

INDIGENOUS CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND RURAL COMMUNITY PROTECTION IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Abstract

Persistent rural insecurity in South-South Nigeria has continued to undermine community safety despite the expansion of formal policing and state-led security interventions. Incidences of communal violence, land disputes, theft, cult-related activities, and other localized conflicts have exposed the limitations of conventional security approaches, thereby reviving interest in indigenous conflict management mechanisms. This study examined the effectiveness of traditional elders' councils and public shaming as indigenous strategies for protecting rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated how these traditional institutions contribute to conflict prevention, dispute resolution, social control, and community protection. A correlational research design was adopted, and a sample size of 1,322 respondents was selected across six (6) Local Government Areas of Cross River and Akwa-Ibom, Rivers States. The instruments for data collection were the questionnaire. Quantitative data retrieved was analysed using simple linear regression. The findings indicate that traditional elders' councils were found to play a crucial role in conflict resolution and mediation, thereby preventing escalation of disputes. Public shaming was identified as a strong deterrent against antisocial behaviour. However, modernization, urbanization, declining respect for traditional authority, and inadequate integration with formal justice institutions have constrained their effectiveness. The study contributes to the growing literature on indigenous peacebuilding by demonstrating the continuing relevance of traditional governance structures in rural security management. It recommends strengthening collaboration between customary institutions and formal security agencies to enhance sustainable conflict resolution and improve rural community protection in South-South Nigeria.

Keywords: indigenous conflict management, rural community protection, public shaming, strategies, traditional elders' council

Introduction

Rural communities in the South-South region have witnessed rising incidents of kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, cult-related violence, communal clashes, illegal oil bunkering, piracy along coastal and riverine areas, herder-farmer conflicts, and politically motivated violence.

These forms of insecurity are particularly acute in riverine and hard-to-reach communities where formal security agencies such as the police and military have limited presence due to poor infrastructure, difficult terrain, and inadequate logistics. Consequently, rural dwellers often experience delayed or insufficient responses to security threats, thereby increasing their vulnerability to attacks and exploitation.

The persistence of insecurity in rural South-South Nigeria has had profound socio-economic consequences. Farmers are unable to access their farmlands regularly due to fear of abduction and violence, leading to reduced agricultural output and food shortages. Fisherfolk in riverine communities face threats from armed groups and pirates, affecting fish production and household income. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, trafficking and exploitation in insecure environments. The climate of fear has also contributed to rural–urban migration, youth unemployment, school dropouts, and the erosion of traditional authority structures that previously played significant roles in maintaining peace and order.

Historically, the Nigerian government has relied on formal security institutions such as the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigerian Army, the Department of State Services (DSS), and other paramilitary agencies to address the aforementioned security threat in rural insecurity. Various initiatives, including periodic security operations, community policing programs, and national security policies, have been implemented to curb rural crime and ensure community protection. For example, operations such as “Operation Restore Hope” and the “Community Policing Programme” were designed to enhance state presence and responsiveness in rural areas.

Despite these efforts, formal security interventions have consistently faced limitations, particularly in rural contexts. Challenges such as insufficient manpower, inadequate logistics, delayed response times, corruption, poor intelligence gathering, and the vastness and remoteness of rural areas have hindered the effectiveness of government security initiatives. In response to the perceived inadequacies of formal security institutions, rural communities in the South-South zone have increasingly relied on informal security strategies. These strategies include vigilante groups, community watch committees, youth and age-grade associations, traditional rulers’ councils, oath-taking practices, intelligence sharing networks, and community-based conflict resolution mechanisms. While such informal mechanisms have historically functioned as indigenous systems of social control, their roles have expanded significantly due to the growing insecurity in the region. In some communities, vigilante groups conduct night patrols and apprehend suspected criminals; traditional leaders mediate disputes to prevent violent escalation; and youth groups mobilize collective action to protect communal assets.

However, despite the growing prominence of informal security strategies, there remains limited empirical understanding of their effectiveness, structure, coordination, and sustainability in addressing contemporary security threats in rural South-South Nigeria. Questions persist regarding whether these informal mechanisms genuinely enhance protection or whether they sometimes contribute to human rights abuses, mob justice, and further cycles of violence. Additionally, the relationship between informal security actors and formal state security agencies is often ambiguous, marked by mistrust, lack of legal recognition, and occasional conflict.

Moreso, the evolving nature of insecurity in the South-South particularly the intersection of criminality with political, economic, and environmental factors raises concerns about the capacity of informal systems to cope with increasingly sophisticated threats. The proliferation of small arms, the politicization of youth groups, and economic marginalization may compromise the neutrality and accountability of some community-based security initiatives. Without systematic investigation, it remains unclear whether informal security strategies are adequately structured to ensure long-term protection or whether they merely provide temporary relief in the face of systemic security failures.

Despite numerous studies on insecurity in Nigeria such as Usman (2021), examine formal security agencies and traditional councils and Ejiogu (2016) conducted an in-depth case study of rural vigilantes in Southeastern Nigeria, much of the existing literature focuses like Bello and Yusuf (2019) on insurgency in the North-East and banditry in the North-West, with comparatively less scholarly attention given to informal security arrangements in rural communities of the South-South zone. Where studies exist, they often examine individual mechanisms such as vigilante groups without offering a comprehensive assessment of the broader spectrum of informal security strategies operating in rural areas. This creates a knowledge gap concerning how these indigenous systems collectively function, the challenges they face, and their overall impact on rural protection. This study seeks to bridge this gap by critically examining informal security strategies and the protection of rural communities in the South-South region, with the aim of contributing to improved community safety, sustainable peace, and rural development.

Research Questions

This study raised the following research questions:

1. To what extent can the activities of traditional elders' councils enhance the protection of rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria?
2. How can public shaming mechanism assist in the protection of rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria?

Theoretical framework

This study adopts the routine activity theory. The theory was proposed by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979, argues that crime occurs when three elements converge in time and space: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. Unlike earlier criminological theories that focused on offenders' dispositions or social backgrounds, Routine Activity Theory emphasizes the situational and environmental conditions that make crime more or less likely. Its basic assumption is that everyday activities shape opportunities for offending; therefore, changes in social routinessuch as economic shifts, migration, agricultural cycles, or community mobilityalter the likelihood that offenders will encounter vulnerable targets without effective guardianship. The theory highlights the importance of capable guardians, not only in the form of police officers, but also neighbours, community members, property owners, or any individual or group that increases surveillance and reduces opportunities for crime.

The study is applicable to this study because community-based vigilante groups operate as visible guardians by conducting night patrols, river surveillance, and access-point monitoring. Their presence increases the perceived risk of apprehension, thereby discouraging motivated offenders. By aligning patrol schedules with local routines such as fishing hours, market days, and festive periodsvigilante groups strategically reduce temporal opportunities for crime.

Age-grade associations function as collective guardianship structures, particularly during farming seasons, communal ceremonies, and conflict-prone periods. Through rotational surveillance, intelligence sharing, and rapid response mechanisms, age grades reduce the suitability of targets and ensure constant human presence in vulnerable spaces. From a Routine Activity Theory perspective, age grades embed guardianship into the daily rhythms of community life. Traditional rulers and councils of elders contribute indirectly to crime prevention by enforcing norms, imposing sanctions, and regulating movement within the community. Informal curfews, visitor identification systems, and communal accountability measures restrict offender access to targets. These practices alter routine activities in ways that limit criminal opportunities, reinforcing the guardianship element of RAT.

Although controversial, practices such as trial by ordeal and public shaming function as symbolic guardianship mechanisms. The fear of supernatural punishment, social exclusion, or public disgrace discourages individuals from engaging in theft, burglary, or sabotage. Within the Routine Activity framework, these practices reduce offender motivation and increase the perceived costs of crime, even in the absence of formal law enforcement. Informal security strategies in rural South-South communities also influence target suitability by encouraging collective protection of assets such as farms, fishing nets, boats, and oil palm plantations. Communal labor systems, joint harvesting, and shared storage facilities ensure that valuable targets are rarely left unattended. This collective approach limits the opportunity for crime by reshaping routine activities to prioritize mutual protection. Furthermore, the integration of informal intelligence networks where community members quickly report suspicious movements reduces anonymity for offenders. The resulting informal surveillance ecosystem makes it difficult for motivated offenders to locate suitable targets without detection.

Despite its usefulness, Routine Activity Theory faces significant criticisms, especially when applied to informal security strategies in rural contexts. One of the major criticisms of RAT is that it largely ignores the root causes of criminal behavior. Critics such as Tilley (2009) and Hayward (2007) argue that RAT assumes a constant supply of motivated offenders without adequately exploring why individuals become offenders in the first place. Unlike other criminological theories that focus on socio-economic, psychological, or environmental factors contributing to criminality, RAT merely presumes the existence of offenders.

Literature review

Activities of traditional elders' councils and protection of rural communities

The literature across Africa demonstrates that traditional elders' councils remain important indigenous institutions for protecting rural communities through conflict resolution, crime prevention, land administration, social control, and community mobilization. Although the authority of these councils varies across countries, studies consistently indicate that they complement formal government institutions, particularly in remote rural areas where access to state security agencies is limited. Traditional elders' councils derive their legitimacy from customary laws, cultural values, and community trust, making them effective mechanisms for maintaining peace and protecting communal resources (Adekola et al., 2023). In Kenya, Kibor (2021) investigated the contribution of councils of elders among the Kalenjin communities using qualitative interviews with community leaders, elders, and government officials. The study found that elders played significant roles in preventing cattle rustling, mediating inter-community conflicts, and strengthening community policing through indigenous intelligence networks. The research concluded that collaboration between traditional elders and formal security agencies reduced violent conflicts and improved rural security. Similarly, a study by Adan and Pkalya (2022) on the Borana and Somali communities of northern Kenya examined indigenous peace committees comprising respected elders. Using focus group discussions and key informant interviews, the researchers found that elders successfully resolved disputes over grazing land, water resources, and livestock ownership before such disputes escalated into violent confrontations. The study recommended greater government recognition of indigenous institutions because of their effectiveness in early warning and conflict prevention.

In Ghana, Aidoo (2023) assessed the influence of traditional councils on community safety in the Ashanti and Northern Regions. Using survey research involving rural households, the findings revealed that traditional elders effectively organized community surveillance, enforced customary sanctions against criminal behaviour, and protected communal farmlands from encroachment. Respondents expressed higher confidence in traditional institutions than in formal policing because elders were more accessible and culturally respected. Research conducted in Uganda by Nsabagasani et al. (2022) investigated traditional conflict management

institutions among rural communities in Northern Uganda after prolonged civil conflict. Using mixed methods involving questionnaires and interviews, the study reported that elders significantly contributed to community reconciliation, reintegration of displaced persons, and restoration of social harmony. The study further established that customary justice mechanisms enhanced social cohesion while reducing retaliatory violence. Adekola, Krigsholm, and Riekkinen (2023) developed an analytical framework for understanding customary land institutions in Nigeria within the broader African context. Their findings demonstrated that customary institutions, including councils of elders, regulate land allocation, dispute settlement, and resource management while providing locally accepted mechanisms for maintaining social order. The study concluded that strengthening customary institutions could improve community protection and sustainable rural governance.

In Nigeria, Nigeria, Odinka et al., (2026) examined the influence of traditional institutions on grassroots development in rural communities of Cross River State using a descriptive survey design involving 200 respondents selected through purposive and accidental sampling techniques. Linear regression analysis revealed that councils of elders significantly influenced community participation, conflict resolution, and rural development initiatives. The study concluded that elders' councils enhance rural protection by promoting social cohesion, mobilizing collective action, and strengthening local governance structures. In Anambra State, Okeke and Okoli (2026) investigated customary conflict resolution mechanisms in Aguata Local Government Area using qualitative interviews with community leaders, traditional rulers, and residents. The study found that elders' councils effectively utilized mediation, arbitration, oath-taking, reconciliation, and customary sanctions to resolve land disputes and family conflicts. These indigenous mechanisms significantly reduced litigation costs, prevented violent conflicts, and enhanced community security. The researchers recommended formal collaboration between traditional councils and statutory judicial institutions to improve access to justice in rural communities. A related study by Oluwasanmi et al., (2025) examined traditional rulers and statutory institutions in managing land conflicts in Osun State. Using interviews and documentary analysis, the researchers observed that traditional elders' councils played complementary roles alongside government agencies by verifying customary land ownership, mediating disputes, and facilitating peaceful negotiations between conflicting parties. Their findings indicated that collaborative governance significantly reduced prolonged land conflicts while strengthening community trust in conflict resolution mechanisms. Ayedoo and Olowu (2026) examined traditional rulers and local governance in Kwali Area Council, Abuja, through a case study involving 208 respondents. The study established that traditional rulers and elders' councils remained indispensable in maintaining law and order, preserving cultural values, resolving disputes, and facilitating communication between rural communities and government authorities. The researchers emphasized that despite lacking constitutional recognition, traditional institutions continue to fill governance gaps, especially in rural communities with limited government presence. Udo (1989) investigated the changing role of traditional rulers in land ownership and management following Nigeria's Land Use Act of 1978. Using survey methods in Bendel State, the study found that traditional institutions continued to influence land administration despite statutory reforms. Community members still relied heavily on elders for customary land allocation, conflict mediation, and protection of communal property, demonstrating the resilience of indigenous governance structures. A study by Olayiwola et al. (2024) examined rural communities in Oyo State using multistage sampling involving 335 respondents. The researchers found that traditional methods of land tenure administration, supervised by community elders, significantly reduced land disputes and enhanced tenure security among farming households. The study recommended strengthening customary institutions alongside statutory land administration systems to improve rural stability and agricultural productivity.

Public shaming mechanisms and the protection of rural communities

Public shaming is an indigenous social control mechanism whereby individuals who violate community norms are publicly identified, condemned, or subjected to social sanctions with the aim of deterring future misconduct and restoring communal order. In many African societies, particularly rural communities where traditional institutions remain influential, public shaming operates alongside customary laws, elders' councils, age-grade associations, and traditional rulers. Although contemporary human rights frameworks discourage degrading treatment, empirical evidence suggests that carefully regulated forms of public accountability continue to contribute to crime prevention, conflict resolution, and community protection when implemented within restorative justice frameworks rather than violent or degrading practices. A study was conducted by Salihu and Gholami (2022) in Apata-Aje Community, Kwara State, Nigeria. The researchers employed a qualitative research design involving 84 participants selected through purposive and convenience sampling. Data were collected using in-depth interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that community members preferred indigenous restorative justice because formal justice institutions were perceived as inaccessible, expensive, and ineffective. Public exposure of offenders before elders and community members served as an important deterrent against theft, land disputes, domestic violence, and other minor offences. Offenders often apologized publicly, compensated victims, and regained social acceptance after reconciliation. The study concluded that indigenous accountability mechanisms strengthened community security while reducing dependence on formal policing, provided they were applied fairly and respected community norms. Tiwa (2022) conducted an ethnographic study examining vigilantism and informal justice mechanisms in Nigeria. Drawing on extensive field observations and interviews, the study demonstrated that communities experiencing weak state security increasingly relied on informal social control measures, including public condemnation, community meetings, and collective sanctions against suspected offenders. While these practices increased community vigilance and discouraged certain criminal behaviours, the study warned that poorly regulated public accusations could degenerate into mob justice and human rights violations. The research therefore recommended strengthening community-led restorative justice while preventing extrajudicial punishment.

Another significant study was undertaken by Adejoh et al. (2023), who investigated farmer-herder conflict and victimization experiences across Anambra, Benue, and Oyo States, Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods design involving 725 survey respondents alongside key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews, the researchers found that traditional community sanctions including public denunciation of individuals who violated peace agreements contributed to maintaining social order in rural communities. Community elders frequently employed public meetings to identify conflict instigators and encourage restitution. Such public accountability mechanisms strengthened compliance with communal agreements and reduced repeated violations. However, the researchers emphasized that these practices were most effective when combined with mediation, reconciliation, and government security interventions. Lamidi et al., (2023) examined community perspectives on the farmer-herder crisis in Ibarapa North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. Employing a descriptive survey research design, the researchers collected quantitative data from community members to assess local security mechanisms. Findings showed that indigenous institutions, community security groups, and public accountability forums significantly enhanced rural protection. Individuals who collaborated with criminal groups or violated community security arrangements often faced public criticism and loss of social reputation, discouraging others from engaging in similar activities. The study concluded that community-based accountability strengthened local resilience against insecurity while complementing formal security agencies. Adekola et al., (2023) investigated customary land institutions in Nigeria using an institutional analysis framework. Their findings demonstrated that customary institutions regulate land

ownership through communal monitoring, public dispute resolution, and collective sanctions against individuals violating land-use rules. Community members who attempted illegal land sales, boundary encroachment, or unauthorized transfers risked public condemnation and exclusion from communal activities. These informal sanctions promoted transparency and protected communal resources more effectively than reliance on formal legal procedures alone. Okafor (2023) experimentally examined public shaming as a regulatory mechanism and found that carefully designed naming-and-shaming interventions strengthened perceptions of justice and increased compliance with established rules. Although conducted within tax administration rather than rural security, the findings demonstrate that reputational sanctions can influence behaviour by encouraging conformity with community expectations when implemented fairly and proportionately. These findings reinforce the sociological understanding that social reputation remains an important mechanism for regulating behaviour in closely connected communities.

Despite the growing body of literature on informal security strategies in Nigeria, significant research gaps remain regarding their effectiveness in protecting rural communities in the South-South region. Existing studies have focused predominantly on community policing and vigilante groups in the South-East and South-West regions, with limited empirical attention to the unique socio-cultural and environmental contexts of South-South states such as Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, and Edo (Jatau et al., 2025; Abiakam & Azuoma, 2025). Furthermore, previous studies have largely examined informal security structures from governance and policing perspectives, while neglecting indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, youth associations, traditional rulers, hunters' groups, and women's security networks as complementary security actors. There is also inadequate evidence on how collaboration between informal and formal security agencies influences rural safety, crime prevention, and community resilience. Consequently, this study seeks to bridge these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the contribution of informal security strategies to the protection of rural communities in the South-South region of Nigeria, thereby enriching policy and scholarly discourse on community-based security governance.

Materials and methods

Research design

A correlational research design is appropriate for this study because it seeks to examine the relationship between informal security strategies and the protection of rural communities in the South-South region of Nigeria without manipulating any variables. The design enables the researcher to determine the direction and strength of the association between the independent variables (such as community vigilante groups, traditional elders' councils, local intelligence sharing, public shaming mechanisms, and neighborhood watch initiatives) and the dependent variable (protection of rural communities). Data will be collected from respondents using structured questionnaires and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, including simple linear regression analysis, to establish the extent to which informal security strategies predict rural community protection. The correlational design is suitable because it provides empirical evidence of existing relationships and supports informed policy recommendations for strengthening community-based security initiatives in the South-South region of Nigeria (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Areas and Scope of the Study

The study was conducted in Cross River, Akwa-Ibom and Rivers States of South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Cross River and Akwa-Ibom states have a total of seventy-two (72) Local government Areas. The three states were chosen for this study because they have experienced varying forms of insecurity over the years. These include militancy, kidnapping,

armed robbery, cultism, communal clashes, piracy and attacks on oil installations. While much scholarly attention has focused on militancy in urban and oil-producing hubs, rural communities in creeks, riverine settlements, and hinterland areas remain particularly vulnerable. The choice of this study area is also as a result of the researcher being familiar with the area and the crime prevalence within the study areas appears to be high.

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Techniques

The population of study consists of 16,862,400 adults (18+ years of ages) residing in the areas. The sample for this study was statistically derived using Taro-Yamane. The Yamane sample size determinant is applied when the population size is known and finite, when a quick and reliable estimate is needed for surveys and when using probability sampling techniques like simple random sampling (Igbe et al., 2026). A total of 1,322 respondents were included in the study. The 1,322 respondents whom were assess with quantitative. Stratified, snowballing, and purposive sampling techniques were used in this study. A multi-stage sampling technique was applied in the sample selection for this study. First, three (3) states in south-south namely; Akwa-Ibom, Cross River and River States were purposively selected because these three states experience persistent security challenges that disproportionately affect rural communities. Issues such as cultism, communal clashes, kidnapping, militancy, oil-related conflicts, land disputes, piracy (especially in riverine areas), and armed robbery are prevalent. Secondly, six (6) Local Government Areas namely; Ikom, Boki, Okobo, Ikono, Abua-Odual and Andoni, Cross River State, Akwa Ibom State and River State was selected using the hat and draw method of simple random sampling.

Thirdly, the hat and draw method of simple random sampling was used to select one political ward per Local Government Area, giving a total of six (6) political wards in the three (3) states of Akwa-Ibom, Cross River and River States. To achieve this, the researcher carefully wrote the names of all the political wards on pieces of paper, fold them neatly, and place them in a container. The pieces were properly mixed, and the researcher picked one paper at a time. The name on the paper was written down, and the paper was returned to the hat. This process was repeated until the required number of communities has been selected making a total of 50 respondents in six (6) wards and 53 in one ward. This variation is because of the intensity crime and larger population of the ward.

Fourthly, a systematic sampling technique was used. The researcher enumerated the houses and decides to select respondents from even-numbered houses, who meet the criterion of being 18 years old and above. This process gave the researcher a total of 189 respondents in each of the six (6) Local Government Areas and 188 respondents in one Local Government Area. The variation of in another Local Government is because of the severity of insecurity and the larger population as contained in other council ward. This was amount to a total of 1,322 respondents for the study.

Method of Data Analysis

The study used quantitative methods, administered questionnaires, and qualitative approaches involving in-depth interviews to collect data. Descriptive statistics such as simple percentages, tables, and frequency were used for the demographic characteristics of the respondents, inferential statistics such as simple linear regression using the Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28 was used in analysing the hypotheses.

Results

Responses

A total of 1,322 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, however, only 1,293 (97.8%) was returned and found useable. The rate of 29 (2.2%) was not returned which does not affect the validity of the study. Descriptive statistics (percentages and tables) were first used to analyse

the demographic data (sex, age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation and residential area, and the results presented in table 1 below. The table 4.1 was categorized into age groups. It was observe that out of the 1,293 respondents, 35.3% were 18-30 years, 30.3% were between the ages of 31-40, 19.8% were between the age brackets of 41-50 years and 14.6% from 51 years above. Table 4.1 also showed sex of respondents, and 54.2% (701) were male and 48.0% (621) were female.

In marital status, 47.6% (615) were single, 45.9% (593) were married, divorce/separated had 3.9% (51), while 2.6% (34) were widow/widowers. The same table 1 above shows that, out of the 1,293 respondents, up to 8.6% (111) of the respondents had no formal education, 15.9% (205) had primary education, 41.2% (533) had secondary education, and 34.3% (444) had tertiary education (such as OND/NCE, HND/B.Sc, Master Degree had master Degree and others educational qualifications.

Under occupational distribution of the respondents, it was discovered that, 19.7% (255) of the respondents were farmers, 43.4% (561) of the respondents were business/traders, while 26.4% (341) were civil servant, and 10.5 % (136) were others such as unemployed, artisans and students. Considering the resident of the respondents, it was discovered that 28.5% (369) reside in Akwa-Ibom State, 26.5% (342) were residents of Cross River State and 45.0% (582) were residing in Rivers State.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Demographic attributes	Frequency	Percentages
Sex		
Male	701	54.2
Female	621	48.0
Total	1,293	100
Age		
18-30 years	456	35.3
31-40 years	392	30.3
41-50 years	256	19.8
51years and above	189	14.6
Total	1,293	100
Marital status		
Single	615	47.6
Married	593	45.9
Divorced	51	3.9
Widowed	34	2.6
Total	1,293	100
Educational qualification		
No formal education	111	8.6
Primary education	205	15.9
Secondary education	533	41.2
Tertiary education	444	34.3
Total	1,293	100
Occupation		
Farming	255	19.7
Trading	561	43.4
Civil servant	341	26.4
Others	136	10.5
Total	1,293	100
Residential area		

Akwa-Ibom	369	28.5
Cross River	342	26.5
Rivers	582	45.0
Total	1,293	100

Source: Field work, 2026

Table 2: Summary of simple linear regression showing influence of activities of traditional elders' councils and protection of rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria

Predictor variable	R	R ²	Df	F	B	T	Sig.
Constant	.900 ^a	.809	1,291	1491.433	.736	6.280	.000
Activities of traditional elder councils						38.619	.000

Source: Field work, 2026

The result presented in table 4.3 showed that there was a significant influence of activities of traditional elders' councils and protection of rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. $R=.900$, $R^2=.809$. $F(1, 1,291)= 1491.433$, $P<.000$]. This hypothesis is therefore not confirmed. This result showed that activities of traditional elders' councils made a contribution of 80.9% to the total contribution and protection of rural communities. This means that elders exercise authority derived from age, experience, and ancestral legitimacy, addressing conflicts that range from land disputes to breaches of local peace accords. The result therefore entails that there is a significant positive relationship between activities of traditional elders' councils and protection of rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of simple linear regression showing influence of public shaming and protection of rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria

Predictor variable	R	R ²	Df	F	B	T	Sig.
Constant	.890 ^a	.792	1,291	1336.973	.895	7.824	.000
Public shaming						36.565	.000

Source: Field work, 2026

The result presented in table 4.5 showed that there was a significant influence of public shaming and protection of rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. $R=.890$, $R^2=.792$. $F(1, 1,291)= 1336.973$, $P<.000$]. This hypothesis is therefore not confirmed. This result showed that public shaming made a contribution of 79.2% to the total contribution and protection of rural communities. The result therefore entails that there is a significant positive relationship between public shaming and protection of rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Discussion of findings

The findings on hypothesis one indicate that traditional elders' councils remain important institutions for protecting rural communities in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Their activities include mediating communal disputes, promoting intelligence sharing, mobilizing local vigilante groups, enforcing customary norms, and collaborating with formal

security agencies to prevent crime and maintain peace. These roles strengthen social cohesion and encourage community participation in security governance. However, the effectiveness of elders' councils is constrained by inadequate legal recognition, declining respect for traditional authority among some youths, political interference, and the increasing sophistication of criminal activities such as kidnapping and cult violence. The findings therefore suggest that integrating traditional institutions with formal policing structures would improve rural security outcomes and enhance sustainable peace (Akanji, 2026; Akinleke & Bankole, 2026).

The findings also support the Social Control Theory, which argues that strong social institutions, shared norms, and community attachment discourage criminal behaviour. Traditional elders' councils reinforce informal social control by promoting collective responsibility, conflict resolution, and compliance with cultural values, thereby reducing opportunities for insecurity. Similarly, the Hybrid Security Governance perspective explains that effective rural protection is achieved through collaboration between state security institutions and traditional authorities rather than reliance on formal policing alone. These theoretical perspectives validate the continued relevance of elders' councils in strengthening rural community resilience and security (Ilori et al., 2026).

The findings on hypothesis two indicate that public shaming functions as an informal social control mechanism that promotes accountability and collective responsibility in rural communities across the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Community members often employ public criticism, traditional sanctions, and communal exposure to discourage theft, cultism, domestic violence, and other deviant behaviours. These practices reinforce local norms and deter potential offenders where formal law enforcement is limited. However, the findings also reveal that excessive public shaming may result in stigmatization, human rights concerns, and social exclusion, particularly when accusations are not objectively verified. The study further shows that community protection is strengthened through collaboration among traditional rulers, youth associations, vigilante groups, and local leaders who collectively monitor security threats and promote social cohesion. These findings support Social Control Theory, which argues that strong social bonds and community norms discourage criminal behaviour by encouraging conformity (Hirschi, 1969). Likewise, Routine Activity Theory explains that coordinated community surveillance reduces opportunities for crime by increasing capable guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Recent studies similarly affirm that community-based security structures remain significant in addressing insecurity in rural Nigeria despite challenges of regulation, funding, and accountability (Balogun & Lawanson, 2025; European Union Agency for Asylum [EUAA], 2026).

Conclusion

This study concludes that informal security strategies play a significant role in the protection of rural communities in the South-South region of Nigeria. Community-based mechanisms such as neighborhood vigilance groups, traditional rulers' councils, youth associations, religious organizations, age-grade systems, and indigenous conflict resolution practices complement formal security institutions by enhancing intelligence gathering, promoting social cohesion, and facilitating rapid responses to local security threats. Understanding the relationships between these informal security strategies and community protection provides valuable empirical evidence for strengthening collaborative security governance. The study contributes to knowledge by expanding the existing literature on community security in Nigeria through a systematic examination of the association between informal security mechanisms and rural community protection in the South-South region. It provides context-specific evidence that can guide policymakers, security agencies, traditional institutions, and development practitioners in designing inclusive and community-driven security policies.

The adoption of a correlational research design is particularly important because it enables the researcher to determine the nature and strength of the relationships between informal security strategies and indicators of rural community protection without manipulating the study variables. This approach generates objective, empirical data that support evidence-based decision-making and offers a foundation for future longitudinal and experimental studies aimed at improving rural security and sustainable community development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. State governments in the South-South region should formally recognize and integrate traditional elders' councils into community-based security and conflict management frameworks. This will enhance collaboration between indigenous institutions and formal law enforcement agencies while preserving local customs and ensuring community ownership of security initiatives.
2. Traditional mediation and reconciliation mechanisms should be institutionalized as complementary approaches to formal judicial processes for resolving minor disputes. Government agencies, local governments, and community organizations should provide technical and logistical support to elders' councils to improve the effectiveness and transparency of indigenous conflict resolution.
3. While public shaming has historically served as a deterrent against deviant behaviour, communities should establish clear ethical standards that protect human dignity and fundamental rights. Traditional leaders should ensure that such sanctions are applied fairly, proportionately, and only after thorough community-based investigations to prevent abuse and wrongful stigmatization.
4. Regular training programmes should be organized for traditional rulers, elders, youth leaders, and women's groups on conflict mediation, restorative justice, human rights, early warning systems, and peacebuilding. Such capacity-building initiatives will improve the effectiveness of indigenous security institutions in responding to emerging security challenges.
5. The Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, local vigilante groups, and traditional institutions should establish structured communication channels for intelligence sharing, early conflict detection, and coordinated responses to rural insecurity without undermining community traditions.

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