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Original Article

The Impact of Insecurity on Tourist Perception of Destination Choice in Selected States in Nigeria

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Sustainable Tourism.*

Security threats play a pivotal role in shaping tourist perceptions and the appeal of ecotourism destinations. This study assesses the impact of security concerns on travel decisions, safety perceptions, and destination appeal in Nigeria. Data were collected using a quantitative approach through structured questionnaires with domestic visitors and industry players in Ekiti, Niger, and Osun States. A stratified random sampling method that ensured diverse representation was used. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, including multiple regression, using the R statistical package. Results indicate that security factors explain 46.4% of the variation in visitation likelihood, 48% in safety concerns, and 22.7% in destination appeal. While terrorism and ethnic/religious conflict positively influence visitation, banditry and corruption deter tourists. Safety concerns are heightened by kidnapping and drug trafficking. The results show the need for improved governance, stronger law enforcement, and strategic crisis management to enhance security and restore confidence in ecotourism. Policymakers and stakeholders should implement proactive measures to mitigate security risks and ensure sustainable tourism development in Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The influence of insecurity on tourism has emerged as a significant research focus, especially in areas where safety issues affect tourist movement and destination choices (Lepp & Gibson, 2007; Zhu & Deng, 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). This study examines the influence of diverse forms of insecurity, such as political instability, violence, and other security risks, on tourist perceptions and travel choices in Ondo, Oyo, and Niger States, Nigeria. These places have experienced security issues, including conflicts between farmers and herders, kidnappings, and regional unrest, which upset local people and jeopardise the sustainability of tourism as an economic activity (Bank, 1990). Addressing these issues is crucial for sustaining tourism development and ensuring that destinations remain appealing to visitors (Salman et al., 2024; Darabi et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023).

The examination of tourist perception and decision-making frequently utilises risk perception theory and the push-pull model of tourism motivation (Dash, 2024; Subedi & Kubíčková, 2023). Risk perception theory posits that visitors assess potential hazards prior to selecting a destination (Fischhoff et al., 1978), whereas the push-pull model elucidates how intrinsic motives (push factors) and extrinsic attractions (pull factors) affect destination choice (Dann, 1977). These frameworks elucidate how safety apprehensions dissuade visitors from travelling to areas regarded as unsafe. The feeling of security is a significant factor influencing tourist behaviour (Rather & Bhat, 2023). Zhang et al. (2023) emphasise that perceived danger significantly affects travel choices, leading tourists to often eschew destinations linked to insecurity. Fourie et al. (2020) contend that security threats deter tourist arrivals, especially in politically unstable regions, hence affecting visitor perceptions and diminishing the appeal of locations in southwestern Nigeria.

The results are provided solely to inspire researchers. The socioeconomic ramifications of insecurity in tourism are particularly pronounced

in instances of herders' violence, which disrupts local communities and undermines economic stability (Ogunsusi and Adeleke, 2021). Insecurity may result in the displacement of local inhabitants, diminished investment in tourism-related enterprises, and a general decline in visitor trust. These patterns correspond with Asongu and Odhiambo's (2023) findings that tourists generally eschew regions seen as high-risk, favouring areas with recognised security protocols. Therefore, creating robust security plans and risk communication frameworks is essential for reinstating confidence and maintaining the sustainability of tourism in these areas.

Perceptions of safety significantly influence tourists' willingness to visit a destination. Research conducted by Salimon et al. (2019) and de Rooij et al. (2022) underscores the significance of fostering a secure destination image to entice tourists. Karl et al. (2020) contend that risk perceptions are shaped by sociocultural circumstances, rendering targeted communication crucial for addressing tourists' concerns. The emergence of digital communication and social media has revolutionised the manner in which tourists evaluate security circumstances prior to travel. Lestari and Pratika (2020) observe that social media platforms influence tourist impressions by transmitting both favourable and unfavourable tales. Adverse reports regarding insecurity may dissuade prospective visitors, underscoring the necessity for proactive marketing and risk communication to mitigate these views. Zhang et al. (2023) promote the implementation of more robust risk management and communication measures to bolster destination resilience and instil confidence in tourists.

Tourists' risk perceptions are affected by contradictory information regarding a destination's safety. Rahman et al. (2021) analyse the perceived travel risks linked to security concerns and health crises like COVID-19, demonstrating that both substantially influence travel decisions. Comprehending how various information sources influence these impressions is essential for tourist management in unstable

environments. An exhaustive examination of the impact of insecurity on tourism must take into account both cognitive and emotional reactions. Perić et al. (2021) note that risk perception is influenced not only by rational evaluations but also by emotional responses. Tourists' apprehensions may not consistently correspond with statistical reality, although they are frequently influenced by personal experiences and media portrayals, which can exacerbate negative opinions even after actual security conditions have improved.

Destination branding is essential in mitigating adverse security impressions. Yan et al. (2024) investigate the impact of incorporating security measures into branding strategies on resilience and tourist attraction. Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin (2017) contend that tourists who establish an emotional bond with a destination experience more contentment and well-being. Robust branding initiatives that highlight safety, cultural diversity, and community involvement can alleviate apprehensions and promote tourism, even in areas traditionally regarded as unsafe. Consequently, site managers must prioritise strategic communication and infrastructure enhancements to bolster tourist confidence.

Mitigating the effects of insecurity on tourism in Ondo, Oyo, and Niger States necessitates a synthesis of improved security protocols and smart destination management. Asongu and Odhiambo (2023) propose that military expenditure may alleviate security threats, rendering it a viable strategy for enhancing tourism in hazardous areas. Enhanced security measures via law enforcement and surveillance can instil reassurance in tourists and rejuvenate confidence in these locales. Nevertheless, in addition to direct security enforcement, a more cohesive strategy is essential. Investments in local community participation, infrastructure development, and risk communication are crucial for influencing the perception of these areas. Dongliang et al. (2022) emphasise that public infrastructure significantly influences tourist experiences, indicating that enhanced safety measures, accessible transit, and targeted

marketing that underscores community unity can facilitate tourism recovery.

This study establishes that insecurity significantly shapes tourists' perceptions and destination choices in Ondo, Oyo, and Niger States. A synthesis of existing literature reveals that insecurity is intricately linked to sociopolitical and psychological factors, which require deliberate and coordinated management. Addressing these concerns through strategic destination branding, effective risk communication, and strengthened security frameworks can enhance tourists' confidence and promote the recovery and growth of tourism in the affected regions. In light of these concerns, this study seeks to investigate the extent to which insecurity influences tourism activities in the selected states; examine tourists' perceptions of insecurity in ecotourism destinations across North Central and Southwestern Nigeria; assess how these perceptions affect their travel decisions; and explore the strategies employed by tourism stakeholders to address insecurity in the study areas.

METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design, data collection methods, sampling technique, and analytical tools employed in this study.

The study employed quantitative techniques to explore how various personal factors influence tourists' perceptions of insecurity in Ekiti, Niger, and Osun states. A total of 120 tourists, comprising domestic visitors and industry stakeholders, were selected as respondents for the study using the Taro Yamane algorithm. Data were gathered using a standardised questionnaire aimed at acquiring demographic information, including gender, age, educational achievement, occupation, and income. (Shavanthappa et al., 2025; Abahre et al., 2023; Milanese et al., 2024). In addition, the questionnaire assessed the respondents' concerns about various security threats (specifically terrorism, insurgency, kidnapping, and political violence) using a standardised rating scale (Moser & Holland, 1997; Lisle, 2013). This combination of methods

enabled a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between individual characteristics and perceived insecurity among tourists in the selected States.

The collected data were analysed using statistical methods in the R software (Tubekova et al., 2024; Andreu et al., 2020). Descriptive statistics helped summarise the demographic details of respondents, while chi-square tests examined how personal factors related to feelings of insecurity (Neary et al., 2025; Gajda & Jeżewska-Zychowicz, 2020). Since the data did not follow a normal distribution, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to see how security concerns affected tourists' travel decisions (Joshi & Mehta, 2019). Furthermore, regression analysis was applied to determine how security threats impact a destination's attractiveness and tourists' confidence in visiting. The study set a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) to ensure reliability in identifying key influencing factors (Elshaer, 2024; Yactayo-Ormeño et al., 2023). These findings provide valuable insights into how security challenges affect tourism sustainability and contribution evidence-based recommendations for policies and destination management (Christie et al., 2014; Wang & Pizam, 2011).

RESULTS

This section presents the findings derived from the analysis of data collected from tourists regarding their perceptions of insecurity and its influence on tourism in Ondo, Oyo, and Niger States. The results are organised to address the study's key research questions, including the extent of insecurity's impact on tourism activities, tourists' perceptions of safety in selected ecotourism destinations, the influence of perceived insecurity on travel decisions, and the strategies adopted by tourism stakeholders to mitigate security challenges. Both descriptive and inferential statistics are employed to highlight key patterns, relationships, and emerging themes from the data.

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The sociodemographic characteristics of respondents from Ekiti, Niger, and Osun states (Table 1) show variations in gender, nationality, age, education, occupation, and income, which could influence perceptions of insecurity and destination choice. Across the states, male respondents predominated, with 67.5% in Osun, 65.0% in Niger, and 62.5% in Ekiti, indicating a potential gendered influence on tourism. Most respondents were Nigerian (92.5% in Ekiti, 90.0% in Niger, and 100% in Osun), with minimal foreign tourist representation, suggesting possible concerns about security or limited international tourism promotion.

However, age distribution varied, with the 36–45 years age group being the largest in Ekiti (45.0%) and Niger (40.0%). In Osun, the majority (40.0%) were 56 years or older. The 26–35 years group was more prevalent in Ekiti (37.5%) and Niger (35.0%) but lower in Osun (5.0%). These differences suggest a younger demographic in Ekiti and Niger compared to Osun, where older respondents were more common.

Educationally, most respondents had tertiary education: 75.0% in Ekiti, 70.0% in Niger, and 37.5% in Osun. Osun had a higher proportion of respondents with only secondary education (30.0%), while all in Ekiti (17.5%) and Niger (12.5%) had at least secondary education. Occupation-wise, civil servants were the majority in Ekiti (70.0%) and Niger (67.5%), while students dominated in Osun (50.0%). Farmers were more common in Osun (22.5%) as against 5% in Niger and Ekiti, respectively. Income levels varied, with the majority in Ekiti and Niger earning ₦101,000–₦200,000 (42.5%), while in Osun, 57.5% earned below ₦50,000. These economic and occupational differences suggest that income and job stability may influence tourists' perceptions and destination choices. These findings emphasise the role of sociodemographic factors, including age, education, and income, in shaping tourism

engagement and perceptions of insecurity across the states.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents in the Study Areas

Variables	Ekiti		Niger		Osun	
	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Gender						
Male	25	62.5	26	65.0	27	67.5
Female	15	37.5	14	35.0	13	32.5
Nationality						
Foreigner	3	7.5	4	10.0	0	0
Nigerian	37	92.5	36	90.0	40	100.0
Age						
26-35 years	15	37.5	14	35.0	2	5.0
36-45 years	18	45.0	16	40.0	12	30.0
46-55 years	7	17.5	9	22.5	9	22.5
56 and above	0	0	1	2.5	16	40.0
Educational Background						
No Education	0	0	0	0	3	7.5
Primary	0	0	0	0	3	7.5
Secondary	7	17.5	5	12.5	12	30.0
Tertiary	30	75.0	28	70.0	15	37.5
Postgraduate	3	7.5	7	17.5	7	17.5
Occupation						
Farmer	2	5.0	2	5.0	9	22.5
Civil Servant	28	70.0	27	67.5	7	17.5
Business	8	20.0	10	25.0	2	5.0
Politician	2	5.0	1	2.5	2	5.0
Student	0	0	0	0	20	50.0
Monthly Household Income						
Below ₦50,000	3	7.5	3	7.5	23	57.5
₦50 - ₦100, 000	11	27.5	8	20.0	7	17.5
₦101-₦200,000	17	42.5	17	42.5	3	7.5
₦201-₦500,000	5	12.5	7	17.5	2	5.0
Above ₦500,000	4	10.0	5	12.5	5	12.5

Source: *Fieldwork, 2024*

Perceived Insecurity in the Study Areas

The perceptions of insecurity in Ekiti, Niger, and Osun states differed significantly across different security threats (Table 2). Terrorism was perceived as a major concern in Osun, where 100% of respondents acknowledged it. In contrast, 57.5% in Ekiti and 47.5% in Niger identified terrorism as a concern, with a higher proportion in Niger (50.0%) dismissing its presence. Insurgency was widely recognised across all states, with 90.0% of respondents in Ekiti, 87.5% in Niger, and 95.0% in Osun acknowledging it. However, a small fraction in Niger (10.0%) and Ekiti (7.5%) were uncertain about its prevalence.

Additionally, ethnic and religious conflicts were most pronounced in Osun (80.0%), followed by

Ekiti (62.5%) and Niger (52.5%), while fewer respondents in Niger (40.0%) and Ekiti (35.0%) reported no such conflicts. Kidnapping concerns were high in Ekiti (95.0%) and Niger (97.5%) but lower in Osun (62.5%), where 37.5% dismissed it. Banditry was similarly noted in Ekiti (95.0%) and Niger (92.5%), while only 57.5% in Osun perceived it as a concern.

Herder-farmer conflicts were most prevalent in Osun (75.0%), followed by Niger (50.0%) and Ekiti (37.5%). Also, political violence was a significant issue in Osun (62.5%) but less concerning in Niger (27.5%) and Ekiti (25.0%). Cybersecurity threats were more recognised in Osun (57.5%), with lower concerns in Ekiti (30.0%) and Niger (37.5%). Economic insecurity

was a concern in Ekiti (90.0%) and Niger (87.5%), but only 60.0% in Osun acknowledged it.

Corruption was universally acknowledged in Ekiti and Niger (100%), while 62.5% in Osun recognised it as an issue. Human trafficking was perceived more in Osun (60.0%) than in Niger (22.5%) and Ekiti (25.0%). Environmental insecurity was more widespread in Osun (70.0%)

and Niger (52.5%) than in Ekiti (47.5%). Arms proliferation and weak border security were also major concerns across all states.

These results show regional variations in perceived security threats, which could influence tourists' destination choices and tourism development in the region.

Table 2: Perceived Insecurity in the Study Areas

Variables	Frequency Ekiti	Per cent	Frequency Niger	Per cent	Frequency Osun	Per cent
Terrorism						
Yes	23	57.5	19	47.5	40	100
No	17	42.5	20	50.0	0	0
Not sure	0	0	1	2.5	0	0
Insurgency						
Yes	36	90.0	35	87.5	38	95.0
No	1	2.5	1	2.5	2	5.0
Not sure	3	7.5	4	10.0	0	0
Ethnic/Religious Conflict						
Yes	25	62.5	21	52.5	32	80.0
No	14	35.0	16	40.0	6	15.0
Not sure	1	2.5	3	7.5	2	5.0
Kidnapping						
Yes	38	95.0	39	97.5	25	62.5
No	2	5.0	1	2.5	15	37.5
Banditry						
Yes	38	95.0	37	92.5	23	57.5
No	2	5.0	1	2.5	17	42.5
Not sure	0	0	2	5.0	0	0
Herder/Farmer Conflicts						
Yes	15	37.5	20	50.0	30	75.0
No	18	45.0	9	22.5	9	22.5
Not sure	7	17.5	11	27.5	1	2.5
Political Violence						
Yes	10	25.0	11	27.5	25	62.5
No	26	65.0	18	45.0	13	32.5
Not sure	4	10.0	11	27.5	2	5.0
Cybersecurity Threats						
Yes	12	30.0	15	37.5	23	57.5
No	23	57.5	14	35.0	15	37.5
Not Sure	5	12.5	11	27.5	2	5.0
Economic insecurity						
Yes	36	90.0	35	87.5	24	60.0
No	4	10.0	5	12.5	14	35.0
Not sure	0	0	0	0	2	5.0
Corruption						
Yes	40	100.0	40	100.0	25	62.5
No	0	0	0	0	13	32.5
Not sure	0	0	0	0	2	5.0
Human Trafficking						
Yes	10	25.0	9	22.5	24	60.0
No	23	57.5	21	52.5	14	35.0
Not sure	7	17.5	10	25.0	2	5.0
Environmental Insecurity						
Yes	19	47.5	21	52.5	28	70.0

No	21	52.5	18	45.0	9	22.5
Not sure			1	2.5	3	7.5
Arms Proliferation						
Yes	27	67.5	34	85.0	31	77.5
No	11	27.5	5	12.5	8	20.0
Not sure	2	5.0	1	2.5	1	2.5
Weak Border Security						
Yes	36	90.0	36	90.0	30	75.0
No	4	10.0	3	7.5	8	20.0
Not sure			1	2.5	2	5.0
Drug trafficking/Substance Abuse						
Yes	22	55.0	25	62.5	31	77.5
No	15	37.5	8	20.0	7	17.5
Not sure	3	7.5	7	17.5	2	5.0
Infrastructure Vulnerability						
Yes	23	57.5	16	40.0	29	72.5
No	11	27.5	15	37.5	9	22.5
Not sure	6	15.0	9	22.5	2	5.0
Health Insecurity						
Yes	19	47.5	19	47.5	25	62.5
No	12	30.0	11	27.5	10	25.0
Not sure	9	22.5	10	25.0	5	12.5

Source: *Fieldwork, 2024*

The Influence of Demographic Characteristics on Perceptions of Insecurity among Tourists in Nigeria

The Chi-Square Test of Independence results (Table 3) suggest significant correlations between specific demographic characteristics of tourists and their perception of insecurity in the study areas. Security concerns among visitors are not evenly distributed but are influenced by demographic factors, particularly age and nationality, while gender exhibits fewer significant associations.

Age reveals the strongest correlation with multiple insecurity variables, including perceptions of terrorism ($\chi^2 = 20.33$, $p = 0.026$), ethnic/religious conflict ($\chi^2 = 40.77$, $p < 0.001$), abduction ($\chi^2 = 13.75$, $p = 0.017$), banditry ($\chi^2 = 68.44$, $p < 0.001$), and corruption ($\chi^2 = 26.89$, $p = 0.003$). These findings imply that visitors who are elderly or more experienced may be more cautious of security threats, particularly those that are high-profile, such as terrorism, banditry, and corruption.

Additionally, nationality is also significantly correlated with perceptions of infrastructure vulnerability ($\chi^2 = 6.64$, $p = 0.036$), environmental

insecurity ($\chi^2 = 6.87$, $p = 0.032$), and ethnic/religious conflict ($\chi^2 = 17.35$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate that foreign and local tourists may have differing levels of apprehension about specific security threats. Foreign visitors, in particular, may perceive risks related to environmental instability and ethnic conflicts as more urgent.

By contrast, gender exhibits significantly fewer associations. The only statistically significant relationship observed is between gender and perceptions of drug trafficking/substance abuse ($\chi^2 = 9.43$, $p = 0.009$). This result suggests that male and female tourists may perceive drug-related crimes differently, potentially influenced by societal roles, exposure, or awareness levels.

These observations reveal the importance of demographic factors in shaping risk perceptions. Age plays a critical role in determining concerns about high-profile security threats, while nationality influences perceptions of systemic insecurities, such as environmental hazards and ethnic/religious conflicts. Although gender differences are less pronounced, perceptions of drug-related criminality remain notable.

Table 3: A Chi-Square Test of Independence

Demographic Variable	Insecurity Perception	Chi ² Value	p-Value	Degrees of Freedom
Gender	Drug Trafficking/Substance Abuse	9.43	0.009	2
Nationality	Ethnic/Religious Conflict	17.35	<0.001	2
Nationality	Environmental Insecurity	6.87	0.032	2
Nationality	Infrastructure Vulnerability	6.64	0.036	2
Age	Terrorism	20.33	0.026	10
Age	Ethnic/Religious Conflict	40.77	<0.001	10
Age	Kidnapping	13.75	0.017	5
Age	Banditry	68.44	<0.001	10
Age	Corruption	26.89	0.003	10

Correlation between Perceived Insecurity and Visitors' Decisions to Visit

Table 4 illustrates a sizable correlation between different forms of insecurity and tourists' decisions to visit destinations in Nigeria. Corruption, banditry, abduction, economic instability, human trafficking, cybercrime, and terrorism exerted a significant influence ($p < 0.001$), showing their crucial impact on tourist decisions. Additional factors, including infrastructure vulnerability, health instability, drought, ethno-religious conflict, political violence, and armaments proliferation, were also significant ($0.001 < p < 0.01$), albeit with marginally reduced influence. Moderate

correlations ($0.01 < p < 0.05$) were identified among herdsmen-farmer conflict, environmental insecurity, inadequate border security, and overall insecurity. The findings indicate that although several forms of insecurity affect tourism preferences, certain factors—specifically corruption, terrorism, and kidnapping—exert a more significant influence. Implementing focused policy interventions to address these critical challenges might markedly enhance perceptions of safety at destinations and promote tourist growth in affected regions, especially in Ondo, Oyo, and Minna, where safety is a serious concern.

Table 4: Correlation between Perceived Insecurity and Visitors' Decisions to Visit

Insecurity Factor	Min p-value	Significance Level
Corruption	9.53e-13	
Banditry	9.58e-11	***
Kidnapping	6.87e-08	***
Economic Instability	9.12e-08	***
Human Trafficking	2.65e-06	***
Cybercrime	3.50e-06	***
Terrorism	4.77e-06	***
Infrastructure Vulnerability	2.00e-04	**
Health Insecurity	2.99e-04	**
Drought	7.24e-04	**
Ethno-Religious Conflict	1.31e-03	**
Political Violence	1.91e-03	**
Arms Proliferation	2.09e-03	**
Herdsmen-Farmer Conflict	5.51e-03	*
Environmental Insecurity	7.86e-03	*
Weak Border Security	2.16e-02	*
General Insecurity	4.32e-02	*

*** *Highly Significant* ($p < 0.001$)

** *Significant* ($0.001 \leq p < 0.01$)

* *Moderate Significance* ($0.01 \leq p < 0.05$)

Perceived Insecurity and Tourist Decision-Making among Tourists in Nigeria

The Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to assess the influence of perceived insecurity on tourists' decision-making regarding ecotourism destinations in Nigeria. Given that the dataset violated the normality assumption required for ANOVA, Kruskal-Wallis's test, a non-parametric alternative, was employed to determine statistical differences. The findings indicate a substantial correlation between tourists' propensity to visit ecotourism destinations and their perceptions of insecurity. The statement *"Your perception of insecurity has influenced your decision to visit ecotourism destinations in Southwestern regions"* yielded a Kruskal-Wallis statistic of 24.9214 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a strong correlation. Likewise, the statement *"Your perceptions of insecurity influence their final decision to visit ecotourism destinations in the study areas"* recorded a Kruskal-Wallis statistic of 19.6145 and a p-value of 0.0001, reinforcing the argument that security concerns, particularly those related to banditry and kidnapping, serve as major deterrents to ecotourism.

Conversely, the perception of security did not have a statistically significant effect on tourists' decisions. However, the statement *"Your perception of security significantly affects your choice to visit Southwestern ecotourism destinations in Nigeria"* produced a Kruskal-Wallis statistic of 0.4276 with a p-value of 0.8075, suggesting that security alone is not a strong motivator for travel. Tourists may prioritise factors such as affordability, accessibility, or personal interests over security when making destination choices.

These findings highlight the necessity for targeted security interventions to mitigate specific threats that deter potential visitors. While addressing insecurity is crucial, ensuring safety alone may not be sufficient to attract tourists. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders must adopt a holistic approach that integrates enhanced security measures with strategic destination branding, infrastructure development, and marketing initiatives to improve visitors' confidence and promote ecotourism in the region.

Table 4: Kruskal-Wallis Test Results: Perceived Insecurity vs. Tourist Decision

Questions	Kruskal-Wallis Statistic	p-Value
Your perception of insecurity has influenced your decision to visit ecotourism destinations in the Southwestern regions	24.9214	0.0
Your perception of security significantly affects your choice to visit Southwestern ecotourism destinations in Nigeria.	0.4276	0.8075
Your perceptions of insecurity influence your final decision to visit ecotourism destinations in the study areas	19.6145	0.0001

The Influence of Security Threats on Tourist Perceptions and Destination Attractiveness

The regression analysis (Table 6) examines the influence of security concerns on tourists' likelihood to visit ecotourism destinations, perceptions of safety, and destination attractiveness. The results indicate that 46.4% of the variation in the likelihood to visit, 48% of the variation in safety concerns, and 22.7% of the variation in destination attractiveness are explained by the included variables.

Terrorism ($\beta = 0.321$, $p = 0.012$) and ethnic/religious conflict ($\beta = 0.287$, $p = 0.020$) positively influence tourists' likelihood to visit, suggesting that some visitors may still consider travelling despite these risks. On the other hand, banditry ($\beta = -0.291$, $p = 0.031$) and corruption ($\beta = -0.409$, $p = 0.005$) significantly deter tourists and show their negative impact on travel decisions. Weak border security ($\beta = 0.259$, $p = 0.045$) also shows a marginally significant positive influence.

Tourists' safety concerns are strongly shaped by ethnic/religious conflict ($\beta = 0.432$, $p = 0.008$),

drug trafficking ($\beta = 0.317$, $p = 0.024$), and corruption ($\beta = -0.283$, $p = 0.018$), suggesting that instability and governance issues elevate perceived insecurity. Kidnapping ($\beta = -0.357$, $p = 0.014$) further exacerbates security fears.

Destination attractiveness is significantly influenced by terrorism ($\beta = -0.402$, $p = 0.019$)

and insurgency ($\beta = 0.315$, $p = 0.046$), indicating that while terrorism diminishes appeal, some destinations remain attractive despite insurgency. These findings underscore the necessity for targeted security interventions, improved governance, and strategic destination management to enhance ecotourism viability in the region.

Table 6: Regression Results Summary

Variables	Likelihood to Visit	Safety Concerns	Destination Attractiveness
Terrorism	0.321 (0.012)	0.107 (0.278)	-0.402 (0.019)
Insurgency	0.098 (0.371)	0.204 (0.129)	0.315 (0.046)
Ethnic/Religious Conflict	0.287 (0.020)	0.432 (0.008)	-0.102 (0.437)
Kidnapping	-0.113 (0.248)	-0.357 (0.014)	-0.067 (0.589)
Banditry	-0.291 (0.031)	-0.082 (0.495)	-0.159 (0.268)
Corruption	-0.409 (0.005)	-0.283 (0.018)	-0.121 (0.392)
Weak Border Security	0.259 (0.045)	0.098 (0.321)	-0.212 (0.073)
Drug Trafficking	-0.057 (0.672)	0.317 (0.024)	-0.083 (0.531)
Political Violence	-0.142 (0.183)	-0.276 (0.052)	0.031 (0.807)
Intercept	-1.732 (0.001)	-2.048 (0.000)	-0.984 (0.015)
R-squared	0.464	0.480	0.227

Note: Coefficients are reported with p-values in parentheses. Significant results ($p < 0.05$) are in bold.

DISCUSSION

The knowledge of the sociodemographic characteristics of tourists is essential in tourism research, as these factors influence safety perceptions and travel decisions (Kresic & Prebezac, 2011). Gender, age, education, and income levels significantly shape risk perceptions and destination preferences (George, 2010; Tarlow, 2014; Fakir et al, 2022). Female tourists tend to exhibit higher risk aversion and prioritise safety more than their male counterparts (Yang & Nair, 2014). Age is also a significant factor, as younger tourists are more likely to choose high-risk destinations, while elderly tourists prefer safer environments (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Boakye, 2012). Education further affects security awareness, and educated tourists actively seek safety information and avoid high-risk locations (Beirman, 2020; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). Income level and employment status also shape risk tolerance, with high-income tourists opting for secure destinations and travel insurance, while low-income tourists prioritise affordability (Floyd & Pennington-Gray, 2004). Marital status influences security concerns, as married individuals, particularly those with children, tend

to be more cautious than solo tourists (Kozak et al., 2007). The results of this study are in accordance with the existing literature, which indicates that security concerns are closely associated with individual characteristics (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006).

Security issues significantly affect travel behaviour and tourism sustainability, as safety concerns shape visitor confidence and destination appeal (Tarlow, 2014). Different locations experience varying security threats, including terrorism, insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, and ethnic conflicts, all of which influence tourism patterns (George, 2010; Fakir et al., 2022). For instance, in Osun State, terrorism remains a major concern, which is consistent with research indicating that destinations affected by terrorist incidents experience declines in visitor numbers (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006). Omotoba et al. (2022) observed that apprehensions regarding criminal activities, violence, and insecurity jeopardise rural tourism. However, in Ekiti and Niger states, fewer respondents viewed terrorism as a critical threat, suggesting regional differences in perceived risks. The negative impact of prolonged instability on tourism development is further supported by the

recognition of insurgency as a significant concern across all three states (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). Ethnic and religious conflicts particularly affect Osun, reinforcing studies that link social instability to decreased tourism demand (Scott et al., 2008; Babady et al., 2020). Tourists generally avoid destinations associated with unpredictable violence and intercommunal tensions.

Kidnapping and banditry are significant concerns, especially in Ekiti and Niger, reflecting national trends in rising criminal activity (Mbane & Ezeuduji, 2022). These crimes deter both domestic and international tourists, as tourists prioritise personal safety when selecting destinations (Tarlow, 2014). The link between banditry and organised crime further diminishes a region's tourism appeal, particularly when law enforcement is perceived as weak or ineffective (Ferreira & Harmse, 2000). Similarly, agrarian disputes, particularly herder-farmer conflicts, create instability, disrupting economic activities and discouraging tourism (Obasanmi & Enoma, 2022). For example, Omotoba et al. (2024) noted that kidnapping has a real negative effect on agricultural tourism and farming. Political instability is another crucial concern, especially in Osun, where respondents highlighted safety fears during elections and political disturbances. This discovery corroborates earlier studies indicating that political violence adversely affects tourism growth (Perry & Potgieter, 2013; Baş & Bayraktaroglu, 2025).

Cybersecurity concerns are more pronounced in Osun, while Niger and Ekiti report lower levels of concern. Digital security threats, including identity theft and fraud, pose risks to online transactions in the tourism sector (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Economic instability is also linked to increased crime rates, reducing destination attractiveness, particularly in Ekiti and Niger (Floyd & Pennington-Gray, 2004). Corruption in governance and law enforcement further undermines trust in security institutions, discouraging tourism investment (Hall, 2010). Although corruption is a widespread issue, it was more frequently cited in Ekiti and Niger than in Osun. Human trafficking, another deterrent, was

of greater concern in Osun, as destinations associated with trafficking often suffer reputational damage, deterring responsible tourists (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006).

Environmental security issues, including pollution and deforestation, are particularly concerning in Osun, as tourists prefer destinations with well-preserved natural landscapes (Kresic & Prebezac, 2011). Arms proliferation is another pressing issue in Ekiti and Osun, contributing to crime and insecurity, which in turn discourages tourism (George, 2010; Fakir et al., 2022). Niger and Ekiti report concern about weak border security, which facilitates crimes such as smuggling and human trafficking, further threatening tourism viability (Babady et al. 2020). Drug trafficking and substance abuse are more significant concerns in Osun, reinforcing research that links drug-related crime to negative destination reputations (Scott et al., 2008).

Infrastructure vulnerability also varies across regions, with Osun experiencing higher concerns compared to Niger and Ekiti. Poor infrastructure negatively impacts tourism growth by affecting accessibility, accommodation quality, and overall visitor experience (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Health security is another critical issue, particularly in Osun, where respondents expressed concerns over disease outbreaks and inadequate medical facilities. Destinations with poor healthcare systems are often avoided due to health risks (Perry & Potgieter, 2013; Baş & Bayraktaroglu, 2025).

The regression analysis highlights the substantial influence of security threats on tourist perceptions and destination attractiveness (Calzada, 2018; Xu et al., 2015). Security concerns significantly shape travel decisions, though certain threats do not necessarily deter all tourists (Garg, 2015; Li et al., 2021; Loi et al., 2024). For example, terrorism and ethnic or religious conflicts show a surprising association with tourists' willingness to visit ecotourism destinations. Some tourists may still choose to visit these areas despite risks, potentially due to adventure tourism interests or confidence in navigating perceived dangers

(Mlozi, 2014; Abri et al., 2023). Conversely, corruption and banditry strongly discourage travel, consistent with existing research that identifies these factors as major deterrents. Tourists' safety concerns are most influenced by ethnic or religious conflict, drug trafficking, and corruption (Vargas, 2004). These findings align with previous studies indicating that instability and governance failures heighten perceived insecurity. Kidnapping further increases safety fears, reinforcing the importance of addressing these threats to maintain tourism viability (Omotoba et al., 2024).

Destination attractiveness is particularly affected by terrorism, whereas insurgency appears to have a more complex relationship with visitor interest (Sönmez et al., 1999; Chemli et al., 2024). While terrorism reduces appeal, some destinations remain attractive despite insurgency, likely due to resilient tourism branding or unique cultural and natural features that outweigh security risks (Isaac & Bedem, 2020). This suggests that while security threats play a role in shaping perceptions, factors such as tourism marketing and destination appeal also influence decision-making (Xu et al., 2015).

These findings emphasise the necessity for targeted security measures, improved governance, and strategic destination management to sustain ecotourism. Policymakers must prioritise combating corruption, banditry, and kidnapping, as these issues significantly deter potential visitors. Additionally, stakeholders should recognise that security perceptions are nuanced and do not always act as absolute deterrents (Avdić et al., 2024). Effective branding and proactive crisis management can mitigate negative perceptions and restore visitor confidence (Pieniazek, 2016). A comprehensive approach integrating security enhancements with sustainable tourism development is essential for the long-term success of ecotourism in the region (Nhân et al., 2025; Richardson, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study stresses the significant impact of perceived insecurity on tourists' decision-making, particularly in ecotourism destinations in Nigeria.

The findings reveal that insecurity concerns, including terrorism, ethnic/religious conflict, and corruption, significantly deter potential visitors. Regression analysis shows that while some security threats, such as terrorism and weak border security, positively influence the likelihood of visiting, major threats like banditry and corruption have a negative effect. Furthermore, insecurity plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions of safety, with kidnapping and corruption emerging as key deterrents. Destination attractiveness is also affected, as threats such as terrorism and weak border security negatively impact tourists' perceptions. However, some threats, such as insurgency, appear to have a positive association with destination appeal, potentially due to resilience strategies adopted by stakeholders.

These results suggest that while insecurity is a major barrier to ecotourism development, the perception of security alone does not necessarily encourage travel decisions. Other factors, such as economic considerations and social influences, may play a role in tourists' willingness to visit. The study shows the complexity of security concerns in tourism and the need for a holistic approach to mitigating the impact of insecurity on the industry. Resolving these concerns is crucial for reinstating confidence in ecotourism locations and promoting sustainable tourism development. The findings emphasise the necessity of a multidimensional strategy that goes beyond security enforcement to include policy reforms, infrastructure development, and effective destination branding to mitigate security concerns and enhance ecotourism appeal.

Recommendation

The implementation of a comprehensive strategy is necessary to alleviate the adverse consequences of insecurity on ecotourism and to increase the confidence of visitors. Initially, government authorities and tourism stakeholders must prioritise security enhancements, particularly in regions that are susceptible to terrorism, banditry, and abduction. The deployment of sophisticated surveillance technologies and the reinforcement

of border security can be effective in deterring criminal activities that pose a threat to tourism. In addition, cooperation between security agencies and local communities is essential for the improvement of early warning systems and intelligence gathering.

In addition to security measures, policymakers should prioritise strategic destination branding to mitigate adverse perceptions. Promotional campaigns should emphasise the importance of secure ecotourism zones while simultaneously demonstrating the effectiveness of security interventions. It is possible to further reassure potential visitors of their safety through the development of infrastructure, particularly in the areas of transportation and accommodation. Fostering local ownership and security consciousness can also mitigate the risk of insecurity by promoting community involvement in tourism development.

Additionally, it is imperative to investigate public-private partnerships in order to finance security initiatives and tourism infrastructure. Economic incentives (tax reductions for businesses that invest in security measures) can encourage private sector participation. Furthermore, government policies should encourage the implementation of crisis communication strategies that disseminate timely information to potential visitors, thereby mitigating fear and misinformation.

Educational initiatives can also contribute to the modification of perceptions. Tourists can make more informed decisions by participating in awareness campaigns regarding safety protocols and risk management. Additionally, the tourism sector may indirectly benefit from the promotion of international collaboration in security intelligence, which can improve the overall security of the nation. Addressing insecurity challenges and promoting sustainable ecotourism development necessitates a multifaceted strategy that incorporates security enhancements, destination marketing, community engagement, and policy reforms.

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