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Opposition, Identity Politics And Insecurity In Southern Taraba State, Nigeria, 1999–2023

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Abstract

This study look at the linkage between opposition politics, identity political mobilization, and insecurity in Southern Taraba State, Nigeria, from 1999 to 2023. Since the dawn of the Fourth Republic, political rivalry in the state and by extension the region has increasingly been determined by ethnic, religious, and communal identities, which political actors have employed to mobilize support, secure electoral gain, and challenge contending groups. The study investigates how opposition politics contributed to the politicization of identity and how such mobilization influenced the nature and persistence of insecurity in Southern Taraba. The study is anchored on social identity theory as its analytical framework. The methodology adopted in this study is the qualitative historical methodology, relying on both primary and secondary sources, including oral interviews, government reports, newspapers, books, and scholarly publications. The study reveal that opposition political activities by the actors in the area often create ethnic and religious divisions, heightened perceptions of exclusion and ostracism, and thus contributed to election violence, ethnic skirmishes, population displacement, and loss of lives and property. The study further demonstrates that the manipulation of identity for political purposes weakened social cohesion and undermined peace-building efforts in the region. The study averred that the linkage between opposition politics and identity politics constituted a principal influence in the reappearance of insecurity in Southern Taraba between 1999 and 2023. The study recommends the push for inclusive governance, agenda based governance, inter-group negotiation, and institutional reforms aimed at reducing identity manipulation and fostering sustainable peace and democratic stability in the area.

Keywords: Opposition Politics, Identity, Identity Politics and Insecurity

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Introduction

A closer look at the subject matter of political development and political history over time will show that there is a strong link between identity politics and the rise of insecurity. The most obvious examples of the above assertion is in one of the main causes of World War 1 (WW I), which was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, what occurred within this broader environment of competing national identities and political claims.[1] This has often time resulted in either reformation or insecurity, or worse, war. While the quest for self-recognition and, to some extent, political dominance has not been a very contentious issue in African political history in the pre-colonial era, however the post-colonial African political landscape has been littered with issues of identity in terms of ethnicity and religion, the quest for political recognition, and freedom fighting, which is often executed through the instrumentality of militia groups or thuggry.[2]

Nigeria, by her heterogeneous nature, stands out as one of the most politically split countries in Africa due to its complicated network of politically significant identities, history of protracted, seemingly unresolvable conflicts, and instability.[3] Nigeria has struggled, since its annexation, creation by the British colonial administration and independence, with protracted issues of territory and legitimacy. This has constantly placed the country's attempts towards democratisation, nation-building, stability, and economic development at risk. The civil war that broke out in 1967, just seven years after the country's independence in 1960, seems to have been the peak of the country's crisis. Disintegration is still being considered by resentful sections of society as a potential solution to the "National Question", aside from the fact that disputes have intensified and become more widespread after the end of the civil war. This implies that the negative effects of Nigeria's diversity in an unsteady political environment are still very real.[4]

On the other hand, opposition politics is not just an essential part but rather the hallmark of democracy because it provides checks and balances, holds the ruling party accountable, and prevents authoritarian rule.[5] To Kwaghe, what balance up democracy is opposition politics by giving it legitimacy, Transparency and encourages leaders to fulfill their responsibilities, noting that "without opposition, there is no democracy".[6]

Over the past three decades of the creation of Taraba State and it southern part (Taraba southern senatorial district, there have been a complicated interactions between politics, religion, and ethnicity what have repeatedly resulted in violence and instability in this part of northeastern Nigeria. The Jukun, Tiv, Chamba, Kuteb and Ichen, and patches of Hausa/Fulani communities are among the primary ethnic groupings that make up Southern Taraba State's ethnic variety.[7] The curving out of Adamawa and Taraba State from the defunct Gongola State in 1991, paved the way for a heightened rivalry between these groups for control over governmental authority, wealth, and cultural acceptance. Although, these historic tensions and claims to indigeneity that dated back to colonial times and have been revived by the new state institutions and limits.

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[1]B. Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.* New York: Verso, 1983.
[2]A. Jega. Identity Transformation and the Politics of Identity under Crisis and Adjustment. In A. Jega (ed.) *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria.* Elanders Gotab, Stockholm, 2000.
[3]E. O. Eghosa and T. S. Rotimi. "*A History of Identities, Violence, and Stability in Nigeria. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE),* Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford. access from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08c9840f0b652dd00141e/wp6.pdf
[4]Eghosa and Rotimi. "A History of Identities, Violence …," 4
[5]Y. Fahruddiana. Implications of the existence of opposition political parties as checks and balances in the implementation of democracy. *Perfect Education Fairy*. Vol. 1(1), 2023. 15-23
[6]O. Akintonde. HSN Urges Nigerians to Embrace Opposition Politics. Voice of Nigeria. October 10, 2026. https://von.gov.ng/hsn-urges-nigerians-to-embrace-opposition-politics/
[7]E. U. Ofodugu. "Effects of Ethnic Conflicts on the Economic Development of Taraba State: A Focus on Takum Local Government Area." *Fuwukari Journal of Politics and Development* (FUWJPD) Vol. 7 No. 1, 2023. 50

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In Southern Taraba, overt identity-based political mobilisation began to take shape in the early 1990s. In order to gain support, political parties and candidates have been appealing to people's ethnic and religious sensitivities and identities more and more. The 1999 return of Nigeria to civilian control created fresh opportunities for competition for local resources and authority, aggravating this trend. The inclusion of the federal character principle in Nigeria's 1999 constitution and the disparities between indigenous and settled people further solidified ethnicity as a crucial element in opposition politics and political rivalry.[8] It is worth of note that the history of this area has been characterised by recurrent instances of community conflict, which most scholar such as Akombo[9], Avav, and Myegba[10] often link to opposition politics on the altar of identity politics.

Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework

Opposition politics

Opposition politics comprises from political parties and organised groups that contest, interrogates, and checkmate the actions of the ruling political party, or the government in power. In a democracy, opposition groups act as a "watch dog for the political party cum government-in-power" offering alternative policies, checking the excesses of the executive power, and holding the ruling elites accountable.[11] Opposition politics is a system where aggregating interests functioned to foster responsible and reasoned debates, staying in contact and interacting with voters and citizens, stressing the importance of politics to ordinary people, and proposing a workable substitute form of government. It extremely difficult to have a functional democratic ecosystem without respectable opposition political groups.[12]

Identity Politics

Identity politics is defined as political and social arrangements where a group of people line up with other groups or organisations on the basis of mutual interests and characteristics that are anchored on ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, or religion with the intention of contesting for election, pushing for injustice, fighting against marginalisation, and campaigning for particular benefits.[13]

The term “identity politics” speak of a direct action engaged in by status-based social movements organized around such categories as gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, in contrast to class-based movements. The term also suggest any mobilisation related to politics, culture, and religion. It is sometimes, although very rare, used in a derogatory manner to criticise movements as exclusionary and focused on individual rather than societal change. Debates about the validity of identity politics reveal competing theoretical ways to understand the relationships among experience, culture, identity, politics, and power.[14]

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[8]C. J. Nwanegbo. “The Jukuns and their Neighbours: Identity Politics and Crisis in Wukari L.G.A. Taraba State, Nigeria”. *Social Science Research* (SSR), VOL 2 NO.2, 2014

[9]E. I. Akombo “*The Genesis of the Tiv – Jukun Rivalry in Former Wukari Federation: Interrogating the Colonial Factor*”. Jalingo. MicroNet Publishers, Jalingo. 2015.

[10]Avav, T. and Myegba, M. The Dream to Conquer: Story of Jukun - Tiv Conflict. Onaivi Printing and Publishing co. 1992

[11]J. E. Kersell. Political Oppositions in Western Democracies, by Robert A. Dahl. *International Journal* 21, no. 4 (1966): 535–36. https://doi.org/10.2307/40184478.

[12]I. M. Gana and O. T. Adamu. Democratization Process and Opposition Party in Nigeria: An Insight. *Wukari International Studies Journal*, Vol 8 (2), 2024

[13]K. Dhabhai. Understanding Identity Politics: Strategies for Party Formation and Growth. Stanforgt Center for Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law. December 10, 2024 access from https://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/news/understanding-identity-politics-strategies-party-formation-and-growth#:~:text=Identity%20politics%20is%20a%20strategy%20of%20political,internal%20unity**%20*%20**Differentiate%20themselves%20from%20competitors. on 29/04/2026

[14]M. Bernstein and V. Taylor. *Identity Politics*. John Wiley and Sons Ltd. 2023. 1

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Insecurity

To Okpeh and Okoli[15], the concept of insecurity can only be understood when it is viewed along with the concept of security; the implication is that the concept of insecurity cannot be treated in isolation in order to have an informed perspective on the concept. Therefore, to simply put, insecurity is the direct opposite of security. Like security, insecurity is perceived in a variety of ways. It could be interpreted by some as meaning danger or lack of safety; it could also indicate hazard, uncertainty, lack of confidence, questionableness, insufficient stability, uneasiness, unsafeness, and so on. The costs of insecurity include losing focus, being saddened, and losing one's humanity, feeling terrified, anxious, or oppressed, and losing confidence.[16] The term "security", on the other hand, has so many definitions and explanations, all of which are supported by a large number of academics.

Opposition, Identity Politics and Insecurity in Southern Taraba State, 1999–2023

Historical Foundations of Opposition Politics and Identity Formation

The link between political opposition, identity politics and insecurity in Southern Taraba State can be situated around the political development and history of ethnic relations in the area. It is worth of note that the scope of this study only covered the period from 1999–2023, however the political developments in the study area dating back to the colonial era and the First and Second Republics offered a significant context that allow for a proper grasp of the persistence of ethnic-based political alignments. Especially as it relates to the political relations between the Tiv and Jukun in the former Wukari Division, as well as the Kuteb–Chamba struggle over political dominance, representation and traditional authority in Takum, major reasons for the rise of rivalry and competing perceptions of political entitlement, exclusion and group identity.[17] These historical experiences did not automatically produce the conflicts of the Fourth Republic; rather, they established political grievances and patterns of rivalry that could be activated by subsequent struggles for electoral power, public appointments, local government control and access to state resources.

Throughout the colonial era, Nigerian politics was anchored on regional basis, ethnic organisation and variances over political power sharing and distribution. The formation of the foremost Northern People's Congress (NPC) whose base was in the north, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in what is today the south-east and the south-south, and the Action Group (AG) reflected, among other factors, the regional and ideological divisions that shaped the nationalist movement.[18] The colonial administration's indirect rule system and uneven development of political institutions reinforced differences in political representation and access to authority. These developments influenced political relations in the former Wukari Division, where the Tiv, Jukun and Hausa/Fulani communities developed different political preferences and alliances. The subsequent formation of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) in 1955 under Joseph Sarwuan Tarka provided many Tiv political activists with an alternative to the NPC-dominated political establishment. While the Tiv increasingly associated themselves with the UMBC and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), many Jukun political leaders maintained

[15]O. O. Okpeh and A. C. Okoli. "The Media, Farmers-Herders Conflict and the 'Fulanization' Narrative in Nigeria." In Studies in Media and Ideological Representation of Herders/Farmers Conflict in Nigeria, edited by Gbenga Ibileye, 1st ed., Malthouse Press, 2022. 29–42. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8543473.8.

[16]B. I. Ozoigbo. Insecurity in Nigeria: Genesis, Consequences and Panacea. European Journal of Social Sciences Studies. Volume 4, Issue 4. 2019. 271

[17]T. A. Luka Elite and Communal Conflicts in Taraba State: A Perception Study of People in Wukari and Takum Local Government Areas. A dissertation submitted to the School of Postgraduate Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. 2017

[18]M. A. Afolabi and A. M. Asiyanbola. Identity Politics and Development: A Critical Reflection on Equity, Inclusion, and National Growth in Nigeria. International Journal of Governance and Development Studies (IJOGDES), 12(2). 2025. 99-108,

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closer relations with the NPC. These alignments contributed to political differentiation between the two groups, although neither ethnic community was politically homogeneous.[19]

The political implication of such split up became progressively noticeable years into the post independent politics and during succeeding republics. Where rivalry between the Tiv and Jukun extended far away from political party affiliation to issues of the threating numerical strength, political representation, power and authority claims and fundamentally the issues of land and local resource ownership. The choice of Simon Iorter Musa a Tiv man as caretaker chairman of Wukari Local Government Council in 1981 during the tenure of Abubakar Barde of the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP) further shows the consequence of ethnic representation in local political struggle. Although sections of the Tiv community saw the nomination as an imperative opportunity for political participation, political actors from other ethnic groups viewed the rising political influence of the Tiv as a challenge to their established position.[20] This kind of differential interpretations pointed out the extent of how political position could become a trigger as well as a symbols of collective progression or perceived "domination". What these developments point to in the present time is the demonstration of how the historical basics of political opposition and ethnic suspicion that has over-time influence security and relations in Southern Taraba State after 1999 beginning of the forth republic.

The carving out of Taraba State from the former Gongola State in the year 1991 went on to altered or heat the political ecosystem by presenting new contests at the state-level representation, the location of political institutions, allocation government position and the distribution of local resources. While these were than supposed to reducing earlier suspicious and mistrusts, the new state structure brings more grounds for rivalry/struggles among ethnic groups and political elites. For example, in Wukari, the Tiv–Jukun relationship remained affected by disagreements over political influence, the control of resource and authority. In Takum, tensions involving the Kuteb and Chamba/Jukun communities were linked to the competing claims to traditional stool and political influence. These tussles revealed the nature contact between ethnic identity, traditional authority and the conventional political institutions. This background is significant for the understanding of why opposition politics in the study area and period sometimes acquired an ethnic and religious character and why political disagreement could instantly explored beyond electoral competition into far-reaching questions of insecurity.

Democratic Transition, Opposition Politics and Ethnic Relations, 1999–2007

The 29 May 1999 return to civilian rule and beginning of the forth republic presented a new era in the relationship between political competition and security in Taraba State. Democratic institutions offered the opportunities for political involvement, opposition mobilisation and the peaceful for elective positions. Nevertheless, the transition also bring to light a renewed struggle over governorship, legislative representation, local government chairmen and the distribution of political appointments. In Southern Taraba State, these races are explained within a political atmosphere already predisposed by historical antagonism over ethnic representation and access to authority. The implication of opposition politics during this time therefore lay not only in struggle between political parties but also in the ways elites and political gladiators mobilised ethnic and religious identities to pursue their interests.[21]

The administration of Reverend Jolly Nyame, which took off in 1999 under the People's Democratic Party (PDP), at the beginning functioned within a political ecosystem in which the accommodation of different

[19]Suleiman, I. Wunti, M. A. Adamu, A. and Yahaya, Y. M. Communal Identity Politics and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Taraba State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Intellectual Discours*e, 7(4). (2024).
[20]Implications of the Tiv-Jukun conflict in Taraba State. BusinessDay News Paper. June 17, 2020. https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/implications-of-the-tiv-jukun-conflict-in-taraba-state/
[21]Jev, A. A. Tyopuusu, J. A. and Yough, G. A. Interrogating the Political Solution to the Tiv/Jukun Conflict in Taraba State: The Participatory Communication Approach. *Jalingo Journal of Social and Management Sciences* Vol. 2 No. 4 (2020)

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ethnic communities remained imperative. The representation of all the religious and ethnic groups in the state government and the local government administration offered opportunities for dealing competing interests. All the same, the existence of political relative political tolerance at this point did not completely eliminate historical resentments and concerns or bring a permanent basis for inter-group cooperation. Political stability hinge partly on the alacrity of the political elites to enter into negotiation on issues of institutional representation and nonviolent political engagement.[22] The experience of the early Fourth Republic the polity was not heated particularly in southern Taraba State for two reasons, first, the election and electioneering process was still under the supervision of the military, secondary, the candidature of Jolly Nyame was sponsored by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar who although was himself a contestant of the governorship election in Adamawa State, he had a strong connection with the North oligarchy. Hence the religious divide was not too obvious.

A noteworthy development during Nyame's second term, particularly between 2003 and 2007, was the reported expansion of political thuggery and factional competition within the state. Political rivalries increasingly involved networks of supporters whose activities extended beyond conventional party mobilisation. Accounts from a number of sources identify rival political blocs associated with Ahmed Yusuf and Danladi Baido, popularly linked to the groups known as *Bani Isra'ila* and *Ba Kuskure*, respectively. These groups reportedly became involved in confrontations connected with political patronage, competition for influence and disagreements over access to the governor. Their activities illustrate how struggles among the ruling political elites could undermine security even when the principal actors formally belonged to the same party.[23]

One remarkable incident took place in August 2005, when hostility amongst the supporters associated with Ahmed Yusuf and Danladi Baido purportedly took place around the Jalingo Presidential Lodge during one of the political visit by the then Vice President Atiku Abubakar. The clash involved dangerous weapons and thus a number of people sustained injuries, including the reported loss of an eye by Murtala Bare. Other incidents identified in accounts of the period include the reported assassination of Idris Waziri Serti, the kidnapping and assassination of Joshua Kala, and attacks on political opponents and their property. These incidents demonstrate the potential consequences of factional competition when political patronage networks employ coercion to settle disputes. Although, most, if not all of these incidence with happening in Jalingo, however, these developments had a wider political climate influenced the security environment across the state, including Southern Taraba, where political elites operated within the same state-wide party system. In another perspective, these incidence set the precedence for the formation of strong oppositions along religious line whose structure became very visible across southern parts of the state, what also come to define the nature of insecurity in the area as was later seen in the attacks on one the gubernatorial aspirants convoyed.[24]

The 2007 electoral cycle went on to further show the relationship between opposition politics and political violence. The race between factions of the Action Congress (AC) loyal to Ahmed Yusuf and Joel Ikenya seemingly engendered violence during the party's governorship primaries and following the emergence of Ikenya as the party's candidate.[25] This episode is important because it shows that opposition politics did not necessarily produce a unified challenge to the ruling party. Instead, opposition parties could experience internal fragmentation, competing candidacies and violent struggles over nomination procedures. Such

[22]Tyogema, V. I. Igwebuike Ontology as an African Philosophical Response to the Tiv-Fulani Crisis in Taraba State. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2017. 144
[23]S. P. Anuye, B. K. Joseph and I. T. Joseph. Politics of Violence in Nigeria: A Study of Taraba State, 1991-2019. Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Studies. VOL 1 NO. 1. 2023. 282 – 296
[24]Anuye, Joseph and Joseph. Politics of Violence in Nigeria …, 282 – 296
[25]Anuye, Joseph and Joseph. Politics of Violence in Nigeria …, 282 – 296

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divisions weakened the capacity of opposition organisations to operate through established political institutions and created opportunities for political thuggery to become an instrument of factional competition.

Opposition Politics and the Management of Political Rivalries, 2007–2011

The emergence of Danbaba Danfulani Suntai as governor in 2007 pfesent another phase in the relationship between political competition and security in Taraba State. Accounts of the period suggest that some of the rivalries inbred from the Nyame administration continued, although their strength and organisational nature changed. The tussle surrounding the PDP governorship nomination, particularly the anticipations of Danladi Baido and his supporters, reportedly generated tension and political pressure. According to Silas Jephthath (2018), the tension was connected with dissatisfaction over the choice of the party's governorship candidate and the interference of the party's national hierarchy, and particularly president Olusegun Obasonjo. The later political accommodation between Baido and Suntai, which reportedly involved the appointment of Baido as chief of staff and Sani Abubakar Danladi as deputy governor, illustrates the role of elite negotiation in managing political opposition and factional rivalry.

This development establishes the dual character of political accommodation in Taraba State. On the one hand, the allocation of political appointments and the negotiation of alliances could reduce immediate tensions by bringing into the fold of some of the influential political actors into government. On the other hand, such arrangements could reinforce patronage-based politics if political loyalty became more important than institutional accountability.

For Southern Taraba State, the broader implication was that the management of political differences often depended on relationships among political elites, rather than on consistently applied mechanisms for resolving grievances. Where political accommodation proves unsuccessful, opposing factions could take to to protests, with attendant threats of insecurity, thereby increasing the vulnerability of communities to political insecurity. More to that the seed of identity politics was gradually growing, because there were claims that the PDP's national hierarchy were looking at the candidature of Ahmed Yusuf, what was vehemently opposed and rejected and hence the emergence of Danbaba Suntai. This act later manifested in rallies and wide jubilation following the new of Suntai's plan crash among Muslim youth in Wukari and Ibi LGAs.

The 2011 governorship election, contested by Suntai of the PDP and of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)'s Joel Ikenya, offers additional instance of the link between opposition politics and insecurity. Accounts of the period label protests that erupt as a result of the announcement of Suntai's re-election, especially in areas of Jalingo Local Government Area which are said to be Muslim dominated areas such as Anguwan Gadi and parts of Anguwan Sarki. Although these protest and tensions were not confined to Southern Taraba, this goes to show that the whole of the state with southern parts of the state (study area) was seating on a time bomb waiting for a little trigger to explored, this also reflected a wider political environment in which electoral outcomes could generate mobilisation, dissatisfaction and confrontation. The relevance of this episode to the present study lies in its demonstration that opposition politics could contribute to insecurity when electoral grievances were expressed through confrontational methods rather than resolved through established legal and democratic procedures.

Political Opposition, Elite Fragmentation and Security Tensions, 2012–2014

The political crisis that followed Governor Suntai's aircraft accident in 2012 significantly altered the distribution of power within Taraba State. With Garba Umar assuming the position of acting governor, disagreements emerged among political stakeholders over cabinet appointments, administrative decisions

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and the future leadership of the state. These disagreements reportedly contributed to the formation of rival political blocs, particularly along identity lines including actors described in the available accounts as the "cabals." The resulting contest involved competing claims to political legitimacy and influence within the PDP-led administration. The eventual removal of Garba Umar from the acting governorship and the return of Abubakar Sani Danladi to the deputy governorship in 2014 marked a major phase in the state's political crisis.

The importance of this period lies in the way political opposition developed within and around the ruling party. Opposition was not limited to formal disagreements between government and opposition parties; it also emerged through rival factions looking forward to influence succession, appointments and the exercise of executive authority. These divisions created uncertainty and increased mutual suspicion among political actors ahead of the 2015 general elections. In a state where ethnic and religious identities already predisposed the political perceptions, elite fragmentation shaped opportunities for political rivalry to be construed through the lances of communal and religious affiliations. Nevertheless, the relationship between factional rivalry and ethnic mobilisation must be established using specific evidence rather than presumed solely from the identities of the elites and political players involved.

The political crisis also had implications for Southern Taraba State, where communities in Wukari, Ibi, Takum, Ussa and Donga faced security challenges arising from intersecting local and state-level disputes. In these areas, disagreements over political representation, traditional authority and communal relations interacted with the broader improbability surrounding state politics. The resulting security ecosystem cannot be explained solely by party competition, because local grievances and historical conflicts possessed their own dynamics. Nevertheless, the catholic political crisis had stimulates the ability of state institutions and political leaders to respond effectively to emerging threats. The period therefore reveals the importance of examining political opposition alongside the institutional capacity to manage communal disputes and maintain public security.[26]

Electoral Competition, Identity Politics and Insecurity, 2015–2019

The 2015 governorship race marked a critical stage in the relationship between political opposition, identity politics and insecurity in Taraba State. The race between Aisha Jummai Alhassan of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Darius Dickson Ishaku of the PDP engendered a heated political struggle. The election held within a political atmosphere shaped by the changing balance between state and federal political alignments, opposing elite interests, and the mobilisation of party fans and cliques. In Southern Taraba State, these developments was pass through with existing ethnic rivalries and local security challenges, particularly in Wukari, Ibi, Takum, and Donga.[27]

The political importance of the 2015 election stretched beyond the race between the APC and PDP. Political mobilisation occurred in communities where questions of ethnic inclusion, political representation and historical claim remained most sensitive. Under such state of affairs, political parties and their supporters were focus and soliciting to collective identities (ethnic and religion) to consolidate electoral support, presenting opponents as threats to ethnic or religious interests, or validate struggle to an anticipated political result. Identity politics thus became particularly substantial when party competition coincided with existing ethnic and religious divisions.

A particularly severe episode of political violence occurred in 2015 following the legal disputes surrounding the Taraba State governorship election. After an election tribunal nullified the victory of the

[26]Anumve, R. T. Fada S. A. and Igah, S. Militia Groups and Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria: A Study of the Jukun-Tiv Conflict in Wukari. *A Journal Publication of the Department of Political Science, Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina, Nigeria*. Vol. 3, No. 7, 2020.
[27]K. Okenyodo. "*Compilation of Security Threat Assessment towards 2015 Election*," Nigeria, CleenFoundation. 2015

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sitting governor, violent protests erupted in Wukari and surrounding communities. Supporters of rival political parties engaged in clashes that reportedly resulted in multiple deaths and the destruction of homes, businesses, and vehicles. [28] The violence demonstrated how electoral disputes and judicial rulings could trigger communal unrest in the region. In the years leading up to the 2019 elections, political tensions continued to escalate, with the climax been the 2018–2019 campaign period, an attack on a political convoy in the Wukari area resulted in several fatalities and injuries.

Reports of violence incidence before, during and after the 2015 election, together with the episode in Wukari, Ibi and Donga, point out the level of exposure of parts of Southern Taraba to politically motivated insecurity. The reported use of militia groups to disenfranchise groups and the intimidation of electoral personnel point to the questions about the protection of electorates and the capacity of electoral umpire to operate without coercion. Where elections were declared inconclusive or their results were contested, existing political tensions could intensify. In places already affected by conflicts, be it communal or religious conflicts, such electoral uncertainty could create further chances for political elites to use the ethnic or religious card to drum up supporters. The attendant insecurity situations threatened lives and property, disrupted economic activities and destabilized the people's confidence in democratic institutions.[29]

The 2019 general election went on to lay to bear the persistent collaboration between opposition, identity politics and the security challenges in Southern Taraba State. Available accounts identify Wukari, Ibi and Ussa among the areas affected by political violence before, during or after the elections. The violence was reportedly associated with conflicts relating to ethnic groups in places where there is uncertainty of the incumbent's victory, thereby putting such communities in a state of fear, that in turn push the people into political aparty . These developments suggest that the return to democratic government had not eradicated the use of oppressive means as a political approach. Rather, political opposition continued to be influenced by the ability of parties and their followers to mobilise local networks, control political spaces and influence electoral processes.

The experience of the 2015 and 2019 elections is particularly important for this study because it demonstrates the need to distinguish between ordinary electoral competition and the political mobilisation of ethnic identity. Opposition parties perform an essential function in democratic governance by challenging incumbents, scrutinising government policies and providing alternative political programmes. However, where political elites frame electoral contests as struggles for the survival or dominance of particular ethnic communities, opposition can become entangled with communal hostility. Such a process may deepen mistrust, undermine interethnic cooperation and increase the risk of violence.

The Implications of Opposition and Identity Politics for Insecurity, 2019–2023

The Implications of Opposition and Identity Politics for Insecurity, 2019–2023

One of the biggest impacts of identity politics and insecurity in southern Taraba State is the displacement of a very large rural population throughout the local government areas in the study area. While the displacement in itself is not political, what is political is that, even after most of the displaced communities have returned to their settlements, these people have been permanently disenfranchised. As their polling units and polling booths are either moved to the private residences of some of the elites with strong political influence for political manipulation or relocated to towns where the people are threatened with thugs into voting for parties and candidates they don't want. To demonstrate the seriousness of the issue of

[28]Olaniyi Muideen. Wukari violence orchestrated by frustrated politicians – Taraba APC. *Daily Trust.* Mon, 9 Nov 2015 21:58:12 WAT
[29]K. Okenyodo. "*Compilation of Security Threat Assessment Towards 2015 Election*," Nigeria, CleenFoundation. 2015

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disenfranchisement in southern Taraba State, the table below provides, in detail, by local government, a list of non-existent polling units and polling booths.

Figure 6.1: Distribution of Displaced Polling Units by Local Government Area (LGA) in the Study Area

S/N	Local Government Area (LGA)	Total Number of Displaced Polling Units
1	Donga	12
2	Ibi	22
3	Wukari	27
Total	All LGAs	61

Source: Field Work 2025.

Another political impact of identity politics and insecurity in Southern Taraba State is the systematic political exclusion affecting Tiv and Hausa populations throughout all the local government areas in Southern part of the State, notably Wukari, Takum, Ibi, Donga, and Ussa, in what looks like a deeply established system of political exclusion. In Wukari and Takum, Tiv and Hausa communities have a history of being blocked from accessing elective positions, with their participation largely restricted to limited representation, such as local government councillorships in Takum. While these positions, including the local government councillorships, are often minimal and contested. In Ibi, a somewhat exceptional arrangement once saw the Tiv occupy the position of vice chairman, indicating a temporary accommodation within the political structure. However, this has since diminished, leaving the Tiv with only a single councillorship position, specifically in Sarkin Kudu Ward III. Similarly, in Donga and Ussa LGAs, Tiv-dominated areas have been systematically excluded from holding any elective offices, reinforcing patterns of ethnicised political control and exclusionary governance.

This exclusion is not incidental but is sustained through a set of deliberate and recurring mechanisms. One of the most prominent strategies involves the eruption or instigation of violent conflicts along communal or religious lines, particularly in the period leading up to elections. These conflicts serve to destabilise communities, displace potential candidates, and create an atmosphere of insecurity that discourages political participation among the Tiv and Hausa populations. In many cases, aspirants from these groups are either directly targeted or forced to withdraw from the political process due to threats to life and property. Consequently, the electoral environment becomes structurally skewed, favouring dominant ethnic groups that are better positioned to withstand or even leverage such instability.

Beyond overt violence, exclusion is further institutionalised through manipulations within political party structures and electoral processes. During party primaries, aspirants from Tiv and Hausa backgrounds frequently encounter systemic barriers, including denial of party tickets or being tactically edged out through coercion, financial inducements, or internal party machinations. Even when candidates manage to secure nominations, the electoral process itself is often compromised. The closure or inaccessibility of polling units in affected areas, many of which are located in Tiv and Hausa communities, creates opportunities for vote suppression and result manipulation. This ensures that electoral outcomes consistently favour opposing candidates, thereby perpetuating a cycle of disenfranchisement and reinforcing the structural exclusion of these groups from meaningful political representation.

The denial of access to local government employment for Tiv populations, particularly in Wukari, reflects a broader pattern of institutionalised exclusion within the administrative structures of Taraba State. In the

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Wukari Local Government council, Tiv individuals are largely excluded from public sector jobs, especially in core administrative and decision-making positions within the local government system. This marginalisation effectively removes them from participation in governance at the grassroots level, limiting their influence over policies and development initiatives that directly affect their communities. In contrast, in other LGAs such as Takum, Ibi, and Donga, Tiv individuals are not entirely excluded from employment but are predominantly confined to the education sector, particularly as teachers. While this provides some level of economic inclusion, it simultaneously reinforces occupational stratification, where Tiv workers are systematically limited to less influential roles, thereby restricting upward mobility and broader participation in public administration.

The exclusion of Tiv communities from traditional administrative structures in Taraba State represents a critical dimension of their broader political and socio-cultural marginalisation. Even in local government areas where the Tiv constitute a demographic majority, such as parts of Wukari, Ibi, Donga, and Takum, they are frequently excluded from participation in recognised traditional institutions.[30] This pattern became particularly evident during the recent statewide upgrading of traditional chiefs, an exercise intended to elevate the status and recognition of indigenous leadership structures. Despite the apparent inclusiveness of this policy, Tiv traditional authorities were conspicuously omitted, thereby denying them formal recognition and legitimacy within the state's chieftaincy hierarchy. Such exclusion not only undermines Tiv claims to indigeneity but also weakens their cultural autonomy and ability to mediate local governance and conflict through established traditional mechanisms.

Additionally, this political suppression has led to paradoxical and contestable instances in which Tiv communities are placed under the traditional authority of other ethnic groups, including the Fulani, Ngas, and Tarok groups, whose presence in some of these areas is often traced to more recent migratory movements, particularly from the 1990s onwards. This subordination raises fundamental questions about the principles of historical ownership, identity, and legitimacy in traditional governance systems.[31] For the Tiv, being subjected to the authority of comparatively recent settlers represents not only a political and administrative disenfranchisement but also a deliberate effort to erode their cultural heritage, traces of their long and historical presence in the area and self-determination. This presents a hierarchy of recognition that privileges certain groups (newcomers) over others, irrespective of demographic strength or historical claims, thereby deepening grievances and sustaining tensions within these multi-ethnic localities.

Conclusion

The historical development of political competition in Southern Taraba State reveals the continuing significance of ethnic identity, political representation and struggles over authority. Colonial political alignments, disagreements between the Tiv and Jukun, and the Kuteb–Chamba contest over traditional leadership provided historical contexts for understanding subsequent political rivalries. The creation of Taraba State in 1991 introduced new opportunities for political participation while also creating additional arenas for competition over representation and public resources. These historical developments are relevant to the period under investigation because they help explain the political sensitivities within which democratic competition unfolded after 1999.

Between 1999 and 2023, opposition politics in Taraba State was shaped by electoral contests, intra-party factionalism, elite patronage, political thuggery and the mobilisation of supporters. The political crises of 2003–2007, the succession disputes following Suntai's aircraft accident, and the electoral contests of 2015 and 2019 illustrate different ways in which competition for political power could generate tension and

[30]Jerry Emmason. Tiv Group Demands Chiefdom Status, Representation In Taraba. Leadership Newspapers. 10/10/2024. Retrieved from https://leadership.ng/tiv-group-demands-chiefdom-status-representation-in-taraba/?utm on 20/03/2026
[31]Oral Interview with Isaac Tyonongu. Male. 48yrs. Farming. Sarkin Kudu. 03/01/2026

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insecurity. In Southern Taraba, these developments interacted with local histories of ethnic rivalry and disputes over traditional authority, particularly in Wukari and Takum, while reported electoral violence affected other parts of the study area.

Ultimately, the relationship between opposition, identity politics and insecurity in Southern Taraba State must be understood as the outcome of interactions among political institutions, elite strategies, communal grievances and local security conditions. Ethnic identity alone does not explain political violence, just as opposition activity does not necessarily produce insecurity. The critical issue is how political actors mobilised identities, managed competing interests and responded to disputes within the democratic process. Examining these dynamics between 1999 and 2023 provides a historical basis for understanding the circumstances under which political competition contributed to insecurity and the extent to which institutional weaknesses and the use of coercive political networks undermined peaceful democratic participation.



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