

## **Insecurity and Economic Development in South-East Nigeria Since 2020**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examined the effect of insecurity on development in South-East Nigeria. It explained the concept of security, insecurity and economic development with focus on South East Nigeria. An overview of insecurity in the area in recent times was x-rayed and it revealed that the region was once voted as the safest in Nigeria. To understand the security situation, the various forms of insecurity was examined to include IPOB agitation, activities of Eastern Security Networks, attacks and assassinations by Unknown Gunmen, reprisal attacks and abductions by government security agents, kidnappings and killer herdsmen's attacks. The study underscored that insecurity impacted negatively on the economy of the region in several ways. It further recorded that security plays a major role in the existence and sustenance of citizens, but when a society is saddled with the problem of insecurity many other sectors are negatively affected. It concluded on the need of the government to undertake a holistic approach in resolving the security challenges. Recommendations were also proffered to the five governors of the south east geopolitical zone.

**Keywords:** Insecurity, Economic Development, South-East, Nigeria, IPOB, Eastern Security Network, unknown gunmen

### **Introduction**

The South East is currently one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria representing both a geographic and political region of the country's inland southeast.<sup>1</sup> The zones were created following the proposal of the former Vice President of Nigeria, Dr. Alex Ekwueme in 1995 as a necessary structure for a just and equitable power sharing in Nigeria. It was formerly known as the Eastern Region following the division of the country into three parts under the Richards Constitution of 1946. During General Yakubu Gowon's Administration (1967–1975), the first twelve states in independent Nigeria were created on May 27, 1967 and the East Central State emerged with Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu as its Governor.<sup>2</sup> On February 3, 1976, under the military leadership of General Murtala Muhammed, the East Central state was split to form Imo and Anambra States. This Anambra is popularly referred to as Old Anambra State because on August 27, 1991 under General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, it was split into Enugu State and a new Anambra State. Abia state was also carved out of Imo State on that same day. On October 1, 1996, Ebonyi the youngest South Eastern State was created from parts of Abia and Enugu States under the military leadership of General Sani Abacha. Till today, South Eastern States are made up of five states- Imo, Enugu, Anambra, Abia and Ebonyi states.

The zone is bounded by the River Niger on the west, the riverine Niger Delta on the south, the flat North Central to the north, and Cross River on the east.<sup>3</sup> Culturally, the vast majority of the zone falls within Igboland—the indigenous cultural homeland of the Igbo people, a group which makes up the largest ethnic percentage of the southeastern population at over 99.7%.<sup>4</sup> Ethnically, the South East populace and language is predominately Igbo with various subgroups and their unique dialects.

Despite being the smallest geopolitical zone in Nigeria, the South East region makes significant contributions to the country's economy. This is primarily attributed to its abundant reserves of oil and natural gas. Economically, the zone has about ten commercial cities with Aba and Enugu as the most populous as well as the tenth and fourteenth most populous cities in Nigeria, including in order by population, Onitsha, Umuahia, Owerri, Nnewi, Awka, and Abakaliki.<sup>5</sup> In addition to its agricultural prowess, the zone is popularly known as a thriving commercial zone with numerous small and medium indigenous industries. In fact, Onitsha Main Market, the commercial hub of Anambra State, based on its geographic scope and merchandise volume is Nigeria's and the entire West Africa's biggest market.

Igbo people are known for being industrious and for their exceptional entrepreneurial spirit. After the 1967–1970 Nigerian Civil War, the people and region suffered widespread hunger, devastation and poverty as many, lost their property, businesses, jobs, and education. But today, in testament to their resilient nature, the region is pulsating once more and home to many affluent and influential persons in Nigeria and beyond. Nevertheless, some Igbo still feel marginalized despite the war ending over 50 years ago.

Previously acknowledged as the safest region in Nigeria, the South East has experienced a distressing decline in recent times, transforming into a hub of violent insecurities. This unsettling transformation encompasses a range of incidents, including violence inflicted by armed herders, targeted political assassinations, killings, arson and abductions. Moreover, there have been distressing cases of security personnel being murdered and state institutions deliberately destroyed by ‘Unknown Gunmen’. Additionally, the region has witnessed retaliatory killings and harassment, committed by security agents. The once peaceful region, known as the pride of Igboland, now finds itself at the epicenter of insecurity, a menacing presence that casts a pervasive shadow of uncertainty and presents substantial challenges to both the peace and economic development of the region. This paper primarily tried to examine the forms and effect of insecurity on the development of South-East Nigeria since 2020.

**Security as a concept:** Security revolves around the experience of being protected from harm, fear, anxiety, oppression, danger, poverty, and the safeguarding, defense, and preservation of core values in the face of threats. To William, security is most commonly associated with the alleviation of threats to cherished values, especially those threats which threaten the survival of a particular referenced object.<sup>6</sup> Security entails the absence of danger or threats that may impede a nation's capacity to protect and advance itself, uphold its esteemed values, and safeguard its legitimate interests while enhancing the well-being of its citizens. To the average man or woman, it means being protected from harm and risk. While Onifade views security as a situation that emerges from the establishment of ways of protecting individuals, information, and properties from hostile people, influences, and behavior... It has to do with a situation in which people can travel around within a given natural space or elsewhere without any real and imaginary threats to their lives or properties.<sup>7</sup> For any sustainable development, there must be security, which is not just an intrinsic aspect of development but an essential precondition for one and most studies have granted evidence to this fact.

**Insecurity as a concept:** Insecurity refers to a condition of lacking safety or stability, as well as a mental state characterized by self-doubt and susceptibility. It poses a significant risk to various aspects of human existence, such as life, property, territories, states, religious beliefs, businesses, and institutions. Unfortunately, insecurity has emerged as a widespread problem in Nigeria, affecting every state, including those in the South East region. Udoh defined insecurity as the anxiety that is experienced when one feels vulnerable and insecure.<sup>8</sup> While Beland asserted that, insecurity is a state of fear or anxiety due to absence or lack of protection.<sup>9</sup> Within the scope of this paper, the term "insecurity" is characterized as the disturbance of peace and security, encompassing multiple dimensions. These dimensions include historical, religious, ethno-regional, civil, social, economic, and political factors that collectively contribute to recurring conflicts, leading to extensive loss of life and destruction of property.

**Economic Development:** Economic development refers to programs, projects and other activities undertaken to improve the economic diversity, growth, well-being and quality of life of a community.<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of an ordinary person, economic development revolves around establishing a favorable living environment in a specific location. When we talk about the economy, we are referring to the generation and utilization of money within that particular place. In this process, entrepreneurship plays a vital role as individuals who initiate businesses have the opportunity to earn income. As these businesses expand, they employ individuals and provide them with compensation for their work. These employees, in turn, spend their earnings at other local businesses within the community. This cycle of earning and spending contributes to the growth and progress of the economy in the area. Furthermore, as companies and individuals achieve success, they often seek avenues to contribute to the improvement

of their community, thereby enhancing the overall quality of life. Essentially, economic development involves not just financial prosperity but also a commitment to enhancing the well-being of the community people call home. Economic development is the intentional practice of improving a community's economic well-being and quality of life. It includes a broad-range of activities to attract, create, and retain jobs, and to foster a resilient, progrowth tax base and an inclusive economy.<sup>11</sup>

### **Overview of Some Economic Activities in South East Nigeria**

The South Eastern Nigeria is an effervescent centre of economic activity. The Igbo are known for their business, industries and relentless commercial pursuits including import and export activities and consequently, it has made a large number of them billionaires and millionaires. An average Igbo man is a business man. The region has large production hubs especially in Anambra and Aba. The Southeast's manufacturing potential has attracted interest from around the world. Numerous domestic industrial manufacturing firms are based in the area.

The South East agricultural sector is renowned for crop production, animal production, agro-processing, and the provision of agricultural inputs. With cassava, yam, and maize as some of their main arable crops, inter-cropping is the predominant cropping pattern in South East Nigeria. Anambra soil is nearly 100% arable for agro-based pursuits including fishing and farming, as well as land used for grazing and animal husbandry. Yet rich in natural gas, crude oil, bauxite, and ceramics. The agro-economy of Abia State boasts of cultivation of many crops including yams, maize, taro, oil palm, and cassava and ranks eighth in the nation for its joint-eighth highest Human Development Index due to its rapidly expanding population and industry.<sup>12</sup> Ebonyi State's cultivation of Abakiliki rice has contributed to its popularity and status as a bustling commercial center. In Enugu State, *yams, oil palm products, taro, corn (maize), rice, and cassava (manioc)* are some of their main crops. Imo state boasts of products like cocoa, rubber, and palm products and of course yam, cassava, cocoyam, and maize. It also has natural gas in commercial amounts as well as white clay, lead, zinc, fine sand, limestone, and crude oil. Agriculture is one of the best forms of investment in the South East. The hospitality sector is also a lucrative one as there are many hotels, eateries, bars and nightclubs where people can relax. The sector is also a labor-intensive one as it offers both skilled and unskilled work opportunities. The entertainment sector boasts of many well-known international celebrities with Igbo ancestry such as T.D. Jakes, Asomugha Nnamdi, Ejiofor Chiwetel and Nigerian celebrities including Genevieve Nnaji, Phyno, Obi-Uchendu Ebuka, Basket Mouth, Don Jazzy and Pete Edochie (Chief).

### **Overview of Insecurity in South East in Recent Times**

Though no stranger to insecurity, South East Nigeria have since around the year 2010 been one of the safest zones in Nigeria. This is in comparison to the nation wherein nearly all parts are plagued by diverse forms of insecurity. Even the Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed affirmed in an interview that, "...the issue of security has dominated our national discourse in recent times, against the background of the terrorism, banditry and kidnapping in the North-East, North-West and North Central; separatist violence and crude oil theft in the South East and South-South as well as cultism, armed robbery and sundry crimes in the South-West.<sup>13</sup> The last time wide scale and severe insecurity has gripped the region till recently was in the terror days of 'Bakassi Boys'. Even so, the group began with the noble aim of fighting insecurity before becoming a source of terror to the citizens.

Bakassi Boys were created in 1998 by some traders in Aba, Abia state who wanted to protect themselves from armed robbers and hoodlums. Having had success in reducing crime in Aba, Bakassi Boys became "in high demand" and their activities spread to Imo, Abia, and Anambra. They were believed to have "magic" powers which were used to determine the guilt of alleged criminals and carried charms that made them "invincible". Their infamous technique involved a machete imbued with powerful magic charms; the machete is placed on a suspected criminal's body and turns red if the person is guilty.<sup>14</sup> Such guilty person(s) could be publicly and summarily executed or mutilated, dismembered or decapitated. They were also used in the settlement of disputes in civil matters as a result of the public's general lack of trust in the court system and law enforcement agents. Soon citizens expressed their disappointment over the outcome of disputes and in the excesses and brutal methods of Bakassi Boys. They were accused of carrying out extra-judicial killings of innocent citizens rather than turning them over to the police, arbitrary arrests and detentions, extortion, torture of suspected criminals, carrying out political assassinations for politicians, intimidation, corruption and recklessness. In fact they became a source of terror and insecurity as they dealt ruthlessly with individuals who have dared to criticize or denounce their methods, or refused to make financial contributions to them. Thankfully in 2002, they were disbanded by the federal government and some, integrated into State controlled vigilante groups.

In 2014 the Nation Newspaper published that, Mr. Abubakar Mohammed, the then Inspector-General of Police declared that, "Anambra State had remained the safest state in the last five years, according to police records", a feat accruable to the region.<sup>15</sup> In 2016, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) while announcing its National Human Development report for Nigeria for 2016, revealed that the most human security secured geopolitical zone in Nigeria is the South East.<sup>16</sup> The report further highlighted the existing gap in human security across the geo-political zones of the country; the most human security secured geo-political zone is the South-East while the North-West and the North-East geopolitical zones are the least human security secured, with residents of the Federal Capital Territory being the worst in most realms of the Human Security Index.<sup>17</sup>

Since late 2020, the region has become a scene of the most violent crimes and insecurity to the dismay of South Eastern Nigerians home and abroad and the nation at large. This is in spite of the presence of government security agents, federal government recurrent security expenditure on internal security, Security Votes given to nearly all states in the zone and private security engaged by individuals and groups to guide their lives and properties.

### **Forms of Insecurity**

In this section, six forms of insecurity that have plagued the region would be discussed. They include: IPOB Agitation, Activities of Eastern Security Networks, Attacks and Assassinations by Unknown Gunmen, Reprisal Attacks and Abductions by Government Security Agents, Kidnappings and Killer Herdsmen's attacks

### **IPOB Agitation**

IPOB stands for the Indigenous People of Biafra, a separatist group based in South East Nigeria. The group advocates for the secession of the predominantly Igbo-speaking region of southeastern Nigeria, known as Biafra, and the establishment of an independent state. The origin of IPOB can be traced back to the Nigerian Civil War, which took place from 1967 to 1970. Prior to the war, Biafra attempted to secede from Nigeria. This led to a devastating conflict that resulted in significant loss of lives and properties. Although Biafra was eventually reintegrated into Nigeria, a sense of marginalization and grievances persisted among some sections of the Igbo population. IPOB's primary objective is to achieve self-determination for the people of Biafra and restore what they perceive as the sovereignty of the region. The group argued that the Igbo people, who constitute a significant portion of the population in the southeastern states, face political, economic, and social marginalization within Nigeria. They believe that secession is the only solution to address these issues and safeguard the rights and interests of the Igbo people. It was founded in 2012 by Mazi Nnamdi Okwu Kanu, an indigene of Afara Ukwu, Umuhia, Abia State. He is also a British Nigerian political activist known for his prominent advocacy

of the contemporary Biafran independence movement...by 2017; IPOB was declared a terrorist organization under Nigerian Terrorism Act.<sup>18</sup>

On June 27 2021, Nnamdi Kanu was arrested in Kenya and later brought back to Nigeria by the Federal Government who announced that he was facing charges bordering on treasonable felony instituted against him at the court in response to years of campaign for the independent Republic of Biafra through IPOB and for skipping the bail granted him during his earlier arrest in 2017 for health reasons.<sup>19</sup> In reaction to this IPOB, declared a sit-at-home protest starting from Monday August 9, 2021 in the entire South-East region of Nigeria. In their words, "... Biafra land will be on lockdown every Monday from 6:00am to 6:00pm until our leader,...who was unlawfully abducted in Kenya and illegally detained by the federal government of Nigeria is released... all institutions public and private, transport companies, schools, banks, markets, airports and sea ports in Biafra land must shut down every Monday...people are to remain indoors to register their concern over the fate of our Leader and the rest of all agitators languishing in various security detentions.<sup>20</sup>

Despite government reversal order, the sit-at-home protests continue due to widespread fear. Incidents of attacks on those who attempted to go about their daily business further intensified the apprehension, causing people to stay indoors. Though in breach of freedom of movement and security, offices and markets remain closed, and individuals both in support and against the protest stay at home. IPOB further modified the sit-at-home schedule, to not only Mondays but on the day(s) when their leader, is scheduled to appear in court.

#### **Activities of Eastern Security Networks**

The Eastern Security Network (ESN) is the militarized gun carrying arm of IPOB. The ESN was formed on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2020 with the aim of protecting the people and communities in the south east. Overall the ESN is tasked with safeguarding the region against external threats, attacks by Fulani herdsmen, communal clashes, conducting patrols, intelligence gathering, preventing criminal activities such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and settling land disputes. Emma Powerful, IPOB's spokesman, had said the objective of the network is to protect the south-east from "criminal activity", adding that ESN is a replica of Amotekun, a security outfit established by the governors of the south-west to curb insecurity in that geopolitical zone.<sup>21</sup> The establishment of the ESN has been a source of controversy and tension to the Nigerian government and citizenry. Supporters of IPOB view the ESN as a necessary defense force to protect their communities, while others view it as an unlawful group that threatens national security and undermines the authority of the Nigerian state.

The government has accused the ESN of escalating attacks on civilians, government facilities, security personnel and destabilizing the south-east region. A good example is the incident on April 5, 2021, where gunmen attacked the Imo State Police Headquarters and Correctional Facilities, freed at least 1,844 inmates during the attack and looted the police armoury. The police accused ESN of being culpable. However, IPOB **denied** involvement in the incident, saying it is not in the group's mandate to attack security personnel and prisons. "Unknown Gunmen are different people which we don't know and they are not IPOB or ESN security outfit," **IPOB spokesperson had said**.<sup>22</sup> Gunmen unleashing deadly attacks in the region are described as "Unknown Gunmen" in the media and public discourses. But many believe the so-called Unknown Gunmen are ESN/IPOB operatives, drawn from dissatisfied youths in the zone where unemployment and feelings of marginalisation are widespread. The IPOB spokesperson in return accused the federal government of sponsoring criminal elements, cultists to commit all manner of atrocities in the south-east -claim he was unable to back with evidence.<sup>23</sup>

Security forces have clashed with ESN members in various instances, leading to casualties on both sides. For instance, on April 24, 2021, a security team made up of officials of the Nigerian Army, the police and the State Security Service (SSS) raided the suspected headquarters of ESN in Awomama Village, Oru East LGA of Imo State killing at least eleven people in the ensuing battle including four security operatives and Ikonsan Commander, the second in command of the ESN.<sup>24</sup> Similarly on May 29, 2021 soldiers of the Nigerian Army in a joint operation with police operatives, shot dead seven suspected members in a gun battle in a hideout between the Eleme and Oyigbo Local Government Areas

of Rivers State as reported by Sahara Reporters.<sup>25</sup> So violent and recurrent were such clashes that Oby Ezekwesili, a former Minister of Education tweeted, “Can the @HQ Nigerian Army please communicate what’s going on here in Orlu Town to the public? It certainly has the appearance of a war scene.... Is an entire town under combat operation from our Military? Can the C-in-C let Nigerians know who ordered this operation?”<sup>26</sup> In all, the clashes between ESN and security agents worsened the insecurity situation in the region.

### Attacks and Assassinations by Unknown Gunmen

Unknown Gunmen" is the term used to describe individuals or groups involved in acts of violence or criminal activities whose identities or affiliations are unclear or unconfirmed. The term gained prominence in recent years due to increased incidents of armed attacks, particularly in the southeast. Actions attributed to "Unknown Gunmen" can vary widely and include attacks on security personnel, destruction of public infrastructure, and killing of civilians and political assassinations. These incidents have resulted in loss of lives, property damage, disruption of normalcy and general insecurity. The motivations behind the activities of "Unknown Gunmen" are often subject to speculation and interpretation. While some believe that these individuals or groups are associated with IPOB, others suggest the involvement of criminal elements taking advantage of existing tensions and security challenges. **Nigeria Mourns** in its 2019 report noted that, the south-east recorded the least number of reported killings with 94 deaths, while the south-west recorded 157 deaths, followed by south-south with 341 deaths. North-central recorded 469 deaths and the north-east had 1009 while north-west had the highest with 1,118 deaths...In contrast, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and media reports show that killings in the south-east rose by 555.7 percent between 2020 and 2021.<sup>27</sup> Media reports of violent attacks collated by CFR and other media platforms were analyzed to ascertain the number of killings in the south-east and it revealed:

State	Year 2020	Year 2021
Abia	15	70
Anambra	21	187
Ebonyi	35	103
Enugu	09	68
Imo	17	208
Total	97	636

Source: *Nigeria Security Tracker (NST)*<sup>28</sup>

According to NST there have been over 75 attacks on police stations and over 100 police officers killed in the region from 2021 to 2022.<sup>29</sup> Other government facilities such as the Independent National Electoral Commission offices, prisons and courts are not spared in the attacks. Insecurity has been compounded by jailbreaks launched by the attackers, leading to more criminals re-entering society. Imo and Enugu States have witnessed eleven separate attacks on INEC facilities between 2021 and 2022, Ebonyi state has seen three in the same period; while Abia and Anambra have recorded one each.<sup>30</sup> The attacks seem coordinated and follow the same pattern. The assailants show up with sophisticated weapons and set the offices and vehicles ablaze killing any official unfortunate to be trapped inside. With more guns in their hands, attackers have become bolder and have branched into other criminal activities such as kidnapping for ransom in the zone’s five states. Dr Chike Akunyili, and **Ahmed Gulak, former Special Adviser (Politics) to President Goodluck Jonathan** were some of the popular victims killed by the unknown gunmen.

### Reprisal Attacks and Abductions by Government Security Agents

The government security agents have responded to separatist agitation through aggressive militarisation, raids, security crackdowns, excessive force, torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests, secret detentions, extortion, burning of houses, theft, extrajudicial executions of suspects, mass arrests of supporters and random youths in all five states in the region. Reprisal attacks from security forces could comprise of military, police, and Department of State Services (DSS) and are often carried out in

location where attacks by Unknown Gunmen had been earlier committed. Members of IPOB, ESN and even innocent persons have received that backlash from these reprisal attacks. Amnesty International documented at least 115 people killed by security forces between March and June 2021, with over 500 arrested after police and military raids in response to spiraling violence in the south-east.<sup>31</sup> The case of Orlu, Imo state is illustrative on harsh nature of reprisal attacks as evidenced by live videos posted by residents revealing the military carrying out an airstrike on civilians in the quest to fish out ESN operatives. Live footages and eye witness accounts abound online on the subject matter.

### **Kidnappings**

Kidnapping is a major problem in Nigeria. It is among the biggest organised or gang crimes and a national security challenge. Largely, it appears to be a lucrative business and the shortest means to wealth by those involved in this crime. The current wave of abductions across the south east makes every person a potential target regardless of social class or economic status. Kidnappers have been laying siege along the road and abducting commuters.<sup>32</sup> Both the rich and poor are targeted. Students, priests, children, public servants, politicians, in fact all manner of people have been victims. Price range of ransom varies and people are warned to not involve the police while dropping the ransom. Survivors tell tales of the harrowing experiences and harsh treatment meted to them while in captivity. Many persons are released after payment of requested ransom while others lose their lives regardless of paying. Some roads are popularly prone to kidnap and motorists are warned to stay clear. This spate of insecurity is so terrible that many rich citizens now camouflage their lifestyles; jeep vehicles are exchanged for affordable vehicles and unnecessary movement avoided.

### **Killer Herdsmen's Attacks**

The term "killer herdsmen" is often used to describe armed Fulani herdsmen who engage in violent activities, such as carrying out attacks on farming communities and destruction of properties. However not all Fulani herdsmen are involved in violence, and attributing violent behavior to an entire ethnic or occupational group can be misleading and unfair. In the South East there have been clashes between pastoralist Fulani herdsmen and local communities, which resulted to violence and loss of lives and led to heightened tensions and concerns over security. The clashes between herdsmen and communities are complex issues with socio-economic, environmental, religious and ethnic dimensions. They involve conflicts over land use, access to resources, and competition for grazing areas. International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety) in its annual report sent to Sahara Reporters accused Fulani herdsmen and other jihadists of killing no fewer than 410 open and captivity killings and 600 abductions in Southeast Nigeria in 2022.<sup>33</sup> Fulani herdsmen are also accused of unlawful occupation and destruction of farmlands thereby bringing famine on the people whose crops had been eaten by the cows while also sending the community packing from their ancestral homes and community.

In 2021, all governors in Southern Nigeria including the five south east governors resolved and passed the controversial "Anti-Open Grazing law which banned the indiscriminate grazing of cattle including cattle movement by foot in their respective states and also vowed to enforce the Bill. They noted that development and population growth has put pressure on available land and increased the prospects of conflict between migrating herders and local populations in the South. This decision was resisted by leaders of the *Miyetti Allah*, the umbrella body of Fulani herdsmen, who insisted that they would continue to graze their cattle as they deem fit. Nevertheless, ESN, IPOB and other groups began forceful enforcement of the Bill. This resulted in a spike of attacks against herdsmen and killing of cattle and in counter attacks by the herdsmen. Many herdsmen and Igbo citizens were recorded dead or gone missing. The situation only served to deepen insecurity in the region.

### **Effect of Insecurity on Economic Development of South East**

Insecurity can have a significant impact on the economic development of a region, hindering its potential for growth and prosperity. Below are some of the key effects of insecurity on the economic development of the region:

**Disruption of Investment:** The prevalent insecurity has discouraged both domestic and foreign investments. With good reason, investors are reluctant to commit their resources to the region characterized by high levels of insecurity due to the risks involved. Uncertain conditions have generally reduced economic activities; undermined confidence in the stability of the business environment, leading to reduced investment flows. Business Am reported that investments in real estate sector in south east has depreciated to 64 percent in 2021.<sup>34</sup> Such lack of investment limits capital inflows, job creation, and the establishment of new businesses, thus hampering economic growth.

**Decline in Productivity:** Since 2000, the region has faced significant challenges in maintaining stable and productive economic activities. The presence of violence, crime, and social unrest has disrupted supply chains, damaged infrastructure, and disrupted daily operations of businesses. The Monday sit-at-home order has contributed to challenges for employees commuting to work, increased absenteeism and decreased productivity. The fear of insecurity has also lead to heightened stress levels among some workers and loss of motivation thereby affecting their overall performance and efficiency.

**Decreased activities in Tourism and Hospitality sector:** Insecurity has a particularly detrimental effect on the tourism and hospitality industry. Movements have been reduced to a need-to- move basis in the south east. Tourists are not even recommended to visit the region currently and consequently there is a decline in tourism, leading to reduced revenue from hotels, restaurants, transportation services, and other related industries. This negative impact on tourism not only affects direct employment in the sector but also has indirect effects on other sectors, such as hospitality, entertainment and local businesses. For instance, the Imo State economy is significantly service driven. However, the security situation in the state since the phenomenon of the so-called “Unknown Gunmen” has crippled the hospitality business in the state, as proprietors of hotels; night clubs, lounges and other entertainment centers now lack customers. Their clientele from within the state and fun seekers from neighboring states and even as far as Abuja at the weekends has reduced, leaving several of these places far less patronized.<sup>35</sup> Leisure centers in Ebonyi such as the Amusement Park and Fati Lami Park in Abakaliki as well as some other government-controlled business centers now close by 7pm daily following a curfew imposed by then, Ebonyi State Governor, Chief David Umahi. All night activities in the state beyond 7pm, including wake during funerals were banned as warned, anyone or group of persons that flouted the directive will be made to pay a fine or face prosecution.

**Brain Drain and Human Capital Flight:** Insecurity often triggers an outflow of talented individuals seeking safer environments. This brain drain can have severe consequences for a region's economic development. The loss of skilled professionals, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals results in a loss of human capital and a decrease in innovation, research, and development activities. University graduates from this region in addition to the challenge of limited employment opportunities are further discouraged by the insecurity and thus migrate to bigger cities and even abroad. These departures lead to a shortage of skilled labor, adversely affecting productivity and economic growth.

**Reduced Trade and Market Integration:** Insecurity has disrupted trade activities within the zone and hindered market integration. Some businesses are reluctant to engage in cross-border trade due to concerns about safety and security of goods during transportation. More so, insecurity has caused some businesses in the five states to close or relocate outside the zone. This adds to unemployment and the loss of internally-generated revenue for state governments. Governor Chukwuma Soludo of Anambra state during a town hall meeting with the market and transport unions' leaders in a bid to resolve the sit-at-home crisis and other social and economic challenges confronting the state said that the state's economy loses about N19.6 billion to every Monday sit-at-home enforcement.<sup>36</sup>

**Increased Government Expenditure:** Insecurity has placed a burden on public finances as South East governors now allocate significant resources towards security and law enforcement. Funds that could have been used for infrastructure development, social welfare programs, or education are diverted to combat crime. High levels of public expenditure on security can lead to budget deficits, increased borrowing, and reduced capacity to invest in crucial sectors that drive economic growth.



The Agricultural sector is another critical sector of the South East economy that has been hit by the problem of insecurity. This is because the activities kidnappers and Fulani herdsmen discourage farmers. Agricultural output is reduced as farmers no longer feel safe enough to go to the farm for fear of possible attacks. This has reduced the Gross Domestic Product. Both local and foreign investors are scared to part with their finances. The result is evident in very high cost of food in the various markets in the region.

### **Conclusion**

In Nigeria, no zone or state is exempt from violence; however, the state of security in the country's southeast region since 2000 is particularly concerning. The populace, political leaders and security personnel at both national and regional levels are facing significant challenges. The south-east region holds great importance for national development, and any conflict occurring in this area has the potential to destabilize its economy. Cities such as Onitsha, Aba and Nnewi have emerged as manufacturing and commercial hubs, with export links to other Central and West African countries. Manufacturing makes up 31% and 30% of businesses in Onitsha and Aba.<sup>37</sup> The unfolding violence in the south-east poses a serious threat to economic development and social stability and demands a holistic response. Only through sustained efforts can the region overcome insecurity and return to a conducive environment for economic development and prosperity.

### **Recommendations**

To effectively address the security challenges in the south-east region of Nigeria and promote stability, the following recommendations should be considered by the various state governments:

1. **Enhance Security Institutions; Improve Intelligence Sharing and Regional Cooperation:** Strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of security institutions at the national and local levels. This can be achieved by providing adequate training, resources, and equipment to security personnel, enabling them to carry out their duties more efficiently. Enhance cooperation and information sharing among neighboring states and regions to address cross-border security challenges. And also collaborate on joint security initiatives, intelligence sharing, and coordinated responses to transnational crime
2. **Address Socio-economic Factors:** Tackle the underlying socio-economic factors that contribute to insecurity, such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Implement targeted programs and initiatives to promote job creation, skills development, and economic opportunities, particularly for vulnerable populations. This can help alleviate desperation, which often leads to involvement in criminal activities.
3. **Strengthen Border Security:** Implement robust border security measures to curb the influx of illegal arms, smuggling, and other transnational crimes. This involves investing in technology, training border security personnel, and enhancing cooperation with neighboring countries to improve cross-border security.
4. **Engage Youths and Counter Radicalization:** Implement targeted programs to engage and empower youths, providing them with educational opportunities, skills training, and access to employment. Additionally, address the root causes of radicalization by promoting inclusive governance, addressing grievances, and fostering social cohesion.
5. **Promote Dialogue and Conflict Resolution:** Encourage dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts within the region. Facilitate platforms for open and constructive discussions among different stakeholders, including community leaders, religious leaders, and civil society organizations. This can help address grievances and build consensus on issues affecting the security and development of the region.

By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to make significant progress in addressing the insecurity challenges in the south-east region of Nigeria and promote stability and economic development.

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