



Counting the Cost of Violent Conflicts Examining Nigeria’s South-East Region (Part 1)

Policy Recommendations

- 1** The security agents deployed to maintain law and order in the South-East must adhere to the rule of law and obey the people’s fundamental human rights.
- 2** The federal government should stop seeing force as an end in itself rather than a means to an end.
- 3** Leaders of dissident groups such as IPOB, ESN and others should be engaged in dialogue to ascertain their grievances.
- 4** The restructuring of the skewed Nigerian federation is an idea whose time has come.

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

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The South-East region of Nigeria, dominated by the Igbo people, has not known durable peace since it tried to secede from the country between 1967 and 1970. The bloody 30-month [civil war](#) claimed ‘Biafran lives’ wantonly despite the pacifying claim of [‘no victor, no vanquished’](#) by the military government in 1970. Over 50 years after the war, the South-East remains volatile today following the activities of restive youth groups. In recent years, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has [castigated](#) the federal government over the continued structural violence against Igbo people through political power exclusion, economic marginalisation and menacing activities of Fulani herders.

Based on the perceived inequity, injustice and violence, IPOB argues that ‘Biafra’ should secede from the rest of Nigeria. But efforts aimed at achieving the Biafra Republic have been violently resisted by the Nigerian government. Both IPOB militancy and the state repression it has engendered have led to damaging costs on lives, livelihoods and public utilities. This edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly examines the human costs and highlights what should be done about them. Next week, the concluding part of this edition (Part 2) will focus on the material costs engendered by the conflict.

Human Costs of the Conflict

The Federal government’s resolve to quell self-determination struggles and separatist agitations has led to the deployment of brutal force, dragnet arrest, illegal detention and even extra-judicial killings against agitators. The strategy was used against the Niger Delta agitators who clamoured for a better life for the inhabitants of Nigeria’s oil-bearing communities in the 1990s and 2000s

(Courson, 2011). In the last three years, the South-East region has been militarised on account of the activities of IPOB. Members of the security forces, including the military, police, and Department of State Services (DSS), have been deployed in the region. The use of brutal force in the South-East has increased since IPOB formed the Eastern Security Network, accused of violence against security agents and formations in the area.

In Imo State alone, over [400 people](#) have been arrested in connection with IPOB violence. An investigation by [Amnesty International](#), however, reveals that many of the people arrested are innocent persons. Besides arrest, several people have suffered gun injuries from state security agents. Amnesty International Nigeria’s Director, Osai Ojigho, [opined](#) that “the evidence gathered by Amnesty International paints a damning picture of excessive ruthless force by Nigerian security forces in Imo, Anambra and Abia States.”

Analysis from the Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database shows the rising fatality figures and conflict types that have been witnessed in the southeast region between January and May 2021. The Database is a real-time track of violent incidents in Nigeria with a view of having reliable data to inform policies and programmes.

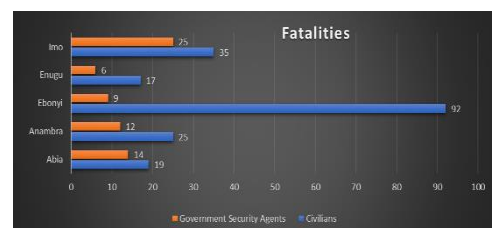


Figure1: Five Months Infographics of South East violent conflict fatalities (January - May 2021)

According to the rights group, repressive state strategy has led to the massacre of [115 civilians](#) in the South-East between March and June 2021. Similarly, between January and June 2021, suspected members of ESN had been accused of killing [21 Police officers](#) in the region. Amnesty International's calculation of the number of killings was based on official body counts and estimates by the American Council on Foreign Relations, SBM and [Nigeria Security Tracker](#). Ironically, bandits, terrorists and Fulani herders have killed at least [11,420 Nigerians](#), including security personnel and civilians in the last six years under Buhari's watch. But surprisingly, while bandits, insurgents and violent herders are on the loose in the North-East, North-West and North-Central with feeble resistance by security troops, the official protectors have become menacing predators in the South-East. Paradoxically, N5.081tn has been allocated for defence since May 2015 when President Buhari took over power, including the appropriation of [N4.669tn](#) to the Ministry of Defence from 2016 to date and \$1bn (N412bn) for the purchase of military equipment. All funds, no security.

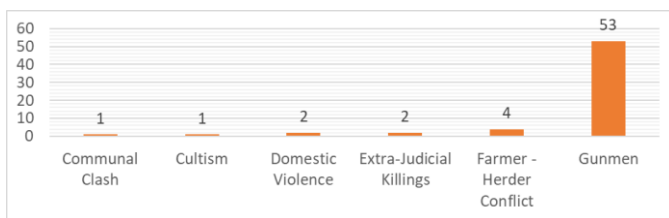


Figure 2: Violent Conflict Type in the South East (January – May 2021)

Rolling Back The Costs

Some policy measures are needed to roll back the damaging human costs of conflict in the South-East.

1. Adherence to the rule of law: The security agents deployed to maintain law and order in the South-East must adhere to the rule of law and obey the people's fundamental human rights. The ongoing practice of violation of the rights of the people and even extra-judicial murder of accused persons must be stopped. People accused of criminal violence must be prosecuted in line with extant Nigerian laws. To achieve this, security agents deployed in the region and to any conflict zone must sign an undertaking to adhere to the rules of law and engagement. Those who flout such rules should be prosecuted according to the United Nations Humanitarian Laws, which Nigeria is a signatory to.
2. Limited use of brutal force: The federal government should stop seeing force as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Across the country, contingents of military forces are being deployed to quell opposition and rebel elements. This (ab)use of security agencies has not guaranteed security or public safety. Thus, the use of force should be limited to peacekeeping only. Once threats to public order, lives and livelihoods are effectively restored, the reconciliatory strategy should take preeminence.

3. Dialogue with restive groups: Leaders of dissident groups such as IPOB, ESN and others should be engaged in dialogue to ascertain their grievances. The practice of rebel leadership assassination or persecution mars rather than mends the security situation (Agbonifo and Aghedo, 2012). The '[judicial murder](#)' of Ken Saro-Wiwa did not stop the Niger Delta resource conflict, neither did the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf end the Boko Haram insurgency. Instead, they triggered a boomerang effect that continues to date. The government needs to learn from these past costly mistakes.
4. Power-sharing and restructuring: The restructuring of the skewed Nigerian federation is an idea whose time has come. The federal government should stop playing ostrich. Political power needs to be devolved to subnational units for effective administration and governance as done in most federations such as the USA, Germany and others (Plotica, 2017). When the local people are in charge of governance and resource utilisation in their areas of jurisdiction, they can no longer externalise the blame of misgovernance to the federal government.

Conclusion

The federal government's shoddy management of IPOB-related conflicts has engendered enormous costs for several persons in the South-East. To not worsen the already terrible security situation in the area, the governments (federal and state) should ensure adherence to the rule of law, limited use of force, have a penchant for dialogue, and use of power-sharing and restructuring to build peace in the fragile region.

References

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