

Non-state Security Actors and Security Governance in Taraba State

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<p>Abstract: This study explores the role of non-state security actors in security governance in Taraba State, Nigeria. It adopted the descriptive research design and the community involvement approach theory to examine the role of non-state security actors in Taraba State. It looks at how private security firms, and neighborhood watch groups, vigilantes, and tribal militias—such as the Tiv and Jukun groups support official security measures. The study used a multistage sample approach to choose seven LGAs where these actors are most active: Ardo Kola, Bali, Donga, Gashaka, Gassol, Ibi, and Jalingo. Key participants were found using a blend of purposive and snowball sampling; primary and secondary sources were used to collect data. In-depth interviews and key informant interviews (KII) are examples of primary sources that were subjected to thematic analysis for trustworthiness and dependability. Results show that non-state security actors are essential to community safety and crime prevention, especially vigilantes and the Hunters Association of Nigeria (HAN). The study found that because of their superior local knowledge and reactivity, organizations such as the Taraba State Youth Empowerment Scheme (TAYES) and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) have improved security outcomes. This study recommends official registration under local government and initiatives to increase capacity such as training in human rights, surveillance, intelligence collection, and conflict resolution. The study concludes that Taraba State's safety and stability will be improved and the dangers associated with unregulated security providers will be reduced by including non-state players into a structured security framework.</p>	<p>Research Paper</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: <i>Destiny Eze Agwanwo</i> Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria</p> <p>How to cite this paper: Destiny Eze Agwanwo & Raphael Lawal (2025). Non-state Security Actors and Security Governance in Taraba State. <i>Middle East Res J. Humanities Soc. Sci</i>, 5(2): 41-48.</p> <p>Article History: Submit: 20.02.2025 Accepted: 18.03.2025 Published: 26.03.2025 </p>
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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's present security landscape is characterized as seriously alarming; different issues such as the terrible effects of terrorism, banditry, abduction, inter-communal clashes, among others, and clashes between farmers and herders, aggravate the situation. According to the Nigeria Security Tracker (2023), violent crimes caused over 10,000 deaths in 2022, with Taraba State accounting the most. In Nigeria, non-state security actors (NSSAs) have always existed. For instance, during the pre-colonial period, traditional structures such as secret societies, age classes, and village councils were essential for upholding law and order. These organizations helped to enforce local laws, settled conflicts, and protected people and property. Such techniques were included in indirect administration systems during colonial control, but they were undermined when state institutions concentrated security tasks in the post-independence era (Ogbozor, 2016).

This void created by centralization remains up to date, especially in rural areas of Taraba State, where government actors have found it not easy to meet security needs very locally. Taraba state, which comprises more than 12 different ethnic groups with movement even in the Middle Belt, therefore, opens itself to the possibility of resource-based conflicts and inter-communal conflicts. Typical of this is the Tiv and Jukun battle that has ended up in most cases with incidents of violence, deaths, and thousands of displacements. According to the International Crisis Group (2021), community clashes in the Middle Belt have resulted in the death of more than 2,500 persons in recent years, with Taraba State accounting for a greater share of these deaths. These issues are compounded by the state-specific physical features like rugged topography and porous borders that facilitate banditry and illegal arms trafficking. These challenges have meant that non-state security actors like the “Taraba Marshall” and the vigilante organization “Yan Banga”

have come to assume a significant role in securing the state. These organizations provide services such as intelligence collection, dispute settlement, and crime prevention at the local level. The Yan Banga vigilantes patrol rural areas to defend crops from damage and livestock from rustling, thereby reducing hostilities among farmers and herders (Basiru & Osunkoya, 2019). Hence, this study seeks to unravel the nature of the relationship between non-state security actors and the security governance in Taraba State.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing relevance of non-state security actors (NSSAs) in Taraba State reflects the higher reality of diverse and increasing threats, which state security services find difficult to deal with. Recently, Taraba State has recorded increased incidents of banditry, abductions, herdsmen-farmer clashes, and intercommunal conflicts that put disarray in communities and paved the way for a fear-inducing environment (Aghedo & Osumah 2021). The state security organizations in Taraba, such as the Nigerian Armed Forces and their Nigerian Police Force, have severally come under fire for their poor response and presence in far-flung areas. Thus, as far as the workforce goes in today's Nigeria Police Force, there is only 1 police officer per 540 Nigeria people, which is far below the 1:450 recommended by the United Nations when compared to the figures released by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics in 2023. This gap is wider in the rural areas where the few and poorly equipped police officers are stationed. Under these circumstances, police presence would hardly be felt in much of the terrain which is still being regarded as 'out of bound' by the police,

According to the Small Arms Survey (2022), an estimated 6.2 million illegal firearms are in operation in Nigeria, with the highest counts in Taraba and some other Middle Belt states. The proliferation of those arms has increased conflicts to the extent that state security agencies have become helpless in controlling the situation. Non-state security providers are gaining importance here in securing Taraba State. Without any government-provided security institutions, such work is currently done by vigilante groups, traditional hunters, or tribal militias, who would sometimes provide the necessary protection, perform patrols, and mediate conflicts. In the local government areas of Bali and Gassol, communities are highly affected by the farmer-herder conflicts, which tend to rely on the Yan Banga vigilante organization to protect them (Bala, 2023).

As pointed out by Osagie (2024), the resurgence of non-state security actors is indicative of the fact that the government had not lived up to its primary obligation of guaranteeing safety to all, thus making people resort to alternative measures steeped in community trust and engagement. This historical trajectory indicates that the non-state security actors are continuing to demonstrate

importance as well as relevance in the changing security architecture in Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To identify the non-state security actors in Taraba State
2. To analyze the roles of non-state security actors in addressing security challenges in Taraba State.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How are the non-state security actors operating in Taraba State?
2. What roles do non-state security actors play in addressing security challenges in Taraba State?

Conceptual Review

Non-state security Actors

Non-state security actors refer to individuals, groups, or organizations that operate outside the formal state security framework but engage in activities aimed at ensuring safety, maintaining order, and resolving conflicts. Their emergence is a response to the limitations of state capacity, particularly in regions where state agencies are unable to fully meet the security demands of the population. As a result, NSSAs have become key players in contemporary security architecture and governance, complementing or, in some cases, challenging state authority. Alemika (2018) defines them as actors that operate independently of state authority, delivering security services and enforcing norms within specific communities. This perspective emphasizes their informal nature and localized focus. For example, in northern Nigeria, the Yan Sakai vigilante group provides security against banditry and cattle rustling, addressing issues that state forces have struggled to contain. Their activities underscore the grassroots nature of many NSSAs and their role as immediate responders to security threats.

Non-state Security Actors in Taraba State

In Taraba State, several non-state security actors operate to address the various insecurity challenges, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas. These actors include:

i. Yan Banga non-state security actor

The Yan Banga, a prominent vigilante group in Taraba State, emerged primarily in response to the escalating insecurity in Taraba State, particularly in the form of farmer-herder conflicts, communal clashes, and banditry. The group originated from local community efforts to protect themselves from external threats, especially during the early 2000s when insecurity began intensifying across Nigeria's Middle Belt region. According to Adeoye (2022), the failure of state institutions to address these threats prompted communities to organize themselves into vigilante units. Yan Banga gained traction because of its grassroots

orientation and reliance on traditional values and knowledge. The leadership of Yan Banga is typically decentralized, with local leaders heading units in different communities. Each community unit operates autonomously but often collaborates with other units when security issues extend beyond local boundaries. In Taraba State, notable leaders of Yan Banga include figures like Mallam Abubakar Gassol, who oversees operations in Gassol Local Government Area, and John Tavershima, a key figure in Wukari. These leaders often have strong community ties and are trusted by local residents, which enhances the group's legitimacy.

ii. Local Hunters

The emergence of local hunters as community defenders in Taraba is rooted in their historical roles. For generations, hunters were not just providers of food but also protectors of their people. They defended villages from wild animals and external aggressors, such as rival tribes. In recent years, their reputation as fearless defenders of their communities has grown, particularly as state security agencies struggle to address the escalating violence in rural areas. Communities have increasingly turned to hunters to provide a layer of security that is both immediate and effective (Yelwa & Tukur, 2023). The organizational structure of local hunters in Taraba varies across communities but typically involves a hierarchical system led by experienced and respected leaders. These leaders are often chosen based on their bravery, tactical knowledge, and spiritual insight. In areas like Takum, Wukari, and Bali, hunter leaders act as both strategists and mediators, coordinating security efforts and representing their groups during negotiations with local authorities. Their leadership is crucial for maintaining discipline within their ranks and ensuring their actions align with community expectations (Okafor, Yelwa & Tukur, 2022).

iii. Fulani Ardo Groups in Taraba State

The origin of Ardo groups can be traced to the traditional governance systems of the Fulani people. The title "Ardo" signifies a leader who oversees a clan or group of herders, serving as a community representative. One of the primary functions of Fulani Ardo groups is addressing cattle rustling, a pervasive issue in Taraba State that threatens the livelihoods of Fulani herders. These groups organize patrols and intelligence networks to track stolen cattle and apprehend rustlers. Their deep knowledge of grazing routes, migration patterns, and local terrain gives them a strategic advantage in countering cattle theft. In some cases, Ardo groups have collaborated with formal security agencies to recover stolen livestock and dismantle criminal networks (Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2023).

Collaboration between State Security and Non-state Security Actors in Crime Prevention

Non-state security actors (NSSAs) have become vital cogs in the embattled Nigerian national

security architecture and are filling important roles in crime prevention and conflict management in the areas where state law and order enforcement agencies are manifestly lacking. Vigilante groups, ethnic security organizations, hunters, religious organizations, private security firms, and a host of other non-state actors characterize non-state security actors. The Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), for instance, has been very resourceful in tackling the cases of kidnapping and armed robbery in rural areas (Okafor et al, 2022). Complementing the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the VGN has dismantled a few criminal syndicates in such areas as Kaduna, Taraba and Kogi States (Ajayi, Okon, & Ibrahim, 2022). Their movement is highly adaptable while seamlessly integrated with the local community, thus allowing them to gather very actionable intelligence, something that the state forces rarely have access to. Hunters in Taraba State present another classical example of the complementary role of non-state security actors. Highly competent in understanding the terrains, hunters usually spearhead search-and-rescue missions in thick forests.

In 2022, hunters in Sardauna LGA collaborated with the police in rescuing abducted victims and nabbing the evildoers responsible (Ezekiel, 2023). This collaboration presents the complementarity between NSSA's local knowledge and formal agencies' resources and legal authority. Again, ethnic and communal security groups are expected to play a major role in conflict resolution. This is particularly true in the areas prone to inter-ethnic conflict. For example, Tiv and Jukun peace committees in Taraba State work with the government-appointed mediator to debrief and negotiate the ceasefire. The committees also brokered a ceasefire in 2021 during one violent spate in Wukari, reportedly saving lives and property from further escalation (Adeyemi & Bello, 2022). They efficiently achieve the task through their cultural ties and credibility in the communities.

Religious organizations such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) have also bridged efforts in conflict resolution. By organizing and facilitating interfaith dialogues and peacebuilding initiatives, these groups have actively engendered a culture of understanding and tolerance in communities that have witnessed religious conflicts. For instance, in Plateau State, hostilities between Christian and Muslim communities were brought to an end in 2022 with the intervention of similar actors within states and local vigilantes (Mohammed & Ibrahim, 2023). Again, pertinent intelligence is gathered through significant contributions by non-state security actors. Their proximity to the grassroots provides contact with possible information on arising security threats. For example, Fulani Ardo groups in Taraba State have intercepted stolen cattle and identified routes used by rustlers (Garba, Mohammed & Yusuf, 2023). This is directed towards police and military channels, who have used it for effective operations against these criminals.

Theoretical Framework

Community Participation Approach Theory

The Community Participation Approach Theory emphasizes the active involvement of individuals and communities in the planning, execution, and evaluation of initiatives that affect their lives. Rooted in the idea that people are the best agents of their development, this theory advocates for bottom-up approaches where communities are not mere recipients of external assistance but active contributors to decision-making and implementation processes (Arnstein, 1969; Oakley, 1991). It highlights empowerment, collaboration, and ownership as central tenets, arguing that sustainable development is best achieved when communities are directly engaged. This theory is highly relevant to understanding the role of non-state security actors in Taraba State's security architecture. This theory emphasizes the active involvement of local communities in identifying, addressing, and resolving challenges that affect their well-being (Arnstein, 1969; Chambers, 1997). Non-state security actors such as vigilante groups, traditional hunters, and ethnic-based security groups embody the principles of this theory by directly engaging with communities to tackle insecurity. For instance, vigilante groups in Taraba State rely on local knowledge and collaboration with community members to track criminals, mediate conflicts, and maintain order. This participatory model aligns with the theory's emphasis on grassroots solutions, ensuring that security efforts are tailored to the unique socio-cultural and geographical contexts of the region (Eweka & Olusegun, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The work used a descriptive research design to document systematically how non-state security actors operate within Taraba State. The sampling size was obtained from the 2006 National Population Census for Taraba State which is put at 3,609,800 (NPC, 2022, estimated figure). The researcher adopted a multistage sampling method by first grouping Taraba State into sixteen Local Government Areas (LGAs). The researchers picked seven Local Government Areas (LGAs) through random selection from the total number: Ardo Kola, Bali, Donga, Gashaka, Gassol, Ibi and Jalingo. The research team selected particular communities which maintained an active non-state security presence in their respective Local Government Areas (LGAs). The study used snowball sampling to discover its target research participants. The research obtained primary data by conducting extensive key informant interview (KII) and In-depth interview (IDI) with participants regarding their insights on non-state security actors' involvement in security governance. The research used sources from journals, articles and newspaper reports alongside online publications as secondary data. Content analysis using qualitative approaches provided the method for data analysis throughout the study. Adopting this methodology contributed to figuring out and identifying key roles of the non-state security actors whose activities matched the

study objectives while allowing a deep examination of their functions.

FINDINGS

This section is concerned with presenting, analyzing, and interpreting data gathered in the field using key informant interviews (KII) and in-depth interviews. The former was used in gathering data from members of non-state security actors, while the latter was used in gathering data from residents of communities in Taraba State. The data were analyzed in themes.

The Non-State Security Actors in Taraba State

The first study objective investigated the Non-State Security Actors in Taraba State. The study found that in Taraba State, ethnic militias, such as the Tiv Militia and Jukun Militia, play a significant role in maintaining security. The hunter groups, such as the Hunters Association of Nigeria (HAN), contribute significantly to security efforts and Taraba State Youth Empowerment Scheme (TAYES) has improved security in the state. A key informant participant stated:

In Taraba State, the security dynamics are primarily influenced by ethnic militias and local groups that collaborate with formal security actors. Among such ethnic militias are the Tiv Militia, Jukun Militia, etc. Such groups have already been established in the security landscape. They are usually formed along ethnic lines and often view themselves as indispensable protectors of their communities, much more so in a state characterized by high ethnic and communal tensions. (IDI, 4).

Another key informant participant stated that:

Aside from these ethnic militias, groups of non-state actors play a significant role in the security apparatus of the state, such as the Hunters Association of Nigeria (HAN). Hunting has a long tradition of safeguarding local communities. Hunters are trained in tracking, and in combat, if necessary, and become indispensable in areas where formal policing may be intervening. (KII, 10).

In the same vein, another key informant interview participant stated:

Programme such as the Taraba State Youth Empowerment Scheme (TAYES) have been contributing positively to security. Though the primary intention was to offer some economic opportunities for the youth, TAYES has come to include some security-concerned projects. It is almost evident that TAYES has involved youth in organized community projects instead of criminal activities and violent conflicts. (KII, 8).

The qualitative data showed that the Taraba State Vigilante Group is effective in providing security in the state, a key informant interview participants stated that:

Robberies and armed robbery cases within our areas had made many people even before the vigilante was established. In those times, most people would hardly be at ease moving around at night since there was little confidence that security agents could protect them from such (KII, 1).

This is similar to qualitative data. According to findings, the police were seen as ineffective due to slow responses and inadequate resources, necessitating neighborhood watch groups, a key informant interview participants stated that:

Life was becoming traumatic as one day dawned the threatening figure of security incidents wherein easy robbery set impromptu examples for aspiring thieves. The shop from which goods were stolen twice could not lead to any identification of the criminals. The police would show up and take the reports, but nothing ever came out of the reports. We had no option but to remain helpless (KII, 2).

On their objectives and role, the study found that non-state security actors protect the community against banditry, kidnapping, and other criminal activities. An –in-depth interview participant stated that:

Our most important interest is ensuring that our communities are not subjected to criminal activities such as banditry, kidnapping, and communal clashes. Since government security forces are always stretched and often slow to respond to critical areas, we fill the gap so that people can live in peace (IDI, 2).

On the method of operation, the study revealed that non-state security actors rely heavily on local intelligence in managing crime in the community and also collaborate with other formal security networks in the study area. A member of a vigilante group confirmed this when he stated:

We follow local intelligence and community cooperation to trace crime incidences. Our members patrol through villages, assist in settling disputes, and, at times, work with formal security agencies to avert attacks before they occur (IDI, 5).

The study also investigated the relationship of non-state actors with formal security operatives in Taraba State. According to the findings, there is a trust deficit between non-state security actors and law enforcement agencies. An in-depth interview stated that:

Sometimes there is a lot of mistrust. They see us as vigilantes, whereas we see ourselves as protectors. But in those instances where we

collaborate, the crime rate has been drastically reduced (IDI, 4).

Furthermore, the study found that the greatest challenge of non-state security actors is funding and lack of equipment to manage crime where they operate. A member of non-state security actor stated that:

Probably the biggest challenge is funding and equipment. This is how far the government forces go. It has proper weapons, training, and logistical support for its forces. Most of our members risk their lives day in and day but are left with little or no resources (IDI, 7).

The study also investigated concerns about the protection of human rights by non-state security actors. Analysis revealed that non-state security actors in Taraba state have good knowledge of the human rights of community members. An –in-depth interview participant stated that:

It is clear that there is fear regarding abuse by non-state security actors, but we are highly disciplined and have community oversight. We act only out of necessity, and our focus is on protecting innocent people, not taking the law into our own hands: (IDI: 2).

The Roles of Non-State Security Actors in Addressing Security Challenges in Taraba State

The second objective examined the roles of Non-state security actors in addressing security challenges in Taraba State. The study found that a greater percentage of the respondents strongly agreed that Non-state security actors play a crucial role in providing intelligence to security agencies. A key informant interview participant stated that:

We make sure Taraba State is safe from kidnaping and armed robbery, we monitor the roads and forest through which bandits frequently operate. Our engagement in local intelligence helps trace the criminals. We work with families and local authorities to mobilize awareness and conduct ransom negotiations as well as investigations into kidnappings. Our effort in all of these have reduced kidnaping and other crimes in our communities (IDI, 1).

The study revealed that non-state security actors engage in community peacekeeping and conflict resolution initiatives in Taraba State. An in-depth interview confirmed this when he stated:

In Taraba, insecurity is sometimes caused by ethnic and religious difference. We mediate into many instances where disputes between different groups could have blown into violence. With these acts of neutrality, we have created dialogue between community leaders and rival groups. We Organizes peace-building forums which bring together different aggrieved parties. This has helped in

maintaining the peace we are experiencing today (IDI, 8).

Another role of non-state security actors in Taraba State is that they provide support in strengthening local law enforcement in communities, by acting as informants with local intelligence. An in-depth interview participant stated thus:

We usually work with police, share information and assist them in carrying out their responsibility in such a way it will be felt by people living in rural communities. Our aim is not to replace the police, but to make sure we assist with local intelligence that will make the communities more safer for people to live in (IDI, 5).

An insight given by a key informant participant stated that with the involvement of the traditional leaders, legitimacy and cultural backing were provided to the Non state security actors.

The traditional rulers were at the forefront of forming the Non state security actors. They called meetings with elders, youth leaders, and other influential people in the community. Their leadership and ability to unite people were crucial. Without them, this initiative would not have gained the trust and support it needed (KII, 6).

The study found that the key role of non-state security is addressing banditry and kidnapping in communities. An in-depth interview participant stated that:

We make sure Taraba State is safe from kidnaping and armed robbery, we monitor the roads and forest through which bandits frequently operate. Our engagement in local intelligence helps trace the criminals. We work with families and local authorities to mobilize awareness and conduct ransom negotiations as well as investigations into kidnappings. Our effort in all of these have reduced kidnaping and other crimes in our communities (IDI, 1).

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with local intelligence. An in-depth interview participant stated that:

Non-state security actors share an informal collaboration with formal security forces by providing critical support on the ground. While we do not have the resources to replace the police or military, we collect local intelligence and act as informants to ensure prompt submission to authorities. (IDI, 5).

The qualitative data shows that non-state security actors protect vulnerable communities in Taraba State, with local intelligence.

Many of Taraba's rural communities are usually neglected by state security agencies due to their location. We provide security in these areas by ensuring that people go to bed with two eyes closed. We are deeply rooted in the communities we serve and thus, understand local dynamics to render immediate assistance. If there are threats against farmers, women, or children, we act fast to secure their safety, and in extreme circumstances, we relocate families to safer zones if need be (IDI, 8).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined Non-state security actors and security provisioning in Taraba State. The first study objective examined the Non-State Security Actors in Taraba State. According to findings, the Taraba State Vigilante Group is effective in providing security in the state. The study found that ethnic militias, such as the Tiv Militia and Jukun Militia, play a significant role in maintaining security in Taraba State. The study revealed that neighborhood watch groups are essential in preventing crime and maintaining security in Taraba State. The study also revealed that the private security companies provide adequate security services to individuals and businesses in Taraba State. The study found that the hunter groups, such as the Hunters Association of Nigeria (HAN), contribute significantly to security efforts in Taraba State. This support the report by Osun State Ministry of Justice (2023) that crime rates dropped by 35% between 2020 and 2022 in communities with active non-state security actors. This is also similar to the findings by Umah and Amannah (2020) and Ogele, *et al.*, (2020) that the formation of non-state security actors led to crime reduction.

The second objective examined the roles of Non-state security actors in addressing security challenges in Taraba state. According to findings, Non-state security actors play a crucial role in providing intelligence to security agencies. The study found that Non-state security actors are effective in protecting lives and property. This is similar to the findings by Oladipo (2021), where 72% of respondents affirmed that they were confident in Non-state security actors capacity to keep their neighborhoods peaceful. It was also established that Non-state security actors are

instrumental in facilitating conflict resolution and peace building. The study revealed that Non-state security actors in Taraba State receive adequate training and capacity-building programs. The study found that Non-state security actors are influential in advocating for policy changes and reforms to address security challenges. According to the study, non-state security actors provide timely and effective humanitarian assistance to affected communities. The study revealed that non-state security actors are effective in addressing security challenges. The study found that Non-state security actors play an essential role in educating the community about safety and crime prevention.

CONCLUSION

The study analysed non-state security actors and security provisioning in Taraba State, focusing on their overall effectiveness in sustaining security. The study concludes that the vigilante groups, ethnic militias, neighborhood watch groups, private security companies, and hunter associations are very important in deterring and preventing crimes and maintaining peace and security. Their influence corresponds with findings of similar studies which indicate that crime is mitigated where non-state security actors are active. The actors also gather intelligence and save lives and properties as well as reconciliation and peace-building. They are trained, lobby for policy change, provide humanitarian assistance, and educate the community about crime control. Broadly speaking, non-state security actors actually do play a significant role in addressing the state's insecurity.

Recommendations

- i. The government should create a formal registration process for non-state security actors under local supervision, and develop policies that outline their roles, responsibilities, and limitations to avoid conflicts with law enforcement. Ensure that non-state security actors are integrated into the local government's overall security architecture for their legitimacy and framework of operations.
- ii. The town hall meetings should be organized by the community leaders including the community development committee to inform the community about the whole idea of non-state security actors and encourage community volunteers to join any non-state security actors' activities such as patrols and create feedback mechanisms by which residents can report issues or give suggestions towards improvement of non-state security actors work. This would, of course, build trust, transparency, and a common sense of accountability about security.

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