

From ENDSARS to Unknown Gunmen: An Analysis of the Implications of Attacks on Security Institutions for the Socio-Economic Development of Southeastern Nigeria

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Abstract

From the #EndSARS protest of October 2020 to the emergence of unknown gunmen as well as the era of IPOB sit-at-home enforcement, the South-East Region of Nigeria has not known peace. Federal government critical infrastructures and security personnel located within the zone have been targeted by hoodlums through arson, vandalism and killings. The Federal Government on her own had over-flooded the zone with military operatives in an attempt to fish out the unknown gunmen and neutralize them. This paper attempts an analysis of the implications of the attacks by EndSARS protesters and Unknown Gunmen on Security Institutions for the socio-economic development of South-Eastern Nigeria. It adopted a qualitative method with reliance on secondary sources of data and observed that perceived injustice and the exclusion of the youths from the zone in the governance process particularly by the Buhari-led government constitutes one of the triggers of violence in the zone. It also uncovered that conflict entrepreneurs in political power in the region have cashed into the already tensed security situation in the zone to escalate the killings through sponsored assassinations with attendant damages to the socio-economic fabrics of the zone. The paper concludes that only a meaningful dialogue between government and the people of the zone will stem the tide of violence and insecurity in the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Keywords: #EndSARS, Unknown Gunmen, South-East Nigeria, Implications.

Introduction

The five states that make up the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria have been witnessing undue youth restiveness in recent times. Precisely, this unusual expression of aggression that gave rise to attacks on federal government critical infrastructures and personnel of the federal government security institutions located within the zone started during the EndSARS protest of 2020. Till date, the situation has not abated and seems more on the rise with the identities of the perpetrators changing, and metamorphosing from 'EndSARS-protest-hijackers' to 'unknown gunmen'; and their modus operandi advancing in complexity. Federal government infrastructures and institutions such as police stations, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices, military checkpoints, correctional facilities etc. are among their target locations; while their target personalities include the police operatives, soldiers on duty at military checkpoints, personnel of other security agencies, perceived political saboteurs etc.

The foregoing suggests that killings, attacks on infrastructures, and security failures in the South-East region of Nigeria within the period has assumed a complex and multi-dimensional nature, causes, manifestations and implications. As for their natures and causes, a lot of reasons have been adduced by

scholars as to how and why the ugly situation emerged and lingered, in the zone. In their manifestations, the perpetrators have, overtime, changed and advanced in their technology and modus operandi, as they now move in convoy of SUV cars, use sophisticated weapons, such as AK-47 rifles and Improvised Explosive Devices (EID). So also, their socioeconomic implications are multifarious, as every economic unit and every sector of the economy, as well as the people's social lives have been negatively impacted.

During the EndSARS era, the youths had seen some cogent reasons to protest against police brutality and bad governance, while the hoodlums hijacked that genuine exercise to unleash terror on innocent citizens. During the 'unknown gunmen' era, while criminals had their way, some politicians who are conflict entrepreneurs have equally infiltrated the ranks of these gunmen unknown, sponsoring hired assassins against their political opponents in the process. What is more, while the secessionist group, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), declares a sit-at-home cycle in the South East every Monday to press home their demand for the release of their incarcerated leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, hoodlums have also capitalized on the situation to perpetuate killings and arson in the zone.

While the social, political, economic and security implications of these killings, both to the South-East Zone and to the entire country at large, are yet to be fully determined, the extent so far reached has kept every right-thinking Nigerian on his/her toes as the worst may not yet have happened. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the implications of the attacks by ENDSARS and Unknown Gunmen Security Institutions on the socio-economic development of Southeastern Nigeria.

Conceptualizing '#EndSARS Hoodlums' and 'Unknown Gunmen'

According to Wikipedia, EndSARS is a decentralized social movement, and a series of mass protest against police brutality in Nigeria. The slogan calls for the disbanding of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notorious unit of the Nigeria Police with a long record of abuses. The protests, which takes its name from the slogan, started in 2017 as a Twitter campaign using the hashtag to demand the disbanding of the unit by the Nigerian Government (Salaudeen, 2017). After experiencing revitalization in October 2020 following revelations of the abuses of the unit, mass demonstrations occurred throughout major cities of Nigeria, accompanied by vociferous outrage on social media platforms. According to Kazeem 2020):

“The core of the protest has included a call for the government of President Muhammadu Buhari to scrap SARS, a notorious “special” police unit designated to combat armed robbery but is largely known instead for blatant extortion and, in some cases, extra-judicial killings”.

One of the popular chants used during the protest was "sorosokeweree", which means “speak up immediately” in the country's Yoruba Language.

“And so, speak up immediately (sorosokeweree) became an EndSARS battle cry nigh a tone of rebellion, a note of valid belligerency and a chant of unification in the Nigerian struggle against police brutality and terrible governance”(Alake, 2020).

The EndSARS protest therefore was a genuine, well-intentioned, peaceful and non-violent civil unrest carried out by Nigerian youths to drive home their demand for an end to police brutality and bad governance in Nigeria.

However, days into the protest, criminal elements in the society hijacked the protest, turning it into a killing, maiming, and arson spree. In the words of Agbo et al (2020):

“The protests by the youths against police brutality started on a peaceful note about two weeks ago and gained international attention. The government acceded to their five-point demand and immediately set machinery in motion towards achieving them. But the youths continued their protests and soon increased their demands while turning it into a carnival of sort with celebrities adding flavor to it, singing and dancing. Few days into the protest, miscreants sponsored by vested interests attacked the protesters in a bid to break the protest, which further fueled the protesters’ resolve to continue with the protest. However, hoodlums eventually hijacked the protest, extorting the residents, which culminated into killing, maiming, looting and destruction of properties across the country”.

Therefore, the EndSARS protest impacted negatively on the youths by instilling in them the audacity and boldness to attack the police without fear. As observed by Olawale Olukode (2020) the Osun State Police Commissioner:

“The EndSARS protest in 2020 had emboldened hoodlums to attack police formations and offices across the country, and criminal elements are now emboldened and dare security officers whether or not the officers are in uniform or they carry arms. This is a kind of hatred for the police”

Unknown Gunmen

According to Advanced English Dictionary, a gunman is simply defined as a professional killer who uses a gun. Synonymously he can be called a triggerman, a hitman, a shooter, a torpedo, or a gun for hire. Conceptually, the expression “unknown gunman” is a vague term that defies contemporary definition. By simple logic however, a gunman becomes unknown when he operates under a disguised physical identity, especially by wearing a mask. In the words of the Governor of Ebonyi State, Engr. David Umahi, “..... the unknown gunmen are not really unknown, they are our young men and women who will defend our land tomorrow; they should stop giving themselves to be killed” (Ajibola, 2021). Governor David Umahi further declares:

“We profiled them and saw that they are not “unknown gunmen. They are our brothers, mainly from the South East, most of them from Ebonyi State. They are never outside the country. Apparently, most of these criminals are known but perhaps due to “political correctness” or ineptitude on the part of our security personnel, or reasons that are not known, their crimes are often dismissed and simply labelled “unknown gunmen”, denying their victims and families the justice they deserve. The inability to apprehend these

“unknown gunmen” has undoubtedly led to the surge in crime and criminality across the country”(Musawa, 2021).

From the foregoing, therefore, it goes without saying that the hoodlums terrorizing our communities, killing and maiming the people and destroying critical state infrastructures, are not unknown, but are so tagged for reasons of “political correctness or ineptitude of the security personnel.

Theoretical Framework- Frustration Aggression theory

This study adopts Frustration Aggression theory as popularized by John Dollard et al’ (1939). This theory argues that frustration always precedes aggression; and aggression is as well the sure consequence of frustration. But Neal Miller had placed question on the exact application of Dollard’s argument, maintaining that while frustration creates a need to respond, some form of aggression is one possible outcome (Sears Robert, 1941). And so, in trying to re-formulate Dollard’s hypothesis, Sears had argued that while frustration prompts a behaviour that may or may not be aggressive, any aggressive behaviour is a consequence of frustration. As such, Dolf (1979) therefore concluded that frustration is a necessary, but not, a sufficient condition for aggression.

In developing this argument further, Whitley Bernard and Kite Mary (2009) used the theory to formulate the ‘scapegoat’ argument. The duo therefore argued that while frustration gives rise to aggression, when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced into an innocent target. This argument has been used to explain riots and revolutions, which usually emanate from the poorer and more deprived segment of the society, as these are ways of expressing bottled up frustration and anger through violence.

While Nicholas (1952), and Arthur (1955) had criticized this hypothesis, describing it as being arbitrary, and trying to propose some moderating factors between frustration and aggression, Arnold (1963), and Kregarman and Worchel (1961) in their empirical studies have confirmed the hypothesis. Furthermore, Berkowitz (1989) expanded on the aggression hypothesis, and suggested that negative affectivity (or negative affective) such as anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear nervousness etc. and personal attributions, play a major role in whether or not frustration instigates aggressive behaviour.

The relevance of this theory in the happenings in the South-East Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. The uncontrolled aggression among youths in the zone and attacks on Federal Government’s critical infrastructures and security personnel within the zone finds interpretation in Whitley Bernard and Kite Mary’s ‘scapegoat’ argument, an expression of bottled up anger against the surrogates of their perceived oppressor. Reminiscent of the history of the South-East Region in relation with the Nigerian state, a relationship that worsened since the ascent of President Muhammadu Buhari into power in 2015, the action of the youths in venting up their anger on Federal Government infrastructures and personnel finds application from this theory.

The Advent of ENDSARS

This was a decentralized social movement and mass protest against police brutality initially targeted at the extortionist Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Nigeria. The protest which was a peaceful one, was subsequently infiltrated and hijacked by hoodlums believed to have been sponsored by government.

During the protest in October 2020, hoodlums in Abia State killed two police officers set Aba Town Hall, High and Magistrate's Courts, Aba Mall, and a new generation bank ablaze (Alaribe, 2020; Eze, 2020). In Anambra State about six policemen including a Divisional Police Officer, DPO, were killed, while more than three civilians also lost their lives; several police stations, Ogidi High Court, Zik's statue in Onitsha were all set ablaze (Eze, 2020; Ujumadu, 2020; Okafor, 2020). In Ebonyi State, the story was not different as several police stations, including the Central Police Station, CPS, Abakaliki, were set ablaze; some policemen, and civilians alike, were killed including one Inspector EguOmini, who was murdered and had his manhood cut off by the hoodlums (Okutu, 2020; Ukah, 2020). In Enugu State, a similar occurrence was witnessed during the EndSARS protest. Two policemen, and more than two civilians were killed while several police stations were razed down (Agbo, 2020; Abdurraham 2020). The situation was not different in Imo State as military checkpoints were attacked and police stations razed down by the protesters (Iwuoha, 2020).

Within these unwarranted attacks on police stations and other government facilities, other heinous activities were also carried out by the hoodlums. For instance, during their raid at the Central Police Station (CPS), and Kpirikpiri, in Ebonyi State, inmates of the police cells were released (Okutu, 2020). Equally, in all the police stations that were torched, exhibits, vehicles, vital documents and essential office equipment were all destroyed.

Incidentally, the EndSARS protest began to wind down nationwide towards the end of October 2020, following the Federal Government's acceptance to oblige the official demands presented to the government by the genuine protesters (Adetayo, 2020). But while peace and normalcy began to return to other regions of the country following the ceasefire, the peace and security situation in the South-East zone has continued to deteriorate.

The Era of 'Unknown Gunmen'

As earlier observed above, while the EndSARS protest abated in other climes, a new violent group emerged in the South East geopolitical zone with more destructive and violent killings in a sustained and well-coordinated manner. For instance, in Abia State, police encounter with these gunmen on March 23, 2021, led to the killing of three policemen and the carting away of police rifles (Alaribe, 2021). In Anambra State, on the March 18, 2021, a police operative lost his life during a police encounter with unknown gunmen at Neni, Aniocha Local Government Area (Onuegbu, 2021). On May 6, 2021, two policemen were killed and two detainees released when unknown gunmen attacked Obosi Police Station; while on the 9th of May, 2021, five vigilantes were killed, and vigilance office set ablaze when gunmen attacked Ozubulu Community in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State (Ujumadu, 2021). The INEC office in Awka, the state capital, was set ablaze on May 23, 2021, while five soldiers were killed at a military checkpoint in Ihiala, Anambra State (Okafor, 2021; Ujumadu, 2021). A police inspector lost his life during one of such attack at Ojoto Police Station on the 11th of June 2021 (Ujumadu, 2021). Equally, on July 14, 2021, Philip Udala, the Chairman of Udala Football Club, his Club Manager, Godsent Eriobu, and three policemen attached to him, were all shot dead in Abatete, Idemili LGA (Akpodonor, 2021).

The story has not been different in Ebonyi State. On April 14, 2021, the police lost three operatives when unknown gunmen attacked a police checkpoint in Abakaliki (Akpa, 2021). Enugu State has also had its fair share of these attacks orchestrated by unknown gunmen. A gunmen attack at Adani Police Station, UzoUwani Local Government Area of Enugu State, on April 21, 2021, left two cops dead, with the police station razed down (Arowolo, 2021). Equally, on the May 17, 2021, the Enugu Headquarters of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was partially razed, with about six operation vehicles completely burnt (Ede, 2021). On May 26, 2021, the Nigeria Police, Iwollo Division, Ezeagu Local Government Area of Enugu State, lost four operatives to the men of the underworld (Adonu, 2021). Furthermore, on May 29, 2021, a retired justice of Enugu State High Court was shot dead by unknown gunmen (Odu, 2021).

The story was not any better in Imo State. On April 5, 2021, anarchy broke out in Owerri, Imo State Capital, when over 100 unknown gunmen attacked Owerri Correctional Centre, releasing about 1844 prison inmates, and bombing Owerri Police Headquarters (Ononobi et al, 2021). Then, on Saturday, April 24, 2021, the country home of Gov. Hope Uzodinma at Onuma Village in Oru East Local Government Area of Imo State, was bombed by unknown gunmen, resulting in the death of four security operatives (Alozie, 2021). For instance, the Governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma had always attributed the killings and arson in his state to the activities of desperate political opponents in the state (Oyero, 2021). On the other hand, IPOB had fingered the Imo State Governor, Hope Uzodinma, as being behind some killings in the state, for example, Ahmed Gulak (Ovat, 2021).

On the night of May 29, 2021, Ahmed Gulak, the former aide to the former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan was killed by unknown gunmen in Owerri. On the same day (May 29, 2021), the Chief Provost of the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) in Imo State, Mr. Okeimute Mrere was murdered in by unknown assailants (Nkwopara, 2021). Furthermore, on June 3, 2021, hoodlums operating under the name 'unknown gunmen' invaded the Orji Area in Owerri and murdered three persons in different locations (Alozie, 2021). The list is endless. Palpable fear of untimely death by unknown gunmen has taken over the residents of the south-eastern region of Nigeria.

The emergence of “Unknown Gunmen” in the South-East Region of Nigeria: The Causatives

In analyzing the sudden emergence of unidentified killers, popularly referred to as 'unknown gunmen' in the South-East zone of Nigeria in the recent times, attention must be focused on the factors that have given rise to the ugly situation. While the 'unknown gunmen' were not seen or interviewed face to face so as to get their responses for analysis, the causative factors highlighted here were deduced from emerging events and scenarios recorded overtime.

The brutality of the police on the civilians in the zone: Cases of police brutality against the civilian population are common in the five South-Eastern states of Nigeria. For example, the notorious activities of the Awkuzu SARS and their leader, James Nwafor in the pre-EndSARS period attracted public attention, even beyond the shores of the country. According to Alfred Olufemi (2020):

“... During his reign at SARS, Amnesty International carried out research on incidences of torture for two different periods (2014 and 2016) and produced damning reports which were widely circulated in Nigeria and abroad. The two reports not only indicted James

Nwafor, but found that SARS Awkuzu under him was the headquarters of human rights violations, particularly torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and extrajudicial executions”.

Also, during the Orlu crisis of January 2021, about 10 police officers of the Imo State Police Command were caught in a viral video flogging resident for purportedly flouting curfew orders (Ogubuaja, 2021). Such extreme expression of animosity and aggression on the civilian population by the police has a tendency of pushing the youths to the wall, with a resultant moves for self defence.

Over-Militarization of the South-East Zone by the Federal Government: Amidst the overwhelming activities of the Boko Haram insurgents in the North East, the high rate of banditry in the North West, and the activities of the killer-herdsmen in the North Central, the Federal Government of Nigeria has done very little in terms of deploying military troops to counter them. Instead, the South East Zone, which was hitherto the most peaceful zone in the country had always been flooded with the federal military troops. This places suspicion on the genuineness of the federal government intention to that effect. What is more, the recent shoot-on-sight order given by President Muhammadu Buhari to soldiers deployed to the zone raises so many questions. According to Uneze (2021, p.8):

“The recent shoot-on-sight order by President Muhammadu Buhari cannot be the solution to the insecurity in the South-East today. Besides, importing soldiers and police personnel from the Northern part of the country to the South-East with the charge to shoot on sight is more of a military culture. The essence of democratic rule is the total involvement of the people in the governance of their affairs and not government by force or kill-on-sight. Before the current madness of attacking police and correctional facilities by the so-called unknown gunmen in Imo State, the people of the state had known peace all the while. The state and its people were regarded as one of the most peaceful states, where visitors and people from other zones found peace.”

The Extortive Tendencies of the Military on the Citizens within the South-East: The successive deployment of the military in the South-East Zone over the years has resulted in undue financial and economic extortion of the residents of the zone. Soldiers deployed to the South-East Zone under the auspices of Python Dance have been alleged to be involved in financial extortion of motorists at checkpoints to the tune of about N200 to N300 per vehicle per trip (Mamah and Adonu, 2018). According to the International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law (ISCLRL), between August 2015 and 2018, about N100 billion has been pocketed by the law enforcement agencies on the roadside bribery and extortion in the southeastern part of the country alone (Ogundipe, 2018).

The attack on Mazi Nnamdi Kanu’s Country Home, Afaraukwu, Abia State, by a Combined Team of the Federal Troop on September 12, 2017: On the 10th of September 2017, barely few weeks after Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was granted bail by the Abuja High Court, on health grounds, and ordered to remain indoors awaiting the date fixed for his trial, a combined team of the Federal Troop, comprising the soldiers, the police and the DSS, ambushed his residence in Afaraukwu, Abia State, shooting sporadically in the air, killing about five unarmed youths,

injuring about 30, and destroying properties, possibly with intent to eliminate him. For the youths, this action called for self defence (Sola, 2018).

The Killing of 21 IPOB Members in Emene Enugu by a Joint Team of the Federal Security Operatives on August 23, 2020: On the 23rd of August, 2020, a combined team of the Police, the Army, the DSS, and the Civil Defence, attacked the IPOB in their meeting in Emene Enugu, executing 21 unarmed IPOB members, with two SSS operatives dead and 47 IPOB members arrested. Following the incident, the IPOB had pledged to ‘pay the Nigerian Government in their own coin’ in due time, (Eze, 2020).

The Attack on the Military Wing of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Eastern Security Network (ESN), in Orlu Imo State, by the Federal Troop (The Orlu Crisis): On January 22, 2021, the combined team of the Federal Security Operatives invaded Orlu, Imo State in search for members of the Eastern Security Network (ESN). Eight buildings were burnt down and one person killed in the ensuing events (Alozie, 2021). Three days later, the Federal Security Forces re-invaded the area, clashing with the ESN and killing at least five people before they were repulsed by the ESN, (Sahara Reporters, 2021). Four soldiers were killed in the ensuing firefight (Ukpong, 2021). With this development, the Federal Government withdrew the police and launched a military offensive in Orlu by deploying Air Force planes and helicopters to comb the entire city. More than 400 Nigerian Soldiers were deployed to oust the ESN (Obialor, 2021), while the Imo State Government declared a dusk to dawn curfew in about 9 local government areas, which was brutally enforced (Ukpong, 2021). The fear of the imminent danger of more killings of innocent souls in the clash caused residents of Orlu to flee the city en masse. This development did not go down well with the IPOB and its Eastern Security Network (ESN), which saw it as a second Nigeria/Biafra war declared against them by the Nigerian Government (Oko, 2021).

The killing of Ikonso Don, the Commander of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB): Perhaps, the last straw that broke the camel’s back was the killing of Ikonso Don, the IPOB Commander, by the Nigerian Security Operatives. In the early hours of Saturday, April 24, 2021, the IPOB Commander, Ikonso Don, along with six other members of IPOB, were killed by the tactical team of the Nigeria Police, Nigerian Army, and the Department of Security Services (DSS), in a joint operation when the team stormed Awo-Omamma town, Oru East LGA of Imo State in search of the members of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), the military wing of the IPOB (Soniya & Nwezeh, 2021). The Nigerian Army claimed that Ikonso was killed during an exchange of gunfire between the government forces and the ESN fighters. But in a swift reaction to the attack, the IPOB refuted the government’s claim, saying Ikonso was ambushed and killed in his sleep in his father’s compound (Sahara Reporters, 2021).

To this end, the Biafra Nation’s League (BNL) had vowed that the killers of Ikonso Don “will face consuming fire”, (Nwachukwu, 2021). To proof that point, the IPOB leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, had allegedly ordered members of the group to avenge the killing of their Commander, Ikonso Don, by using 2000 heads of the Nigerian security agents to bury him (Okoli, 2021).

The Socio-economic Implications of the Attacks on Federal Government Critical Infrastructures and Personnel in the South-East Nigeria



From the EndSARS period of October 2020, through the travails of the era of unknown gunmen which followed the EndSARS in close succession, and coupled with the sit-at-home order of the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), a lot of lives and valuable properties have been lost in the South-East Zone of the country. While the list is inexhaustible, the few cases highlighted in the table below will suffice.

S/N	Incident	Location	Date	Nature of attack/damages	No of casualties
1.	Hoodlums and security agents clash	Aba (Abia State).	20/10/2020	Police stations razed down.	4
2.	Protesters clash with police.	Umuahia (Abia State).	21/10/2020	Aba Town Hall, High Court, set ablaze. First generation bank, Aba Mall destroyed.	Unascertained
3.	Hoodlums attack police station in Anambra.	Anambra State.	23/10/2020	Nnewi Police Station set ablaze. Zik's Statue vandalized at Onitsha.	1
4.	Five police stations attacked in Anambra.	Anambra State.	24/10/2020	Oraifite Police Station vandalized; facilities therein set ablaze. Exhibits carted away. Amichi, Osumenyi, Ezinifite and Ukpok Police Stations attacked.	2
5.	Two police stations burnt down; banks shut in Ebonyi.	Abakaliki (Ebonyi State).	21/10/2020	Ekeaba and KpiriKpiri Police Stations burnt down. Banks shut down in Abakaliki.	Unascertained
6.	One killed; school, markets shut down as military take over Abakaliki	Abakaliki (Ebonyi State).	21/10/2020	No Damages.	1
7.	Hoodlums shut 2 policemen; burnt stations, release 8 suspects in Ebonyi State.	Abakaliki (Ebonyi State).	22/10/2020	CPS Abakaliki, Ekumenyi Police Station burnt; suspects released. 4 exhibit vehicles set ablaze.	2
8.	Uburu Police Station attacked.	Ohaozara (Ebonyi State).	23/10/2020	Uburu Police Station razed down.	Unascertained
9.	Hoodlums kill police inspector, cut off manhood in Ebonyi.	Abakaliki (Ebonyi State).	29/10/2020	Victim's AK-47 rifles snatched. Ezza North Divisional Headquarters vandalized; Inspector Sunday Okwu hospitalized.	1
10.	Two feared killed as protest turns violent in Enugu.	Enugu (Enugu state).	21/10/2020	Politicians' bill boards brought down. Bus stops destroyed.	2
11.	Police kill 2 protesters in Enugu.	Enugu (Enugu State).	22/10/2020	No Damage.	2
12.	#EndSARS hoodlums kill 2 policemen; burnt down police stations.	Enugu (Enugu State).	29/10/2020	Emene Police Station, AmechiIdodo, Akwatta Police Posts, Maryland Police Post, Phase 6 Police Post, Trans Ekulu, burnt down. Other public and private buildings burnt down.	2
13.	EndSARS protest claims four lives in Imo.	Owerri (Imo State).	22/10/2020	Divisional Police Station Nwaorubi set ablaze. Mbaitolu Local Government Secretariat set ablaze. Orji Police Station burnt down.	4
14.	EndSARS protesters raze	Mbaitolu	23/10/2020	Army checkpoint at Ubommiri,	Unascertained





	Army checkpoint in Imo.	(Imo State).		Mbaitolu LGA burnt down.	
15.	Armed men burn prison, free 1844 inmates.	Owerri (Imo State).	06/04/2021	Owerri Correctional Centre broken into, burnt. 1844 inmates released; police headquarters bombed.	Unascertained
16.	Gunmen attack Ebonyi community, kill 4.	Ngbo (Ebonyi State).	12/04/2021	7 houses razed.	4
17.	Gunmen kill 3 policemen in Ebonyi.	Abakaliki (Ebonyi State).	15/04/2021	No Damage.	3
18.	Gunmen attack, burn Anambra police station; free detainees, kill 2 policemen.	Obosi (Anambra State).	06/05/2021	Obosi Police Station burnt.	2
19.	Hoodlums attack Enugu INEC Headquarters.	Enugu (Enugu State).	18/05/2021	INEC Office burnt. 6 Hilux vehicles burnt; 2 other vehicles smashed.	Unascertained
20.	Unknown attack INEC Secretariat, police division in Anambra	Awka (Anambra State).	23/05/2021	INEC Anambra Headquarters, Awka partially burnt. 5 Hilux vehicles burnt. 35 electricity generating sets burnt. Zone B Police Division set ablaze.	unascertained
21.	Two killed in Anambra over INEC sit-at-home order.	Nnewi (Anambra State).	09/08/2021	No Damage.	2
22.	Bloody sit-at-home: gunmen kill 4; set houses ablaze.	Orlu (Imo State).	09/08/2021	2 commercial houses set ablaze at Ngwogwu in AbohMbaise LGA.	4
23.	Hoodlums burn trailer carrying auto spare parts for disobeying IPOB's sit-at-home order.	Nsukka (Enugu State).	06/09/2021	Trailer carrying auto spare parts worth N30million burnt to ashes.	Unascertained
24.	WAEC Examination Comprehensive School Njaba stalled; candidates chased out of the hall.	Njaba (Imo State)	13/09/2021	Tricycle burnt; school building torched.	Unascertained
25.	Tricycle operator attacked, macheted, tricycle burnt in Anambra over sit-at-home.	Awka (Anambra State).	13/09/2021	Tricycle burnt down. Tricycle operator wounded, hospitalized.	Unascertained
26.	Sit-at-home: hoodlums attack bus distributing bread around OriEmene.	Emene (Enugu State).	13/09/2021	Bus filled with bread vandalized; bus set ablaze.	Unascertained

Source: Compiled by Author (2021)

From the above illustrations, and many more cases which this study cannot contain, it is evident that the socio-economic development of the South-East Zone of Nigeria has been negatively impacted to the core. This depletion of the socio-economic strength of the zone has come through reduction in human population of economically productive age through killings, destruction of federal government critical infrastructures and privately-owned property within the region, man/hour loss, loss of sources of livelihood, financial extortion, etc.

During the EndSARS protest of 2020, hoodlums hijacked the process, turning it into a killing spree. A number of lives were wasted during the protest, both of the police and of the civilian population. In all



the five South-Eastern States, lives of people, majority of whom were of economically productive age brackets, were destroyed with reckless abandon. High profile personalities such as Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) were killed. People were killed and their organs mutilated (Inspector EguOmini killed in Ebonyi; his reproductive organ removed). The ‘unknown gunmen’ are no less brutal in their operations as they kill, steal and destroy. The police, on their own, increased the tempo in extrajudicial killings. According to statistics released by the Amnesty International on August 5, 2021, at least 115 civilians were extra-judicially killed by security forces in the South-East in three months, while at least 21 police personnel were killed in the zone within the same period (AI, 2021).

In the same vein, Federal Government critical infrastructures located within the zone have become the target of the highly aggressive youths of the zone who had manifested their grievances against the Nigerian State through #EndSARS, ‘unknown gunmen’, or IPOB. Within this period, critical federal institutions such as police formations, military checkpoints, INEC offices, Correctional Centres, Directorate of State Service (DSS) offices, Federal Road Safety Corps offices, National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) offices, National Immigration Service (NIS) offices, among others located within the zone have either been vandalized or burnt to ashes. Infrastructures belonging to states, local government councils, and individuals were not spared. Countless vehicles (both belonging to the police and to private individuals) were burnt to ashes. The monetary worth of destroyed public and private assets runs into billions of Naira. To date, most of those public facilities are still in the sorry states the hoodlums left them; probably because there is no money to fix them, or there is no political will to do so.

Perhaps, the most unquantifiable socioeconomic loss in the South-East Region of Nigeria as a result of killings and insecurity in the region is the evident loss of man hour and sources of livelihood in the region. According to a survey carried out by SB Morgan Intelligence, a Lagos-based research firm, between April and August 20, 2021, among 1,000 respondents interviewed, over 83 percent said they were affected by the sit-at-home order of IPOB. The spread of the effects of the sit-at-home order on the people of the South-East Zone, according to the survey are as follows:

Ebonyi – 84%;

Enugu – 74.43%;

Anambra – 55%;

Imo – 55%; and

Abia – 44%.

In occupational spread, the worst affected were the self-employed, followed by transporters, and then, the blue-collar formal sector workers (Oluwafemi A., 2021).

According to an unverified statistics released by the first Vice President of Nnewi Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NCCIMA), Chief Moses Ezukwo, the South-East loses about N8billion every “Ghost Monday.” According to his analysis, the transport sector accounts for

about N3billion (i.e. an average of one million travelers per day @ N3,000 per traveler (Ogbonna R., et al, 2021). According to him, on the average, the South-East has lost N50billion to ‘Ghost Mondays’.

On another note, uncountable working hours are being lost to traffic jams on daily basis in the South-East, no thanks to the artificial road blocks created by the security operatives along the highways in the five states of the region. For instance, from Onitsha to Enugu takes about one and half hours on public transport (due to bad roads) without artificial road blocks. But with the present military and police road blocks along the road, it takes about three and half hours to cover the same distance.

Another attendant socioeconomic loss that has befallen the South-East Zone consequent upon the killings and the security challenges in the zone (which resulted in over-militarization of the zone) is financial extortion. According to a survey carried out by the International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law (Intersociety) between August 2015 and 2018, about N100 billion has been extorted from motorists by the security agencies on roadside bribery and extortion in the South-East alone (Ogundipe, 2018). While no verified statistics have been released lately, the figure has definitely doubled, following the recent military flooding of the zone by the Federal Government.

The killings, maiming, abductions, looting, arson, and various other forms of aggressive tendencies being witnessed in the South-East Zone of Nigeria since October 2020 are, to say the least, colossal. From the EndSARS era through the periods of the early signals of some greater danger, when federal security operatives as well as critical federal infrastructures located within the zone became clearly their targets, and their identities became clearly unidentifiable, with their only known name becoming ‘unknown gunmen’, the characters behind these actions have left the country’s South-East Zone in an undesirable state. The end is not yet in sight. Their complexity, in terms of mode of operation, the capacity of weapon they apply, the quality of vehicles they use during operations, the lifestyles they display etc. is increasing by the day. They now use AK 47 guns, apply Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), go in convoy of SUV cars, and throw bundles of money to street commoners who show them approval and support (Okoli et al, 2021).

In Anambra State an investigation carried out by a group known as International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law confirms that:

“some politicians are behind wanton killings of innocent citizens in the South-East to create panic among people. ... to also scare away eligible voters from casting their votes in the Anambra State governorship election slated for November 6, 2021. According to the group, the results of the election scheduled for early next month have been completed and stored by rigger politicians” (Sahara Reporters, 2021).

The above probably informs why killers in Anambra State now target politicians during campaigns (Okafor, 2021). While police brutality and extortion, over-militarization of the zone (with their attendant highhandedness on the civilian population) as well as the clash between Mazi Nnamdi Kanu’s IPOB and the Federal Government of Nigeria have been highlighted as some of the causative factors, the negative influence of some desperate politicians and other conflict entrepreneurs in the zone over the matter cannot be denied.

Conclusion

The killings, maiming, arson, vandalism, and the general attacks on persons and critical infrastructures of the federal government located within the South-East Zone of Nigeria from the EnaSARS protest of October 2020 to the emergence of unknown gunmen, as well as the IPOB sit-at-home order of 2021, have been highlighted in this study. Analysis has shown that over-flooding of the zone with the military, and the latter's extortive tendencies on the civilian population, are among the reasons for the emergence and continued persistence of the problem. Other causative factors included issues that have to do with confrontations between the separatist IPOB group and the Federal Government of Nigeria; as well as the activities of desperate politicians and conflict entrepreneurs in the zone who have taken advantage of the already tense security situation to unleash mayhem on perceived political adversaries. While the targets of those killers and arsonists have remained overtly unchanged, their modus operandi, overtime, had undergone remarkable changes, evolving new technologies and becoming more complex by the day; and their identities metamorphosing with time. The level of killings in the zone (either the hoodlums killing the security forces or the latter's extrajudicial killing of innocent citizens) has drastically reduced the population of economically productive age in the region while some of the federal government's critical infrastructures of inestimable values have been destroyed by hoodlums in the region and have not been repaired till date. What is more, the loss of man hour and sources of livelihood caused by artificial gridlock created by the federal forces on the highway, and also the IPOB sit-at-home order, is colossal; while the level of financial extortion of motorists by the federal troop in the zone is a matter of great concern. While the end is not yet in sight, the extent so far reached has kept every right-thinking Nigerian on his/her toes as the worst may not have happened with regards to the security challenges in the zone.

Recommendations

The level of brutality and extortion on the civilian population by the police and other security operatives posted to the South-East Region is a matter of great concern. The National Assembly (through their oversight function), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and other human rights groups in the country need to rise up to the situation and instill more civility on the military, the police, and other para-military groups posted to the region.

Secondly, the South-East Zone is over-militarized. While the region is not at war, nor is it involved in any emergency situation, the volume of military deployment to the region suggests otherwise. The situation is really suffocating, more so when those military men sound unfriendly to their host communities. The Federal Government therefore needs to reduce the number of military and para-military men deployed to the region.

Thirdly, the Federal Government needs to seek a non-kinetic approach in tackling the secessionist agitation in the South-East Region. The Federal Government should rather apply dialogue and round table discussion to settle the matter. The idea of declaring military onslaught on some towns in the region is no solution to the problem. This has rather increased the level of violence and extrajudicial killings in the region. President Muhammad Buhari also needs to listen to the voice of reason and release

the incarcerated IPOB leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu unconditionally; so as to further douse the tension in the region.

Finally, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), as the apex think tank and peacebuilding agency in the country needs to rise up to the challenge by making its presence felt more in the zone. It can do this by way of organizing peace sensitization workshops in the zone. The Institute also needs to form more Peace Vanguard in the zone by expanding her Infrastructure for Peace (I4P) programme, Conflict Early Warning, Early Indicator Monitoring System (CEWIMS) etc. in the zone.

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