

Tourism as an Economic and Social Policy Instrument for National Security in Nigeria

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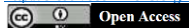
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ABSTRACT

Tourism is increasingly recognised as an important contributor to economic growth, employment, livelihood diversification and social inclusion. Beyond its conventional role as a source of foreign exchange and recreational activity, tourism can support national security by strengthening household livelihoods, expanding employment opportunities, stimulating local economies and enhancing community resilience. This study examines tourism as an economic and social policy instrument for national security in Nigeria. The study is anchored on Human Security Theory, Human Capital Theory, Social Investment Theory and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. It relies on secondary data from international organisations, national institutions and relevant scholarly literature, with emphasis on evidence from 2021–2026. The study demonstrates that tourism has substantial economic and social value globally, contributing US\$10.9 trillion to the world economy and supporting 357 million jobs in 2024. Evidence from Portugal and Spain demonstrates how tourism can be integrated into economic development, employment and social-cohesion policies, while experiences from Kenya and Rwanda illustrate its potential within African development strategies. In Nigeria, however, significant tourism resources coexist with widespread poverty, unemployment, infrastructure deficits and insecurity, limiting the sector's developmental contribution. The study argues that tourism should be repositioned within Nigeria's broader economic diversification, social-policy and preventive-security architecture. It recommends an integrated framework linking tourism investment with employment, community development, social protection, infrastructure, local enterprise and destination security.

Introduction

Tourism has evolved from an activity largely associated with leisure and recreation into a major component of contemporary economic and social development. Its significance derives not only from expenditure by domestic and international visitors but also from the extensive economic linkages that tourism creates across transportation, agriculture, accommodation, food services, retail, entertainment, culture, construction and small and medium-sized enterprises. Consequently, tourism has become increasingly relevant to discussions of employment generation, economic diversification, poverty reduction and inclusive development. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2025) estimated that Travel and Tourism contributed US\$10.9 trillion to the global economy in 2024, equivalent to 10% of global GDP, while supporting 357 million jobs, approximately one in every ten jobs worldwide. International visitor spending reached about US\$1.87 trillion, while domestic visitor spending exceeded US\$5.3 trillion, demonstrating the breadth of tourism's economic multiplier effects.

The importance of tourism has become particularly evident following the disruption caused by COVID-19. The sector demonstrated considerable vulnerability to mobility restrictions but also a strong capacity for recovery, reaffirming its importance to economic resilience. The OECD (2026) reports that tourism directly accounts, on average, for approximately 4.0% of GDP and 6.3% of employment across OECD economies, while also generating significant spillovers into agriculture, retail, transportation and

other sectors. This makes tourism particularly relevant to countries seeking to diversify their economies and create employment in sectors with broad participation across different skill categories.

The economic significance of tourism also intersects with social policy. Tourism is relatively labour intensive and creates opportunities for people with different levels of education and skills. It can provide employment in hotels, restaurants, transportation and travel services while also creating indirect opportunities for farmers, artisans, entertainers, traders, tour operators and digital-service providers. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024) notes that tourism provides significant employment opportunities for women, young people and local communities, although informality, seasonal employment, low wages and inadequate social protection remain important challenges. The implication is that the contribution of tourism to social development depends not simply on the number of jobs created but on the quality, accessibility and distribution of those opportunities.

The experience of Portugal demonstrates how tourism can be incorporated into a broader economic and employment strategy. Tourism accounted for 8.1% of Portugal's gross value added in 2024 and directly supported 542,200 jobs in 2023, representing 12.1% of total employment. Tourism also generated €27.7 billion in travel exports in 2024, equivalent to 47.9% of the country's service exports (OECD, 2026). These figures illustrate how a sector built around cultural heritage, hospitality, mobility and destination attractiveness can become an important pillar of national economic performance. More importantly, Portugal's current tourism strategy places increasing emphasis on territorial balance, social equity, economic resilience, workforce development and sustainability, demonstrating that tourism can be deliberately connected to wider social and economic objectives rather than pursued solely for visitor growth.

Spain provides another important illustration. Tourism directly accounted for 6.0% of Spanish GDP in 2023, while travel exports represented 48.4% of total service exports in 2024. In 2025, tourism directly employed approximately 2.98 million registered workers, representing 13.4% of total employment (OECD, 2026). Spain's tourism strategy increasingly emphasises destination transformation, social cohesion, improved labour conditions and workforce development. The Spanish experience therefore demonstrates that tourism can simultaneously support economic activity and become a vehicle for employment and regional development when supported by coordinated public policy.

These European experiences are significant because they demonstrate that the economic value of tourism does not arise exclusively from international visitors. Domestic tourism, local supply chains, employment, cultural industries and infrastructure also contribute to its wider socioeconomic impact. They further demonstrate that the benefits of tourism are influenced by policy choices. Where governments integrate tourism with employment, skills, infrastructure and regional-development policies, tourism can produce broader social benefits. Conversely, where tourism is treated primarily as a commercial activity, its contribution to social inclusion may remain limited.

The relationship becomes particularly important in Africa, where many countries face the combined challenges of youth unemployment, poverty, economic informality and limited economic diversification. Tourism offers opportunities to connect local resources with domestic and international demand while creating employment across urban and rural communities. The sector can also stimulate agriculture, transportation, cultural industries, environmental conservation and local entrepreneurship, thereby creating economic linkages that extend beyond traditional tourism establishments.

Kenya provides a strong African illustration of this potential. In 2024, Travel and Tourism contributed approximately KSh1.2 trillion to the Kenyan economy and supported 1.7 million jobs, equivalent to more than 8% of national employment. Domestic visitor spending reached KSh528 billion, while international visitor spending amounted to KSh288 billion (WTTC, 2025). The Kenyan

Government also recognises tourism as a sector with substantial multiplier effects across agriculture, trade, manufacturing, infrastructure and other areas of the economy. Its policy emphasis on sustainable and inclusive tourism reflects an understanding that tourism can contribute not only to foreign exchange earnings but also to employment and socioeconomic development.

Rwanda provides another relevant example. The Rwanda Development Board (2025) reported that the country's tourism sector generated US\$647 million in revenue in 2024 from approximately 1.36 million visitors. The country's tourism strategy has increasingly focused on high-value and sustainable tourism, conservation, business events and international destination branding. Tourism has therefore been incorporated into a wider strategy of economic transformation, investment promotion and international positioning. The Rwandan experience demonstrates that even a relatively small economy can use targeted tourism policy, institutional coordination, conservation and destination promotion to create economic value and strengthen its international economic profile.

The experiences of Kenya and Rwanda are particularly relevant to Nigeria because they demonstrate that tourism can contribute to economic development when supported by coherent policy, infrastructure, destination management, security and local participation. They also show that tourism should not be understood narrowly as an activity involving hotels and visitors. Rather, it constitutes a network of economic relationships through which local communities, enterprises, governments and service providers can participate in value creation.

For Nigeria, this relationship is especially important because the country possesses extensive tourism assets but continues to confront substantial economic and social vulnerabilities. Nigeria has a diverse range of cultural festivals, historical sites, museums, natural landscapes, wildlife resources, coastal environments, religious and cultural heritage sites and creative industries. Yet the economic potential of these assets remains substantially underdeveloped. Tourism is also affected by infrastructure deficiencies, inadequate destination management, limited investment, weak tourism data and insecurity. These challenges restrict both domestic and international tourism and reduce the capacity of local communities to benefit from tourism-related economic activity.

The economic context makes the issue more urgent. The World Bank (2026) reports that approximately 3.5 million people enter Nigeria's labour force annually, while weak job creation and limited entrepreneurial opportunities continue to constrain inclusive growth. Poverty also remains widespread, with more than 60% of Nigerians estimated to have lived below the national poverty line in 2025. The World Bank estimates that the national poverty rate increased from about 61% in 2024 to 63% in 2025, with high food inflation placing disproportionate pressure on poorer households. These conditions highlight the need for economic sectors capable of creating employment, supporting livelihoods and expanding opportunities outside traditional sources of national income.

Tourism offers one such opportunity. Its extensive value chains can support employment and enterprise beyond formal tourism establishments. A functioning tourism destination requires food suppliers, farmers, transport operators, artisans, cultural performers, construction workers, digital marketers, security providers and numerous other service providers. The sector can therefore stimulate local economies while creating multiple entry points into productive economic activity. This is particularly important for young people and women, who frequently face barriers to formal employment.

Available Nigerian data already demonstrate the existence of an economic base upon which tourism can be expanded. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024) reported that accommodation and food services recorded real year-on-year growth of 2.13% in the second quarter of 2024. Although accommodation and food services do not represent the entire tourism economy, their performance illustrates the potential of the wider hospitality and visitor-economy ecosystem. The Federal Ministry of

Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy has also increasingly positioned tourism as an instrument for sustainable job creation, economic diversification and cultural development.

The social-policy dimension becomes important because economic growth alone does not automatically produce human security. Nigeria's security environment is shaped by the interaction of poverty, unemployment, inequality, displacement, weak infrastructure, communal tensions, violent extremism, banditry, kidnapping and organised crime. The persistence of these vulnerabilities makes it necessary to examine security through a broader human-security lens. Economic insecurity can weaken household resilience, while inadequate employment opportunities can contribute to social exclusion and increase vulnerability to exploitation. This does not imply that unemployment or poverty automatically produces criminality or violent extremism. Rather, socioeconomic vulnerability can create conditions that may be exploited by criminal or violent actors.

Tourism can contribute to addressing these vulnerabilities when it is deliberately designed as an inclusive economic and social-policy intervention. Employment generated through tourism can provide legitimate livelihood opportunities. Tourism-related skills development can improve employability. Community-based tourism can strengthen local participation and ownership. Tourism-linked MSMEs can diversify household income. Infrastructure developed around tourism destinations can improve access to markets and services. Cultural tourism can strengthen social interaction and promote appreciation of Nigeria's diverse identities. These outcomes can collectively strengthen community resilience.

This creates a direct connection between tourism and national security. National security in contemporary societies increasingly depends upon the capacity of states to protect citizens while also creating conditions in which people can live productive and secure lives. Human security therefore complements conventional security by recognising economic, social, community and personal vulnerabilities as relevant dimensions of security (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994). From this perspective, policies that expand employment, strengthen livelihoods, reduce exclusion and build community resilience can make an indirect but important contribution to national security.

Tourism should consequently not be presented as a substitute for the Nigerian Armed Forces, police, intelligence institutions or other security agencies. Rather, it should complement conventional security by addressing some of the socioeconomic vulnerabilities that undermine resilience. This represents a shift from viewing tourism merely as a sector that requires security to viewing inclusive tourism development as one of the economic and social conditions that can strengthen preventive security.

The central argument of this study is therefore that tourism can function as an economic and social policy instrument for national security when its development is deliberately connected to employment, livelihood security, social inclusion, community development and resilience. The study consequently examines the relationship between tourism, economic development, social policy and national security in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria possesses considerable tourism potential, yet the sector has not achieved the level of economic and social significance observed in several other countries. This underdevelopment occurs alongside persistent economic and security challenges. The country must absorb millions of new labour-market entrants annually, while poverty remains widespread and infrastructure deficits constrain productivity and economic integration (World Bank, 2026). The dominant response to insecurity has necessarily focused on military, intelligence and law-enforcement interventions. While these remain indispensable, the persistence of insecurity demonstrates the need for complementary preventive

approaches that address underlying socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Tourism represents an underexamined component of such an approach.

The problem is therefore not simply that Nigeria has failed to exploit its tourism resources. It is that tourism policy has insufficiently been connected to the country's broader economic diversification, social-protection, employment, community-development and national-security priorities. Consequently, the potential of tourism to generate livelihoods, strengthen local economies, improve social inclusion and build community resilience remains underutilised. This study addresses this gap by examining tourism not merely as an economic sector but as an integrated economic and social-policy instrument capable of contributing to national security.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine tourism as an economic and social policy instrument for national security in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the contribution of tourism to economic development and employment in Nigeria;
- ii. assess the potential of tourism for livelihood security and social inclusion;
- iii. examine the relationship between community-based tourism and community resilience;
- iv. assess the relevance of tourism to Nigeria's preventive national-security framework; and
- v. propose an integrated policy framework for leveraging tourism for economic development, social policy and national security.

Research Questions

- i. How does tourism contribute to economic development and employment in Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent can tourism strengthen livelihood security and social inclusion?
- iii. How can community-based tourism contribute to community resilience?
- iv. What role can tourism play within Nigeria's preventive national-security framework?
- v. What policy framework can integrate tourism, economic development, social policy and national security?

Theoretical Framework

Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory provides the principal theoretical foundation for this study. The concept broadens security beyond territorial protection and state survival to include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security (UNDP, 1994). Tourism becomes relevant within this framework because its effects extend to employment, income, community development and social inclusion. Tourism that improves livelihood opportunities can therefore strengthen economic and community security, while tourism development that excludes local populations may produce limited human-security benefits.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory explains the importance of investment in knowledge, skills and capabilities as drivers of productivity and economic opportunity (Becker, 1964). Tourism provides opportunities for vocational and entrepreneurial skills development in hospitality, catering, transportation, cultural interpretation, digital marketing, event management and other fields. Investment in these capabilities can improve employability while simultaneously strengthening the competitiveness of the tourism sector.

Social Investment Theory

Social Investment Theory views expenditure on people, skills, employment and social capabilities as investments capable of generating long-term economic and social returns. Tourism-related infrastructure, enterprise development, skills training and employment programmes can therefore be

understood as social investments when they strengthen people's productive capacity and reduce socioeconomic vulnerability.

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework provides a useful explanation of how tourism can diversify household and community economic assets. Human capital is developed through skills; financial capital through tourism income; social capital through community networks; physical capital through infrastructure; and natural and cultural capital through sustainable utilisation of tourism resources. Tourism can therefore strengthen resilience by providing alternative or complementary livelihood opportunities.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative-dominant secondary-data research design supported by descriptive statistical evidence. Secondary data were obtained from the World Bank, OECD, ILO, WTTC, United Nations, UNDP, National Bureau of Statistics, Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy and relevant scholarly literature.

Sources were selected based on four criteria: relevance to tourism, economic development, social policy or security; institutional or scholarly credibility; recency, with priority given to 2021–2026 evidence; and direct relevance to the Nigerian context or comparable international experiences. Earlier sources were retained where they provided foundational theoretical concepts.

The evidence was analysed thematically around five dimensions: tourism and economic development; tourism and employment; tourism and social inclusion; tourism and community resilience; and tourism and preventive national security. Descriptive statistics were used to demonstrate the scale and potential of tourism, while theoretical analysis was used to explain the mechanisms connecting tourism to economic and security outcomes.

Tourism, Economic Development and National Security

The evidence indicates that tourism's contribution to national security operates primarily through economic and social pathways. Its first major contribution is economic diversification. Tourism can expand the service economy, stimulate domestic consumption and create opportunities for investment outside traditional extractive sectors. For Nigeria, this is significant because economic diversification remains essential to reducing vulnerability to fluctuations in oil revenues and expanding employment opportunities.

The second pathway is employment. Tourism's labour intensity allows it to create opportunities across different skill categories. Global tourism supported 357 million jobs in 2024 (WTTC, 2025), while Kenya's tourism sector supported approximately 1.7 million jobs in 2024 (WTTC, 2025). These experiences demonstrate the potential scale of employment when tourism is integrated into national economic strategies.

Nigeria's demographic structure makes this particularly important. With approximately 3.5 million people entering the labour force annually, the country requires sectors capable of absorbing large numbers of workers (World Bank, 2026). Tourism can contribute to this objective because employment opportunities extend beyond hotels to transportation, agriculture, cultural production, entertainment, retail and other activities.

The third pathway is livelihood diversification. Households that depend on a narrow range of economic activities are vulnerable to shocks. Tourism can provide supplementary sources of income through accommodation, food supply, handicrafts, transportation, cultural performances and other services. This is particularly relevant to rural and peri-urban communities possessing cultural and environmental assets.

The fourth pathway is enterprise development. Tourism creates markets for small businesses. Local entrepreneurs can provide food, transport, accommodation, cultural products and recreational services. However, the ability of Nigerian enterprises to benefit from tourism will depend upon access to finance, infrastructure, digital platforms, skills and market information.

The fifth pathway is social inclusion. Tourism can provide economic opportunities for groups that are frequently excluded from formal labour markets, particularly youth and women. However, inclusion cannot be assumed. Government policy must deliberately ensure access to training, finance, social protection and local procurement.

The sixth pathway is community resilience. Communities with diversified economic opportunities are generally better positioned to absorb economic shocks. Tourism can strengthen resilience when local people participate in decision-making and benefit from tourism revenue. Community ownership can also encourage the protection of cultural and environmental assets.

The seventh pathway is social cohesion. Domestic tourism can promote interaction among Nigerians from different cultural and geographic backgrounds. Cultural festivals, historical sites and heritage tourism can provide opportunities for citizens to encounter and appreciate the diversity of Nigerian identities. Such interactions can contribute to national cohesion when managed inclusively.

The eighth pathway is infrastructure development. Tourism destinations require roads, electricity, water, sanitation, telecommunications and public spaces. When infrastructure is appropriately planned, residents benefit alongside visitors. Tourism can therefore provide an additional rationale for investment in underserved communities.

The ninth pathway is preventive security. Where communities possess legitimate economic opportunities and stronger social networks, their resilience to destabilising pressures may improve. Tourism cannot eliminate terrorism, banditry, kidnapping or organised crime, but it can form part of a wider preventive approach that addresses economic vulnerability and social exclusion.

The tenth pathway is institutional collaboration. Tourism intersects with economic planning, labour, transportation, culture, environment, local government and security. Its effective development therefore requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. This aligns with contemporary approaches to security governance that recognise that complex security challenges cannot be addressed by security institutions acting alone.

Policy Implications for Nigeria

The evidence suggests that Nigeria should move from a narrow tourism-promotion model towards an integrated tourism-development framework. Such a framework should connect tourism investment to local economic development, employment, infrastructure and community participation.

First, tourism planning should identify destinations with strong cultural, ecological or historical assets and integrate them into broader development plans. Destination development should include infrastructure, skills, financing, security and environmental protection.

Second, tourism should be connected to youth employment and enterprise-development programmes. Training should focus on hospitality, tour guiding, culinary services, digital marketing, transportation, cultural entrepreneurship and event management.

Third, community-based tourism should be expanded. Host communities should participate in destination planning and benefit from tourism revenues. This would strengthen local ownership and reduce the risk of tourism development becoming disconnected from community interests.

Fourth, tourism workers should be integrated into appropriate social-protection systems. Employment growth without decent work would limit the social-security contribution of tourism.

Fifth, tourism security should focus on prevention, early warning and destination resilience. Security institutions should work with tourism authorities, communities and operators to protect destinations while avoiding excessive securitisation that could discourage visitors.

Finally, Nigeria requires stronger tourism data. Tourism satellite accounts, employment data, domestic-tourism statistics and destination-level indicators are necessary for evaluating the sector's actual economic and social contribution.

Conclusion

Tourism represents an underutilised economic and social-policy resource for national development in Nigeria. International evidence demonstrates that tourism is a major contributor to GDP, employment, trade and local economic activity. The experiences of Portugal and Spain show how tourism can be integrated with economic development, employment, skills and social-cohesion policies, while Kenya and Rwanda demonstrate its potential within African development strategies.

For Nigeria, the opportunity is particularly significant because the country simultaneously possesses substantial tourism resources and faces major challenges of unemployment, poverty, economic diversification, social exclusion and insecurity. Tourism can contribute to addressing some of these challenges by creating employment, strengthening livelihoods, supporting MSMEs, developing skills, stimulating local economies and promoting social inclusion.

The security value of tourism should therefore be understood through its indirect contribution to human and community security. Tourism does not replace military or law-enforcement responses to terrorism, banditry, kidnapping or organised crime. Rather, inclusive tourism development can complement conventional security by strengthening the socioeconomic conditions upon which resilience depends. The central policy implication is that tourism should be incorporated into Nigeria's wider economic diversification and preventive-security architecture. The Federal Government should therefore move beyond treating tourism primarily as an avenue for attracting visitors and foreign exchange and recognise it as an instrument capable of linking economic development, employment, social inclusion, livelihood security, community resilience and national security.

Recommendations

Recommendation One

The Federal Government should integrate tourism into Nigeria's economic diversification and employment strategy.

Implementation Strategies

- i. Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy (FMACCE) to develop a tourism investment framework linking tourism development with employment, local economic development and economic diversification.
- ii. Federal Ministry of Finance and Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning to prioritise tourism infrastructure and investment incentives within national development planning.

Recommendation Two

The Federal Government should position tourism as an instrument for livelihood security and social inclusion.

Implementation Strategies

FMACCE in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment to establish tourism-focused skills and employment programmes targeting youth, women and vulnerable communities.

The Bank of Industry (BOI) in collaboration with the Bank of Agriculture (BOA) to provide accessible financing and enterprise-development support for tourism-related MSMEs.

Recommendation Three

The Federal Government should institutionalise community-based tourism as a mechanism for strengthening community resilience.

Implementation Strategies

- i. FMACCE in collaboration with State Governments to establish community participation and benefit-sharing mechanisms for tourism projects in host communities.
- ii. National Orientation Agency (NOA) in collaboration with Local Governments to support community awareness, cultural preservation and local ownership of tourism assets.

Recommendation Four

The Federal Government should integrate tourism into Nigeria's preventive national-security framework.

Implementation Strategies

- i. Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) in collaboration with FMACCE and State Governments to establish destination-level mechanisms linking tourism development, early warning and community resilience.
- ii. Nigeria Police Force in collaboration with relevant security agencies to develop coordinated security and emergency-response arrangements for priority tourism destinations.

Recommendation Five

The Federal Government should strengthen tourism data and evidence-based policy planning.

Implementation Strategies

- i. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in collaboration with FMACCE to strengthen tourism data collection and develop regular indicators on tourism, employment, investment and local economic impact.
- ii. NBS in collaboration with ONSA and relevant research institutions to establish a tourism and community-resilience monitoring framework incorporating livelihood, social-inclusion and security indicators.

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