

## INTERROGATING CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN IMO STATE: 2020 – 2024

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the dynamic relationship between civilians, civilian authorities, government and military institutions, exploring both the benefits and drawbacks of military activities in Imo State, Nigeria, from 2020-2024. In Nigeria, including Imo State, civil-military relations have been complex due to various factors such as historical tensions, political interference, security challenges, crises from the nationwide 2020 End-Sars movement and 2024 End-bad Governance movement, rise of the Eastern security network (ESN), continued violent agitations of the indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB), malicious killings by the Unknown-Gunmen (UGM) and numerous deaths of youths caused by the raid of the military against these non-governmental security agencies set up by individuals. This research scrutinizes the impact of military operations on the local population, security, and political stability. The findings shed light on the complexities of civil-military interactions, revealing both positive contributions to security and negative consequences, such as human rights violations and displacement. Furthermore, several unjust killings of military personnel by unlawful armed individuals without legal and explainable reasons were also discovered. This research recommends to policymakers and military leaders to enhance their understanding of effective civil-military engagement strategies like civil-militia security partnerships and constitute other strategies that can balance security imperatives with civilian needs and human rights. Conclusively, both civilians and the military should be constantly informed that human life is sacrosanct.*

**Keywords:** Civil-military activities, military institutions, historical tensions, security challenges, policy making, human rights.

### **Introduction**

At Independence, Nigeria inherited from the British colonial administration a military force which comprised the Army and the Navy. These two of which later included the Air force are what made up the Nigerian Armed Forces (Bulus 2019). These forces were raised as a matter of necessity and urgency by the British colonialists to establish political dominance over Nigeria for smooth economic exploitation. However, desirous of having a military force which he could rely upon in the event of the need to solve minor problems of a military and police nature in the new British colony of Lagos, Captain J.N. Glover, a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy was empowered to raise what later became the Lagos Constabulary; a force charged with both military and police duties (Bulus 2019). From the early years of independence, the role of the Nigerian Army was largely ceremonial; the government specifically expected the army to provide support for the fledgling state, to help maintain law and order to provide the ritual marks of sovereignty with military parades, march pasts and guards of honour (Bulus 2019). When the Nigerian civil war

started, it was meant to be a relatively localized military action carried out by the federal troops against the Biafran forces. The Nigeria armed forces were ordered to launch a 'police action' which was to take back secessionist territory. It was a military order that eventually escalated into a full-scale civil war that claimed military and civilian lives. Consequently, the Nigerian civil war became a catalyst for the reorganization in the army, emphasis was no longer placed on numerical strength but of fire power and mobility. In order to conduct and sustain all types of ground operations with other services of the armed forces, the government envisioned Constitutional roles for the army. Section 217 subsection (2) of the Nigerian constitution (1999) specifies Nigerian armed forces roles to:

1. Defend Nigeria from external aggression
2. Maintain its territorial integrity and secure its borders from violation by land, sea or air.
3. Suppress insurrection and act in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President prescribed by an act of the National Assembly.
4. Perform such other functions as may be prescribed by an act of the National Assembly.

These functions were instituted for the functioning of the Nigerian army and also the Navy and air force specifically had their functions and duties instituted to check mate their activities. However, as far back as the 90's, Nigeria's military capabilities were subjected to several systemic constraints. Economic difficulties, corruption, and budgetary limitations slowed the pace of military modernization, delayed new equipment procurement, hindered defense industrial growth, reduced training, and magnified logistical and maintenance deficiencies. Ironically, this became the advent of top military administration becoming politicized, engrossed in government business, and preoccupied with internal security at the expense of professional military development (Bulus 2019). Unfortunately, since 1999 to 2024, the role of the military in securing and maintaining internal security has been unsuccessful giving rise to the wanton killing of people and destruction of properties all over the country, which is being allowed to fester with no end in sight (Ohazuruike 2024).

Consequently, civil-military relationships are crucial for cultivating mutual respect, trust, and better communication among the people, not only during times of war but also in periods of peace, thereby strengthening their democratic rights. To achieve this, it is necessary to undo the advantages previously enjoyed by the military during military or autocratic rule (Adihma 2016). In a democratic state like Nigeria, civil-military relationships describes a situation where the military establishment is obedient by accepting subordination to elected civilian authorities; which has further deteriorated the security conditions of the country and now, barely a day goes by without the media covering one crises or another. These crises range from terrorist incidents, conflicts between local farmers and cattle herders, youth militancy, kidnappings, armed banditry, and cattle rustling to the slaying of innocent Nigerians in herder's attacks. The constant ethno-religious conflicts have also added to the severe menaces to the stability and peace of Nigeria (Ohazuruike

2024). Regrettably, the frequent engagement of the armed forces in most internal civilian security crises has gradually become a standard practice in Nigeria. The presence of soldiers has grown to be a regular facet of the day to day lives of Nigerian Citizens. This climate of fear further exacerbates tensions and intensifies mistrust between civilians and the military. It also poses significant challenges for security personnel in the region and throughout Nigeria (Olofin, 2019).

## **Conceptual Framework and Literary Reviews**

### **Civil-Military Relations**

According to the National Defense Policy (2006), Civil-military relations refer to the power dynamics involving the military, the National Assembly (NASS), the executives comprising of the President, Vice President and Ministers, and the principles of civilian supremacy in the military (Ohazuruike 2024). Furthermore, as with any concept in social science, the definition of civil-military relations is subject to interpretation by different scholars. It is about interactions between civilian leaders and high-ranking military officials and includes the general population. A sound civil-military relationship is crucial for the stability of democratic systems. In contrast, a strained relationship can lead to either a weakened military or one that poses a threat to the very citizens it is meant to protect (Abdullahi & Olofin 2019). Ashila 2024, describes civil-military relations as interactions among the people of a state, the institutions of the state and the military of the state. Further stating that in a democratic rule, circumstances such as political, strategic and social situations –change the terms of civil-military relations and the three arms of government are in constant negotiation to restore the equilibrium. Civil-military relations now extend beyond just warfare to encompass nation-building (Ohazuruike 2024). Wogu and Ibietan (2014) connote civil-military relations as the rapport involving the entirety of civil society and the military establishment instituted for its protection. More so, civil-military relations cover many connections that inculcate different state security participants and non-state actors within society.

### **Contradictions of civil-military cooperation**

One of the primary contradictions of civil-military cooperation in the country lies in the divergent interests and objectives between the civilian and military spheres of the population under the same nation. The civilian segment seeks peace, security and development in Nigeria. While the military hierarchy prioritizes national defense and safeguarding of the nation's territorial integrity. But to guarantee security, peace and development in the country and to also reach national defense goals and safeguard the nation's territorial integrity requires civil-military cooperation. Hence, the identified differing priorities often lead to conflicts of interest, making it challenging to achieve a unified and coherent approach to civil-military cooperation (Remi & Chukwuemeka 2023).

The military's high-handed and heavy approach to issues that border on internal security and peace, at times, clashes with the civilian population's aspirations for full democratic governance and respect for human rights, resulting in a strained relationship.

During the ENDSARS protests in October 2020 for instance, the military was widely accused of shooting of protesters in Lagos (Remi & Chukwuemeka 2023). The nationwide protests which eventually spread to Nigerians in diaspora was principally coordinated to battle police brutality against Nigerian youths. It is commonly held that 'the Nigerian government deployed armed forces on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2020, to open gun-fire at the peaceful protesters in Lekki Toll Gate Lagos, the symbolic center of the protest leading to the death of approximately forty-nine (49) civilians together with many civilian casualties (Oluyemi, 2022; Oluyemi, 2023). Furthermore, the Amnesty International (the influential international non-governmental organization focused on human rights) also strongly believe hat the Nigerian military was culpable in the killings at the Lekki Toll Gate (Amnesty International, 2020). To this effect, when the citizens were not hitherto engaged in massive protests in the category of the Endsars uprising, it is the military personnel they prefer to engage in settling unnerving interpersonal disputes (Remi & Chukwuemeka 2023).

Another significant disagreement arising from an inherent trust deficit between civilians and military in Nigeria stems from historical experiences of military rule, continuing human rights abuses, and excessive use of force by the military in relating to their civilian counterparts. The military have continued to perceive their group as superior, as this boosts their self-worth and as a result, civilian populations in the country still view the military as an instrument of oppression rather than a protector, leading to continuing skepticism and resistance towards seamless cooperation efforts (Remi & Chukwuemeka 2023).

In addition, the militarization of public spaces is a visible contradiction of civil-military cooperation in Nigeria. The presence of armed forces in civilian areas, such as checkpoints usually creates an atmosphere of intimidation and fear among the population. This militarization breeds resentment, exacerbates social divisions, and erodes the trust necessary for cooperation.

More so, the military's involvement in civil affairs such as law enforcement and governance blurs the lines between civilian and military roles, further complicating the dynamics of civil-military cooperation in the country (Remi & Chukwuemeka, 2023). In effect, the limited involvement of civilians in decision-making processes related to security and defense further hampers the effectiveness of civil-military cooperation in Nigeria. The military often dominates strategic planning and implementation, with minimal output from civil society organizations, community leaders, and other stakeholders. This exclusionary approach undermines the principles of democratic governance, hinders local ownership of security initiatives, and perpetuates a top-down approach that failed to address the diverse needs and aspirations of the civilian population ( Remi & Chukwuemeka 2023)

## RECORD OF VIOLENT KILINGS IN IMO STATE 2020-2024 CIVILIAN KILLINGS FROM 2020-2024

<p>Gunmen attack the palace of the traditional ruler of Ogberuru in Orlu council area, Imo State, destroyed properties and left several persons injured.</p> <p>Date- Sept.2023, (Source: BBCnewspidgin).</p>
<p>Gunmen kill a soldier couple on their way to Nkwerre LGA Imo State for their traditional marriage.</p> <p>Date- 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 (Source: BBCnewspidgin)</p>
<p>Gunmen kill a soldier couple on their way to Nkwerre LGA Imo State for their traditional marriage.</p> <p>Date- 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 (Source: BBCnewspidgin)</p>
<p>Gunmen target and kill 4 traditional rulers in Imo State, 2 of which were killed during their traditional rulers' meeting and the other 2 were traced at a later time and shot dead. Date- 5<sup>th</sup> Feb;2022 (Source: BBCnewspidgin).</p>
<p>Gunmen set ablaze the hometown residence Governor Hope Uzodinma at Omuma in Oru East LGA Imo State causing the deaths and serious injuries from the incident.</p> <p>Date- 24<sup>th</sup> April,2021 (Source: BBCnewspidgin).</p>
<p>Gunmen carry out a prison break at the Owerri correctional service centre, Imo State. Freeing about 1,884 inmates.</p> <p>Date-5<sup>th</sup> April, 2021 (Source: BBCnewspidgin).</p>
<p>-Gunmen attack the Police station headquarters in Owerri Imo state in the early hours of the morning but were met with reprisals from the police force leaving about 5 of them dead and some police men injured.</p> <p>- Same day, some assailants burnt down the house of the Imo state commissioner for information at his hometown in Oru west LGA.</p> <p>- On the same day, the house of the interim management committee chairman of Oru West LGA was set ablaze.</p> <p>Date-6<sup>th</sup> June (Source: BBCnewspidgin).</p>
<p>Armed persons attack the Okporo village in Orlu Imo State and shot a mechanic who died before medical aid could be given to him.</p> <p>Date- Aug 2 ,2021.</p>

In summary, around late January 2021, an attack on a Hausa-dominated market in Orlu by masked gunmen, left at least 10 persons dead including 4 soldiers and 2 women hit by stray bullets, offered the largest measure of the increased violent crises in the area and in

Imo State at large (Premiumtimesnewsonline). Also Amensty.Org news reads that at least 21 military personnel were killed in 3 months in Imo State between January and June 2021.

### MILITARY ACTIONS FROM 2020- 2024

BENEFITS	MENACE
Troops destroy seperatists Supreme headquarters at Mother valley in Ekeututu, Orsu LGA Imo State and urged the leaders of the liberated community to return to their ancestral homes. Date- March 9,2024 (Source: The Cablenews)	Soldiers destroy buildings, properties, food-shops, bars as villagers flee. This is resulting from the killing of 8 soldiers by gunmen and thus this became the reprisal actions meted out on the villagers, in Oriendu Umualumaku Umueze Ehime Mbano Imo State. Date- 21 <sup>st</sup> Sept; 2023.
Troops destroy bomb factory of terrorists in Okigwe Imo State, destroying several weapons and ammunitions. Date- Jan.26, 2024 (Source: Vanguardnews)	#ORLUISBLEEDING# This is the Easter sporadic shootout between soldiers and some gunmen who are suspected IPOB & ESN members. This left the villagers in fear on a supposed day of celebration at Orlu in Imo State. Date- 10 <sup>th</sup> April,2022. Source: BBC newspidgin.
Troops destroy camps of Indigenous People of Biafra(IPOB) , Eastern Security Network (ESN) and other hideouts in a raid spanning through Umuekele, Amousu & Agbobu villages in Imo State; during which 2 burnt policemen corpses were discovered and taken for proper burial. Date-January. Source: BBC newspidgin).	Shooting and death of a businessman at Amakohia flyover in Owerri Imo State; because he refused to stop when he was flagged down by soldiers. Date- 30 <sup>th</sup> April, 2021.(Source: Premiumtimes)
Troops on night patrol thwarted a kidnapping attempt by suspected IPOB/ESN and rescued the victim. Source: BBC newspidgin).	A German based businessman killed in the presence of his wife and kids on his way to the airport to return to Germany at the Owerri, Imo state Airport. Date-May 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2021.(Source: Premiumtimes)
Nigerian army kill suspected terrorist kingpin and arrested 2 other notorious terrorists during multiple raids of IPOB hideouts spanning through Okwe Umucheke in Onuimo LGA, Ama Hausa in Okigwe LGA and another raid at Orlu LGA; all in Imo State.	A 45 year-old businessman was shot on his way home from work when he ran into soldiers at a shootout and he could not get immediate medical help because of the ongoing violence. Date- 25 <sup>th</sup> May,2021. (Source: Amnesty. Orgnews)

Date- July 1,2024. (Source: Premium times)	
The police force arrest 150 suspected terrorists, kidnappers and armed robbers which were arrested within a period of 1 year between Jan 2022 & Jan 2023 Date-5 <sup>th</sup> Feb. 2022. (Source: BBC Pidginnews)	

### **Findings of the altercations between the Military and Civilians**

In conclusion to the above gruesome activities of both armed civilians and the military, it is evident that there have been cases of several extra-judicial killings by the military, unlawful arrests and use of force, torture and other ill-treatment of largely innocent civilians, according to Amnesty reports. On the other hand, violence and crime have exacerbated from gunmen who are members of one separatist group or the other and sadly, it is the civilians in the local communities that bear the brunt. It is therefore imperative that positive pro-active actions have to be taken to curb these crimes and security unrest permanently to pave way for the sustainability of Imo State and the nation at large. A security analyst (name withheld by the organisation for security reasons) with Premium Times, opined that the government's poor management of the agitations bears enormous responsibility that led to these problems of security unrest. Uti & Ubong 2022, state the imperatives of maintaining a cordial relationship between the military and the civilian population. The lack of cooperation with the military and the general public in carrying out its combat and noncombat military operations in Nigeria has continued to undermine the success of such operations. Despite the numerous attempts by the civil authority and the military institutions to address these situations, there are still cases of non-cooperation from majority of citizens, deliberate withholding of intelligent information and in some cases open hostility and confrontation between the military and the civil populace.

### **FINDINGS FROM CIVIL-MILITARY PEACE ATTEMPTS**

During the 30<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2023 FEN RAD-Stakeholders dialogue which was aimed at fostering collaboration and understanding between civilian and military entities for the promotion of peace and security. Divers groups of participants, including government officials, religious groups, military/paramilitary representatives, community leaders, the media and civil society organizations were brought together for this dialogue. Some salient issues raised that fueled the insecurity in the country especially in the south-east were;

- Failure of governance in the zone, leading to young people becoming more vulnerable to recruitment into separatist groups due to poor governance, unemployment and poverty.
- (Un)intended mismanagement of separatist agitation.
- Rogue security officials: allegations of the complicity of military and security officials are seldom investigated.

- Proliferation of check-points and check-points induced accidents
- Cases of forced disappearance, humiliation, intimidation and harassment
- Killing of police officers and soldiers
- Frequent confrontation with security agents
- Operation python dance, shrinking of civic space, which were only but the few itemized issues by the delegates at the stakeholders meeting.

### **Recommendation**

To address these unhealthy frequent clashes and crimes emanating from poor civil-military relationship, proactive measures as listed below should be employed and sternly adhered to in order to attain a considerably applaudable state of security in the country at large and in Imo State in particular.

These actions include: the prioritizing of the protection of human lives and human rights, the urgent rebuilding of trust in the military by the civilians through honest and clear lines of action by the military, sincere and thorough investigations of military-extra-judicial actions instead of denials and refusal to comment or even pursue reported cases of such actions. Again, the resolve and commitment of the state government to wholeheartedly follow up the security challenges and mobilize forces to thoroughly investigate crimes will also go a long way to curb these crimes and avoid making media appearances to make promises to the citizens which are not followed to the latter. The encouragement of civilian-military partnership through community policing, dialoging, constant sensitization to both parties on where their boundaries lie and also carrying members of the community along in their operation will reassure the both parties that they are working for the best interest of their families, loved ones, State and country at large.

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