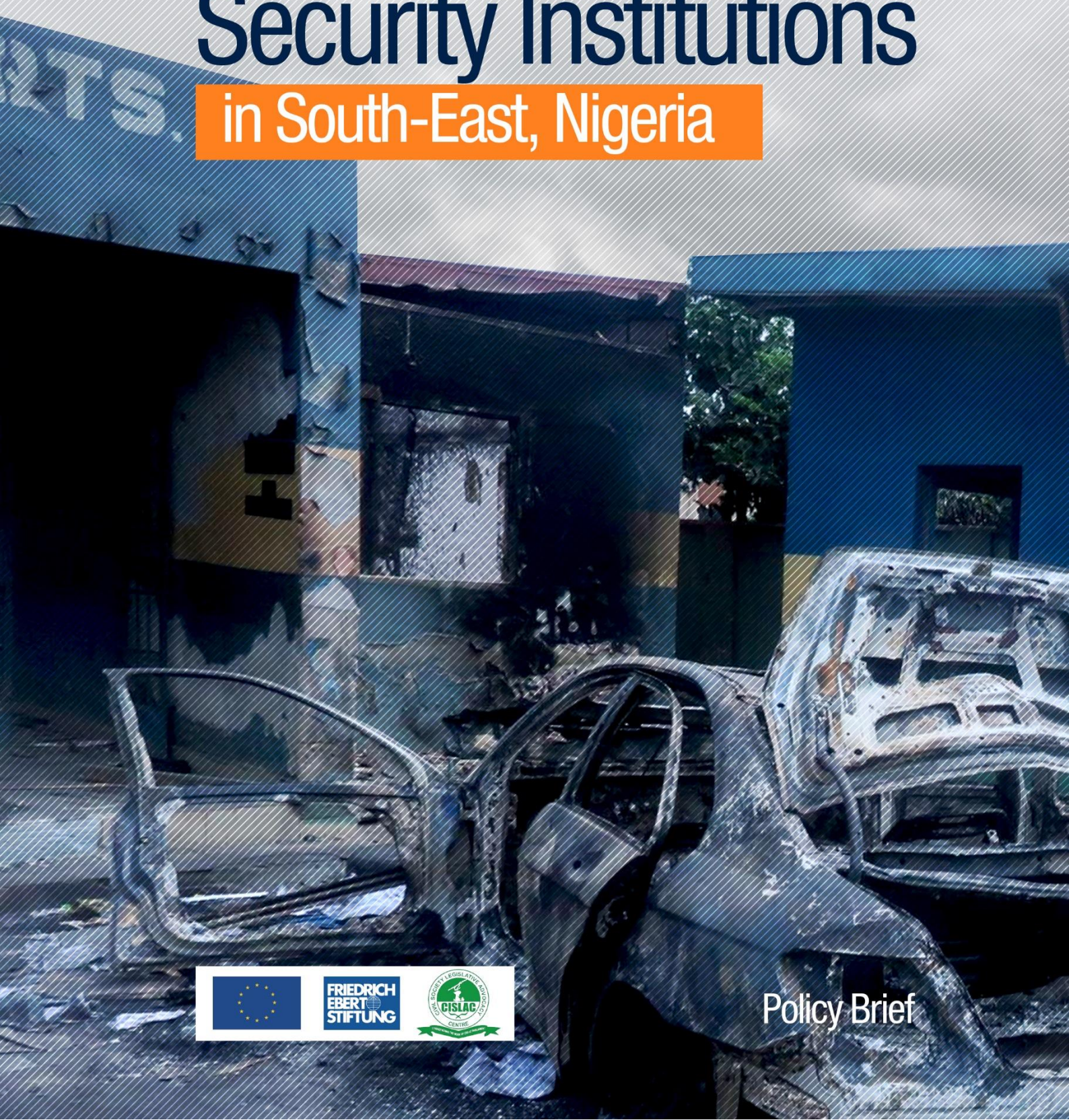


Multi-Stakeholder **Consultative Forum** on the Attacks on **Security Institutions** in South-East, Nigeria



Policy Brief

Executive Summary

Nigeria is witnessing the escalation of violence and conflicts across the board. While the incidents have led to thousands of losses to lives and then the destruction of livelihood, it has seemingly overwhelmed Nigeria's security operatives. The Southeast region, which used to be one of Nigeria's relatively peaceful zones, has witnessed rising violence. The past couple of months have been dreadful, given the region's rise of violence and security uncertainties. About 254 people were killed in 63 incidents recorded in the first five months of 2021. Ebonyi state topped the incident table with 101 fatalities, followed by Imo state with 60 casualties. While Anambra state recorded 37 losses, Abia state had 33 deaths. Enugu completed the table with the least casualty figure at 22 deaths.

These incidents and wanton killings stem from the consistency of unknown gunmen violence, clashes between security agencies and self-rule enthusiasts (IPOB), extra-judicial killings, banditry, cultism, land-related and communal conflicts in the region. Despite the presence of increased formal security measures and parallel quasi-security formations, the violence has continued. Indeed, the proliferation of multiple security groups may have added to the security uncertainties in the Southeast. For instance, the Nigerian government has opposed the Eastern Security Network (ESN) through consistent military operations.

An understanding of the conflict dynamics points to old and new issues in the region. For example, there are clear links between current southeast violence to marginalisation and group violence that heralded the Nigerian/Biafran civil war. Furthermore, it has also been linked to new perceptions of exclusion, structural violence, government's repressive stance on pro-Biafra secession calls. On a broader scale, the cross-cutting insecurity in Nigeria and apparent ineffectual security measures add to the recurrence of violence and conflict in the region. As mentioned above and detailed in this paper, the consistent rise of violence in the Southeast and Nigeria, in general, is evidenced in the Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database.

The slippery slope of southeast violence has elicited the need to consider other alternative measures to manage the unfolding crisis. Dialogue considerations will provide non-combative opportunities for government and agitating groups to seek sustainable outcomes. Also, tailored interventions to build public trust and counteract collective victimhood will seek to address issues around perceptions of marginalisation and the losses to the civil war that have continued to manifest in present-day Nigeria. Furthermore, recommendations also look at implementing a comprehensive security sector reform (SSR) to improve security and manage the inadequacies of security institutions that create room for the establishment of recognised and unrecognised informal security formations. This policy brief will serve as an up-to-date and objective paper

that seeks to provide a frame of understanding and reliable data to provide insights and sustainable pathways to peace in the newly troubled Southeast region.

Introduction

Nigeria has been plagued by various forms of insecurity in every part of its federating geopolitical regions. These immense internal security challenges have continued to fuel various forms of violent conflicts between groups in the country. Most notable of these security challenges are the continuous activities of Islamist terrorist groups consisting of Boko Haram and Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) in the North-East region. The actions of these terrorist groups in Nigeria and across another part of the Sahel have continued to increase despite the global war on terrorism. Over the last eleven years, the groups have continued to rely on the country's governance failure and institutional fragility to engender insecurity in the North-East region in the BAY states (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe) as the Lake Chad Basin region.¹

Militancy in the south-south region, especially the part of Niger Delta hosting oil installations and facilities, has remained unabated despite introducing the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP), which secured a reduction of attacks on oil facilities. Following the introduction and activities of the PAP, the Niger-Delta region is described as enjoying a negative peace. However, structural violence which led to the violent conflicts in the first instance has remained mainly unsolved². This region consisting of about 31 million, has continued to be experiencing various forms of insecurity³ from cultism to sea robbery, land struggles, electoral violence and gang activities etc.

The North-West and North-Central region are currently experiencing heightened violent conflicts between farmers and herders, uncontrollable and well-organised banditry and kidnapping for ransom, as well as pockets of ethnic and religious violence. The farmer-herder clashes, formerly a prominently Northern Nigeria crisis, have spread to all parts of the country. Over the years, it has become more complex and protracted, wiping up ethnic, cultural, religious and political sentiments and instituting the need for self-help to address perceived grievances, protection and

¹ Iro Aghedo & Oarhe Osumah (2012) The Boko Haram Uprising: how should Nigeria respond?, Third World Quarterly, 33:5, 853-869, DOI: [10.1080/01436597.2012.674701](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.674701)

² Ndubuisi N. Nwokolo (2017) Building "Peace" and Neglecting Structural Violence, Peace Review, 29:4, 497-505, DOI: [10.1080/10402659.2017.1381523](https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2017.1381523)

settlements⁴. For instance, the Middle Belt of Nigeria, which is part of the geopolitical North-Central and North-East region, witnesses an astronomical level of violent conflicts between farmers and herders. Each group struggles to control the diminishing region's fertile land for farming or grazing. According to a 2018 report by Search for Common Ground (SFCG), "this dynamic is compounded by factors which have led to increased tensions over resources, including climate variability, environmental degradation, socio-political upheaval, and open-grazing prohibition laws that herders view as contrary to their interests"⁵ The spread of this conflict to the southern part of the country is today considered as the precursor to the current violent between farmers and herders in communities in the Southern part of the country as well as the growing ethnic tension in communities in the Southern part of the country with herders.

The Southwest region has also witnessed increasing violence between farming and herders' communities, leading to attacks and counters-attacks with losses of lives and properties. The situation is further exacerbated by ransom kidnapping and violent deaths, which are often associated with herders from Fulani ethnic communities. This, in many cases, has led to ethnic clashes and multiplicity of non-state security outfits like Amotekun to patrol and guard the forests and some ungoverned spaces in the Southwest. Amotekun ("Leopard" in the Yoruba language) or the Western Nigeria Security Network (WSN) was formed on March 6, 2020, by the six states of the Southwest as a regional security arrangement to complement the efforts of the Nigeria Police Force to curb the rising violence against travellers and farmers in the region especially in the rural areas. However, as opined by Obado-Joel, "community responses to these violent crises have been diverse and included the establishment of armed groups to supplement"⁶. This has, in many cases, led to clashes between groups, in this case, herders who are considered the leading purveyor of rural violence against farmers and travellers in the southwestern region.

The Southeast region currently presents a different dimension in the nature of violence that has bedevilled the country. The farmer-herder conflicts and kidnapping in the

⁴ Forum on Farmer-Herder Relations. (2018), report of a workshop on Conflict System Analysis of Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria.

⁵ Kwaja, Chris M.A. and Bukola I. Ademola-Adelehin. (2018). Seeking Security and Stability: An Analysis of Security Responses to Conflicts Between Farmers and Herders in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. Search for Common Ground. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Seeking-Security-and-Stability_Nigeria_-Search-for-Common-Ground.pdf

⁶ Jennifer Obado-Joel (2020) "The Challenges of state-backed Internal Security in Nigeria: Considerations for Amotekun" Washington D.C.: Resolve Network, 2020. <https://www.resolvenet.org/research/challenge-state-backed-internal-security-nigeria-considerations-amotekun>

South-East fueled the emergence of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), an armed wing of IPOB (The Indigenous People of Biafra) in the Southeast region. According to Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the proscribed secession agitation group leader, the unveiling of the Eastern Security Network is an answer to "insecurity and Fulani terrorism"⁷ in the region. With this aim of protecting farmlands and forests in the area from criminals, kidnappers and other possible threats, the non-state security armed group is a vigilante group.⁸ According to the IPOB, it is like Amotekun in the Southwest and the Miyetti Allah Security outfit. The formation of this non-formal security outfit on December 12, 2020, further heightened the tension between Nigeria's security services (especially the military and the police) and the members of the proscribed group, especially thousands of youths in the region who are drawn by the narratives of the group and the deteriorating security situation in the area.

Understanding the rising violence in the South-East Region

The spate of escalating violence in the Southeast begs for explanation. It can be linked to many issues, including the calls for secession that birthed and heralded the Nigeria and Biafra civil war fifty-four years ago. Perceptions of marginalisation, structural violence, and lack of inclusion form part of the basis for self-determination calls in the Southeast. For example, after the Biafra and Civil War, the post-conflict stabilisation strategy tagged "Reintegration, Reconstruction and Reconciliation (RRR) failed to achieve positive outcomes as Biafran sentiments and ambitions are still topical issues more than five decades after the war ended.

New secession calls have emerged with the now-proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), championing the cause in recent years. IPOB are consistent with disseminating anti-one Nigeria messages and promoting the Biafra nation agenda. The group's offshoot, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), which was purportedly set up to secure "Igbo lives" from the activities of herdsmen, forms part of its growing discredit for Nigeria's authority and its monopoly of the instrument of violence and its plan to establish a Biafra nation. This series of events has triggered constant violent clashes between IPOB and security agencies, especially in the Southeast. The consistency of the conflicts has added to security uncertainties in a relatively peaceful southeast region of Nigeria.

⁷ <http://saharareporters.com/2020/12/13/nnamdi-kanu-launches-eastern-security-network-says-not-different-amotekun-miyetti-allah>

⁸ <https://dailypost.ng/2020/12/13/breaking-nnamdi-kanu-launches-eastern-security-network/>

Beyond IPOB and Nigeria's security operatives' violent schisms, new concerns have emerged. Since December 2020, multiple attacks by "unknown gunmen" on security personnel and infrastructure, especially the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), have been recorded in the southeast and south-south zones. While the Nigerian government, through security agencies, have consistently indicted IPOB for the targeted assaults, even paraded suspected IPOB members behind the attacks, the group have denied responsibility. This leaves the situation in a perplexed state; the government's stance on IPOB's involvement in the attacks, the group's unwavering denials and the continuity of the attacks. Moreover, there is a likelihood that other criminal actors may have capitalised on this perplexing situation to carry out attacks within the region undetected.

Across Nigeria, insecurity is a huge concern for the Nigerian government and its residents. Multiple violent vistas exist within the federation. It is not rocket science that the southeast zone is not immune to the spate of violence in other locations in the country. In addition, there may be neighbourhood effects of violence or spillover violence from different sections of the country in the Southeast. Clear instances are the cases of farmer-herder clashes and land-related conflicts in some communities.

The Current Security Crisis and Its Implications on National Development

Currently, Nigeria is witnessing cross-cutting security issues across the nation, which poses significant risk factors to its national development. As mentioned in the preceding, multiple conflict types exist across the geopolitical zones that make up the federation. In addition, there is over a decade of jihadist violence in the northeast, rising banditry, large scale abduction of students for ransom, attacks of communities, gang wars, and now targeted assaults on security formations in the southeast and south-south zones. The trends have also led to the proliferation of parallel quasi-security structures to make security provisions to deplete stability in the country.

Data from the Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database shows a noticeable increase in widespread violence and conflict in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the last quarter of 2020. About 384 deaths and 510 kidnappings were recorded in 256 incidents in the previous quarter of 2020. In the first quarter of 2021, 724 fatalities and 802 kidnap victims were observed in 336 attacks. The figures prove the state of current security dynamics in the country despite the efforts of the Nigerian security operatives to restore peace and safety.

In the now troubled southeast zone, 254 people died in 63 incidents recorded in the first five months of 2021. Ebonyi state recorded the highest statistics with 101 fatalities (92 civilians and nine security agents). Imo state came second with 60 casualties, out of which were 35 civilians and 25 security agents. Anambra and Abia recorded 37 (25 civilians and 12 security agents) and 33 (19 civilians and 14 security agents) deaths, respectively. With 22 fatalities (17 civilians and six security agents), Enugu state is the least violent state in the Southeast for the period under review.

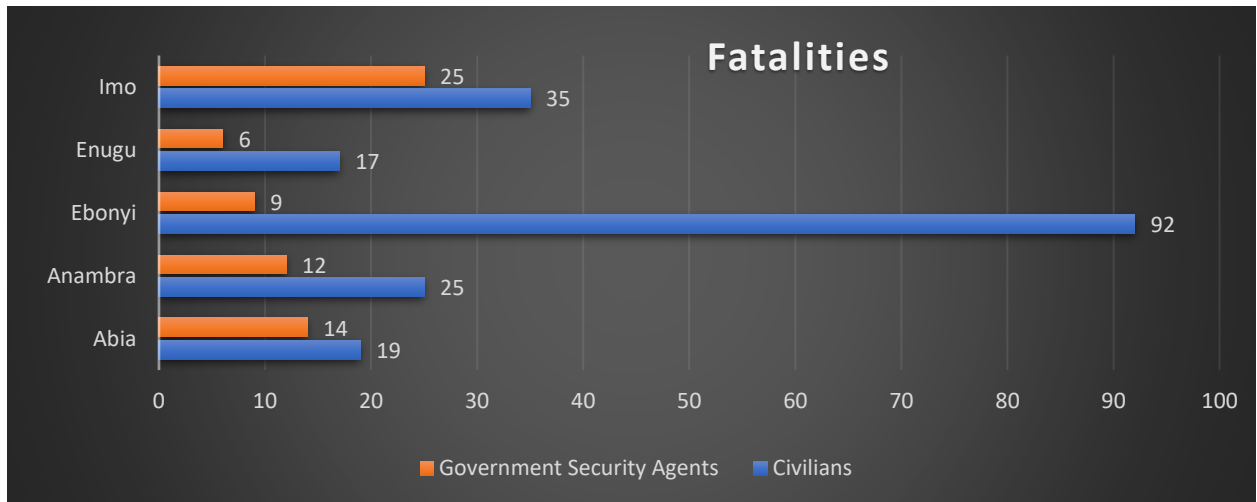


Figure 1: Five Months Infographics of South East violent conflict fatalities (January - May 2021)

More specifically, the current spate of insecurity in the region can be traced to the spike of gunmen attacks, farmer-herder crisis, extra-judicial killings, domestic violence, cultism and communal clashes. Out of the 63 incidents recorded in the Southeast, 53 were attacks by "unknown gunmen".

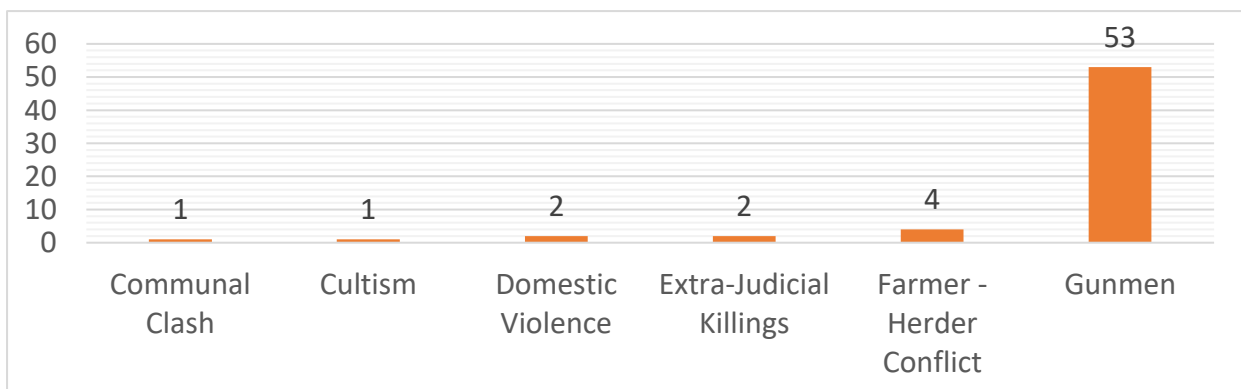


Figure 2: Violent Conflict Type in the South East (January – May 2021)

For more than five months, criminals have strategically targeted government facilities, especially police stations and personnel, in the various states of Nigeria eastern region.

However, to date, there is no conclusive investigation by Nigeria's security operatives to uncover the identity of these gunmen.

In the review period, a total of 16 police stations have been attacked, buildings burnt, arms carted away, and officers killed. The pattern of attacks arguably makes it easier to curb, only if Nigeria's security posts are fortified and its personnel battle-ready to make arrests.

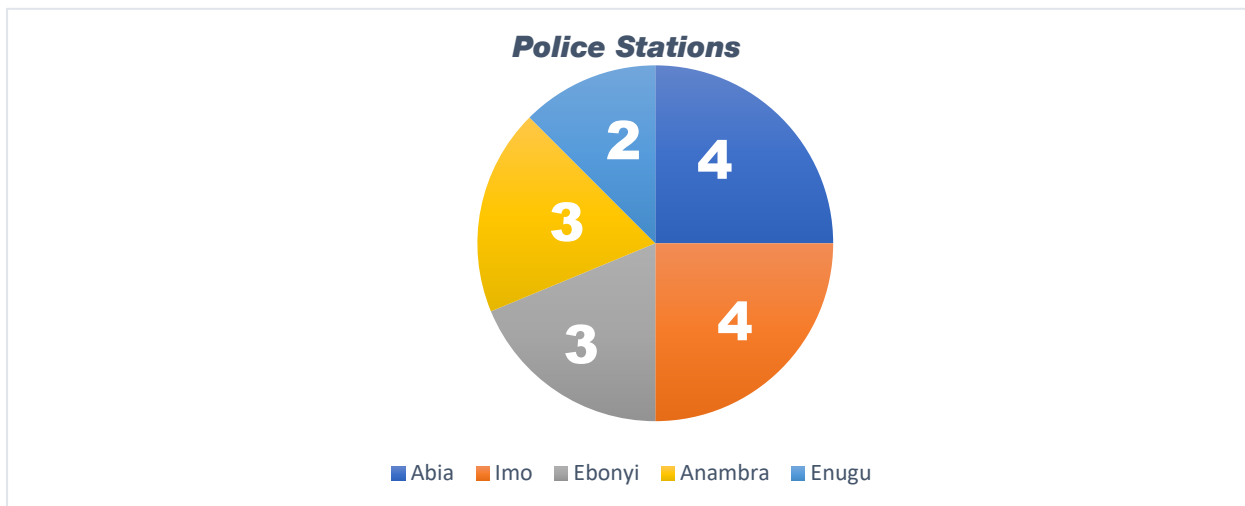


Figure 3: Breakdown of attacks on police stations in the South East (January – May 2021)

The Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) Facilities have not been spared the arson as about ten offices were attacked within the last five months. This is a worrisome trend, especially with the governorship election coming up in Anambra in November. In the November 18, 2017, gubernatorial election, though voters' turnout was low (22%), the state did not witness the spate of violence as it is currently. There are concerns about electoral violence given the about 1.3 million Nigerians presently unemployed/ underemployed residing in the state. As the Anambra state gubernatorial elections draw close, the proliferation of 'unknown gunmen violence leaves much to be desired as the Nigerian Police Force expected to maintain law and order during the polls are as vulnerable as the citizens.

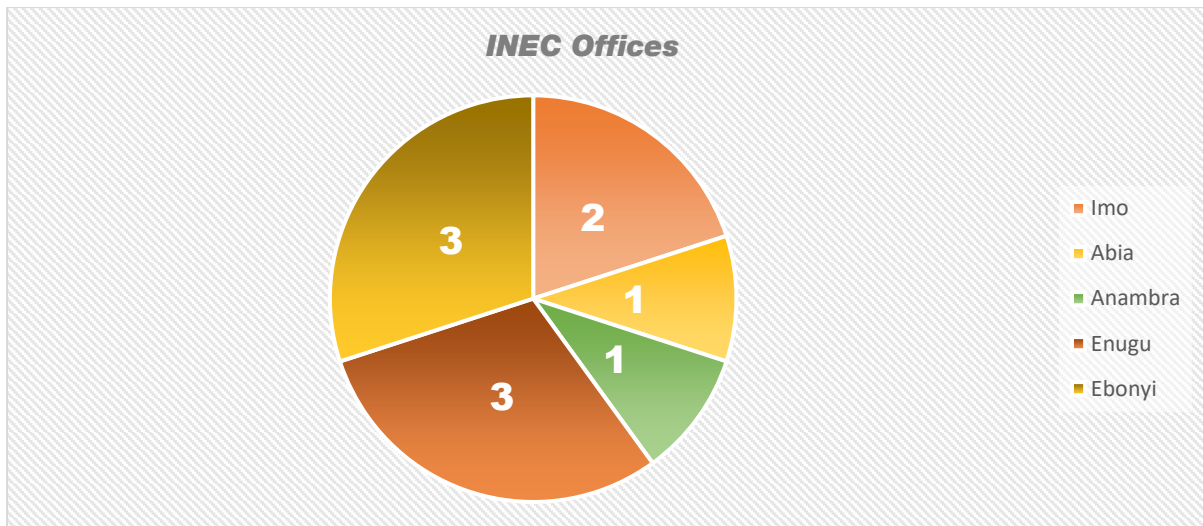


Figure 4: Breakdown of Attacks on INEC Offices in the South -East (January – May 2021)

Building Peace in the Southeast

New efforts must be targeted at building sustainable peace in the region by focusing on some issues. First, age-long sentiments on marginalisation are still strife in present-day Igbo society, and it feeds into the current agitations for self-rule. Second, the consistency of perceptions of exclusion and structural violence promises the continuity of agitations that are often violent and have created issues of security concerns to the Southeast and Nigeria in general. Third, the problem can be traced back to the build-up of the Nigeria/Biafra civil war, the allegations of a pogrom against Igbos in some sections of the country. In addition to this is the alleged genocide during the war, ineffective reintegration, reconstruction, and reconciliation efforts claimed to still be evident in the country's current socio-economic and socio-political standings. Many Nigerians of southeast extraction share in the collective victimhood of these series of events and channel their travails to calls for a Biafran nation. This narrative is corroborated by victimhood psychology which explains the perceptions of group members who feel targeted for being members of a particular group.

Second, the government's hardline stance on self-rule hopefuls in the Southeast forms part of the issues to be addressed. The suppressive nature of the government's response to pro-Biafra sentiments and movements have shown not to deter new calls for self-rule. With targeted arrests on members of the various pro-Biafra groups that have been established over the years, the strategy has not prevented continuity of self-determination calls but have likely widened the gaps between government and many pro-Biafra supporters in the region. The perceived government's inefficiency adds to this plight. For example, the creation of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) by the

proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is purportedly to fill the security gaps in the Southeast and secure "Igbo lives" from herdsmen attacks. The radio Biafra have also capitalised on these perceived governance shortfalls to propagate anti-Nigerian messages and pro-Biafra dreams.

The Federal government's suppressive response joins with the reactive effort of state governments in the Southeast to complicate the security situation in the region. The creation of a southeast regional security structure code named Ebube Agu is arguably in response to the formation of the ESN. Also, the growing insecurity in the region and state governments' requests makes more security agents in the Southeast quell the uprising. The trends have created multiple security elements operating in an increasingly delicate environment such that violent clashes are likely occurrences.

Recommendations

The trend of southeast violence, unknown gunmen era, extant issues around perceived marginalisation, self-rule calls and creation of parallel security frameworks calls for multilayered and locally-driven efforts to renewed peace and stability. For this peculiar reason, some sustainable measures can help navigate out of the slippery slope.

Dialogue Alternative: Over the years, the repression of self-rule agitations has not ended it. There have been other vistas of self-determination in the country. Clear and recent examples are the Oduduwa nation movement currently sweeping through the Southwest and the relatively docile Biafra Customary Government (BCG). Dialogue alternative will provide platforms to communicate grievances before the escalation of violence and impact on public safety. It will also trigger commitments on the part of government and agitating groups instrumental to peace and stability. Also, there are existing security threats in the nation competing for the government's limited budget and the attention of the overwhelmed security agencies. The dialogue will allow the government to reduce security spending needed in the emerging theatres of violence and redeploy them to the existing crisis hotspot. In addition, it is a sustainable way of achieving people-oriented peace and stability, especially in the southeast zone.

Reclaiming Monopoly of Violence: As drawn from the Nextier SPD's Violent Conflict Database, Nigeria is witnessing multiple security crises, the state's monopoly of violence has become a luxury. Therefore, the government must channel efforts towards arresting the ongoing security menace in the country. This could be achieved through security provisions, efficient border management and security to regulate the

proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) and influx of undocumented foreigners.

Security Reforms: Considering current security dynamics, Nigeria needs security sector reform (SSR). Such reforms include repositioning Nigeria's security agencies, improving their service delivery, addressing remuneration, providing adequate security gadgets, and reviewing accountability frameworks to monitor personnel conduct. The benefits of these activities will seek to reduce gross human rights abuses, inefficient security personnel and lapses in security frameworks, and extra-judicial killings by security operatives. In essence, the SSR will feed into the need to bridge the gaps between society and security organisations. The SSR will also pave the way for the demilitarisation of the public space and the reestablishment of police officers into the business of efficiently maintaining law and order, securing lives and properties.

Rebuilding Public Trust and Counteracting Collective Victimhood: Public perception impacts on governance delivery and stability of any society. The distrust between some southeasterners, mainly pro-Biafra hopefuls, have been traced as far back as the civil war and perceived recent concerns about marginalisation and exclusion. There is a need to revisit conversations on reconciliation and foster social cohesion. Also, the government must ensure fairness in the distribution of public goods and allocation of value. Genuine grassroots level conversations and stakeholder engagements are necessary to recapture people's minds beyond improving governance delivery and fostering development. The stakeholder engagement must be wide-reaching to fit into the Igbo egalitarian nature and ensure that no group is excluded in the quest for sustainable solutions. In essence, the government must effectively communicate its efforts in the region and equally walk the talk.

Improving Governance and Sustainable Development: Generally, in Nigeria, fostering good governance and promoting sustainable development will help manage and prevent some existing social issues. For example, unemployment problems, lack of equal opportunities, and structural violence predispose people, especially young people, to criminality and membership in elaborate criminal networks. This is in line with the greed and grievance theory by Paul Collier that connects such trends of unrest as being driven by grievance. This recommendation feeds into the need for government to be proactive rather than reactive in managing social issues before they lead to wanton ruin to the country's social fabric.

