

Sit-at-home Order by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Socio-economic Development in Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract

The resurgence of self-determination agitation spearheaded by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Southeastern Nigeria has precipitated profound socio-political and economic consequences. Employing aggressive tactics, IPOB's actions have raised critical concerns about regional stability, food security, and the protection of human rights. The study therefore, questions how the enforcement of sit-at-home by the Indigenous People of Biafra has affected food security in Southeast Nigeria, and how the conflicts between IPOB and the Nigerian military resulted in the significant loss of life and property in the Southeast. Adopting a trend research design and secondary data collection within the framework of conflict theory, the study sheds light on the disruptive socio-economic activities in Southeastern Nigeria. In conclusion, the activities of IPOB and the Eastern Security Network have significantly disrupted the socio-economic fabric of Southeastern Nigeria. The persistent enforcement of sit-at-home orders has resulted in disorderliness, violence, and substantial loss of life and property, hindering economic growth and exacerbating food insecurity. Moreover, the separatist agitations challenge the nation's unity, underscoring the imperative need for a comprehensive Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Nigeria. The study recommends prioritizing sustained dialogue between the Nigerian government and IPOB, implementing SSR to enhance security and restore stability, and fostering equitable governance and resource allocation.

Keywords: Biafra, Economic Development, IPOB, Sit-at-Home & Southeast

Introduction

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)-imposed Monday sit-at-home order has evolved from an isolated act of civil disobedience into a deeply entrenched tradition within Nigeria's southeastern region (Alita, 2023). This phenomenon is rooted in the long-standing historical grievances of the Igbo people, tracing back to the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967–1970), a defining moment in Nigeria's post-independence trajectory. The war not only solidified ethnic and political divisions but also left a legacy of perceived marginalization, fueling contemporary separatist sentiments (Ezemenaka & Prouza, 2016). More than fifty years after the conflict, the echoes of Biafra persist, manifesting through various socio-political movements, with IPOB at the forefront of renewed demands for self-determination.

Since its formation in 2012, IPOB has increasingly gained momentum as a formidable opposition to the Nigerian state, articulating grievances centered on economic neglect, political exclusion, and insecurity. The situation escalated significantly following the establishment of IPOB's paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), in December 2020. Positioned as a response to growing insecurity and criminal activities in the Southeast, the ESN quickly became a flashpoint of violent confrontations between IPOB members and Nigerian security forces. These clashes intensified in August 2021, when a security operation in Orlu, Imo State, resulted in the killing of several IPOB members, triggering widespread unrest and reinforcing deep-seated

animosities (Okeke, 2021). The Nigerian government's militarized approach to containing IPOB has led to accusations of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests, further fueling resistance and entrenching IPOB's appeal among marginalized populations (Onuoha, 2018).

Beyond its political and security dimensions, IPOB's sit-at-home order has profoundly impacted the socio-economic stability of the southeastern region. Initially declared as a symbolic act of resistance and solidarity with detained IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu, the order has morphed into an enforced directive, often upheld through coercion and violence by IPOB-affiliated enforcers. As a result, economic activities in major commercial hubs, including Onitsha, Aba, and Enugu, have been severely disrupted. Businesses, schools, and public institutions remain shut on Mondays, causing significant financial losses and deepening economic hardships in a region already grappling with high unemployment rates (Obi, 2022). The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports that the Southeast has experienced an alarming rise in inflation, with food prices surging due to the paralysis of supply chains and restricted access to markets. Small and medium-sized enterprises, the backbone of the regional economy, have borne the brunt of these disruptions, further exacerbating poverty and economic stagnation.

The implications for human security are equally dire. The interplay between IPOB's sit-at-home enforcement and state security responses has intensified humanitarian challenges, leading to widespread displacement, heightened food insecurity, and a surge in criminal activities. With economic hardship escalating, communities have become more vulnerable to insecurity, as job losses and economic disenfranchisement drive an increase in armed robbery, kidnapping, and other forms of violent crime (Uchendu, 2020). Furthermore, the climate of fear engendered by both state and non-state actors have eroded public trust in institutions, leaving communities in a state of prolonged anxiety and uncertainty.

This study seeks to critically examine the far-reaching effects of the IPOB-imposed sit-at-home order on food security and socio-economic stability in Southeastern Nigeria. It analyzes how the ongoing political confrontations and economic disruptions have reshaped human security dynamics in the region, with particular focus on access to food, market functionality, and the broader socio-political consequences of continued state and non-state hostilities.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Nigerian socio-political landscape has been shaped by numerous historical and contemporary factors that have contributed to its economic and security challenges. Among these are non-state actors' increasing influence, ethno-political movements, and the long-standing issues of governance and development. In the last decade, the Southeast region of Nigeria has witnessed a resurgence of separatist agitations, prominently led by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which has employed various strategies, including the sit-at-home order, to press its demands. The interplay between these activities and Nigeria's socio-economic development highlights the complexity of governance in a multi-ethnic state. This conceptual review examines the sit-at-home order, IPOB, and socio-economic development within the Nigerian context, relying primarily on indigenous scholarly contributions to provide a nuanced understanding of these terms.

Sit-at-Home Order

A sit-at-home order is a strategic form of passive resistance where individuals voluntarily refrain from engaging in economic, social, and political activities, often as an act of protest. Historically,

sit-at-home strategies have been deployed as a tool of civil disobedience by various movements worldwide, notably during India's independence struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the United States. In Nigeria, however, the concept has evolved beyond peaceful protest into a mechanism of coercion.

The contemporary sit-at-home order in Nigeria is largely associated with IPOB's activities in the Southeast. IPOB initially introduced the directive as a symbolic remembrance of the Biafran war, but over time, it has become a recurring and enforced measure, often leading to severe economic and security consequences (Okeke, 2021). The order, issued every Monday and on select commemorative dates, is frequently accompanied by threats of violence against those who defy it, leading to widespread business closures and disruptions in critical sectors such as transportation, education, and commerce (Nwafor, 2022).

Scholars argue that while civil disobedience has historically been a tool of political bargaining, the IPOB-led sit-at-home order has been marked by unintended consequences. Reports indicate that major economic hubs like Onitsha, Aba, and Enugu lose billions of naira in revenue due to enforced closures on sit-at-home days (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). The informal sector, which constitutes the backbone of the Southeast economy, has suffered immensely, with traders and artisans bearing the brunt of lost income (Obi, 2022). The transportation sector has also faced significant setbacks, as roads remain deserted and logistics companies experience disruptions in supply chains. Furthermore, educational institutions are frequently shut down, exacerbating an already fragile education system (Uchendu, 2020).

Beyond the economic impact, the sit-at-home order has contributed to increased insecurity in the region. Armed enforcers, often linked to IPOB's paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), have carried out attacks on those who violate the order, further instilling fear among residents (Onuoha, 2018). This cycle of enforcement and compliance has created a governance vacuum where non-state actors dictate social behavior in ways that undermine state authority.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a separatist group advocating for the re-establishment of Biafra as an independent nation. The group traces its ideological lineage to the Biafran secessionist movement of the late 1960s, which culminated in the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). Founded in 2012 by Nnamdi Kanu, IPOB initially functioned as a pressure group leveraging digital platforms to disseminate its secessionist rhetoric. Over time, however, it evolved into a more structured organization with a transnational support network, engaging in protests, advocacy, and, controversially, armed resistance (Ojukwu & Nwankwo, 2020).

IPOB's ideological foundation is rooted in the assertion that the Igbo ethnic group and other southeastern communities have faced systemic marginalization by the Nigerian state (Obasi, 2021). The group points to issues such as political exclusion, economic underdevelopment, and security neglect as justifications for its secessionist aspirations (Eme & Ugwu, 2023). Unlike its predecessor, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which largely employed non-violent tactics, IPOB has adopted a more confrontational approach, frequently clashing with Nigerian security forces.

The Nigerian government's proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organization in 2017 intensified tensions, with security agencies increasing their crackdown on its members (Onuoha, 2018). Despite this, IPOB continues to operate through underground networks and digital mobilization,

maintaining significant followership among the Igbo diaspora. The rise of IPOB has also drawn scholarly attention to the dynamics of digital activism in modern separatist movements. Through social media platforms, IPOB has successfully rallied international support, countering Nigerian government narratives and amplifying its cause globally (Obasi, 2021).

Critics argue that IPOB's strategies, particularly its use of coercion in enforcing compliance with its directives, have undermined its legitimacy. The sit-at-home order, for instance, has alienated some local communities who view it as counterproductive to economic growth (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). Moreover, the rise in targeted assassinations and violent enforcement of IPOB's orders has shifted public perception, with some residents expressing disillusionment over the group's methods (Obi, 2022).

Socio-Economic Development

Socio-economic development encompasses the broad spectrum of policies, strategies, and outcomes aimed at improving a society's economic productivity, human capital, and overall well-being. In Nigeria, socio-economic development is assessed through various indicators, including GDP growth, poverty reduction, employment generation, education, healthcare access, and infrastructural development (Ake, 1981).

Historically, development models in Nigeria have been influenced by both Western economic theories and indigenous perspectives. Scholars such as Ekekwe (1986) have argued that true socio-economic development must integrate local cultural, historical, and economic realities rather than rely solely on Western paradigms. In the Southeast, economic activities are largely driven by trade, manufacturing, and diaspora remittances, making stability a crucial factor in regional growth (Okoli & Orinya, 2019). However, IPOB's activities, particularly the sit-at-home order, have significantly impeded these growth trajectories.

The repeated disruptions caused by the sit-at-home order have led to declining investor confidence in the region. Businesses are increasingly reluctant to expand operations in an environment where forced closures and insecurity persist (Obi, 2022). Additionally, the education sector, a fundamental pillar of development, has been heavily impacted, with school attendance rates plummeting on designated sit-at-home days (Uchendu, 2020). The long-term implications of these disruptions are dire, as they risk creating a generation of youth with limited access to formal education and economic opportunities.

The IPOB use of ESN and Implications for Human Security in Southeast Nigeria

Mbachu (2022) critically examined the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the formation of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), framing its development as a reaction to perceived threats from Fulani herders. The study delves into the socio-political tensions that led to the formation of the ESN, but failed to examine the wider security implications. While it tracks the ESN's evolution into a paramilitary group, it doesn't delve deeply into how this affects Nigerian national security, inter-ethnic relations, or the stability of governance. To gain a more understanding of the ESN's impact, it would be beneficial to include perspectives from government officials, security experts, and the communities directly affected. Additionally, broadening the analysis to consider the long-term effects on law and order would greatly enhance the discourse. Similarly, Uzoma (2021) takes a closer look at the rise of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), which emerged as a reaction to what many see as the government's failure to protect the Igbo community. By pointing out Nnamdi Kanu's accusations against the governors of the Southeast, the study sheds light on the region's

ongoing socio-political struggles and security issues. However, it falls short in providing a detailed analysis of the ESN's wider implications, especially regarding its effects on regional stability and national security. A more in-depth look at both the immediate and long-term consequences—like the potential for conflict escalation and socio-economic challenges—would really enrich the conversation. To fully grasp the ESN's influence on security dynamics in Southeast Nigeria, a more thorough evaluation is essential.

Iwuamadi *et al* (2021) contribute valuable insights into the operations of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), pointing out serious issues like alleged human rights violations, security breaches, and the damage to both public and private property. Their study highlights the rising violence and the ESN's effect on the stability of Southeastern Nigeria, but it overlooks the economic impact of IPOB's "sit-at-home" orders. While they focus on the threats that regional security networks pose, the analysis failed to dive deep into the socio-political factors that are fueling their rise. A more thorough exploration of the historical, cultural, and political backgrounds would really help in understanding the situation better. Also, the study did not critically evaluate the allegations against the ESN or offer a range of viewpoints, which limits a comprehensive analysis of the security challenges and the complexities surrounding the IPOB's agitation. Okoye (2021) provides a comprehensive analysis of IPOB and ESN activities, particularly the tensions that arose after Nigerian security forces disrupted an IPOB meeting in Enugu back in August 2020. Okoye (2021) effectively detailed how IPOB retaliated, including Nnamdi Kanu's announcement of the ESN in December 2020, which he framed as a necessary response to security threats. However, the analysis misses out on a deeper dive into the wider socio-political and economic implications of this conflict. A more thorough exploration of the historical, cultural, and political factors that have fueled IPOB's agitation, along with insights from various stakeholders, would really enrich the understanding of the deep-rooted conflicts and possible paths to resolution in Southeast Nigeria.

According to IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu (2021), the Eastern Security Network (ESN) was established to safeguard the Igbo community from incursions by the Fulani. Tensions escalated into the Orlu Crisis between January and February 2021, triggered by IPOB's demand for Southeast governors to ban open grazing. The Nigerian government perceived the ESN as a significant threat, which led to military deployments in the area. For a week, Intense fighting erupted in Orlu until the ESN announced a ceasefire. Following this, IPOB renewed its call for a ban on open grazing, and the ESN launched an attack on a Fulani camp in Isuikwuato, Abia State. In response, some governors enacted bans. IPOB also accused the Nigerian Army of harassing civilians, including allegations of torture against a Rabbi and his family. On February 15, reports surfaced about military reinforcements heading to Orlu, and on February 18, the Nigerian Army conducted an airstrike. IPOB reacted by stating, "they have finally brought the war upon the Biafran people," indicating a rise in tensions.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict theory, originally formulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-19th century, provides a critical lens for analyzing social structures, power struggles, and economic inequalities. Marx and Engels argued that society is inherently divided into competing classes, where dominant groups seek to maintain control over resources, while subordinate groups resist exploitation (Marx & Engels, 1848). Later theorists, including Max Weber, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Lewis Coser, expanded this framework to explore how institutional power, economic stratification, and state control contribute to systemic inequalities (Dahrendorf, 1959; Coser, 1956).

Applying conflict theory to the sit-at-home order imposed by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Southeastern Nigeria highlights the power struggle between the Nigerian state and separatist movements. The sit-at-home order, initially a form of civil disobedience, has evolved into a socio-political tool used by IPOB to assert its resistance against perceived marginalization and state repression. The Nigerian government, in turn, has responded with military crackdowns, economic restrictions, and legal actions aimed at suppressing IPOB's influence. This dynamic reflects a classic conflict theory framework, wherein a marginalized group (IPOB) challenges the dominant political and economic structures that it perceives as oppressive (Onuoha, 2018).

From an economic perspective, the sit-at-home order disrupts commerce, education, and daily life in Southeastern Nigeria, exacerbating economic stagnation and deepening regional disparities (Obi, 2022). Conflict theorists argue that such disruptions are not merely incidental but are embedded within broader structural inequalities that disadvantage certain regions. The systematic exclusion of the Southeast from key federal infrastructure projects, limited political representation, and historical grievances rooted in the Nigerian Civil War have fueled IPOB's agitation (Okoli & Orinya, 2019). In this context, the sit-at-home order serves both as a symptom of these systemic conflicts and a mechanism for mobilizing resistance. Furthermore, conflict theory underscores the role of state repression in exacerbating social unrest. The Nigerian government's militarized response to IPOB's activities—through arrests, bans, and violent crackdowns—reinforces the cycle of conflict, as state coercion often radicalizes movements rather than suppressing them (Onuoha, 2018). This aligns with Coser's (1956) argument that conflict can intensify when grievances are ignored or repressed, leading to prolonged instability.

Thus, examining the IPOB-led sit-at-home order through the conflict theory framework reveals the entrenched socio-economic and political tensions underlying the agitation. It highlights how structural inequalities, historical marginalization, and state responses shape the economic and social realities of the Southeast. Understanding this conflict from a theoretical standpoint provides deeper insight into the persistent struggles for regional autonomy, economic justice, and political inclusion in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employed a trend research design to analyze the ongoing activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) since 2012. Trend analysis, which identifies recurring patterns, provides insights into the evolving dynamics of IPOB agitation and its implications for southeastern Nigeria. Data were sourced from secondary materials, including scholarly journal articles, government reports, newspapers, and reputable online sources. The documentary method was adopted for data collection, involving the critique, summarization, and interpretation of relevant documents using both deductive and inductive approaches. Institutional reports, government publications, and research on agitation movements and terrorist group operations in Nigeria were also analyzed. Content analysis was employed to critically examine the collected data.

Result of the Findings

The enforcement of sit-at-home by the IPOB leadership and the challenge of food security in Nigeria

Recent attacks by IPOB fighters have led to the deaths of state security personnel and civilians, targeting police stations, markets, and public facilities, including offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Since the enforcement of the IPOB's sit-at-home orders

in August 2022, which see substantial compliance, economic activities in the region have been severely disrupted, particularly on Mondays, crippling the business hub of the week and contributing to food scarcity across Nigeria. The sit-at-home protests have closed schools and halted socio-economic activities, while the state's militarized response to the escalating violence has intensified tensions. Local businessman Innocent Francis, based in Onitsha, noted that many buyers and investors have relocated to neighboring regions due to the situation. Francis lamented, “We lose billions every sit-at-home, and it is doing a lot of harm to us. Our elites have kept quiet for too long, and we continue to lose our fruitful investments.” The ongoing crisis thus poses significant challenges to both local economies and regional stability.

Table 1: Prices of food before and after the pronouncement of sit-at-home in southeast States.

Food Items	Base price in 2020(₦)	Market price in 2021 (₦)	Market price in 2022 (₦)	Percentage increase 2021-2022
1kg of Tomato	₦ 215	₦ 342.25	₦ 445.12	30%
1kg of rice	₦ 225	₦ 417.00	₦ 519.22	14%
1kg of beans	₦ 180	₦ 397.04	₦ 789.74	13.14%
1kg of beef	₦ 1,100	₦ 1,768.14	₦ 2,199.37	24.39%
1kg of palm oil	₦ 320	₦ 709.50	₦ 927.34	30%
Vegetable oil	₦ 650	₦ 812.94	₦ 1,073.89	32.35%

Source: Peoples Gazette 2021, and compiled in tabular form by Akpoke Sunday 2021.

Table 1 illustrates a significant increase in food prices in the Southeast, as social and commercial activities have been severely affected by the sit-at-home order enforced by the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in protest against the trial of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu. Despite several announcements to cancel the order and the deployment of security personnel, criminals continue to enforce it. The Southeast, traditionally known for its vibrant marketplace economy, relies heavily on buying and selling for daily income. Each enforcement of the sit-at-home order results in the closure of all marketplaces, disrupting economic activities across the region. This shutdown means no sales, no purchases, and consequently, no income for vendors. Many individuals, particularly those who rely on food vendors for meals, face hunger as a result. The adage "a hungry man is an angry man" aptly describes the social unrest this situation breeds, leading to broader implications for community stability and well-being.



Plate 1: Destruction of food materials by IPOB

Source: Punch News 2021.

On Monday, September 27, 2021, members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) set ablaze a bus transporting tomatoes, vegetables, and other foodstuffs to Enugu, alleging a violation of the

suspended sit-at-home order. This incident occurred as residents continued to adhere to the stay-at-home directive, even defying the repeated calls from IPOB leaders to cease the action (Ede, 2021). Reports indicate that the Ford vehicle was engulfed in flames by individuals enforcing the previous sit-at-home order at Edem Junction, Ibeagwa Nike, in Enugu East Local Government Area around 5:45 a.m. The bus, which had been traveling from the Ugwogo area along the Opi/Enugu bypass, was blocked and set on fire. Sympathetic passersby contacted the State Fire Service, leading to a prompt response from the Ogui Road fire station. The destruction of food supplies has emerged as a tactic of reprisal by IPOB members in relation to the sit-at-home order, with significant negative economic repercussions for the Southeast region. These actions not only destabilize local economies but also have broader implications for the entire nation. During such sit-at-home orders, schools are closed, depriving schoolchildren of their education despite parents having already paid their fees. This disruption in education contributes to a widening economic impact, affecting future productivity and opportunities for the region's youth. The cycle of violence and reprisal further exacerbates the challenges faced by the Southeast, hindering economic growth and stability, which are crucial for the overall development of Nigeria.



Plate 2: Sit at Home in market places in the southeast Nigeria.

Source: Vanguard, 2022.

According to Vanguard reporter Adonu (2021) residents of Enugu metropolis on partially observed the Sit-At-Home order given by the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, and other Biafran freedom agitators in Enugu state. Just like last year, while several people stayed back at their homes, some residents of Enugu Capital City went about their normal routine, with major markets, transporters, banks and other public institutions offering skeletal services. Also, many government ministries and agencies, as well as private and public schools also recorded little or no activities. The constant sit at home in the southeast Nigeria have led to so many crises such as economic crisis. This order by IPOB has equally resulted to inflation and high cost of living in the south east. The fear of the brutal punishment by the IPOB groups have instilled conformity in the minds of traders and civilians which have impacted adversely on the Nigerian economy and the surge in food insecurity

The Implications of the Confrontations Between IPOB and Nigerian Forces on Human Security in Southeast Nigeria

The persistent confrontations between the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Nigerian security forces have far-reaching implications for human security in Southeast Nigeria. These clashes, often characterized by military raids, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and retaliatory attacks by IPOB-linked armed factions, have significantly altered the socio-political

and economic landscape of the region. Human security, which extends beyond traditional state security to include the protection of individuals from threats to life, livelihood, and dignity, has been gravely undermined in the Southeast due to the intensification of this conflict.

Threat to Life and Physical Safety

One of the most immediate consequences of the IPOB-government confrontations is the rising toll of civilian casualties. While the Nigerian government justifies its military operations as efforts to curb separatist agitation and restore order, the disproportionate use of force has led to widespread violence, affecting not only IPOB members but also innocent residents. Reports of security forces storming communities, conducting mass arrests, and executing suspected IPOB sympathizers without due process have become frequent (Onuoha, 2018). IPOB, on the other hand, has also been implicated in acts of violence, including the assassination of political figures, security agents, and those deemed as saboteurs. This volatile situation has created an atmosphere of fear, where many residents are caught in the crossfire of state repression and militant resistance.

Displacement and Humanitarian Crisis

The recurring violent clashes have triggered waves of internal displacement, as families flee their homes to escape military raids and IPOB-related violence. Towns such as Orlu, Nnewi, and parts of Enugu have witnessed forced migrations, with displaced individuals seeking refuge in rural areas or moving to other regions of the country. The destruction of properties, marketplaces, and community centers has exacerbated economic hardship, making resettlement and recovery difficult. Unlike conventional refugee situations where international humanitarian organizations intervene, internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Southeast receive minimal assistance, as the Nigerian state does not officially recognize them as victims of armed conflict (Eme & Ugwu, 2023).

Economic Devastation and Livelihood Disruptions

The prolonged security crisis has significantly weakened economic activities in the region. The frequent sit-at-home orders, which IPOB enforces as a form of resistance, have crippled businesses, disrupted transport systems, and led to massive financial losses for traders, artisans, and daily wage earners. Additionally, the militarization of commercial hubs has deterred investors, leading to capital flight and stagnation of local enterprises (Obi, 2022). Insecurity on major highways, caused by both IPOB-linked armed groups and state security checkpoints, has made the movement of goods and services more difficult, further deepening the economic downturn in the region.

Erosion of Civil Liberties and Social Cohesion

A major aspect of human security is the protection of civil liberties, including freedom of movement, expression, and association. However, the IPOB-government conflict has led to the erosion of these fundamental rights. The Nigerian government has repeatedly banned pro-Biafra demonstrations, arrested activists without trial, and shut down media outlets accused of sympathizing with the separatist movement. On the other hand, IPOB enforces strict compliance with its directives, meting out violence against perceived defaulters. This dual repression by both state and non-state actors has created an environment of fear and mutual suspicion, where individuals hesitate to express political opinions or participate in public discourse (Okeke, 2021).

Psychological Trauma and the Normalization of Violence

The prolonged conflict has also had severe psychological effects on residents of the Southeast. Continuous exposure to violence, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary arrests has instilled a deep sense of insecurity and trauma among the people. Many families have been forced to endure the disappearance of loved ones, with no access to justice or official explanations. Children and young adults growing up in this climate of unrest have become desensitized to violence, raising concerns about the long-term implications for social stability in the region (Uchendu, 2020).

Since the arrest of the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in 2015 by the Nigerian government, the country has experienced numerous confrontations that have intensified calls for secession. A notable incident occurred on August 23, 2020, in Enugu, where clashes between Nigerian security forces and IPOB members resulted in the deaths of at least two officers and up to 21 civilians. Although the final casualty count remains unconfirmed, viral videos on social media have circulated, depicting victims of the violence. IPOB has called for retaliation against what it characterizes as the murder of its members, while police authorities assert that their response was defensive, claiming that IPOB members fired first. According to Ugorji (2021), the deployment of military forces signifies an escalation in violence. The ongoing clashes between IPOB and Nigerian security forces represent a protracted conflict that has claimed hundreds of lives and left many homeless. The federal government's suppressive tactics, combined with the reactive measures of state governments in the Southeast, have further complicated the security landscape in the region. The establishment of a Southeast regional security outfit, Ebubeagu, can be viewed as a response to the emergence of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) and as a direct attempt to address the escalating insecurity. Additionally, the increasing calls for more security personnel in the Southeast to quell the unrest have resulted in a convoluted security environment, with multiple security forces operating under precarious conditions. Such dynamics make violent confrontations a frequent occurrence, exacerbating the challenges faced by the region (Ogunyemi, 2020; Uche, 2021).

Table 2: Civilian Casualties from the Enforcement of IPOB sit-at-home order in Anambra state.

S/N	DATE	ANAMBRA	NATURE OF ATTACK	DEATH TOLL	OTHER CASUALTIES
1	August 9, 2021	Anambra State	Soldiers shot commercial cyclists at Nnewi	2	-
2	August 9, 2021	Anambra State	Suspected IPOB members attacked Police Area Command, Nnewi, and shot policemen	4	Police station burnt
3	August 9, 2021	Anambra State	A joint security patrol team allegedly killed suspected members of the Eastern Security Network/IPOB in Nnewi	2	
4	August 9, 2021	Anambra State	Suspected IPOB members allegedly shot Naval officers in Awkuzu, Oyi LGA	2	
5	August 9, 2021	Anambra State	Suspected IPOB enforcers of sit-at-home were killed on Ugwuorie/ Nnewi Road in Ozubulu, Ekwusigo LGA	2	
6	August 9, 2021	Anambra State	residents were feared killed in Nnewi when three buses were set ablaze in the industrial city.	2	3 buses razed
7	Sept 27, 2021	Anambra State	Suspected IPOB militants attacked Dr Akunyili's convoy at Umuoji, Idemili LGA	3	

Source: Kabir (2022); Blueprint (2021); Ogbonna (2022); Odu (2021); Okoli (2022); Mbawike (2021); Are (2021); Tolu-Kolawole et al. (2021); Onu et al. (2021); Nwaiwu and Odu (2022); Okeoma (2021).

Table 3: Civilian Casualties from the Enforcement of IPOB sit-at-home order in Ebonyi State.

S/N	DATE	EBONYI	NATURE OF ATTACK	DEATH TOLL	OTHER CASUALTIES
1	May 31, 2022	Ebonyi State	Police invaded a suspected IPOB/ESN camp in Isu, Onicha LGA	5	
2	June 30, 2022	Ebonyi State	Police raided a suspected IPOB/ESN camp in Oriuzor, Ezza North	1	
3	August 9, 2021	Ebonyi State	A woman was shot in the eye at the Aguogboriga axis by suspected armed robbers.	1	Robbed of her belongings.

Source: Kabir (2022); Blueprint (2021); Ogbonna (2022); Odu (2021); Okoli (2022); Mbawike (2021); Are (2021); Tolu-Kolawole et al. (2021); Onu et al. (2021); Nwaiwu and Odu (2022); Okeoma (2021)

Table 4: Civilian Casualties from the Enforcement of IPOB Sit-at-Home Order in Enugu

S/N	DATE	ENUGU	NATURE OF ATTACK	DEATH TOLL	OTHER CASUALTIES
1	May 13, 2021	Enugu state	Suspected IPOB militants attacked and burnt INEC office in Udenu LGA.		
2	July 18, 2022	Enugu state	Suspected IPOB member attacked INEC registration centre in Igboeze North LGA		
3	May 19, 2022	Enugu State	Suspected IPOB militants attacked Emene	1	1
4	July 2021	Enugu State	A 16-year-old boy was hit by a stray bullet during IPOB's confrontation with the police.	1	
5	August 11 & 12, 2022	Enugu State	Police raided suspected IPOB/ESN camps in Aguibeje, Igbo-Eze LGA and Oduma, Aninri LGA	2	2 AK-47 rifles, other ammunitions recovered

Source: Kabir (2022); Blueprint (2021); Ogbonna (2022); Odu (2021); Okoli (2022); Mbawike (2021); Are (2021); Tolu-Kolawole et al. (2021); Onu et al. (2021); Nwaiwu (2022); Okeoma (2021)

Table 5: Civilian Casualties from the Enforcement of IPOB sit-at-home order in Imo State

S/N	DATE	IMO	ATTACKER AND NATURE OF THE ATTACK	DEATH TOLL	OTHER CAUSALITIES
	Aug. 2, 2021	Imo State	Assailants suspected to be IPOB militants enforcing sit-at-home order attacked Okporo, Orlu LGA	1	3 motorcycles and 4 vehicles were burnt. A hotel building was burnt.
	August 9, 2021	Imo State	Suspected IPOB members shot at Orlu and Mbaise	4	2 commercial buses burnt 1 house burnt
	August 16, 2021	Imo State	Suspected IPOB militants enforcing sit-at-home attacked Lee Engineering Company operating in Assa Community, Ohaji/Egbema LGA	5	
	August 16, 2021	Imo State	Suspected IPOB militants killed, beheaded and displayed a community leader's head at OrieOkporo market.	1	
	July 29, 2021	Imo State	Suspected IPOB militants killed, beheaded and displayed the heads of a 70-year-old retired mechanic and a palm wine tapper at OrieOkporo market, Orlu LGA	2	
	August 22, 2021	Imo State	Suspected IPOB militants set ablaze 18-seater bus at Orlu LGA		1 bus
	Sept. 20 2021	Imo State	Angry youths mobbed a suspected IPOB leader to death for attempting to enforce sit-at-home in Ahiazu-Mbaise	1	

Source: Kabir (2022); Blueprint (2021); Ogbonna (2022); Odu (2021); Okoli (2022); Mbawike (2021); Are (2021); Tolu-Kolawole et al. (2021); Onu et al. (2021); Nwaiwu and Odu (2022); Okeoma (2021)

Table 2 to 5 above, illustrates the current security situation in Nigeria, particularly in the Southeast region, remains dire despite efforts by security operatives to restore order. In the first five months

of 2021, 254 individuals died across 63 incidents, with Ebonyi State recording the highest fatalities at 101 (92 civilians and nine security personnel). Imo State followed with 60 casualties, while Anambra and Abia States reported 37 and 33 deaths, respectively. Enugu State had the lowest toll, with 22 fatalities. To foster sustainable peace, efforts must address ongoing sentiments of marginalization within Igbo society, which fuel agitations for self-rule. Perceptions of exclusion and structural violence contribute to ongoing unrest, rooted in the historical context of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war and allegations of pogroms against the Igbo people. Many in the Southeast share a collective sense of victimhood from these events, leading to calls for a Biafran nation, as highlighted by victimhood psychology. The pro-Biafran movements, notably led by IPOB, have elicited mixed reactions among the Igbo community. While many support the quest for freedom for Nnamdi Kanu and Biafra, opinions differ on strategies, with some viewing the agitation as a means of secession and others as a negotiation tactic. Unfortunately, this unrest has resulted in significant violence and destruction in the Southeast.



Plate: 3 ESN clash with Nigerian security in Orlu, Imo State

Source: PLAC, 2022

The recent unrest in Orlu, Imo State, has reportedly resulted in significant casualties, as evidenced by eyewitness accounts and video footage depicting gunfire and widespread property destruction. According to the 2022 report by PLAC, security forces, including the military and police, clashed with a group dubbed the “Volunteers,” linked to the Eastern Security Network (ESN), associated with the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). This confrontation resulted in multiple fatalities, with scenes of deceased individuals and armed personnel captured in circulating videos. The commercial sector in Orlu also suffered damage, leaving the streets deserted as residents remained indoors in fear.

Historically, the Nigerian military has employed violent tactics against IPOB, with Amnesty International documenting instances where live ammunition was used against protesters. Reports indicate that from 2015 to 2016, at least 150 peaceful pro-Biafran demonstrators were killed by Nigerian security forces. Notably, Nnamdi Kanu, the IPOB leader, was arrested in 2015 for his secessionist activities, deemed treasonous by the government. Although Kanu's whereabouts remain uncertain since his flight in 2017, he continues to mobilize support via his UK-registered Radio Biafra, advocating for self-defense against security forces.

Ugorji observed that police suspicions towards IPOB are fueled by Kanu's incendiary rhetoric, exacerbating insecurity and restricting freedom of movement in the region. This tension has manifested in a series of attacks on police stations across five southeastern states. Between 2021 and 2022, IPOB-affiliated youth strategically targeted government facilities, resulting in the assault of 16 police stations, the destruction of buildings, and the deaths of officers. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) facilities were also attacked, raising concerns about the potential for electoral violence as the Anambra gubernatorial election approaches. The violent backdrop of the 2017 election contrasts sharply with current fears, especially given the high unemployment rate in the state.

Reports from April 5, 2021, indicate a tense atmosphere in Owerri, following a major jailbreak that freed over 1,800 inmates and raised fears of violence from escapees. The Nigerian security forces' response to IPOB's activities is perceived as disproportionate compared to their handling of other violent incidents, such as the July attacks in Southern Kaduna that left 53 dead without a similar military response. IPOB's spokesperson highlighted the inconsistency in security force engagement, noting that while Fulani herdsmen gather without interference, gatherings of Biafran youths are met with overwhelming military force.

The crackdown on pro-Biafran demonstrations has resulted in numerous fatalities and abuses against the Igbo population, exacerbated by military operations like Operation Python Dance, launched in September 2017. This campaign, ostensibly aimed at combating crime, has led to numerous clashes and civilian casualties. The Orlu Crisis represents a culmination of escalating violence between the Nigerian Army and the ESN, following a government offensive against the paramilitary group, which the IPOB declared a state of war on February 19, 2021.

Summary of Findings:

1. The enforcement of sit-at-home orders in Southeast Nigeria has severely impeded economic growth, contributing to rising food prices and a heightened cost of living.
2. The ongoing conflicts between the IPOB and Nigerian security forces underscore critical vulnerabilities within the Nigerian security apparatus, resulting in increased casualties and property damage in the Southeast.

Conclusion

This study took a closer look at the ongoing activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) since 2012 by using a trend research design. By analyzing trends, we can spot recurring patterns that shed light on how IPOB's agitation has evolved over time. The data for this research came from a variety of secondary sources, such as scholarly journals, newspapers, government reports, and trustworthy online platforms. The study employed the documentary method for data collection, which involved carefully critiquing and interpreting relevant documents. Additionally, the study used content analysis, a non-experimental approach, to dive deep into the economic and political factors fueling IPOB's quest for self-determination and to explore its wider implications for the socio-political landscape of southeastern Nigeria.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Facilitate Comprehensive Dialogue and Conflict Resolution: The Nigerian government should prioritize initiating and sustaining meaningful dialogue with IPOB and relevant stakeholders in Southeastern Nigeria. This engagement should aim to address the underlying grievances, foster mutual understanding, and promote peaceful conflict resolution. Incorporating local leaders, civil society organizations, and community representatives will ensure inclusivity and enhance the sustainability of peace-building efforts.
- ii. Implement Security Sector Reforms (SSR): To restore public trust and enhance security, it is imperative for the Nigerian government to prioritize the implementation of comprehensive SSR. This should encompass robust training programs, improved infrastructure, and the integration of transparent accountability measures within security agencies. Additionally, equitable representation in security appointments is crucial for fostering collaboration between security forces and local communities.
- iii. Promote Equitable Governance and Resource Allocation: The government must demonstrate a commitment to equitable governance by ensuring fair and inclusive resource allocation and public service delivery in Southeastern Nigeria. This includes transparent distribution of federal appointments, development projects, and social amenities to cultivate a sense of belonging and mitigate feelings of marginalization. Moreover, targeted development programs aimed at addressing socio-economic disparities and enhancing livelihood opportunities for the local population are essential for long-term stability.

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