



South East Region of Nigeria as the Hotbed of Terrorism: The Unknown Gunmen Experience from 2021-2024

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Abstract

Despite the peace that followed the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967–1970, which increased internal security and economic prosperity, terrorism has plagued all the states that make up the southeast region. The study examined the southeast region of Nigeria, which has become the hotbed of terrorism emanating from unknown gunmen from 2021 to 2024. Thus, the study utilised secondary sources of data and contends that unknown gunmen originated in 2021 after the establishment of the Eastern Security Network, coupled with military and paramilitary activities, etc in the region. Activities of unknown gunmen became pronounced after the declaration of a sit-at-home by the Indigenous People of Biafra in the region. There are three types of unknown gunmen: political, criminal, and secessionist/real. The study concludes that the southeast is under siege due to the activities and operations of unknown gunmen, as Nigerians are no longer safe in the region. By way to nip the problem in the bud, the study proposes that the federal government of Nigeria should release Nnamdi Kanu from detention, as this gesture will ease the tension and create room for the termination of the unknown gunmen in the region.

Keywords: *Unknown Gunmen, South East, Terrorism, Insecurity, Nigeria*

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Background to the Study

Despite the peace that followed the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967–1970, which increased internal security and economic prosperity, terrorism and violence have plagued all the states that make up the southeast region of Nigeria. The assailants responsible for this violence and terrorist act are unknown gunmen (UGM), representing not a singular entity but a complex phenomenon consisting of various political, criminal, and secessionist groups. The atrocities perpetrated by these UGM have resulted in significant security challenges that persistently jeopardise the peace, progress, and development of the southeastern region. Thus, it is no longer a secret that unknown gunmen have wrecked the internal security of the region, thereby contributing to Nigeria's ranking in the sixth position in the global terrorism index (VOA, 2025), as the nation has been classified as a country in a state of war. A multitude of scholars, public analysts, and security experts contend that Nigeria constitutes a failed state, attributable to persistent security challenges, a stagnant economy, and significant emigration (Japa) of its citizens to Europe and other regions in pursuit of better opportunities, health, and safety.

However, criminal activities such as kidnapping, murder, theft, vandalism of government infrastructures and police stations and other security installations, and the beheading of innocent Nigerians have become commonplace in the southeastern region, leading residents to sleep with one eye open and the other closed. Numerous individuals have ascribed the unknown gunmen to a faction of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), which was created as a military division of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The IPOB is a secessionist movement representing the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria, which the Nigerian federal government designated as a terrorist organisation in 2017. The continuous security escalation and bastardisation of the southeast region by unknown gunmen prompted Professor Obiozor George, the then President of Ohanaeze di Igbo, while welcoming Muhammadu Buhari, the immediate past President of Nigeria, to Imo State on the 9th September 2021, to remark, regrettably our southeast region has recently become a theatre of conflict, negating the peace-loving nature of our people (Yakubu, 2024). The Governor of Anambra State, Professor Charles Soludo, while lamenting on the exacerbation of security in the region caused by unknown gunmen, noted that the unknown gunmen are criminals, kidnapping people for ransom, killing, and destruction are not agitation but engaging in lucrative criminality. We know where these criminals are; it is not agitation but criminal activity (Sahara Reporters, 2022). While reminiscing on the above, the fulcrum of the study is to examine the southeast region of Nigeria, which has become the hotbed of terrorism emanating from unknown gunmen from 2021 to 2024.

Conceptual Clarification

Terrorism

The concept of terrorism is contested in the literature, as there is no generally accepted definition of the term globally (Asanebi & Ayibatari, 2019). Terrorism is a form of political violence on a horrendous scale adopted or used by groups or individuals acting on behalf of a group, with the sole aim of achieving an order based on their worldview. This worldview could be ideological in terms of politics and religious beliefs (Istifanus, 2006). According to Asanebi

and Ayibatari (2019), terrorism is the act of atrocity, threat, and unlawful violence unleashed on harmless people and non-combatants to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or intimidate the government in the pursuit of goals and purpose. Terrorist all over the globe employ numerous devices to press home their points, demands, and even to perceive their aggressors. Their methods are force, intimidation, threat, and violence, amongst others, targeted at the achievement of their goals, which could be religious, political, economic, and social in society. Terrorism is a crime against humanity, as it is a challenge to man's march to modern civilization (Asanebi & Ayibatari, 2019).

Internal Security

Internal security is the protection of citizens and their properties by a sovereign state government from dangers and attacks within its territorial environment (Asanebi, 2023). It could also be seen as the safeguarding of a country's internal stability and safety from threats within its territorial borders. Internal security encompasses several methods or measures to safeguard, prevent, detect, and respond to threats within, ensuring the well-being and protection of citizens, nations, institutions, and infrastructures.

South East Region

The southeastern region, predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group, is recognised as the nation's center for trade and commerce. The region constitutes one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria and includes five states, specifically;

1. Abia
2. Anambra
3. Ebonyi
4. Enugu
5. Imo

The indigenous population of the region is recognised for their profound cultural heritage, resilience, commerce, and spiritual disposition. The primary religion in the region is Christianity, followed by African traditional religion. There are minor adherents of Islam in the region.

Unknown Gunmen (UGM)

The term unknown gunmen (UGM) has become a source of psychological fear and terror in the southeast region of Nigeria. The identities of these unknown gunmen remain unclear to the media and to many Nigerians living within and outside the southeast region, hence the appellation unknown gunmen by Nigerians. According to Ibekwe (2024), unknown gunmen are unidentified violent groups, with a significant number being an offshoot of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Across all the states that comprise the region, the UGM operating in the southeast has carried out a series of attacks, making certain areas ungoverned spaces for residents, security personnel, and state governments. Ironically, the worsening security coincides with an increasing push for the sovereign state of Biafra led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of IPOB, who is presently detained and facing treason charges by the federal government of Nigeria.

Origin of Unknown Gunmen

The origin of the unknown gunmen can be traced to the IPOB Eastern Security Network (ESN) in 2021. The sole goal of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's establishment of IPOB in 2021, with Mr. Uche Okafor-Mefor serving as his deputy, was to bring about the sovereign nation of Biafra, which his kinsmen unsuccessfully fought for in Nigeria between July 6, 1967, and January 15, 1970. Due to the continual decrease in security brought on by Fulani herdsmen, the killing of Southeast indigenous people, and their confrontation with security forces in the region, among others, IPOB decided to establish a security outfit to protect and defend the Southeast territories and its citizens from Fulani herdsmen, security personnel, and other intruders, both internal and external. Following the formation of the ESN in 2021, unknown gunmen developed as a result of military and paramilitary action, poverty, marginalisation, poor governance, corruption, and weak institutions, as well as Fulani herdsmen killings in the region. Thus, IPOB in 2017 was designated as a terrorist organisation by the federal government of Nigeria. After IPOB ESN declared a sit-at-home in the southeast region, UGM activities became more apparent. The UGM utilised the sit-at-home declaration to commit acts of terrorism against the people and the region, making life difficult and the security situation direr.

Types of Unknown Gunmen in the South East

There are three types of unknown gunmen in the southeast; they are:

1. Secessionist/ Real
2. Political
3. Criminal

Secessionist / Real Unknown Gunmen

Secessionist/ real unknown gunmen are indigenous citizens of the region who believe they are fighting for the secession of Biafra from Nigeria. The majority of them are supporters, ex-members, and members of IPOB directly and indirectly. The only difference is that secessionist/real unknown gunmen respect Mazi Nnamdi Kanu as the current leader of the Biafra agitation, but do not follow him or any other IPOB leader in the southeast. They operate independently, targeting the Nigerian Police Force and the Nigerian Army in the region. They also oppose any institution or individual working against the Biafran secessionist agitation. Onyema and Princewill (2023) noted that the temerity and gestapo manner in which these unknown gunmen attack police stations, local council headquarters, and other public institutions, kidnap and kill politicians and citizens raises questions about whether there is any government in place to arrest the situation. These concerns were echoed by Njoku and Nzeagwu (2022), who stated that what surprises residents is the level of confidence these marauders have in their notorious acts. They move unhindered in choice cars to their various targets at any time of day, brazenly dressed in black with guns strapped to their chests and ready to fire. They leave no target without inflicting pain and depriving people of their breadwinners.

Secessionist/real unknown gunmen are willing to die in defence of their ideology, as evidenced by the final statement of former Governor of Ebonyi State, Senator Dave Umahi,

who stated at a briefing in June 2021 that these people should stop being killed; they should stop allowing themselves to be killed. Three factors are responsible for the menace: people are brainwashed and unaware of what they are agitating for; these people go to a talisman to be fortified against bullets, but end up being killed (Channels TV, 2021). Sardonicly, after carrying out their operations, they don't care about the souls they killed or the properties they destroyed; their primary goal is to achieve the objectives of the operations, which pose a serious threat to resident's lives, internal security, and the development of the region.

Political Unknown Gunmen

Political unknown gunmen are the product of many politicians who consistently exploit the region's insecurity to commit crimes against their political rivals, critics, and the defenceless citizens. These politicians work tirelessly before, during, and after elections to discredit their opponents, critics, and anyone else who gets in their way. For unknown gunmen to fulfill their self-serving political goals and interests, these politicians supply them with firearms and other ammunition, security, and government support and protection. Sardonicly, these politicians don't care if the activities and operations of politically unknown gunmen have resulted in unquantifiable loss of lives and property, exacerbating security and stunting the development of the region. They sometimes fail to retrieve the guns and ammunition provided to these politically unknown gunmen after their operations or when they are no longer in power. These political unknown gunmen then utilised these guns and ammunition to commit crimes to generate revenue for their survival and sustainability. When their political leader/boss tenure ends, the unknown gunmen switch to other politicians in the region who may require their services. They are not faceless, nameless, or homeless; they are well-known to the politicians who patronise and sponsor them, as well as the neighbourhood where they reside in the region.

Criminal Unknown Gunmen

Criminal unknown gunmen take advantage of the insecurity and havoc created by secessionist/ real and political unknown gunmen. The secessionist/ real and political unknown gunmen have been credited for several terrorist activities and crimes in the region. For instance, several destructions of properties, assassinations, and beheadings of politicians, military, paramilitary personnel, and citizens in the region have been attributed to these groups. Criminal unknown gunmen capitalised on the weak security situation in the region created by secessionist/ real and political unknown gunmen to perpetrate terrorism in the region. Many of them are breakaway members of political and secessionist UGM in the region, who desire to have freedom in carrying out their terror without being checkmated by anyone. For the criminal unknown gunmen, crime is the only way to pay back the government and security personnel for the years of unemployment, poverty, and insensitivity to the needs, security, and development of the region and the people. They see their actions as a justifiable source to generate revenue for their sustainability as a gang and the survival of their families. The criminal unknown gunmen primarily target citizens with kidnapping value and security personnel in the region, with the Nigerian Police Force and Nigerian Army being the most frequently targeted in their operations. They utilised the activities and operations of secessionist/ real and political UGM and the sit-at-home order by IPOB to steal and

perpetrate heinous crimes against humanity in the region. Operationally, they are deadly and ruthless, wreaking havoc on the region's internal security, and do not pledge allegiance to political or secessionist/real unknown gunmen. Citizens who inhabit the same environment as unknown gunmen are aware of their identities and are afraid to speak up for fear of the consequences that await them and their families at the terminus of such a journey.

Understanding the Rationale Behind the Unknown Gunmen

The southeast region has become a hotbed of terrorism as a result of the activities of unknown gunmen. It is critical to understand the rationale behind the unknown gunmen and their activities. These rationales can be linked to the following issues: the raiding and killing of IPOB members by security personnel, the use of force on pro-IPOB, Fulani herdsmen killing, bad government and weak institutions, unemployment, poverty, Igbo marginalisation, arrest, extradition, and continuous detention of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu.

1. Raiding and killing of IPOB members

As part of their responsibilities in the southeast, security personnel from the Nigerian Army and Nigerian Police Force raided multiple IPOB camps, hideouts, and barracks in an effort to eliminate insecurity and restore security and peace. Some IPOB members have been arrested, and others have been killed in gun battles that have followed these raids.

2. The use of force in their operational activities in the region

The Nigerian Police and Army have employed brutal force to intimidate IPOB members into ceasing their activities. In the southeast, numerous confrontations have occurred between IPOB members and security forces, suggesting that the application of force has proven to be an ineffective strategy. In 2021, Nigerian security forces, comprising the Army and Police, engaged in multiple confrontations with IPOB, leading to the fatalities of both IPOB members and innocent civilians, an event now referred to as the Orlu crisis. The Orlu crisis, security raids, Fulani herdsmen killings, and killings by security personnel prompted the establishment of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), IPOB's security wing dedicated to protecting and defending its members and the region. The culmination of these events, along with the establishment of the ESN, intensified regional insecurity, leading to the emergence of unknown gunmen.

3. Fulani herdsmen's killing of Igbo farmers

Fulani herders have resorted to violence in their pursuit of cattle grazing territories and sustenance, affecting not only the southeast but all regions of Nigeria. Several clashes between Fulani herders and indigenous farmers in the southeast have resulted in injuries and deaths among Fulani herders and farmers on their ancestral lands. The killing of farmers by Fulani herders was one of the reasons for the formation of ESN, which was followed by the formation of UGM, both of which claimed to be fighting Fulanisation in the southeast.

4. Bad government and weak institutions

Many people in the Southeast are dissatisfied with the federal and state governments failure to provide good governance and basic needs for citizens. As a result, a small group of people,

primarily youths, exploited poor governance and weak institutions to commit crimes and exacerbate the region's insecurity. Unfortunately, the institutions responsible for responding to crime and criminality that have jeopardised the region's security are ineffective. The weakness and corruption within these institutions have instilled distrust and uncertainty among the region's citizens.

5. Unemployment

It is widely held that the idle mind is the devil's workshop. Nigeria is experiencing an unemployment crisis, which has drawn a large number of young people into crime and criminality throughout the country. Unemployment is high in Nigeria, with a larger proportion of the unemployed being young and active men and women. Many unemployed people who have turned to crime and criminality admit in Nigerian police, correctional service detentions, and courts that they do so for the following reasons:

- (i) Economic survival
- (ii) To repay the wicked and bad government that created the system in Nigeria
- (iii) Frustration
- (iv) Power and fame
- (v) Bad influence and poor guidance, and
- (vi) Unemployment.

6. Poverty

It is widely acknowledged that many Nigerians live below the poverty line. The failure of the federal and state governments to adequately address the region's poverty and unequal wealth distribution has attracted many poor citizens into crime and criminality, exacerbating insecurity. A society with poor citizens can never enjoy peace and stability because poverty breeds crime and terrorism.

7. Marginalisation of the Igbo ethnic group

Marginalisation dates back to the colonial era and has persisted into the postcolonial era. Following the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War on July 6, 1967, to January 15, 1970 (a 30-month war), Nigerian troops killed numerous Igbo indigenes both in and out of the region. The war left anguish and pain in the lives of Igbo indigenes within and outside the region. At the terminus of the war Nigerian government's efforts to restore peace, unity, and confidence to the people of the eastern region which the Southeast is a major component was through the three Rs, which are; reconciliation, reintegration, and reconstruction, and other institutions, such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and unity schools, etc failed to address the marginalisation of the ethnic group. Despite being economically devastated by the war, the Igbos have struggled to become Nigeria's commerce and trade powerhouse, with celebrated businesses and a presence in all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Regardless, the Igbo ethnic group continues to be marginalised in the post-colonial era, as evidenced by lopsided promotion in the military and paramilitary, public and civil services, appointments to the federal government cabinet, and so on. Since returning to democratic rule in the Fourth Republic, the Igbos have never been elected president or vice president, even though many Igbo sons have contested for the office of the president and vice president in general elections from 1999 to date in various political parties.

According to Akinyetun et al. (2023), violence in the southeast is motivated by the region's continued marginalisation. Mr. Peter Odo, a former permanent secretary of Enugu State civil service, alluded to this, claiming that the region's increased internal insecurity is due to a lack of equity and fairness. The security crisis in the southeast stems from a lack of true federalism and political will (Ikem, 2022). This perceived marginalisation has been central to the agitation in the southeast, as evidenced by the IPOB's resurgence of secessionism (Ugwu, 2022).

8. Arrest, extradition, and continuous detention of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu

Since 2012, IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu has been courageous in advocating for the secession of the Republic of Biafra from Nigeria. This move was not well received by the elites who governed and controlled the Nigerian federation. The Nigerian government accused Mazi Nnamdi Kanu of inciting and instigating terrorism and criminal conspiracy, which led to his arrest on October 14, 2015, by the Department of State Security. The arrest of the IPOB leader heightened the violence in the southeast, thereby crippling internal security. With Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's eventual release by the Nigerian government, things got worse, as the leader of IPOB didn't succumb to federal government pressure and warnings. Mazi Nnamdi Kanu continued to clamour for the Republic of Biafra with greater courage and bravery than before. On January 18, 2017, the Nigerian government designated IPOB as a terrorist organisation based on the actions of its leaders and methods of operation. The Nigerian federal government wasted no time in dispatching the military to effectively quell Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and IPOB's uprising in the southeast. This development resulted in numerous confrontations between IPOB and the military, with several deaths on both sides and the destruction of properties, thereby making the region unfit for human habitation. As a result, the leader of IPOB fled the country, fully aware that he was the military's target, while IPOB continued to engage the country's security institutions. The Nigerian government became agitated and went all out for the IPOB leader both at home and abroad, successfully extraditing him from the Republic of Kenya to Nigeria and charging him in court with crimes ranging from hate speech, terrorism, treason, and violence, among others.

The leader of IPOB's firm stance in the struggle, despite being imprisoned, serves as a source of hope and motivation for his men to continue agitation for Biafra's sovereignty. To establish their authority in the region, IPOB declared a Monday sit-at-home order on August 19, 2021, for every week of the month until their leader is released by the Nigerian government. Those who fail to comply with this sit-at-home order face severe consequences, including death. This sit-at-home order has turned the region into a ghost town on Mondays of every week in the month, as almost all activities are halted.

Modus operandi of Unknown Gunmen

Unknown gunmen have wreaked havoc on the southeast's states through kidnapping, armed robbery, political thuggery, separatist movements, terrorism, and conventional armed assaults. These Mephistophelean terrorist acts and activities have resulted in unquantifiable loss of lives and property, exacerbating the region's insecurity.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping is a global issue and no doubt a crime punishable by law in Nigeria and other global nations (Asanebi, 2024). According to Asanebi (2024), kidnapping is the forceful abduction and captivity of a person or group of persons to an unknown destination against the person or group of persons' wishes, typically to obtain a ransom or press home the demands of the kidnappers to the government of the nation or the organisation where the person or group of persons work. He noted further that kidnapping can also be seen as the act of keeping someone confined through coercion for a ransom to be paid for his or her release (Asanebi, 2024). The unknown gunmen adopted kidnapping in their modus operandi to generate revenue through the ransom paid by victim families, friends, organisations, or the state government. These ransom monies are channeled towards their sustainability as a gang, family survival, and the purchasing of arms and ammunition to carry out further attacks and kidnappings in the region. The Unknown gunmen in their modus operandi target wealthy businessmen and women, politicians, government officials, traditional rulers, and all those who stand against their operations and ideologies in the region.

Armed Robbery

Unknown gunmen in their quest to generate revenue engage in armed robbery with such targets as businessmen and women, grocery stores, markets, politicians, and citizens driving exotic cars and living flamboyant lives, etc. Most of the armed robbery activities and operations are carried out on Monday, the sit-at-home day in the region, with no regard for their victims.

Political Thuggery

Many politicians from the southeast region employ thugs before and after their elections, with the sole purpose of assisting them to win their elections. When there are strong oppositions, the job of these thugs is to destroy the opponent's campaign billboards, posters, political rallies, and assassination or kidnapping of any stubborn opposition before the election. Ikporukpo and Rufus (2023) noted that unknown gunmen have become involved in political violence as a means of establishing their influence and power in the region. This political violence has had a profound impact on the local population, causing widespread fear and insecurity as well as undermining the democratic process in the region. It is this political thuggery that metamorphosed into political unknown gunmen in the region.

Separatist Movement

The secessionist/ real unknown gunmen in their activities clamour for the secession of Biafra from the Nigerian State. These unknown gunmen are militia who are prepared to die for the liberation of their people and region. They provide support to the IPOB secessionist group by fighting with security personnel and the Nigerian government with the same ideology of secession. Their modus operandi has exacerbated insecurity and destroyed lives and property, leading many citizens to question whether there are elected governments in the region and the federation.

Terrorism and Conventional Armed Assaults

The activities and operations of unknown gunmen are undoubtedly attributed to terrorism. In their operations and activities, they have terminated the lives of several security personnel and civilians. Unknown gunmen have been credited with the beheading of security personnel, politicians, and civilians who are going about their normal lives and duties as citizens of Nigeria. They rape and sexually assault female victims in their custody, not minding the psychological and mental consequences. Several arsons and attacks on Nigerian police stations, local government headquarters, and military checkpoints have been attributed to unknown gunmen in the region. Traditional rulers who are custodians of the culture are not exempted from the atrocities, as several of them have been kidnapped, with some not making it alive to their families and kinsmen after ransom has been paid for their release. For unknown gunmen, nobody is innocent except those supporting them and Biafra. Private and commercial drivers and their vehicles are not excepted when unknown gunmen are on operations. During operations, they occasionally burn down their victim's vehicles and tricycles after beating and stealing from them. Many drivers and passengers have been kidnapped, and ransom demanded for their release, as failure to comply by their families might result in the brutalisation and occasionally death of their loved ones. Unknown gunmen modus operandi and activities have become emblematic and showcase the weak nature of security institutions and the Nigerian state.

Litany of Unknown Gunmen Attacks and Casualties

The table below shows unknown gunmen's litany of attacks and casualties and doesn't claim to be comprehensive in the southeast from 2021 to 2024.

Table 1.

Date	Litany of Attacks	Casualties	Source
January 8, 2021	The Onueke police station in Ezza South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State was attacked by unknown gunmen.	Three police officers paid the supreme price.	Vanguard Newspaper
February 23, 2021	Abayi police station was attacked by unknown gunmen in Abia State	Two police officers paid the supreme price.	Premium Times
March 20, 2021	Unknown gunmen attacked the divisional police headquarters at Isiala Mbano, Imo State.	Unknown	Premium Times
May 9, 2021	Unknown gunmen attacked the Ubani police station in Trademore Estate, Abia State.	Unknown	This-day Newspaper
May 30, 2021	Unknown gunmen attacked Ahmed Gulak, the former special adviser on politics to the Nigerian former president, in Imo State.	Ahmed Gulak was assassinated by unknown gunmen.	Akinyetun, et al 2023.
July 5, 2021	Unknown gunmen attacked Mr Ifeanyi Okeke, the Executive Officer of Auto Ease, on the Enugu – Port Harcourt expressway.	Ifeanyi Okeke was assassinated by unknown gunmen	Ndah 2021
July 7, 2021	Unknown gunmen attacked Prof. Samuel Ndubuisi, the Director General of the Scientific Equipment Development Institute (SEDI) in Enugu State.	Prof. Samuel Ndubuisi was assassinated by unknown gunmen	Ndah 2021
September 23, 2021	Unknown gunmen attacked a police checkpoint in Nachi, Orji River local government area of Enugu state.	Two police officers paid the supreme price.	Vanguard Newspaper
October 18, 2021	Unknown gunmen attacked the Ohaukwu divisional police headquarters. They set ablaze police operational vehicles and exhibit vehicles parked inside the station.	A police officer paid the supreme price.	The Punch Newspaper
October 19, 2021	Unknown gunmen attacked stakeholders in their meeting at Nnenasa, Njaba local government area of Imo state.	Three traditional rulers were killed, and many were injured.	Nwangqu, 2023
March 21, 2022	Unknown gunmen attacked the Umuguma police station outside Owerri, Imo State.	Two police constables paid the supreme price.	Al Jazeera
May 2 2022	Sergeant A. M. Linus and his wife (a lance corporal from the southeast) were gunned down along with five other colleagues who accompanied the military couple by unknown gunmen. Unknown gunmen beheaded the corpses and called their friends and family members, and posted the conversation and video of their evil and demonic act on social media.	Seven military personnel were killed, and their corpses were beheaded.	Nigerian news
May 2, 2022	Unknown gunmen kidnapped Mr. Okoye Okechukwu, who was representing Aguata II in the Anambra State House of Assembly, and his aide, Mr Cyril Chiegboka, along Aguluzegbo Road, Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State.	Mr Okoye Okechukwu and his aide, Mr Cyril Chiegboka, were killed by unknown gunmen.	Premium Times
June 23, 2022	Unknown gunmen kidnapped a former lawmaker in Anambra State, Hon Nelson Achukwu, who represented Nnewi II in the Anambra State House of Assembly.	Unknown gunmen killed and beheaded Hon Nelson Achukwu after his family reportedly paid a 15-million-naira ransom for his release.	Premium Times
August 24, 2022	Unknown gunmen attacked and killed Mr Henry Chukwu, a bodyguard to Mr Ifeanyi Odii, a former governorship aspirant of the PDP in Ebonyi State. Two other persons were also killed in the attack, which took place in the Isu community in the Onicha local government area of Ebonyi State.	Three persons were killed by unknown gunmen	Premium Times

September 28, 2022	Unknown gunmen attacked a Nigerian army checkpoint at Obeagu-Amodu along Amechi Agbani road in Enugu South local government of Enugu State.	An unspecified number of soldiers and police officers paid the supreme price.	The Punch Newspaper
October 28, 2022	Unknown gunmen set ablaze a section of the Ezza North Local Government Area headquarters in Enugu State, destroying valuable items and documents.	Unknown	Daily Trust Newspaper
November 14, 2022	Unknown gunmen disguised as people under distress killed the traditional ruler of Obadi, Agwa, HRH Igwe Ignatius Asor, and his two aides.	Igwe Ignatius Asor and two others were killed by unknown gunmen.	Premium Times
December 16, 2022	Unknown gunmen macheted and killed the Labour Party candidate for the Onuimo state constituency in Imo state in the House of Assembly election. They also set his house ablaze and destroyed the deceased's properties, including his motorcycle.	One person was killed by unknown gunmen in Imo State.	Premium Times
February 16, 2023	Unknown gunmen killed Mr. Oyibo Chukwu, a senatorial candidate in Enugu State, just hours before the commencement of voting in the Nigerian general election in 2023. The personal assistant to the senatorial candidate was also killed in the same attack	Mr. Oyibo Chukwu and his personal assistant were killed by unknown gunmen.	The Africa Report
February 18, 2023	Unknown gunmen attacked the Nigerian police force station in Ogidi, Ndimili North local government area of Anambra State	Three police officers paid the supreme price	The Cable
February 20, 2023	Seven persons, including the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of Awada police division in Obosi community of Idemili North local government area of Anambra State, were killed in a gun duel with unknown gunmen in Anambra State.	Seven police officers paid the supreme price	David Chyddy (Thisdaylive.com)
March, 2023	Three officers of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) were killed following an ambush in the Obiangwu community in the Ngor-Okpala local government area of Imo State by unknown gunmen.	Three officers of the NSCDC paid the supreme price	Independent Newspaper
May 4, 2023	Unknown gunmen attacked police officers at the Umunze security checkpoint in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State.	Four police officers paid the supreme price	Shun Terrorism
May 16, 2023	Unknown gunmen attacked an advance convoy of the United States Mission in Nigeria as it traveled through a rural part of Anambra State	Four workers of the mission were killed alongside two police officers. Three other people were also abducted by unknown gunmen.	Hanson Institute
July 18, 2023	Unknown gunmen attacked the Isi-Uzo divisional police station in Ikem, Enugu State, and allegedly carted away with arms and ammunition.	Unknown	The Vanguard Newspaper
September 19, 2023	Unknown gunmen attacked and killed security personnel in the Umu-Alumaku community in Ehime Mbano local government area of Imo State. The security personnel were members of the search and flush team, a combined security outfit in the state comprising soldiers and police.	Unknown Their corpses were burnt to prevent people not to identifying them and to indicate how many police officers and soldiers were killed in the attack.	Premium Times
November 16, 2023	Unknown gunmen attacked some police officers on patrol on Nwofe Road on the outskirts of Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.	Two police officers paid the supreme price	Sahara Reporters
December 24, 2023	Unknown gunmen attacked a popular Ebonyi State business mogul, Ojimba, C. Ojimba, on his way to his father's compound for Christmas celebration at Ogbaga Road in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.	Unknown	Nikky world

April 19, 2024	Unknown gunmen attacked and set ablaze the Zone 13 police headquarters in Ukpò, Anambra State.	Three police vehicles were set ablaze	TVC News
May 30, 2024	Unknown gunmen attacked Nigerian Army personnel at a military checkpoint at Obikabia junction in Aba, Abia State. Also, unknown gunmen burnt the patrol vehicles of the soldiers and carted away their ammunition.	Five soldiers paid the supreme price, while six civilians were killed.	Wikipedia
June 2, 2024	Unknown gunmen attacked and killed five soldiers at a military checkpoint in Aba metropolis, Abia State.	Five soldiers paid the supreme price	Thisdaylive.com
June 9, 2024	Unknown gunmen killed a police officer and a civilian at a checkpoint at Akobo near Owerri, Imo State.	Two people lost their lives.	Premium Times
July 7, 2024	Unknown gunmen attacked a police officer in Abia State	Four police personnel paid the supreme price	English New online
July 30, 2024	Unknown gunmen attacked police personnel at a security checkpoint close to Blossom Hotel along Owerri-Onitsha road, Owerri, Imo State.	Four police personnel and a civilian during her private business	Premium Times
August 4, 2024	Unknown gunmen attacked and killed eight Umucheke Okwe community leaders of the Onuimo local government area of Imo State.	Eight community leaders lost their lives	Premium Times
September 2, 2024	Unknown gunmen attacked and bombed the Oba police divisional headquarters in Ndemili South local government area of Anambra State.	A police officer paid the supreme price, with others sustaining injuries	Nigerian Tribune
November 3, 2024	Unknown gunmen attacked soldiers at a checkpoint at Ekenobizi community, a border town between Abia and Imo States in Umuopara, Umuhia South local government area, Abia State.	Two soldiers paid the supreme price	Lindaikejiblog.com
November 18, 2024	Unknown gunmen launched a simultaneous attack on Abatete and Ukpò communities in Ndimil Local Government Area, Anambra State.	Three persons were killed.	Vanguard Newspaper
November 18, 2024	Unknown gunmen attacked and killed a local vigilante on duty at Ukpò roundabout in Dunukofia Local Government Area, Anambra State.	One person was killed.	Lindaikejablog.com

Unknown Gunmen Impact on Internal Security

What is happening in the southeast, from the above, cannot be ruled out as terrorism. The brazen attacks, assassinations, kidnappings, and beheadings by unknown gunmen in the region are too many; as such, the total number of people affected may never be known and accounted for accurately. It is imperative to note that most of the victims may never secure justice. Unknown gunmen, to an extent, operate with a comfortable level of impunity, as there has been no slowdown since the senseless attacks and killings began despite the efforts of the security agencies and the state governments of the region to abate the situation. The absence of relative peace, law, and order in the southeast has affected not just internal security but all sectors of the region. Without peace and security, no meaningful development, education, and commerce can take place in any society, and the Southeast region is no exception. The activities and modus operandi of the unknown gunmen establish insecurity, fear, and anxiety that affect the people's mental stability, psyche, attitude, movement, associations, and activities. These unknown gunmen carry out their activities and operations in the daytime and night, as failure to obey their orders and instructions might lead one to his/her early grave or be kidnapped. The intra-city and inter-city day-to-day transactions of people in the southeast have grossly declined, as many breadwinners, political and traditional leaders, businessmen,

and women, etc, have lost their lives and property. Sardonicly, unknown gunmen have ripped the region's soul apart while also exacerbating internal security, putting the region under siege.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

The discourse examined the south-east region of Nigeria, which has become the hotbed of terrorism emanating from unknown gunmen from 2021 to 2024. The study findings reveal that the modus operandi of unknown gunmen has wrecked the internal security of the region, thereby leading to the death of several security personnel, traditional rulers, politicians, businessmen and women, citizens, and even UGM personnel. However, the study contributed to knowledge by documenting human rights abuses in the litany attacks, contextualising the UGM phenomenon, the rationale behind UGM, types of UGM, the modus operandi of UGM, and their impact on the security of the region. Be that as it may, the limitation of the study lies in the fact that the researcher was not able to cover the litany of attacks or visit any camps or hideouts of UGM in the region. Thus, the study recommended the following to abate UGM;

1. The federal government of Nigeria, in collaboration with southeast governors, traditional rulers, and stakeholders, should summon a round table meeting, dialogue, and address the root causes of secession in the region.
2. Both the federal and state governments should honour their words and agreements reached at the meeting to improve citizen's trust and governance in the region.
3. The federal government of Nigeria should release Nnamdi Kanu from detention, as this gesture will ease the tension and create room for the termination of the unknown gunmen in the region.
4. Severe security and political strategies are needed for the unknown gunmen in the region to curb their actions.
5. Internal security should be strengthened by the security institutions in the region.
6. Security personnel should be trained and retrained with modern security skills and knowledge.
7. Government at the federal and state levels should collaborate in creating jobs for the youth and able-bodied men and women in the region.

The federal government of Nigeria should be concerned with the rationale behind secession, not just in the southeast but throughout the country, and scholars should study secession and provide solutions to this menace in Nigeria. The study concludes that the southeast is under siege due to the activities and operations of unknown gunmen, as Nigerians are no longer safe in the region.

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