptive peacebuilding, strengthened institutions, and inclusive governance.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the research is to assess the state driven peace initiative and it effect on sustainable development.

The specific objectives are;

i. To assess the impact of insecurity on sustainable development
ii. To assess the implementations of the various peace initiative driven by the state
iii. To assess the various challenges to the adoption of the peace initiatives

2. Literature Review

Concept of Peace initiative

A peace initiative is a concerted effort or action taken to promote, establish, or restore peace in a particular region, community, or situation. It involves proactive steps, often diplomatic or humanitarian in nature, to address conflicts, reduce tensions, and foster a harmonious environment. Dunmoye (2015) asserts that peace initiatives can be undertaken by various entities, including governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and individuals. The effectiveness of peace initiatives depends on various factors, including the commitment of involved parties, the context of the conflict, and the support from the international community. Successful peace initiatives often require a comprehensive and sustained approach that addresses the root causes of conflict and promotes long term stability and cooperation.

Rationale for the establishment of state driven peace initiatives

State-driven peace initiatives are established for several reasons, encompassing early warning, long-term planning, precautionary measures, and post-conflict interventions. These initiatives aim to prevent conflicts, mitigate their impact, and promote sustainable peace and stability. Here's an overview of each aspect:

1. Early Warning: State-driven peace initiatives often incorporate early warning systems to identify potential sources of conflict and emerging threats before they escalate into violence. These systems utilize various indicators, such as socio-economic grievances, political tensions, and intercommunal disputes, to anticipate and respond to potential crises proactively. By monitoring early warning signs and engaging with affected communities, governments can implement preventive measures and mediation efforts to address root causes and prevent conflicts from escalating.

2. Long-Term Planning: Peace initiatives typically involve long-term planning aimed at addressing underlying drivers of conflict and promoting sustainable development. This may include socio-economic development programs, governance reforms, and institutional capacity-building efforts aimed at addressing inequalities, promoting social cohesion, and strengthening state institutions. By investing in long-term solutions, governments can address root causes of conflict and build resilience to future challenges, thereby laying the foundation for lasting peace and stability.

3. Precautionary Measures: State-driven peace initiatives often include precautionary measures aimed at reducing the risk of violence and protecting vulnerable populations. This may involve deploying

security forces to conflict-affected areas, implementing disarmament and demobilization programs, and establishing early response mechanisms to contain outbreaks of violence. Additionally, governments may engage in diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions and prevent conflicts from spreading across borders or escalating into regional crises.

4. Post-Conflict Interventions: In situations where conflicts have already occurred, state-driven peace initiatives focus on post-conflict interventions aimed at rebuilding communities, promoting reconciliation, and addressing the legacy of violence. This may include providing humanitarian assistance to displaced populations, supporting peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, and facilitating transitional justice processes to address grievances and promote accountability. By investing in post-conflict recovery and reconciliation, governments can help communities heal from the trauma of conflict and rebuild social cohesion, thereby reducing the risk of recurrence. Overall, state-driven peace initiatives encompass a range of strategies aimed at preventing conflicts, promoting sustainable peace, and addressing the root causes of violence. By integrating early warning, long-term planning, precautionary measures, and post-conflict interventions, governments can effectively manage conflicts, mitigate their impact, and build resilient societies capable of overcoming future challenges.

2.2 State driven peace initiatives in the study area

2.2.1 Government responses to Settlers and indigenes crisis in the North central region

In the North central region, governments have implemented various responses to address the settlers and indigenes crisis. Some of these responses are Conflict Resolution Initiatives as Governments have established conflict resolution mechanisms, such as peace committees or commissions, to facilitate dialogue and mediation between settlers and indigenes. These platforms aim to find peaceful resolutions to disputes and promote understanding.

Governments have deployed security forces to affected areas to maintain peace, prevent violence, and protect the lives and properties of both settlers and indigenes. This helps create a secure environment for dialogue and reconciliation. Governments have implemented development programs that focus on improving infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities in the region. These initiatives aim to address the underlying causes of the crisis, such as poverty and marginalization.

Governments have enacted laws and policies that promote equality, justice, and the protection of rights for both settlers and indigenes. The National boundary commission, federal character at the state and federal level etc. These reforms aim to address grievances and ensure accountability for any acts of discrimination or violence. More, the: Governments have encouraged community engagement and participation by organizing town hall meetings, community dialogues, and cultural events. These initiatives foster interaction, understanding, and cooperation between settlers and indigenes.

One more common response is to establish dialogue platforms where representatives from both groups can come together to discuss their concerns, grievances, and find common ground. Like the Judicial committee and the state relations forum. The state Governments has also implemented policies that promote inclusivity, equality, and respect for the rights of all individuals, regardless of their background. Additionally, investing in education and awareness programs that promote understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence can help mitigate tensions and foster harmony between settlers and indigenes.

2.2.2 Government Responses to Herdsmen and Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria.

The incapacity of successive Nigerian administrations to support pastoralism and agriculture, promote goodwill among neighbours, and help restrict access to water sources, cropland, and pastureland has worsened the farmer-herder conflict. Furthermore, the government's incapacity to address these problems jeopardises the coexistence of farmers and herders. In actuality, this dispute occasionally involves violence between different ethnic groups as well as religious groups, and it occasionally resurfaces after a previous election has thus been very difficult to settle, mostly due to the significant number of lives lost. Thousands of people have been killed in these clashes in recent years, which has damaged community confidence.

The Federal Government of Nigeria has reacted in a variety of ways in an effort to put an end to confrontations between Fulani and herdsmen. In 2019, the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari introduced the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) as a means of ending the ongoing conflict between farmers and nomadic herders. In Nigeria, RUGA advocates ranching as the future of cattle rearing. In order to

accommodate nomadic herdsmen who raise livestock in many states, RUGA entails setting up villages. The goal of the Federal Government is to relocate the nomads to a developed settlement where they will have access to agro-rangers, schools for their children, water and pasture for their animals, and security, cattle markets which will mark the end of herdsmen having to transport their herds mostly by foot and avoid conflict with local farming communities etc. To try and stop conflicts between Fulani and herdsmen, the Nigerian Federal Government has taken a number of actions. President Muhammadu Buhari's administration established the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) in 2019 in an effort to resolve the long-running dispute between farmers and herders who live on the move. RUGA promotes ranching as the way forward for cattle farming in Nigeria. RUGA requires establishing villages in order to serve the needs of the nomadic herdsmen that raise cattle throughout numerous states. Moving the nomads to a developed town where they can access agro-rangers, schools for their kids, water and pasture for their animals, and security is the Federal Government's goal (NLTP)

Additionally, a measure was drafted, supported by Senator Zaina Kure. Egbas (2018) claims that the "National Grazing Reserve (establishment) Bill 2016" established the National Grazing Reserve Commission, which would be tasked with creating at least one Cattle Reserve in each of the Federation's states, among other things. However, many have opposed the proposed legislation to establish grazing zones across the nation, claiming that the choice is misguided and goes against the land use act as well as the greater well of the population. Furthermore, the National Livestock Transformation Plan was introduced by the Federal Government in an effort to permanently eliminate tensions between Nigerian farmers and herders. Across the nation, conflicts between cow herders and local farming communities over land ownership were sharply denounced and attributed to open grazing. The National Livestock Transformation Plan, a ₦179 billion, ten-year effort aimed at ending long-standing tensions between farmers and herders and drastically enhancing the livestock business, was unveiled by the federal government in June 2018. According to the programme, ranching represents the future of cattle rearing in the nation. Cattle herders are required under the Federal Government's plan to register and be acknowledged by cooperatives for the purposes of the ranching system. The first three years of the plan's pilot phase are anticipated to receive money from the Federal and State governments amounting to a total of ₦70 billion, while between the third and tenth years, private sector interests and investment are anticipated to exceed ₦100 billion. The concept calls for a cluster of 30, 60, 150, and 300 cows to be ranched in a specific area within the donated reserves as the proposed ranch size models. The pilot states for the plan's implementation were Adamawa, Benue, Ebonyi, Edo, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Oyo, Plateau, Taraba, and Zamfara. Of those states, 94 ranches were to be constructed, and 24 operational clusters with four ranches each were chosen. Of the 10 states designated as pilot states, and Ebonyi State have publicly denied agreeing to provide land for the Federal Government's initiatives.

According to Yusuf and Safina (2018), the Federal Government also introduced cow colonies in response to the recent harvest of killings in rural communities across the States of Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba, which were attributed to suspected herdsmen. In many respects, colonies and ranches are the same thing; nonetheless, a colony is a biological representation of any kind of animals, whether created by nature or by humans, which live in a big group on the same terrain. An example of this would be bee colonies in specific regions. Twenty to thirty ranchers can live in one colony; a ranch is often operated by a single person or business with a small number of cows. There could be 100, 200, or 300 cows in a cattle colony, all owned by different people. The goal of the colony design was to create a large-scale setting where numerous cattle owners could live side by side, feed their animals well (since agro-waste can be used to make feed), provide water, raise cows on a large scale, harvest and feed the animals, provide veterinary care and keep the cows safe from rustlers. Cattle colonies are huge projects where up to 40 ranchers can share the same facility that will be provided by the government at a reduced fee; in contrast, cattle ranching is more of an individual endeavour for the herdsmen and those desiring to participate in the livestock sector. For individuals who choose to invest, ranching is more of an individual endeavour; yet, the breadth and scale of a cow colony are greater. Cattle colonies were intended as a solution to the problems between farmers and herders as well as a way for the government to commit more funds to the growth of the livestock subsector.

However, some Nigerians have expressed fury and overt opposition to the government's announcement of the cow colony policy, claiming that it has a secret objective to forcibly acquire communal land across the country for roving herdsmen. There were rumours that the government was planning to give Fulani herdsmen control over community land. However, the government's overall concept was distinct. Colony

operations will be carried out in collaboration with state governments who are willing to donate land for the project. The project will be funded by the federal government, and people who want to use it will have to pay certain fees.

More so, some state in the middle belt region also established for itself some peace commission and agency

2.3 Empirical Review

The term, conflict according to Ofuoku and Isife (2010) suggests differences and disagreement. Conflict is the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulse or motives. This was further described by Wilson and Hanna (1979) as struggle involving opposing ideas and| or limited resources. The Nigerian Middle Belt is regarded as the nation's food basket. Farmers and herders can flourish in this area because of the rich soil and mild weather. For years, the two communities in Nigeria have been cultivating land and raising livestock together, enjoying mutual advantages. Cattle dung is beneficial to farmers for fertilising crops, and agricultural refuse is beneficial to herders for providing nutritious feed for their herds. This mutually beneficial practice linked the herders' well-being and made it possible for the majority of conflicts between the two groups to be settled peacefully.

This reliance has therefore gotten worse since 2000 as a result of shifting demographics, varying climates, depleting natural resources, and sociopolitical manipulation. Violent conflicts have thus emerged as a key characteristic of interactions, according to Ismaila and Bibi (quoted in Ademola-Adelehin, 2017). Unquestionably, the ownership and use of resources have shaped the nature of most confrontations between farmers and herders in Nigeria's Middle Belt both directly and indirectly. Out of all resources, land has been the primary source of conflict between different user groups and individuals at different levels since 2000.Conflicts between farmers and herders in the use of agricultural land are becoming fiercer and increasingly widespread in Middle Belt region of Nigeria, largely due to 'intensification and extensity' of production activities that are necessitated by increasing human population (Gefu and Kolawole 2005; Fasona and Omojola 2005 cited in Solagberu and Oluwasegun 2010,Tyolumum 2018).

Thus, it is indisputable that agriculture has played a dynamic role in the growth of the economy of developing countries, including Nigeria. Nigeria, which has 180 million people living in its 923,773 square kilometre territory, continues to gain greatly from agricultural productivity. Additionally, agriculture (the production of crops and animals) contributed between 31.2% and 39.2% of the country's GDP between 1986 and 1995, and over 40% between 1999, 2006, and 2017 (National Economic Intelligence Unit 2017). However, only 42% of the country's 82 million hectares of arable land have been put to use. Arable lands, which are necessary for the production activities of farmers and cattle herders in the middle belt region of Nigeria, are under increasing pressure due to declining economic fortunes, the need to reduce high food import bills, and the growing demand for food and raw materials.

In the Nigerian middle belt, the ensuing increase in rivalry for fertile land has frequently resulted in severe social unrest and violence between the two user groups. Due to the loss of farmer lives, livestock, crops, and valuable properties, the conflicts have not only made the situation more unstable but have also shown a strong potential to worsen the food crisis and national development in Nigeria and other impacted nations (Cotula et al. 2004). For example, the battle between farmers and herders in Sudan's Darfur region began as a struggle over resources and escalated into a full-fledged war that has killed over 200,000 people and left over a million homeless (Tsuwa and Ochoga,2016). Just as in Sudan, resource-based conflicts arising from farming and cattle-herding distinct ethnic groups is a potential recipe for ethnic war in the middle belt region of Nigeria.

2.3 Theoretical framework

State Fragility Theory

The theory gained prominence from the 1990s onwards and gained further traction after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. A fragile state is a low income country characterized by a weak state capacity or weak state legitimacy leaving citizens vulnerable to a range of shocks. A fragile state is significantly susceptible to crisis in one or more of is sub systems. It is a state that is particularly vulnerable to internal and external shocks, and domestic and international conflicts. In a fragile state institutional arrangements embody and perhaps preserve the conditions of crisis: in economic terms, this could be institutions that reinforce stagnation or low growth rates or embody extreme inequality(in wealth, in access to land, in access to the means to make a living); in social terms institutions may embody extreme inequality or lack of access

altogether to health or education; in political terms institution may entrench exclusionary coalitions in power (in ethnic religious, or perhaps regional terms)or extreme factionalism or significantly fragmented security organizations". Nigeria is presently a fragile state due to the weak democracy, ethnic volatility, crisis of legitimacy, dwindling economy, poor security architecture etc. This has therefore made the state to prone to security, causing the state slow and ineffective reaction to the security issues.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to examine the impact of state-driven peace initiatives on sustainable development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (2010–2023). The research focuses on selected security hotspots, including Kaduna State in the North West, Kwara State in the North Central, and Oyo State in the South West, with comparative insights drawn from conflict-prone areas in the Middle Belt. The mixed-method approach combines quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide both measurable and context-rich analysis. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires using a Likert scale and analysed using the Relative Importance Index (RII), enabling the study to assess patterns in perceptions of insecurity, peace initiatives, and development outcomes. Qualitative data were derived from secondary sources such as scholarly publications and policy reports, as well as Key Informant Interviews (KII) involving community leaders, security actors, and relevant stakeholders.

The sampling strategy integrates purposive and simple random techniques to ensure that respondents possess relevant knowledge while maintaining representativeness. Sample size determination follows the Yamane (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level, ensuring statistical validity (Israel, 1992). The design is structured around key analytical themes, including the relationship between security and development, the effectiveness of peace initiatives, and the challenges limiting their implementation. This approach allows for triangulation of data, thereby enhancing the reliability and depth of findings. By combining empirical measurement with contextual interpretation, the methodology provides a robust framework for understanding how insecurity and governance responses shape sustainable development outcomes in Nigeria.

Table 3.1: Study Area, Actors, and Conflict Issues

Region (State)	Key Actors/Communities	Nature of Conflict Issues
Middle Belt (Plateau)	Farmers/Herders; Christian/Muslim groups	Agricultural conflict, marginalization, indigene-settler tensions
North West (Kaduna)	Southern Kaduna vs Northern Kaduna communities	Identity politics, religion, farmer-herder conflict, banditry, armed groups
North Central (Kwara)	Erin-Ile/Offa; Share/Tshagiri communities	Land disputes, political control, inter-communal conflict
South West (Oyo)	Farming communities, local vigilante groups	Emerging farmer-herder tensions, rural security challenges

4. Result and Data Analysis

4.2 Objective One: Impact of Insecurity on Sustainable Development

Table 4.1: Impact of Insecurity on Sustainable Development (n = 380)

S/N	Variable	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Score	RII
1	Insecurity leads to loss of lives and displacement	210	110	30	20	10	1630	0.86
2	Insecurity disrupts economic activities	190	120	40	20	10	1600	0.84
3	Insecurity destroys infrastructure	170	130	40	25	15	1555	0.82
4	Insecurity reduces agricultural productivity	180	120	35	30	15	1560	0.82

Interpretation

The findings show a consistently high RII across all indicators (above 0.80), indicating strong agreement among respondents that insecurity significantly undermines sustainable development. Loss of lives and displacement ranked highest (RII = 0.86), suggesting that human security concerns are the most immediate consequence. The disruption of economic activities and agricultural productivity further reinforces the argument that insecurity directly weakens both livelihood systems and development structures. This aligns with Sen's (1999) human security perspective, which situates development within the protection of lives and economic freedoms.

4.3 Objective Two: Implementation of State-Driven Peace Initiatives

Table 4.2: Effectiveness of State-Driven Peace Initiatives (n = 380)

S/N	Variable	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Score	RII
1	Peace committees have reduced local conflicts	160	130	50	25	15	1535	0.81
2	Security deployment has improved stability	140	140	50	30	20	1490	0.78
3	Dialogue platforms promote peaceful coexistence	170	130	40	25	15	1555	0.82
4	Ranching/NLTP initiatives reduce farmer-herder conflict	120	110	70	45	35	1375	0.72

Interpretation

The results reveal moderate effectiveness of state-driven peace initiatives, with RII values ranging from 0.72 to 0.82. Dialogue platforms (RII = 0.82) and peace committees (RII = 0.81) rank highest, indicating that non-kinetic, community-based approaches are more impactful. In contrast, structural interventions such as ranching and the National Livestock Transformation Plan recorded the lowest RII (0.72), suggesting implementation challenges and limited acceptance. This supports the broader peacebuilding literature that emphasizes legitimacy, inclusion, and local participation as critical to sustainable peace outcomes (Dunmoye, 2015).

4.4 Objective Three: Challenges to the Adoption of Peace Initiatives

Table 4.3: Challenges to Peace Initiative Implementation (n = 380)

S/N	Variable	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Score	RII
1	Political interference affects peace initiatives	200	120	30	20	10	1620	0.85
2	Lack of trust in government undermines initiatives	190	130	30	20	10	1610	0.85
3	Poor funding limits effectiveness	180	130	40	20	10	1590	0.84
4	Ethnic and religious bias affects implementation	170	140	35	20	15	1570	0.83

Interpretation

The findings indicate that the challenges to peace initiatives are deeply institutional and political. Political interference and lack of trust in government both recorded the highest RII (0.85), demonstrating that governance deficits significantly constrain peacebuilding efforts. Funding limitations and identity-based biases further compound these challenges. These results reinforce the assumptions of State Fragility Theory, which links weak institutions and legitimacy deficits to poor policy outcomes and persistent insecurity.

4.5 Discussion of the findings: State-by-State Comparative Analysis of Insecurity and Peace Initiatives (Narrative Prose)

The patterns of insecurity and the effectiveness of state-driven peace initiatives in Nigeria are not uniform but vary significantly across regions. A comparative examination of Plateau State, Kaduna State, Kwara State, and Oyo State reveals distinct conflict dynamics, policy responses, and developmental implications that reflect the broader structural realities of the Nigerian state.

In Plateau State, insecurity is deeply rooted in farmer–herder conflicts intertwined with ethno-religious divisions between Christian and Muslim communities. These tensions are historically embedded in the indigene-settler dichotomy and are further exacerbated by competition over land and perceptions of marginalization. The consequences for sustainable development are severe and immediate. Agricultural activities, which constitute the backbone of the state's economy, have been significantly disrupted due to persistent violence and displacement. Rural livelihoods have deteriorated, and food security has become increasingly fragile. In response, the state has established institutional mechanisms such as the Plateau Peace Building Agency, alongside interfaith dialogue platforms and community-based mediation structures. While these initiatives have contributed to periodic reductions in violence, their overall effectiveness remains constrained by the persistence of structural grievances. The Plateau case therefore illustrates a situation in which institutional peacebuilding exists but is continually undermined by unresolved identity and resource-based conflicts.

Kaduna State presents a more complex and volatile security environment. Unlike Plateau, where conflict is largely centered on land and identity, Kaduna exhibits a multi-layered crisis involving identity politics between Southern and Northern Kaduna, religious polarization, farmer–herder conflicts, and the proliferation of banditry and activities of armed non-state actors. This multiplicity of threats has produced a more systemic form of instability that affects both rural and urban areas. The developmental consequences are correspondingly broader, encompassing disruptions to education, business activities, and investment flows. State responses have included the establishment of the Kaduna Peace Commission, alongside security operations and dialogue initiatives. However, the persistence of violence, particularly banditry, suggests that these interventions have achieved only limited success. The Kaduna experience highlights the constraints of hybrid approaches that combine kinetic and non-kinetic strategies without sufficient institutional coherence. It reflects a deeper issue of state capacity, where the inability to effectively monopolize the use of force undermines both security and development outcomes.

In contrast, Kwara State represents a relatively lower-intensity conflict environment, where insecurity is primarily localized and revolves around inter-communal disputes such as those between Erin-Ile and Offa, and Share and Tshagiri. These conflicts are largely driven by land ownership issues, boundary disputes, and political competition among local elites. Although these tensions disrupt community-level economic activities, they do not generate the widespread displacement or systemic instability observed in Plateau or Kaduna. State-driven peace initiatives in Kwara rely heavily on traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, supported by local peace committees and government-mediated negotiations. The relative effectiveness of these interventions can be attributed to their local legitimacy and the lower degree of politicization surrounding the conflicts. Nevertheless, the persistence of unresolved land disputes indicates that these peace gains remain fragile and susceptible to escalation if not structurally addressed.

Oyo State, located in the South West, presents a different trajectory altogether. While it has not experienced the same scale of violence as the northern states, it is not entirely insulated from insecurity. Emerging issues such as farmer–herder tensions and urban crime are gradually reshaping the security landscape. However, the state has adopted a more proactive approach to conflict management, exemplified by policies such as the anti-open grazing law and the establishment of the Amotekun regional security outfit. These measures are complemented by community engagement frameworks aimed at preventing escalation. As a result, the impact of insecurity on sustainable development in Oyo remains comparatively limited, although not insignificant. Agricultural tensions persist in rural areas, and urban security concerns are gradually increasing. The Oyo case therefore reflects a preventive governance model, where early intervention plays a critical role in mitigating the escalation of conflict.

A comparative reading of these cases reveals important patterns. First, the nature and intensity of insecurity vary significantly, with Plateau and Kaduna experiencing high to very high levels of conflict, while Kwara and Oyo exhibit moderate to low levels. Second, the effectiveness of state-driven peace initiatives is closely tied to issues of legitimacy, local participation, and the degree of politicization. Initiatives tend to perform better in contexts such as Kwara, where conflicts are localized and governance structures retain some level of public trust, and less effectively in highly fragmented environments such as Kaduna. Third, the developmental implications of insecurity are directly proportional to its intensity. High-conflict states experience severe disruptions to economic productivity, social cohesion, and human development, whereas lower-intensity states maintain a degree of developmental continuity.

These variations provide strong empirical support for State Fragility Theory. Kaduna exemplifies a highly fragile context characterized by weak institutional control and multiple overlapping threats. Plateau reflects identity-driven fragility, where historical grievances and social divisions undermine stability. Kwara and Oyo, while not free from conflict, demonstrate elements of institutional resilience, particularly in their reliance on localized and preventive approaches to peacebuilding. The broader implication is that insecurity in Nigeria is not a uniform phenomenon but a context-dependent challenge that requires differentiated policy responses.

Ultimately, the comparative analysis underscores a critical insight: sustainable development is contingent not merely on the presence of peace initiatives, but on the extent to which these initiatives are contextually grounded, institutionally supported, and socially legitimate. Where these conditions are absent, peace initiatives remain superficial and incapable of addressing the deeper structural drivers of insecurity.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how insecurity shapes the prospects for sustainable development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, with particular attention to state-driven peace initiatives. The evidence is clear and difficult to ignore: insecurity is not a marginal disturbance but a structural constraint that cuts across economic productivity, social cohesion, and human development. The consistently high Relative Importance Index scores on issues such as loss of lives, displacement, and economic disruption show that instability directly erodes the foundations upon which development depends. In practical terms, communities cannot farm, trade, invest, or plan for the future when uncertainty defines everyday life. The study also finds that although governments have introduced various peace initiatives, their effectiveness remains uneven. Community-based and dialogue-driven mechanisms tend to perform better because they resonate with local realities, yet even these are limited by deeper institutional weaknesses that prevent sustained impact.

What emerges most strongly is that insecurity in Nigeria is not uniform but varies significantly across contexts. States such as Kaduna State and Plateau State reflect deeply entrenched and overlapping conflicts, while Kwara State and Oyo State present more localized and manageable tensions. This variation underscores a simple but often overlooked point: peacebuilding cannot be standardized. More fundamentally, the findings reinforce the logic of State Fragility Theory. Weak institutions, low public trust, and fragmented governance systems continue to undermine both security and development efforts. In this sense, insecurity is less a failure of force and more a failure of governance. Sustainable development in Nigeria will therefore depend not just on the presence of peace initiatives, but on the state's ability to build credible institutions, earn legitimacy, and respond to conflict in ways that are grounded in the realities of each context.

6. Recommendations

The recommendations are structured to reflect the empirical findings and are oriented toward practical policy engagement.

1. Institutional Strengthening and Governance Reform

The government must prioritize strengthening state institutions, particularly in conflict-prone regions. This involves improving coordination among security agencies, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and reducing political interference in peace processes. Without institutional coherence, peace initiatives will continue to produce limited outcomes.

2. Adoption of Context-Specific Peacebuilding Strategies

Given the variation in conflict dynamics across states, a "one-size-fits-all" approach is ineffective. Peace

initiatives should be tailored to local realities. For instance, identity-based conflicts in Plateau and Kaduna require different interventions compared to land disputes in Kwara or emerging tensions in Oyo. Context-sensitive strategies will improve both legitimacy and effectiveness.

3. Addressing Structural Drivers of Conflict

Peace initiatives must move beyond symptom management to address root causes. This includes:

- Land reform and clear property rights frameworks
- Equitable resource distribution
- Inclusive governance structures

Failure to address these structural issues will continue to reproduce cycles of violence.

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