

EFFECTS OF UNKNOWN GUNMEN AND INSECURITY ON NIGERIAN SECURITY; 2017-2022

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Abstract

There is a need to discourse the protracted and recurring multidimensional insecurity in Nigeria. The prevalence of insecurity in the country is caught in recurring web. Insecurity in Nigeria comprises armed robbery, banditry, extrajudicial killings, ethno-religious contest, militancy, insurgency, killer herdsmen, cybercrime and attacks by unknown gunmen. The frequency of attacks by unknown gunmen is prevalent and symptomatic of a brittle state where the government's monopoly of power is challenged and where marginalization, crises and contested spaces are order of the day. The drive of this paper is that the threat of unknown gunmen is widespread and threatens to plunge the country into a cesspool of instability. The discourse is based on the conceptual and theoretical hypotheses of a brittle state amidst God's blessings. To this end, the paper adopts the documentary method of data collection and uses quantitative descriptive analysis to illustrate on the phenomenon. The findings reveal that the words unknown gunman, as a social terminology, is used to describe the metaphor of insecurity in the country, a bane to peaceful coexistence of Nigerian populations. The paper also shows that the phrase unknown gunmen is a government cover-up language; insecurity caused by these armed attacks and other forms of threat is emblematic of a brittle of Nigeria state. Consequently, policy recommendations – state-building and peace-building are offered by the researchers.

Keywords: *Unknown Gunmen, Insecurity and Security; internal terrorism; secession; regionalism*

Introduction

Nigeria is presently bedeviled by an abundance of insecurity that trouble at the very soul of the nation's existence since her inception in 1914. One of the challenge is the attacks by unknown gunmen whose identities are unclear to members of the public, hence the appellation 'unknown gunmen'. Killings by unknown gunmen have become a daily occurrence even when the reportage is repetitively downplayed. The attacks by these misfits have claimed the lives of several people, including the political elite. The prominent Nigerians murdered by unknown gunmen include Ahmed Gulak, the former special adviser on politics to President Goodluck Jonathan, who was killed in Owerri, Imo State, on his way to the airport. Other victims include Justice Stanley Nnaji, the former judge of Enugu State High Court and Linus Owuamanam, a prominent businessman, who were killed in Enugu and Ibadan, Late Chief Bola Ige was murdered in Ekiti respectively in a nation that has political leaders. There is also the case of Okiemute Mrere; the Chief provost of the Nigerian Immigration Service in Imo, who was killed along the Owerri-Port Harcourt Road in Owerri. At the time of writing, the most recent attack has been the gruesome killing of Prof. Samuel Ndubuisi, the Director- General, Scientific Equipment Development Institute (SEDI), in Enugu on 7th July 2021 on the Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway. This happened two days after Ifeanyi Okeke, the Chief Executive Officer of AutoEase was killed in the same area (Nda-Isaiah, 2021).

These killings demonstrate the high level of insecurity in the country and the government's loss of its internal security mechanism and control; an index of instability. The assertion that "state fragility/instability drives some of the biggest problems in our world today: extreme poverty, mass migration, terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking." Nigeria is reportedly a fragile state where security, legitimacy, state capacity, private investment, economy and cohesion is constantly threatened and where a weak state structure deepens insecurity (London School of Economics (Eke, 2018).

This paper illustrates on the pervasiveness of the menace of unknown gunmen and how it is leading Nigeria to a state of instability. The central argument posited in this study is that the incidence of attacks by unknown gunmen in Nigeria is indicative of an instability state where the government's monopoly on the use of state power is being contested by men of the underworld. The paper further contends that the pervasive threat posed by unknown gunmen has the potential to worsen Nigeria's unwarrantable state of instability and insecurity. This paper rests on a foundation for scholarly research on the prevalence of unknown gunmen and its consequences for national security in Nigeria. This is significant given that the erudition on the subject matter is at a nascent and inchoate stage. The paper contends that specific political and economic variables such as deprivation, poverty, marginalization, ungoverned spaces, under-policing, the proliferation of arms, leaky borders and poor political will are responsible for this nefarious phenomenon in Nigeria. The paper also x-rays the implications of the incidence towards state instability. It pays close attention to the indicators of state fragility and the attacks by unknown gunmen within this context. The paper is thematically discussed under the following headings: methodology; unknown gunmen; prevalence of attacks by unknown gunmen in Nigeria; the Nigerian state; unknown gunmen, insecurity and instability in Nigeria; policy implications; and a conclusion.

Methodology

This methodological section is to describe the procedure followed to identify, categorize, and analyse the open sources used in this paper. The research design of this study was secondary data from various open sources. This study relied on a content to identify and categorize how attacks by unknown gunmen are exacerbating insecurity in Nigeria and increasing the chances of instability. Data collection for this study was conducted by searching and selecting relevant sources from open-access databases, including academic journals, news articles, government reports, and non-governmental organisation (NGO) reports. The sources were selected based on their credibility and relevance to the paper. The data was synthesised and summarised to develop the findings of this study.

Concept of Unknown Gunmen

It is imperative to unravel the phrase ‘unknown gunmen’ which has recently become a popular catchphrase in Nigeria’s insecurity enmeshment. The phrase has been used to refer to criminal act from a particular part of the country; thus, giving the incidence of insecurity in Nigeria a religious and ethnic coloration. ‘Attacks by unknown gunmen’ is a phrase often used to describe sectional violence taking place in the country. The unknown gunmen phenomenon appears to be connected to the banditry malady rooted in the north-west. The attacks by unknown gunmen have increased since the government placed a ban on open grazing. Meanwhile, it is not clear whether the unknown gunmen are individuals masquerading as bandits or a repeated case of farmer-herder conflict on vengeance mission. It is however vibrant that the incidence requires prompt attention because Security Peace and Development (SPD), the killings in the country shows that violent death is fast becoming a tradition. The position above is noteworthy given the incidence of such attacks in other states such as Taraba and Plateau. According to the Governor of Plateau state, Simon Lalong, expressed concern over the state of insecurity caused by unknown gunmen Nanlong. He was quoted as saying:

However, we have also realized that while we consolidate on the peace, the crises merchants are not sleeping as their source of business has been obstructed due to the actions we have put in place to restore stability. Therefore, they are restless and trying various methods to breach the peace. As I commend the security agencies for doing their best to tackle the cases of such attacks and other criminal activities, I have also expressed deep concern over the inability to prevent such killings or arrest the perpetrators in some cases. I have since told the police and other security agencies that I do not want to hear unknown gunmen again in Plateau State!

It is hereby evident that the incidence is not restricted to any part of the country, but it is a national illness. This paper, therefore, describes these unknown gunmen as criminal entities without logical objectives but with the proclivity to cause pandemonium and threaten national security and unity. This description is echoed by the governor of Anambra State, Prof. Charles Soludo, who states that:

the so-called ‘unknown gunmen’ were not unknown as they claimed to be but were yet to be exposed because they were being pampered by landlords and other stakeholders... Criminals kidnapping people for ransom, killings and destruction are not agitating but engaging in lucrative criminality. We know where these criminals are... It is not agitation, but a criminal activity, Sahara Reporters, 2022, (p. 1).

The unknown gunmen modus operandi involves abduction, sporadic shooting, maiming, arson, jailbreak and extrajudicial killing. Their targets include farmers, politicians, private citizens, government institutions, business owners and business organizations. Their activities are carried out in both rural and urban areas; in daytime or at night. The effect of such attacks is the destruction of life and property, piles of dead bodies, displacement, torched villages, maimed victims, lots of casualties, an increase in internal displacement, forced migration and food shortages. Attacks by unknown gunmen have led to a humanitarian crisis with an increase in the number of internally displaced persons, student abductions and wanton killings and among others. These attacks also have economic implications as the means of livelihood of several Nigerians have been destroyed, while foreign investors have been scared away from the country.

Prevalence of attacks by unknown gunmen in Nigeria

The attacks and their resultant victims are widespread across Nigeria and continue unrelenting. This is represented in the table below, where various attacks in 2021 are reported.

Date	Event	Fatality	Source
8 th January	Onueke Police Station in Ezza South Local Government Area was attacked	Three police officers were killed	Vanguard Newspaper
24 th February	A patrol vehicle was torched in Ekwulobia in Anambra State	One police officer was killed	Premium Times
24 th February	Gunmen attacked Abayi police station in Osioma Ngwa, Abia State	A police officer was killed while arms and ammunition were looted and the station was set ablaze	Vanguard Newspaper
3 rd March	Policemen were attacked at Obubra, Cross River	Six police officers were killed	Vanguard Newspaper
9 th March	Gunmen attacked a police station in Imo State	Several vehicles were set on fire.	Premium Times
5 th April	Unknown gunmen attacked a correctional facility in Owerri, Imo State and freed 1,844 inmates	Unknown	Premium Times
20 th April	Greenfield University, Kaduna State was attacked and students were abducted	Twelve people were abducted	Premium Times
9 th May	Unknown gunmen attack a police station in Trademore estate in Ubani, Abia State	Unknown	This Day Newspaper

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The information is sourced from the mass media, particularly online newspapers. As a result, this paper depended largely on newspapers; even though the data presented in such open sources is often underreported.

The government's response to the threat has been described as languid. The shoot-at-sight order issued by President Muhammadu Buhari has been greeted with mixed feelings, especially considering the level of extrajudicial killings by the security forces. Moreover, governors have tried the carrot-and-stick approach by granting amnesty to criminals, giving cash to bandits and paying ransom in exchange for kidnap victims, yet the killings continue and the grief map continues to spread (Nda-Isaiah, 2021).

Instability and the Nigerian state

Instability is a concept that has gained currency in the development debate since the 1990s. It has attracted wide scholarship given that it describes distressed states that cannot discharge their primary functions and drive development. Instability is often used to depict the state of development in Third World Countries (TWCs); particularly African states that have historically been characterized by corruption, poverty, electoral malpractices, weak institutions, social inequality and armed conflicts. Ojo (2011) defines state instability as “a fundamental failure of the state to perform primary functions necessary to meet citizens’ basic needs and expectations.” Instability states are usually unable to maintain the rule of law and justice, provide basic services, or guarantee the security of their citizens. A distinguishing feature of a brittle state is weak state legitimacy and unpopular support. An instability state is susceptible to internal and external shocks, crises and conflicts. The concept of instability is heralded by the classification of states according to their strength or weakness: weak states – lacking control over their territories; failing states – failing to achieve economic growth; failed state – the collapse of central government authority to impose order; and collapsed states – where a state ceases to function.

However, there about 40–50 fragile states, the majority of which are in Africa continent and notable for their extreme poverty, mass killing, corrupt practices, etc. These states are either falling behind or falling apart and are caught in one or more of four traps: the conflict trap; the natural resources trap; the trap of being landlocked with bad neighbors; and the trap of bad governance. States with instability are often troubled by the inability to deliver an efficient and equitable distribution of public goods, insecurity and persistent violence and weak governance. Meanwhile, the rate of poverty, malnutrition and higher child mortality in such states continues to rise. There is an unmistakably high level of violent conflict, environmental degradation, mass migration, organised crime, terrorism, human trafficking, humanitarian crisis, and transnational security threats in these states (Chauvet *et al.*, 2010).

Nigeria is an example of a fragile state or state with instability. In addition to being the poverty capital of the world, Nigeria is also plagued by socio-political challenges, including bad governance, poor service delivery, identity-based conflicts, poverty and trapped natural resources. The country is also enmeshed in a series of security issues occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency, armed robbery, extrajudicial killings by security forces, banditry, militancy and, recently, unknown gunmen. States with instability is frequently associated with violent, conflict

and sustained poverty. As this paper posits, the incidence of unknown gunmen and the consequent insecurity is driving Nigeria to a state of perpetual instability; whereas the country is presently troubled in this regard. According to the 2022 Fragile States Index (FSI), Nigeria is the 16th state with high level of instability and insecurity out of 197 countries. With an FSI score of 97.2, Nigeria recorded a -0.80 change from the previous year, a -4.40 change in five years and a -3.90 change in 10 years. By implication, Nigeria has been experiencing worsening condition of instability in the past decade; hence the continued activities of unknown gunmen and other armed groups will further push the country towards an eonian state of instability.

Unknown Gunmen, Insecurity and Instability (UGII) in Nigeria

The security challenge in the country is necessitated by a plethora of socio-economic and socio-political quandaries such as deprivation, poverty, ungoverned spaces, under-policing, the proliferation of light arms, the porous border and the dearth of political will. This coupled with high rate of youth unemployment, a high inflation rate, low industrial output, inadequate physical and social infrastructure and insurgency gives impulse to the proliferation of criminal groups, thereby increasing instability. The neglect of Nigerian human resources and the attendant economic discontent increases people's helplessness to recruitment for violence. This is supported by the paradox of suffering amid plenty enforces the notion of deprivation, unfairness and material inequality. This is corroborated by who states that exclusion from governance, employment opportunities and politics increases the risk of restiveness and criminality among young people in the country. This has not only inhibited community and national development, but also threatens the national security and development of the country. These issues coupled with institutional incapacity make the delivery of public services difficult and can lead to aggrieved innocent Nigerians taking part in criminal activities. The high rate of youth unemployment, widespread poverty and insecurity become elicits of frustration and aggression for the people of Nigeria to engage in violence activities.

The issue of marginalization in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial epoch which accentuated a northern hegemony that transcended to the post-colonial epoch. Nigeria is a multicultural state with varied ethnic nationalities and three major groups: Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba. These groups are characterized by ethnic rivalry and a contest for superiority which has engendered conflict on several occasions. The politics of identity became endemic with the military incursion of January 15 1966, which was seen as an Igbo coup, and the counter-coup of July 29 1966. Following the massacre of Igbos in the North, Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Governor of the Eastern region, declared the Republic of Biafra on May 30 1967. This culminated in a civil war that lasted 30 months in the country. The war left anguish and pain in the Eastern region, while its people have since decried the state of relegation and deprivation in the region. Meanwhile, the efforts by the government to foster unity and address the lingering deprivation and neglect – through its Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation initiative, the introduction of Federal Character, Unity schools and the National Youth Service Corps – have failed to mitigate the pervasive relegation. On the contrary, there has been an increase in agitations ever since, ethnic rivalry, violence, militancy and secessionism (Onwubiko and Ugorji, 2022).

The spate of marginalization in the Eastern region is further expressed in the change in Nigeria's currency in 1968 (which led to an economic loss for the Igbos during the civil war and the creation of more states), which weakened the solidarity of the Igbos; and the granting of 20-30 pounds to

survivors of the war – irrespective of their wealth before the war. Moreover, the years of civil war led to the exclusion or low representation of Igbos in the various echelons of government and the control of the country's resources. This systemic exclusion continues to linger in flagrant disrespect for the doctrines of federalism.

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The spate of marginalization in the Eastern region is further expressed in the change in Nigeria's currency in 1968 (which led to an economic loss for the Igbos during the civil war and the creation of more states), which weakened the solidarity of the Igbos; and the granting of 20 pounds to survivors of the war – irrespective of their wealth before the war. Moreover, the years of civil war led to the exclusion or low representation of Igbos in the various echelons of government and the control of the country's resources. This systemic exclusion continues to linger in flagrant disrespect for the doctrines of federalism. The distribution of appointments to various offices in 2018, reveals the manner in which the Igbo have been marginalized from the office of the Head of State/President and the number of states and local government areas to which federal government projects have been allocated. The South East lags in representation in the various key offices, and when assessed as a region, the North amasses greater representation than the East and West – indicating prevalent relegation in the South.

It is believed that the continued marginalization of the South East drives violence in the country. This was alluded to by Mr Peter Odo, the former permanent secretary, Enugu State, who claims that the lack of equity and fairness is responsible for increased insecurity in the country. He further states that the security enmeshment in Nigeria is a result of the lack of true federalism and a lack of political will (Ikem, 2022).

Some of the driving forces for the inflow of illicit arms into Nigeria are its porous borders, ungoverned spaces and undermanned security personnel in the country. Nigeria's borders are grossly undermanned by the relevant authorities thus increasing the country's vulnerability to invasion by illegal migrants and criminal elements. With an additional 1500 illegal borders, the official 84 borders in the country are without adequate protection. These illegal borders have become favourite routes for smuggling activities and illicit trade and movement of illegal goods including arms and weapons by non-state armed groups. Indeed, the assembling, growth and

coordination of the operations of terror groups and illegal migrants have gone undetected due to the vast ungoverned spaces that pervade the country. An ungoverned space typically has a limited government presence and a general absence of governance. However, given the arguments against the concept of ignoring the presence of traditional authorities in these spaces, contribute immensely to the country's insecurity.

Contested spaces are areas with contested governance where the government performs limited functions in contest with other non-state actors. Such spaces provide a haven for non-state actors to mobilise and establish themselves. This explains the growth of IPOB since 2012 and its metamorphosis from a peaceful group to a radical one responsible for the escalation of tension and conflict in Nigeria. The rise of unknown gunmen and their brazen attacks on security institutions in the country, create the context of a group that is protected by the haven provided in a contested space. The shortage of security personnel in the country is also fuelling insecurity. This is suggested by Senator Kashin Shettima, who notes that "in Nigeria, where we have over 250 million people, the security personnel, including the police, army, immigration, etc. are not even up to 500,000". This statement by a Nigerian Senator confirms the intense state of security agencies in Nigeria and suggests a ratio of 1:400 of Independent, 2021 security agencies and citizens in the country.

The proliferation of armed groups and their continued battles with the government clearly increases the chances of fragility in the country. This submission finds a kindred spirit in the statement that "brittle societies are typically trapped in a syndrome of interlocking characteristics which makes it hard to make sustained progress. Usually, they are fractured into groups with opposing identities, who see their struggles as a zero-sum game. This impedes inter-group cooperation to use the state for national purposes. Instead, it induces a view of the state as a resource to be plundered if only the group can capture control of it". This is followed by the state's loss of legitimacy, and the lack of capacity to perform basic functions, such as service delivery, citizen security, taxation, and infrastructure. These challenges culminate in inadequate security, which manifests itself in sporadic outbreaks of violence. This is true of the security situation in Nigeria, where various groups have taken turns to foment trouble over the past decade. It is as though one group is giving impetus to the rise of another. This was why asserted that when criminal groups are not properly handled, they become internalized, patterned and conventionalized. This engenders the routinisation of violence, reprisal attacks, proliferation of arms and an offshoot of other deadly sects. This explains the incidence of the unknown gunmen coexisting with the killer herder's menace – which is a precursor to banditry and consequence.

Iloh and Nwokedi (2020) argue that the state's monopoly of force and security of life and property is constantly threatened by non-state actors. The rise in criminality, vigilante groups (and by extension, unknown gunmen) continues to undermine the state's legitimacy, for which the people initially gave up some of their natural rights for state protection. In a bid to deal with the lacuna created by poor governance, people have resorted to self-help in the form of non-state activities, which further widens the vacuum created by the inability of formal security institutions to ensure the safety of citizens and their property. Moreover, the nature of criminality in the country has made effective maintenance of law and order very difficult for state security actors, thus these non-state actors constitute a bane to national security and continue to evoke instability. Kidnapping for ransom is another threat that undermines national security in Nigeria. The phenomenon is evidence of organised crime in the country. Based on the methods adopted by kidnappers, four distinct

typologies are discernible: routine, invasion, highway, and insider models. Undoubtedly, the incidence of kidnapping is overwhelming for the Nigerian Police and military task force. This is because the government has failed to tackle the root causes such as the absence of a database, marginalisation, extreme poverty, widespread unemployment, as well as weak, poorly trained and technologically incapacitated security and law enforcement agencies (p. 99) also on emphasis on the role of the protracted farmer-herder conflict Onuoha and Okolie-Osemene (2019) and Odigbo (2019) believe that poverty is a catalyst for deepening insecurity in Nigeria. Odigbo (2019) further asserts that:

In the last few years, the intensification and rising cases of the herders-farmers crisis, from a brush fire to an all-consuming conflagration, raised issues of conspiracy of the state, poor attitude and inadequate preparation to providing security to the Nigerian people. The protracted violent confrontations between the farmers and the herders have expanded into more worrisome dimensions. This can be seen from the changing patterns of the conflict in which the strategies adopted by the rampaging herdsmen shifted from primitive attacks at farmlands to the use of sophisticated weapons to invade communities and institutions.

Meanwhile, the government's efforts to address the protracted farmer-herder crisis are feeble. The government's laxity and elite conspiracy has restricted the performance of its efforts, such as the deployment of Special Task Force—Operation Safe Haven (STF-OSH) in 2001 to states like Plateau and Kaduna, the failed National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill 2016 and the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017, in states such as Benue, Ekiti and Taraba. This is evident in the security agencies' inability to apprehend and prosecute the perpetrators (Odigbo, 2019).

Policy Implications

Given the foregoing, this paper makes two policy recommendations:

State-building: This refers to the process of a state functioning more effectively. It is an “endogenous process to develop capacity, institutions and the legitimacy of the state driven by state-society relationships. Positive state-building processes involve reciprocal relations between a state that delivers services for its people and social and political groups who constructively engage with their state” (, p. 1). With regard to the menace of unknown gunmen in Nigeria, the Federal Government should make an effort to build a positive relationship with members of the state through efficient service delivery. This will address the structural, economic and social factors necessitating the menace, such as poverty, exclusion, inequality etc. An inclusive government that promotes justice and security is advisable. There should also be an improvement in service delivery, especially in the areas of education, healthcare and other public services that improve economic well-being. Moreover, the state would have to guarantee the economic, social and political rights of every citizen whilst promoting transparent, accountable and good governance. These improved conditions will cause the unknown gunmen to desist from engaging in acts of criminality and accept the state's monopoly of force and legitimacy. The government must also make decisive efforts to increase its Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2008 presence in its ungoverned and contested spaces by providing adequate security personnel.

Because fragility can arise from exclusion, state-building will help the political and societal groups excluded from the state to participate effectively through an intentional social inclusion programme. The state can adopt political negotiation or other responses that will lead these unknown men to shun violent opposition. Another germane factor in the process of state-building is legitimacy. For state-building to be feasible in Nigeria, it would have to consider the OECD's (2008) sources of legitimacy: performance legitimacy – which arises from effective and equitable service delivery; legitimacy – derived from socially accepted beliefs about the rightful source of authority; and process legitimacy – the constitutional rule of law and/or appropriate accountability mechanisms. Legitimacy can also derive from international recognition and support.

Peacebuilding: According to , p. 9), peacebuilding “encompasses all activities that intentionally try to resolve conflict and bring about a deeper and more sustainable level of peace. It refers to the whole process of building peace before, during and after outbreaks of violence.” Peacebuilding is different from peacekeeping and peacemaking in terms of permanence and scope, respectively. Peacekeeping is concerned with maintaining a truce and preventing immediate violence, while peacemaking refers to political and diplomatic measures that aim to bring conflicting parties to an agreement. Peacebuilding seeks to transform the social and cultural conditions that generated the conflict in the first place – this is called conflict transformation. According to Payne and Islamic Relief (2020) Lederach and Mansfield (n.d.):

Peacebuilding is the development of the constructive personal, group, and political relationships across ethnic, religious, class, national, and racial boundaries. It aims to resolve injustice in nonviolent ways and to transform the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict. Peacebuilding can include conflict prevention; conflict management; conflict resolution and transformation, and post-conflict reconciliation.

This strategy can be applied to the incidence of unknown gunmen and fragility in Nigeria to address the key drivers of violence and forestall the reoccurrence of such by tackling the inherent economic, social and political problems in the political system. The government should engage in wide-ranging reform; economic, governance, justice, security sector and political, as well as create truth and reconciliation processes. Some of the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria are a weak security apparatus, inequality, social exclusion, marginalisation, poverty, discrimination and violations of human rights. Therefore, development efforts should be made to address these issues alongside peacebuilding (p. 11) observe, “if peacebuilding works together with development assistance to ensure that the grievances, frustrations and needs of all communities are addressed fairly then this can help to resolve conflict, which helps Payne and Islamic Relief (2020) to end the humanitarian crisis.”

In addition to the above, the paper recommends that the thin and stretched Nigerian security apparatus should be increased in terms of workforce and devolved into state police units to enable the officers to tackle the growing insecurity in the various regions in Nigeria. By encouraging state policing, citizens will be encouraged to speak to police officers in their indigenous languages to foil criminal cells before they turn into syndicates. This will also help address the lack of trust and fear of victimisation that Nigerian citizens hold for police officers.

The security forces should also employ technology in the fight against insecurity and unknown gunmen. Satellite tracking devices should be adopted, while cameras should be mounted in various

areas – particularly densely populated areas. Meanwhile, it is also advised that creating a comprehensive database of Nigerians, including their phone numbers, should be encouraged. This will assist in tracking suspected criminals using cellular networks. The security forces in Nigeria must be trained and retrained in intelligence gathering in rural areas and ungoverned spaces where kidnappers and unknown gunmen are suspected to operate from. Finally, the governors of the South East must develop a regional security outfit like their South West counterparts by jointly contributing their security votes to tackling insecurity and complementing the state security apparatus.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The catchphrase ‘unknown gunmen’ has become widely recognised and associated with insecurity in Nigeria. This study places the attacks by unknown gunmen within the context of state fragility, highlighting their implications for Nigeria’s stability. When assessed using fragility indicators, Nigeria is on the brink of fragility. This paper notes that these attacks have become emblematic of a state of fragility and insecurity, with dire consequences for the country’s peaceful coexistence. This paper presents new knowledge on the prevalence and implications of the menace of unknown gunmen in Nigeria. It establishes that the incidence of attacks by unknown gunmen in Nigeria is indicative of a fragile state in which the government’s monopoly on the use of force is being contested. This study provides a foundation for further scholarly research on the prevalence of incidents involving unknown gunmen and its consequences for national security in Nigeria, particularly given that knowledge of the subject matter is still nascent and inchoate. It argues that specific political and economic variables, such as marginalisation, deprivation, poverty, ungoverned spaces, under-policing, the proliferation of arms, porous borders, and the lack of political will, are responsible for this nefarious phenomenon.

The paper’s practical values are also noteworthy, as they reveal the implications of the slide towards state fragility and places the attacks by unknown gunmen within this context. It focuses on the indicators of state fragility and highlights the need for efforts to restore the stability of the country by implementing the recommendations proposed herein. It identifies unknown gunmen as criminal elements without clear objectives but with the propensity to cause chaos and threaten national security. Furthermore, this paper shows that these attacks have created a humanitarian crisis in Nigeria, leading to an increase in the number of abductions, wanton killings, and the destruction of property.

This study’s insights into the various factors fuelling menace, such as brainwashing, drug use, and the ban on open grazing, can be of immense value in informing policy decisions and developing strategies to address the threat posed by unknown gunmen in Nigeria. This study identifies various political and economic variables that contribute to this phenomenon, such as marginalisation, deprivation, poverty, ungoverned spaces, under-policing, the proliferation of arms, porous borders, and the lack of political will. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it offers new insights into the prevalence and implications of attacks by unknown gunmen in Nigeria, highlighting that the incidence is a national malaise and not restricted to any particular region. This provides a foundation for further research on this phenomenon and its impact on national security.

This paper recognises the urgency of the situation and calls for immediate efforts to restore the stability of the country by implementing the recommendations proposed herein. To mitigate the

incidence attacks by unknown gunmen, this study recommends addressing these underlying causes through good governance, increased economic opportunities, and effective security measures. In addition, the study emphasises the need to address the grievances of armed groups, while maintaining the territorial integrity of Nigeria requires political will, dialogue, and engagement.

The study also highlights the excessive use of force, torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests, and unlawful detention of IPOB members by security forces as significant contributors to insecurity in the South East region. The study recommends improving security sector governance, including respect for human rights and accountability mechanisms, as necessary to build trust and reduce tension. Furthermore, this study identifies the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) as a significant driver of insecurity in Nigeria. The study recommends controlling the flow of illicit arms through enhanced border security, intelligence gathering, and cooperation with neighbouring countries. It further highlights the humanitarian crisis resulting from attacks by unknown gunmen, including an increase in the number of internally displaced persons, student abductions, and wanton killings. Addressing a humanitarian crisis requires a comprehensive response, including providing humanitarian assistance, protecting civilians, and addressing the root causes of insecurity. Finally, the study recommends conducting further research to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon and develop evidence-based policy solutions to mitigate the incidence of attacks by unknown gunmen in Nigeria.

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