

GUNS AND SILENCE: THE PARADOX OF MILITARIZATION AND PASTORALIST INSECURITY IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA (2021–2025)

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Abstract

The study investigates the paradox between militarization and the persistence of pastoralist insecurity in Southeast Nigeria between 2021 and 2025. The central objective is to assess whether militarization strategies have been effective in curbing insecurity associated with herdsmen violence. The study adopts securitization theory to frame the analysis, focusing on how security threats are constructed and how state responses shape outcomes. The method of data collection is documentary, minimizing personal bias, while content analysis is used to interpret key incidents, policy measures, and patterns. Evidence shows that, despite the widespread presence of military forces across the region, herdsmen-related attacks have continued unabated. These findings question the effectiveness of militarized strategies—particularly the use of checkpoints—in addressing internal security challenges such as pastoralist violence. The study recommends removing military checkpoints in residential and community areas and implementing targeted border security measures to prevent unauthorized herdsmen crossings. These recommendations provide a more sustainable approach to improving security in Southeast Nigeria

Keywords: *Militarization, Pastoralist Insecurity, Southeast Nigeria, Security Checkpoints*

Introduction

Nigeria has confronted one of the most profound crises of internal security in Africa over the past decade, with patterns of violence escalating across different regions and undermining national stability (Orhero, 2020; Akinola, 2024; Ogunleye et al., 2024). Over 63,000 people were killed in Nigeria between 2011 and 2021 as a result of insurgency, communal clashes, banditry, and pastoralist-related violence (Ukoji&Ukoji, 2023), with the southeastern states witnessing a sharp rise in insecurity after 2021 (Mbachu& Anyadike, 2021). These dynamics have not only eroded public confidence in the state's capacity to secure lives and property but have also imposed devastating socio-economic consequences, including displacement, food insecurity, and the collapse of rural economies (Okonkwo, Umeasiegbo, & Umeokafor, 2023). The persistence of violence underscores the widening insecurity trap in Nigeria, where government responses appear to generate mixed outcomes and sometimes deepen the very crises they are intended to address.

Herders–farmer violence represents one of the most acute dimensions of this insecurity, with the

Southeast emerging as a troubling hotspot (Nwapi, 2025). Tensions between largely Fulani pastoralists and sedentary farming communities have transformed from resource competition into protracted conflicts shaped by ethnic and religious narratives, political manipulation, and economic dispossession (Ajala, 2020; Nwankwo, 2024; Nwapi, 2025). Estimates suggest that more than 3,600 people lost their lives to herders–farmers clashes nationwide between 2016 and 2021, while hundreds of thousands were displaced (Joab-Peterside, 2020; Amnesty International, 2018, as cited in Ifegwu et al., 2022). In the Southeast, states like Ebonyi, Enugu, and Anambra recorded recurrent attacks between 2021 and 2025, with media reports of massacres in rural communities making national headlines (Mbachu& Anyadike, 2021). Alongside this, the Nigerian government has also securitized other regional threats such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), framing separatist agitation as an existential danger to national unity (Onuoha et al., 2021; Amadi, Allen, & Mai-Bornu, 2023). These overlapping insecurities have positioned the Southeast as a heavily militarized space, where civilian life is increasingly mediated by security operations, checkpoints, and counter-insurgency deployments (Emelife& Obi, 2024).

However, there is an existential paradox in the Southeast region's security context. Despite the extensive deployment of military forces since 2021—including joint task forces, mobile police units, and specialized counter-insurgency squads—attacks linked to pastoralist violence persist (Nwangwu, 2023). Villages in Benue and border communities in Ebonyi and Enugu states continued to witness raids, killings, and kidnappings between 2021 and 2025, with survivors recounting the failure of security forces to provide adequate protection (Ohazuruike, Elechi, & Eze, 2024; Uzoho, 2023). Government narratives emphasise “kinetic responses” as the central tool of state authority, yet field reports and local testimonies repeatedly suggest a disconnect between militarization and actual security outcomes (Ejiofor, 2025). The visible presence of soldiers contrasts sharply with ongoing displacement, the destruction of farmland, and widening mistrust between communities and state actors. This paradox raises a pressing research question: Has militarization been effective in curbing insecurity associated with herdsmen violence in Southeast Nigeria between 2021 and 2025?

Scholarly literature has engaged with these issues in significant but often fragmented ways. Studies on pastoralist–farmer conflicts have interrogated the environmental, economic, and ethnic dimensions of the clashes, highlighting drivers such as climate change, competition over land, and migration pressures (Ajala, 2020; Allison, 2021; Nwangwu et al., 2020). Other works have examined the broad security challenges in Nigeria, emphasizing how the proliferation of small arms, weak governance, and institutional corruption exacerbate violence (Omitola et al., 2021; Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023). Research on militarization in the Southeast has also gained traction, particularly with the focus on separatist agitations, securitization of dissent, and the militarized response of the Nigerian state (Amadi et al., 2023; Nwangwu, 2023; Emelife & Obi, 2024). However, what remains underexplored is the specific effectiveness of militarization as a strategy in addressing herdsmen-related insecurity in the Southeast during the critical period of 2021 to 2025. Most analyses treat militarization as either an inevitable response to state fragility or as a manifestation of authoritarian tendencies, yet few measure its outcomes in terms of actual

security for affected communities. This gap in literature is not trivial. While government policies often highlight the necessity of military deployments, communities on the ground measure effectiveness by whether farms are safe, families can return to villages, and markets can function without fear of attack. Without assessing these outcomes, scholarly and policy debates risk remaining abstract and detached from lived realities. The present study addresses this omission by evaluating the efficacy of militarization in reducing insecurity tied to herdsman violence in the Southeast between 2021 and 2025.

The significance of this inquiry lies at both theoretical and practical levels. On the theoretical side, the study contributes to debates on securitization and civil–military relations, questioning whether heavy militarization in fragile democratic contexts enhances security or entrenches cycles of violence (Ifegwu et al., 2022; Nwangwu, 2023). It also enriches scholarship on the paradox of state power in postcolonial Africa, where security expansion often coexists with insecurity proliferation (Pflaum, 2021). On the practical level, findings hold implications for policymakers seeking more effective responses to farmer–herder crises, civil society organizations advocating for human security, and local communities demanding accountability. Understanding whether militarization produces tangible reductions in violence—or merely shifts its dynamics—is crucial for rethinking Nigeria's broader security strategy and for advancing pathways toward sustainable peace in the Southeast.

Theoretical Framework

Securitization theory provides a useful lens for interrogating how herdsman-related insecurity and militarization have been constructed and addressed in Southeast Nigeria. The theory, pioneered by the Copenhagen School—particularly the works of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde—shifts the analysis of security away from material threats alone to the processes through which issues are framed as existential dangers requiring extraordinary measures (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). According to the theory, security is not an objective condition but rather the outcome of speech acts, where political leaders, state institutions, or influential actors define certain phenomena as threats to survival (Williams, 2003). Once securitized, these issues move beyond the realm of normal politics into the realm of emergency measures. Here, extraordinary responses, often involving coercion and militarization are legitimated. In the context of the study, extraordinary measures refer to the full spectrum of militarized state interventions that deviate from routine law enforcement and governance. These include, but are not limited to: The deployment of soldiers and mobile police, the establishment of permanent and mobile military checkpoints, cordon-and-search operations, joint security task forces, curfews and movement restrictions, as well as routine armed patrols along highways. These measures represent the extraordinary mechanisms through which the state has sought to address herdsman-related violence in Southeast Nigeria, and they form the empirical focus of this study's evaluation.

In academic works, securitization theory has been applied to diverse issues such as migration in Europe, terrorism in the post-9/11 world, and public health during the COVID-19 pandemic

(Balzacq, 2011; Floyd, 2019). Within African contexts, securitization has been invoked to analyze how states frame insurgencies, protests, separatist agitations, and pastoralist violence as threats that justify expansive state interventions (Behr, 2015; Appiagyei-Atua et al., 2017; Adesanya, 2023; Ameh, 2025). For instance, research has shown that the Nigerian state has historically securitized the Boko Haram insurgency, elevating it to the status of an existential danger to national unity and legitimizing military operations across the Northeast (Omitola et al., 2021). Similar processes have been identified in state responses to separatist agitations in the Southeast, where the government consistently represents the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a threat to sovereignty and territorial integrity, thereby justifying heavy militarization of the region (Amadi, Allen, & Mai-Bornu, 2023; Nwangwu, 2023). Securitization theory also draws attention to the actors involved in the process, the audience whose acceptance validates securitization moves, and the consequences that follow. In Nigeria, securitization of herdsmen violence has involved state officials, security chiefs, and political elites who repeatedly construct pastoralist-related violence as a national security crisis. Such framing has been reinforced by media coverage and civil society discourses, which often portray Fulani herders as armed aggressors threatening community survival and food security (Ajala, 2020; Okonkwo, Umeasiegbu, & Umeokafor, 2023). Yet, while securitization provides justification for militarized interventions, it does not necessarily resolve the underlying causes of insecurity. The application of this framework to the study of Southeast Nigeria between 2021 and 2025 underlines a paradox: militarization has been legitimated through securitization discourses, framing herdsmen attacks as existential threats to regional stability. Hence, the Nigerian state adopted extraordinary measures, including the deployment of soldiers, military patrols, checkpoints, raids, joint security operations, and cordon-and-search operations across affected communities. These military actor behaviors represent the operationalization of securitization theory's "extraordinary measures" premise and constitute the mechanisms through which the state sought to address herdsmen-related insecurity.

The study, therefore, utilizes securitization theory to evaluate whether these exceptional military responses translated into improved security outcomes. Empirical evidence, however, suggests that such deployments have not eliminated insecurity. Most villages across Enugu, Ebonyi, and Anambra continued to experience killings and displacements despite visible military operations (Ohazuruike, Elechi, & Eze, 2024; Ejiofor, 2025). Also, kidnappings persisted along highways heavily littered with checkpoints (Sahara Reporters, 2024; FIJ News, 2025). These raise critical questions about the effectiveness of securitization processes: whether framing an issue as an existential security threat actually enhances public safety, or primarily serves to legitimize coercive state interventions while communities remain vulnerable. Thus, this paradox—the gap between securitized rhetoric, extraordinary military action, and persistent insecurity—forms the central analytical question that the study investigates.

Methodology

The study is situated within the qualitative research tradition, which prioritizes depth over breadth, meaning over measurement, and context over generalization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative inquiry is particularly suited to investigating social phenomena such as insecurity, state responses, and community experiences, where understanding the how and why of human behaviour and institutional action requires immersion in textual and narrative data rather than statistical abstraction. In this spirit, the study adopted the documentary method of data collection, which involves the systematic use of existing records, reports, and publications to generate evidence for scholarly analysis. This approach aligns with qualitative principles by minimizing researcher bias while allowing for interpretive richness and contextual depth (Mogalakwe, 2006).

Academic literature was sourced from Google Scholar using search terms such as “herdsmen violence Southeast Nigeria,” “farmer-herder conflict Enugu,” and “militarization and insecurity Nigeria.” To ensure academic rigor, only peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reputable theoretical texts, such as those by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) and Balzacq (2011) were included. Also, given the study's focus on contemporary events and state responses, media reports formed the primary empirical data source. These were retrieved from major Nigerian news outlets, including *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Guardian*, *Premium Times*, *Sahara Reporters*, *Daily Post*, *THISDAY*, and *FIJ.ng*, as well as international media like *Anadolu Agency*. Additionally, social media platforms (Facebook) and video reports were incorporated to capture real-time accounts and eyewitness narratives of specific incidents, providing granular detail often absent in formal reports. Reports from civil society organizations, such as *Intersociety*, were also included for their investigative depth. Documents were purposively selected based on three criteria:

1. **Relevance:** direct coverage of herdsmen-related violence, community attacks, state security responses (including checkpoints and military deployments), or separatist agitations in Southeast Nigeria.
2. **Source Credibility:** for media, preference was given to established outlets with editorial standards, named authors, and corroborated details. For social media, posts were selected only when they documented specific, verifiable events (e.g., video evidence or geo-located incidents). Academic sources were required to be peer-reviewed.
3. **Temporal Scope:** coverage of the period 2021–2025, which marks the peak of reported herder–farmer violence and the subsequent intensification of militarized state responses, including the establishment of numerous security checkpoints across the region.

To interpret the gathered data, the study adopted content analysis as the central analytical tool. This qualitative technique enables systematic examination of texts to identify recurring themes, policy directions, and patterns of discourse (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis focused on language used in policy statements, the framing of herdsmen-related insecurity in media narratives, and scholarly evaluations of state interventions. Particular attention was given to

identifying consistencies and contradictions between official security narratives and documented outcomes, such as the persistence of kidnappings despite heavy military checkpoints. For media and social media sources, the analysis catalogued reported incident frequencies, victim accounts, and community responses, allowing for a grounded assessment of the actual security situation on the ground. Hence, the combination of academic theory, media accounts, and social media reports allowed for triangulation of data from diverse sources, reducing the risk of bias inherent in any single source type. Where discrepancies emerged, for example, between official government pronouncements and media documentation of extortion at checkpoints, multiple independent sources were cross-referenced to establish a more balanced and evidence-based account. This framework ensured that the study maintained objectivity, avoided speculative claims, and provided findings rooted in verifiable evidence (Bowen, 2009).

Militarization in Southeast Nigeria

Militarization in Southeast Nigeria between 2021 and 2025 has been one of the most visible features of the federal government's response to insecurity. The Nigerian state consistently justified heavy troop deployment as a necessary step to confront pastoralist violence and the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Ifegwu et al., 2022; Nwangwu, 2023). Official statements emphasized that these threats were existential, capable of undermining Nigeria's sovereignty, food security, and territorial integrity (Nwezeh, 2021). This framing followed the logic of securitization, where government actors elevated and prioritized security challenges and separatist agitation into matters of survival, thereby legitimizing extraordinary measures. In practice, these measures translated into the large-scale deployment of armed forces, the establishment of roadblocks, and the intensification of surveillance across the region.

Table 1: A Glimpse of Checkpoint Proliferation and Military Presence in Southeast

States	S/N	Checkpoints
Abia	1	Army Check Point, adjacent to the House of the Rt. Hon. Speaker of FHR, along Umuahia – Ohafia – Bende Road, Ohafia LGA, Abia State
	2	Eluama – Isiukwuano beside Common Wealth Hotels Isiukwuano LGA, Abia State
	3	Ohafia/ Nguzu Junction, Abriba – Ohafia Road, Ohafia LGA, Abia State.
	4	Better Life Junction along Enugu -Okigwe Expressway, Abia State
	5	JTF Check Point at Isugwu Junction, Akanu, Ohafia LGA, Abia State
	6	JTF Check Point at Idima Abam Road, Arochukwu LGA, Abia State
	7	Army Checking Point at Front of Ohafia Local Government Council Headquarters, Ohafia LGA, Abia State

	8	Army Checking Point beside the gate of Ohafia Federal Government College, Ohafia LGA, Abia State
	9	Army Check Point at IyiOmenuko Bridge, Ozu Abam, Arochukwu LGA, Abia State
	10	Military Check Point at Imo – Rivers Boundary, Ukwa West LGA, Abia State
	11	Military Check Point by China Civil Construction Company (CCCC) gate along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ukwa West LGA
	12	Military Check Point at Oil Serve Junction along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ukwa West LGA, Abia State
	13	Military Check Point by Primemoore Filling Station along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ukwa West LGA, Abia State
	14	Military Check Point at Imo Gate Flyover by Old Obigbo Road, Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ukwa West LGA, Abia State
	15	Military Check Point by Chippings Dump along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ukwa West LGA, Abia State
	16	Military Check Point opposite Coral Gold Filling Station along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ukwa West LGA, Abia State
	17	Military Check Point by China Steel Company Gate along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ukwa West LGA, Abia State
	18	Military Check Point by 144 Battalion Nigerian Army, at former Asa High School Junction along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway Ukwa West LGA, Abia State
	19	Military Check Point by Nwaiyiekwe Junction along, Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ukwa West LGA, Abia State
	20	Military Check Point by Ihe Junction along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ugwunagbo LGA, Abia State
	21	Military Check Point at the Front of EEDC Gate along Port – Aba Harcourt Expressway Ugwunagbo LGA, Abia State
	22	Military Check Point at Alaoji Motor Spare Parts Market, Asa Nnentu, along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ugwunagbo LGA Abia State
	23	Military Check Point at Uratta Building Materials/ Onion Market along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Ugwunagbo LGA, Abia State
	24	JTF Check Point by Faulks Road/ Ariara Junction along Port Harcourt – Aba Expressway, Osisioma LGA, Abia State.
	25	Umuikkaa Junction along Aba-Enugu Expressway Ishiala Ngwa South LGA Abia State

	26	Imo River Bridge, Owerinta along Aba- Owerri Road Ishiala Ngwa South LGA, Abia State
	27	Tonimas Junction behind BICOZ Fast Food along Aba-Enugu Expressway Osisioma LGA, Abia State
	28	Beside ABSU gate Uturu, Isuikwuato LGA Abia State
	29	Nunya junction along Okigwe-Umuahia express road, Isuikwuato LGA Abia State
	30	Military Base at Ariam Usaka, Ikwuano LGA, Abia State
	31	JTF Check Point Ahia-Ohuru Aba South LGA, Abia State
	32	JTF Check Point Ngwa Road by Cemetery, Abia South LGA, Abia State
	33	JTF Check Point Emelogu junction Ogbor Hill, Aba South LGA, Abia State
	34	JTF Check Point Obikabo Junction Ogbor Hill, Aba South LGA, Abia State
	35	JTF Check Point Opopo Junction Ogbor Hill, Aba South LGA, Abia State
	36	Military Checkpoint at Uzuakoli by Ozuitem Road Junction, Bende LGA, Abia State
	37	Military Checkpoint at Urban Market along Umuahia – Uzuakoli Road, Bende LGA, Abia State
	38	Military Checkpoint at Ntigh Junction along Port Harcourt – Enugu Expressway, IsialaNgwa North LGA, Abia State
	39	Military Checkpoint at Arongwa Junction along Port Harcourt – Enugu Expressway, Ngwa North LGA, Abia State Osisioma LGA, Abia State
	40	Military Checkpoint at Ihieoji, along PortHarcourt – Enugu Expressway Road, IsialaNgwa North LGA, Abia State
Anambra	1	Army Check Point opposite Primary School by St. Theresa’s Catholic Church, Uli, Ihiala LGA, Anambra State
	2	Naval Check Point at Awkuzu Junction along Awka – Onitsha Road Expressway, Anambra State
	3	Army Check Point by ICC Awka, along Amansea, old Awka Road, Awka South LGA, Anambra State
	4	JTF Military Check Point at Ekwulobia – Isufia Road, Aguata LGA, Anambra State
	5	Oko – Umunze Road, Orumba North LGA, Anambra State
	6	Nanka – Agulu Road by Rock Tamar Junction, Nanka, Orumba North LGA, Anambra State
	7	Opposite Aguata Local Government Council Headquarters, Ekwulobia – Aguluezechukwu Road, Aguata LGA, Anambra State

	8	Head bridge entrance police checkpoint
	9	Head bridge entrance army checkpoint
	10	Head bridge under bridge police checkpoint
	11	Upper Iweka under flyover police checkpoint
	12	Iweka Road (Izuchukwu Park front) police checkpoint
	13	Owerri Road police checkpoint
	14	Owerri Road army checkpoint
	15	Awka Road to main market police checkpoint
	16	New Tarzan Park police checkpoint
	17	MgbukaObosi Junction police checkpoint
	18	Electrical market Junction police checkpoint
	19	Owerri Road express new flyover police (under flyover) police checkpoint
	20	Obosi Road entrance from New flyover police checkpoint
	21	Between Ochanja and main market police checkpoint
	22	Oba Road army checkpoint
	23	Awkuzu Junction army checkpoint
	24	Awkuzu Junction FRSC checkpoint
	25	Dunukofia LG police checkpoint
	26	Enugu ukwu Junction police checkpoint
	27	Amawbia Junction police checkpoint
	28	Unizik Junction army checkpoint
	29	Mopol base Awka Junction police checkpoint
	30	Prince and Princess hostel front army checkpoint
	31	Amansea boundary police checkpoint
	32	Front of Abbott Boys Secondary School, along Owerri – Onitsha Expressway, Ihiala LGA, Anambra State
	33	Military Check Point Onusorogu Junction Amichi Nnewi along Oba-Nnewi-Amichi-Okigwe Road Nnewi South LGA, Anambra State
	34	Military Checkpoint at Uga Junction Ogbaru LGA, Anambra State
Ebonyi	1	Acha junction, along Mile 2 and before mile 2 junction Ivo LGA, Ebonyi State.
	2	Ezzamgbo axis of Abakaliki-Enugu Expressway
	3	Nkwoagu axis of Abakaliki-Afikpo Highway
	4	Egbeagu axis of Abakaliki-Ogoja Trans Sahara Highway
	5	Enugu-Ebonyi Boundary: A major checkpoint where security agents (police/Road Safety) often collect fees from commercial drivers.

	6	Ishieke Checkpoint: Frequently identified as a permanent, notorious spot for extortion of motorists, including Okada and tricycle operators.
	7	Onuebonyi Area: A heavily monitored, high-traffic checkpoint area.
	8	Afikpo Expressway/Amasiri: Checkpoints along this route, specifically near Afikpo and Amasiri, are frequently mentioned.
	9	Ishiagu Boundary: A border point between Ebonyi and Abia State, noted for frequent stops.
	10	Izzi-Ikwo-Cross River Boundary: A checkpoint connecting Ebonyi to neighboring Cross River State.
Enugu	1	Ugwuoba boundary (police)
	2	Ugwuoba bridge (police)
	3	Ugwuoba Junction (army)
	4	Ugwuoba Junction (NDLEA)
	5	Ugwuoba Junction (FRSC)
	6	Ugwuoba Central (army)
	7	Oji river Junction (army 1)
	8	Oji River Junction (army 2)
	9	Ezeagu express (army)
	10	Near Nkwoezeagu (police)
	11	Near tiles factory (police)
	12	UmumbaNdiuno express (police 1)
	13	UmumbaNdiuno express (police 2)
	14	Nsude express –approach to ninth mile (police)
	15	Ngwo express (army)
	16	Ngwo express (Anti-terror Squad)
	17	Onyeama Hill –near refuse dump (army)
	18	Onyeama Hill –near coal mine (army)
	19	Abakpa interchange (police)
	20	Abakpa Junction (FRSC)
	21	New Kenyetta along Enugu – Okigwe Expressway Ugwuaji LGA Enugu State (army)
	22	Ituku Military Check Point along Enugu – Okigwe Expressway, ItukuIsuawa, Agwu LGA, Enugu State
	23	Amechi Agbani Link Road, Enugu South LGA, Enugu State (army)
	24	Umuogbalhe along Enugu – Okigwe Expressway, Agwu LGA, Enugu State (army)

	25	Nnenwe Junction along Enugu – Okigwe Expressway, Agwu LGA, Enugu State (army)
	26	Agwu Mgbowo Aki naUkwa Junction along Enugu -Okigwe Expressway, Agwu LGA, Enugu State (army)
	27	Abia – Enugu Boundary, along Enugu –Okigwe Expressway (army)
	28	Army Check Point Udi, Four Corner, Nkanu-East LGA, Enugu State
	29	Army Check Point Amodu, Nkanu West LGA, Enugu State
	30	4-Corner Junction, Amagunze, Nkanu East LGA, Enugu State (army)
	31	Obollo-Eke road, Udenu LGA, Enugu State (police)
	32	Obollo-Eke road, Udenu LGA, Enugu State (army 1)
	33	Obollo-Eke road, Udenu LGA, Enugu State (army 2)
	34	Nsukka-Obollo road, Igbo-Eze South LGA, Enugu State (police 1)
	35	Nsukka-Obollo road, Igbo-Eze South LGA, Enugu State (police 2)
	36	Aji Enugwu-Ezike, Igbo-Eze North LGA, Enugu State (Army)
	37	AmufieEnugwu-Ezike, Igbo-Eze North LGA, Enugu State (police)
	38	InyiEnugwu-Ezike, Igbo-Eze North LGA, Enugu State (army)
	39	Idodo Military Checkpoint, Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State
	40	Umuhu bridge in Eha-Amufu, Isi-Uzo LGA, Enugu State
	41	Eha-Amufu – Ikem Road, Isi-Uzo LGA, Enugu State
	42	Military Checkpoint at Ugwuonyeama, Enugu North LGA, Enugu State
	43	Air Force Checkpoint by NAF Base along Trans-Ekulu, Enugu East LGA, Enugu State
	44	Military Check Point in front of Peace University, along Enugu - Opi Road, Igbo-Etiti LGA, Enugu State
	45	Military Check Point Iheaka, along Enugu -Makurdi Road, Igbo - Eze LGA, Enugu State
Imo	1	PDS Anara – Amaraku Road in Isiala Mbano LGA Imo State
	2	Akachi Junction, Aba – Owerri Expressway, Naze, Owerri North LGA Imo State
	3	Umuowa by Imo Airport Junction, Aba – Owerri Expressway, Umuowa, Ngor-Okpala LGA Imo State
	4	Ugwu Orji along Owerri – Onitsha Expressway, by Umunoha junction, Mbaitoli LGA Imo State
	5	Ogii-Isiokwe along Okigwe/Umuahia express road, Okigwe LGA. Imo State
	6	Umualumoke junction, Ugwuaku Road, along Okigwe-Umuahia express road, Okigwe LGA. Imo State
	7	Ubahu, opp. Camp Faith Ubahu, Okigwe LGA, Imo State
	8	Okigwe-Uturu junction, along ABSU road, Okigwe LGA Imo State

	9	Amawel junction, Ubomini Town along Owerri – Orlu Road Mbaitoli LGA, Imo State
	10	Opposite Nkwerre Local Government Council Headquarters, Nkwerre LGA Imo State
	11	Front of Ehime Mbano Local Government Council Headquarters along Aba Branch– Umuahia Road, Umuezeala, Ehime Mbano LGA, Imo State
	12	Military Check Point adjacent to Timber Market, along Orlu – Owerri Road, Orlu LGA, Imo State
	13	Ekeahara Junction, AhiazuMbaise LGA, Imo State
	14	Umulolo junction along Port Harcourt – Enugu Expressway, Okigwe LGA, Imo State
	15	Ihube Junction along Enugu – Port Harcourt Expressway, Okigwe LGA, Imo State
	16	Ihube Cashew Plantation, along Enugu – Port Harcourt Expressway, Okigwe LGA, Imo State
	17	Ihube/Isuochi Boundary along, Enugu – Port Harcourt Expressway, Okigwe LGA, Imo State
	18	Limca Junction by FGC, along Enugu – Port Harcourt Expressway, Okigwe LGA, Imo State
	19	Military Check Point Unuapu, along Owerri – Port Harcourt Expressway, Ohaji Egemba LGA, Imo State
	20	Military Check Point Mgbirichi – Obinze Boundary, along Owerri – Port Harcourt Expressway, Ohaji Egemba LGA, Imo State
	21	Army Check Point by Umuokanne Junction, along Owerri – Port Harcourt Expressway Owerri West LGA, Imo State
	22	Military Checkpoint Egbema Production Center (NPDC) Egbema, Ohaji-Egbena LGA, Imo State
	23	Army Check Point opposite Emmanuel Anglican Church Mgbidi, along Owerri – Onitsha Expressway, Oru West LGA, Imo State
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(Source: compiled by the author from sources including Nwamu, 2020; Aroh, 2020; Nworie, 2021; Tochukwu, 2022; Sahara Reporters, 2022; The Sun Nigeria, 2023; Akinfehinwa, 2024; Benneth, 2024; Sahara Reporters, 2025; Igbo Di Uso Media, 2025; Habaklef, 2025; Abugu, 2025; Vanguard, 2025)

The table presents a snapshot of security deployment across the five states of Southeast Nigeria, highlighting the wide geographical spread of checkpoints and military formations during the study period. Checkpoints are shown to be concentrated along major motorways, state boundaries, commercial corridors, and urban entry points, reflecting an emphasis on controlling movement within and across the region. Government authorities justified this scale of deployment as a response to prevailing security concerns in the region, framing the presence of armed personnel as a necessary measure to restore order and maintain stability. Abia and Enugu States record particularly dense clusters along interstate highways and industrial routes, while Anambra shows a mix of army, police, naval, and FRSC checkpoints around major markets, bridges, and transport hubs. The table does not claim exhaustiveness, as it only documents identified locations at specific points in time and does not capture all temporary or mobile checkpoints that may operate intermittently.

Taken together, the distribution outlined in the table illustrates how militarization has become embedded in everyday mobility across the region. Security presence extends beyond rural flashpoints into urban centers, market areas, educational zones, and residential-adjacent roads, which suggest a broad spatial reach of enforcement activities. The variety of agencies involved, including the army, police, joint task forces, and other security bodies, points to a layered security architecture rather than a single, unified deployment pattern. While the table serves as a limited glimpse, it helps map the physical footprint of militarization across Southeast Nigeria and provides a concrete basis for understanding how security infrastructure is positioned within civilian spaces during the period under review.

Herdsmen Related Violence During Militarization in Southeast Nigeria

Herdsmen-related violence persisted across the Southeast between 2021 and 2025 despite the intense militarization of the region. The official rationale for military deployments was to protect rural populations, yet documented cases reveal that attacks continued with alarming frequency. In Enugu State alone, at least 22 major incidents were recorded, leaving more than 200 people dead and displacing thousands (Ede, 2025; Daily Post Nigeria, 2022). The Eha-Amufu massacre of December 2022, where over 50 villagers were killed despite the presence of security checkpoints nearby, highlighted the gap between securitization rhetoric and the lived reality of affected communities (Daily Post Nigeria, 2022). Women-led protests in Enugu in 2025 further illustrated that residents saw militarization as ineffective in stemming violence, as they marched against repeated killings and destruction of farmland (Adeniyi, 2025).

Table 2: Documented Herdsmen Violence in Southeast Nigeria (2021–2025)

State	Number of Reoccurrence	Reported Casualties & Displacements
Enugu	22	Over 200 killed, thousands displaced
Ebonyi	20	Over 146 killed, 3,000+ displaced
Abia	10	Over 100 killed, hundreds displaced
Imo	Many	Multiple deaths, thousands displaced
Anambra	Many	Over 12 communities attacked; dozens killed and displaced

(Source: compiled by the author from sources including Adeniyi, 2025; Alike, 2025; Angelic Voice Media, 2021; Babalola Dawodu, 2022; Daily Post Nigeria, 2022; Emeruwa, 2021; Ede, 2025; EONS Intelligence, 2023 ; Guardian Nigeria, 2022; IbrandTV, 2021; Ige, 2022; Iheaka, 2025; Ikeh, 2025; Makama, 2021; Nnachi& Ede, 2021; Nkwopara, 2025; Okeoma, 2021; Ogunsile, 2025; Okafor, 2021; Okutu, 2021, 2023)

Enugu and Ebonyi states experienced some of the most brutal episodes, with 22 and 20 occurrences respectively. In March 2021, coordinated attacks across seven villages displaced more than 3,000 people in Ebonyi state, with at least 22 confirmed dead (Nnachi& Ede, 2021; Okutu, 2021). Violence did not abate in subsequent years, as kidnappings and killings were still reported in 2023, including the abduction of five residents in August (Okutu, 2023). Even in 2025, massacres such as the killings in Akaeze point up the continued vulnerability of farming communities (Alike, 2025). These figures suggest that despite military checkpoints and surveillance, violence persisted with devastating human and economic costs.

Abia State recorded at least 10 major incidents, including killings of university students and kidnappings of undergraduates (Okeoma, 2021). The state government had earlier assented to an anti-open grazing law, but enforcement was weak, and repeated invasions left hundreds displaced (Emeruwa, 2021). Imo State also witnessed frequent attacks, such as the May 2025 shooting spree in rural communities that left villagers injured and displaced (Iheaka, 2025), and the August 2025 killing of vigilante leaders during herdsmen incursions (Nkwopara, 2025; Ogunsile, 2025). These events confirmed that state policies and military deployments did little to deter armed herders who continued to strike at will.

Anambra was particularly controversial because the state government frequently denied or downplayed incidents. However, multiple independent reports confirmed massacres and displacements. In April 2021, Fulani herdsmen attacked Odumegwu Ojukwu University hostel, killing students in their rooms (iBrandTV, 2021). That same year, communities across Ayamelum and Anam reported deaths and destruction (Okafor, 2021). In December 2022, herdsmen attacked Nnewi South, killing 17 people and burning homes (Guardian Nigeria, 2022). Despite official denials, evidence showed that at least 12 communities were repeatedly targeted between 2021 and 2024, leaving lasting scars on the state's social fabric (Okafor, 2021;

Angelic Voice Media, 2021).

The foregoing suggest that rather than declining under militarization, attacks either remained constant or evolved into new forms, such as kidnappings near heavily militarized highways. Reports showed that the Enugu–Port Harcourt expressway, lined with checkpoints, became a hotspot for abductions by the herdsmen (Ugwu, 2022; Vanguard, 2022; Sahara Reporters, 2024). In some cases, security forces themselves were implicated in extortion and unlawful detentions, further undermining public trust (Ugwu, 2024). The persistence of massacres in Enugu, Ebonyi, and Anambra, alongside frequent attacks in Imo and Abia, shows that militarization may have intensified securitization rhetoric but failed to reduce the underlying drivers of violence. Instead, the Southeast experienced a paradox where military presence coexisted with high casualty rates, mass displacement, and community-level trauma (Babalola Dawodu, 2022).

Conclusion

The study set out to examine the impact of militarization on herdsmen-related violence in Southeast Nigeria between 2021 and 2025. The primary objective was to determine whether the deployment of troops, establishment of hundreds of checkpoints, and securitizing rhetoric by the state effectively reduced pastoralist-related insecurity. The findings reveal that despite the intensity of military presence, attacks by herdsmen persisted across Enugu, Ebonyi, Abia, Imo, and Anambra. Massacres, kidnappings, and displacements occurred in rural communities even in areas close to checkpoints, while widespread extortion at roadblocks undermined the legitimacy of the state's security approach. The persistence of violence despite militarization shows that securitization measures largely failed to address the root causes of insecurity. Instead, the Southeast remained vulnerable to killings, mass displacements, and the destruction of livelihoods, highlighting a disconnection between government security narratives and the lived realities of citizens.

Recommendations

To enhance security in the Southeast, the study recommends that military checkpoints within residential and community areas should be dismantled, as they have proven ineffective against herdsmen violence and often serve as sites of extortion and abuse. Efforts should instead be directed toward targeted border security measures and surveillance technology, to prevent unauthorized herdsmen crossings into farming settlements. Complementary policies such as strict enforcement of anti-open grazing laws and investment in rural policing, should also be prioritized. These measures would not only address the mobility of armed herdsmen but also rebuild public trust in state institutions by shifting security away from militarized posturing to people-centered strategies.

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