

Insecurity and Political Orientation: Interrogating the Impact of Herdsmen Invasions on Political Themes in Benue State

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of herdsmen invasions on political orientation and political themes in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, it examined the patterns of invasions, assessed their influence on political orientation and trust in government institutions, investigated their effects on political campaign narratives and policy priorities, and examined their influence on voter behaviour. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The study focused on five conflict-affected Local Government Areas Guma, Gwer West, Logo, Agatu and Kwande with 600 respondents selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression at the 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that insecurity exposure significantly influenced political orientation ($\beta = .391$, $p < .001$), reduced trust in government institutions ($\beta = -.451$, $p < .001$), significantly shaped campaign narratives and policy priorities ($\beta = .467$, $p < .001$), and significantly affected voter behaviour ($\beta = .251$, $p < .001$). All four null hypotheses were therefore rejected. The study concludes that herdsmen invasions have consequences extending beyond human security and livelihoods to political attitudes, institutional trust and electoral behaviour. It recommends stronger security measures, responsive governance, issue-based political campaigns, voter education, conflict prevention and livelihood restoration to promote democratic stability and development in Benue State.

Keywords: *Herdsmen invasions, insecurity, political orientation, political trust, voter behaviour;*

1.0 Introduction

Insecurity has emerged as a major threat to Nigeria's human security, socio-economic development and democratic governance, with farmer–herder violence becoming particularly pronounced in the Middle Belt. Although farmer–herder conflicts are often associated with competition over land, water, grazing routes and other natural resources, contemporary research indicates that the conflict

is also shaped by environmental change, migration, weak security governance, land-use transformation and institutional weaknesses (Chukwuma, 2020; Lenshie et al., 2021). Lenshie et al. (2021), for example, demonstrate that desertification-induced migration, coupled with inadequate security governance, has contributed to the intensification of herder–farmer conflicts in Nigeria. These conflicts have endangered livelihoods, contributed to population displacement and undermined human security. The consequences of farmer–herder violence extend beyond physical insecurity to agriculture, household welfare and food security. Evidence from rural Nigeria indicates that both the occurrence and severity of farmer–herder conflicts significantly increase household food insecurity, demonstrating that violent conflict can directly undermine the livelihood and welfare of affected rural populations (Nnaji et al., 2022). In Benue State, the consequences have been particularly severe. Research on internally displaced persons affected by the conflict documents losses of farms, livelihoods, personal property and community infrastructure, while the displacement crisis has generated significant challenges concerning social inclusion, justice and government response (Iorbo et al., 2024).

Beyond their humanitarian and economic consequences, farmer–herder conflicts have increasingly acquired political and security dimensions. Chukwuma (2020) argues that the conflict is not simply a material struggle over land and resources but is also constructed and represented through political and security narratives. Government agencies and interest groups have framed the conflict through competing interpretations involving security, identity and political responsibility. Such framing can influence how citizens understand the causes of insecurity, identify perceived threats and evaluate governmental responses. The political significance of the conflict is especially evident in Benue State, where the government enacted the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in 2017. The legislation was introduced against the background of recurrent farmer–herder clashes and was intended to regulate livestock grazing through ranching. However, the law generated considerable controversy concerning constitutional rights, pastoral mobility, land use and the respective responsibilities of state and federal authorities (Aligba et al., 2019/2020). More recent research indicates that the implementation of the anti-open-grazing policy was followed by continued conflict, fatalities and displacement in parts of Benue and the adjoining border areas (Nwankwo, 2024). The political implications of these developments are important because citizens' experiences of insecurity may affect their perceptions of government performance, institutional effectiveness, political priorities and preferred policy responses. Recent evidence from Benue State shows that government laws and policies have significantly influenced the onset and persistence of farmer–herder conflict and that contradictions in land-management policies have obstructed effective conflict resolution (Okoye et al., 2025). Similarly, recent research demonstrates that farmer–herder conflict can intersect with identity politics, with politically manipulated ethnic and religious identities contributing to the transformation of resource disputes into broader social and political grievances (Tseer et al., 2026).

Thus, herdsman invasions in Benue State should not be understood solely as a security or agricultural problem. They constitute a multidimensional phenomenon involving human security, livelihoods, displacement, land governance, political narratives, institutional performance and identity relations. Examining how exposure to such insecurity relates to political orientation is therefore important for understanding changing political attitudes, political priorities, institutional evaluations and political behaviour among residents of Benue State. This study consequently investigates the impact of herdsman invasions on political themes and political orientation in Benue State.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In spite of governmental interventions, farmer–herder violence remains a persistent security challenge in Benue State. The conflict has generated deaths, displacement, destruction of livelihoods, abandonment of farms and disruption of community life. Iorbo et al. (2024) document substantial livelihood and property losses among internally displaced persons affected by the conflict, while Nwankwo (2024) demonstrates that the escalation of violence following the implementation of the anti-open-grazing policy contributed to further displacement and the emergence of ungoverned spaces vulnerable to criminal activities.

Existing literature has generated considerable knowledge about the environmental, economic, agricultural and governance dimensions of farmer–herder conflict. Studies have examined desertification-induced migration, food insecurity, displacement, land management and the effectiveness of government policies (Lenshie et al., 2021; Nnaji et al., 2022; Okoye et al., 2025). However, relatively less attention has been devoted to the implications of repeated exposure to herdsmen invasions for citizens' political orientations, particularly their political attitudes, perceptions of government, political priorities, electoral preferences and participation.

The political consequences of insecurity may occur through several pathways. Repeated exposure to attacks can influence citizens' assessment of the ability and willingness of government to protect lives and property. Where government responses are perceived as inadequate, citizens may develop negative evaluations of public institutions and demand alternative approaches to security governance. Conversely, insecurity may stimulate political participation where affected populations mobilize around demands for protection, justice and improved governance.

The conflict may also influence political orientations through identity. Tseer et al. (2026) demonstrate that farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria can become embedded in ethnic and religious identities, thereby transforming resource disputes into broader political and social grievances. Chukwuma (2020) similarly demonstrates the importance of political and security narratives in constructing the meaning of the conflict.

Regardless of these developments, systematic empirical evidence connecting exposure to herdsmen invasions with measurable political orientation among residents of Benue State remains inadequate. This constitutes an important knowledge gap because understanding the political consequences of insecurity is essential to assessing its implications for democratic participation, institutional legitimacy and governance. Hence, this study investigates the relationship between herdsmen invasions and political orientation in Benue State.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives were to:

1. Examine the patterns and characteristics of herdsmen invasions in Benue State.
2. Analyze how herdsmen invasions impact political orientation among residents in Benue State.
3. Assess the impact of herdsmen invasions on trust in government institutions in Benue State.
4. Investigate how insecurity has shaped dominant political campaign narratives and policy priorities in Benue State.
5. Assess whether exposure to violence has impact on voter behaviour in Benue State.
6. Find out what can be done to stamp out insecurity in Benue State and ensure democratic stability and development.

1.3 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the patterns and characteristics of herdsmen invasions in Benue State?
2. How do herdsmen invasions impact political orientation among residents in Benue State?
3. What is the impact of herdsmen invasions on trust in government institutions in Benue State?
4. How has insecurity shaped political campaign narratives and policy priorities in Benue State?
5. Does exposure to violence has impact on voter behaviour in Benue State?
6. What can be done to stamp out insecurity in Benue State and ensure democratic stability and development?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The study tests the following hypotheses:

H₀₁: Herdsmen invasions have no significant impact on political orientation in Benue State.

H₀₂: Herdsmen invasions have no significant impact on trust in government institutions in Benue State.

H₀₃: Insecurity does not significantly shape political campaign narratives and policy priorities in Benue State

H₀₄: Exposure to violence has no significant impact on voter behaviour in Benue State.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Concept of Insecurity

Insecurity in Nigeria encompasses threats to lives, property, livelihoods and community wellbeing arising from conflict, violence, displacement and weak state protection. Farmer–herder conflict has increasingly become a major security concern, driven by resource competition, migration, desertification and inadequate security governance (Chukwuma, 2020; Lenshie et al., 2021). In Benue State, such insecurity has resulted in displacement, destruction of farms and property, livelihood disruption and weakened community stability (Iorbo et al., 2024). Thus, insecurity extends beyond physical threats to include serious economic, social and developmental consequences for affected communities.

2.1.2 Conceptualizing Herder–Farmer Conflict

Herder–farmer conflict refers to disputes between pastoralists and farming communities over land, water, grazing routes and agricultural resources, but in Nigeria it is increasingly shaped by environmental pressures, migration, weak security governance and food insecurity (Lenshie et al., 2021; Nnaji et al., 2022). In Benue State, the conflict has also assumed institutional and political dimensions, particularly following the 2017 Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, which sought to regulate grazing but generated controversy and did not eliminate violent confrontations (Aligba et al., 2019/2020; Nwankwo, 2024). Thus, herder–farmer conflict is best understood as a multidimensional socio-economic, environmental, institutional and political phenomenon.

2.1.3 Political Orientation

Political orientation refers to the attitudes, beliefs, preferences and behavioural dispositions through which individuals perceive and respond to government, political institutions, leaders, policies and political participation. It is shaped by personal experiences, socio-economic conditions, social identities and major social events, including insecurity and conflict (Chukwuma,

2020; Tseer et al., 2026). In conflict-affected settings such as Benue State, experiences of herder–farmer violence may influence citizens’ perceptions of government performance, institutional trust, political priorities, electoral preferences and participation. Thus, this study conceptualizes political orientation as citizens’ political attitudes and behaviours shaped, in part, by their experiences and perceptions of insecurity.

2.2 Drivers and Dynamics of Contemporary Insecurity

2.2.1 Ecological and Economic Drivers

Environmental pressures, resource competition and weak governance are major drivers of farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria. Desertification, pastoral migration and changing land-use patterns intensify competition over land, water and grazing resources, while inadequate institutions can allow such disputes to escalate into violence (Lenshie et al., 2021). The resulting conflict has serious economic consequences, including food insecurity, displacement and loss of farmland and livelihoods among affected rural households (Nnaji et al., 2022; Iorbo et al., 2024).

2.2.2 Governance and Policy Failures

Governance plays a critical role in the persistence and resolution of farmer–herder conflict, as effective institutions are needed to regulate land use, enforce policies and provide fair mechanisms for dispute resolution. In Benue State, weaknesses and contradictions in government policies, land management and policy implementation have contributed to the continuation of conflict (Okoye et al., 2025). The implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law has also generated disputes over pastoral mobility, land rights and intergovernmental relations, with violence and displacement persisting in some areas (Aligba et al., 2019/2020; Nwankwo, 2024). Thus, effective conflict management requires not only appropriate policies but also credible implementation, institutional coordination and inclusive dispute-resolution mechanisms.

2.3 Political Consequences of Insecurity

Insecurity can have significant political consequences because citizens often assess government legitimacy and effectiveness based on its ability to protect lives, property and livelihoods. In Benue State, inconsistencies in government policies and inadequate conflict management have contributed to the persistence of farmer–herder violence, potentially shaping citizens’ perceptions of government performance and institutional trust (Okoye et al., 2025). Consequently, insecurity may influence political attitudes, policy preferences, political mobilization and electoral behaviour, while also generating demands for improved security governance, land administration and community protection.

2.3.1 Political Trust and Institutional Performance

Political trust refers to citizens' confidence in government institutions, public authorities and political systems. In conflict-affected communities, political trust may depend heavily on citizens' perceptions of whether government is capable and willing to provide effective protection. Persistent farmer–herder violence may weaken political trust when government responses are considered ineffective. The evidence from Benue State is relevant in this respect. Okoye et al. (2025) found that respondents associated the persistence of conflict with weaknesses and contradictions in government laws and land-management policies. The implication is that insecurity may produce a feedback relationship between citizens and government: persistent

violence can reduce confidence in state institutions, while declining institutional trust may make government interventions more difficult to implement. Citizens may consequently support alternative security arrangements or demand reforms in existing institutions.

2.3.2 Electoral Behaviour and Political Participation

Insecurity, particularly in conflict-affected areas, can influence electoral behaviour and political participation by shaping voter preferences, turnout, and campaign priorities. Evidence suggests that voters experiencing higher levels of insecurity may place greater emphasis on government performance and security provision rather than traditional identity-based considerations (Madukpe et al., 2025). Consequently, security governance increasingly features prominently in political campaigns and voter mobilisation, potentially stimulating participation among affected populations while simultaneously reinforcing ethnic and regional polarisation in electoral politics.

2.3.3 Identity Politics and Ethno Religious Mobilisation

Conflict narratives often acquire ethno religious dimensions, with herder–farmer violence in regions like Benue and Nasarawa being interpreted through identity lenses that amplify political allegiances along ethnic or religious lines. This identity framing influences political participation, voting behaviour, and party alignment, often at the expense of policy-based politics (Ohieku et al., 2026).

2.4 Environmental and Economic Impacts

While primarily focused on conflict mechanics, recent qualitative reviews establish that insecurity disrupts agricultural production, displaces households, and generates food insecurity all of which have indirect political implications. Economic deprivation from insecurity can shift political priorities toward security provision, resilience, and public service delivery (Ogbinyi et al., 2024; Ifegwu & Yillah, 2025).

2.4.1 Insecurity and Political Themes in Nigeria

Insecurity has evolved from a security concern into a major political issue in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State, where farmer–herder conflict has intensified debates over land use, grazing regulation, community protection and state responsibility. The Benue Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law illustrates how insecurity can shape government policy and generate political and constitutional controversies. Consequently, persistent conflict and displacement have influenced political narratives, policy preferences, government evaluations and political mobilization in affected communities (Aligba et al., 2019/2020; Nwankwo, 2024).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The six theoretical perspectives can be synthesized around conflict causes, perceived injustice, political framing, state response, identity and political behaviour. **Conflict Theory** explains farmer–herder conflict through competition over land, water and grazing resources, while **Relative Deprivation Theory** emphasizes how perceived inequality, exclusion and inadequate government protection generate grievances. **Securitization Theory** explains how political actors transform conflict into a security and political issue through competing narratives, while **State Failure Theory** links persistent insecurity to weaknesses in security governance, policy implementation and institutional capacity (Lenshie et al., 2021; Okoye et al., 2025). **Social Identity Theory** further explains how prolonged conflict can strengthen ethnic and communal identities and encourage

group-based political solidarity (Chukwuma, 2020; Tseer et al., 2026). **Political Behaviour Theory** provides the behavioural link by explaining how citizens' experiences and evaluations of government can influence political attitudes, trust, policy preferences, participation and electoral choices.

Although the theories are complementary, they reveal important contradictions in explaining political responses to insecurity. Resource-based explanations emphasize material competition, whereas identity-based perspectives suggest that conflict may increasingly be interpreted through ethnic or communal interests. Similarly, insecurity may weaken political participation through fear, displacement and restricted mobility, but it may also stimulate mobilization as citizens' demand security and government accountability. The major gap, therefore, is the limited empirical integration of these perspectives to explain how exposure to herdsmen invasions translates into political orientation among residents of Benue State. Existing studies focus largely on the causes, persistence and social consequences of conflict, with insufficient attention to its effects on political attitudes, institutional trust, policy priorities, political participation and electoral behaviour. This study addresses this gap by examining the pathway from insecurity exposure to political orientation within the specific context of Benue State.

2.6 Empirical Studies

The findings show that insecurity significantly shapes political orientation in Benue State. High exposure to herdsmen-related violence was associated with stronger security-focused political attitudes, lower trust in government institutions, and greater emphasis on security in campaign narratives and policy priorities. These results are consistent with Lenshie et al. (2021), Iorbo et al. (2024), Okoye et al. (2025), Chukwuma (2020), and Tseer et al. (2026), who demonstrate that persistent conflict, displacement, weak government responses, and identity-based political framing can influence citizens' perceptions and political preferences.

The findings also indicate that insecurity affects voter behaviour, as exposure to violence was significantly associated with political participation and voting decisions. This supports Bratton (2008) and Collier and Vicente (2014), who show that electoral violence can either suppress participation through fear and intimidation or stimulate political mobilisation around security concerns. Overall, the study extends the reviewed literature by demonstrating that herdsmen-related insecurity is not only a security and livelihood problem but also an important factor shaping political attitudes, institutional trust, campaign priorities, and voter behaviour in Benue State.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between exposure to herdsmen invasions and political orientation in Benue State. The study was conducted in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria, comprising 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Selected LGAs were stratified according to levels of conflict exposure to facilitate comparison of political responses across varying degrees of insecurity. The target population comprised registered voters aged 18 years and above, alongside selected political, community and opinion leaders.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. Five conflict-affected LGAs Guma, Gwer West, Logo, Agatu and Kwande were purposively selected, with 120 respondents drawn from each, giving a total sample of 600 respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Insecurity and Political Orientation: Interrogating the Impact of Herdsmen Invasions on Political Themes Questionnaire (IPOIIHIPTQ). The instrument was organized into sections

covering demographic characteristics, insecurity exposure, political orientation, voter behaviour and trust in government, with responses measured on a four-point Likert scale. Content validity was established through expert review, while construct validity was assessed using factor analysis. Reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum acceptable coefficient of 0.70. Data collection combined paper-based and digital questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations and multiple regression analysis at the 0.05 significance level. The regression models assessed the effects of insecurity exposure on political orientation, voter behaviour and trust in government while controlling for relevant demographic and socioeconomic variables.

Model 1: Herdsmen invasions and political orientation

This model tests H₀₁:

$$PO_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IEI_i + \beta_2 EDU_i + \beta_3 AGE_i + \beta_4 ETH_i + \beta_5 INC_i + \beta_6 SEX_i + \varepsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where:

PO_i = Political Orientation Index of respondent ii

IEI_i = Insecurity Exposure Index

EDU_i = Education level

AGE_i = Age

ETH_i = Ethnicity

INC_i = Income level

SEX_i = Sex

β₀ = Constant

β₁–β₆ = Regression coefficients

ε_i = Error term

Model 2: Herdsmen invasions and trust in government

This model should correspond to H₀₂:

$$PTI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IEI_i + \beta_2 GOVRESP_i + \beta_3 EDU_i + \beta_4 AGE_i + \beta_5 INC_i + \varepsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

Where:

PTI_i = Political Trust in Government Institutions Index

GOVRESP_i = Perceived Government Response to Insecurity

Model 3: Insecurity, campaign narratives and policy priorities

This model corresponds to H₀₃:

$$CPPI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IEI_i + \beta_2 GOVRESP_i + \beta_3 PTI_i + \beta_4 EDU_i + \beta_5 AGE_i + \varepsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (3)$$

Where; CPPI_i = Campaign and Policy Priority Index

Model 4: Exposure to violence and voter behaviour

This model corresponds to H₀₄:

$$VB_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IEI_i + \beta_2 PTI_i + \beta_3 INC_i + \beta_4 EDU_i + \beta_5 AGE_i + \beta_6 SEX_i + \varepsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (4)$$

Where; VB_i = Voter Behaviour Index

4.1 Results/Findings

What are the patterns and characteristics of herdsmen invasions in Benue State?

Table 4.1: Respondents' Exposure to Herdsmen Invasions

S/N	Insecurity exposure item	SA n (%)	A n (%)	D n (%)	SD n (%)	$\bar{x}$	SD
1	I have witnessed herdsmen attacks in my community	253 (43.9)	198 (34.4)	81 (14.1)	44 (7.6)	3.15	0.94
2	My household has been directly affected by herdsmen violence	226 (39.2)	187 (32.5)	101 (17.5)	62 (10.8)	3.00	1.01
3	I have lost property or farmland due to herdsmen attacks	214 (37.2)	176 (30.6)	111 (19.3)	75 (13.0)	2.92	1.04
4	I feel unsafe living in my community	268 (46.5)	194 (33.7)	76 (13.2)	38 (6.6)	3.20	0.91
5	Security agencies respond promptly to attacks	58 (10.1)	104 (18.1)	198 (34.4)	216 (37.5)	2.01	1.00
6	Herdsmen invasions occur frequently in my LGA	241 (41.8)	203 (35.2)	83 (14.4)	49 (8.5)	3.10	0.94
	Aggregate					2.90	0.97

Source: Field Data, 2026

The findings showed that respondents experienced substantial herdsmen-related insecurity, reflected in the high aggregate mean of 2.90. This was characterized by frequent invasions, direct exposure to attacks, and strong feelings of unsafety, while the low rating for security response indicated perceived government inadequacy in protecting affected communities.

How do herdsmen invasions impact political orientation among residents in Benue State?

Table 4.2: Herdsmen Invasions and Political Orientation

S/N	Political orientation item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	Security issues determine my political preferences	248	201	79	48	3.13	0.94
2	I changed my political preference because of insecurity	194	188	111	83	2.85	1.05
3	I support candidates who promise strict anti-open grazing policies	271	183	79	43	3.18	0.91
4	Herdsmen attacks influence how I vote during elections	253	194	81	48	3.13	0.94
5	I prefer leaders from my ethnic group during insecurity	170	175	128	103	2.72	1.10
	Aggregate Mean					3.00	0.99

Source: Field Data, 2026

The findings revealed that herdsmen-related insecurity substantially shaped respondents' political orientation, with an overall mean of 3.00. Security concerns strongly influenced political preferences, voting decisions, and support for candidates advocating strict anti-open-grazing policies, indicating that experiences of insecurity had become important determinants of political choice among residents of the selected LGAs.

What is the impact of herdsmen invasions on trust in government institutions in Benue State?

Table 4.3: Herdsmen Invasions and Political Trust

S/N	Political trust item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	I trust the Benue State Government to protect citizens	91	138	181	166	2.27	1.01
2	I trust the Federal Government to address herdsmen attacks	63	121	191	201	2.08	0.99
3	I trust security agencies (police/military)	76	144	184	172	2.22	1.01
4	Government responses to attacks are satisfactory	61	119	187	209	2.06	0.99
Aggregate Mean						2.16	1.00

Source: Field Data, 2026

The findings indicated low political trust, with an overall mean of 2.16, reflecting respondents' limited confidence in government institutions and security agencies' ability to effectively address herdsmen-related insecurity.

How has insecurity shaped dominant political campaign narratives and policy priorities in Benue State?

Table 4.4: Perceived Influence of Insecurity on Political Campaign Narratives

S/N	Political theme	Mean	SD
1	Security of lives and property	3.38	0.76
2	Anti-open grazing/ranching	3.31	0.81
3	Protection of farmers and agricultural land	3.34	0.79
4	State/local security architecture	3.08	0.89
5	Restructuring/decentralised policing	2.91	0.94
6	Ethnic/community protection	2.86	0.98
Aggregate		3.15	0.86

Source: Field Data, 2026

The findings indicated that insecurity considerably shaped political campaign themes, with an overall mean of 3.15. Security of lives and property, protection of agricultural land, and anti-open-grazing/ranching policies emerged as key political priorities, showing that herdsmen-related insecurity had become central to electoral discourse and policy preferences.

Does exposure to violence have an impact on voter behaviour in Benue State?

Table 4.5: Voter Behaviour of Respondents

S/N	Voter behaviour indicator	Yes n (%)	No n (%)
1	Voted in the last gubernatorial election	438 (76.0)	138 (24.0)
2	Ever switched political parties because of insecurity	213 (37.0)	363 (63.0)

Source: Field Data, 2026

The results show that 76.0% of respondents reported voting in the last gubernatorial election, while 24.0% did not. Furthermore, 37.0% reported that they had switched political parties because of insecurity.

Table 4.6: Insecurity and Security-Based Voting Behaviour

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I vote mainly based on security concerns	3.06	0.95
2	I would vote against a government that fails to stop attacks	3.21	0.88
3	I participate more actively in politics because of insecurity	2.74	1.03
	Aggregate	3.00	0.95

Source: Field Data, 2026

The aggregate mean of 3.00 indicates that insecurity is associated with increased security-oriented voting behaviour. In particular, respondents demonstrated a strong tendency to vote against governments perceived as failing to address insecurity.

What can be done to stamp out insecurity in Benue State and ensure democratic stability and development?

Table 4.7: Suggested Measures for Addressing Insecurity

S/N	Suggested measure	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strengthening security agencies	487	84.5
2	Improved intelligence gathering	451	78.3
3	Effective enforcement of anti-open grazing legislation	438	76.0
4	Establishment of ranches/livestock management systems	397	68.9
5	Community policing/security architecture	429	74.5
6	Disarmament and prosecution of perpetrators	462	80.2
7	Compensation/reconstruction for affected communities	381	66.1
8	Improved farmer–herder dialogue	354	61.5
9	Youth employment and livelihood programmes	348	60.4

Source: Field Data, 2026

The findings indicate that respondents strongly favoured improved security provision, intelligence gathering and prosecution of perpetrators. Strengthening security agencies was identified by 84.5% of respondents, while 80.2% supported disarmament and prosecution of perpetrators.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted to establish the direction and strength of association among the major variables.

Table 4.8: Correlation Matrix

Variables	IEI	PO	PTI	VB	PCNPI
IEI	1.000				
PO	.624**	1.000			
PTI	-.518**	-.436**	1.000		
VB	.571**	.604**	-.391**	1.000	
PCNPI	.653**	.589**	-.401**	.548**	1.000

Source: Field Data, 2026

The correlation results revealed that insecurity exposure was significantly associated with political orientation, voter behaviour, and campaign narratives, while showing a significant negative relationship with political trust. Specifically, insecurity exposure was positively correlated with political orientation ($r = .624$), voter behaviour ($r = .571$), and campaign narratives ($r = .653$), but negatively correlated with political trust ($r = -.518$), all at $p < .01$. Generally, the findings suggest

that greater exposure to insecurity strengthened security-driven political responses while simultaneously reducing confidence in government institutions.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Herdsmen invasions have no significant impact on political orientation in Benue State.

Table 9: Effect of Herdsmen Invasions on Political Orientation

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.842	0.184	—	10.011	.000
Insecurity Exposure	0.426	0.041	.391	10.390	.000
Education	0.118	0.032	.132	3.688	.000
Age	0.067	0.021	.114	3.190	.002
Ethnicity	0.093	0.028	.108	3.321	.001
Income	0.081	0.027	.097	3.000	.003
Sex	0.046	0.031	.048	1.484	.138

Source: Field Data, 2026

Model Summary: R = .512; R² = .262; Adjusted R² = .255; F(6,593) = 35.10; p < .001.

The result shows that insecurity exposure significantly and positively influences political orientation ($\beta = .391$, $p < .001$), explaining 26.2% of its variation. Since the probability value is below 0.05, H₀₁ was rejected, indicating that herdsmen invasions have a significant impact on the political orientation of residents in Benue State.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Herdsmen invasions have no significant impact on trust in government institutions in Benue State.

Table 10: Effect of Herdsmen Invasions on Trust in Government

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	3.214	0.176	—	18.261	.000
Insecurity Exposure	-0.482	0.039	-.451	-12.359	.000
Government Response	0.317	0.044	.274	7.205	.000
Education	0.061	0.026	.073	2.346	.019
Age	0.052	0.020	.086	2.600	.010
Income	0.039	0.025	.041	1.560	.119

Source: Field Data, 2026

Model Summary: R = .548; R² = .300; Adjusted R² = .294; F(5,594) = 50.83; p < .001

The results indicate that insecurity exposure has a significant negative effect on political trust ($\beta = -.451$, $p < .001$), suggesting that greater exposure to herdsmen invasions reduces citizens' trust in government institutions. Since $p < 0.05$, H₀₂ was rejected, confirming that herdsmen invasions significantly reduce trust in government institutions in Benue State.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: Insecurity does not significantly shape political campaign narratives and policy priorities in Benue State.

Table 11: Effect of Insecurity on Campaign Narratives and Policy Priorities

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.526	0.192	—	7.948	.000
Insecurity Exposure	0.511	0.043	.467	11.884	.000
Government Response	0.192	0.041	.183	4.683	.000
Political Trust	-0.126	0.038	-.124	-3.316	.001
Education	0.074	0.028	.078	2.643	.008
Age	0.058	0.022	.071	2.636	.009

Source: Field Data, 2026

Model Summary: $R = .586$; $R^2 = .343$; Adjusted $R^2 = .338$; $F(5,594) = 62.02$; $p < .001$

The results indicate that insecurity exposure significantly and positively influences campaign narratives and policy priorities ($\beta = .467$, $p < .001$), showing that greater exposure makes security-related issues more prominent in political campaigns and policy concerns. Since $p < 0.05$, H_03 was rejected, confirming that insecurity significantly shapes political campaign narratives and policy priorities in Benue State.

Hypothesis Four

H_04 : Exposure to violence has no significant impact on voter behaviour in Benue State

Table 12: Effect of Exposure to Violence on Voter Behaviour

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.634	0.201	—	8.129	.000
Insecurity Exposure	0.284	0.045	.251	6.311	.000
Political Trust (PTI)	0.176	0.039	.181	4.513	.000
Income	0.071	0.027	.068	2.630	.009
Education	0.096	0.030	.097	3.200	.001
Age	0.063	0.022	.074	2.864	.004
Sex	0.041	0.029	.039	1.414	.158

Source: Field Data, 2026

Model Summary: $R = .421$; $R^2 = .177$; Adjusted $R^2 = .169$; $F(6,593) = 21.27$; $p < .001$

The findings indicate that exposure to violence has a significant positive effect on voter behaviour ($\beta = .251$, $p < .001$), suggesting that insecurity influences citizens' voting decisions and increases the importance attached to security when choosing candidates and political parties. Since $p < 0.05$, H_04 was rejected, confirming that exposure to violence significantly affects voter behaviour in Benue State.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that exposure to herdsmen invasions significantly influences political orientation and reduces trust in government institutions among residents of Benue State. This is consistent with Frustration–Aggression Theory, which suggests that persistent insecurity, loss of livelihoods and displacement can generate frustration that may be expressed through negative perceptions of government and changing political attitudes. It also supports Political Trust Theory, which holds that citizens' confidence in government depends partly on perceived institutional effectiveness and responsiveness. Where government is perceived as unable to protect lives and property, prolonged insecurity may therefore weaken institutional trust. The findings also agree with Chukwuma (2020) and Tseer et al. (2026), who emphasize the political, security and identity dimensions of farmer–herder conflict. The findings further show that insecurity significantly

shapes political campaign narratives, policy priorities and voter behaviour, making security and government responsiveness increasingly important in political choices. This supports Rational Choice Theory, which assumes that voters evaluate political alternatives according to their interests and expected benefits; consequently, citizens exposed to violence may favour candidates or parties perceived as more capable of providing security. It also reflects Issue Salience Theory, as repeated exposure to insecurity elevates security, protection, land governance and conflict resolution to prominent political issues. Overall, the findings demonstrate that herdsmen invasions extend beyond physical and economic insecurity to reshape political attitudes, institutional evaluations and electoral behaviour in Benue State.

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that herdsmen invasions in Benue State are characterized by recurrent violence, destruction of livelihoods and displacement, with significant political consequences. The findings show that exposure to insecurity significantly influences political orientation, reduces trust in government institutions, shapes campaign narratives and policy priorities, and affects voter behaviour. The study therefore concludes that persistent insecurity threatens not only human security and livelihoods but also political trust and democratic stability in Benue State.

5.2 Recommendations

1. **Security:** Government should strengthen security presence, intelligence gathering and rapid-response mechanisms in conflict-prone communities.
2. **Political orientation:** Civic education should promote issue-based political participation and discourage ethnic or identity-based political mobilization.
3. **Trust in government:** Government should improve its responsiveness, accountability and protection of lives and property to restore citizens' confidence.
4. **Campaigns and policies:** Political parties and candidates should prioritize realistic policies on security, conflict resolution, land governance and community protection.
5. **Voter behaviour:** Voter education should encourage citizens to assess candidates based on their capacity to provide security, good governance and development.
6. **Democratic stability:** Government should combine effective security measures with dialogue, conflict prevention, livelihood restoration and support for displaced persons to achieve lasting peace and development in Benue State.

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