



The Igwebuike Model of Leadership Approach to Mitigating Crime and Insecurity in the South East, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examined the security challenges in southeastern Nigeria and explored how the Igwebuike republican system of governance, grounded in synergy and humanism, can mitigate the persistent crisis of insecurity. Drawing on the cultural and philosophical heritage of the Igbo people, it argued that the application of Igwebuike principles collective responsibility, solidarity, and humanism can provide a sustainable framework for addressing crime through economic inclusion and community-based policing. The paper employed Marxist dialectical materialism as its analytic framework to demonstrate how economic deprivation can drive criminality. This dialectical approach, structured around thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, is used to examine the origin, escalation, and possible resolution of insecurity in the Southeast. The analysis identified prolonged economic neglect, recurring attacks by armed herders, and the perceived inability of the state to respond effectively as key historical drivers of the crisis. It concluded that insecurity can only be meaningfully addressed by tackling the material conditions that sustain deprivation and violence, particularly through inclusive economic policies and community-based security structures consistent with Igwebuike leadership principles.

Keywords: Igwebuike philosophy, Dialectical materialism, Security, Violence, Leadership.

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Introduction

The persistent insecurity in southeastern Nigeria is neither new nor inexplicable; it reflects decades of systemic neglect, economic marginalization, and the gradual erosion of indigenous governance structures. The region, predominantly inhabited by the Igbo, has witnessed a steady escalation of violent crimes, including kidnapping, armed robbery, and communal clashes. More recently, it has become a focal

point of complex insecurity, ranging from targeted killings and abductions to confrontations between separatist groups and federal security forces.

States such as Anambra, Imo, and Ebonyi have experienced increasing attacks on security formations, destruction of public infrastructure, and the emergence of non-state armed actors operating under claims of self-determination. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its paramilitary

wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), have developed partly in response to perceived state neglect and persistent violence attributed to armed herders, further complicating the regional security landscape. According to SMB Intelligence (2022), the region has recorded significant fatalities and displacement, with many communities resorting to self-help mechanisms due to inadequate state protection. These developments point to a deeper structural crisis rooted in political alienation and economic exclusion.

Mainstream responses to insecurity, largely defined by militarized interventions and reactive deployments, have proven insufficient and, in some cases, counterproductive. The reliance on coercive force, rather than collaboration with local communities, has deepened mistrust and widened the gap between the state and its citizens. As Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) observe, securitization without corresponding socio-economic reform tends to reproduce violence. In the Southeast, this dynamic has reinforced perceptions of repression, where local resistance is often criminalized (Ezeani 2013).

This study challenges the prevailing state-centric conception of security and advances the Igbo indigenous philosophy of Igwebuike (strength in unity) as a more sustainable and culturally grounded framework. Igwebuike is not merely a cultural expression but a living system rooted in collective responsibility and humanism. It reflects a republican ethos that

privileges consensus, mutual aid, and shared accountability. As Edeh (1985) notes, it embodies the view that the individual exists within and through the community, and that social harmony depends on mutual obligation.

To deepen this analysis, the study adopts Marxist dialectical materialism as an interpretive lens. Through the dialectical movement of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, it examines how economic deprivation (thesis) generates resistance and state repression (antithesis), thereby necessitating a transformative synthesis grounded in indigenous leadership and community-based security structures. The Igwebuike model, with its emphasis on participatory governance and economic inclusion, thus emerges as a viable alternative to the limitations of state-centric approaches.

Accordingly, the study calls for a rethinking of security in southeastern Nigeria, one that prioritizes indigenous frameworks and community participation.

The crisis of insecurity in southeastern Nigeria requires both cultural and structural analysis. This study therefore draws on two complementary frameworks: the Igbo philosophy of Igwebuike and Marxist dialectical materialism. Igwebuike, meaning “strength in unity,” emphasizes communal responsibility, participatory leadership and mutual accountability as the basis of social order. It offers a contextually relevant model for conflict resolution that is rooted in the lived realities of southeastern communities. In

contrast, dialectical materialism provides a critical lens for examining how material conditions such as economic deprivation and political exclusion generate contradictions that fuel insecurity. While Igwebuike offers normative direction, dialectical materialism exposes the underlying economic and political forces that sustain violence. This synthesis moves beyond state-centered security by redefining protection as a shared responsibility grounded in cultural legitimacy and economic inclusion. This paper thus argues that any sustainable resolution must be rooted in systems that are culturally legitimate and socially inclusive as well as responsive to the lived realities of the people.

Historical and Socio-economic Context

The insecurity in southeastern Nigeria is deeply embedded in historical and socio-economic processes that have shaped the region's political and economic trajectory. Any meaningful leadership framework must therefore engage these underlying conditions. The effectiveness of the Igwebuike model depends not only on its philosophical coherence but also on its responsiveness to the lived realities of the people. These realities are defined by a combination of historical grievances, economic marginalization, and evolving patterns of violence.

Colonial administration under British indirect rule significantly disrupted indigenous systems of governance. By weakening traditional institutions and replacing them with warrant chiefs who

lacked legitimacy, the colonial state undermined established mechanisms of accountability and conflict resolution (Afigbo 1972). This intervention eroded the communal structures that had sustained social order in precolonial Igbo society and created a legacy of institutional dislocation that persists in contemporary governance.

The postcolonial period did little to reverse these structural distortions. The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) further deepened the sense of marginalization among the Igbo. Although officially framed within a policy of reconciliation, the aftermath of the war left enduring economic and political imbalances. Achebe (2012) notes that the experience fostered a collective memory of exclusion that continues to shape political consciousness in the region.

Subsequent federal policies reinforced this perception. Limited infrastructural investment, restricted access to national resources, and inadequate political representation contributed to sustained economic inequality. As Nnoli (2003) argues, the uneven distribution of opportunities has perpetuated cycles of deprivation and resentment in the Southeast. This structural marginalization has created conditions in which insecurity can thrive, as communities increasingly resort to self-help mechanisms in the absence of effective state protection.

In recent years, these longstanding grievances have been compounded by new forms of violence, particularly conflicts between herders and farming communities. These clashes directly

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threaten agrarian livelihoods, leading to loss of life, destruction of farmland, and displacement. Okoli and Atelhe (2014) identify the herder-farmer conflict as a major source of insecurity in Nigeria, with significant socio-economic consequences. In the Southeast, where agriculture remains central to local economies, such disruptions intensify existing vulnerabilities.

State responses to these conflicts have largely been militarized. While intended to restore order, these interventions often fail to address root causes and are frequently perceived as excessive or ineffective. Amnesty International, (2018), reports instances of human rights violations in the management of communal conflicts, contributing to further erosion of trust between communities and the state. Rather than resolving tensions, such approaches often reinforce perceptions of marginalization and neglect.

The persistence of violence, coupled with limited confidence in formal institutions, has led to the expansion of informal security arrangements. Communities increasingly rely on vigilante groups, neighborhood watch systems, and privately funded security networks to protect lives and property. While these initiatives provide immediate responses to insecurity, they also reflect a broader crisis of state legitimacy.

This reliance on private and informal security structures creates a dual dynamic. On one hand, it enhances local capacity for protection; on the other, it raises concerns about accountability and

reinforces inequality. As Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) observe, the privatization of security often results in uneven access, where those with resources can secure protection while others remain vulnerable. This fragmentation undermines the collective nature of security and weakens social cohesion.

Beyond its material consequences, insecurity has also produced significant psychological effects. Fear and uncertainty have altered everyday life, discouraging economic activity, restricting mobility, and weakening social bonds. Communities increasingly operate within a climate of suspicion and self-preservation, further eroding trust and collective solidarity.

Within this context, the relevance of the Igwebuike philosophy becomes evident. By emphasizing shared responsibility, mutual trust, and collective action, it offers a framework for countering the fragmentation associated with privatized security. Rather than delegating protection to isolated actors, it calls for the revitalization of community-based mechanisms grounded in accountability and cultural legitimacy. Such an approach not only addresses immediate security concerns but also contributes to rebuilding the social foundations necessary for long-term stability.

Dialectical Analysis of Insecurity

The patterns of historical marginalization, economic exclusion, herder-farmer conflict, and the proliferation of informal security

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arrangements reveal insecurity in southeastern Nigeria as a product of structural contradictions rather than isolated incidents. A dialectical approach therefore provides a more adequate framework for understanding its dynamics. Economic deprivation and political exclusion generate conditions of alienation, which in turn provoke resistance and invite state repression. Within this cycle lies the possibility of transformation through a synthesis grounded in communal solidarity. In this regard, the Igwebuike philosophy offers a basis for reimagining security through community-centered approaches.

The prevailing security architecture in Nigeria remains largely state-centric, emphasizing centralized authority and coercive enforcement. This model, inherited from colonial administrative structures, continues to shape postcolonial governance. It is characterized by top-down deployment of military and police forces, often with limited sensitivity to local socio-cultural contexts. While intended to maintain order, this approach has proven inadequate in addressing the localized and complex nature of insecurity in the Southeast.

The limitations of this model are evident in the increasing reliance of political elites and public officials on private security. The widespread use of privately funded protection is not merely symbolic but reflects a broader lack of confidence in state capacity. As Mbembe (2001) suggests, this trend signals a form of “privatization of

sovereignty,” where the state’s claim to a monopoly on legitimate violence is weakened by the growing role of non-state actors.

State responses to insecurity are also largely reactive and militarized. The deployment of joint task forces and security checkpoints, while aimed at deterrence, often leads to allegations of human rights abuses, extortion, and further alienation of local populations. Obasi (2021) notes that such militarization has deepened mistrust between communities and the state, undermining both legitimacy and effectiveness. Rather than resolving insecurity, these measures frequently reinforce the very tensions they seek to contain.

Moreover, the state-centric model tends to overlook the specific historical and socio-political grievances of the region. Issues such as perceived marginalization, unresolved post-war tensions, and economic exclusion are often subsumed under a generalized national security framework. As Ezeani (2013) argues, this tendency results in the securitization of dissent, where legitimate grievances are treated as threats rather than addressed through dialogue. Consequently, insecurity is reproduced rather than resolved.

In response to these inadequacies, communities have increasingly turned to grassroots mechanisms of self-protection. Vigilante groups, neighborhood watch systems, and youth-led initiatives have emerged as alternative security arrangements. These responses reflect both a practical need

for protection and a broader assertion of local agency in the face of state failure.

However, these grassroots strategies are not without challenges. Operating outside formal legal frameworks, some groups engage in extrajudicial practices, raising concerns about accountability and human rights. Chukwuma and Alemika (2004), note that the rise of vigilante formations is symptomatic of a governance crisis in which the absence of effective state security legitimizes informal and sometimes coercive alternatives. In the Southeast, this dynamic is further complicated by the presence of separatist movements such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its security arm, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), which are simultaneously viewed as protective and destabilizing forces.

The state's response to these developments has largely been repressive. Military operations such as "Python Dance" and "Crocodile Smile" have been deployed to restore order, but their implementation has often resulted in civilian casualties, mass arrests, and heightened fear. As Uzoechina (2014) observes, the use of force in contexts of socio-political marginalization tends to intensify rather than diminish resistance.

This interaction between grassroots resistance and state repression illustrates a dialectical tension. Communities seek to secure themselves in the absence of effective protection, while the state interprets these efforts as challenges to its authority. The resulting cycle produces a security stalemate in

which neither coercion nor informal self-help yields sustainable peace, leaving civilians exposed to continued instability.

Breaking this cycle requires a shift beyond the binary of state versus non-state security. The dialectical synthesis proposed in this study redefines security as a shared responsibility rooted in communal participation. The Igwebuike model provides a framework for this synthesis by integrating collective responsibility, local knowledge, and cultural legitimacy. Rather than privileging control, it emphasizes collaboration, trust, and inclusivity as the basis for sustainable security.

Igwebuike Model and Indigenous Strategies for Security (Revised & Compressed)

Against the backdrop of state inadequacies and grassroots resistance, a synthesis emerges that reconceptualizes security as a shared communal responsibility rather than a monopoly of the state. This synthesis finds expression in the Igwebuike model, an indigenous philosophical framework rooted in the Igbo worldview. Igwebuike, meaning "strength in unity," emphasizes solidarity, mutual responsibility, and collective agency. It functions not only as a cultural ideal but as a practical ethic guiding social organization, conflict resolution, and community protection.

Philosophically, Igwebuike is grounded in a relational ontology that privileges communal existence over individualism.

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As Kanu (2015) argues, it affirms complementarity and shared identity as the basis of social life. Within this framework, leadership is not conceived as domination but as service—an integrative and participatory role derived from communal trust. This is particularly significant in southeastern Nigeria, where the perceived distance between the state and the people has weakened institutional legitimacy. By re-centering leadership within the moral and cultural fabric of the community, the Igwebuike model offers a corrective to this disconnection.

In practical terms, this orientation transforms security into a collective endeavor sustained by mutual obligation. The Igbo ethic *onye aghala nwanne ya* (“let no one abandon his brother”) encapsulates this sense of shared responsibility. Community-based security initiatives, therefore, are not merely reactive measures but expressions of an underlying cultural logic that views protection as a communal duty.

One of the most prominent manifestations of this model is community policing. Unlike centralized policing systems that are often reactive and detached, community policing in the Southeast is participatory and preventive. It draws on local knowledge, social networks, and everyday interactions to detect and deter criminal activity. As Kpae and Adishi (2017) note, such localized approaches are most effective when communities are treated as active partners rather than passive recipients of security.

Closely related is the practice of civic vigilance through whistle-blowing. Public campaigns, such as those encouraging residents to report individuals displaying unexplained wealth, reflect a shift toward collective accountability. These initiatives reinforce the idea that security is a shared responsibility and that community members play a crucial role in maintaining social order.

Another significant strategy is the revival of oath-taking as a moral and spiritual deterrent. In traditional Igbo society, oaths serve as binding covenants that invoke moral consequences for wrongdoing. Their contemporary application reflects an effort to reinforce communal norms in contexts where formal legal mechanisms are weak or distrusted. Nwankwo (2021) and Nwosu (2020) highlight the continued relevance of such indigenous practices in crime control.

Youth engagement also constitutes a central component of the Igwebuike model. By integrating young people into security and governance structures, communities can reduce their vulnerability to criminal involvement while fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. Initiatives that provide employment opportunities, leadership roles, and community participation help redirect youth energies toward constructive ends.

Economic inclusion further strengthens these strategies by addressing the material roots of insecurity. Drawing on traditional practices of communal labor and cooperative enterprise,

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communities can create sustainable livelihoods that reduce the appeal of criminal activity. Chukwu (1995) emphasizes that such economic systems historically reinforced both financial stability and social cohesion. Contemporary adaptations, including community-based enterprises and vocational initiatives, continue to demonstrate their relevance.

Taken together, these strategies illustrate how the Igwebuike model integrates cultural values, social structures, and economic practices into a coherent framework for security. By emphasizing participation, accountability, and inclusion, it offers a holistic alternative to centralized and coercive approaches. Rather than treating insecurity as a purely criminal issue, it addresses the broader social and economic conditions that sustain it, thereby enhancing the prospects for long-term stability.

Conclusion

This study has examined insecurity in southeastern Nigeria as a product of historical marginalization, economic deprivation, and the limitations of state-centric security approaches. It has argued that the Igwebuike philosophy, with its emphasis on communal solidarity, participatory leadership, and moral accountability, provides a viable and culturally grounded framework for addressing these challenges.

Through a dialectical analysis, the study has shown how structural deprivation and political exclusion generate cycles of resistance and repression. The

Igwebuike model offers a synthesis that moves beyond this cycle by re-centering security within the community and linking it to broader processes of social and economic inclusion. Practices such as community policing, civic vigilance, oath-taking, youth engagement, and cooperative economic initiatives demonstrate the practical relevance of this approach.

In light of these findings, several recommendations emerge. First, there is a need for formal recognition and integration of indigenous security structures within the national security framework, with appropriate legal and institutional safeguards. Second, traditional and community leaders should be supported through capacity-building initiatives to enhance their roles in conflict mediation, youth mobilization, and local governance. Third, youth engagement must be prioritized, not only as a security measure but as a broader development strategy aimed at reducing vulnerability to criminal activity. Finally, economic inclusion should be pursued as a central component of security policy, particularly through investments in community-based enterprises, vocational training, and cooperative systems.

Federal and indigenous approaches to security in the southeast differ fundamentally in philosophy and practice. Federal strategies rely on militarization and centralize control, which often lack local legitimacy and fail to address the socio-economic roots of insecurity. This top-down approach

has deepened mistrust and reproduced violence in many cases. By contrast, the Igwebuike model emphasizes participation, moral accountability and restorative engagement through practices such as community policing, civic vigilance, oath-taking, and youth inclusion. It addresses both the causes and manifestations of insecurity by linking protection to economic and social inclusion.

However, indigenous mechanisms are not without limitations. Issues of accountability, potential abuse and internal inequalities such as gender and generational hierarchies must be acknowledged. Without formal oversight and legal safeguards, community-based systems risk replicating the same injustices they seek to resolve. Obviously then, the Igwebuike model is most effective when integrated within broader institutional frameworks that ensure transparency and protection of human rights. Despite these challenges, its emphasis on solidarity and shared humanity provides a culturally legitimate pathway towards sustainable peace in a context where state institutions remain distant or ineffective.

The fact remains that sustainable security cannot be achieved through coercion alone. It requires rebuilding trust, addressing structural inequalities, and fostering inclusive participation. The Igwebuike model underscores the importance of community agency in this process, demonstrating that effective security is not imposed from above but cultivated through shared responsibility

and collective action. In reaffirming the relevance of indigenous leadership, this study highlights the need to re-center local values, institutions, and experiences in the pursuit of peace. The Igwebuike philosophy offers not merely an alternative framework but a practical pathway toward a more inclusive, legitimate and enduring security order in southeastern Nigeria.

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