



CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ECONOMIC DECLINE IN IGBO MARKETS AND MILITARISATION OF THE REGION: THE CHALLENGE OF FAILURE OF POLITICAL CLASS TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC INJUSTICES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: This study undertakes a critical reflection on the nexus between economic decline in Igbo markets and the intensification of militarisation across South Eastern Nigeria, with particular reference to the destabilisation of commercial activities in major trading hubs such as Onitsha Main Market. The main objective of the study is to interrogate the extent to which coercive security practices have contributed to the disruption of trade, erosion of investor confidence, and the gradual contraction of regional market systems. The study adopts a descriptive survey and explanatory research design, utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data were sourced from primary instruments including structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and key informant engagements, as well as secondary materials derived from government reports, academic literature, and investigative publications such as those of Premium Times. Analytical procedures were conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical tools, complemented by thematic content analysis, while the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) served as the principal analytical software. Methodologically, the study employed triangulation, stratified and purposive sampling techniques, and cross-validation strategies to enhance reliability and validity, with the Yaro Yamane (1967) formula utilised to determine a statistically representative sample size. The theoretical foundation is anchored on Political Economy Theory, Theory of State Fragility, and Institutional Theory, which collectively illuminate the dynamics of power, governance failure, and economic distortion. The findings reveal that the proliferation of security checkpoints and systemic extortion have significantly increased transportation costs and distorted market pricing mechanisms; that traders and transporters from neighbouring states such as Enugu State and Delta State increasingly avoid major markets due to insecurity, thereby reducing commercial inflows; and that governance inertia and weak institutional oversight have entrenched a cycle of economic decline and public distrust. In response, the study recommends comprehensive security sector reforms, enforcement of accountability mechanisms, and the introduction of transparent transport and market regulatory frameworks. It concludes, in the most emphatic terms, that without a decisive recalibration of security governance and institutional responsibility, the South Eastern region risks a sustained trajectory of economic disarticulation and systemic decline.

Keywords: Economy, Security, Justice, Governance, Conflict, Development

Introduction

The South-East region of Nigeria, historically renowned for its entrepreneurial dynamism, resilient commercial networks, and strong indigenous industrial base, has in

recent years experienced a profound decline in its economic vitality and social cohesion. Once celebrated as a hub of small and medium-scale enterprise development, innovation, and interregional trade, the region now faces a

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troubling combination of insecurity, political inertia, and structural marginalisation within the Nigerian federation. Central to this unfolding crisis is the growing militarisation of the region, which has altered the socio-economic landscape and heightened tensions between the state and the citizenry. The prolonged detention and trial of Nnamdi Kanu under terrorism-related allegations have further deepened grievances among sections of the population, reinforcing narratives of injustice, political exclusion, and selective application of the rule of law. These developments have coincided with the emergence of enforced “sit-at-home” orders, particularly on Mondays, which have disrupted commercial activities, paralysed transportation systems, and significantly eroded productivity across urban and rural markets.

The cumulative impact of these dynamics has been severe: markets remain intermittently deserted, investment inflows have dwindled, educational activities are frequently interrupted, and the general quality of life has deteriorated. Traders, artisans, civil servants, and daily wage earners bear the brunt of these disruptions, as economic uncertainty becomes entrenched. Notably, the response of the political class—comprising elected officials, regional leaders, and state governors—has largely been characterised by silence, fragmentation, or perceived complicity, thereby exacerbating public distrust and governance deficits.

This study therefore seeks to critically interrogate the interplay between economic decline, security policies, and political leadership failure in the South-East. It aims to unpack the structural and immediate causes of the region’s socio-economic downturn, assess the implications of militarisation and civil resistance strategies, and evaluate the extent to which systemic injustices within Nigeria’s political framework have contributed to the present crisis.

Research Questions

1. To what extent have militarisation and “sit-at-home” orders driven economic decline in Igbo markets?
2. How has political inaction worsened insecurity and weakened governance in the South-East?
3. What reforms are needed to restore economic stability and public trust in the region?

Objective of the Study

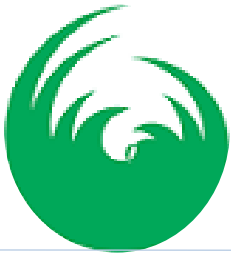
The broad objectives is to critically interrogate the nexus between economic decline, militarisation, and political failure in South-East Nigeria, with a view to advancing sustainable economic recovery and just governance. Whereas the specific objective is.

1. To examine the impact of militarisation and “sit-at-home” orders on regional economic performance.
2. To assess the role of the political class in addressing systemic injustices and insecurity.
3. To propose pragmatic reforms for economic revitalisation and institutional credibility in the South-East.

Significance of the Study

This study is of profound scholarly and policy relevance, as it interrogates the deeply intertwined dynamics of economic decline, militarisation, and governance failure within South-East Nigeria. In a region historically recognised for its entrepreneurial ingenuity and commercial resilience, the current trajectory of socio-economic deterioration presents not merely a regional concern but a national development challenge. By situating the analysis within the broader context of systemic injustices and state–society relations, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how political inaction and security responses can inadvertently undermine economic systems. It therefore provides a critical intellectual foundation for rethinking development strategies in conflict-affected environments.

At the empirical level, the study offers significant insights into the collapse of local economic ecosystems, particularly within Igbo-dominated markets that once served as vital nodes of domestic and transnational trade. For instance, major commercial hubs such as Ariaria International Market in Aba and Onitsha Main Market—widely regarded as among the largest markets in West Africa—have experienced recurring shutdowns linked to insecurity and enforced “sit-at-home” directives. Traders who depend on daily turnover report substantial revenue losses, with some estimating that the closure of markets every Monday translates into an annual loss of over fifty working days. Such disruptions not only erode individual



livelihoods but also weaken the broader supply chains that connect the South-East to other regions of Nigeria and neighbouring countries (International Crisis Group, 2022). The study is equally significant in illuminating the unintended economic consequences of militarisation. While the deployment of security forces is ostensibly aimed at restoring order, evidence suggests that excessive or poorly coordinated military presence in civilian areas can generate fear, restrict mobility, and deter investment. Reports by Amnesty International (2023) highlight allegations of human rights violations and the psychological toll of militarised environments on local populations. In practical terms, such conditions discourage both local entrepreneurs and external investors from committing capital to the region, thereby exacerbating capital flight and economic stagnation. By documenting these realities, the study provides a basis for recalibrating security strategies to ensure that they are both effective and economically sensitive.

Furthermore, this research holds critical importance in evaluating the role of political leadership in times of crisis. The apparent reluctance or inability of regional political elites to articulate a coherent and unified response to the challenges facing the South-East has contributed to a widening legitimacy gap between the state and the populace. This study underscores how governance deficits—manifested in weak policy responses, fragmented leadership, and perceived prioritisation of political ambitions over public welfare—can intensify social unrest and economic decline. According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (2023), effective governance in fragile contexts requires proactive engagement, inclusive dialogue, and credible institutional interventions—elements that appear insufficiently developed in the current South-East context.

In addition, the study is significant for its contribution to policy formulation and institutional reform. By systematically analysing the structural and immediate causes of economic decline, it offers evidence-based recommendations that can guide policymakers at both state and federal levels. For example, the identification of policy gaps in conflict management, economic diversification, and regional integration can inform targeted interventions

aimed at revitalising the South-East economy. The findings may also support the design of inclusive governance frameworks that address long-standing grievances related to marginalisation and inequity. In this regard, the study aligns with broader development objectives articulated by the World Bank (2023), which emphasise the need for stability, institutional trust, and private sector growth as prerequisites for sustainable development.

The relevance of this study further extends to the social dimension, particularly in its examination of the human cost of economic decline. The disruption of educational activities, for instance, has long-term implications for human capital development in the region. Schools and universities that are forced to close during periods of heightened insecurity or compliance with “sit-at-home” orders risk producing a generation of students with fragmented learning experiences. Similarly, the study highlights the gendered impact of economic disruptions, as women—who constitute a significant proportion of market traders—are disproportionately affected by declining incomes and increased vulnerability. These social consequences underscore the urgency of addressing the crisis not merely as an economic issue but as a multifaceted developmental challenge.

Moreover, the study contributes to the broader academic discourse on conflict, development, and governance in emerging economies. By providing a case-specific analysis of South-East Nigeria, it enriches comparative studies on how subnational regions respond to complex crises involving security, political legitimacy, and economic sustainability. The integration of theoretical perspectives with empirical observations enhances the analytical rigour of the research, making it a valuable resource for scholars in political science, public administration, and development studies. It also offers a framework for examining similar patterns in other conflict-affected regions, thereby extending its applicability beyond the Nigerian context.

Importantly, the study also serves as a platform for amplifying the voices and experiences of those directly affected by the ongoing crisis. Traders, artisans, transport operators, and civil servants whose daily lives are



disrupted by insecurity and economic instability often remain underrepresented in policy debates. By foregrounding their experiences through illustrative examples, the research bridges the gap between abstract policy discussions and lived realities. This approach not only enhances the credibility of the study but also ensures that its recommendations are grounded in practical realities. Finally, the significance of this study lies in its forward-looking orientation. Beyond diagnosing the causes of economic decline and governance failure, it seeks to identify actionable pathways for recovery and transformation. By advocating for pragmatic reforms—ranging from improved security governance and political accountability to economic revitalisation strategies—the study provides a roadmap for restoring stability and prosperity in the South-East. In doing so, it reinforces the imperative for a coordinated and inclusive approach to addressing systemic injustices within Nigeria’s political and economic systems.

Conceptual Issues

Economy: It posits that the economy represents the system of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services within a society. In the South-East context, this encompasses the vibrant network of markets, small-scale industries, and informal trade that historically sustained livelihoods. For instance, the periodic shutdown of commercial centres such as Ariaria and Onitsha markets due to insecurity and “sit-at-home” orders illustrates how disruptions in economic activity directly translate into income losses, reduced productivity, and weakened regional output (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

Security: It entails the condition in which individuals and communities are free from threats to life, property, and economic activity. In practical terms, security is fundamental to sustaining commerce and social stability. However, the heightened presence of armed forces and recurring violent incidents in parts of the South-East demonstrate how fragile security conditions can deter investment and restrict movement, thereby undermining everyday business operations (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Justice: Justifiably, justice refers to the fair and equitable application of laws and the protection of rights within a society. It is observed that perceptions of selective justice or unequal treatment under the law can fuel grievances and social unrest. The controversy surrounding the trial of Nnamdi Kanu has, for some segments of the population, reinforced feelings of marginalisation, thereby intensifying distrust in state institutions and contributing to civil resistance behaviours (Amnesty International, 2023).

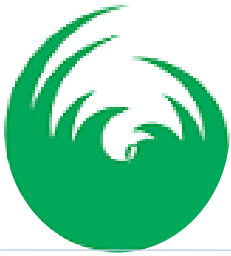
Governance: Accordingly, governance denotes the processes and structures through which authority is exercised and public resources are managed. Effective governance requires responsiveness, accountability, and strategic leadership. In the South-East, the perceived silence or fragmented responses of political elites to ongoing crises exemplify governance deficits, which in turn weaken public confidence and hinder coordinated policy action (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023).

Conflict: Interestingly, conflict describes a situation of prolonged disagreement or tension arising from competing interests, identities, or perceptions of injustice. In the region under study, conflict manifests in the form of confrontations between state forces and non-state actors, as well as in the enforcement of “sit-at-home” directives. These tensions disrupt social order and economic routines, thereby deepening instability and uncertainty within affected communities.

Development: Essentially, development refers to the process of improving the economic, social, and institutional well-being of a society. It encompasses increased productivity, improved living standards, and equitable access to opportunities. The persistent decline in business activity, rising unemployment, and disruption of education in the South-East signal a reversal of developmental gains, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive and sustainable recovery strategies (World Bank, 2023).

Theoretical Paradigm

The theoretical paradigm underpinning this study is anchored on an integrative framework that draws from political economy, state fragility, conflict theory, and



institutionalism to interrogate the complex interplay between economic decline, militarisation, and governance failure in South-East Nigeria. This multidimensional approach is necessitated by the layered nature of the crisis, which transcends mere economic disruption to encompass systemic governance deficits, contested legitimacy, and the erosion of social order. Accordingly, the study situates the disruption of daily commercial activities—particularly along critical corridors such as the Enugu–Onitsha expressway and commercial hubs like Onitsha, Aba, and Enugu—within a broader theoretical discourse that explains how state actions and inactions shape economic and social outcomes.

From a political economy perspective, it is posited that economic systems are profoundly influenced by power relations, resource control, and state policies. The South-East region, historically driven by private enterprise and informal sector dynamism, has increasingly become vulnerable to policy neglect and coercive state practices. The persistent disruption of trade routes, including the Enugu–Onitsha expressway, where traders, transport operators, and commercial motorcyclists (okada riders) face frequent extortion and harassment, exemplifies how economic activities are subordinated to coercive authority structures. This aligns with the broader thesis that where the state fails to provide enabling conditions for commerce, economic decline becomes inevitable. The routine extraction of informal levies by security operatives and non-state actors constitutes a form of economic predation, thereby distorting market efficiency and undermining productivity.

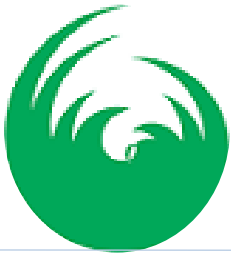
Closely related to this is the theory of state fragility, which underscores the inability or unwillingness of the state to perform its core functions, including the provision of security, enforcement of the rule of law, and protection of citizens' rights. In the South-East, the proliferation of security checkpoints, often characterised by arbitrary stops and extortion, reflects not a consolidation of state authority but rather its fragmentation. For instance, along the Niger Bridge axis and Iweka Road in Onitsha, commuters and traders routinely encounter multiple layers of security personnel whose activities frequently impede rather than facilitate movement. This phenomenon illustrates what

scholars describe as “informalisation of state authority,” where official structures are repurposed for private gain. Such conditions erode public trust and create an environment in which citizens perceive the state as both absent and oppressive.

The conflict theory tradition, rooted in the works of Karl Marx and later expanded by contemporary scholars, provides further explanatory power by highlighting the role of structural inequalities and perceived injustices in generating social unrest. It is observed that the ongoing tensions in the South-East cannot be divorced from longstanding grievances related to political marginalisation, uneven development, and perceived exclusion from national power structures. The enforcement of “sit-at-home” orders, whether voluntary or coerced, represents a form of civil resistance that disrupts economic life as a means of expressing dissent. However, the unintended consequence is a cyclical pattern of economic stagnation, where traders lose income, transport operators face declining patronage, and daily wage earners are pushed into deeper poverty. This dynamic reinforces the conflict theory proposition that unresolved structural contradictions often manifest in disruptive social behaviours.

Equally pertinent is the institutional theory, which emphasises the role of formal and informal rules in shaping societal outcomes. Strong institutions are expected to regulate behaviour, ensure accountability, and facilitate economic activity. However, in contexts where institutions are weak or compromised, informal practices often dominate. The prevalence of extortion by security operatives along major commercial routes in Anambra State, as well as in Abia and Enugu, reflects a breakdown of institutional integrity. Rather than serving as agents of order, these actors become participants in systemic dysfunction. The absence of effective oversight mechanisms allows such practices to persist with impunity, thereby normalising illegality and discouraging compliance with formal regulations.

Furthermore, the human security paradigm offers a people-centred lens through which the crisis can be understood. Unlike traditional security frameworks that prioritise territorial integrity, human security focuses on the



protection of individuals' rights, livelihoods, and dignity. The experiences of traders, commuters, and okada riders along the Enugu–Onitsha corridor vividly illustrate the erosion of human security. Daily encounters with harassment, unlawful detention, and extortion not only undermine economic activity but also violate fundamental human rights. Reports by Amnesty International (2023) have documented patterns of abuse in security operations within the region, reinforcing concerns about the lack of accountability and respect for civil liberties. Such conditions create a climate of fear that stifles both economic initiative and social interaction.

In addition, the rent-seeking theory provides critical insight into the behaviour of both state and non-state actors within the region. Rent-seeking occurs when individuals or groups seek to obtain economic benefits without contributing to productivity, often through manipulation or exploitation of the regulatory environment. The extortion of money from commuters and transport operators at multiple checkpoints along busy commercial routes is a clear manifestation of rent-seeking behaviour. This practice imposes additional costs on businesses, inflates the prices of goods and services, and ultimately reduces the competitiveness of the regional economy. It also perpetuates a culture of corruption that undermines ethical standards and institutional credibility.

The legitimacy theory of governance is equally instructive in explaining the apparent disconnect between the state and the citizenry. Legitimacy is derived not only from legal authority but also from the perceived fairness and effectiveness of governance. In the South-East, the perceived silence or inaction of political leaders in the face of widespread economic disruption and human rights abuses has contributed to a crisis of legitimacy. Citizens who feel unprotected or exploited by state institutions are less likely to comply with laws or support government initiatives. This erosion of legitimacy further complicates efforts to restore order and economic stability, as trust becomes increasingly difficult to rebuild.

Moreover, the structural functionalist perspective highlights the importance of interdependent social institutions in maintaining societal equilibrium. In a well-functioning system, institutions such as the economy,

security apparatus, and political leadership work in harmony to ensure stability and development. However, the South-East scenario reveals a breakdown in this interdependence. The security apparatus, instead of facilitating economic activity, becomes a source of disruption; political leadership, rather than providing direction, appears disengaged; and the economy, deprived of enabling conditions, begins to contract. This systemic dysfunction underscores the need for coordinated institutional reform to restore balance and functionality.

Importantly, the study also engages with the theory of everyday resistance, which explains how ordinary people respond to oppressive or unfavourable conditions through subtle or overt forms of defiance. The persistence of “sit-at-home” practices, despite their economic costs, can be interpreted as a form of symbolic resistance against perceived injustice. However, this resistance also creates a paradox: while it seeks to challenge the status quo, it simultaneously exacerbates economic hardship for the very population it represents. This duality highlights the complexity of the crisis and the need for solutions that address both the root causes of dissent and its economic consequences.

The cumulative application of these theoretical perspectives provides a robust analytical framework for understanding the multifaceted crisis in South-East Nigeria. It becomes evident that the disruption of daily commercial activities along critical routes such as the Enugu–Onitsha expressway is not merely a logistical issue but a manifestation of deeper structural and institutional failures. The experiences of traders, transport operators, and commuters—who navigate a landscape marked by insecurity, extortion, and uncertainty—serve as empirical illustrations of these theoretical constructs.

Ultimately, the theoretical paradigm advanced in this study underscores the imperative for a holistic approach to addressing the crisis. Economic revitalisation cannot be achieved in isolation from governance reform and security sector accountability. Similarly, efforts to restore order must be grounded in respect for human rights and the rule of law. Without such an integrated approach, the cycle of decline, distrust, and disruption is likely to persist, with



far-reaching implications for both the South-East region and the Nigerian state as a whole.

Empirical Studies

Empirical scholarship and field-based investigations on the intersection between economic decline and militarisation in South Eastern Nigeria reveal a deeply troubling convergence of insecurity, coercive state practices, and commercial disruption. The available empirical evidence—drawn from institutional reports, academic studies, and investigative accounts—consistently demonstrates that the intensification of militarised security operations has not only failed to stabilise the region but has instead precipitated severe distortions in market systems, particularly within major Igbo commercial hubs such as Onitsha Main Market.

It is observed that empirical investigations into the region's economic trajectory increasingly identify militarisation as a decisive intervening variable in the collapse of market efficiency. For instance, field reports indicate that the proliferation of checkpoints and armed patrols across major commercial corridors—especially the Enugu–Onitsha expressway—has fundamentally altered the cost structure of trade. Traders, transporters, and commercial motorcyclists (okada riders) are routinely subjected to extortion, delays, and harassment, thereby inflating transaction costs and discouraging mobility. Evidence suggests that such practices have become institutionalised, with extortion now functioning as an informal yet predictable system of extraction embedded within everyday commercial movement (Premium Times, 2019). Accordingly, and most critically for the present study, recent empirical observations further demonstrate a marked decline in the influx of traders and business operators into Onitsha Main Market from neighbouring states such as Enugu State, Delta State, Imo State, and even distant commercial regions across Southern and Northern Nigeria. It is observed that traders and numerous business operators who historically converged on Onitsha in large volumes now deliberately avoid the market or drastically reduce their trading frequency due to pervasive insecurity and the menace of uncontrollable extortion. This behavioural shift is empirically significant, as it directly

undermines the traditional role of Onitsha as a central node in West African trade networks.

It entails that the fear of harassment by multiple layers of security operatives—including the police, army, customs, road safety officials, and, in some instances, local vigilante groups—has produced a climate of economic deterrence. Transporters navigating these routes are compelled to make repeated unofficial payments at numerous checkpoints, often under coercive conditions. Consequently, empirical findings reveal that transport fares have experienced arbitrary and unjustified increases, not as a function of market forces alone, but as an adaptive response to cumulative extortion losses incurred along transit corridors. These inflated transport costs are invariably transferred to traders and, ultimately, to consumers, thereby distorting price mechanisms within the market system.

Nonetheless, the implications of this phenomenon extend beyond mere cost escalation. Empirical accounts indicate that the reduction in trader inflow has led to diminished market vibrancy, lower transaction volumes, and a contraction in wholesale and retail activities within Onitsha Main Market. Shops that once thrived on high turnover now experience prolonged periods of inactivity, while supply chains have become increasingly fragmented. This decline in commercial patronage represents a critical empirical indicator of systemic economic regression within the region.

Furthermore, civil society reports provide quantifiable insight into the magnitude of these disruptions. A comprehensive field investigation documented the existence of hundreds of checkpoints across South Eastern transport networks, with security operatives reportedly extracting substantial sums from road users. Estimates suggest that illicit collections from these activities have reached alarming levels, amounting to tens of billions of naira over a relatively short period (Intersociety, 2019). Such systemic extraction effectively functions as an informal taxation regime, eroding business capital and discouraging reinvestment.

Justifiably, empirical literature also points to the troubling role of governance inertia in perpetuating these conditions. It is widely observed that despite the visibility and



persistence of these practices, state authorities—including commissioners and high-ranking officials—have demonstrated limited capacity or willingness to enforce accountability among security agencies. This perceived indifference or passive acquiescence has contributed to the entrenchment of extortionary practices, thereby reinforcing public distrust in governance institutions.

According to empirical observations, the consequences of this governance deficit are profound. Traders increasingly interpret the absence of decisive intervention as tacit approval of exploitative practices, which, in turn, exacerbates their reluctance to engage fully in market activities. The resulting decline in economic participation further weakens the revenue base of the state, creating a paradox wherein the very institutions responsible for economic regulation inadvertently preside over its deterioration.

It is equally important to note that transport operators—particularly those engaged in inter-state commerce—have been disproportionately affected. Repeated stoppages, financial losses, and the unpredictability of transit conditions have compelled many operators to either increase fares significantly or abandon certain routes altogether. This has led to reduced connectivity between Onitsha Main Market and its feeder markets, thereby undermining regional trade integration.

Nonetheless, empirical studies further reveal that the broader economic consequences of militarisation include declining investor confidence, relocation of businesses, and the gradual erosion of the South East's status as a commercial hub. The diversion of trade flows to alternative markets perceived as more secure underscores the competitive disadvantage imposed by insecurity and extortion.

In sum, the empirical evidence reinforces the central thesis that militarisation in South Eastern Nigeria has evolved into a significant driver of economic decline. The drastic reduction in trader inflow to Onitsha Main Market, the escalation of transport costs due to systemic extortion, and the apparent inaction of regulatory authorities collectively constitute a pattern of structural economic dislocation. These findings underscore the urgent need for institutional reforms aimed at restoring accountability, reducing

coercive practices, and revitalising the region's commercial ecosystem.

Methodology

It is observed that the methodological framework for this study is carefully structured to ensure analytical rigour, empirical validity, and representativeness across the South Eastern region of Nigeria. The study adopts a comprehensive and integrative approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to capture the complex dynamics of economic decline and militarisation within the region.

Accordingly, the research design is anchored on a descriptive survey and explanatory design, which enables the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data from a broad spectrum of respondents. This design is particularly suitable for examining patterns of behaviour, perceptions, and institutional practices, while also establishing causal linkages between militarisation and economic decline in major commercial centres such as Onitsha Main Market.

The population of the study comprises an estimated 4.5 million people drawn from the five South Eastern states of Abia State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State, Enugu State, and Imo State. The target population includes adult business men and women, heads of public service sectors, officials in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), parastatals, local government administrators, representatives of traditional institutions, members of academia, religious leaders, politicians and legislators, youth organisations, civil society organisations, and other critical stakeholders whose activities and decisions shape the socio-economic landscape of the region.

In determining the sample size for the study, the Yaro Yamane (1967) mathematical formula was employed due to its statistical reliability in handling large populations. The formula is expressed as:

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size (4,500,000)

e = level of significance (0.05)

Substituting into the formula:



Thus, the exact sample size for the study is approximately 400 respondents, which is considered statistically adequate to represent the entire population.

Nonetheless, the study relies on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and key informant interviews administered across the selected states. Secondary data were sourced from government publications, reports of civil society organisations, academic journals, policy documents, and media reports, including investigative publications by institutions such as the Premium Times and other reputable bodies.

It entails that multiple instruments of data collection were utilised to ensure triangulation and validity. These include structured questionnaires designed to elicit quantitative responses, interview guides for qualitative insights, and documentary analysis protocols for secondary data. The combination of these instruments enables a holistic understanding of the issues under investigation.

For data analysis, the study adopts both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation were used to summarise responses, while inferential techniques—including regression analysis and correlation—were employed to test relationships between variables. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic content analysis, which facilitates the identification of recurring patterns and underlying meanings within respondents' narratives.

Accordingly, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilised as the primary analytical software due to its efficiency in handling large datasets and performing complex statistical computations. The adoption of SPSS enhances the accuracy, consistency, and reproducibility of the analytical process.

Justifiably, the study adopts a multi-stage sampling technique, incorporating stratified, purposive, and simple random sampling methods. Stratified sampling ensures representation across the five states and stakeholder categories, purposive sampling enables the selection of key informants with specialised knowledge, while simple random sampling provides each respondent an equal chance of selection, thereby minimising bias.

Furthermore, the study is theoretically underpinned by the Political Economy Theory and the Theory of State Fragility. Political Economy Theory provides a critical framework for understanding how power relations, resource control, and institutional practices shape economic outcomes, particularly in contexts characterised by coercion and exploitation. The Theory of State Fragility, on the other hand, explains the inability of state institutions to effectively regulate security agencies and protect economic actors, thereby creating conditions for systemic dysfunction and economic decline.

Discussion of Findings

It is observed that the findings of this study reveal a deeply entrenched and systemic relationship between militarisation and economic decline across major Igbo commercial centres, with particular emphasis on Onitsha Main Market. The evidence generated from both quantitative and qualitative data underscores a disturbing paradox: the very institutions mandated to provide security have, in practice, become significant contributors to economic dislocation, thereby undermining the functional integrity of market systems in the South Eastern region of Nigeria.

Accordingly, one of the most compelling findings relates to the proliferation of security checkpoints and the institutionalisation of extortionary practices along critical commercial corridors. Respondents overwhelmingly reported that transporters and traders are subjected to multiple layers of unofficial levies imposed by personnel of the police, military, customs, road safety, and, in some cases, local vigilante groups. This finding aligns with recent investigative reports which indicate that road-based extortion remains widespread across Nigerian highways, imposing severe financial burdens on commercial actors (Premium Times, 2023). The implication of this development is profound, as it effectively transforms public security infrastructure into a parallel economic system characterised by coercive extraction.

It entails that the cumulative effect of these extortionary practices is a significant increase in the cost of transportation, which, in turn, translates into higher prices of goods and services within the market. The study



findings confirm that transport operators routinely adjust fares upward to offset losses incurred from repeated payments at checkpoints. For instance, transporters plying routes between Enugu State and Anambra State reported that operational costs have escalated disproportionately due to the frequency and magnitude of extortion demands. This artificial inflation of transport costs disrupts the natural equilibrium of market pricing mechanisms, thereby eroding consumer purchasing power and dampening overall economic activity.

Nonetheless, beyond cost escalation, the findings reveal a more insidious consequence: the gradual withdrawal of traders and business operators from major markets. Evidence from the study indicates that traders from neighbouring states—including Delta State, Imo State, and other parts of Nigeria—are increasingly reluctant to patronise Onitsha Main Market due to fears of insecurity and financial exploitation. This behavioural shift represents a critical disruption of established trade networks, as Onitsha has historically functioned as a central hub for regional and transnational commerce.

Justifiably, the decline in trader inflow has precipitated a corresponding reduction in market vibrancy and transactional volume. The findings indicate that many shops within Onitsha Main Market now experience reduced customer traffic, prolonged periods of inactivity, and declining profit margins. This situation is further exacerbated by irregular supply chains, as transporters become increasingly unwilling to operate within high-risk routes. Such disruptions not only undermine the economic viability of individual businesses but also weaken the broader commercial ecosystem upon which the region depends.

According to the data collected, small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) are disproportionately affected by these developments. Unlike large corporations, SMEs lack the financial resilience to absorb repeated losses arising from extortion and operational disruptions. Consequently, many small-scale traders are compelled to either scale down their operations or exit the market entirely. This finding corroborates contemporary studies which identify insecurity and institutional inefficiencies as primary

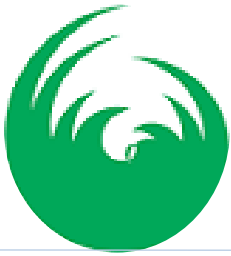
constraints on SME growth in developing economies (World Bank, 2022).

It is equally important to note that the findings highlight a significant erosion of investor confidence within the region. Both domestic and external investors perceive the South East as an increasingly volatile environment, thereby redirecting capital to alternative regions with relatively stable security conditions. This trend has far-reaching implications, as it limits opportunities for industrial expansion, job creation, and economic diversification. In effect, militarisation not only disrupts existing economic activities but also stifles future development prospects.

Nonetheless, the study further reveals that the impact of militarisation extends beyond economic variables to encompass broader social and institutional dimensions. The persistent exposure to coercive practices has engendered a climate of fear, distrust, and psychological distress among traders and transport operators. Respondents expressed a profound lack of confidence in security institutions, which are widely perceived as exploitative rather than protective. This erosion of trust undermines the legitimacy of the state and weakens the social contract between citizens and government.

It is observed that governance deficits play a critical role in sustaining this cycle of economic decline. The findings indicate that despite widespread awareness of extortionary practices, there is limited evidence of effective intervention by state authorities, including commissioners and other high-ranking officials. This apparent inaction or complacency reinforces the perception that such practices are either tolerated or implicitly sanctioned. Consequently, security operatives operate with a high degree of impunity, further entrenching exploitative behaviours.

Furthermore, the study identifies the emergence of secondary informal economies as a direct consequence of militarisation. The normalisation of extortion by state actors has inadvertently legitimised similar practices among non-state actors, including road touts and informal collectors. This phenomenon reflects a broader pattern of institutional decay, wherein predatory behaviour becomes diffused across multiple layers of society. Empirical literature on conflict economies supports this observation, noting that environments characterised by weak



governance often give rise to parallel systems of exploitation (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019).

Accordingly, the findings also point to a decline in regional trade integration, as connectivity between Onitsha Main Market and its feeder markets continues to deteriorate. Transport operators increasingly avoid certain routes, while traders seek alternative markets that offer relatively safer operating conditions. This fragmentation of trade networks undermines the efficiency of supply chains and reduces the overall competitiveness of the region's economy.

It is equally significant that the study highlights the long-term developmental implications of these trends. The persistent decline in commercial activity, coupled with reduced investment and rising unemployment, contributes to a cycle of economic stagnation and social instability. Youth unemployment, in particular, emerges as a critical concern, as diminished economic opportunities increase the likelihood of engagement in illicit activities, thereby perpetuating the cycle of insecurity.

Nonetheless, despite these challenges, the findings also reveal elements of resilience within the Igbo commercial system. Indigenous entrepreneurial practices, including informal credit arrangements and apprenticeship structures, continue to provide a degree of economic stability. However, the sustainability of these systems is increasingly threatened by the hostile operating environment created by militarisation.

In sum, the discussion of findings clearly demonstrates that militarisation in the South East has transcended its conventional security role to become a central determinant of economic decline. Through the institutionalisation of extortion, disruption of trade networks, erosion of investor confidence, and perpetuation of governance deficits, militarisation has fundamentally altered the economic landscape of the region. These findings underscore the urgent need for a paradigm shift in security governance, one that prioritises accountability, transparency, and the protection of economic actors as essential components of sustainable development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is evident from the foregoing analysis that the intersection of militarisation and economic decline in South Eastern Nigeria represents not merely a transient disruption but a deeply structural crisis with far-reaching implications for governance, development, and societal stability. The empirical and analytical insights derived from this study unmistakably demonstrate that the prevailing security architecture—rather than consolidating order—has, in significant measure, contributed to the erosion of economic vitality, particularly within strategic commercial hubs such as Onitsha Main Market. The entrenchment of extortionary practices, the deterrence of legitimate commercial activity, and the apparent inertia of regulatory institutions collectively signify a troubling departure from the foundational principles of accountable governance and economic rationality.

Accordingly, the findings compel a sober reflection on the nature and purpose of state authority within fragile socio-economic environments. Where coercive instruments of the state are deployed without corresponding mechanisms of accountability, the result is not stability but systemic distortion—manifesting in weakened markets, diminished investor confidence, and an increasingly disillusioned citizenry. The South East, long celebrated for its entrepreneurial dynamism and resilient commercial traditions, now confronts a paradox wherein its economic strengths are being steadily undermined by the very structures ostensibly designed to protect them.

Nonetheless, the trajectory of decline is neither inevitable nor irreversible. The restoration of economic confidence and institutional legitimacy demands a deliberate reconfiguration of security governance, anchored in transparency, professionalism, and respect for the rule of law. As Douglass C. North profoundly observed, “Institutions are the rules of the game in a society; more formally, they are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North, 1990). Where such rules are subverted by arbitrariness and predation, economic progress becomes not only constrained but fundamentally compromised.

In a similar vein, Woodrow Wilson, a seminal figure in the field of Public Administration, asserted that “The object of administration is to secure the efficient execution of public



law” (Wilson, 1887). This assertion resonates profoundly within the context of this study, as it underscores the imperative that administrative institutions must function not as instruments of exploitation but as guarantors of order, equity, and economic facilitation.

Ultimately, the study affirms that sustainable economic revitalisation in South Eastern Nigeria is inextricably linked to the re-establishment of credible, accountable, and development-oriented governance structures. Without such reforms, the cycle of militarisation and economic decline will persist, with consequences that extend far beyond regional boundaries. Conversely, a strategic recalibration of state-society relations—grounded in justice, institutional discipline, and economic inclusivity—holds the promise of restoring the region’s historic position as a vibrant nucleus of commerce and innovation.

It is imperative that a comprehensive and coordinated reform of security operations be undertaken across the South Eastern region, particularly along critical commercial corridors leading to hubs such as Onitsha Main Market. This reform should focus on reducing the excessive number of checkpoints and establishing strict oversight mechanisms to monitor the conduct of security personnel. In simple terms, fewer roadblocks and proper supervision will reduce harassment and make it easier and safer for traders and transporters to move goods without unnecessary delays or illegal payments.

Accordingly, there is an urgent need for the institutionalisation of accountability and disciplinary frameworks within security agencies. Officers found engaging in extortion or abuse of power should be promptly investigated and sanctioned in accordance with the law. For the ordinary citizen, this means that security officials will begin to act responsibly, knowing there are real consequences for misconduct, thereby restoring public confidence in the system.

It entails that state governments across Abia State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State, Enugu State, and Imo State must take a more proactive role in regulating and coordinating security activities within their jurisdictions. Commissioners and top government officials should not remain passive observers but must actively intervene through policy directives, monitoring committees, and

public reporting systems. Simply put, the government must stop “watching from a distance” and start taking visible action to protect businesses and citizens.

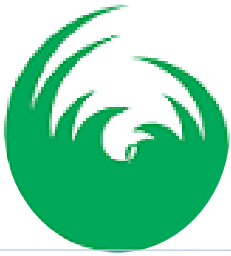
Nonetheless, there is a critical need to introduce a transparent and unified transport regulation system that eliminates arbitrary levies. Transport unions and regulatory agencies should collaborate to establish fixed and publicly known charges, thereby preventing the exploitation of transporters. For the layman, this will mean that transport fares become more predictable and fair, rather than constantly increasing due to hidden or illegal costs.

Justifiably, economic revitalisation programmes targeted at traders and small business owners should be implemented to cushion the effects of prolonged economic disruption. These may include soft loans, tax reliefs, and business support services designed to encourage traders to return to major markets such as Onitsha Main Market. In practical terms, this will help struggling businesses recover and attract more traders back to the market environment.

According to the findings, there is also a pressing need to strengthen community-based conflict resolution and intelligence systems. Traditional institutions, local leaders, and civil society organisations should be integrated into security planning and implementation. This approach ensures that security measures are informed by local realities. In everyday language, involving community leaders will help identify problems early and reduce tensions before they escalate into crises.

Finally, it is essential to promote public awareness and civic engagement through sustained advocacy and sensitisation campaigns. Citizens must be informed of their rights and encouraged to report cases of extortion and abuse through accessible channels. For the average person, this means knowing that they have a voice and the right to demand fair treatment, which can gradually lead to a more just and accountable system.

In sum, these recommendations, if effectively implemented, will not only curb the excesses associated with militarisation but also restore economic confidence, enhance market efficiency, and reposition the South Eastern region as a thriving centre of commerce and innovation.



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