

## GOVERNMENT HANDLING OF IPOB AND THE RISING INSECURITY IN IGBO LAND: THE WAY OUT

**Samuel C. Nwankwo**

Department of Theology

Wesley University Ondo

[samuel.nwankwo@wesleyuni.edu.ng](mailto:samuel.nwankwo@wesleyuni.edu.ng)

### Abstract

This research argued that insecurity occasioned by government handling of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist group agitating for self-determination, has snowballed in recent times in Igbo land. The degree of dislocation witnessed in Igbo land within the period under review, can only be imagined. Studies have shown that agitations by different groups in countries of the world do have effects on the social, religious, political, economic and security stability of the countries involved. The impact of this development where it occurs, is usually in the negative. This is the case with IPOB activities in Igbo land and its handling by the Federal and state government in Nigeria. Sociological and historical phenomenology approaches, with the use of secondary sources of data collection, were adopted for this research. The paper discovered that hitherto, government's strategies in dealing with the Biafra separatist group (IPOB), has resulted to rising insecurity in Igbo land. It suggested that inclusive Nigeria, dialogue, restructuring, referendum, amnesty and other political solutions should be employed in resolving the group's agitation. The contributions of elder statesmen, leaders of thought, traditional and religious leaders in the region, will go a long way in addressing the imbroglio, so that Igbo land will assume her former status, as one of the peaceful and prosperous regions in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** IPOB, Igbo land, insecurity, Biafra, security.

### Introduction

The Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria have been known for their egalitarian, industrious, independent and peaceful disposition in Nigeria. It is a region that is distinguished by her unique cultural and religious values, which have aided them in various areas of development. It is on note to mention that other regions in Nigeria and beyond know the Igbo people as loving, accommodating and peaceful set of human beings. However, this fact and perception have been truncated in recent times due to the rising insecurity across the nation and especially, in Igbo land. Omonijo et al. (2017), averred that "the nature of insecurity at global level is changing rapidly." No society is strictly protected against insecurity but the nature and its rate of occurrence as well as the negative implications it portends on societal development varies from one society to another.

On this note, it was observed that the rising insecurity in Nigeria, is constantly taking different dimensions as the day goes by. National dailies, social media and major communication stations like television and radio outlets, are awash with news bordering on insecurity across the country on daily basis. Alikor (2022) noted that, “Nigeria was rated the worst country with insecurity in the world in 2020 by the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), behind Afghanistan and Iraq. Nigeria has two of the five deadliest terrorist groups in the world namely: Boko Haram and Fulani extremists.” These two groups have devastated human lives and property across the nation especially, the North East. Untold mayhem, ranging from kidnapping, rape, killing, ethnic cleansing, economic, religious, political and social dislocation have been a recurrent issue within this part of the country. All efforts by the government to curtail the spate has yielded not the required and expected results. Unfortunately, this menace has spread across other parts of the country, including the most peaceful parts like the South East.

In the words of Chime (2022), “South East Nigeria was considered the safest geopolitical zone in the country. The five states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo), that form the zone had recorded the least spate of violent attacks in comparison with other parts of the country.” However, with renewed secessionist agitations by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which have turned radical and violent, as well as the government’s countermeasures, security in the region has deteriorated.

Adekunle (2017), noted that the emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a nationalist separatist group in Nigeria, has contributed immensely to the worsening insecurity in the region. Poor government handling of the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has escalated the tension in the South east. This is in form of proscribing the group as a terrorist organization and the constant clampdown on them, with concomitant multiple effects on lives and property of the people within the region. Today it is difficult to travel safe within Igbo land. Businesses have collapsed. Political participation is at the lowest ebb. The religious and other social interactions have been constantly and negatively affected.

Media reports of violent attacks collated by CFR and other media platforms were analyzed to ascertain the number of killings in the South-East. The analysis was from January 1, 2020, to December 12, 2021. Reported killings associated with domestic violence and mob justice were excluded. Based on the data obtained, the South-East recorded 97 deaths in reported violent attacks between January 1, 2020 and December 12, 2020, while 636 deaths were recorded in

reported violent attacks between December 13, 2020, and December 12, 2021 (Chime, 2022). The number has subsequently, increased with what is going on there today.

This research adopted sociological and historical phenomenological methods. According to Haralambos and Holborn (2013, p.3), “Sociology is less concerned with the individual, and much more concerned with humans in the society.” Its major thrust is man’s interaction with his fellow and the society in which they find themselves. Here, what affects one, affects the other. On the other hand historical phenomenology according to Ituma (2015), insists that, “no religious phenomena can be understood outside their history” (p.38). It examines the historical, cultural and socioeconomic contexts of the event. This method will be applied in the effort to uncover the historical settings to insecurity in the South East, since inception. Secondary sources of data collection will equally be employed to expound the issues raised. This is in the area of use of published and unpublished materials, and online sources that detailed the research topic under consideration.

The major objective of this research is to unravel how the Federal Government of Nigeria handling of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has rather, heightened insecurity challenges in the South Eastern region. The need to adequately analyze how Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) activities and secession struggles have affected national cohesion in Nigeria is a major concern. The work will at the end suggest better ways out, so that the region will be restored to her former status as one of the peaceful and safest regions in Nigeria anyone will like to visit. This done, the region will boom again in all spheres of life- religiously, economically, politically and socially. In the next sub-heading, the researcher will consider the explanation of the key terms that formed the nexus of this work.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

IPOB is an acronym for the Indigenous People of Biafra. Ekpo and Agorye (2019), affirmed that “the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a secessionist movement founded in 2012 from Southeast Nigeria aimed at achieving a sovereign state of Biafra, through peaceful means.” The group is said to have originated from a similar group- ‘Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra’ (MASSOB) and the ‘Biafran Zionist Movement’ (BZM) and although they shared a common goal they however carried out their activities in a less radical manner. Ekpo and Agorye (2019), acclaimed that it was the inability of MASSOB to achieve its goal that

paved the way for the emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a more radical group. Furthermore, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), according to Allison (2017, p.9), “is a nationalist separatist group in Nigeria that aims to restore the Republic of Biafra, a country which seceded from Nigeria prior to the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) and later re-joined Nigeria after its defeat by the Nigerian military.”

On insecurity, Achumba et al. (2013), opined that ‘it is an absence of protection or safety.’ These scholars argued further that insecurity entails peril; deathtrap; ambiguity; dearth of fortification, and lack of security. It is the state of being subject to danger or injury. The anxiety that is experienced when one feels vulnerable and insecure. In another dimension, Ezemonye (2011, p.23), affirms the above definition of insecurity as “a state of being not secure, lack of confidence.”

According to Lecher (2011, p.70), ‘insecurity’ is defined as “lack of confidence or a feeling of uncertainty and inadequacy that drives you to be anxious about yourself and your abilities.” In other word’s insecurity is when you find yourself short on self-confidence or self-esteem.

Thus the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist organization seeking secession from a relationship considered a forced union; that is unsafe, unaccommodating and marginalizing, thus, desires to be independent. This course has been pursued over the years peacefully, but now in a violent manner, given the apprehension and treatment meted out to them by the government of Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two theories form the basis for this research. The first is the Marxist conflict theory and the group theory.

Marxian theoretical analysis of class struggle, conflict and exploitation shall frame this study in the first instance. Olu-Olu and Jegede (2014) citing Max and Engels (1882) said that:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on in an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes (pp.52-57)

Marx and Engels (1882) went on to argue that the history of human society is rooted in class struggle and violent conflicts. In his work on capitalism, Marx acknowledged two major opposing classes- the Bourgeois and Proletarians. The former own the means of production which determine the social relations of production while the latter work as labourers for their means of livelihood. The conflict of interest between the bourgeois and the proletarians emerged from the hostile and aggressive social relations which is hinged on creating and expanding business empire for the bourgeoisie at the expense of the proletariat who are poorly remunerated (Olu-Olu and Jegede, 2014). Marx and his associates believe that this contradiction cannot be resolved except there is a structural change (violent revolution) in favour of the proletarians (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004).

Group theory is also adopted as the second framework. Group theory further explicates the dynamics of human relations in the polity. It maintained that given the gregarious nature of man, his actions are better understood in the context of the group relations in which people are involved (Olomjobi, 2015). Mayer (2021), agreed “that what underscores every society is the organic interest that binds people together in groups and conditions” (p. 65). Smith, (1979, p.1) contents that individuals within a group considers themselves as having a ‘we’ awareness and a sense of belonging. This is because every human society is a pluralist social configuration oriented towards the achievement of diverse interest and concerns” (Olomjobi, 2015).

On the relevance of these theories to the research, one can agree that there is a strong social, political, religious, and cultural polarity between the two contending interests. The way of thinking and reasoning are not the same. In fact the cosmology are quite at contradistinctive with each other. Hence the constant frictions and quest to detach. Macridis, (1964,p.139), noted “that the organic interest amongst group membership that acts as the binding element of group relationship and thus provides the power of a group are deterministic social construct either for good or evil.” Where this is lacking what follows is conflict. This further explained the agitation for a sense of belonging and inclusion by the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria. The feelings of exclusion and isolation by the dominant ethnic groupings in the Nigerian State is really, irritating.

### **The Bone of Contention: Marginalization of the Igbos since 1967**

Nsoedo (2019) said, “the Igbo race continues to face enormous political and economic challenges since the civil war. A plain glance at the economic and political development in Nigeria may be considered normal in terms of where the Igbo people stand politically, especially economically when compared to other ethnic nationalities. Indeed a cursory look at the poverty level among the ethnic groups would make the Igbo race appear exceptionally successful” (pp. 427-428).

Accordingly, Egbujo (2021), noted that “Igbos have been marginalized; perhaps as retribution of the vanquished. Perhaps it is residual Igbophobia- a consequence of the victor’s paranoia. Perhaps it’s an exaggeration, a misconception- an artifact of an incurable sense of victimhood. Whatever may be the cause, local mitigation has been so absent that it has become the real demon.” Sani (2021), accentuated that, “There has been a systemic exclusion and marginalization of the people, stemming from the historical Biafra war. This is informed of a collective punishment.”

The Igbo people in reality experienced an overwhelming level of disadvantages based on public policies that seemed created to undermine their ability to maximize political and economic potentials. Furthermore, the marginalization of the Igbo could be seen in other areas such as: the failure to rehabilitate the Biafra land after the war, the 20 pounds flat refund to any Biafran who wished to convert the old currency, or deposits with banks prior to the war; the Nigerian Enterprises promotion Decree of 1972, also known as indigenization Decree, federal character principle, manipulated population census, creation of states and local government areas in favour of the Northern Nigeria, deliberate underuse of Seaports within the Igbo axis, lack of standard International airport, and other exploitative actions. These formed many overt and indirect actions to diminish the ability of the Igbo people to compete on a level playing ground with other major ethnic groups (University of Central Arkansas, 2019).

Politically and economically the Igbos are impeded. Leicher (2011), affirmed “that today, political actors will dare the Igbo people to vote against their aspirations, and perhaps, would still go ahead to win whether the Igbo people voted for them or not” (p.55). It was not like that during the fight for the country's Independence from the British Colonial masters, and neither was that way during the first Republic.

On the level of the economy, every region was hitherto, autonomous, and developing at its pace. The information service (1956) reported that the Eastern region economy was heavy palm

produce, through which Palm Kernels were exported to earn foreign exchange, as well as Palm frond is used for roofing, and Palm wine for drinking. The Eastern region government promoted systematic agricultural economy, including farm settlements, cash crops such as rubber, Cocoa, and Palm grove scheme were established, creating an opportunity for people to earn a living through farming (Ministry of Commerce, 1966). Those are history today.

Furthermore, other factors impinging on the development of the region include the excessive militarization and Police checkpoints directed against the Igbo people and business, and Customs personnel harassment of Igbo people's business interests. The use of touts to harass and collect illegal levies from the Igbo shops with the active support of some politicians in places such as Lagos state (Nsoedo,2019).

Okolie (2017, p.115), said “the Igbo people suffer excessive extortion and harassment at the ubiquitous Police checkpoints both within their homeland and routes leading to the South East. The harassment is more intense during the festive periods when the people of South East visit their families.” Prominent Igbo sons and daughters have spoken out and condemned these activities targeted at the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria in their quest to earn a living in ‘one’ Nigeria(Olowookere, 2016).

These grievances among others in the spheres of the economy and politics are enablers of this monster treatment and marginalization of the Igbo people. It is rather not subtle; it is as active and deliberate effort designed by the government to check-mate their growth and recovery from the devastation of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war.

### **The Emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)**

Many years had passed now since the Nigerian-Biafran war ended. In spite of all attempts, political, literary and psychological to make Biafra a mere historical hiccup or footnote failed, it has once more become a subject of intense discussion (Uwalaka, 2003). It was thought that Biafra is a thing of the past not knowing it is of the mind. Speaking further on the revival of Biafran interest, Uwalaka (2003), nostalgically, affirmed that:

‘Biafra,’ an opprobrious name for some, dead name still for some others, a name of intense emotion and delight for many Igbo, a word uttered with trepidation by many, has once more re-emerged with full force, the once trumpeted dead six letter word, now adorn the front page



captions in the national dailies, attracting commentaries in the international media and evoking feeling and equally provoking hateful reactions in some quarters (p. 108).

This has been the dream of many Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria, a time when Biafra will be realistically appropriated. Not just being within the domain of wishes and desires to which many have hoped and died; but an entity that materializes physically. To this end, many movements and groups have cropped up since after the civil war in pursuit of this hope.

Bammeke (2022) observed, that since the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 fought between the Nigerian government and the separatist Biafran state, there has been a distinct movement designed to enshrine the liberation of the South Eastern states which fall under the Biafran region. This fight in a contemporary setting has largely been shaped by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)- an organization centered around fulfilling the vision of Dim Odumegwu Ojukwu- the Biafran leader during the Civil War.

According to Adekunle (2017), the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was founded in 2012. The group is a reformation of the already weakened Pro-secessionist groups of Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Biafra Zionist Movement (B.Z.M). The group which is under the leadership of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and his deputy Uche Okafor-Mefor, aims at creating an independent state for the people of Old Eastern Region through referendum (Nwachukwu, 2017).

Although the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was created in 2012, the Leader Nnamdi Kanu had gained popularity in 2009 from his broadcasts on Radio Biafra. This radio is stationed in London, and from there, he called out for the freedom of Biafra people as well as criticizing the practices of the Nigerian government. Nwachukwu, (2017, p. 49), averred that the “International Crisis Group described Radio Biafra as, “an unlicensed station using violent struggle to achieve independence for Biafra,” and states that its broadcast are “highly provocative message laced with misinformation, hate speech and anti-Nigeria derision.”

On the inclusive geography of Biafran territory within, Anaya (1996, p.67) noted that “the South- East is the region that makes up Biafra land. Its Western border is the River Nigeria and it incorporates most of the Niger Delta. The Eastern border is Cameroon. Many Biafrans are Igbo speakers, while other Biafrans speaks Urhobo-Isoko, Ijaw-Epie Ogbia, Ogoni, Efik, Annag, Eket, Oron-Ibibio, Ogoja, Ejagham, Igala, Idoma, Ibani, and Igbanke among others.”

### **Insecurity Challenges in the South-East and the IPOB Security Measures**



The activities of Fulani herdsmen in some communities became a source of great worry to the people of the South Eastern zone. Ikenga (2017) described the situation further by saying that “the people were worried that the Fulani herdsmen have continued to kill, maim and rape women in most of the routes where they pass with their cattle for grazing wondering why the security agencies turn blind eyes to complaints from victims of robbery and rape committed by the suspected Fulani herdsmen,” (p.34). There is hardly any community where Fulani herdsmen are not found. The activities of these herdsmen in some parts of South East have become worrisome. This is because; the cattle belonging to these herdsmen have inflicted huge damage on crops and farms lands (Ikenga, 2017).

Reports of clashes between the herdsmen and Fulani across the states are inundating to say the least. Accordingly Nwaopara and Okoli (2015, p. 98) described the carnage and mayhem caused by the marauding herders in parts Igbo land. In Abia communities of Uzuakoli and other places in Umunneochi local government area, there have been cases of deadly clashes between rural farmers and these cattle breeders. In Anambra State, many people have continued to lose their lives in Ayamelum and Awka North local government areas and farm lands destroyed due to violent activities of Fulani herdsmen (Ezeonwuka and Igwe, 2016).

Farmers and villages in Imo state have gory tales to tell. Emotions ran high and tension was electric recently as scores of angry youths of Irete community in the state blocked the ever-busy Owerri- Onitsha dual carriage way to protest the damnable activities of the Fulani herdsmen in their community (Nwopara and Okoli, 2015).

In Ebonyi State, people are not comfortable with the activities of Fulani herdsmen who tend to become very violent at slightest provocation. The women came out in the streets of Ishiagu recently protesting against destruction of their crops by the Fulani herdsmen.

The story is the same in Enugu state and other Biafran communities in their locations. Communities in Enugu state like Isiuzo, Nsukka and others have been grumbling over the alleged inability of security agencies to curtail the criminal activities of the suspected Fulani herdsmen who had robbed, raped and killed some of their victims apart from destroying their farm land. They are always armed with dangerous weapons, including AK 47 rifles, charms, daggers laced with poison and machetes and are ready to attack the farm owners at least provocation.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian government has not done enough in the area of protecting the lives and properties of the people. They are rather seen by the Igbo as enablers and sponsors of these crimes. Many at times, they appear to have shielded the criminals and have them released when arrested. The security agencies were also seen to have collaborated with them, because most of the crimes were committed under their nose without them doing anything.

IPOB which claims to seek for the interest of the Biafrans have no option than to swing into action in the bid to protect their territory. More so, when it appears that the governors in the South East are incapacitated and or paying lip service to security situation, and for failing to create a security outfit like other states in the country. Hence the creation of a security arm of the IPOB known as the Eastern Security Network (ESN).

Osae-Brown and Alake (2021) said, that the Eastern Security Network (ESN) is the Para-military organization of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Eastern Security Network (ESN) was formed in December 2020, as a reaction to the Igbo's perception that they are targeted by the Muslim Fulani herdsmen, whom they accused of grazing on farmlands and committing crimes against local residents. The movement then morphed into a para-military unit with broader functions (Osae-Brown and Alake, 2021).

According to Nzeagwu (2020), the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Kanu, declared that failure of South East governors to secure the lives and property of the Igbo people led to the formation of the Eastern Security Network. Kanu wondered why governors of the Southeast have allowed themselves to become fragmented for fear of displeasing their masters, adding that the Eastern Security Network was modeled after Amotekun in the West and Miyetti Allah vigilante group in the North to protect the South-South and South East from bandits and terrorists (Nzeagwu, 2020).

For the Federal Government of Nigeria, a non-state sanctioned, paramilitary organization in the old Biafran heartland was unacceptable, and it moved against ESN camps. This led serious friction between the group and the military causing significant numbers of displaced persons.

Allison (2017, p.43), stated that “there were accusations of military collaboration with the Imo government to continue the harassment and intimidation of civilians in parts of Imo state, leading to the arrest of a Rabbi and his family members, whom it was reported were being tortured. This development made IPOB leadership to issue a statement asserting that “they have finally brought war upon the Biafra people” (Allison, 2017).

Campbell (2021) noted that the Nigerian government saw the ESN as a threat to its authority and deployed the army to locate and destroy ESN bases. In January 2021, intense fighting broke out in towns of Orlu, in Imo State. The military confrontation lasted for seven days, until ESN declared a unilateral ceasefire and both sides withdrew from the city.

### **Government Handling of IPOB and the Implications:**

The poor manner with which the Federal Government is handling the case of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and its leader has led to the spread of IPOB's activities and consequent insecurity in the region.

Adebayo (2022) accentuated that the intensifying violence associated with the secessionist movement in Nigeria's South-East is fuelled by the excessive militarized response of the state security forces. Citing CDD, he identified further reasons contributing to the recent intensification of violent separatism in the region as: "a violent defensive counter-response to the state's militarized approach; a pronounced perception of contemporary marginalization in Nigeria's current federal political and security architecture; and the development and spread of false narratives legitimizing armed mobilization as a pathway to a regional secession" (Adebayo, 2022).

Uzoaru (2023) noted that the Indigenous People of Biafra has registered its grievances over what it described as unfair treatment of its members in the country. IPOB in a statement by its leaders had alleged that other social organizations and agitators were being justly treated but regretted that the group has suffered so much including killing and maiming of its members.

The Nigerian government has not only proscribed IPOB but also officially labelled it a terrorist organization, thus ruling out formal discussions with the group.

### **Proscription and Crackdown of IPOB**

This paper has noted earlier the peaceful manner with which IPOB had hitherto organized itself. Quest for self-determination, peaceful protests and rallies, and call for referendum have dominated the activities of the group based on the provisions of the constitution. However, with the deterioration of security situation in the region, and apparent indolence and inaction on the part of the government, state and federal; IPOB, took it upon themselves to defend the Biafran land from the menace of killer herders. Hence, the establishment of a security unit, which did not go down well with the state. The only alternative to justify the ongoing crackdown and further crackdown was the proscription of the group as a terrorist organization.

Commenting on this, Nasiru (2017), noted that the pronouncement that the IPOB is a terrorist organization and its proscription are designed and choreographed to justify the discreetly agreed agenda to crush the agitation by military might in order to sustain the 1999 Military Constitution and the current unjust status quo, thereby postponing the restructuring of Nigeria for as long as they can. This pronouncement was made on the 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2017, through a court judgment. Gabriel and Agbaraukwu et al. (2017, p. 78), affirmed that “declaring the IPOB a terrorist group implies that the organization from that moment will be handled as terrorists by the security forces if they should be found gathering or engaging in any of their activities.”

Speaking further on the activities of IPOB that made the government see them as a threat to national unity and consequent proscription, Nasiru (2017) said that “the IPOB constituted a tsunami that had successfully mobilized the downtrodden masses against the inept political class that had compromised the future of their people through the format through which they climbed into political offices. And this is what those benefiting from this situation will not want to relinquish.” The anger of the opponents of restructuring towards IPOB leadership is understandable. The leader of IPOB has driven Nigeria closer to restructuring more than anybody else, therefore, lovers and defenders of the status quo want to eat him raw. Python Dance was aimed at scuttling the IPOB/government dialogue which began on 30<sup>th</sup> of August, 2017 (Nasiru, 2017).

Confirming this, the Eastern Consultative Forum (ECA) described the branding of the IPOB as a terrorist group and its proscription by South-East governors as an attempt by the federal government to impede the clamour for restructuring. In a statement signed by its secretary, the group said the military exercise by the Nigerian Army tagged – “Operation Python Dance II,” was also a play to foil the IPOB/government dialogue which began on August 30, 2021 (Olomjobi, 2015).

Kanu (2021) affirmed they hastily proscribed and declared IPOB 'a terrorist group' because they know that IPOB is the only constant obstacle on their path to Fulani conquest of the rest of Nigeria. Citing Biko, Kanu (2021) said “The most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

The deliberate decision to roll in military equipment into the South-East and provoke crisis was designed towards scuttling the peace process between the IPOB and the government and some people are not comfortable with that because they believe it could lead to restructuring Nigeria

which they resent intensely. Adekunle (2017, p.35) citing ECA said “the clampdown on the leader of IPOB did not come as a surprise, alleging that the government was after its leader for “opening the eyes of Nigerians to restructuring.”

### **Arrest and Trial of the Leader of IPOB and the Institution of Sit at Home Order**

Another factor fuelling the rising insecurity in the South East is the re-arrest and continued incarceration of IPOB leader. Kanu, the IPOB leader, fled the country in September 2017 after an invasion of his home by the military in Afara-Ukwu, Umuahia, Abia State (Ejekwonyilo, 2021). The leader of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), was re-arrested in June, 2021 and brought back to Nigeria to face trial.

Since then, there have been controversies on whether the government observed due internationally accepted process in re-arresting him; and whether the amount of public resources expended on the operation was worth it, given the seemingly more urgent need to stop massive killings and abduction of Nigerians by bandits particularly in the northern parts of the country.

This re-arrest, trial and continued detention of the leader of IPOB has received wide criticism and condemnation locally and internationally. Several calls have been put out to the government for the unconditional release of the IPOB leader, even after Supreme Court judgment. The continued trial of IPOB leader and the refusal of the government to release him has degenerated into what is known as ‘sit-at-home’ in Igbo land.

According to Orji (2021), the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) introduced a sit-at-home order in August 2021, as a means of putting pressure on the Nigerian government to release its leader, who is standing trial for alleged treasonable felony and terrorism. Since then, Mondays, have become public holidays in the South Eastern states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo and Enugu. Apart from Mondays, IPOB also declared that any day its leader appears in court, there will be a sit-at-home day in solidarity with their leader and as a protest to the government. It could also declare any day a sit-at home day anytime it deems fit.

Initially, citizens obeyed the sit-at-home order in solidarity with the cause. However, the pains and deprivation that came with it and the sheer economic cost on businesses and the livelihoods of individuals and households over a long period of time have rendered it insufferable. Besides, citizens, residents and businesses in the states have endured the resulting pain and hardships without any assurance that their sacrifices have had or will have any impact on the federal Government. As citizens began to resist IPOB's order, enforcers, often referred to as 'unknown gunmen', started killing people, maiming others, and destroying properties in the bid to enforce compliance. These have rendered the South-East one of the most unsafe and insecure regions in Nigeria. Besides, law enforcement agents are being killed regularly and government properties burnt. Public examinations have been disrupted, with adverse effects on the education sector (Orji, 2021).

### **The Unknown Gun Men (UGM): Arm of IPOB or a Political creation?**

Bakare (2022), observed that in the past couple of years, the security situation in the South-east has deteriorated, as 'Unknown Gun Men' allegedly linked to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its militant arm, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), have been conducting attacks in the region.

As earlier noted, the emergence of the 'unknown gun men,' in Igbo land and its environs is one fall outs of the poor handling of IPOB matters by the government of Nigeria. The rampaging activities of this notorious killers cut across the five states in the South Eastern region and beyond. Imo and Anambra states are the nucleus of violence by these gun men.

Imo state, has been experiencing increasing levels of terrorism, with the primary hotspots being Orlu, Orsu, Njaba and Oru local government areas. Groups of 'unknown gunmen', have been targeting and killing people, especially military and security personnel and other federal agents. Their operations have included; burning down police stations, attacking government personnel and facilities (Obeng-Akrofi, 2022).

The activities of the 'unknown gun men' (UGM) have gained notoriety in Anambra also, with the Monday lock-downs by the separatist group, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), as a form of civil disobedience against the Federal Government for the arrest and detention of their leader.

Not long after this, some unknown elements begun a brutal attempt to enforce the same lock-down beyond the stipulated time lines.

Nonetheless, Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi are comparatively safe and stable except for the intermittent terrorist activities of armed herdsmen which the police, military and security agencies appear rather reluctant to deal with.

IPOB has constantly denied its involvement in all atrocities associated with the Unknown Gun Men in the East. It has rather accused the government of being the sponsors of these ills to justify their clamp down on IPOB (Powerful, 2022).

Speaking further on the problem of Unknown Gun Men, Powerful (2022), alleged “that members of the state security outfit (Ebubeagu), a local vigilante group set up by South-East governors, is responsible for attacks in the region.” According to the statement, “the Eastern Security Network (ESN) and IPOB volunteers stay in the bushes and forests to safeguard Biafran women from Fulani terrorists masquerading as herdsmen.”

It is absolutely clear to all and sundry that Nigerian Government and security agencies and their evil politicians created the Unknown Gunmen in the region particularly in Imo State because the state government wants to demonize IPOB and her leader (Emma Powerful, 2022). It is a case of giving the dog a bad name, in order to hang it.

Powerful (2022), insisted that Governor of Imo State created Unknown Gunmen. He described the Unknown Gun men as ‘demons,’ that will haunt and destroy the creators (Nigerian Police, Army, DSS and the Federal and State government). “The government of Imo State, created unknown gunmen and now using Ebubeagu security outfit to accomplish his aims to eliminate the innocent citizens and youths in the state. “Ebubeagu is now the major cause of death in Imo State. They were recruited and given orientation to harm the people, thereafter, blame IPOB and ESN” (Powerful, 2022).

Further on the political side to insecurity in the region, Igboayaka (2023),insisted that about 75 per cent of the victimization and marginalization meted out to Ndigbo are instigated by the so-



called leaders at both State and Federal levels. These political cartels have regrettably, made it possible for uninformed Igbo youths to believe that Hausa/Fulani or Nigeria are the only people marginalizing Ndigbo, but the primitive accumulation of wealth by Igbo politicians has proven that the real enemies of Ndigbo are politicians from South-East.

Reports of extra-judicial killings by security forces/Jihadist as of May, 2022 put the number of defenseless Igbos killed at 1400 with abducted/arrested at over 4800 Igbo youths while over 1000 youths disappeared and over 8000 internally displaced (Igboayaka, 2023).

### **Impacts of Rising Insecurity and Government Handling of IPOB: the Way Out**

The result of government poor handling of IPOB saga in the South East has given rise to myriads of unrests in all facets of Igbo life and existence. The degree of social, cultural, religious, economic and political disintegration can only be imagined. Igbo land, the pride of the Igbo people, has thus become a desecrated region, by the amount of blood letting and abuse of sanctity of life alien to her culture and religion. It has become a theatre of war and unrest in the last couple of years. The impacts have been briefly discussed in what follows.

Insecurity generally leads to social dislocation. Security plays a major role in the existence and sustenance of human beings. In this wise Coupland (2007) observed that insecurity has a far reaching impact on people's lives and well-being and for this singular reason the government has to be alive to its responsibility of guaranteeing security. When people's security are guaranteed, it gives them the freedom, physically and mentally to get on with the business of building their lives without fear of molestation or violent death. Thus, to experience a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, security is essential (Meddings, 2001), without security, there can be no stable society rather there will be prevalent fear and danger from violent death (Hobbes 1651, cited in Coupland, *ibid*).

Since the inception of violence in South East, occasioned by IPOB handling, several innocent citizens both average and prominent have lost their lives in the most gruesome manner, depriving families of their loved ones, who are sometimes breadwinners, and truncating the destinies of the dependents left behind while leaving scars that may never heal.

Moreover, in the hospitality and tourism sector, Alesina (2018, p. 21), posited that "a chain is as strong as its weakest link, as, beyond any other sector." This means that even though the sit-at-

home is on a Monday, tourists and revelers across the South-East altogether are affected one way or the other. Cities like Owerri and Enugu, which used to bubble with nightlife, have become shadows of themselves as their usual patronage has dwindled. In 2021, a National Conference scheduled to hold in Enugu by the National Society of Engineers (NSE) was moved to Abuja, with the organizers citing insecurity as a reason.

On the impact of insecurity on the economy, Adeleke (2013, p. 11) argued that “the productive aspect of most manufacturing business depends largely on the availability and regular supply of raw materials for production. Insecurity has cut off the supply of such raw materials hence, jeopardizing production activities. Besides this, insecurity affects marketing of finished product as there is a continuous exodus from areas of insecurity.” There is also an increase in security spending as most business organizations operating in Nigeria spend a lot in maintaining private security outfits. The destruction of their business building, properties and equipment is tantamount to loss of capital which has ruined not a few businesses in Nigeria. Thus, security is critical for the nation’s development and its absence means that economic growth and development cannot be achieved (Achumba, Ighomereho and AkporRobaro, 2013). Insecurity is a risk factor which business owners and managers dread and avoid by relocating their businesses elsewhere. In the case of Nigeria, there is also evidence of some businessmen and manufacturing companies having to relocate particularly from the North in recent times to other peaceful parts of the country (Nwagboso, 2012).

IPOB sit-at-home order has negatively affected the economy of South East, including that of the broader Nigerian economy. On Transportation which is an important sector in the region as the region hosts the Onitsha main market and the Aba market, some of the major markets in the country. This necessitates a huge flow and outflow of people in the region. However, the report states that transporters lose a huge sum of ten billion naira (\$18.5 million dollars) for each sit-at-home day. This double tragedy for a country whose national economy is already on its knees, as reduced income means less purchasing power for transporters in the South East; with the attendant reduction in tax remission to the State governments (Orji, 2011:43).

The religious circles are not left behind on the effects of sit-at-home in the South East region. Most religious activities in the South East have been hindered by insecurity. In many instances, some missionaries who scheduled programmes for religious purposes have to withdraw for

security reasons and relocate to safer regions which is seriously affecting the growth and works of most religious groups in the South East (Nafziger, 1972).

Politically, South East is seriously disadvantaged in Nigeria. There has been a systematic attempt to reduce the voting power of the region. The activities of the unscrupulous elements in the region have aggravated the situation. In the build up to 2023 elections, Police stations, INEC offices and politicians were the major targets of these 'Unknown Gun Men' in the Igbo land. Many of these public facilities have been destroyed, thus making it difficult for people to collect their permanent voter's cards. This has resulted in the loss of lives and the destruction of citizens' permanent voter's cards. This sad development seeks to create voter apathy towards local and national elections.

### **The Way Out**

The agitation's future trajectory is unclear but that is not to say that the IPOB saga and the rising insecurity in Igbo land is not without solution. Much depends on the federal and state government, the group itself, Igbo people and leaders of thought, security agents and international community; as they must find a lasting solution to the challenge. This work has outlined several approaches that could be applied by the federal government and the states in order to address the political and economic marginalization of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria that resulted to the agitation by the IPOB; and consequently, quell the abnormalities.

In the first instance, the government should refrain from further repression as this will earn the separatists more local sympathy and support and could push them to more desperate actions. If there is no progress towards constitutional, administrative and policy reforms that would respond to the demands of the South East, the agitation could escalate. The government, instead of continued onslaught against the group, which has hitherto shown to be counterproductive, should free unconditionally the hundreds of protestors currently imprisoned (Obasi, 2017). The current government's double standard in overlooking incendiary statements and criminal actions emanating from a section of the country, while clamping down hard on other Nigerians demanding justice amounts to official miscarriage of justice that has no place in modern governance. On the contrary, the solution to sustainable peace is not to suppress agitators or label them as terrorists when the real daredevil terrorists in the North are roaming the streets unchallenged.

The National Assembly should resume its stalled constitution review and pass provisions that would guarantee all citizens a stronger sense of national belonging and redress the imbalance in administrative units between the zones. This is a key demand of South Easterners and one already endorsed by the leaders of most other zones (Obasi, 2017). This constitutional review should take the issue of restructuring into consideration. This is one key solution to this imbroglio. There is the need for the Nigerian government to agree to wholesome restructure without reservation. The restructuring would be ideal for returning the country to the era when the regions manage their economic and political affairs. During the period of the regional government, all the regions thrived in their respective paces.

The over five decades of neglect of the region constitutes a big problem. For instance, all other regions have six states or more but South-East has only five. The South-East has been militarized by the supposed or acclaimed owners of Nigeria; these same elements are the ones creating insecurity in the South-East for their evil ends. Justice, equity and fairness must be entrenched in the running of affairs of the country. The security of this country must be given to competent men and women to administer. Until other regions start seeing the South-East as part of Nigeria, the country and the South-East will remain where it is. Addressing these issues will bring about peace in the region and the entire country (Osi, 2013).

Massive constructions roads, railways and water ways will go a long way in solving the problem. The Southeast governments should align their plans for the construction of roads to maximize the efficiency of moving human and goods that are based on road transportation. The geopolitical zones needs a dedicated rail network to facilitate easy movement of human and products within the region. The same rail system will encourage more movement of products from the geopolitical zone to other zones. On water ways transport, before the civil war, the Eastern region used to have an advanced water ways transportation system using varieties of waterways-vehicles. They should introduce water vehicles that are technologically advanced and efficient. Other measures to be adopted for permanent solution are further proffered. Political solution, dialogue, referendum and amnesty could solve permanently the insecurity challenges in the South. The government should be willing to dialogue with the parties involved on the possible way out. There is need for amnesty and total rehabilitation of the fighters. Unconditional release from prison and pardon on the part of those championing this course will go a long way. The call

for referendum should be heeded by the government. Nwodo (2023) noted that the Federal Government can meet all the demands of the region, adding that its refusal to dialogue with the people gave rise to the agitations which have devastated the region.

In his words, Nwodo (2023) said, “I have always said that whether we are talking about Biafra or Unknown Gunmen, what the Federal Government owes the people of the South-East to stop all these agitations is to dialogue with us. There is no demand in the South- East today which the Federal Government cannot meet, but it has stoutly refused to dialogue with us. The result is these agitations here and there.”

### **Conclusion**

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), was formed with the aim of restoring the defunct Biafran Republic. Their activities in the South East since inception has been relatively, peaceful as they non-violently agitate for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra. The freedom of expression under the democratic government which came back in 1999 gave room for the group to freely express their opinion and tender their dissatisfaction with the government in power. However, this move became a big threat to the unity of the nation Nigeria, as they were seen to be gaining the sympathy and support of majority of the Igbo, thus fuelling the same interest in other regions.

To avoid further threats to the nation’s unity, the federal and state government resorted to arrest, imprisonment, and the unleashing of their arsenals in order to crush the group. This went on until the group was declared a terrorist organization, when the IPOB established a security wing to secure its territory from the marauding killer herdsmen in Igbo land. Hence, further mayhem was meted out against the group to finally put them to rest.

This handling on the part of the government ended up escalating the insecurity challenges in the Igbo land and its environs. The proscription, arrest of its leader, killings and other forms of crackdown resulted in serious security issues in the region. Within this period under review, killing, stealing, kidnapping, rape and all forms of crime escalated in Biafra land.

In order to protest the perceived injustices, and in solidarity with their leader, IPOB instituted sit-at-home order. Another armed group ‘the unknown gun men,’ emerged. Today, Igbo land is ‘a no go area.’ The socio-religious, political, and economic activities have been badly affected ever since. This is the result of the poor handling of IPOB by the government.

The work advised that the only way out is for the government to address the major concerns of the group that led to agitation such as marginalization and restructuring. The government should be willing to dialogue with the group, release unconditionally, forgive and rehabilitate all who have been affected by this carnage. The leaders of thought, elders in Igbo land, traditional and religious leaders, should mediate between the government and the group to finding a lasting solution to the problem.

IPOB should as well lay down their arms and be willing to dialogue. The group should go back to the original intention and weed itself of unscrupulous elements whose activities are inimical to the group’s mode of operation. With all these in place, Igbo land will rise again in all facets of endeavour.

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