

Policyweekly

Ebubeagu Regional Security Outfit in South-East Nigeria: Reasons for the Discontents



(Photo credit: The Guardian)

Policy Recommendations

- 1** State governors and other stakeholders should be mindful of public resentment against Ebubeagu and consider not only changing the nomenclature before other reforms to the security outfit.
- 2** Any regional security outfit in the South East should be institutionalised by the statutory establishment.
- 3** The financing of South East regional security outfit should also consider citizen involvement through a kind of security fund.
- 4** Staff of such security outfits must be trained, especially on human rights issues.

In the past few years, Nigeria has been under security challenges occasioned by gaps in the size and effectiveness of the country's security personnel. Precisely, the police and other outfits which deal with civil security are patently understaffed. For instance, the Nigerian police have a combined strength of [370,000](#). A good part of this number is involved in providing security to rich individuals and organisations. Hence, most of Nigeria's space suffers limited governmental regulatory penetration. Since 2009, the northern geopolitical zones of the country came under the siege of terror, banditry and farmer-herder violence. The South-East, South-West and South-South are troubled mostly by crimes of kidnapping, secessionist agitations, armed robbery and farmer-herder conflicts. Part of the common agitations by Nigerians as the solution to the problem is the establishment of state police forces. This is to swiftly meet local security challenges, unlike the Federal Police, which may not respond quickly to emergencies that demand prompt

action because it takes directions from Abuja, the nation's capital. Consequently, governors in different geopolitical zones undertook to establish regional security outfits. In the South-West, the [Amotekun](#) was established on January 9th 2020. The South-East later set up the South Eastern regional security outfit called [Ebubeagu](#) on 12th April 2021. This latter group came after long public pressure from the citizens due to the rising insecurity.

The operations of these regional networks of security to support policing in their various zones attracts different levels of legitimation from the population in their operational bases. Amotekun clearly has an established law in each of the six South-Western States, a clear command structure, and properly defined operational limits based on their establishment laws. For the Ebubeagu group, the long delay in its establishment created room for the establishment of the [Eastern Security Network \(ESN\)](#), launched in December 2020 by the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra ([IPOB](#)). At the time the Ebubeagu security outfit was launched, ESN was already confronting the violent herdsmen in different parts of the South East. IPOB in question had declared that it was not going to coexist with Ebubeagu in the region. Besides, the operations of Ebubeagu have been trailed by reports of [rights abuses, torture and extra-judicial killings](#). In Ebonyi State, it was reported that the security outfit is used to harassment of perceived enemies of the State Government. In Imo State, several deaths have been linked to Ebubeagu. Also, the widespread misgiving about the security outfit led to an allegation that they overlapped into Oba in Anambra State recently to attack a prominent member of the community. Overall, Ebubeagu tends not to command the required goodwill of a localised security outfit to support security in the South East. In this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly, we explore the discontentment surrounding the operations of Ebubeagu.

Ebubeagu, its trajectory and popular attitudes

The launch of Ebubeagu by South East Governors was not followed up by the enactment of supportive laws to establish the outfit in each of the states with a clause to network with one another just like that of Amotekun in the South West. Also, its establishment failed to build on a similar experience from the South West by way of setting out a standard operational structure and a sustainable funding mechanism. While this is a major setback on Ebubeagu, it has a more fundamental problem in terms of failure to establish the outfit in the entire individual states of the South East apart from Ebonyi and Imo States. This was a failure of a deadline that the governors and other South East leaders agreed on regarding the establishment of the security outfit by the end of 2021. This launch was not also driven by unity of purpose as the political divisions in the South-East Governors Forum meant that they could not muster one voice

politically in seeing through the security outfit project. While the South-West region is governed by the All Peoples Congress (APC) except for Oyo state, the South-East have three different political parties in its five states.

The lack of diligent care in following up on the collective decisions as Governors regarding the establishment of Ebubeagu may account for the fact that some of the states already have vigilante organisations that they support in one way or another. Anambra State has Anambra Vigilante Services. Abia State also had Abia Vigilante Services. In Enugu State, the government established what they call [Forest Guard](#) to mitigate the activities of violent Fulani herdsmen. The states already expend funds on these organisations and probably did not see a reason to duplicate security spending or even dissolve what they have set up for a new one. The common attitude was that the Governors continued to hold conversations around the security outfit without being willing to provide the wherewithal for its success.

In terms of operational records in Imo and Ebonyi States, where Ebubeagu is operational, the reports about their conduct raise fears of abusive use of sub-national security outfits, which is part of the reasons for the rejection of state police in Nigeria. In Ebonyi State, Ebubeagu was accused of having killed a man on [January 18th 2022](#). Also, in August 2022, Ebubeagu invaded a venue where [a women's group](#) was holding their meeting and disbanded the meeting with sporadic gunshots. A further allegation is that Governor Umahi uses Ebubeagu to [hound opposition members](#) (Peoples Democratic Party), though the Governor denies this charge. In Imo State, citizens have been reaping a harvest of deaths due to the introduction of Ebubeagu. On July 2022, Ebubeagu shot and killed 25-year-old Kelechi Obinna in Amaeshe, Imo State. They are also accused of killing [14 youths of Otulu community](#) who were returning from a marriage ceremony in Awo Omamma, Oru West LGA, Imo State. While the Governor of Imo State, [Hope Uzodinma](#), denies that Ebubeagu carried out the killings, there is widespread anger and resentment against Ebubeagu. Joining a widespread condemnation with Civil Society Organisations is the apex socio-cultural organisation of the Igbo in Nigeria, Ohanaeze, which has also called for the disbandment of Ebubeagu.

Indeed, while Ebubeagu faces several allegations of rights abuses, torture and killings, there are also purported reprisals against them. In [Ebonyi state](#), in January 2022, a member of the Ebubeagu outfit was shot and then beheaded. On March 31st, an operative of the outfit was killed in the Nduogbuovu community of Izzi LGA Ebonyi State. Similarly, a commander of the Ebubeagu outfit was killed in the mid of March 2022 in Ezza North LGA. In Imo State, controversy is trailing a video circulating widely on social media, which shows the assassination of a man initially

identified as the commander of Ebubeagu in Imo State. IPOB and other sources have declared that the person killed in the video is not the commander of the Ebubeagu security group in Imo State.

The point to be made is that Ebubeagu is a well-thought-out plan. It was, in fact, an original demand from the people of the South East. Some youth groups issued ultimatums to their state governors in the South East on why they must set up a regional security outfit. Incidentally, the demand-driven security mechanism was muddled in expedient political calculations that ranged from non-establishment of the security outfit in some states to coercive force standing above and against the people due to a lack of proper institutionalisation. The lack of institutional backing paves the way for misconduct because there are no laws and operational codes to refer to. Besides, it is beyond public oversight and control.

Consequently, the organisation becomes available to any chief executive of a state who wishes to use the organisation in the manner of a private army of their regime. This was also an issue missed by the willing governors who committed to setting up Ebubeagu. The republican and egalitarian nature of the Igbos meant that they would question authorities and want to be treated equally and be consulted on issues of their governance. The lack of adherence to this by the governors meant that people's support became lacking, even though they had initially called for it. This is unlike the South West populated by the Yorubas with a history of pre-colonial monarchical government and social organisation, which modern-day democracy in the region often exploits.

Recommendation

The very core of the discontent against the Ebubeagu security outfit revolves around several issues related to institutionalisation. Thus, to have any regional security organisation, there is need to do the following:

1. State governors and other stakeholders should be mindful of public resentment against Ebubeagu and consider not only changing the nomenclature before other reforms to the security outfit. The governance and operations of the outfit must be re-sold to the people to get their buy-in.
2. Any regional security outfit in the South East should be institutionalised by the statutory

establishment. Its Command and control structure should integrate active citizen involvement.

3. The financing of South East regional security outfit should also consider citizen involvement through a kind of security fund, which the government also supplements with a specified percentage. The funds must be managed in a transparent and accountable manner.
4. Staff of such security outfits must be trained, especially on human rights issues. But, above all, they are to work in collaboration with and as a source of support to conventional security outfits.

Conclusion

A regional security outfit to supplement the security needs of the citizens in the South East is a great idea that has not been nurtured to achieve its potential. Ebubeagu was introduced without proper institutionalisation to save it from misuse. Besides, essential security training on human rights, code of conduct and responsible use of firearms was not consciously provided. Consequently, it has evolved into an operational pattern attracting public opprobrium.

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Weekly Update



Wed, 28th September 2022
@5:00pm - 6:30pm
Thought Pyramid Art Centre,
18 Libreville Crescent, Wuse II,
Abuja

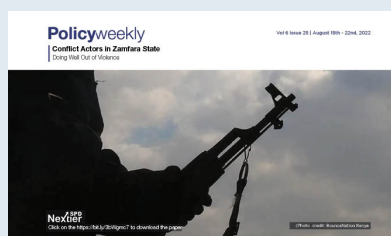
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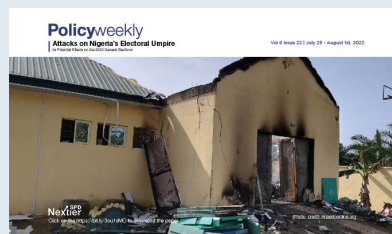
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