

SECURITY-CHECKPOINT DISTRIBUTION ALONG THE ABUJA–ABA CORRIDOR: AN EXPLORATORY OBSERVATIONAL COMPARISON OF NORTH-CENTRAL AND SOUTH-EASTERN SEGMENTS

Nworgu, Okey Theodore, PhD¹ & Amaram, Chukwuma Ubaji²

¹*Department of Sociology, Gregory University Uturu, Nigeria.*

o.nworgu@gregoryuniversityuturu.edu.ng; okeynworgu1@gmail.com

²*Department of International Relations, Gregory University Uturu, Nigeria.*

shaftembassy@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory observational study examines the distribution of identifiable security-checkpoint formations along the Abuja–Aba road corridor, with particular attention to differences between North-Central and South-Eastern segments. Field observations were conducted during six interstate journeys undertaken over a nine-month period between 2024 and 2025. The observational route comprised seven segments: Abuja–Abaji, Abaji–Lokoja, Lokoja–Ajaokuta, North-Central/South-East Connector Corridor, Nsukka–Enugu, Enugu–Okigwe and Okigwe–Aba. The study recorded 77 identifiable security formations across the seven segments. Because Ajaokuta–Nsukka represents a transition between the North-Central and South-Eastern parts of the route, it was not included in either regional total. The three North-Central segments recorded 12 formations, whereas the three South-Eastern segments recorded 42; the Ajaokuta–Nsukka (North-Central/South-East Connector Corridor) transition segment accounted for 23. Findings indicate a pronounced regional asymmetry: the four North highway-Central segments contained 15 security checkpoints ($\bar{x} = 3.75$), whereas the three South-East segments contained 62 security checkpoints ($\bar{x} = 20.67$), representing an overall 80.5% concentration in the South-East corridor. Multi-agency layering (Police, Military, Naval, and Paramilitary) was observed exclusively within South-East transit points. Thus, the South-Eastern segments contained a larger share of the observed formations than the North-Central segments within this limited field dataset. However, the observation sequence did not demonstrate a consistent progressive increase toward the South-East, since the transition segment recorded 23 formations followed by 7 on Nsukka–Enugu, 15 on Enugu–Okigwe and 20 on Enugu–Aba. Securitization Theory is used cautiously to interpret the possibility that differentiated security environments reflect different threat perceptions and policy responses. The findings provide preliminary evidence for further systematic research using repeated observations, standardized road-distance denominators and multiple observers.

Keywords: security checkpoints; checkpoint distribution; South-East Nigeria; North-Central Nigeria; securitization; exploratory observation; highway security

Introduction

Security governance along major interstate transport corridors in Nigeria has increasingly relied on static highway checkpoints. In response to heightened non-state armed violence, separatist agitation, attacks on state infrastructure, and violent crime over the past decade, federal authorities have deployed joint security task forces across critical transit routes (Nwangwu, 2022). Highway security is an important component of mobility and public safety in Nigeria because major inter-state roads connect administrative centres, commercial markets and communities across geopolitical boundaries. Security agencies may establish temporary or semi-permanent control points for purposes including vehicle checks, intelligence gathering, crime prevention and enforcement of transportation regulations. The presence of such formations, however, is not itself evidence that a particular area is more dangerous than another. Their distribution can reflect several factors, including perceived security threats, administrative practices, road characteristics, institutional responsibilities and operational decisions. While statutory justifications anchor these deployments on threat containment and intelligence gathering, transport operators, commuters, and civil society actors report severe mobility constraints, economic friction, and spatial disparities in checkpoint frequency (Ezeibe et al., 2021).

The question of highway security has particular relevance to South-Eastern Nigeria. Previous research and human-rights documentation have reported problems associated with police checkpoints in parts of the region. Public discourse and human rights documentation frequently highlight a disproportionate concentration of security infrastructure within South-East Nigeria relative to adjacent North-Central transit zones (Amnesty International, 2025; Igbo National Council [INC], 2024). Human Rights Watch, for example, documented allegations of extortion at police checkpoints in Nigeria and reported direct observations of checkpoint practices on the Onitsha–Enugu route. These historical observations are important background evidence, but they cannot be treated as measurements of the present study period since systematic primary data documenting the exact spatial distribution of these checkpoints remains sparse.

More recent scholarship has examined the relationship between insecurity, separatist mobilisation and state security responses in South-East Nigeria. Nwankpa (2015), for example, examined the political economy of securitization in the context of Boko Haram and argued that security framing can influence the direction of state responses. Recent studies have also examined securitization in relation to neo-Biafra separatism and the evolution of military-led security operations in the South-East (Ejiofor, 2025; Nwangwu, 2025). These studies provide a conceptual basis for asking whether visible security deployment varies spatially, but they do not provide a direct substitute for systematic measurement of highway checkpoint distribution.

The present study arose from field observations made during interstate journeys along the Abuja–Aba corridor. Rather than relying on media claims about the number of checkpoints in the South-East, the study recorded identifiable security formations encountered along the specified route. The observations comprise seven route segments and cannot support population-level statistical inference or a causal explanation of why particular checkpoints were established.

The study therefore has a deliberately narrower purpose. It asks whether the observed number of identifiable security formations differed between the North-Central and South-Eastern portions of the observed corridor and whether the field sequence showed a progressive increase as the route approached South-Eastern nodes. The study does not attempt to determine whether the observed distribution resulted from regional profiling, whether checkpoints caused

transportation delays, whether security deployment reduced crime, or whether the deployment affected public trust. Even though those questions require different data, the study makes a modest empirical contribution by documenting a field-observed spatial pattern that can be tested more rigorously in future research. Its value lies not in claiming definitive proof of disproportionate security deployment but in demonstrating the feasibility and limitations of direct corridor observation as a method for investigating highway security.

Statement of the Problem

The Abuja–Lokoja–Ajaokuta–Nsukka–Enugu–Okigwe–Aba corridor serves as a major socio-economic arterial link between Northern and Southern Nigeria. Despite its economic significance, highway travel along this route is characterized by frequent stop-and-search operations, multi-agency vehicle inspections, and cumulative transit delays. The central empirical problem is the limited availability of systematic, route-level evidence on how visible security formations are distributed across major interstate corridors connecting Nigeria's North-Central and South-Eastern regions. Existing literature has examined policing, insecurity, separatist mobilisation and security responses, while human-rights investigations have documented checkpoint-related complaints. However, these bodies of literature do not answer the narrower question addressed here: whether the number of identifiable security formations observed along successive segments of one major interstate corridor differs between its North-Central and South-Eastern portions.

A claim that one region has a disproportionate density of checkpoints requires a denominator, normal road distance, and ideally repeated observations across different days and periods. A simple count of observed formations does not constitute density where segment lengths differ. Likewise, a difference in observed checkpoint counts does not establish discrimination or profiling without information about threat levels, population exposure, traffic volume, agency mandates and the decision-making process behind deployment.

The present study consequently treats the available observations as exploratory rather than definitive. It investigates the observed distribution of security formations and examines whether the pattern is consistent with the two stated hypotheses. This approach addresses the research question without extending the evidence beyond what the field records can support.

Objectives of the Study:

1. Compare the observed number of security formations across the North-Central and South-Eastern segments of the Abuja–Aba corridor;
2. Determine whether the observed sequence demonstrates a progressive increase in security formations as the route approaches South-Eastern nodes.

Research Questions:

1. How does the observed number of security formations differ between the North-Central and South-Eastern segments of the Abuja–Aba corridor?
2. How does the observed sequence show a progressive increase in security formations toward South-Eastern nodes?

Research Hypotheses:

- H1: South-Eastern corridor segments exhibit a higher observed number of security formations than North-Central corridor segments.
- H2: The observed number of security formations increases progressively as the route approaches South-Eastern nodes.

Literature Review

The literature establishes three relevant points. Firstly, checkpoint-related problems have previously been documented in Nigeria. Secondly, South-East Nigeria has experienced intensified security responses associated with separatist mobilization and other security challenges. Thirdly, securitization scholarship provides a framework for understanding how threat perceptions can influence security governance.

What remains insufficiently documented is the direct observation of security-checkpoint distribution along a single interstate corridor crossing North-Central and South-Eastern Nigeria. The present study addresses this narrow empirical gap through exploratory field observation.

Security Checkpoints and Highway Policing

A security checkpoint is an observable location at which state or authorized security personnel establish some form of vehicle or traveler control. In practice, checkpoints may be permanent, temporary, staffed or intermittently staffed. Consequently, counting checkpoint sites is not equivalent to counting security personnel.

Research on policing in Nigeria has long identified tensions between the security objectives of road controls and the experiences of road users. Human Rights Watch documented extensive allegations of police extortion at checkpoints and reported direct observations in Anambra and Enugu States. The investigation also recorded checkpoint frequency along the Onitsha–Enugu route, providing an important historical example of how field observation can be used to document roadside policing.

Nnaeto's study of police roadblocks in South-East Nigeria similarly used observation and secondary evidence to examine roadside policing and allegations of extortion. The study provides useful contextual evidence that checkpoint proliferation has previously attracted concern in the region. However, its observations were conducted in an earlier period and should not be substituted for measurements from the 2024–2025 fieldwork reported here.

The distinction between earlier evidence and present observations is important. Historical reports may establish that checkpoint-related concerns have previously been documented, but they cannot establish that the same number, distribution or operational practices still exist up till the present observation period.

Security Responses in South-East Nigeria

South-Eastern Nigeria has experienced significant security challenges associated with violent non-state actors, separatist mobilization and confrontations between state security agencies and armed groups. Recent scholarship documents the evolution of state responses to these challenges. Nwangwu (2025), for example, examines the transition from Operation Python Dance to later military-led operations and situates these responses within a broader securitization and peace-building framework.

Ejiofor (2025) similarly examines securitization in relation to ethno-nationalist violence and argues that non-state actors as well as state actors can participate in processes through which threats are constructed and politically mobilized.

These studies are relevant to the present research because they demonstrate that security deployment in the South-East occurs within a contested security environment. Nevertheless, the existence of insecurity does not automatically explain the number of checkpoints observed on a road. The present study therefore avoids treating security threat narratives as direct explanations of the observed field counts.

Securitization and Spatial Security Practices

Securitization Theory, principally associated with the Copenhagen School, conceptualizes security not simply as an objective condition but as a political process through which issues are framed as security threats and thereby become subject to intensified security responses (Buzan et al., 1998; Wæver, 1995).

The relevance of the theory to this study is limited but useful. If two parts of the same transport corridor exhibit visibly different levels of security deployment, securitization theory provides a conceptual vocabulary for asking whether differing perceptions of threat may be associated with different security practices. The theory does not, however, permit the researcher to infer from checkpoint counts alone that a region has been politically profiled or intentionally discriminated against.

Bigo's (2002) work further demonstrates how security practices can become embedded in routine institutional processes and practices of surveillance. Huysmans (2006) similarly analyses how political constructions of insecurity can shape governance practices. These perspectives support examination of the visibility and spatial distribution of security practices without requiring the present study to claim that securitization has been conclusively demonstrated.

Empirical Gap

The literature establishes three relevant points. First, checkpoint-related problems have previously been documented in Nigeria. Second, South-East Nigeria has experienced intensified security responses associated with separatist mobilization and other security challenges. Third, securitization scholarship provides a framework for understanding how threat perceptions can influence security governance.

What remains insufficiently documented is the direct observation of security-checkpoint distribution along a single interstate corridor crossing North-Central and South-Eastern Nigeria. The present study addresses this narrow empirical gap through exploratory field observation.

Theoretical Framework:

Securitization Theory:

The study is anchored on Securitization Theory as developed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), with its earlier formulation in Wæver's work on securitization and desecuritization (Wæver, 1995); and complimented by The State Of Exception Framework develop by Giorgio Agamben (2005). The theory distinguishes ordinary political treatment of an issue from its construction as a security problem. Once an issue is successfully presented as an urgent security threat and accepted as such by a relevant audience, exceptional or intensified security responses may become legitimate (Buzan et al., 1998). The theory is relevant to the present study at the level of interpretation. A visibly greater concentration of security formations in one part of a corridor may reflect different institutional perceptions of threat. However, the study does not observe the speech acts, policy deliberations or institutional decisions that would be necessary to establish a complete securitization process.

Accordingly, securitization is treated here as an interpretive framework rather than as an empirically demonstrated causal mechanism.

The State of Exception Perspective

Complementing Securitization Theory, Giorgio Agamben's (2005) State of Exception framework theorizes how sovereign power creates legal spatial zones where standard legal protections are suspended under the premise of emergency. Rather than remaining temporary interventions, exceptional security protocols become normalized, spatialized practices within

routine territorial governance (Bigo, 2002). Applied here, the concentration of static roadblocks in the South-East exemplifies a normalized state of exception, wherein citizen mobility is systematically conditioned on mandatory security compliance and arbitrary discretion (Huysmans, 2006).

Application to the Present Study

The framework helps explain why a corridor may contain different levels of visible security deployment. It permits the researcher to ask whether a concentration of security formations is consistent with a heightened security environment without asserting that the concentration was necessarily discriminatory. The distinction is methodologically important because the present data show where formations were observed, not why they were established.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive observational research design. Direct non-participant observational fieldwork from within the travelling vehicle was utilized to record security formations, multi-agency compositions, and travel delays along a single continuous transit corridor without experimental intervention or variable manipulation.

The design was selected because the research questions concerned the direct observation of security formations along a fixed interstate corridor without manipulation of any variable. The fieldwork consisted of six interstate journeys undertaken over approximately nine months between 2024 and 2025. Three journeys were made toward Abuja and three toward the South-Eastern destination. The journeys occurred on different travel occasions, with several observations made on Fridays and Sundays. The observations were therefore treated as field snapshots rather than a continuous census of the corridor. The study corridor extended from Abuja through Abaji, Lokoja, Ajaokuta, Nsukka, Enugu, Okigwe and Aba.

For analytical purposes, the route was divided into seven segments that covered the 704-kilometer interstate transport corridor connecting Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) to Aba (Abia State). To facilitate spatial analysis, the corridor was stratified into seven contiguous operational segments based on major administrative transit nodes: Abuja–Abaji; Abaji–Lokoja; Lokoja–Ajaokuta; Ajaokuta–Nsukka; Nsukka–Enugu; Enugu–Okigwe; and Enugu–Aba. Ajaokuta–Nsukka is classified as a transition and gateway segment because the route crosses from Kogi State into Enugu State along this portion of the journey. The principal unit of observation was an identifiable security-control formation encountered along the route. For purposes of the field record, a formation was recorded where there was visible evidence of a checkpoint or security-control location, including identifiable structures, barriers, signs or other physical indicators. A location could therefore be identifiable even when security personnel were not physically present at the exact time of observation. This distinction prevents the count from being incorrectly interpreted as a count of officers. The study measured observed security formations, not the number of personnel.

The seven route segments constituted the purposively selected observational units. The selection was based on their position along the Abuja–Aba interstate corridor and their relevance to the comparison between North-Central and South-Eastern portions of the route. No probability sample of Nigerian highways was drawn. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all Nigerian roads.

Primary data were generated through direct field observation. Secondary data were obtained from journal articles and human-rights documentation used for contextual and theoretical interpretation. Data were gathered using a standardized observational log sheet during daylight commercial transit along the designated corridor. Field records captured: Total number

of static security checkpoints per segment; institutional affiliation of personnel present (Nigeria Police Force [NPF], Mobile Police [MOPOL], Nigerian Army [NA], Nigerian Navy [NN], Federal Road Safety Corps [FRSC], Nigeria Customs Service [NCS], National Drug Law Enforcement Agency [NDLEA], and state vigilante groups); occurrence of multi-agency co-location (layering); vehicle stoppage times recorded via timed interval tracking; whether personnel were present; approximate waiting time where directly observed; observed monetary demand where directly witnessed; direction of travel; date/time; and field remarks.

The study did not interview security personnel, motorists or passengers as part of the quantitative count. Consequently, statements about the purpose of individual checkpoints, the legality of payments or the motives of personnel were not inferred merely from their presence. Where monetary demands were directly observed, they were treated as individual field observations and not extrapolated into estimates of total extortion.

The analysis is descriptive. Frequencies, percentages, means and ranking were used to summarize the observed formations. Internal consistency of observation was promoted through the use of a structured checklist and repeated travel observations. However, the study does not claim inter-observer reliability because the fieldwork was not conducted by multiple independent observers using independently completed checklists. The observations were conducted in public roadside environments. No names, vehicle registration numbers or other personally identifying information were collected for the purpose of the study. The results are reported in aggregate.

Data Presentation

The standard highway route connecting Aba to Abuja through the Eastern and North-Central transit corridor follows a direct south-to-north route along the A3 and A233/A2 highways.

Sequential Routes from Aba to Abuja

Abia State:

- i. Aba (Origin: Departure via Enugu–Port Harcourt Expressway / A3)
- ii. Umuahia
- iii. Okigwe (Border junction entering Imo/Abia boundary)
- iv. Lokpanta (Major cattle market axis along the A3 expressway)

Enugu State:

- i. Awgu
- ii. Enugu City (Connecting Enugu By-pass to Enugu–Makurdi Expressway / A3)
- iii. Obollo-Afor / Nsukka Axis (Exiting Enugu State via the Nsukka–Obollo corridor)

Kogi State (Kogi East Corridor)

- i. Otukpa Junction / Enugu-Ezike Boundary (Entry point into the North-Central axis)
- ii. Ankpa
- iii. Anyigba
- iv. Ajaokuta / Ejule Axis
- v. Gbagana / Lokoja Link (Crossing toward the North-Central transit belt)

Nasarawa State:

- i. Toto / Loko Axis (Connecting via the Loko-Oweto route across the River Benue)
- ii. Keffi (Major junction town linking Nasarawa to the FCT)

Federal Capital Territory (Abuja)

- i. Nyanya / Karu (FCT entry border communities)
- ii. Abuja City Centre (Central Area / Mararaba Link)

Source: Field observations, 2024–2025

Alternative North-Central Link via Benue:

This is another route to Abuja from Aba that this study didn't capture: →Obollo-Afor through Otukpa→Otukpo→Makurdi (Benue State) → Lafia→Akwanga→Keffi (Nasarawa State), depending on road conditions and interstate commercial transit route .

Source: Field observations, 2024–2025

Eastern and North-Central Transit Arterial Roads:

Along the specified observed route from Aba to Abuja via the Eastern and North-Central transit arterial roads, there are 4 primary federal transport corridors:

1. The Trans-Sahara / South-Eastern Arterial Corridor (A3 Expressway) extending from Aba→Umuahia→Okigwe→Lokpanta → Awgu → Enugu City and Characterised by highly urbanized and commercialized interstate highway with high frequency of security checkpoints (Police, Military, and FRSC) and revenue/tax collection points around state boundaries (Abia, Imo, Enugu).
2. The South-East/North-Central Connector Corridor (A3 / Nsukka–Obollo-Afor Highway), extending from Enugu City→Nsukka / Obollo-Afor Axis→Otukpa Junction (Enugu–Benue/Kogi border) and serves as the critical transition zone between the South-East and North-Central regions. Border communities around Obollo-Afor and Otukpa typically exhibit dense joint-security agency checkpoints.
3. The Middle-Belt Transit Corridor (A233 Highway Belt), extending from Otukpa Junction→Ankpa→Anyigba→ Ejule→Ajaokuta Axis→ Loko→Oweto Crossing and characterized by agrarian communities in Kogi East and Nasarawa; and influenced by highway patrol units, community-based toll points.
4. The Federal Capital Gateway Corridor (A2 Highway / Keffi Corridor), extending from Loko → Toto → Keffi → Nyanya→ Karu →Abuja Central characterized by highly controlled arterial entry into the Federal Capital Territory.

Source: Field observations, 2024–2025.

Table 1. Distribution of Observed Security Formations across Corridor Segments

S/N	Corridor Segment	Classification	Security Units	%
1	Abuja–Abaji	North-Central	5	6.5
2	Abaji–Lokoja	North-Central	2	2.6
3	Lokoja–Ajaokuta	North-Central	5	6.5
4	South-East/North-Central Connector Corridor	Transition/Gate way	23	29.9
5	Nsukka–Enugu	South-East	7	9.1
6	Enugu–Okigwe	South-East	15	19.5
7	Okigwe–Aba	South-East	20	26.0
	Total	7	77	100.0

Source: Field Observations, 2024–2025.

The seven segments yielded a total of 77 identifiable security formations. The largest single segment count was recorded on North-Central/South-East Connector Corridor followed by Ajaokuta→Nsukka =23, followed by Okigwe → Aba=20, Enugu→ Okigwe =15, and Nsukka→Enugu=7.

Table 2. Regional Comparison of Observed Security Formations

Region/Classification	Segments	Units	Mean per Segment	% of Total
North-Central	3	12	4.00	15.6
Transition/Gateway	1	23	23.00	29.9
South-East	3	42	14.00	54.5
Total	7	77		100.0

Source: Field Observations, 2024–2025.

From the geographical classification, the three North-Central segments accounted for 12 of the 77 observed formations, while the three South-Eastern segments accounted for 42. The transition-and-gateway segment accounted for 23. The mean number of observed formations per segment was 4.00 in the North-Central group and 14.00 in the South-Eastern group. This represents a descriptive difference of 10 formations per segment. Because there were only three segments in each comparison group, the result should be regarded as a field-observation pattern rather than evidence of population-level statistical significance.

Table 3. Ranking of Observed Security Corridor Segments and Formations

Rank	Corridor	Units
1 st	North-Central/South-East Connector Corridor (Ajaokuta–Nsukka)	23
2 nd	Enugu–Okigwe	15
3 rd	Okigwe–Aba	20
4 th	Nsukka–Enugu	7
5 th	Abuja–Abaji	5
6 th	Lokoja–Ajaokuta	5
7 th	Abaji–Lokoja	2

Source: Field Observations, 2024–2025.

The ranking indicates that the highest count occurred on the transition-and-gateway segment rather than on a segment wholly within the North-Central or South-East. Among the South-Eastern segments, Enugu–Okigwe had the highest observed count, followed by Okigwe –Aba and Nsukka–Enugu. This finding is particularly important because it prevents a simplistic interpretation that checkpoint concentration begins only after entering the South-East.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for the Seven Corridor Segments

Statistic	Value
Observations	7
Total observed formations	77
Mean	11.00
Median	7
Minimum	2
Maximum	23
Standard deviation	8.68

Source: Field Observations, 2024–2025.

The mean number of formations across all seven segments was 11.00. The median was 7, indicating substantial variation among segments. The minimum was 2 on Abaji–Lokoja, while the maximum was 23 on Ajaokuta–Nsukka.

Qualitative and Thematic Data on Major Observations:

Theme One- Spatial Distribution and Density of Security Checkpoints:

- i. Empirical Observation 1: Uneven Regional Corridor Distribution of Security Checkpoints

Field observations revealed a clear regional disparity in checkpoint distribution. The North-Central corridor recorded relatively few security formations, while checkpoint density increased considerably from Nsukka through Enugu, Okigwe and Aba. This observation raises suspicion on the reason for fewer security checkpoints along this route since Okoli, & Orinya (2019) identified highway crime and the need for security policing along North-Central transit corridors in Nigeria.

ii. Empirical Observation 2: Multi-Agency Security Layering in the South-East:

The South-East corridor was characterized by simultaneous deployment of multiple security agencies, indicating a layered security architecture. Agbiboa (2018) and Innocent & Ikeanyibe (2020) concur that multi-agency security stops along the South-East to FCT corridor are heavily concentrated extortion points particularly along the A3 expressway and the Obollo-Afor border nexus .

iii. Empirical Observation 3: Corridor-Specific Concentration of Security Personnel:

The Enugu–Aba and Ajaokuta–Nsukka corridors recorded the highest concentration of security formations, identifying them as major security hotspots. This corroborate with Agbiboa (2018) that most checkpoints in urban Nigeria are Illegal.

Theme Two: Operational Practices and Economic Consequences of Checkpoints:

i. Empirical Observation 4: Repeated Vehicle Stops and Journey Delays

Motorists were subjected to repeated inspections at multiple checkpoints. A journey beginning around 9:00 a.m. reached Aba around 10:00 p.m., demonstrating substantial travel delays. Empirical Observation 5: Systematic Monetary Extraction from Road Users Field observations documented checkpoint payments ranging from ₦1,000 to ₦4,000 depending on vehicle type, particularly after 10:00 p.m. at Isi Ala Ngwa and Aru Ngwa Junctions. This is what Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) (2021) called Militarization and Checkpoint Economy in South-East Nigeria; Ezeibe, et al. (2021) see it as extortionate policing.e

ii. Empirical Observation 6: Increased Transportation Costs

The repeated payments imposed additional financial burdens on commercial transport operators and increased transportation costs. Innocent, & Ikeanyibe (2020) observed also that security agencies involve in extortion on Nigerian South-East highways.

Theme Three: Security Governance and Implications for Securitization:

i. Empirical Observation 7: Statistical Evidence of Higher Security Presence

Descriptive statistics showed substantially higher security formations in the observed South-East corridor than in the North-Central corridor.

ii. Empirical Observation 8: Construction of the South-East as a High-Security Environment

The concentration of multiple security agencies can trigger a suspicion of an intensified security posture consistent with securitization arguments. Civil Liberties Organization (CLO). (2021) asserts that there is militarization and heavy checkpoint extortion along the Enugu–Port Harcourt and Enugu–Onitsha Expressways.

iii. Empirical Observation 9: Implications for Public Trust, Mobility and Regional Development

High checkpoint density, prolonged travel times and reported monetary extraction have implications for mobility, transport costs and public confidence in security institutions. Innocent & Ikeanyibe (2020) corroborates that Security agencies and extortion on Nigerian highways: Implications for informal sector mobility in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Extortion points and multi-agency security stops along the South-East to FCT corridor are heavily concentrated around inter-state transit boundaries, particularly along the A3 expressway and the Obollo-Afor border nexus (Agbiboa, 2018; Innocent & Ikeanyibe, 2020).

Discussion:

Observed Regional Difference-

The first research question concerned whether the observed number of security formations differed between the North-Central and South-Eastern portions of the corridor.

The field data show a descriptive difference. The three North-Central segments recorded 12 formations, compared with 42 on the three South-Eastern segments. The corresponding segment means were 4.00 and 14.00.

Hypothesis Testing Results:

Hypothesis-1

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Test Result	p-Value	Decision at $\alpha = 0.05$
H ₁ : South-East highway segments have significantly higher checkpoint density than North-Central segments.	Mann–Whitney U	U = 0.000	p = 0.057 (two-tailed exact)	Not Supported

H₁: Not supported. Although the South-East had a substantially higher observed median checkpoint count (15) than North-Central (4), the exact two-tailed Mann–Whitney test does not reach the 0.05 significance level with only seven segments.

Hypothesis-2

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Test Result	p-Value	Decision at $\alpha = 0.05$
H ₂ : Multi-agency security layering is disproportionately concentrated in South-East segments.	Fisher's Exact Test	Fisher's exact p = 0.016 (two-tailed)	p = 0.016	Supported

Supported. Multi-agency posts were significantly more concentrated in the South-East (18/62; 29.0%) than in North-Central (0/15; 0%), Fisher's exact p = 0.016 < 0.05.

The finding supports H₁

As an exploratory descriptive proposition: the South-Eastern segments in this field dataset contained a higher observed number of security formations than the North-Central segments. The study contains only three segments in each comparison group, the segments were not selected probabilistically, and their lengths were not incorporated into a standardized density denominator. The appropriate conclusion is therefore that the observed counts were higher in the South-Eastern segments.

The finding is nevertheless consistent with earlier documentation that roadside policing and checkpoint practices have previously been particularly visible in parts of South-Eastern Nigeria. Human Rights Watch's field investigation, although conducted many years earlier, recorded multiple police checkpoints on the Onitsha–Enugu route and documented allegations of monetary extortion at Nigerian police checkpoints. These studies provided contextual support that could be interpreted as confirmation of the present count.

The Pattern Is Not Uniform

The second important finding is that the South-Eastern pattern is not uniform. Nsukka–Enugu recorded 7 formations, Enugu–Okigwe recorded 15, and Okigwe–Aba recorded 20. The transition segment Ajaokuta–Nsukka recorded 23, the highest number in the entire dataset. This result prevents a simplistic interpretation that checkpoint concentration begins only after entering the South-East. The pattern therefore suggests spatial variation in accordance with entry or exit points of the South-Eastern commuters based on simple regional boundary effect. The observed count may also reflect local road characteristics, security priorities, junctions, administrative boundaries or other factors that the present design did not measure.

Test of Hypothesis 2

The Progressive-Increase Proposition- Of H2 proposed that security density would increase progressively as vehicles approached South-Eastern nodes.

The observations do not support H2:

The sequence from the transition toward the South-East was: 23 → 7 → 15 → 20.

This is not a progressive increase. The count falls sharply from 23 on Ajaokuta–Nsukka to 7 on Nsukka–Enugu before increasing again on Okigwe–Aba 20, and Enugu–Okigwe 15.

Securitization as an Interpretive Framework:

The observed regional difference can be considered alongside securitization scholarship. Buzan et al. (1998) conceptualize security as a form of politics in which particular issues can be elevated into security concerns requiring intensified responses. Recent research on South-Eastern Nigeria similarly demonstrates the relevance of securitization to understanding state responses to separatist mobilization and other forms of insecurity (Ejiofor, 2025; Nwangwu, 2025).

The present data are compatible with the possibility that different threat perceptions contribute to different patterns of security deployment. However, the study did not examine government speeches, operational orders, threat assessments or security-planning documents. It therefore cannot establish that securitization caused the observed distribution.

The theoretical contribution is consequently modest: securitization theory offers a framework through which the observed spatial differentiation can be interpreted and subsequently investigated with stronger data.

Checkpoints, Delays and Monetary Demands:

The field records included observations of vehicle stoppages, journey delays and monetary demands at selected locations. These observations are relevant because previous research has documented similar checkpoint-related practices in Nigeria. Human Rights Watch, for example, documented checkpoint extortion and delays associated with police demands, including observations in South-Eastern Nigeria. Nevertheless, the present study did not systematically sample motorists, measure journey speeds, calculate monetary losses, estimate transportation-cost changes or compare trips with and without checkpoints. Consequently, it cannot conclude that the observed formations caused higher transportation costs or regional economic losses. The appropriate interpretation is limited to the fact that some checkpoint-related operational practices were observed during the field journeys along the observed transport corridors.

1. H₁ not supported: The data show a large descriptive difference in checkpoint counts between the zones, but with only 7 highway segments, the evidence is insufficient to conclude statistically that South-East checkpoint density is higher than North-Central density.

2. H₂ supported: The evidence is stronger for multi-agency security layering. The South-East had multi-agency posts on 18 of 62 observed checkpoints (29.0%), compared with 0 of 15 in North-

Central. This supports an association between the South-East segments and greater multi-agency layering.

3. The study's main conclusion should be narrowed: The observed South-East segments exhibited substantially higher checkpoint counts descriptively, while statistically significant evidence was found specifically for multi-agency layering.

4. Policy implication: The strongest policy concern arising from the data is therefore the apparent concentration of multi-agency security deployment, rather than simply the number of checkpoints. This raises questions about duplication, coordination, proportionality, and consistency of security deployment across the corridor.

The findings provide descriptive evidence of substantially greater checkpoint counts on the observed South-East segments, but the difference did not attain statistical significance under the exact two-tailed Mann–Whitney test. In contrast, the significant Fisher's Exact Test indicates that multi-agency security layering was disproportionately represented in the observed South-East segments. The evidence therefore supports an association with differential security layering more strongly than it supports a generalized claim of statistically higher checkpoint density.

Conclusion:

This exploratory observational study examined the distribution of identifiable security formations along seven segments of the Abuja–Aba corridor. The revised analysis corrected the geographical classification of Ajaokuta–Nsukka by treating it as a transition-and-gateway segment rather than a South-Eastern segment. Within the field dataset, the three North-Central segments recorded 12 formations, while the three South-Eastern segments recorded 42. The South-Eastern segments therefore had a higher observed mean number of formations per segment than the North-Central segments. This finding provides descriptive support for H1. However, the study does not establish statistically significant regional differences, because the number of segment-level observations is very small and the route segments were not sampled probabilistically. More importantly, the data do not support H2. The sequence of 23, 7, 15 and 20 formations does not demonstrate a progressive increase toward South-Eastern nodes. Since the unit of analysis is checkpoint locations, not only personnel present at a specific moment, repeated observations across six journeys revealed a stable spatial pattern in checkpoint distribution. While the number of personnel present varied between observation days, the locations of checkpoint infrastructure remained largely unchanged, suggesting institutionalized deployment rather than temporary security operations or incidental roadside obstructions. The persistence of checkpoint infrastructure, even where personnel were temporarily absent, suggests that checkpoint deployment functions as territorial security architecture rather than merely a response to immediate threats. This finding aligns with perspectives that emphasize routinized security practices and spatial control.

Since the study counted observed formations but did not standardize those counts by road distance, it therefore treats the evidence as a distributional comparison rather than a formal density estimate. The central conclusion is consequently cautious: the observed field data show a marked difference in the number of identifiable security formations between the North-Central and South-Eastern segments of this particular corridor, but they do not establish the cause of that difference, its statistical significance, or the existence of regional profiling.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings, the following policy interventions are recommended:

- i. Transition to Intelligence-Led Policing: Federal security agencies should dismantle redundant, static highway roadblocks and transition toward mobile patrol units supported by electronic surveillance and intelligence-driven interventions.
- ii. Expand Longitudinal Research: Future research should expand observational tracking across multiple seasonal cycles, incorporating larger longitudinal datasets to further evaluate the economic costs of highway securitization.
- iii. Improve inter-agency coordination. Where several agencies perform overlapping roadside functions, future policy assessments should examine whether coordinated deployment can maintain security objectives while reducing unnecessary duplication..

Limitations of the Study:

First, the number of analytical units is seven corridor segments. This is too small for robust inferential modeling and explains why the revised manuscript does not report an OLS regression. Second, the study was based on six interstate journeys over approximately nine months rather than continuous monitoring. The observations therefore represent selected travel occasions and cannot establish the permanent condition of every checkpoint along the corridor. Third, the study relied principally on the researcher's field observations. Although a structured checklist was used, independent inter-observer reliability was not established. Fourth, the study measured observed formations rather than formal checkpoint density per kilometre. Differences in segment length may therefore influence the raw counts. Fifth, the study did not independently measure the level of insecurity within each segment. It consequently cannot determine whether the observed deployment pattern corresponded to the incidence of crime or security threats. Sixth, the study did not survey road users systematically. Its observations of delays or monetary demands therefore cannot be converted into population-level estimates of economic impact. Finally, the study cannot establish discriminatory intent, regional profiling or causality. Such conclusions require additional evidence beyond the present observational dataset.

Implications for Future Research:

Future research should move from exploratory observation to a standardised corridor-monitoring design. A stronger study could divide the route into equal distance units, obtain GPS coordinates for every checkpoint, conduct repeated observations across multiple time periods and involve independent observers. The resulting dataset could then support more appropriate statistical techniques. Rather than assigning regional labels to individual observations, researchers could examine checkpoint counts per 100 kilometres, compare manned and unmanned sites, examine temporal variation and model checkpoint distribution against independently verified security incidents. Such a design would permit a much stronger test of whether apparent differences in security deployment are associated with measurable differences in security risk or other explanatory variables.

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