

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF BIAFRA AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The paper is desk research which explores and analyses group agitations for Independence in the south eastern part of Nigeria, relying on secondary literary sources, including peer-reviewed publications, websites, and eBooks. This study explores the historical evolution of successionist agitation in Nigeria and the agitations in the south east part of Nigeria. The effect of the agitations on nation building such as disruption of economic activities, discouragement of investments in the South East, security challenges and rise in radical separatist groups. The study adopts the Relative deprivation theory which explains the agitations in the south east as responses to deprivation, inequality, other grievances, and explains in part the motivations for protests and rebellion against the state which is perceived as failing or insecure. In conclusion, the south east agitations and grievances are better understood not only in assigning political portfolios or appointments to politicians (elites) of the South-Eastern region in Nigeria, but the human and economic development of the region. The paper recommends that, deprivations, inequalities, human rights abuses in the south east should be addressed by the Nigerian government to bring the south east at par with other parts of the Nigerian Federation.

Keywords: Ethnic group, Agitation, Independence, South East, Nigeria

Introduction

The saying, 'unity in diversity,' epitomizes Nigeria's multi-ethnic nation, diversified in cultural affiliation and tradition. Nigeria is carved into three regions each with distinct ethnic identities and controversial political and constitutional arrangements. In addition, the problems are connected with the introduction of federalism, personality clashes between Nigerian leaders before and after independence, and the absence of a strong ideological magnet (Ezemenaka and Jan 2016).

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was founded in 2012 by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, a British-Nigerian political activist who had earlier launched Radio Biafra in London in 2009 as a platform to voice concerns about the marginalisation of the Igbo people in Nigeria (Wikipedia, 2024a). IPOB emerged as a successor to the earlier Biafra independence movements and was formed to revive the quest for the self-determination of the Igbo people and other ethnic groups in the southeastern region of Nigeria (Ogbogu, 2021; Oduah, 2021). Kanu, who remains the group's leader, co-founded the organisation with Uche Mefor, who initially served as the deputy leader (Wikipedia, 2024b). The establishment of IPOB was largely rooted in grievances over political exclusion, economic neglect, and security threats faced by southeastern Nigerians.

The primary objective of IPOB is the peaceful restoration of the independent state of Biafra through a UN-supervised referendum (HRW, 2020). The group advocates for the protection of Igbo identity, language, and cultural heritage, arguing that the Igbo people have been

systematically marginalised in Nigeria since the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970 (Oduah, 2021; Okpi, 2021). IPOB also claims to pursue nonviolent civil disobedience, including protests, media advocacy, and legal action, as means to achieve its goal of secession (Onyekwere, 2022). Despite being labelled as a terrorist group by the Nigerian government in 2017 (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2017), IPOB insists it is nonviolent and driven by international human rights laws (Amnesty International, 2022). In response to the region's insecurity, the group launched the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in December 2020, with the aim of defending Igbo communities from criminal elements, including armed herdsmen (The Guardian Nigeria, 2021).

IPOB is organised under a structured hierarchy. At the top is Nnamdi Kanu, the supreme leader and the central decision-making authority. Beneath him is the Directorate of State (DOS), a governing council overseeing operations, currently led by Chika Edoziem, who assumed key responsibilities after Kanu's arrest in 2021 (Iconsnews, 2021). The Publicity Secretary, known publicly as Emma Powerful, is the group's spokesperson and manages communication with the media (Wikipedia, 2024a). IPOB operates globally through regional chapters across Europe, North America, and Africa, coordinated by diaspora representatives. These international structures help fund IPOB's activities and mobilise advocacy campaigns abroad (Okpi, 2021). Additionally, the ESN functions as the paramilitary wing of IPOB, though the group claims that it is a defensive force and not an offensive militia (The Guardian Nigeria, 2021). IPOB adheres to a "command and control" system, meaning that all members are subject to a strict chain of command and are expected to follow orders from the leadership (Iconsnews, 2021).

Literature Review

National Security

National security refers to the protection of a country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the welfare of its citizens against both internal and external threats. While traditionally associated with military defence, the concept has evolved to include a broad range of concerns such as political stability, economic resilience, cyber security, environmental safety, and social cohesion (Nweke, 2020). This expansion reflects the understanding that threats to national security can come from non-military sources such as economic downturns, pandemics, terrorism, and ethnic conflict, which equally undermine the stability and functionality of a nation (Akinola, 2022).

In the Nigerian context, national security has been significantly challenged by persistent insecurity across different regions of the country. Issues such as terrorism by Boko Haram and ISWAP in the North-East, armed banditry in the North-West, separatist agitations in the South-East, and oil militancy in the Niger Delta have exposed the fragility of Nigeria's internal security architecture (Ajayi & Fashagba, 2021). These security threats not only destabilise communities but also hinder national development, undermine trust in government institutions, and fuel ethno-religious divisions. The government's responses have included military operations, establishment of special security task forces, and collaborations with international

partners, yet the root causes such as poverty, youth unemployment, and political marginalisation remain largely unaddressed (Onuoha, 2022).

National security is fundamental to a country's sustainable development and democratic consolidation. When a nation is secure, it provides a conducive environment for investment, human rights protection, economic productivity, and political participation. However, insecurity disrupts education, health services, business activities, and overall governance. Therefore, addressing national security challenges in Nigeria requires not only military responses but also socio-economic reforms aimed at reducing inequality and promoting inclusive governance (Eze & Ome, 2023). A multidimensional and people-centred approach is necessary to achieve long-term peace and stability.

Nation Building

To understand the idea of nation-building, explain the meaning of a nation becomes important. Early definitions of nation conceived it as 'a group or race of people who share history, traditions, and culture, sometimes religion, and usually language' (Carolyn, 2005). In this regard, the people of a nation generally share a common national identity. Part of nation-building therefore becomes building of a common identity. Accordingly, distinction can be drawn between ethnic nations based in race or ethnicity and civic nation based in common identity and loyalty to sets of political ideas and institutions as well as the linkage of citizenship to nationality (Carolyn, 2005). However, the contemporary understanding and usage of the term nation is fast corroding the older order and is now synonymous with the state only that a state is more properly the governmental apparatus by which a nation governs itself.

In the context of this paper, a nation may be likened to an umbilical cord that joins the fetus with its mother thereby creating an everlasting bond that is sustained after delivery through breastfeeding. A state, on the other hand, is like an apparatus that makes or mar this bond. Nationhood would give the state the legitimacy to operate. Once a nation is built to an enviable standard, state failure becomes difficult and security guaranteed. With this in mind, a nation is here seen strictly in the Civic sense which de-emphasizes ethnic monolithic in a place of political commonality irrespective of the number of ethnic groups that make up the nation-states.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted Securitization Theory is a contemporary framework in security studies that explains how certain issues become security concerns through discursive processes rather than through objective threats. It argues that a situation or group becomes a security issue when influential actors such as political leaders or government institutions; declare it an existential threat that requires emergency measures. This theory shifts the focus of security from military power to language, perception, and societal construction (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2016). Once an issue is successfully securitized, it is treated with urgency and often removed from normal political discourse.

The theory was originally developed by Ole Wæver and other scholars of the Copenhagen School, who emphasised the role of "speech acts" in security dynamics. Wæver proposed that

by merely stating something as a security issue, political actors can transform it into one, provided the audience accepts this framing (Balzacq et al., 2016). Over the years, this theory has been applied across various domains, including migration, health crises, and political violence. It has proven especially useful in analysing how states respond to internal threats, particularly when governments use national security rhetoric to justify exceptional measures against perceived domestic enemies.

In the context of Nigeria, securitization theory helps explain the government's response to secessionist movements such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Since 2017, IPOB has been labelled as a terrorist organisation by the Nigerian state, and its activities have been framed as a serious threat to national unity and constitutional order. Through speeches, media framing, legal proscription, and military operations, the government has securitized IPOB's calls for self-determination (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). This framing has allowed the state to legitimise the use of force and bypass traditional democratic debate around the grievances of the South Eastern region.

Furthermore, IPOB engages in a counter-securitization process, portraying the Nigerian state as a threat to the rights and identity of the Igbo people. The movement uses media channels like Radio Biafra to redefine the narrative and justify its own actions as defensive rather than aggressive (Ezeibe et al., 2022). This contest of securitization versus counter-securitization contributes to escalating tensions, hardening public perceptions, and reducing space for peaceful negotiation. Thus, the application of securitization theory in your paper provides a valuable analytical tool for understanding the dynamics between IPOB and the Nigerian state, and how the conflict is shaped not only by actions but also by rhetoric and framing.

Historical Evolution of Igbo Secessionist Agitations in Nigeria

In 1945, the animosities that had grown between the Igbo and other ethnic communities erupted into violence. The October 1945 riot in Jos, in which at least two people were killed, many others injured, and considerable number of properties destroyed, constitutes the first major inter-ethnic violence involving the Igbo. Eight years after the Jos riot, the Igbo in Kano were again attacked in a fresh violent incident. The Kano riots which began on 16 May 1953 and lasted for four days, was a more serious violent encounter than what was experienced in Jos. The immediate trigger of the attacks was the decision of the Action Group (AG) to hold a rally in Kano on 16 May as part of a northern tour to campaign for national self-government in 1956, but underlying the violence were longer term resentments of southerners, especially the Igbo, living in Northern Nigeria; resentments further provoked by the self-government debate in the House of Representatives and its aftermath (Ibeanu, Orji & Iwuamadi, 2017).

In 1966, a wave of targeted attacks against the Igbo population mainly in Northern Nigeria occurred in the aftermath of the 15 January 1966 coup and 29 July 1966 counter-coup. These attacks are now widely known as the "1966 Igbo pogrom." The attacks began on 29 May 1966 after peaceful demonstration by students of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria against the unification decree enacted by the military government escalated into violent action against the Igbo. The attacks quickly spread across several Northern cities and towns. At end of the

incident, over 3,000 Igbo were reportedly killed or wounded. Exactly two months after the May killings, a massacre of Igbo officers and men in the Nigerian armed forces took place. By 9 August 1966, when the killings halted temporarily, 27 Igbo officers, 12 non-Igbo officers, 154 men of “other ranks” from Eastern region, and 17 from Western and Mid-Western regions had been killed and many others injured. Again, two months after the July massacre, a more destructive pogrom ensued in the North and other parts of the country where Northern soldiers were stationed. Various accounts indicated that over 50,000 Igbo were killed between 29 September and end of November 1966. With the return of “Igbo refugees,” inter human network that cut across regional boundaries was severed, and with it, lingering sense and feeling of unity between the Igbo and the rest of Nigerians. The 1966 pogrom and the immense population displacement it caused were, therefore, contributory factors in the development of separatist feelings that eventuated in the declaration of Biafran secession (Ibeanu et’al, 2017).

Biafra pulling away from Nigeria in 1967 was an overt act even though before that time, it had been an idea. According to Napoleon, politics in post-independent Nigeria became controversial as the three major groups, the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo failed to get along. Following the coup of 1966, relations between the major ethnic groups worsened, as thousands of Igbo living in the north were massacred. Ojukwu, the leader of the Igbo resistance, removed part of the eastern region from the Nigerian federation to form the Republic of Biafra. The federal government immediately declared war on Biafra in 1967 and successfully ended the secession in 1970 (Bamfo, 2012).

The war with its eventualities left millions dead and wounds in the hearts of those who witnessed the war. However, the aftermath of the war marked another phase in Igbo history as they battled for reintegration in the larger society. In 1976, at the meeting of Igbo Elders and Chiefs, a need for an organisation to serve as a platform through which the Igbo people could articulate their collective views on issues of national importance with its spectrum to include all adult of Igbo origin was formed. This was called the Ohanaeze Ndigbo socio-cultural organisation with late Francis Akanu Ibiam as the maiden chairman and late Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe as the only patron it ever had (Thompson et’ al, 2016).

In the Fourth Republic, precisely on the 26 August, 2004, Ralph Uwazuruike’s MASSOB formed in 1999 called on the Igbo both in the Southeast and the cities across the country to shut down their businesses of which was a success and subsequently in May 2005, it embarked on demonstrations in Canada, France, Germany and Italy and also established a radio station in the US for the purposes of reaching out to Igbos in the diaspora and attracting international attentions (Thompson et’ al, 2016).

Also, The Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) was founded by a United Kingdom based lawyer, Benjamin Onwuka who hails from Bende local government area of Abia state in 2010 with affiliations with Igbos in Diasporas; United Kingdom, United States and South Africa. The movement claimed that it sent its application to the UN for an observer status for the Republic of Biafra on 6th August 2012 with reference no BZM/OS/REPUBLIC OF BIAFRA. In its application, the movement claimed that the security of lives and property, practice of religion

and freedom of Association of the Biafra People are no longer guaranteed in the entity called Nigeria, hence the call for an independent state on 5th November 2012. He however put the threat to action on 8th March, 2014 when the Biafra flag was hoisted at the government house, Enugu state until the group was chased by the Nigerian Police (Thompson et' al, 2016)

Enduring post-war peace depends largely on the degree to which combatants are able to reconcile war related grievances through post-war settlement. It is argued that governments which are willing to address and settle key rebel grievances are more likely to avoid renewed agitation than governments that leave important grievances unresolved. In other words, effective post-war settlement is critical in bringing about enduring peace. Post-war settlement in Nigeria cannot be said to be effective as it was not based on any clear plan; but rather, on the rhetoric of "No victor, No vanquished" and "Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Reintegration" (the 3Rs) put forward by the Nigerian government (Ibeanu et'al, 2017).

The 3Rs which represent an expression of the Nigerian government's desire to rehabilitate war-affected persons and infrastructure and to reintegrate Biafra into the Nigerian society were poorly implemented. The £400 million budget announced by the East Central State for reconstruction of war damages was not fully implemented because the federal government did not release substantial part of its share based on claims of lack of money. Even when the financial fortunes of the federal government improved tremendously as a result of the oil boom of 1973-74, the government used little of the oil revenue to directly fund reconstruction projects. Another notable example of these policies include the decision to exchange Biafran for Nigerian currency only for a specified lump sum, regardless of the amount of currency owned by an individual. The issue of "abandoned property" regarding the takeover of Igbo-owned real estate by "indigenes", especially by minority groups in Port Harcourt after the war, with little or no compensation is perhaps the most outstanding symbol of post-war injustice against the Igbo (Ibeanu et'al, 2017).

Group Agitations: Issues and Challenges

There is no well-established theory of secessionism despite the fact that many states, not least the United States of America, were born of secessions. Much of the scholarship tends to be normative rather than positive, focusing on the legal foundations of the rights of groups to secede. As for the causal determinants of secessions, there is a widespread range of competing hypotheses revolving around economic, cultural and political factors. Separatist regions are usually believed to be different from the rest of the country in terms of wealth, physical or human capital, or natural resources endowment. Discriminatory economic policies from the central state vis-à-vis its regions may also affect the costs and benefits of allegiance or exit. In addition, a country's overall income level and its economic rate of growth may contribute to the separatist propensity of its constituent groups (Boyle and Englebert, 2006).

Cultural Determinants, Cultural theories relate the likelihood of separatism to cultural features of the country or of specific groups. Ethnic, linguistic and religious heterogeneity is frequently argued to promote secessions. Government repression of certain cultural groups, even in relatively homogeneous national environments, is also believed to encourage them to seek their

own political fortunes. Finally, when a group already has grievances vis-à-vis the central government, the existence of a diaspora is believed to facilitate the organization of collective action within the group (Boyle and Englebert, 2006). More so, it cannot be denied that there are gross regional disparities in economic and social development of Nigeria. However, the current agitation for Biafra isn't ideologically inclined to liberation from class oppression but has its roots in the Republic of Biafra, a secessionist state in the former Eastern Nigeria, which existed from 30 May 1967 to January 1970. Against this backdrop, the study will attempt a survey of reasons responsible for current resurgence of the Biafran Spirit below;

Political Culture: Elitist Politics

A political culture is a pattern of individual values, beliefs and emotional attitude. Individual notions of what is right and wrong, good or bad in political affairs together make up the value pattern of norms of what is considered 'ought to be'. It is widely believed that African politics even during the heyday of independence has always been a privilege reserved for the elite, with social repression as an alternative method for keeping power in the face of declining legitimacy and societal scarcity. Besides, poor training, corruption, and nepotism in public bureaucracies have ensured that only the opinions of the ruling elite stand in policy decisions (Thompson et'al, 2016).

Scholars of Nigerian politics have tended to focus on ethnicity and inter-ethnic competition for federal power to explain why agitation for Biafra tends to recur. A refined perspective is represented by Jibrin Ibrahim's argument that the current agitation for Biafra is led by the Igbo masses who feel disappointed by the failure of their elite to capture federal power. According to him, the current agitation for Biafra "represents a complete fracture between the Igbo elite and their masses" due to the inability of the former to capture the Nigerian presidency, and suggests that the fact of the matter is that the Igbo elite has a strong empirical basis to read Nigerian political history as one of failure and frustration for them. With this failure of the elite, the Igbo elites have seized the initiative of following the path of disintegration" (Jibrin, 2005)

Adetula (2015) in presenting his accounts of the recurrence of Biafra separatism, sees the elite rather than the masses as the main drivers of the agitation. To him, the recent upsurge in Biafran separatism involves local elites negotiating for power. Many groups in the country have never felt represented by the central power. Local elites play on these emotions for their own personal gain...this is how local elites try to create greater political space for themselves".

Political Value: Social Insecurity

Political value includes expectations from governments. A government both gives and receives and is expected to do so. There exist values about the collection and distribution in every society. In Nigeria, the state of relationships between regions and central governments is far from clear. In the country, regions want the central government to address outstanding issues to their satisfaction as government also have wanted regions to play their part by being responsible partners and acquiescing to their edicts (Bamfo, 2012).

In recent times, IPOB's leadership claims are that the present administration have hounded and short-changed the Igbos in the scheme of things causing disharmony hence the call for a

divided Nigeria. This is informed by the incessant hardship, lack of holistic development in the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria, lack of youth employment, corruption in high offices and economic regression. This recent agitations are from the IPOB led by Nnamdi Kanu, a British-Nigerian. The agitators believe that the post-civil war slogan of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction which intends to integrate and reintegrate the returning Biafrans is still a chimera and the recent administration of Buhari rather than take off from where Goodluck Jonathan stopped, is set out to marginalize and oppress them (Thompson et'al, 2016).

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is often used as a veneer by the elites to mask their intra-elite and intra-class struggles over power and resources. Over time, however, in Nigeria ethnicity has acquired a more objective character, tending towards more or less an ideology and a prism through which most government measures are filtered. It is also a potent instrument of mobilization. For instance, the fact Nnamdi Kanu was detained for a long period of time and denied bail, despite court rulings for him to be so released, stoked ethnic solidarity even from people averse to his brand of harsh rhetoric. The more his ethnic brethren use the refusal to grant bail as another instance of injustice against the Igbo or more evidence of Buhari's alleged loathing of the Igbo. The more Buhari's 'kith and kin' from the North feel compelled to defend one of their own. The dominant ethnic groups routinely use threats of secession as bargaining tools when things are not going their way. The pervasive hate speeches and ethnic profiling in the media may have given some ethnic groups the belief that they are better off being on their own (Bamfo, 2012).

Revenue Allocation

In most African nations, the manner in which government allots money to regions may not be defined by the locus of production or need but by politics. Regions that wield political power or dominate the civil service may reward themselves the most. Based on central governments' tradition of putting taxes from exports into a common fund, regions lacking in high-value minerals and crops have been more accepting of their budgetary allotment from the government. Regions endowed with high-value minerals and crops, on the other hand, expect to be compensated a little bit more (Bamfo, 2012). It is believed in some quarters that, Biafra pulling out of the federation was based on the unequal sharing of national wealth. The Nigerian Independence Constitution of 1960 redistributed revenue by a series of formulas, which allowed the regions to get between 65 and 75 percent of their funding from federal payments. The Eastern region's special grievance was that it was receiving only about 60 percent of the rents and royalties from the oil produced there. Easterners believed the other regions were cheating the region out of development capital for which there were no guidelines for its sharing (Bamfo, 2012).

Political Socialization: Bitter memories of War

Political socialization is the process by which the values, beliefs and emotions of a political culture are passed on to succeeding generations. The process starts at an early age and continues throughout life. The institutions of family, school, church, work groups, political party and so on being its agencies. It is possible that Igbos' bitter memory of the war as handed

over by generations and their attempt to aggressively contest the narratives about the war creates residual anger among those who fought on the federal side or animates among many in the North the bitter memories of their lost leaders during the January 15, 1966 coup. The anger and suspicion around the agitations for Biafra maybe subtle but they help to feed into Igbo's feeling of being unwanted, which in turn fuels separatist sentiments. This feeling must have persisted because Nigeria seems to struggle with the skill to conclusively resolving grievances by several groups in the country. One of the consequences of this is that many groups appear to have institutionalized memories of hurt or perceived sense of injustice, which they popularly express as "marginalization." This inability to conclusively resolve group grievances has contributed to the rise of the notion that only groups with the capacity to hold the state to ransom will have their grievances addressed (Bamfo, 2012)

Effect of Group Agitations on Nation Building in Nigeria

1. **Disruption of Economic Activities:** Due to the frequent demonstrations by pro-Biafra activists and the clashes between them and the security agencies, economic activities are often disrupted in locations where these protests occur. The tendency for pro-Biafra protests to disrupt economic activities is understandable considering that most of the protests occurred in the major commercial areas of the South East. The media analysis of pro-Biafra protests indicates that 16 incidents involving pro Biafra separatists were reported in two national dailies (The Sun Newspaper and the Vanguard Newspaper) between 28 March 2014 and 14 June 2016. Of these, eight incidents occurred in Onitsha, while five took place in Aba; other cities in the South East and South South such as Asaba, Port Harcourt, Abakaliki, Enugu, Ikom and Yenagoa, recorded one to three incidents (Adetula, 2015).
2. **Discouragement of Investments in the South East:** Related to the problem of disruption of economic activities is the issue of discouragement of investments in the South East. Since the last two decades, the South East has been struggling with a declining economy. While poverty rate in all regions of Nigeria has increased in the past two decades, the degree at which the number of poor in the South East spiralled is indicative of the plunge in the region's economic prosperity. The decline in the economic fortune of the South East reflect on the number of publicly quoted companies in the region, which is the least in Nigeria (Tom, 1995). With the absence of formal enterprises, the South East's economy is essentially informal, employing less number of graduates than other regions. The informal nature of the South East economy has a link with the Biafra war. The war forced many formal businesses out of the zone and following the indigenization of many of these businesses and the transfer of their ownership to individuals from other parts of Nigeria, not many companies considered it expedient to return to the South East (AOAV, 2013). The economic depression of the late 1970s and 1980s stifled the remaining formal businesses and frustrated attempts by Igbo entrepreneurs to sustain formal businesses in the area. With increasing hostilities between Biafra separatists and Nigerian authorities, the

investment climate in the South East could be made more unfriendly, discouraging potential investors from directing their resources to the area.

3. **Security Challenges:** There is a strong potential for the increasing separatist agitation in the South East to further complicate the security situation in the region by providing a basis for potential criminals to become part of the protesters, and switch easily from being Biafra protesters to armed bandits. Anecdotal evidence points to this possibility as some pro-Biafra protesters have been identified as former members of the Bakassi Boys and other armed groups who are bussed from one location to the other to lead the protests. Without any stable means of livelihood, these protesters could constitute serious threats to security in the region. At the national level, recurring agitation for Biafra can intensify existing security challenges. Nigeria ranks, on several global indices, as one of the countries that are most severely affected by violence and insecurity in the world (AOAV, 2013). Security challenges in Nigeria manifest in multi-faceted ways, but the most disturbing form of insecurity is intercommunal, political and sectarian violence. As discussed earlier, the Igbo community, mainly in Northern Nigeria, is usually the victims of these recurrent attacks, and this has created a deep sense of disaffection (Obi, 2006).
4. **Rise in Radical Separatist Groups:** The intensification of the activities of radical-separatist groups such as MASSOB and IPOB has a cultural dimension which involves an increasing break down of existing forms of inter-generational relationship. Since the 1970s, the “Igbo cause” has been championed by elite-led organizations formed by the “older generation,” seeking mainstream-inclusivism. However, with the rise of radical-separatist groups since 1999, existing forms of cultural and inter-generational relations are being redefined. Mainstream organizations, such as Ohaneze-Ndi-Igbo and Aka Ikenga, have declined as, if not ceased to be, the dominant voice that speaks for the entire group. This development feeds into the broader Nigerian context where youth-based groups, youth revolt and agitations currently play a critical role in Nigeria’s political process, with far-reaching implications for exercise of power and authority, social cohesion, and peace building (Obi, 2006). One immediate consequence of this development might be further fragmentation of the Igbo society, which could make consensus building on several issues extremely difficult to achieve.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the resurgence of group agitations for independence in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, particularly by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), is deeply rooted in a combination of historical grievances, perceived marginalisation, and socio-political exclusion. Respondents and secondary data sources consistently highlighted the legacy of the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), as well as continued feelings of political and economic alienation among the Igbo people, as key motivators behind the renewed calls for secession. These findings are consistent with prior studies, such as Ezeibe et al. (2022), who observed that unresolved post-war reconciliation and uneven development contribute to persistent separatist sentiments.

Furthermore, the study shows that the Nigerian governments securitized response to IPOB and related groups, including proscription, military operations, and arrests of members has contributed to the escalation of tensions in the region rather than diminishing them. Drawing on the lens of securitization theory, the government's actions can be interpreted as constructing IPOB's activities as existential threats to national security, which then justifies extraordinary measures. However, this approach may have unintended consequences, such as deepening distrust, radicalising sympathisers, and reducing opportunities for dialogue (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). The findings suggest that state-driven securitization without corresponding efforts at political engagement has limited effectiveness in addressing underlying discontent.

Additionally, the study finds that IPOB has effectively employed modern communication tools, such as social media and Radio Biafra, to advance its narrative and mobilize support, especially within the diaspora. The group's messaging frames the Nigerian state as an oppressor of the Igbo people and promotes a sense of Igbo nationalism that resonates with historical and cultural memory. This form of counter-securitization serves not only to challenge the government's narrative but also to legitimize IPOB's cause in the eyes of its followers. These dynamics underscore the complex and evolving nature of the agitations, suggesting that any long-term solution must go beyond security operations and engage with the political, cultural, and economic dimensions of the crisis.

Conclusion

The Biafran agitation and grievances are better understood not only in political portfolios or appointments to politicians (elites) of the South-Eastern region in Nigeria, but the human and economic development of the region. Although the South-East region has been given political portfolios, the substantiation put forward is that, these portfolios were or are seen as not accommodative enough and non-effective for the human and infrastructural development of the South East and Southern regions. Consequently, the non-enabling environment and policies which are diminishing the livelihood of the common man and the national political prospects of South-Eastern Nigerians is used as a front for agitations and calls for Nigeria's dissolution. Nevertheless, we must endeavour to wrestle one point home: Radicals, Nationalists, patriots, progressives and socialist from dominant and minority ethnic groups must admit that the bourgeoisie from their areas who happen to be their fathers, mothers, uncles, brothers and sisters have collectively been subjugated and exploited both by the dominant and minority groups for several decades. The above can be achieved only in the dearth of total commitment to a political culture and parochial politics fortified by the Nigerian elite, which will permit and ensure deep friendships across political, ethnic and religious divides.

Recommendations

Base on this study, the recommendations are:

The Nigerian government should convene a genuine and inclusive national dialogue that addresses longstanding grievances of marginalisation expressed by the South Eastern region. Political reforms that promote equity in resource allocation, appointments, and federal character principles should be prioritised to rebuild trust and reduce the appeal of separatist ideologies.

Dialogue platforms involving traditional leaders, civil society groups, and representatives of agitators like IPOB can foster peaceful negotiation and reconciliation.

Rather than relying solely on military force and proscription, the government should adopt a balanced strategy that upholds human rights while maintaining national security. Excessive use of force and blanket labeling of agitators as terrorists may worsen tensions and alienate the population. Implementing community policing, intelligence-led operations, and conflict-sensitive approaches will be more effective in managing dissent without infringing on civil liberties.

The root causes of agitation, including unemployment, poor infrastructure, and lack of opportunities, must be addressed through targeted development programmes in the South East. The government should invest in industrialisation, youth entrepreneurship, and educational initiatives tailored to the region. Empowering the youth with economic and political opportunities can help reduce frustration and curb recruitment into secessionist movements.

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