

Mbakyer at the Crossroads: Communal Violence, Conflict Diffusion, and Positive Peace Pathways in Nigeria's Middle Belt

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Abstract—This article examines the Mbakyer crisis in the Takum–Donga–Bali axis of southern Taraba State, Nigeria, as a localized communal conflict with wider implications for insecurity, governance fragility, and peacebuilding. Rather than presenting untested econometric claims, the study adopts a qualitative documentary case-study design triangulating published scholarship on Taraba conflict, conflict-event reporting, displacement records, and global peace and terrorism indicators. The core argument is not that communal violence is identical to terrorism, but that persistent subnational violence can create enabling conditions that mirror the structural risk environment highlighted by the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) and the Positive Peace framework. Nigeria's continued placement among the countries most affected by terrorism, alongside documented violence and displacement in Taraba, underscores the analytical importance of localized conflict systems within broader national insecurity. The article makes three contributions. First, it situates the Mbakyer case within broader debates on land, indigeneity, exclusion, and state presence in the Middle Belt. Second, it demonstrates how localized communal violence may diffuse spatially and institutionally when governance deficits, social distrust, and livelihood disruption are left unresolved. Third, it applies the Positive Peace framework to identify practical pathways for prevention, stabilization, and recovery in southern Taraba. The findings suggest that repeated violence in the study area reflects deficits in well-functioning government, equitable distribution of resources, good relations with neighbours, free flow of information, and accountable institutions. The article concludes that sustainable peace in southern Taraba requires moving beyond episodic security deployments toward an integrated framework grounded in inclusive governance, local mediation, livelihood restoration, and institutional credibility.

Index Terms—Taraba State, Mbakyer, communal conflict, conflict diffusion, Positive Peace, Global Terrorism Index, local governance, Nigeria

I. Introduction

Nigeria's security environment is shaped by overlapping forms of violence, including insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, farmer–herder clashes, and communal conflicts. The cumulative effect is a layered insecurity landscape in which local disputes frequently intersect with wider patterns of fragility, displacement, and weak state protection. Recent global reporting continues to portray Nigeria as one of the states most affected by terrorism, but national insecurity is not reducible to designated terrorist organizations alone; recurrent local conflicts also erode trust in institutions, disrupt livelihoods, and deepen civilian vulnerability (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025a; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025b).

Southern Taraba State exemplifies this problem. The Takum–Donga–Bali corridor has experienced repeated violence associated with land disputes, identity contestation, militia activity, farmer–herder tensions, and violence against civilians. Recent reporting drawing on ACLED data shows persistent insecurity in Taraba,

with Takum among the more affected local government areas, while IOM reporting documents significant displacement in Bali following communal clashes (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025; International Organization for Migration, 2021).

Localized conflicts do not exist in isolation but are often embedded within broader regional and systemic patterns of violence. Research on conflict diffusion shows that violence can spread spatially and institutionally through mechanisms such as transnational linkages, retaliatory cycles, displacement, and weakened state capacity (Buhaug & Gleditsch, 2008; Gleditsch, 2007). This perspective is particularly relevant in fragile contexts such as Nigeria, where subnational violence interacts with wider insecurity dynamics and where event-based conflict datasets reveal geographic clustering of violent incidents (Raleigh et al., 2010).

The article asks a central question: how can a local communal crisis in southern Taraba be linked analytically to wider patterns of insecurity without collapsing communal violence into terrorism? The answer advanced here is careful and relational. Mbakyer is significant not because it should be relabelled as terrorism, but because it reveals how local violence can generate conditions associated with broader insecurity—displacement, livelihood collapse, distrust in institutions, spatial contagion, and normalization of coercive force. In this sense, the GTI provides macro-context, while Positive Peace offers the more useful diagnostic lens for understanding why violence persists and diffuses (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024; World Bank, 2011).

II. Conflict in Southern Taraba and the Relevance of Positive Peace

The literature on Taraba conflict consistently identifies land, belonging, political exclusion, and struggles over local authority as central drivers of recurring violence. In studies of Tiv–Jukun relations and related conflicts in southern Taraba, land is shown to be more than an economic resource: it is tied to identity, recognition, security, and political relevance. This helps explain why disputes endure despite repeated peace agreements and why conflict often becomes cyclical rather than incidental (Bamidele, 2022; Yange, 2025).

Existing scholarship also demonstrates that the consequences of violence in southern Taraba extend well beyond immediate casualties. Studies on communal clashes and farmer–herder conflict in Takum document farm abandonment, business disruption, market instability, household displacement, and eroding confidence in local order. State-wide analyses likewise show that weak implementation of inquiry reports, limited adherence to peace frameworks, and politicized mediation frequently undermine conflict resolution efforts (Atiyaye et al., 2025; Okonkwo et al., 2025; Daudu et al., 2024).

The persistence of violent communal conflict in Nigeria’s wider security landscape has also been linked to governance weakness, humanitarian strain, and the erosion of public security. Although northern insurgency and Middle Belt communal crises are not identical phenomena, both highlight the development costs of institutional fragility and citizen insecurity (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014; World Bank, 2011).

The Positive Peace framework is valuable precisely because it moves the analysis beyond event-counting. Positive Peace refers to the attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. It is built around eight pillars, including well-functioning government, equitable distribution of resources, good relations with neighbours, free flow of information, and low levels of corruption. In conflict-prone

settings, deficits in these pillars increase vulnerability to violence, reduce resilience to shocks, and hinder recovery (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024; OECD, 2020).

III. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative documentary case-study design. The choice of method is deliberate. A central weakness identified in the rejected manuscript was the reliance on loosely dated personal communications with unnamed individuals, without clear methodology or corroboration. The revised design therefore rests exclusively on publicly available documentary sources and published scholarship. The aim is to produce a transparent and defensible evidentiary basis appropriate for a qualitative case study (Bamidele, 2022; Daudu et al., 2024).

Four categories of material are used. First, global peace and terrorism reports from the Institute for Economics & Peace provide macro-analytical context, especially the Global Terrorism Index 2025, the Global Peace Index 2025, and the Positive Peace Report 2024. Second, conflict-event and displacement evidence is drawn from Taraba-focused reporting linked to ACLED data and from the International Organization for Migration's displacement reporting for Bali LGA. Third, the study engages published work on communal conflict, land dispute, and insecurity in Taraba and Takum. Fourth, relevant publication-policy materials are consulted for transparency regarding AI disclosure and manuscript preparation (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025a; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025b; Taylor & Francis, 2026).

The analytical strategy is based on triangulation and structured focused interpretation. Documentary evidence is first used to establish the wider conflict environment of the Takum–Donga–Bali axis. The Mbakyer crisis is then read as a local manifestation of that wider environment and mapped against selected Positive Peace pillars in order to identify structural deficits associated with violence persistence and diffusion. This use of documentary and event-based data aligns with contemporary approaches to conflict analysis that rely on structured conflict datasets such as ACLED in order to analyze patterns of conflict intensity, clustering, and diffusion (Raleigh et al., 2010; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025).

Because the present version relies solely on publicly available materials and does not involve human subjects, no formal human-subject ethics clearance was required for this documentary analysis. However, if future revisions incorporate interviews or focus groups, the study should include explicit ethics approval or informed-consent procedures, along with details of sampling, anonymity, and data security (Taylor & Francis, 2026).

IV. The Mbakyer Crisis in Context: Local Violence in a Wider Southern Taraba Conflict System

The Mbakyer crisis should be situated within the longer history of violent contestation in southern Taraba. The Takum–Donga–Bali corridor lies within a region historically affected by disputes over land, settlement, political recognition, and access to security. Recent reporting shows that Taraba has continued to record significant levels of violence against civilians and battles across multiple local government areas, with Takum among the most affected. This indicates that local episodes of violence are part of a broader regional pattern rather than isolated anomalies (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025).

At the social level, the dynamics commonly associated with Mbakyer-type violence are consistent with patterns documented in the wider Taraba literature: hardened group boundaries, contested belonging, low trust in external mediation, and recurring retaliatory logic. In areas where the distinction between indigene and settler is politically salient, even mundane disputes can rapidly acquire existential meaning. Once violence emerges, it tends to be narrated not as a discrete incident but as evidence of wider persecution, entitlement, or abandonment, thereby making escalation more likely (Bamidele, 2022; Yange, 2025).

The humanitarian and developmental consequences of this pattern are substantial. In Bali LGA, IOM documented major displacement following communal clashes, with thousands of affected persons and widespread shelter damage. Studies of Takum also highlight loss of farmland, interruption of trade, reduced investment confidence, and weakening of local livelihoods. These consequences reveal that the costs of local violence are cumulative: conflict reshapes settlement patterns, distorts economic life, and degrades the capacity of communities to coexist under conditions of uncertainty (International Organization for Migration, 2021; Atiyaye et al., 2025; Okonkwo et al., 2025).

Seen in this way, Mbakyer is not simply a local security episode. It is a micro-case that reveals how repeated violence becomes normalized within a wider conflict system. The local significance of the case lies in its immediate harm to affected communities, while its broader significance lies in how it reflects and reproduces subnational fragility (Daudu et al., 2024; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025).

Table 1. Illustrative conflict dynamics in the Takum–Donga–Bali corridor

Dimension	Observed pattern	Analytical implication
Spatial spread	Violence and insecurity recur across Takum, Donga, Bali, and neighboring areas.	Local crises are embedded in a wider subregional conflict system.
Humanitarian effect	Displacement, shelter loss, and disrupted settlement patterns follow outbreaks of violence.	Local conflict generates long-term civilian vulnerability.
Economic disruption	Farm abandonment, constrained mobility, and market interruption affect households and local trade.	Conflict weakens recovery and deepens grievances.
Institutional strain	Communities report weak trust in state mediation and uneven response capacity.	Governance deficits increase the probability of repeated violence.

V. From Local Communal Crisis to Conflict Diffusion

A key claim often made in local conflict studies is that a specific crisis has wider national or regional implications. Such a claim must be demonstrated rather than asserted. In the present case, the relevant mechanism is conflict diffusion. Diffusion does not require formal insurgency or ideological terrorism. It occurs when violence spreads across space, when displacement alters social and political balances in neighboring areas, when retaliatory narratives circulate, and when trust in formal institutions declines (Buhaug & Gleditsch, 2008; Gleditsch, 2007).

In southern Taraba, diffusion can be seen in at least four forms. First, there is spatial diffusion: insecurity is not confined to a single settlement, but recurs across the Takum–Donga–Bali axis and adjoining areas. Second, there is institutional diffusion: repeated violence weakens confidence in the state's ability to provide impartial security and credible dispute resolution, thereby encouraging local communities to rely on self-help, vigilante arrangements, or retaliatory action. Third, there is economic diffusion: disrupted agriculture, abandoned markets, and mobility constraints spread the consequences of violence beyond the original site of conflict. Fourth, there is discursive diffusion: local incidents are absorbed into broader narratives of fear, group victimhood, conquest, or abandonment (Raleigh et al., 2010; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025).

This wider relevance is where the GTI is most useful. The GTI is not employed here to classify Mbakyer as a terrorist event. Rather, it provides macro-context, showing that Nigeria remains embedded in a regional insecurity environment in which violence is spatially networked and conflict zones are particularly vulnerable to escalation. Localized communal crises matter within such an environment because they deepen the very institutional and social weaknesses that make wider insecurity harder to contain (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025a; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025b).

The appropriate analytical claim, therefore, is not equivalence but connection: the Mbakyer crisis is connected to broader national insecurity because it exemplifies how unresolved local violence contributes to a wider ecology of fragility (Buhaug & Gleditsch, 2008; World Bank, 2011).

VI. A Positive Peace Diagnostic of the Mbakyer Case

The Positive Peace framework helps identify the structural deficits that make recurrent violence more likely in southern Taraba. Five pillars are especially salient for the present case: well-functioning government, equitable distribution of resources, good relations with neighbours, free flow of information, and accountable institutions/low corruption (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024).

First, well-functioning government is weak where the state cannot provide timely civilian protection, implement inquiry findings, or sustain trusted conflict-management institutions. The recurrence of violence in Taraba despite repeated interventions suggests not the complete absence of government, but a deficit in governmental effectiveness and credibility at local level (Daudu et al., 2024; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025).

Second, equitable distribution of resources remains deeply contested. In Taraba, access to land is inseparable from issues of recognition, authority, and belonging. Where communities perceive resource access and political inclusion as unfairly structured, peace remains brittle irrespective of temporary calm (Bamidele, 2022; Yange, 2025).

Third, good relations with neighbours are undermined by accumulated distrust, thin reconciliation, and memories of violence. Positive Peace requires horizontal social trust, yet the Taraba literature suggests that coexistence often rests on fragile accommodation rather than durable reconciliation (Bamidele, 2022; Daudu et al., 2024).

Fourth, free flow of information is compromised in conflict-prone environments where rumor, selective narratives, and poor institutional communication shape perceptions of events. In such contexts, weak informational credibility can accelerate fear and retaliation. Strengthening trustworthy channels of

information is therefore central to conflict prevention, not peripheral to it (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025b).

Fifth, low levels of corruption and accountable institutions are central to peace resilience. International fragility frameworks consistently emphasize that recurring violence is closely linked to weak institutions, lack of inclusive governance, and limited economic opportunity. Where communities perceive security, justice, or mediation processes as politically selective, compromised, or ineffective, every new incident can become a referendum on identity and power rather than a matter for lawful redress (World Bank, 2011; OECD, 2020).

Table 2. Positive Peace diagnostic of the Mbakyer case

Positive Peace pillar	Local manifestation	Peacebuilding priority
Well-functioning government	Delayed, inconsistent, or weakly trusted dispute management and civilian protection.	Institutionalized local peace architecture and implementation credibility.
Equitable distribution of resources	Disputed land access and exclusionary perceptions of belonging and authority.	Transparent land governance and inclusive dispute adjudication.
Good relations with neighbours	Thin coexistence, inter-group mistrust, and retaliatory memory.	Reconciliation, dialogue, and community-level trust rebuilding.
Free flow of information	Rumor, weak official communication, and politicized narratives.	Early warning systems and credible local communication channels.
Low levels of corruption/accountability	Perceived impunity or selective enforcement.	Transparent justice, monitoring, and local accountability mechanisms.

VII. Policy Implications

The first policy implication is that reactive security deployment, while sometimes necessary, is insufficient. Security forces may stop immediate violence, but repeated reliance on reactive deployment does not address the structural factors that regenerate conflict. Sustainable peace therefore requires a local peace infrastructure rather than episodic pacification (World Bank, 2011; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024).

Second, there is a need for territorially grounded mediation and land-governance reform. Where conflict is tied to land, belonging, and recognition, durable peace depends on transparent adjudication mechanisms, institutionalized mediation, and credible follow-through. Peace committees should be inclusive, community-anchored, and linked to enforceable administrative and judicial processes rather than convened only after violence has escalated (Bamidele, 2022; Yange, 2025).

Third, livelihood recovery must be treated as a peacebuilding priority. Conflict in southern Taraba disrupts agriculture, trade, and household security. Recovery efforts should therefore go beyond emergency relief to include restored farm access, market rehabilitation, local enterprise support, youth employment, and targeted social protection for affected communities (Atiyaye et al., 2025; Okonkwo et al., 2025; International Organization for Migration, 2021).

Fourth, conflict prevention requires stronger local information systems and early-warning channels. Trusted communication between communities, traditional authorities, administrative officials, and security actors is essential to reducing rumor-driven escalation. Multichannel reporting arrangements, routine public communication, and transparent follow-up on incidents can improve confidence and contain violent narratives (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024; OECD, 2020).

Finally, local communal conflicts must be treated as strategic fragility indicators within Nigerian security governance. When localized violence is tolerated as a peripheral issue, it can generate displacement, deepen grievance systems, and weaken state legitimacy in ways that compound broader national insecurity. A coherent response must therefore integrate peacebuilding, development governance, civilian protection, and accountability (World Bank, 2011; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025a).

VIII. Conclusion

This article has argued that the Mbakyer crisis in southern Taraba is best understood as a local communal conflict embedded in a broader subnational fragility system. Its significance lies not in equating communal violence with terrorism, but in showing how repeated local conflict can generate the conditions—displacement, institutional weakness, livelihood disruption, distrust, and spatial diffusion—that widen insecurity over time (Buhaug & Gleditsch, 2008; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024).

By shifting from unsupported personal communications and unestimated regression claims to a transparent documentary case-study design, the revised paper provides a more defensible evidentiary basis for publication. It shows that published Taraba scholarship, displacement reporting, event-based conflict reporting, and global peace frameworks can be triangulated meaningfully to explain why violence persists in the Takum–Donga–Bali axis (Raleigh et al., 2010; International Organization for Migration, 2021; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025).

The overall conclusion is that sustainable peace in southern Taraba requires more than suppressing outbreaks. It requires rebuilding the institutions, relationships, and distributive arrangements that make recurrent violence less likely. In this sense, the Mbakyer case is both deeply local and nationally relevant: local in its immediate geography and lived consequences, but nationally significant as an illustration of how neglected communal conflicts can become enduring nodes of insecurity in Nigeria's wider peace landscape (World Bank, 2011; OECD, 2020; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025b).

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