Impact of operations of the Nigerian armed forces on insurgency in Abia state southeast geopolitical zone in Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of the military in combating insurgency in Abia State, Nigeria. This study was guided by an objective and hypothesis. This research employed a descriptive research design. Simple regression analysis was used to analyse the hypothesis. The regression coefficient (β) for military operation was 0.379, and the corresponding p-value was 0.000, indicating that the military's operational effectiveness in combating insurgency is statistically significant. The R² value of 0.144 suggests that military operations explain 14.4% of the variance in combating insurgency in Abia State. The significant positive regression coefficient indicates that the Nigerian military operation does have a significant effect on combating insurgency in Abia State as this is in line with the objective of the study. The findings reveal that while the military has recorded some successes, its effectiveness is hindered by inadequate intelligence gathering, limited community engagement, and insufficient coordination with other security agencies and community stakeholders. The Study recommends that the Nigerian military should integrate both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches in counter-insurgency operations. The Nigerian government should also develop and implement a comprehensive policy framework that includes clear guidelines for military engagement, civilian protection, and post-conflict reconstruction. The Military should have a multifaceted approach, including improved intelligence gathering, enhanced community engagement, and better coordination with other security agencies to combat insurgency effectively in Abia State. Ultimately, this study contributes to the understanding of the military's role in combating insurgency and provides insights for improving future operations.

Introduction

Insurgency has posed a significant threat to Nigeria's national security, with various groups operating in different parts of the country. Abia State, located in the southeastern region, has not been immune to the challenges of insurgency. The Nigerian military has been deployed to combat insurgency in Abia State, with the aim of restoring peace, stability, and security. The South East region of Nigeria has a complex history of secessionist movements, including the Biafran Civil War (1967-1970) (Udegbunam, 2017). The current insurgency in the region is fueled by political, economic, and social grievances (Ojukwu, 2021). The South

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Eastern of Nigeria has been experiencing insurgency and insecurity through the activities of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which has led to loss of lives and properties in the region. The Nigerian Armed Forces have been deployed to combat the insurgency, but the impact of their operation is yet to be fully assessed.

The Nigerian Military has been actively involved in combating IPOB/ESN insurgency in the SouthEast region, particularly in Abia State. The Eastern Security Network (ESN) has a complex history. Formed in December 2020, ESN is the paramilitary wing of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist movement seeking independence for the Igbo people in southeastern Nigeria.

The IPOB, led by Nnamdi Kanu, established ESN in response to the growing tensions between Igbo farmers and Fulani herders, who were accused of grazing on farmlands and committing crimes against local residents. The ESN's primary objective is to protect the people of the region from "invaders" and to confront the attacks by herders (Sahara Reporters Feb. 1, 2021). Since its inception, ESN has been involved in several clashes with the Nigerian military, resulting in casualties on both sides. The Nigerian government has designated IPOB as a terrorist organization, and ESN's activities have been viewed as a threat to national security (Sahara Reporters April 6, 2021).

While the military has made efforts to curb the activities of the separatist group, there have been instances of attacks and human rights violations in various local government areas. In Umunneochi, there have been reports of military raids and arrests of suspected IPOB members (Adibe, Nnamani, Nwaogaidu & Oranye, 2024). Similarly, in Umuahia North, the military has been accused of extrajudicial killings and torture of civilians suspected to be IPOB sympathisers (Amnesty International, 2022). In Obingwa, there have been clashes between the military and IPOB/ESN militants, resulting in fatalities and destruction of property. Despite these efforts, the military's approach has been criticised for its heavy-handedness and lack of adherence to human rights standards. There have been reports of arbitrary arrests, detention, and torture of civilians, as well as the destruction of homes and businesses (Chibueze, 2023)

Statement of the Problem

The insurgent activities of members of IPOB and ESN within the southeast region of the country left the people in great fear. Many persons have abandoned their businesses, farms, and ancestral homes, seeking refuge in other states and regions of the country with less or no presence of IPOB/ESN. The situation which has led to the proscription of the group as a terrorist group in 2020 has attracted military operations to curtail the activities of the group. This led to a humanitarian situation, reduced economic life, social cohesion, and integrative power, and decreased the need for foreign investment in the region, including Abia State.

Regardless of the military response to the fight against IPOB and ESN, whose activities have rendered many people homeless, the number of houses destroyed cannot be quantified. The Nigerian Armed Forces have been engaged in counter-insurgency operations in South Eastern Nigeria since 2020 to curb the insurgency of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN). However, the impact of these operations on the region's security and civilian population remains a concern.

According to a report by the International Crisis Group (2021), at least 500 civilians have been killed and over 1,000 arrested in the context of counter-insurgency operations in South Eastern Nigeria between January 2020 and June 2021. (International Crisis Group, 2021). A survey conducted by the Nigerian Polling Institute (2021) found that 70% of respondents in South Eastern Nigeria reported feeling less secure since the start of counter-insurgency operations. (Nigerian Polling Institute, 2021).

It is within this gap in the literature that the thrust of the research is to interrogate and arrive at a definite position about the assessment of the effectiveness of the military in combating insurgency in Abia state, Nigeria. Against the background of the preceding problem, this study will attempt to answer the research objective.

Objective of the Study

The broad objective of this research work is to evaluate the effectiveness of the military in combating insurgency in Abia State, Nigeria. The validity of the hypothesis was tested in respect to this study.

Ho: The Nigeria military operation does not have a significant effect in combating insurgency in Abia State.

Methodology

The research design used in this study is a descriptive survey. The descriptive research methodology is a methodical approach to describing a population's facts, traits, and characteristics. The descriptive research design was chosen partly because it comprehensively explains the study issue: the effectiveness of the military in combating insurgency in Abia State, Nigeria. The study will adopt a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Abia State has a population of Four million, One Hundred and Forty Three Thousand, One Hundred (4,143,100) City Population (2022). However, the target populations for this study consist of Umunneochi, Umuahia North and Obingwa with a total population of 827,300. The choice of these LGA is because they are the most engaged by military operations occasioned by the activities of IPOB and ESN.

Table 1. Population of Study Areas

S/No	Item	Population of the Study Area	Percentage of Adults (62%)
1.	Umunneochi	237,500	147,250
2.	Umuahia North	324,900	201,438
3.	Obingwa	264,900	164,238
	Total	**27,300**	**512,26**

Source: National Population Commission as cited City Population (2022).

The table shows the general population of the selected LGAs in Abia State and the target population, which represents a population of 827,300, made up of 512,926 of the adult population, which is 62%. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2020, the adult population in Nigeria constitutes approximately 62% of the general population. This is concerned with the presentation and analysis of data collected from the field which the researcher obtained via the administration of the questionnaire. Questionnaire served as the groundwork for statistical analysis in which data retrieved was analyzed using suitable statistical tools. Statistical package for social science (SPSS) was used to analyse the data and test the hypotheses formulated for this study. The data gathered for the study were analyzed using SPSS v27 software. Also, the researcher conducted an interview and analysed the qualitative data via the use of Nvivo.

The sample size for this study is three hundred and eighty-two (382) respondents, who were systematically drawn using the Krejcie and Morgan table to determine the sample size. The table indicates that for any population of more than 72,000 and less than 1,000,000, the sample size is simply given as 382. This will be drawn among respondents from the three (3) local government areas of Abia State under review.

Table 2. Sample Distribution Table

S/No	Area	Population	Sample	Percentage (%)
1.	Umunneochi	147,250	110	29
2.	Umuahia North	201,438	150	39
3.	Obingwa	164,238	122	32
	Total	**512,926**	**382**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2024

Umunneochi	**Umuahia North**	**Obingwa**
$\underline{382 \times 147{,}250} = \textbf{110}$	$\underline{382 \times 201{,}438} = \textbf{150}$	$\underline{382 \times 147{,}250} = \textbf{122}$
512,926	512,926	512,926

The table shows how the sample was distributed proportionately in their duly percentages. Hence, the simple sampling would provide efficiency and effectiveness in studying a specific cultural domain with knowledgeable expertise.

The researcher adopted a single method of data collection using quantitative data from respondents to understand the issues being studied comprehensively. Additionally, employing this method allows for objective measurement and data analysis, reducing the influence of personal biases and opinions, and there is also reliability as it involves standardised instruments and procedures.

Using closed-ended questions, quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire on the impact of operations of the Nigerian Armed Forces on insurgency in Nigeria's Southeast Geopolitical Zone. The questionnaire will be divided into two sections. The first section of the questionnaire solicited information on the respondents' background, such as age, sex, education, marital status, and occupation. Five (5) questions and suggested answers were raised in this section.

Secondary data are second-hand information, that is, data already collected and presented in a form useful to interested researchers. The data collected from the reviewed articles was extracted from Microsoft Excel to organise and analyse the data. Secondary data sources include published materials such as books, journals, bulletins, government gazettes, monographs, newspapers and magazines; unpublished materials like thesis, dissertations, projects, papers presented at conferences, workshops, symposia, and consultation.

Table 3. Questionnaire Response Rate

S/N		Number
1	Copies of Questionnaire administered	382
2	Copies of questionnaire returned	367
3	Copies of questionnaire not returned	15
4	Number of questionnaire valid and used for analysis	354
5	Number of questionnaires not valid and not usable	13
6	Percentage of questionnaire used (questionnaire response rate) out of total questionnaire administered	92.2%
7	Percentage of questionnaire not used (copies of questionnaire not returned plus copies of questionnaire not usable) out of total questionnaire administered	7.8%
	Total percentage	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 shows the distribution of questionnaire responses. A total of 382 questionnaires were administered, out of which 367 were returned, indicating a high initial return rate. Out of the returned questionnaires, 354 were deemed valid and used for analysis, representing 92.2% of the total questionnaires administered. Conversely, 28 questionnaires (comprising 15 not returned and 13 invalid) were not used, representing 7.8% of the total questionnaires distributed.

The total percentage of questionnaire responses and non-responses equals 100%. The response rate of 92.2% implies a high level of participation and engagement from the respondents, which enhances the credibility and reliability of the findings. This robust response rate reduces the likelihood of non-response bias and ensures that the results are representative of the target population. However, the 7.8% of questionnaires not used (either due to non-return or invalidity) suggests the need for improved follow-up or clearer instructions to minimize data wastage in future studies. Overall, the high response rate strengthens the generalizability and validity of the research outcomes.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Effectiveness of the Military in Combating Insurgency in Abia State

The opinions of the residents of Abia State, were solicited to provide understanding about the effectiveness of the military in combating insurgency in Abia State. To achieve this objective, 4 items of statement describing the various effectiveness of the military in combating insurgency in Abia State. The data collected and organized are presented in Table 4 as follows:

Table 4. Response on Effectiveness of the Military in Combating Insurgency in Abia State.

Statements	N	Mean		Decision
How would you rate the Military's ability to combat insurgency in South Eastern Nigeria?	354	2.09	.997	Negative
Have the Nigerian military successfully dismantled insurgent networks?	354	2.21	1.040	Positive
How would you assess the Military's intelligence gathering and surveillance capabilities in combating insurgency?	354	2.18	1.100	Positive
Have the Nigerian Military counter-insurgency operations in Abia State enjoyed popular support from local communities?	354	1.96	.992	Negative

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Note: Weighted Mean: 8.44/4= 2.11

Table 4 shows the responses regarding the military's effectiveness in combating insurgency in Abia State, with an overall mean score of 2.11, indicating limited effectiveness in the eyes of the residents. Military ability to combat insurgency was rated negatively (M = 2.09, SD = 0.997), highlighting a perceived lack of substantial progress in reducing insurgency levels. Success in dismantling insurgent networks was viewed positively (M = 2.21, SD = 1.040), indicating some success in disrupting insurgent operations. Intelligence gathering and surveillance capabilities were also rated positively (M = 2.18, SD = 1.100), reflecting a belief that the military has made improvements in gathering intelligence to inform counter-insurgency efforts.

However, popular support for military operations among local communities was rated negatively (M = 1.96, SD = 0.992), suggesting a significant gap in building community trust and collaboration. Although the military has made progress in certain areas, such as dismantling insurgent networks and improving intelligence, the negative perception of its overall effectiveness and lack of community support point to challenges in achieving long-term peace. There is a need for greater community engagement, more culturally sensitive strategies, and an increased focus on fostering trust between the military and local populations. These elements are essential for ensuring broader support for military operations and their success in combating insurgency.

Effectiveness of Military Operations in Combating Insurgency in Abia State

The findings revealed that while military operations in Abia State have been partially effective in containing insurgency, there remain significant challenges that limit their overall success. The military's efforts have been hindered by insufficient intelligence, inadequate resources, and logistical problems, which have affected the coordination and efficiency of operations.

Additionally, Zubairu (2024) highlighted that insufficient intelligence and logistical challenges in military operations further limit their success in the region. Counterinsurgency Theory underscores that the success of military operations depends not only on kinetic force but also on intelligence gathering, community support, and strategic political engagement (Galula, 1964). Similarly, Human Security Theory stresses that addressing the broader political, social, and economic factors contributing to insurgency is crucial for the effectiveness of military operations, suggesting that long-term peace cannot be achieved solely through force but requires addressing underlying grievances (UNDP, 1994).

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis Ho: The Nigeria military operation is ineffective in combating Abia State insurgency. Simple regression analysis was used to analyze the hypothesis in table 5.

Table 5 Summary of simple linear regression analysis showing Nigeria military operation is ineffective in combating Abia State insurgency.

DV	Predator	R	R^2	F	Df	B	T	P
Insurgency	Constant	.379	.144	59.077	1,352			.000
	Military Operation					.379	7.686	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Insurgency

Source: Author's Computation, 2024 via SPSS v. 27

A simple regression analysis was used to test this hypothesis, and the results are shown in Table 5. The regression coefficient (β) for military operation was 0.379, and the corresponding p-value was 0.000, indicating that the military's operational effectiveness in combating insurgency is statistically significant. The R^2 value of 0.144 suggests that military operations explain 14.4% of the variance in combating insurgency in Abia State.

This significant positive regression coefficient indicates that the Nigerian military operation does have a significant effect on combating insurgency in Abia State. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H02), suggesting that the military operation is indeed effective in reducing insurgent activities in the state. The results imply that military operations are playing a vital role in combating insurgency in Abia State. However, with 14.4% of the variance explained by military efforts, other factors not included in this analysis may also contribute to insurgency dynamics, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach to tackling the issue.

Conclusion

This study has examined the assessment of the effectiveness of the military in combating insurgency in Abia state Nigeria, focusing on the effectiveness of these operations. The findings indicate that while military operations, such as Operation Python Dance, have contributed to reducing insurgent activities in the region, they have also led to significant humanitarian consequences, including civilian casualties and displacement. These negative outcomes highlight the need for a more balanced strategy that prioritizes both military success and the protection of civilians. Despite the challenges faced, including logistical issues, intelligence failures, and inadequate coordination, the military's operations have demonstrated some level of effectiveness in containing insurgency. However, these efforts have been constrained by operational inefficiencies, which

hinder the military's full potential to restore peace and stability to the region. Addressing these challenges is essential to improving the military's effectiveness in counter-insurgency operations.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of adopting alternative strategies to complement the kinetic approach. These strategies should include community engagement, socio-economic development, and political dialogue, which are essential for addressing the root causes of insurgency. A comprehensive approach, combining military action with non-kinetic measures, is crucial for achieving long-term peace and security in Abia State. In conclusion, while military operations play a vital role in counter-insurgency efforts, a more holistic, people-centred approach is required. By integrating both kinetic and non-kinetic strategies, addressing operational challenges, and ensuring civilian protection, the Nigerian military can enhance the effectiveness of its counter-insurgency operations and contribute to sustainable peace in Abia State.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to improve the effectiveness of military operations in counter-insurgency efforts in Abia State:

i. The Nigerian military should integrate both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches in counter-insurgency operations. While military force is necessary to neutralize insurgents, non-kinetic strategies such as community engagement, socio-economic development, and political dialogue should also be prioritized. This comprehensive approach will help address the root causes of insurgency and win the support of local populations.

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