



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE POLITICS OF SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE: BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF ARMED SECURITY ROAD BLOCKS IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

CORNEL CHINEDU U. UDUMAGA ¹, GRACE UWEM EBONG ²,
GIDEON UCHECHUKWU ODOEMENAM ³

^{1&3} Department of Political Science, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri,
Imo State; ² ExxonMobil, Qua Iboe Terminal Ibeno, Akwa Ibom State

ABSTRACT

Armed security roadblocks have become a key part of Southeast Nigeria's state security infrastructure. This is because the government is responding to rising crime, separatist agitation, and general insecurity in the area. The government implements these measures to fulfil state security goals; however, their wider effects on human security, governance, and socio-economic conditions are still debated. This study examines the degree to which armed security roadblocks advance state security objectives and their effects on community-level human security; their influence on citizen-state relations, specifically regarding trust, legitimacy, and governance perceptions; and the socio-economic and political ramifications of their existence for regional stability and development. Utilising a mixed-methods approach comprising field surveys, participant observation, and documentary analysis, the article investigates the dual nature of roadblocks as both protective and coercive instruments of state power. Research shows that roadblocks can stop some types of crime and help with intelligence, but they often have unintended effects, like hurting the economy, violating rights, causing corruption, and making people angry. These dynamics erode public trust, delegitimise state authority, and intensify pre-existing governance challenges. The article contends that the politics surrounding security infrastructure in Southeast Nigeria exposes a conflict between state-oriented security strategies and community-focused human security requirements. It ends by suggesting different security frameworks that find a balance between protecting civil liberties and promoting sustainable development in unstable situations while still allowing for effective law enforcement.

Keywords: Security, infrastructure, roadblocks, governance, citizen

Corresponding Author:

Cornel Chinedu U. Udumaga; Telephone Number: +2347035214994

E-mail Addresses: cornel.udumaga@alvanikoku.edu.ng & uzodinmac2@gmail.com

Received: 14/1/2026; **Revised:** 27/2/2026; **Accepted:** 19/3/2026; **Published:** 30/3/2026



1.0. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, violent clashes between state security forces, separatist movements, criminal gangs, and other non-state actors have made the southeast region of Nigeria a theatre of recurrent insecurity. Instability in the area has increased due to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its security arm, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), as well as an increase in armed robberies, kidnappings, and intercommunal violence (Nwangwu and Ezeibe, 2022; Okoli, 2021). In the Southeast region of Nigeria, these factors have created an atmosphere of insecurity that jeopardises development and governance. The rise in youth unemployment and poverty is a major contributing factor to the rise in criminal activity.

In the fourth quarter of 2020, Nigeria's unemployment rate was 33.3%, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), with youth unemployment standing at an alarming 42.5% (NBS, 2021). Many young people have been forced to participate in illegal activities in order to survive due to the dire economic conditions. The Southeast continued to face political marginalisation and economic challenges in the years following the war. Southeast economies were neglected and underdeveloped as a result of the federal government's policies, which frequently favoured other areas. Youth unemployment and poverty rates rose, creating an atmosphere that encouraged crime and social unrest (Nwabara, 2011).

As a key security measure in response, the Nigerian government has erected sizable armed security roadblocks throughout highways, cities, and rural areas. Roadblocks are intended to prevent violent crime, stop the trafficking of weapons, and establish state authority in unstable areas. They are frequently guarded by military and paramilitary organizations (Eke, 2021). Although these roadblocks were meant to improve national security and law enforcement, they have turned into contentious locations of daily politics linked to extortion, harassment, and violations of human rights in addition to surveillance and protection (Onuoha and Nwankpa, 2020).

The paradox of Southeast Nigeria's security infrastructure is the root of the issue. On the one hand, roadblocks are defended as essential tools to counteract growing insecurity. However, by interfering with economic activity, undermining public confidence in the government, and violating citizens' rights, their operations frequently undermine the very objectives of security. In fragile areas where state legitimacy is already questioned, this tension calls into question the political and social ramifications of militarized security measures.

In light of this, the study's three main goals are to: (1) evaluate the degree to which armed security roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria support state security goals and affect community-level human security; (2) investigate how roadblocks affect citizens' perceptions of the state, specifically with regard to legitimacy, trust, and governance; and (3) analyze the socioeconomic and political ramifications of roadblocks for regional stability and development.

Consequently, the following research questions serve as the foundation for this study:

1. How do armed security roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria affect community-level human security and how much do they advance state security goals?



2. In Southeast Nigeria, how do security barriers affect citizens' perceptions of governance, legitimacy, and trust in the state?

3. How do the roadblocks erected by armed security forces in Southeast Nigeria impact regional stability and development, and what are the socioeconomic and political ramifications?

This study adds to discussions on how to strike a balance between state-centric and human-centric approaches to security in fragile democracies by placing obstacles within the larger politics of security infrastructure.

2.0. CONCEPT CLARIFICATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Concept Clarification

Security Infrastructure: The institutional, physical, and operational safeguards put in place by the state to preserve law and order, preserve territorial integrity, and defend citizens against both internal and external threats are collectively referred to as security infrastructure. This includes physical checkpoints like roadblocks and barricades, police systems, surveillance technologies, and military deployments (Aning and Aubyn, 2013). As a tool of law enforcement and a representation of the state's presence in disputed areas, security infrastructure frequently becomes politicised in fragile democracies (Eke, 2021). Armed roadblocks serve as outward displays of state security infrastructure in the southeast of Nigeria, reflecting efforts to combat organised crime and separatist threats while also influencing daily governance experiences.

Human Security: The 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report introduced the idea of human security, which moves the emphasis of security away from the state and toward the individual. It places a strong emphasis on safeguarding against both abrupt interruptions to daily life and long-term dangers like repression, illness, and hunger (UNDP, 1994). Economic, food, health, environmental, personal, social, and political security are all aspects of human security. Although state-centric security measures like militarised roadblocks are intended to provide safety, in reality they may compromise human security by limiting mobility, permitting extortion, and encouraging rights violations. The conflict between state priorities and citizens' daily well-being is thus revealed by the human security framework (Paris, 2001).

The degree to which people believe that the state's authority is legitimate, respectable, and deserving of obedience is known as state legitimacy (Beetham, 1991). It is intimately related to the state's ability to maintain law and order, protect citizens' rights, and maintain security. Legitimacy may be undermined when state institutions place a higher priority on coercive control over the welfare of their citizens, particularly in areas where governance is already precarious (Levi, Sacks, and Tyler, 2009). In Southeast Nigeria, the use of security roadblocks to militarise public areas both upholds state power and runs the risk of losing legitimacy if the roadblocks are linked to abuse, corruption, or harassment. As a result, legitimacy issues and the politics of security infrastructure are closely related, influencing how communities view government and the state's claim to power.

When combined, these three ideas security infrastructure, human security, and state legitimacy offer a crucial framework for evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of armed security barriers. They



shed light on how state goals are pursued by infrastructure responses to insecurity, which also alter community realities and rebalance the relationship between the people and the government.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Human Security Theory served as the theoretical foundation for the investigation. The 1994 Human Development Report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) introduced the idea of human security theory, which broadened the traditional, state-centric view of security. Human security places more emphasis on defending people and communities against threats to their safety and dignity than it does on maintaining regime stability or territorial integrity. Economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security are the seven main facets that are frequently used to frame it. Human security is essentially about prioritising people's rights, freedoms, and well-being as the foundation of a safe society.

Armed security roadblocks are an example of state-centric security measures intended to quell separatist, criminal, or insurgent activity. From the standpoint of the state, they serve as surveillance and preventative tools, proving the existence of the government. Contrarily, human security theory concentrates on the day-to-day experiences of those who must navigate these checkpoints. The conflict between defending the state and putting people in danger is brought to light by problems with harassment, extortion, delays, and movement restrictions. Using this theory, the study can investigate whether roadblocks are actually safety measures or if they compromise development, human welfare, and public confidence in the government.

Relevance to the Research Questions: RQ1: How do armed security roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria affect community-level human security and how much do they advance state security goals?

Human security theory offers a framework for assessing whether barriers promote or undermine citizens' sense of safety, dignity, and economic freedom in addition to preventing crime or insurgency (state goals). The framework makes it possible to evaluate the trade-off between claims of collective security and the welfare of individuals and communities.

RQ2: In Southeast Nigeria, how do security barriers affect citizens' perceptions of governance, legitimacy, and trust in the state?

The reciprocal nature of protection is emphasised by human security theory, which holds that citizens give the state legitimacy if it protects their welfare. The social contract is undermined when barriers lead to extortion, fear, or violations of rights. This framework contributes to the explanation of why people might see security personnel more as agents of insecurity than as protectors.

RQ3: How do armed security agencies' roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria affect regional stability and development, and what are the socioeconomic and political ramifications of these actions?

The theory of human security places obstacles in the context of larger socioeconomic realities. Economic and personal security are directly impacted by transportation delays, trade harassment, and financial losses, while political security is weakened by widespread resentment that distances

communities from the government. The framework enables the study to link macro-level results (regional instability, diminished development prospects) to micro-level effects (economic disruption, individual harassment).

By applying human security theory, the analysis shifts from determining whether roadblocks are effective at reducing crime to evaluating their effects on daily life in a more comprehensive manner, highlights the inconsistencies between human-centered outcomes and state security goals. The perspective gives governance practices a normative basis for evaluation. Hence, a secure society must defend not only the authority of the state but also the rights of individuals.

The politics of armed roadblocks are, in essence, reframed by human security theory as a conflict between security visions that are people-centric and state-centric. It clarifies why, ironically, Southeast Nigerian infrastructure intended to maintain order may instead lead to mistrust, insecurity, and developmental setbacks.

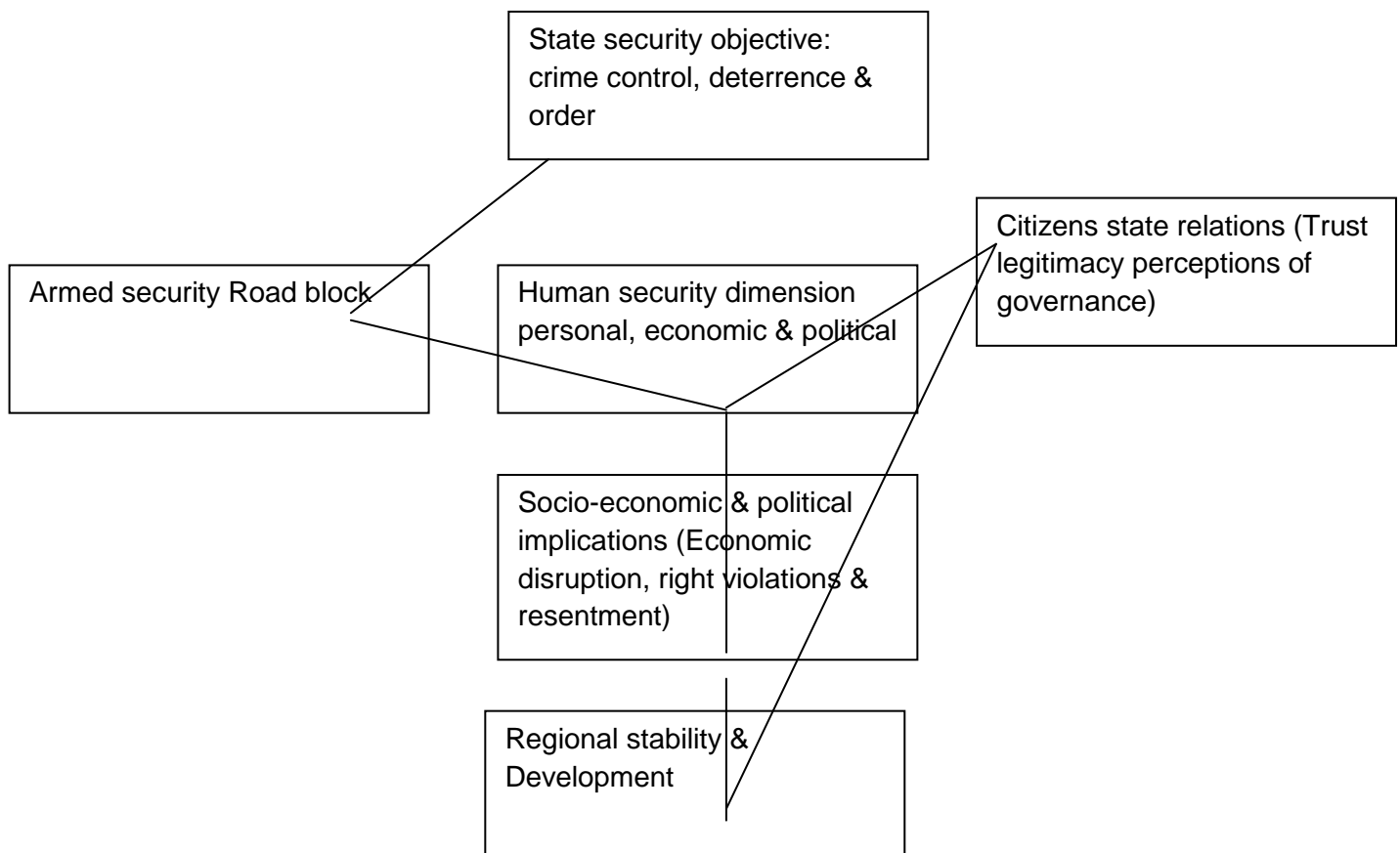


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Political Infrastructure and Human Security in the Southeast
Source: Authors compilation



The diagram above shows how roadblocks, human security dimensions, governance, and development outcomes are all connected. It shows how armed security roadblocks help both state security goals and human security goals. Human security outcomes affect the relationship between citizens and the state, as well as the economy and society. These ultimately influence regional stability and development, either favourably or unfavourably.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

Because armed security roadblocks have political, social, and economic effects, a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design was used. This design facilitates a comprehensive examination of citizens' lived experiences while integrating limited quantitative data to assess trends in perceptions and socio-economic effects. The study concentrates on Southeast Nigeria, specifically the states of Imo, Anambra, and Enugu, where insecurity associated with separatist movements, organised crime, and communal violence has exacerbated the prevalence of armed roadblocks. The study population comprises commuters, traders, transport operators, community residents, and security officers operating or interacting with roadblocks. We used a purposive sampling method to choose people who had firsthand experience with roadblocks. We conducted semi-structured interviews with community members, security personnel, and civil society representatives to elicit their views on the benefits and drawbacks of roadblocks. The study employed questionnaires to measure public perceptions regarding the efficacy of security, corruption, violations of rights, and trust in the state, alongside documentary analysis of government security policies, media reports, NGO reports, and academic literature to situate findings within the larger discourse on governance and security. It also used direct observation of certain roadblocks to see how they work in real life, looking at how people interact, how long it takes, and how they do business informally. Thematic analysis was used to look at qualitative data, and descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations) were used to look at quantitative data. This helped find patterns in public opinion about roadblocks.

4.0. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PERSPECTIVES AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Critical Analysis of Perspectives

Advantages of Armed Security Roadblocks

Crime Deterrence and Surveillance: Armed security roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria have shown that they can help stop violent crimes like armed robbery, kidnapping, and vehicle hijacking. People in a number of communities said that the constant presence of security agents at roadblocks keeps criminals from taking advantage of the situation on highways and in semi-urban areas. The UNDP's (1994) human security framework says that one part of human security is being safe from physical violence. In this way, roadblocks act as a kind of "visible surveillance," making criminals think they are more likely to get caught.

For example, traders and transport workers interviewed in Imo and Anambra States said that having more checkpoints on major roads had made highway attacks less common, which was a big problem in the middle of the 2010s. This finding indicates that, at least temporarily, roadblocks partially fulfil the state's obligation to ensure citizens' personal safety, despite the potential variability of their deterrent effect across different locations.



Prevention of Arms Trafficking and Insurgency Operations: Another important benefit is that roadblocks stop the spread of weapons and make it harder for insurgents to move around. At checkpoints, security guards check cars on a regular basis. This has led to the seizure of small arms, light weapons, and illegal goods that were meant for insurgent groups or criminal networks. In certain documented instances, checkpoints have allegedly thwarted efforts to transport arms across state lines, thereby diminishing the operational effectiveness of violent non-state actors.

This preventive function aligns with the state security goal of territorial control and the mitigation of threats to sovereignty (Akinyemi, 2020). Roadblocks are places where intelligence can be gathered and early warnings can be sent by stopping the flow of weapons and watching for suspicious movements. It helps keep separatist militia and armed banditry under control, which have made parts of the Southeast less stable. So, even though they are often criticised for being ineffective, roadblocks are still a part of the state's larger plan to fight insurgency.

Role in Maintaining Short-Term Public Order: Roadblocks also help to keep short-term public order, especially when tensions are high or there is a security crisis. Respondents said that after violent protests, community fights, or insurgent attacks, adding more roadblocks helps to bring back some calm by limiting movement, controlling traffic, and making sure people are more alert in areas that are likely to get violent.

This fits with the idea of negative peace, which is the temporary absence of direct violence (Galtung, 1969). Putting up roadblocks won't make security or structural stability last, but they can lower the immediate risk of violence and make communities feel safer. For instance, people in Orlu, Imo State, said that more activity at checkpoints after insurgent attacks made them feel like the government was there and was doing something, which made them less afraid of total lawlessness.

Synthesis of Findings: Collectively, these findings underscore that armed security roadblocks fulfil significant short-term and tactical roles in Southeast Nigeria. They stop crime that happens when people see an opportunity, make it harder for arms trafficking and insurgency logistics to work, and help keep the peace for a short time. From a state-centric viewpoint, these results correspond with Nigeria's security aims of establishing dominance and asserting authority in disputed areas.

However, as later parts of this study will show, these benefits come with big problems, such as violations of human rights, economic disruption, and a loss of trust among citizens. This duality highlights the primary challenge in the politics of security infrastructure: although roadblocks provide tactical advantages, their durability and legitimacy are fiercely debated within impacted communities.

Problems with Armed Security Roadblocks

Economic Costs: Stopping trade and delaying transportation: Roadblocks may stop crime, but they also cost regular people a lot of money. Traders, transport operators, and commuters all said that checkpoints often caused long delays, which made it more expensive to move goods and services. These interruptions cause perishable goods to go bad, lower earnings, and lower economic productivity for small-scale traders and farmers who depend on daily markets.



This finding aligns with the economic aspect of human security (UNDP, 1994), which underscores the entitlement to stable livelihoods and liberation from economic deprivation. Roadblocks often act as barriers that slow down the movement of people and goods, which hurt local and regional economies instead of making it easier for people and goods to move around. In the Southeast, where road networks are already weak, too many roadblocks make structural economic problems worse.

Human Rights Issues: Harassment, Extortion, and Violence Against Civilians: A common worry among those who answered is the widespread abuse of power at security roadblocks. Security agents often harass, search without cause, threaten, and ask for bribes from civilians. Some communities have reported cases of physical assault, illegal detention, and even extrajudicial killings, which raise serious concerns about human rights (Amnesty International, 2021).

These kinds of things show the difference between the security goals of the state and the security needs of its people. Roadblocks are supposed to keep people safe, but they often make people feel less safe by exposing them to daily violations. This weakens the personal and political security aspects of human security, making people less sure that the state will protect them. **Governance Issues: Eroding Trust in State Institutions:** The rise of roadblocks and the abuses that come with them have made people less trusting of state institutions. Many residents see checkpoints not as ways to keep people safe, but as ways to exploit and force people to do things. This perception directly affects the legitimacy of the state because more and more people see government as predatory instead of protective (Beetham, 1991).

Surveys and interviews show that roadblocks make people think of the government as distant, corrupt, and unaccountable. In Southeast Nigeria, where there are strong historical grievances against the federal government, the use of forceful security measures makes the gap in trust between the government and the people even bigger.

Socio-Political Consequences: Alienation, Resistance, and Public Resentment: Lastly, armed security roadblocks have effects on society and politics as a whole. People in communities often feel like they don't belong, and they see roadblocks as signs of militarization and control instead of safety. This has led to anger, occasional resistance, and, in some cases, violent clashes between civilians and security forces.

The politics of security infrastructure goes beyond just keeping people safe in the short term; it also shapes the long-term relationship between the state and society. Roadblocks can become symbols of oppression, which can make separatist stories more popular and make social divisions worse. This finding supports the idea that security systems can both stabilize and destabilize political systems at the same time (Eke, 2021).

Synthesis of Findings: The disadvantages of armed security roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria highlight a contradiction in the state's security strategy. While meant to keep people safe, they put a big strain on the economy, allow systematic violations of human rights, weaken the state's legitimacy, and cause social and political alienation. These results show that roadblocks often make the safety and dignity they are meant to protect worse, according to the human security framework. Additionally, the decline of trust in state institutions underscores the political ramifications of favoring coercive control over citizen welfare.



What People in the Southeast Think and Feel about Armed Security Roadblocks

Public Attitudes toward Security Agencies: People in Southeast Nigeria have a complicated mix of feelings about security agencies. Some people accept them, some are sceptical, and some are outright hostile. Some respondents said that security checkpoints are a sign of the state's visible presence, which can stop crime and make people feel safe in their communities by showing that the government has power over local areas. This is in line with the traditional view of state security, which says that citizens see armed personnel as a way to protect themselves from criminals and insurgents (Akinyemi, 2020). Most government officials agree that setting up joint armed security agency roadblocks is an important way to deal with the growing violence in southeastern Nigeria. They say that these roadblocks are necessary to keep the peace, stop rebellion, and protect people's safety. Government reports have shown that roadblocks are effective at stopping armed robbery, kidnapping, and illegal arms trafficking (Ministry of Interior, 2020; NHRC, 2020).

A lot of people, though, were very upset with how security officers acted at roadblocks. Harassment, corruption, and excessive use of force were cited as recurring experiences that fuel resentment toward the police, military, and paramilitary units. Many people in these communities don't see roadblocks as protective structures; instead, they see them as "toll gates of exploitation." One of the people who wrote the observation survey said that drivers and commuters are going through levels of persecution that have never been seen before. People who travel from Enugu to Awka often can confirm that there are more than thirteen police and military roadblocks that scare drivers from the 9th Mile to Awka. Obstructions on the motorway cause traffic jams in Awka every day, making it hard for people to get around.

Traders often complain about roadblocks because they cause delays, extortion, and harassment, all of which make doing business more expensive. Delays in road transport limit market opportunities and cause more perishable goods to spoil, which makes many traders see roadblocks as more of an economic barrier than a protective infrastructure.

Transportation workers, such as commercial drivers and motorcycle riders, also talk about how hard it is to make repeated stops and pay informally. For them, checkpoints are often a form of forced taxation that makes it harder to make a living. However, some people agree that roadblocks can make highway robbery less likely, especially at night. This shows that there is a conflict between safety and harassment.

Generational tensions with state authority often shape how young people see things. Young men, in particular, say they are more likely to be profiled, searched without cause, and attacked, which makes them angry at security agencies and makes them feel even more politically excluded. Conversely, certain youths perceive roadblocks as impediments to armed groups, acknowledging their role in enhancing temporary security in unstable regions.

Women have experiences that are both economic and gendered. Women who trade and travel say that they don't have as many direct run-ins with armed people as men do, but they do have to pay more for transportation and have trouble getting around. In some instances, women also report sexual harassment at checkpoints, highlighting the intersection of gender and security governance. This finding aligns with the assertion by Levi, Sacks, and Tyler (2009) that citizens' trust in institutions is



contingent not only on the state's competence but also on the equity and transparency of its operations. Where such fairness is lacking, legitimacy declines, and public attitudes harden into distrust.

Perceptions of Safety Versus Insecurity at Roadblocks: The study also shows that there is a strange relationship between safety and insecurity at roadblocks. Some people in the community said they felt safer driving on roads with visible checkpoints, especially at night, because these make it less likely that armed robbers or insurgents will attack them. This view is in line with the personal security dimension of the UNDP's (1994) human security framework, which says that visible enforcement makes people less likely to be hurt right away.

On the other hand, some people said they felt less safe because of the roadblocks. Many people thought they could be used to harass people, hold them without cause, or even make things worse during fights with security forces. Younger men, in particular, thought that roadblocks were dangerous places where profiling and abuse were more likely to happen. This view shows that security infrastructures have two sides: they are meant to keep people safe, but they can also make people feel unsafe in everyday life (Eke, 2021). The IPOB spokesperson said that military and police checkpoints in the Southeast, especially the well-known "kill and bury" roadblock at Ukwu Orji on the Owerri/Onitsha highway, make Igbo passengers go through different kinds of humiliation, torture, and forced disappearances (Opejobi, 2024).

The Security Agency checkpoint in the southeast has become a major cause of death for both civilians and security personnel. From the middle of 2015 to 2024, there have been many killings at security checkpoints in southern Nigeria. Most of these killings were caused by tensions between the Nigerian government and groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Biafra Liberation Army. When secessionist groups and criminals tried to break away, the police often used force, which caused a lot of deaths among both civilians and police officers. One of the most important events was the stopping of pro-Biafra protests in 2015 and 2016, when security forces killed at least 150 peaceful protesters. Amnesty International said that the military used live ammunition and killed a lot of people without going through the courts, especially during the Biafra Remembrance Day rallies in Onitsha, Anambra State, in 2016. The over-the-top reactions made things worse in the southeast (Amnesty International, 2016).

Do we have any information on how many Igbo criminals have been arrested at these roadblocks? The authors are not aware of any. It seems wrong to think that more police and military checkpoints will lead to less crime and criminal activity in the area. According to the accusations, the police and military officers who work at the different checkpoints are giving information to kidnappers and highway robbers. The Methodist bishop also said that the Fulani herdsmen were behind the kidnappings for ransom in Abia State.

The Bishop called the group that kidnapped him and his fellow clerics "Fulani boys." He said that their leader, who said he was born in Amuzukwu Umuahia, was about 35 years old, and the rest were teenagers. The prelate was upset that the security services didn't seem to care about the crimes committed by the Fulani herdsmen in the Umunneochi and Isiukwuato Local Government Areas of Abia State. The irony is that the kidnappers worked very close to Nigerian troops of Fulani descent who were stationed at Lokpa Junction, and the people who did the kidnapping were able to do so without being seen (Ugwu-Nwogo, 2022).



Synthesis of Findings: Citizens' views on armed roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria show that security infrastructure is still up for debate. Some people see checkpoints as a way for the state to protect them, while others see them as coercive, exploitative, and a threat to human dignity. The balance between feeling safe and unsafe affects the relationship between citizens and the state as a whole. It affects whether roadblocks make the state look more or less legitimate.

Table 1: Comparative Citizen Perspectives on Armed Security Roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria

Group	Perceived Benefits	Perceived Drawbacks
Traders	Reduced fear of highway robbery in volatile areas.	Increased cost of doing business due to bribes and delays. - Spoilage of perishable goods.
Transport Workers	Occasional deterrence against armed robbery, especially at night.	Frequent harassment and extortion (“illegal taxation”). Repeated stoppages cause fuel waste and time loss.
Youth	Some see checkpoints as deterrents to insurgent movement.	Frequent profiling, arbitrary searches, and violence. - Deepened political exclusion and mistrust of the state.
Women	Fewer confrontations compared to men at checkpoints. - Some sense of protection during travel.	Indirect costs via higher fares and disrupted mobility. - Reports of sexual harassment and gendered vulnerabilities.
General Public	Contribution to short-term public order. - Visible state presence reassures some communities.	Widespread perception of corruption and abuse. - Erosion of trust in security agencies and governance.

Source: Authors’ compilation

Table 2: Comparative Citizen Perspectives on Armed Security Roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria linked to Human Security and State Legitimacy

Group	Perceived Benefits (linked to State Security + Legitimacy)	Perceived Drawbacks (linked to Human Security Concerns + Erosion of Legitimacy)
Traders	Reduced fear of robbery fosters a sense of state control and order.	Harassment and delays undermine economic security, eroding confidence in state governance.
Transport Workers	Visible checkpoints symbolize state authority and provide temporary reassurance against crime.	Extortion and fuel/time losses weaken livelihood security and contribute to perceptions of state corruption.
Youth	Some youth acknowledge deterrence of insurgent activities as evidence of state protection.	Profiling and violence violate personal security, intensifying alienation and reducing trust in state legitimacy.
Women	Checkpoints provide occasional safety reassurance during travel, contributing to perceived protection security.	Sexual harassment and fare hikes compromise gender and economic security, eroding state legitimacy in the eyes of vulnerable groups.
General Public	Short-term public order aligns with state security priorities and reinforces visible state presence.	Widespread corruption and abuse violate community and political security, weakening citizen–state trust and democratic accountability.

Source: Authors’ Compilation.



Connections between frameworks and Human Security Theory

The drawbacks underscore violations of essential security dimensions, including economic, personal, community, and gender security, indicating that state initiatives designed to maintain order frequently exacerbate daily insecurities. State Legitimacy: When roadblocks turn into places of corruption, abuse, and harassment, the perceived benefits of crime deterrence, order, and state visibility are lost. People start to see the state as both a protector and a predator, which breaks down trust, legitimacy, and democratic accountability.

4.2. DISCUSSIONS

Understanding the Results Using Theoretical Framework

The results of this study emphasize the dual role of armed security roadblocks as both protective structures and catalysts of insecurity. From the perspective of human security theory, roadblocks achieve restricted state security goals by deterring crime, seizing weapons, and temporarily restoring public order; however, they frequently compromise more extensive dimensions of human security, including economic, personal, and political security (UNDP, 1994; Paris, 2001). For instance, while people understand that checkpoints can stop crime, the harassment, extortion, and delays that come with them show how state-centric approaches don't care about people's everyday well-being.

At the same time, state legitimacy theory (Beetham, 1991; Levi, Sacks, and Tyler, 2009) sheds light on the decline of public confidence in governmental institutions. The continued use of coercive and extractive practices at checkpoints makes people less likely to believe that the government is fair and accountable. This strengthens the idea that the government is more of a predator than a protector. The results demonstrate the theoretical conflict between coercive state security and the participatory, rights-oriented aspects of human security.

Balancing State Security Priorities with Human Security Issues: The main problem that the findings show is how to balance the need for state security with the need to protect people's rights and ways of making a living. The government thinks that roadblocks are a quick way to stop crime and fight insurgency. But when these actions hurt the economy, violate human rights, and push people away from each other, they threaten long-term stability and could make the situation even more dangerous than it already is.

The human security framework shows that long-term security needs to move away from a narrow, state-centered focus on territorial integrity and toward a people-centered focus on dignity, livelihood security, and trust. This balance is especially important in Southeast Nigeria, where historical grievances and separatist movements make the relationship between the state and society weak. The overreliance on coercive infrastructures endangers the continuation of a cycle of oppression and resistance.

Consequences for Governance, State Legitimacy, and Democratic Accountability: The politics surrounding security infrastructure in Southeast Nigeria has dire implications for state governance and democratic accountability. First, making roadblocks a normal part of daily government work could lead to a militarised state-society relationship, where coercion replaces consent. This goes against democratic values because it puts force ahead of conversation. Second, when people lose faith in



security institutions, the state loses its legitimacy, especially in areas where people are already sceptical of central authority. People see checkpoints as "toll gates" that take money from them instead of protecting them, which makes the divide between citizens and the state even bigger.

Lastly, the results show that there is a bigger problem with governance: security systems need to be redesigned to better meet the needs of people and the government's priorities. To get this balance, security agencies need to be made more professional, there need to be ways to hold people accountable for abuses, and checkpoints need to be paired with socio-economic programs that deal with the root causes of insecurity. If these changes aren't made, there is a risk that roadblocks will continue to provide temporary stability while making long-term fragility worse.

4.3. Policy implication and Recommendations

Changing how roadblocks work: The results make it clear that armed security agencies at roadblocks need to change their ways right away. In Southeast Nigeria, roadblocks often act as extractive institutions instead of protective ones, which hurts trust and legitimacy. To fix this, government agencies should make accountability a part of their work by requiring regular audits and independent monitoring of how checkpoints work. Civil society organisations and community representatives could be included in frameworks for oversight. Use body cameras and digital reporting systems to keep track of interactions at checkpoints to make things more open and honest. This will cut down on chances of extortion and harassment. Train police and military personnel stationed at checkpoints in strict human rights and community engagement. This would bring roadblock practices in line with Nigeria's international human rights law obligations and help people trust the government again to protect them.

These changes would change how people see roadblocks, turning them from places of coercion and exploitation into legitimate security measures that follow democratic principles.

Alternatives to Militarised Checkpoints: Roadblocks may work in the short term, but they have long-term problems that make it necessary to look for less coercive and more sustainable options. Policy measures should include: We should give neighbourhood watch groups and local security committees more power to share information and work with state agencies to make community policing stronger. This method would use local trust networks and make the relationship between citizens and security agents less hostile. Putting money into surveillance technology like CCTV networks, drones, and automated license plate recognition systems along major highways and in cities. These kinds of technologies make it easier to keep an eye on mobility without being too intrusive, and they also make it harder for people to extort money in person. Expanding security operations that are based on intelligence, with a focus on targeted actions instead of blanket militarization. This would make things run more smoothly and cause fewer problems for trade and travel. These alternatives acknowledge that security measures must transition from coercive tactics to intelligent, community-focused, and technologically advanced strategies.

Ways to balance national security and the well-being of citizens: The main problem is finding a way to balance the state's need to keep its territory safe with citizens' needs for safety, respect, and economic freedom. So, policy changes should focus on: Integrating human security principles into national security strategies and making sure that the effectiveness of roadblocks is measured not only



by how well they stop people but also by how they affect people's livelihoods, dignity, and trust. Combining socio-economic measures with security infrastructure, like better roads, job training for young people, and help for small businesses, to get rid of the root causes of insecurity that make checkpoints necessary. Encouraging inclusive governance by setting up dialogue platforms where community leaders, civil society groups, and security agencies can work together to make security policies. This participatory approach can restore legitimacy and diminish feelings of alienation.

To balance national security and the well-being of citizens, we must understand that coercive infrastructures alone cannot bring about lasting peace. Security needs to be thought of as a whole project that combines safety with fairness, wealth, and democratic accountability. Putting together the policy implications: To fix security roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria, we need to change the way we do things from coercive, state-centered methods to ones that respect rights, focus on the community, and use technology. Accountability and transparency mechanisms can help stop abuses. Alternatives like community policing and surveillance tools can make militarization less necessary. Adding human security issues to governance strategies can help restore trust and legitimacy in state institutions. These changes would not only make security better, but they would also make democracy more accountable and the region more stable.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has analysed the politics of security infrastructure by focusing on armed security roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria, emphasizing their advantages and disadvantages. The results show that roadblocks help stop crime, catch weapons, and keep the peace in the short term, but they also come with high costs to the economy, allow human rights abuses, lower public trust, and increase social and political alienation. These two outcomes highlight the paradox at the core of Nigeria's security governance: infrastructures intended to ensure protection often compromise the human security and democratic legitimacy they are supposed to support.

The analysis theoretically uncovers the conflicts between state security priorities and the overarching principles of human security theory. From the state's point of view, checkpoints show power and control over a region where separatist violence and organized crime are common. However, the human security framework established by UNDP (1994) and Paris (2001) underscores that authentic security cannot be confined to coercive control; it must include the safeguarding of livelihoods, dignity, and rights. Insights from state legitimacy theory (Beetham, 1991; Levi et al., 2009) elucidate how abusive roadblock practices undermine perceptions of fairness and accountability, thereby exacerbating the divide between citizens and state institutions.

This study's policy recommendations suggest that Nigeria's approach to security governance needs to change completely. Reforms should put accountability and openness first at roadblocks, make security forces more professional by teaching them about human rights, and cut down on the need for force by putting money into community policing and surveillance technologies. Most importantly, national security plans need to be changed to include human security principles. This will make sure that the government's efforts to keep order don't hurt people's well-being.

To sum up, the politics of armed security roadblocks in Southeast Nigeria are part of a bigger fight between coercion and legitimacy, control and trust, and state security and human security. To break



the cycle of oppression and resistance in Nigeria, its leaders need to rethink security as a whole project that combines protection with justice, dignity, and growth. The state can only strengthen its legitimacy, promote regional stability, and fulfil the democratic promise of accountable governance by finding this balance.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Akinyemi, B. (2020). State security and counterinsurgency in Nigeria: Tensions between sovereignty and human rights. *African Security Review*, 29(2), 134–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2020.1772542>
- Amnesty International (2016). Nigeria: At least 150 peaceful pro Biafra activists killed in chilling crackdown, Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org>
- Amnesty International. (2021). *Nigeria: Authorities must end unlawful killings, extortion, and harassment by security forces*. Amnesty International Report.
- Aning, K., & Aubyn, F. (2013). *Confronting complex threats: The African Union and peace operations in the 21st century*. Institute for Security Studies.
- Beetham, D. (1991). *The legitimation of power*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Eke, S. (2021). The politics of security and the everyday in Nigeria. *African Affairs*, 120(480), 499–523. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adab028>
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- Levi, M., Sacks, A., & Tyler, T. (2009). Conceptualizing legitimacy, measuring legitimating beliefs. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53(3), 354–375. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209338797>
- Ministry of Interior. (2020). Annual Security Report. Federal Republic of Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://www.interior.gov.ng>.
- National Bureau of statistics (NBS). (2021). Labour Force statistics: Unemployment and Underemployment Report (Q4 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>.
- National Human Right Commission (2020) Annual report. <https://www.nigeriarights.gov.ng>.
- Nwabueze, C. (2020). Security challenges in Southeastern Nigeria: The role of non-state Actors. *Journal of security Studies*, 12(3), pp. 45-67.



- Nwangwu, C., & Ezeibe, C. C. (2022). State fragility and the rise of separatism in Nigeria's Southeast. *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, 39, 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.24193/csqs.39.1>
- Okoli, A. C. (2021). Insurgency and counterinsurgency in Nigeria: Navigating complex security challenges. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 32(7-8), 1433 – 1454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2021.1976564>
- Onuoha, F., & Nwankpa, M. (2020). Counterterrorism and human rights in Nigeria: Security infrastructure and civil-military relations. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 55(6), 859 – 874. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909620908849>
- Opejobi, S. (2024). Southeast checkpoints now 'kill and bury' -IPOB to IGP, DHQ, Retrieved from <https://www.dialypost.ng/2024/07/12>>.
- Paris, R. (2001). Human security: Paradigm shift or hot air? *International Security*, 26(2), 87–102. <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753191141>
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (1994). *Human Development Report 1994: New dimensions of human security*. Oxford University Press.
- Ugwu-Nwogo, E. (2022). Methodist prelate speaks on abduction, says #1,000,000 ransom paid to kidnappers for his freedom, Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com>.