

# Nigeria's Reign Of Unknown Gunmen: A New Sector Of Criminality And Security Challenges

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## Abstract

## Introduction

The emergence of 'unknown gunmen' added to the multiple security challenges Nigeria has been going through in the past two decades. Unknown gunmen have constituted themselves as lethal agent of terror. The unknown gunmen infiltrate the entire Nigerian territory, raining terrors as they wish.

## Methodology

The study covered the entire country with at least two states captured in each of the six geo-political zones of the country. Newspaper reportages were used as secondary sources and analyzed by content analysis.

## Results/Discussion

Victims of the unknown gunmen cut across civilians and armed security men. Soldiers and policemen were usually targeted and their weapons taken away by the gunmen when killed. The gunmen engage in killings, raping, robbing, and kidnappings for ransom. Seeing the rate of military and police casualties, peoples' confidence in the ability of the government to secure their lives and properties has been eroded.

**Key words:** Gunmen, Violence, Crimes, Insecurity, Nigeria

## Introduction

Examining and reporting patterns of crime in society have always been an important undertaking in criminological research (Liu, 2005:613). The emergence of unknown gunmen (UGM) has created additional new nomenclature and a new crime sector within the numerous new crime sectors heating the security systems in Nigeria. There are other newly heavily armed gunnery groups like Boko Haram terrorist, bandits, kidnapers, herdsmen, militants in addition to old violent crime sectors like robbery, cultism and assassins. The activities of Unknown Gunmen encompasses the modus operandi of these other armed criminal groups with no identifiable group name hence the tag Unknown Gunmen by media outfits has become what they are known in the public domain. Fears, sorrows, tears, pains, traumas and moral panic have become part of daily life among many Nigerians and their families. The activities of these new criminal groups have captures the focus of the media to dominate newspaper headlines (Mohammed, 2022; Nnodim, 2022; Adams, 2021; Nwaizu, 2021; Olanrewaju, 2020; Ndidi & Igbowelundi, 2020; Viashima, 2019).

The insecurity situation in Nigeria presently is unprecedented leading to scores of deaths of not only innocent civilians but including foreigners, soldiers, policemen, elected officials as well as government workers. Businesses are equally adversely affected by the heightened insecurity as a good number of them stay closed most of the time or offer skeletal services. Consumer and investor confidence have equally fallen resulting in a decrease in business expansion which would normally have bolstered economic growth. The daunting proportion of the insecurity challenge has caused the country's political and economic managers and, indeed the entire nation, to bemoan both the loss of their loved ones and investments as well as the

absence of safety in most parts of the country (Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013). This insecurity may not be unconnected to the increasing ethnic hate, religious bigotry, political rivalry and a growing population of disgruntled citizens in the country who feel that they have been short-changed and given very limited or no access to the common patrimony (Onifade, et al., 2013). The continued state of insecurity has not only become a menace to the very foundations of national integration in the country, but it has also equally meted a deadly blow to the socio-economic welfare of the people resulting in the pattern of fear, disquiet and anxiety. Thus, three objectives stand out in this research;

1. to ascertain the impacts of unknown gunmen on social network in Nigeria,
2. to find out the extent of casualties in terms of victim fatalities, and
3. to highlight the national spread of the criminality of unknown gunmen

## **Problem Statement**

Igbuzor (2011), noted that the state of insecurity in Nigeria is as a result of the government's failure as manifested in her incapacity to deliver public goods to the citizens. The suffering of lack of basic necessities by the Nigerian people (poverty) has resulted in the emanation of fear of uncertainty, discontentment, frustration and hopelessness thus creating a growing army of frustrated people who are ready to take laws into their hands and resort to violence at the slightest opportunity. Seemingly in agreement, Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robaro (2013), highlighted unemployment and poverty, terrorism, porous borders etc. as some proximate factors that have contributed to the state of insecurity in Nigeria. The challenge of insecurity in Nigeria have increased the crime rate and terrorists'/bandits' attacks in different parts of the country, leaving unpalatable challenges for the nation's economy and its growth. According to Ewetan (2013), the numerous resultant daunting challenges confronting Nigeria include a high rate of unemployment, debilitating youth unemployment, low industrial output, unstable and deteriorating exchange rate. Others include a high inflation rate, inadequate physical and social infrastructure, very large domestic debt, rising stock of external debt and most importantly endemic rural and urban poverty which pose a serious threat to the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria.

The current killings, arson, vandalism and economic sabotage purportedly being carried out by "unknown gunmen" add no benefits and values to the ordinary people. Such acts would rather jeopardize the interest of the common men. The activities of unknown gunmen have inflicted unquantifiable economic hardship on the masses. The constant armed terror has grossly affected more the many people who survive on daily income. Moreover, many innocent persons have been killed by unknown gunmen. A plethora of investments and businesses have been run aground by them. Hit and run tactics adopted by unknown gunmen would only give birth to endless insurgency. Bearing the problems in mind, this research investigated Nigeria's reign of unknown gunmen: a new sector of criminality and security challenges.

## **Literature**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2021, seven persons under the name "Unknown Gunmen" invaded the Orji area in Owerri and its environs and allegedly killed three persons in different locations (Alozie 2021). Crimes and murders cut across different regions and are being perpetuated by a seemingly faceless group of people popularly labeled as "Unknown Gunmen. Although the media, sometimes, tag them bandits or terrorists, apparently security agents seem to be reluctant in providing the true identity of these culprits or apprehending them. Hence, the onslaughts have continued unabated and the marauders, most often escape without capture. Hanatu (2021) asserted that many of these criminals are known but perhaps due to "political correctness" or ineptitude on the part of the security personnel's, or reasons that are not known, their crimes are often dismissed and simply labeled as "Unknown Gunmen", denying their victims and families of the justice they deserve. The inability to apprehend these "Unknown Gunmen" has undoubtedly

led to the surge in crime and criminality across the country (Kola 2022).

The spate of fear that has enveloped millions of Nigerians due to the protracted acts of these “Unknown Gunmen” is unprecedented. Interstate travelling by road has become a nail-biting experience with thanksgiving prayers and celebrations when travelers safely reach their destinations. While intra-state movements are filled with caution and anxiety with many looking above their shoulders. Even when under lock and key in our homes, the fear is palpable due to the menace of “Unknown Gunmen.” The security situation is indeed very dire at the moment, even when many undiscerning people try to downplay it. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) covering events in 2019/2020 ranked Nigeria in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, describing the country as being one of those that could be classified as in a ‘state of war’. In the Global Peace Index ranking of 2020, Nigeria ranked 147<sup>th</sup> out of 163 countries, compared to 148<sup>th</sup> position in the previous year (Hanatu, 2021). Millions of Nigerians are currently internally displaced persons, students are being abducted from their schools and killed, farmers have been sent home not by the usual culprit – natural disasters, but by “Unknown Gunmen.” Policemen and women are being brutally murdered in the South-East, businesses are being destroyed and Foreign Direct investors are scared of coming into the country to invest and those already here have begun relocating. Boko Haram insurgents have continued their reign of terror in the Northeast, invading military bases and killing our patriotic soldiers and stealing their weapons that are not even adequate in the first place.

Tunde (2021) affirmed that every region in the country is faced with this peculiar problem irrespective of creed, political affiliation or tribe. Many people seem to live in denial of the enormity of the security challenge which the country is currently facing. Some attributed the situation to certain tribes and regions while some at the helms of affairs denounces anyone that calls them out on their failure in addressing the hapless situation. Ukpong (2021) reports that the setting ablaze of part of the building of Imo State Governor Hope Uzodinma’s country home in April by gunmen and killing of Ahmed Gulak, a chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and a former political adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan, in Owerri show the level of insecurity in the state. The Amnesty International 2021 equally reported that in reprisal attacks, security forces comprising military, police and Department of State Services (DSS) have killed dozens of gunmen as well as civilians in areas where these attacks have been committed (Ukpong (2021)

In another report, Nkwopara (2021) posits that due to damnable activities of official and unofficial armed men, the South Eastern states, particularly Owerri in Imo State, have been passing through perilous times and a very careful peep into the economic and social life of the people will show that it has been lying flat on its belly bleeding since the unknown gunmen descended on it with their large dose of mayhem. Most private business establishments in Owerri and the adjoining communities, for instance, are no longer open for business before 9am. Between the hours of 4.30pm and 5pm, most shop owners close their shops for the day and leave for their homes as a result of fear of either armed robbers or unknown gunmen, the bandits, kidnapers and/or herdsmen – a situation that can adequately be referred to as a self-imposed curfew. Owerri city which prides itself as the hospitality capital has literally become a ghost of its former self.

Omede (2013) asserts that security is a vital situation involving the comparative ability of a state to counter threats to its fundamental values and interests. McGrew (1988) posits that the security of a nation depends on two important pillars which are (1) the protection and maintenance of the socio-economic order in the event of internal and external threat and (2) the promotion of a preferred international order, which reduces the threat to basic values and interests, as well as to the domestic order. To Nwolise (2006), security is a comprehensive condition that recommends: the safety of a territory by a network of armed forces; the sovereignty of the state which must be assured by a democratic and nationalistic government and protected by the military, police and the people themselves; safety of the people from not only external attacks but also from catastrophic consequences of domestic disruptions such as hunger, unemployment, starvation,

homelessness, ignorance, diseases, environmental degradation, pollution and other socio-economic injustices. In another vein, Nwagboso (2012) defines insecurity as the danger that entrepreneurs and executives of business organizations exercise by removing their business ventures from insecure areas to more secure ones. Security is simply the presence of conditions that enables individuals in a society to go about their normal daily activities without any form of threat to lives and property (Akin, 2008).

Insecurity is therefore the extreme opposite of security such as lack of safety, danger, hazard, uncertainty, want of confidence, state of doubt, instability, trouble etc. (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robaro, 2013). The authors argued further that these characteristic features point to a situation of susceptibility to harm, loss of life, property or livelihood. Therefore, they equate insecurity to a state of lack of knowledge and control as well as the inability to take defensive action against forces that are harmful or dangerous to an individual or group, thus making them vulnerable. Beland (2005) maintained that insecurity is the state of fear or anxiety as a result of an evident or alleged lack of protection. Nwagboso (2012) identifies insecurity as a form of danger that forces entrepreneurs and executives of business organizations to relocate their business ventures from an insecure environment to a more secure one exemplified by the relocation of the Igbo and Yoruba businessmen to their native lands in the wake of Boko Haram Insurgency (Adegbami, 2013). Omonijo, Obiorah, Onyekere, Anyaegbunam, Shaibu and Ogunwa (2017) aver that presently, the issue of insecurity seems to be heightened more within countries than between one country and another most especially in developing countries. This they argued is to be attributable to the assimilation of western culture with traditional ways of life which have resulted in developing societies changing their mode of security from informal system to formal. Furthermore, exacerbated insecurity has become endemic as a result of poor management by the leaders of the least developed countries like Nigeria. Not much has been done on the activities of the unknown gunmen in Nigeria. This study intends to bridge the gap in literature by bringing to the forefront the elements of unknown gunmen as a new sector of criminality to criminological inquiries.

### **Theoretical framework**

Strain theory was applied to explain this study. This theory is a version of Social Structure Theory that sees crime as a function of the conflict between peoples' goals and the means available to obtain them (Siegel, 2005). The author further stated "that multiple sources of strain interact with an individual's emotional traits and responses to produce criminality. Social strains are product of mistrust, hate, anger, frustration, marginalization, leadership insensitivity and perceived deprivation. Strain theory captured this study given the general conditions of Nigerians in the past twenty years in which conflicts exacerbated on grounds of ethnic/communal clashes, ever rising agitations, militancy and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Agnew (1992) argued that as there are varying sources of strains in social relationships, that criminality is the direct result of negative effect of states. Against the above background, Strain theory captured this study to explain the plethora of multiple emerging new sectors of criminality in Nigeria, including the activities of the unknown gunmen.

### **Methodology**

The study derived from secondary sources of data. As such, data for this study were drawn from newspapers to ascertain the impact of Unknown Gunmen as a new emerging sector of criminality in Nigeria. As a qualitative mechanism, the ex-post-facto (after the fact) study design is taken to apply since data were specifically sourced from secondary materials. Because of the nature of the study in which people are skeptical to volunteer information, the use of secondary data collection mechanism appeared workable. *The PUNCH, Daily Trust, THE NATION, Vanguard* and *DAILY Sun* newspapers were purposively selected due to their wider circulations and devoted reportage on the activities of the Unknown gunmen. The period covered in the survey was four months (June – October 2022). The study utilized content analysis which

was appropriate and had been applied in similar studies (see Nnam, Ugwuoke, Njemanze & Akwara, 2020; Heap & Waters, 2019; Tade, Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2019; Ordu, 2017).

## Findings/Results

**Table 1: Litany of attacks, places and casualties**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Litany of attacks, places and casualties</b>
<i>The PUNCH</i>	May 4, 2022	<p><b>60,000 killed in Northern states in 10 years – CDD</b></p> <p>An international human rights organization, Centre for Democracy and Development, said at least 60,000 people have been killed in 18 Northern states of Nigeria in the last 10 years due to insecurity... the North Western states of Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara, about 14,000 people lost their lives between 2011 and 2021</p>
<i>The PUNCH</i>	June 27, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen kill Edo, Kaduna Catholic priests, two others</b></p> <p>Gunmen have killed the priest in charge of St. Michael Catholic Church, Ikabigbo, in the Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State, Rev. Fr. Christopher Odia... In a related development, gunmen, suspected to be terrorists, have killed a Kaduna State based Catholic priest, Rev. Fr. Vitus Borogo.</p>
<i>The PUNCH</i>	June 21, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen abduct Plateau monarch, Bauchi village head, demand N150m</b></p> <p>Gunmen numbering over 20 have kidnapped a traditional ruler in Plateau state, Aminu Derwan after attacking his palace in Panyam in the Mangu Local Government Area of the state... A family member of the victim said the hoodlums later contacted some family members on the phone and demanded N150m as ransom.</p>
<i>The PUNCH</i>	June 15, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen abduct two in Ogun church, six Katsina residents, eight Bayelsa mourners</b></p> <p>Gunmen have invaded a Celestial Church of Christ, Oshofa, Wasimi, in the Ewekoro Local Area of Ogun State, abducting the Assistant Shepherd (Assistant Pastor) of the parish, Oluwaseun Ajose, and a Sunday school teacher, Dangunro Abayomi...</p>

<p><i>Daily Trust</i></p>	<p>July 7, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen invade NYSC lodge in Anambra, rape female occupants</b></p> <p>Gunmen in a tricycle on Tuesday night invaded a National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) lodge on Udo Ekong Ekwere Street in Uyo, AkwaIbom State, raped the female occupants and carted away valuables, including laptops, cell phones and money... They beamed high intensity torchlight everywhere and pounced on every door with heavy irons and threatened to shoot us if we failed to cooperate.</p>
<p><i>THE NATION</i></p>	<p>July 18, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen abduct expectant mum, 11 others in Kaduna, Anambra</b></p> <p>An expectant mother was among 12 persons whisked away yesterday (July 17) as armed men attacked communities in Kaduna and Anambra states. The woman was abducted from Lema community in the Mando Area of Kaduna, opposite the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA). Seven other persons were kidnapped when the bandits entered three houses around 1am... They took away eight residents including a pregnant woman that came to visit her sick mother in the community.</p>
<p><i>Daily Trust</i></p>	<p>July 14, 2022</p>	<p><b>How kidnapppers targeting ex-govMuazu’s children killed nephew, abducted family members.</b></p> <p>Mua’zu Danladi, a 25-year old man, who is a relation of Bauchi ex-governor, AdamuMua’zu, has been shot dead at Boto village of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area of Bauchi State. Danladi was killed when gunmen invaded the residence of Mua’zu’s family members in the early hours of Wednesday (July 13). Three persons were abducted in the incident which took the villagers by surprise.</p>
<p><i>Vanguard</i></p>	<p>July 21, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen kidnap varsity student in Calabar</b></p> <p>Calabar – The Police Command in Cross River State has confirmed the abduction of a student of Arthur Jarvis University, Akpabuyo, near Calabar...It was gathered that the student returning to their hostels from where they had gone to read when gunmen accosted them at about 8pm on Tuesday (July 109). While one of the students was seized by the gunmen, others, who ran for their lives, sustained injuries.</p>
<p><i>THE NATION</i></p>	<p>July 19, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen kill soldier, nine others in Plateau, Imo</b></p> <p>Ten persons have been gunned down in attacks on Plateau and Imo States. One of the dead was a soldier, who was killed in a bandits’ ambush on Sunday night in the Kapani area of Wase council of Plateau State... In Imo, gunmen suspected to be operatives of <i>Ebube-agu</i> security outfit allegedly opened fire on wedding guests, killing seven of them.</p>

<p><i>Vanguard</i></p>	<p>July 20, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen kidnapped traditional ruler in Abuja</b></p> <p>Abuja – The District Head of Kuchibuyi community in the outskirts of Bwari Area Council of FCT has been kidnapped by suspected bandits, who shot sporadically to scare residents during the operation. Sources said the traditional ruler, MalamIsiaka Dauda, was abducted in his private residence close to his palace during the wee hours’ attack which lasted between midnight and 1am...</p>
<p><i>Vanguard</i></p>	<p>July 26, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen attack traditionalists performing ritual on murdered prince</b></p> <p>Osogbo – Gunmen, yesterday (July 25, 2022) reportedly attacked traditionalists performing ritual rites for deceased Prince Yinusa Okunloye, allegedly killed by cultists over the weekend... The cultists numbering about three invaded the Prince’s house at midnight on Saturday, called out and shot him dead.</p>
<p><i>The PUNCH</i></p>	<p>July 25, 2022</p>	<p><b>Tension as Delta gunmen kill father, abduct son</b></p> <p>Tension has gripped Orhuwhorun community in the Udu Local Government Area of Delta State as gunmen shot dead a popular building material merchant, Francis Tefue. His son, Sam, who was with him during the attack, was allegedly abducted by the assailants. The incident occurred at the Usiefurun Junction around 9pm on Saturday (July 23, 2022).</p>
<p><i>THE NATION</i></p>	<p>August 18, 2022</p>	<p><b>Policeman, assailant killed in Ebonyi checkpoint shootout</b></p> <p>A policeman and an assailant were killed yesterday afternoon (August 17, 2022) in a gun attack on a checkpoint in Ebonyi State. The attack took place on Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway by G-Hostel Junction, it was learnt. Sources said the three gunmen came on a motorcycle and opened fire on the policemen, killing one instantly.</p>
<p><i>Vanguard</i></p>	<p>August 7, 2022</p>	<p><b>...Gunmen confesses: I killed only 2 policemen, 2 civilians.</b></p> <p>One of the suspected hoodlums operating as unknown gunmen in Anambra State has confessed that he killed four persons, two policemen, since he joined a gang. The gunman nicknamed ‘50’ was allegedly caught inside a forest at Ukpor in Nnewi South Local Government Area of the state along with other members of his gang by security operatives.</p>
<p><i>Vanguard</i></p>	<p>August 16, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen invade Kogi market, kill one, abduct another.</b></p> <p>Lokoja – Gunmen, Sunday (August 14, 2022) reportedly invaded one market in Agbedo community of Igalamela/Odolu Council Area of Kogi State, killing one person and abducting another...It was gathered that the gunmen in their large numbers stormed the markets at 2pm shooting sporadically to scare the people in the market.</p>

<p><i>Vanguard</i></p>	<p>August 17, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen kill motorcyclist in Owerri</b></p> <p>Owerri – Unidentified gunmen, yesterday (August 16, 2022) shot and killed a commercial motorcyclist at Ogbaku junction, Mbaitolu Local Government Area of Imo State. They came here in a Sienna bus and beckoned on the Okada man to meet them... The Okada man asked them what he did, and they shot him two times and left.</p>
<p><i>Vanguard</i></p>	<p>August 27, 2022</p>	<p><b>Terrorists asked our men to send their wives, daughters for sexual escapades, release them after one week</b></p> <p>Terrorists would come to our communities, ask us to bring either our wives or daughters to them. They would carry them to their camps and bring them back after one week. These are the words of the elders of Katsina State, the home state of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as they raised the alarm on atrocities committed by terrorists unchecked in rural areas of the state.</p>
<p><i>DAILY Sun</i></p>	<p>August 3, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen abduct scores of passengers: Block Enugu-Port Harcourt highway, wound 2 soldiers, set military van ablaze</b></p> <p>The police have confirmed the abduction of scores of passengers, last weekend, by suspected herdsmen in Abia State. The bandits were said to have wounded two soldiers and set an army van ablaze... The gunmen, who were said to have had a free day while the operation lasted, blocked the Enugu-Port Harcourt Highway between Leru Junction and the Ihube axis, abducting the passengers in the process.</p>
<p><i>DAILY Sun</i></p>	<p>August 3, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen kill 7 security guards, injure 2 others in Imo</b></p> <p>The Umuafof, Orogwe community in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo State has been thrown into deep mourning after gunmen reportedly invaded the area, killed seven local security guards on duty and left two other residents seriously wounded...the gunmen, who came in two vehicles and a motorbike, at about 9:30pm, took the guards unawares and shot them in separate locations.</p>
<p><i>Daily Trust</i></p>	<p>August 17, 2022</p>	<p><b>Abductors of Nasarawa commissioner demand N100m</b></p> <p>The police in Nasarawa State have confirmed the abduction of the Commissioner for Information, Culture and Tourism, Mr. Yakubu Lawal...It was gathered that the gunmen stormed the residence of the information commissioner around 8:45pm and shot into the air to scare residents of the area before abducting him.</p>



<i>Daily Trust</i>	August 2, 2022	<p><b>4 traders killed, 14 travellers abducted in Taraba.</b></p> <p>At least four persons were killed Sunday afternoon (July 31, 2022) when gunmen numbering about 30 on motorcycles invaded Jauro Manu market in Gassol Local Government Area and opened fire on traders...In another attack, no fewer than 14 travelers were reported abducted by bandits along Mutumbiyu-Wukari road on Sunday at Benbel in the same Gassol LGA at about 2pm.</p>
<i>Daily Trust</i>	August 2, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen kill 75-year old, kidnap 3 grandchildren, family in Bauchi</b></p> <p>Gunmen have killed a 75 year old man, AlhajiKatu Ma Dukkuna, and abducted his three grandchildren in Shafa village of Duguri District in Alkaleri Local Government Area of Bauchi State...the gunmen shot the man at a close range because he resisted them while trying to kidnap him.</p>
<i>The PUNCH</i>	August 25, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen kill policeman guarding Lagos bank</b></p> <p>Gunmen on Wednesday (August 24, 2022) killed a yet-to-be-identified policeman attached to a new generation bank around cassette bus stop, Coker Aguda in the Surulere area of Lagos State. The incident which happened in the afternoon forced businesses in the area to close early to ensure the safety of lives and property.</p>
<i>The PUNCH</i>	August 29, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen invade Ebonyi hotel, kill owner, three guests</b></p> <p>A hotelier, Ogonnaya Nwadiibia, and three yet-to-be identified guests, have been allegedly shot dead by gunmen who invaded the Galaxy Hotel at Isu community, in the Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi State... The armed suspects came in motorcycles and about three of them entered the hotel.</p>
<i>The PUNCH</i>	August 23, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen kill Delta chief, Kwara hotelier, abduct friend</b></p> <p>Gunmen on Sunday (August 21, 2022) allegedly shot a chief, Emmanuel Bikogha, to death at the popular PTI junction in Affurun, in the Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State... In another development, on Sunday, gunmen who invaded the 16 Hour Hotel at Alomilaya, Ganmo, in the Ifeodun Local Government Area of Kwara State, allegedly shot the owner of the hotel, Kayode Akinyemi, to death.</p>
<i>DAILY Sun</i>	September 29, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen kill 4 soldiers, 1 civilian in Anambra</b></p> <p>Gunmen, yesterday afternoon (September 28) killed four army officers and one civilian in Umunze community, Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State... Sources said the gunmen who attacked Umunze stormed the area around 1pm and opened fire on the soldiers who were in stationary vehicle.</p>

<p><i>Vanguard</i></p>	<p>September 12, 2022</p>	<p><b>Ifeanyi Uba injured, many killed as gunmen attack convoy in Anambra</b></p> <p>Awka – Many in the convoy of Senator Ifeanyi Ubah, the Senator representing Anambra South senatorial district were feared killed when he was attacked at Enugwu-ukwu, Njikoka Local government Area of the state... He was ambushed by heavily armed men, who opened fire on his convoy. Some of his aides were killed, including some police officers.</p>
<p><i>The PUNCH</i></p>	<p>September 28, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen kill soldiers, policemen, army raids Enugu community</b></p> <p>Some yet-to-be-identified gunmen have attacked an army checkpoint at Obeagu-Amodu, along Amechi-Agbani Road, in the Enugu South Local Government Area of Enugu State, killing an unconfirmed number of soldiers and policemen...Prior to the Tuesday attack, gunmen had attacked the checkpoint at least three times.</p>
<p><i>The PUNCH</i></p>	<p>September 8, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen kidnap LG boss in Plateau</b></p> <p>Gunmen on Wednesday (September 7, 2022) kidnapped the Executive Chairman, Kanke Local Government Area, Plateau State, Henry Gotip, from his residence around Kwang in the Jos South Area of Plateau State. The kidnap of the council boss was coming barely two days after gunmen kidnapped a traditional ruler, Dauda Suleiman, in Pinau community, in the Wase LGA of the state.</p>
<p><i>The PUNCH</i></p>	<p>September 12, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen kidnap Plateau politician's brother, demand N100m ransom</b></p> <p>Gunmen have kidnapped one Nengak, the elder brother of a governorship aspirant of the Peoples Democratic Party in Plateau State, Kefas Ropshak, during an attack in the Rin community, in the Quaapan Local Government Area of the state on Saturday (September 10, 2022).</p>
<p><i>DAILY Sun</i></p>	<p>October 10, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen kill community leader, 8 others in Plateau</b></p> <p>No fewer than seven people were killed by suspected bandits in three communities in Bokkos Local Government Area of Plateau State. The attack also left the community leader dead, while several households were displaced in Takai, Kunet and Kulas communities in the council area.</p>
<p><i>Daily Trust</i></p>	<p>October 11, 2022</p>	<p><b>Gunmen invade Ezza North Council, burn documents</b></p> <p>Unknown gunmen on Monday morning (October 10, 2022) set ablaze a section of Ezza North Local Government Area headquarters destroying valuable items and documents worth millions...the arsonists numbering over 20 persons stormed the area around 1:30am in the morning and proceeded to set ablaze the store of the local government.</p>

<i>Daily Trust</i>	October 17, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen invade Kwara community, abduct 2</b></p> <p>Gunmen have abducted two sons of a scrap dealer, Mr. Lukman Aliyu, in Aseyori community, Alagbado area of Kwara State... The Alagbado community, located at the outskirts of the town close to Okoolowo, had come under several kidnapping attacks in the last one month with some of the victims killed in the process.</p>
<i>DAILY Sun</i>	October 19, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen kill village head, 2 others, kidnap 5 in Plateau</b></p> <p>Gunmen, on Monday night (October 17, 2022) attacked Nyalung community in Wase Local Government Area of Plateau State, and brutally killed three people, including the village head, Alhaji Sunusi Muhammad. It was gathered that the bandits invaded the village at about 8:30pm, and shot dead the traditional ruler and kidnapped five people from the community</p>
<i>Vanguard</i>	October 11, 2022	<p><b>Gunmen kill 2 policemen in Imo</b></p> <p>Owerri – Two police officers were reportedly shot by gunmen along Akokwa/Aroniizogu/Ikpeora/Okigwe road in Imo State... It was gathered yesterday (October 10, 2022), that the police officers were on a stop-and-search operation when the gunmen stormed the area and opened fire on them.</p>

Source: Data survey, 2022

## Discussion

This paper studied the reign of Unknown Gunmen (UGM) in Nigeria as a new sector of criminality. This is against the backdrop of insecurity as heightened by Unknown Gunmen which added to the plethora of security challenges occasioned by democratic and economic transitions as take-off of the new millennium from the year 2000. The emphasis of discussions is based on account of newspapers reportage of the activities of the Unknown Gunmen with its attendant killings, abductions, arsons, mayhems and intimidations. Data were sourced from five major national newspapers prominent in their devoted report coverage on the prevalence of UGM. These newspapers are: The PUNCH, THE NATION, Vanguard, Daily Trust and DAILY Sun. The above newspapers had the monopoly of catchy headlines relating to the violent and destructive activities of the UGM which had made blood flow and left many families in sorrow and trauma and the entire country in fears and anxieties.

The timeframe covered by the media reportage was four months from June to October 2022. Major headlines highlighted locations of the attacks, killings, abductions and arsons. Victims and the casualties were highlighted. The media coverage during the period under review captured 20 states in addition to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) out of the 36 states. These were made up of 12 states from the South and 8 States and Abuja in the North. The report captured at least 2 States from the each of the six geopolitical zones in the country which indicated a clear geographical spread of the violent activities of the Unknown Gunmen across the country's landscape. The states are; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States in the Southeast, Lagos, Ogun and Osun States in the Southwest, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta and Edo in South-South.

In the North are; Bauchi and Taraba States in Northeast, Kaduna and Katsina in Northwest, Kogi, Kwara,

Nasarawa and Plateau States and FCT Abuja in North central. The spread nature as indicated above shows how the Unknown Gunmen have taken the entire country by storm.

From the figures captured in this study, it was discovered that not less than 62 persons were killed and not less than 78 persons abducted by Unknown Gunmen during the period under review (June – October, 2022). The figure could be higher because some reports did not specify the number of people killed or abducted. These unspecified numbers were not included in the figure of victims indicated in the study. All the abductions were mainly for the payment of ransom and in few cases for sex slavery. Example of abduction for sex slavery was narrated below:

**“Terrorists asked our men to send their wives, daughters for sexual escapades, release them after one week”**

Terrorists would come to our communities, ask us to bring either our wives or daughters to them. They would carry them to their camps and bring them back after one week. These are the words of the elders of Katsina State, the home state of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as they raised the alarm on atrocities committed by terrorists unchecked in rural areas of the state (*Vanguard*, August 27, 2022).

The study indicated that southern parts of Nigeria are more affected by the activities of Unknown Gunmen than the northern parts. This is as indicated by the number of states covered by the reports used in this study in which 12 states are from the south while 8 states in addition to Abuja (FCT) are from the north. However, there are two other heavily armed criminal groups in the north that are not prominent in the south. Among these groups in the north are the Boko Haram terrorist group and the bandits that have ravaged northern Nigeria for over a decade now.

In the southern parts, Southeast appears to have been hit more by Unknown Gunmen such that all the five states of the geo-political zone were captured by the newspaper reports used in the study. This could be attributed to the political agitation that had heightened tensions and insecurity in the Southeast zone in which for the past one year since July 2021, every Monday had been sit-at-home by civil servants and other categories of the population because of the directive given by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the political agitating group for political self-determination. The IPOB had denied having any armed wing, and categorically denounced violence and disowned any armed group including the Unknown Gunmen who initially attempted to use IPOB as a cover. As it is in the Southeast, the Unknown Gunmen have targeted soldiers and policemen more as shown by the reports below.

**“Gunmen kill 4 soldiers, 1 civilian in Anambra”**

Gunmen yesterday afternoon (September 28) killed four army officers and 1 civilian in Umunze community, Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State... Sources said the gunmen who attacked Umunze stormed the area around 1pm and opened fire on the soldiers who were in stationary vehicle (*DAILY Sun*, September 29, 2002).

**“Gunmen kill soldiers, policemen, army raids Enugu community”**

Some yet-to-be-identified gunmen have attacked an army checkpoint at Obeagu-Amodu, along Amechi-Agbani Road, in Enugu South Local Government Area of Enugu State, killing an unconfirmed number of soldiers and policemen... Prior to the Tuesday attack, gunmen had attacked the checkpoint at least three times (*The PUNCH*, September 28, 2022).

The above narratives indicate the intensity of the activities of the Unknown Gunmen in Southeast of Nigeria

given the military and police casualties at various checkpoints. Across the five states of Southeast were frequent reports of attacks on security personnel and invasion of Police Stations with attendant killing of policemen and of setting the stations and operational vehicles ablaze. The story is the same across the country as Unknown Gunmen continue to unleash terror elsewhere in Nigeria as *Daily Trust Newspaper* report similar incident in Taraba state, Northeast of the country:

#### **“4 traders killed, 14 travelers abducted in Taraba”**

At least four persons were killed Sunday afternoon (July 31, 2022) when gunmen numbering about 30 on motorcycles invaded Jauro Manu market in Gassol Local Government Area and opened fire on traders... In another attack, no fewer than 14 travellers were reported abducted by bandits along Mutumbiyu-Wukari road on Sunday at Benbel in the same Gassol LGA at about 2pm (*Daily Trust*, August 2, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

Unknown Gunmen have continued to rain terror in Nigeria. There has been continuous loss of lives and properties across the country. The armed violent group appeared to have been emboldened by the inability of the government and its security agencies to tackle the menace. Victims cut across all the social class including Armed Forces personnel, politicians, businessmen, farmers, artisans, teachers, students and religious leaders have been fallen victims to Unknown Gunmen. These were as markets and worship places have been invaded by the Unknown Gunmen by its ferocity of attacks, killings and other forms of destructions coupled with their intimidations, using verbal threats and media outfits. Their activities have gone far to affect in no small way the state of politics, economy and social harmony in the society. A lot of people are restricting their political participation, timing of their business period by avoiding early and late hours, and also, minimize social outings and leisures. It can be argued that Unknown Gunmen in Nigeria operate with comfortable level of impunity. Unavoidably too, this criminal group have succeeded to carve a wider visibility within the media space. The police have continued to complain of shortage of manpower, poor equipment and poor welfare scheme. The military also complain of shortage of manpower and equipment in addition to other forms of internal security engagements like the war on terrorists and bandits which have lingered over the years. The government laments poor economy as a result of dwindling sources of revenue as reasons for its inability to equip its security apparatus. Against these backgrounds, the security challenges in the country require a paradigm shift from the present formula in the organization of the country's security systems.

These are the security trends of the moment in Nigeria. These had drawn lamentations, sorrows and anxieties across the country. The emergence of Unknown Gunmen as a new sector of criminality compounded the security challenges the country has experienced in the past 20 years since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999, after 16 years of military dictatorship which sparked off a series of new sectors of criminalities. Starting with herdsmen attacks on farming communities across the country, Boko Haram terrorist group in the North, Niger Delta militants in South-South, Bandits in North, kidnapers on the stage, Nigeria had been on war against escalating violent crimes as has never seen before. The sit-at-home on every Monday in Southeast in the past one year which had paralyzed social and economic activities in the region is mainly for the fear of Unknown Gunmen not because of the political agitations of IPOB in the Southeast. Apparently, the security agencies appeared helpless, talk-less of curtailing the situation given fatality rate of soldiers and policemen in addition to consistent invasions and destructions of Police Stations and checkpoints.

### **Recommendations**

1. Government should get its priorities right by cutting down its over spending on governance which are

mainly funding political appointments through which political appointees live ostentatious life and wastes. This will enable the government to conserve funds enough to strengthen its security apparatus.

2. De-centralization of the police to create State Police for more effective policing. The present system of centralized police structure whereby officers police complete strange spaces is not working. Familiarity with the environment is very important for effective policing and even for the security of officers themselves. Therefore, the calls over the years for State Police is overdue.

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