



## Social Movements and National Security in Nigeria: A Study of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

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### ABSTRACT

*Nigeria has been engulfed in crises of national question regarding its corporate existence as a sovereign state entity by the emergence and agitators of groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The ability of the separatist movement to mobilise actions has increased the volatility of insecurity in Nigeria's South East/South-South zones. The study aims to examine the nexus between IPOB threat and national security so as to identify the factors behind IPOB movement. Based on the descriptive study design, the study adopted the opportunity structure perspective as its theoretical framework. The literature is descriptive in nature and adopted secondary method of data collection. The data was collected from secondary sources such as internal publications, newspaper reports, journal articles, official reports documentations and documentaries, and textbooks and commentaries. The findings of the study revealed that although the IPOB movement is fueled by a feeling of victimisation and marginalisation among the Igbos, the movement constitutes a threat to national security. In conclusion, the study recommends the need to engage the genuine IPOB agitators in meaningful dialogue and also fish out the criminal elements whose activities threaten national security.*

**Keywords:** Insecurity, IPOB, National Security, Separatist Movement, Social Movement, Southeast Zone

### I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, social movements had manifested in varied forms as groups felt dissatisfied with their mother entities. The history of Nigeria is replete with cases of militarised ethnic or sectarian groups threatening the continued existence of the state (Njoku and Sidhu, 2021). Currently, Nigeria is on a shaky ground as there are varied forms of movements in all the geographical regions of the country. From the Yoruba enclave for instance, echoes of separatism come in varied forms ranging from a direct call for Oduduwa Republic/Yoruba Nation to the group that is negotiating for a sovereign national conference (Adebulu, 2021). From the Northern hemisphere comes intermittent demands for Arewa Republic. Apart from the demand for Niger Delta Republic, pockets of separatism are embedded in the demands for resource control by regional activists in the Niger Delta Region (Achonwa, 2024).

Adibe (2017) argues that in a diverse country like Nigeria, the desire for different groups to participate in social movements and demand various forms of self-determination is intensified. This is due to the tendency for suppressed emotions during periods of dictatorship guaranteed under the liberal democracy's freedom of speech. Since the restoration of civil rule in 1999, the Igbos have been actively involved in various social movements aimed at bringing about change in Nigeria's geopolitical structure. These movements have been carried out through several Igbo socio-cultural groups such as the Igbo Concerned Citizens, Igbo Elders' Forum, Igbo Renaissance Movement, Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), and the IPOB, among others. Among these groups, IPOB has gained the most prominence in the Biafra agitation (Nwangwu, 2022).

The movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), founded in 1999 by Chief Ralph Uwazuruke, was the forerunner in the neo-Biafra secessionist struggle before Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's 2012 formation of the IPOB (the most recent group and manifestation of the neo-Biafra separatist movement in Nigeria). MASSOB was successful in gaining the support of a vibrant international Igbo organisation network. Nonetheless, a

combination of government repression and factionalisation weakened MASSOB, leading to serious cracks (Ezea, 2017). These challenges paved the way for the emergence and thriving of IPOB.

The IPOB appeals directly to the marginalised underclass, primarily of Igbo descent, using its digital communication channels, with Radio Biafra being the most widely known. The IPOB is based on the principle of non-violence. The establishment of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) as the paramilitary wing by the IPOB on 12 December 2020 marked a significant shift in the group's separatist approach from non-violent means to armed resistance. According to Nwangwu (2022), the prevailing sentiment within the IPOB, ESN, and other radical separatist groups is that the governance challenges in Igboland stem from the repressive Nigerian state and the collaborationist role of conservative Igbo nationalists.

As the paramilitary unit of the IPOB, the ESN's mission is to protect Biafran territory by countering the violent attacks of marauding armed Fulani herdsman targeting peasant farmers and local communities. Osa-Brown and Alake (2021) also contended that IPOB established the ESN in order to safeguard the oil-rich South-East region from encroachments by ethnic Fulani herders, whom it accuses of trespassing on farmlands and perpetrating crimes against the local communities. Hence, this study is set to examine the nexus between IPOB separatist movement and national security in Nigeria.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The IPOB's agitation has persisted longer than anticipated. And the fact that a group built on the principle of non-violence is now portrayed in many literary works as a radical separatist organisation with questionable character is extremely concerning. Undoubtedly, this image contributed to IPOB's 2017 proscription as a terrorist organisation (Adesomoju, 2018), a proscription that was nullified in 2023 (Oko, 2023). The Federal Government of Nigeria has previously conducted searches and detained IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu for treason, terrorism and inciting remarks that were seen to be at odds with national security (Asadu, 2023).

Divergent views exist on the role, tactics, and composition of the Eastern Security Network – the paramilitary wing of IPOB. While some opinions favour the group for working in tandem with the goal which it was established, others argue that the group has been infiltrated by criminals who hide under the cloak of Biafra movement to commit acts that conflict with national security. Hence, the current composition and activities of IPOB and its paramilitary wing Eastern Security Network leaves us with questions such as: What factors have sustained the persistent separatist agitation by IPOB and its forerunners? Knowing the most studies on the IPOB focus on factors that gave birth to the movement, the researchers attempt to establish a nexus between IPOB movement and national security. Through these questions, the study aims to identify the factors behind IPOB movement and examine the nexus between IPOB movement and national security.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Opportunity Structure Perspective

The opportunity structure perspective contends that social movement may rise and thrive because the opportunities exist with the required structure. Essentially, the state may also provide some of the opportunities for individuals to mobilise such as regime instability, lessening of repression, and division among elites, which can be analysed by measures of political effectiveness and political legitimacy (McAdam 2001). Within the opportunity structure perspective are the modernisation theory, relative deprivation theory, and the rational choice theory.

Huntington (1968) contributed greatly to the Modernisation theory when he argued that instability in the form of social movement surfaces when institutions cannot keep up with societal and economic changes; consequently, society will strive to replace the current institutions with ones that can meet current social and political demands. However, Gurr (1968, 1970) adds relative deprivation to fill in a gap in modernisation theory. Gurr argues that even if institutions are able to catch up with societal and economic changes, the feeling of relative deprivation will also lead people to mass organise. Relative deprivation argues that, people are motivated to organise out of a sense of deprivation or inequality brought forth by a comparison to others, or in relation to their own expectations. In this case, people will join social movements because their expectations will have outgrown their actual situation (Gurr-1968, 1970).

The increasing gap between an individual's expected value and what they actually attain will lead to growing social frustration. This disparity or gap is determined by the situation of an individual's neighbour. If everyone in a particular area is facing similar challenges in achieving value, then relative deprivation will not arise (Gurr 1970). Therefore, both relative deprivation and modernisation theory explain that social mobilisation is driven by individuals' grievances and anger. Rational choice theory also emphasises that individuals are rational decision-makers who consider

the costs and benefits of different actions to maximise their own benefit (Olson 1965). Importantly, all these theories provide initial explanations on social movements, illustrating how social, institutional, and economic factors lead to the emergence of social movements. Thus, opportunity structures drive movement organisation through their social, economic, and institutional contexts. These fundamental conditions support social movements by fostering individual grievances. These conditions primarily focus on the external environments that drive social movements. Social movements stem from individuals feeling deprived of certain goods, resources, or services. People are motivated to organise due to a sense of deprivation or inequality, either in comparison to others or in relation to their own expectations (Gurr, 1968, 1970).

## 2.2 Conceptual Review

### 2.2.1 Social Movement

A social movement is the result of many individuals acting together, either through activity or protest. Online petitions, hashtag usage, and well-planned social media campaigns are typically used to accomplish it (Williams and Houghton, 2023). Social movements are structured but informal social groups that participate in extra-institutional conflict with a specific objective. These objectives may be more widely directed at political or cultural change, or they may be more narrowly focused on a particular policy (De la Porta & Diani, 2006). Social movement is also used specifically to describe a collective group of people who share a common political or social agenda and use coordinated action to bring about social change (Williams and Houghton, 2023). Similarly, Godwin and Jasper (2003) defined social movement as conscious, concerted and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means. McAdam (1988) noted that social movements can be important vehicles for social and political change and have the potential to transform the systems of institutionalised politics in which they occur. Social movement is usually a form of collective action with common cause or agenda, triggered by various events, including economic conditions, cultural norms and changes in the social environment. Similarly, it usually has a horizontal leadership structure with some leaders being more prominent than others (Diani, 2012). And these movements are distinct from political parties, they may be less formal and unpredictable than political parties (Williams et al, 2023). They can be alternative, redemptive Movement or reformatory in nature (Aberle, 2023).

### 2.2.2 National Security

National security examines how the state protects the physical integrity of its citizens from threats such as invasion, terrorism and violence (Achonwa, 2024). National security is characterised by the absence of internal or external threats to the government, sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, well-being of the population, ongoing economic and social progress, and other vital interests of the country, as well as the ability to uphold a continual state of security. (Zhao, 2024). National security is permanently the absolute national interests of every state pursued mainly through coercive techniques of power and use of force (Karen, 1999).

Morgenthau (1978) portrayed national security as the integrity of national territory and its institutions. Asobie (2007) detailed it as the protection of the physical, political and cultural identity of the nation against encroachment by other nations. Udentia (2005), Asobie (2007) strongly contend that besides national security, all other interests are peripheral and cannot be achieved unless the former is guaranteed. National security is the ability of a state to cater for the protection and defence of its citizenry and national sovereignty. Singh (2014) similarly defines national security as the safeguarding of a country's territorial integrity. In this view, it is the job of defence strategy to promote national security which is accomplished by relying on the acquisition of military hardware and the strengthening of the country's defence forces which is in reality military security. Michael cited in Singh (2014) simply captures national security as the state of being free from external physical threats.

National security is of utmost importance to every modern government. Nigerian government places much premium on national security. Hence Section 14 (2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of governments and in so doing, the Nigerian government is saddled with the herculean task of responding to any external or internal threat.

Following its over ten years' secessionist movement in Nigeria (BBC, 2021), there is no dearth of literature on how the IPOB impacts Nigeria's national security. For instance, scholars such as Esho (2022) analysed the socio-political and religious interplay between the Nigerian state and IPOB while Tanko (2021) described IPOB as one of the five different security threats in Nigeria. In line with Tanko's views, Onuoha et al, (2021) observed that Biafra separatism remains one of the greatest threats confronting Nigeria's unity. In their views, Henry et al, (2020) believe that the IPOB agitation is a crack on Nigeria's national integration while the Council on Foreign Relations argue that perceptions of discrimination by the federal government and highhandedness of security operatives are largely responsible for driving IPOB sentiment (CFR, 2021). This collaborates Amnesty International Reports on the killing of

at least 150 and 115 peaceful pro-Biafra activists in Nigeria's Southeast in chilling crackdown by security forces in 2016 and 2021 respectively (Amnesty International, 2016 & Amnesty International, 2021). Considering these and other numerous literature that have provided sufficient explanations on the emergence, ideology, operational methods of the IPOB, state repression and its implications on national security, this research considers it redundant to review these issues exhaustively.

### 2.2.3 IPOB's Desire for an Independent Biafra

A review of relevant literature identified disunity in Nigeria (Chiluwa 2018), traumas and documentaries associated with memories of civil war (Ugwueze, 2019), the lopsided structure of Nigeria's federalism (Adibe, 2017), ineffective implementation of the post-war peace building initiatives (Johnson and Olaniyan, 2017), fear of planned Islamisation of the south east (Achonwa 2024, Adibe 2017) perceived marginalisation and feeling of collective victimhood amongst the Igbo (Ibeanu et al., 2016), as the factors behind the IPOB movement. Nnam (2024) strongly argued that social injustice and marginalisation remains the primary factor behind IPOB's separatist movement.

**Table 1**

*Showing appointments into The Top Echelon of Military Architecture by President Buhari, 2015-2023*

S/N	Military Officeholder	Designation and Region
1a	General Abayomi Olonisakin, Chief of Defence Staff	Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff (SW)
1b	General Lucky Irabor, Chief of Defence Staff (2020-2023)	Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff (SS)
2a	Lt. Gen. I. Attahiru, Chief of Army Staff, 2019-2020	Commander/Head of the Army (NW)
2b	Lt. Gen Tukur Yusuf Buratai, Chief of Army Staff 2020-2022	Commander/Head of the Army (NW)
3a	Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas, Chief of Naval Staff	Commander/Head of the Navy (SS)
3b	Rear Admiral Awwal Zubairu Gambo (2021-2023)	Commander/Head of the Navy (NW)
4	Air Marshal Siddique Abubakar, Chief of Air Staff	Commander/Head of the Air Force (NE)
5	Chief of Defence Staff -Intelligence	Head of Intelligence
6	The Inspector General of Police	Commander/Head of the Police Force
7	National Security Adviser (NSA)	Coordinator of Security Council

From the above table, there is no military Chief from the Southeast geopolitical zone from 2015 – 2023. These lopsided appointments by President Buhari contributed in fanning anger and feelings of marginalisation among the people of the southeast. The former president was accused of deliberate exclusion and marginalisation when he coined the "97 versus 5 per cent" term (Fasan, 2015). This and other social, political, and economic challenges that have largely sustained the IPOB movement and other similar groups in Nigeria (Njoku & Sidhu, 2017).

**Table 2**

*Showing President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Selected Political and Military Appointments*

S/N	NAME	APPOINTMENT	Ethnic Group
1	President Bola Tinubu	Minister of Petroleum	Yoruba
2	Mr. Wale Edun	Minister of Finance & Coordinating Minister for the Economy	Yoruba
3	Mr. Gboyega Oyetola	Minister of Marine & Blue Economy	Yoruba
4	Dr. Olayemi Cardoso	Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)	Yoruba
5	Dr. Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo	Minister of Interior	Yoruba
6	Bosun Tijani	Minister of Communication, Innovation & Digital Economy	Yoruba
7	Zacch Adedeji	Federal Inland Revenue Services (FIRS)	Yoruba
8	Dele Aleke	Minister of Solid Mineral	Yoruba
9	Engr. Bisoye Cooker Odunsote	National Identity Management Commission (NIMS)	Yoruba
10	Mr. Adebayo Adelabu	Minister of Power	Yoruba
11	Mr. Adewale Bashir Adeniyi	Comptroller General of Nigerian Customs Service	Yoruba
12	Mr. Lateef Fagbemi	Minister of Justice/Attorney General	Yoruba

Similar to the exclusion of the Southeast by the former President, the administration of President Tinubu has also inadvertently given credence to the allegation of marginalisation and exclusion of the Southeast through lopsided



appointments into government agencies and parastatals as shown in table 2 above. Through skewed appointments that favours his ethnic group (Yoruba) against other groups (especially the Southeast), the IPOB movement has been given more reasons to justify their cries of marginalisation.

**Table 3**

*Showing the 6 Geopolitical Zones/Regions of Nigeria with Number of States per Region*

S/N	Geopolitical Zone/Region	Number of States
1	Southeast	5 States of: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo
2	South-south	6 States of: Akwa Ibom; Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, Delta, River State
3	Southwest	6 States of: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo,
4	Northeast	6 States of: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe
5	North Central	6 States of: Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau
6	Northwest	7 States: Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara

Table 3 shows that the allegation of marginalisation of the Southeast is much more than appointments. While other zones in Nigeria have six states (the North West with seven states), the Southeast is the only region with the least number of states. This means that the Southeast receives the least share of federal allocation. The Southeast also has the least number of local government areas in Nigeria. For instance, while the Northwest and Northeast have 186 and 113 LGAs respectively, the Southeast comprises 95 LGAs only. Of all the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, it is also the only group that has not had its turn of producing the president of Nigeria in recent times. From the IPOB's perspective, the marginalisation of the Southeast is largely perpetuated through structural imbalance.

**Table 4**

*Showing Federal Executive Council, 2023 – Present*

S/N	Ministerial Appointments Per Geopolitical Zone/Region	Number of Ministers
1	Northwestern Zone/Region	10 Ministers
2	North Central Zone/Region	8 Ministers
3	Northeastern Zone/Region	8 Ministers
4	Southwest Zone/Region	9 Ministers
5	South-south Zone/Region	8 Ministers
6	Southeast Zone/Region	5 Ministers

From the above table, southeast is the least represented in both elected and appointed political offices at the federal level. Similarly, the zone is poorly represented in the federal public service, as well as the zone with the least number of Ambassadors and heads of government parastatals/government boards or councils (Oluabunwa, 2017). In his letter to President Tinubu in June 2024, Edwin Clark highlighted the alleged marginalisation of the Southeast during the administration of former President Buhari. According to the elder statesman, even though the Southeast has three oil-producing states – Abia, Anambra and Imo, the then President did not appoint anyone from the zone in constituting the Board of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (Shotayo, 2024). In his words, “President Buhari did everything to subjugate the Igbos for reason best known to him.” Wondering how President Tinubu intends to justify his appointment of 10 ministers from the Southwest while appointing only five ministers from the South-East, Clark noted that injustice, discrimination and marginalisation against Igbos still permeates under Tinubu's administration (Shotayo, 2024).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study is literature based and descriptive in nature. It adopted secondary method of data collection. And secondary sources in this study include internal publications, newspaper reports, journal articles, official reports, documentations and documentaries, Legal and policy documents, textbooks and media publications. By comprehensively appraising these sources on ethnic nationalism, separatists' movements, state responses and national security, the study contributes to the academic discourse on separatist movements and their implications for national unity. By employing a descriptive research design and identifying themes and patterns relating to the IPOB's movement and national security, the study categorised the data into key areas such as social movement, national security and



IPOB's desire for an independent state of Biafra so as to create a structured narrative and provide an all-inclusive overview of IPOB movement and its implication for Nigeria's national security.

Tables were used to show trends in the IPOB and national security incidents over time and the perceived marginalisation of the Southeasterners. The lopsided appointments at the federal level (that tend to lend credence to IPOB's sense of marginalisation) and suspected cases of IPOB violent attacks on state institutions and personnel (as threat to national security) are also presented in a tabular form.

#### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The findings show that IPOB has weakened Nigerian common position and strength in foreign policy and National interest matters. Hence, her economy is weak; military strength worn out, diplomatic advantage lost – all these factors of National power in pursuit of National interest are affected. The movement for a separatist Biafra as championed by the IPOB currently constitutes a threat to national security. The movement has assumed a violent, destructive and damaging dimension distinct from its initial peaceful and non-violent approach. The violence of the group has not only put the government on its toes but has kept the group on international searchlight.

The activities of the IPOB has raised concerns amongst scholars and opinion analysts as regards the implications of the movement to national security. Achonwa (2024) argues that recurring agitations for Biafra by IPOB constitutes a serious threat to regional and national security. Onuoha et al. (2021) posit that the IPOB movement has been re-enforced in such a way that Nigeria's security environment appears to have become more volatile than ever before.

This led to the proscription of IPOB which also generated more national questions. IPOB and other separatist movements within the South-East and South-South regions seem to constitute threat to national security in the views of the State and Federal Government of Nigeria. The then Senior Special Assistant to President Muhammadu Buhari on Media and Publicity Garba Shehu while presenting a paper at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Federal University Dutsin-Ma (FUDMA) Katsina, expressly stated that the IPOB pose a significant threat to the safety and security of Nigeria citizens (Israel, 2021).

Ibeanu et al. (2016) argues that the increasing capacity of IPOB separatists to mobilise potential protesters could fuel armed violence and worsen the existing levels of insecurity in the South East region of Nigeria. Ekpenyong (1989) drew our attention to the first three decades after the civil war noting that the problems of armed robbery and carjacking were the most serious forms of security challenges in the South East. Smith (2001) hence submits that since the late 1990s, these problems have been worsened by the spike in kidnapping and other forms of armed banditry as well as the more persistent struggle between vigilante and criminal networks. Ibeanu et al, (2016) further notes that in the early 2000s, vigilante violence became widespread in the region with the most prominent militant vigilante group, the Bakassi Boys active in the major commercial centers. 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 protestors and switch early from being Biafra protestors to armed bandits without any stable means of livelihood, these protestors could constitute serious threats to security in the region.

Oyedeki (2022) submits that apprehension, fear and uncertainty are the prevailing sentiments in the Southeast region of Nigeria. The random killings by unknown gunmen, the sit-at-home order declared by the IPOB on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2021 and the military's intervention in the state have contributed to a heightened sense of danger. Hence, Njoku (2022) agrees that insecurity created by unknown gunmen is on the rise in the region and stressed that the activities of gunmen who move about almost unchallenged, attacking targets and dispossessing security personnel of their weapon and killing them in the process, constitute serious security problems in the Southeast region.

Onuoha et al, (2021) contends that the Nigerian government sees IPOB's use of inciting remarks and hate speech on Radio Biafra to garner support as a security breach. Consequently, the Federal Government consistently airs documentaries on a number of radio and television channels, such as Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), in which it is stated unequivocally that hate speech constitutes terrorism for which individuals are held accountable. The leader of the IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu, was believed to have stated, through the Radio broadcast, that "if they (referring to the leadership of Nigeria) fail to give us Biafra, Somalia will look like a paradise compared to what will happen to the zoo (Nigeria). It is a promise, it is also a pledge and it is also a threat to them." Also, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2015, through his official Facebook page, Nnamdi Kanu said "when we speak, the zoo trembles. This is what happens when a cattle-rearing terrorist is your ruler. Hardcore Biafrans, if you see anyone in your village kill the baboon, Hausa or Yoruba".

In the same vein, the Sahara Reporters of 21<sup>st</sup> July 2017 captured an inciting statement credited to Nnamdi Kanu, saying "if the Government of Nigeria does not agree with us on a date for referendum, there will be no election in the South East starting with Anambra State come November 2017." The statement heightened political tension in the



South-East and dissuaded people from coming out to cast their votes for fear of molestation from IPOB foot soldiers. Onuoha et al, (2021) further reported that on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017, Kanu said “I will go to Abuja and when I’m coming back, I will bring back Buhari’s head”. Also, while speaking during World Igbo Congress in Los-Angeles, Nnamdi Kanu said “Anyone who voted or supported Buhari, give me a gun, I will shoot the person dead and go to prison”. A report credited to Sahara Reporters of 6<sup>th</sup> July 2017 also indicated that the IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu threatened to kill Obasanjo, march with over two million of his men to overrun the nation’s capital Abuja and consistently warned that Nigeria would burn. Hence, according to Nigerian Bulletin of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017, in what looks like a grand design, on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2017 suspected members of IPOB destroyed the Ariaria Police Station in Aba, Abia State.

In the process, they injured policemen, carted away the pump action rifles, attacked MOPOL Patrol vehicle with petrol bomb, destroyed commercial vehicles, set bonfires on the road, attacked a commercial bank among other violent acts. These were considered serious security breaches that considerably impinged on the national security of Nigeria. Hence, according to Onuoha et al (2021), IPOB’s anti-establishment rhetoric constituted a serious breach to Nigeria’s national security. Such activities resulted in the invocation of Terrorism Prevention and Prohibition Act (TPA) 2011 as amended in the proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organisation. There has been spike in the waves of insecurity in many parts of the five states that made up the South East. This has been epitomised by the spate of killings, arson and other forms of violent crimes in the region particularly Anambra State.

The prevailing security situation in the Southeast where individuals are not allowed to carry out their lawful activities due to the fear of being harmed or killed by unknown gunmen due to the imposition of sit-at-home orders by the IPOB while elected government officials offer no protection begs the question of government’s competence (The Guardian, 2021). Hence, Achonwa (2024) agrees that recently the wave of insecurity in the South East region of the country has reached an alarming rate with blood chilling incidents of daylight killings. He further contended that two states in the zone (Imo and Anambra States) have taken the lead with heightened state of insecurity. While some of these security issues are attributed to cultism and other social deviance, the separatist agitation by the IPOB is largely responsible for these cases. Onuoha et al, (2021) argues that a worrisome dimension on IPOB’s separatist movement that impinges on national security is the establishment of parallel security guards in Nigeria different from the Nigerian security formation.

The IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu formed illegal and unlicensed security outfits such as the Biafran Secret Services (BSS) and the Biafran National guard (BNG) in preparation for the independence of Biafra. Ibeanu et al, (2016) avers that while the activities of the pro-Biafra movements intensify and widen, the capacity of the security agencies to handle the movement in a peaceful and professional manner might decline. Hence Campbell (2021) argues that fighting between Government forces and an Igbo separatist group risks adding yet another challenge for the Buhari administration. The emergence for an Igbo paramilitary force highlights the growing break-down of any Federal Government monopoly on the use of force in the face of multiple challenges. Recurring agitation for Biafra can intensify existing security challenges at the national level (Ibeanu et al., 2016). Security challenges in Nigeria manifest in multi-faceted ways but the most disturbing form of insecurity is inter-communal, political and sectarian violence. Igbo community mainly in northern Nigeria is usually the victims of these recurrent attacks (Action on Armed Violence, 2013).

Such has created a deep sense of disaffection among the Igbo which can be exploited by the Biafra separatists. As inter-communal violence involving the Igbo continue to reoccur, Biafra agitators could utilise such attacks as basis to mobilise support, intensify their struggles and attempt to launch reprisal attacks (Achonwa, 2024). Nwangwu (2022) reported that on December 30, 2020, just two weeks after the ESN was founded, the Nigerian military raided some South-Eastern forests where ESN members were believed to be camping, using battle helicopters, gun trucks, and soldiers. The ESN militias and the Nigerian military turned Orlu communities in Imo State into a theatre of war. Njoku & Elekwa (2021) claim that during the conflict, a number of lives were lost and properties worth billions of naira were destroyed. Comparably, according to a study from the European Asylum Support Office, from January 1 to April 30, 2021 became the theatre of war between the Nigerian military and the ESN militia.

According to Njoku & Elekwa (2021), several lives were lost and billions of naira worth of properties got destroyed during the clash. Similarly, a report of the European Asylum Support Office indicates that from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021 a total of 32 security incidents comprising 14 battles, 1 incident of remote violence/explosions, 13 cases of violence against civilians and 4 incidents of riots were recorded in Imo State resulting in 59 deaths (European Asylum Support Office 2021).

Furthermore, following the initial confrontations between the Nigerian military and ESN combatants in January 2021, Imo State and other areas of Igboland faced grave security threats. For example, on April 5, 2021, gunmen who have not yet been identified—known as "Unknown Gunmen" in the media and public—launched a vicious attack on government buildings, including the Nigerian Correctional Center in Owerri and the Imo State Police Command freeing



1,944 inmates of the center (Akingbule & Parkmson, 2021; Ayitogo, 2021). The unknown gunmen also set the premises of the centre (including numerous vehicles) on fire whilst other soldiers were killed at Umuoji on the Owerri-Onitsha Expressway (Nkwo-Akpolu, 2021).

Every state in the South-East and other adjoining states in the South-South especially Akwa-Ibom, Delta and Rivers states have recorded widespread attacks on security formations, particular police stations and check points (Nwangwu, 2022). More than 16 police officers and four naval officers have died as a result of a string of violent attacks on security formations in Anambra state since February 2021, particularly at the Nkpologwu and Omogho communities in the Aguata and Orumba North Local Government Areas, respectively (Eze et al., 2021). With at least 15 police stations assaulted and/or raised throughout the state, Imo state has been the worst hit by unidentified gunman attacks (Nwangwu, 2022).

In particular, INEC offices and facilities have become the second most adversely affected only coming after police stations by attacks across Nigeria. Apart from attacks credited to arsonists who disrupted the 2020 #EndSARS protests (which were more evenly distributed in Southeastern Nigeria), subsequent attacks on INEC facilities by unknown gunmen since December 2020 have been concentrated in the South-East – the main domain of the neo-Biafra separatist agitations (Nwangwu, 2022). One of the greatest national question confronting the corporate existence of Nigeria in recent time is the separatist agitation of the IPOB social movement against the Nigerian state. The movement has inevitably become an albatross to the apparent claim of corporate entity of Nigeria as a sovereign state of the global community. The movement has been reinforced in such a way that Nigerian security environment appears to have become more volatile than ever before, putting paid to Nigerian government regular claim of being in charge and always on top of national security matters.

The IPOB movement not only exacerbates tensions and violence in Southeast region but also poses a significant threat to national security. Excessive militarised response of the state security forces also radicalises IPOB members, resulting in more extreme actions such as terrorist activities and armed insurgency (Adebayo, 2022; Ani, 2017).

## V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

The IPOB separatist movement is fueled by a feeling of collective victimisation among the Igbos. And the movement constitutes a threat to national security. Findings of the study reveal that the social movement in Nigeria championed by the IPOB and which is geared towards the actualisation of sovereign state of Biafra has changed gear.

IPOB eclipsed all other pro-Biafra groups in the struggle to address a feeling of collective victimisation among the Igbos. The movement which started on a peaceful and non-violent footing is today associated with violent trajectories. In spite of being reckoned with peaceful protests, some members of IPOB currently engage in armed attacks on the government/government facilities, security agencies, and even defenseless citizens of the Nigerian state. The violent and criminal disposition of IPOB today hence poses a serious threat to national security. Fear, apprehension arising from some clandestine activities of some IPOB members has dwindled the degree of acceptance which it had hitherto enjoyed among the Igbos whose course it is championing.

The series of attack on establishment of Nigerian security and paramilitary agencies – Army, Police, Immigration, Custom, NSCDC as symbol of National security and defence has weakened and eroded the morale and strength of National security.

It has equally weakened citizens' public trust and confidence on the government of the state to protect and safeguard their life and property as guaranteed by laws, as the purpose of the state in its social contract with the citizens.

The increase in the emergence of agitating groups in the North and other parts of Nigeria, provoked by the IPOB media awareness on the crisis of identity and domination of one group over the others constitute serious threats to National security. It has provoked outburst of agitations from gravely peaceful groups in the North on issues of right of indigenous identity and recognition in fair and just representation in National allocation and distribution of socio-economic and political values.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The government should cautiously make use of carrot and stick approach in the handling of the Biafra movement, engaging the genuine IPOB led agitators in meaningful dialogue while at the same time fishing out the criminal elements whose activities threaten national security. The ordinary citizens should assist security operatives in fishing out the criminal elements who hide under the cloak of IPOB movement to commit acts that threaten national security.



The print and electronic media should create strong messages aimed at discouraging the repressive strategy of Nigerian security agencies as well as re-orientating the radical IPOB members towards a peaceful disposition. Support for IPOB-led Biafra agitation by Igbos leaders should be made with appropriate statements rather than rhetoric that fuel extremism and threat to national security.

On the other hand, the war on the IPOB movement will not be won by military offensive alone. In other words, the Nigeria government must meaningfully address the range of social, political, and economic challenges that have sustained the IPOB movement.

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## APPENDIX I

Due to perceived marginalisation, IPOB has employed various strategies such as sit-at-home (Ibeanu et al., 2016), propaganda (Adesomoju, 2022), protest letters (Achonwa, 2024, Adebayo 2022), lobbying (Adesomoju, 2021) and violent attacks to demonstrate its discontent over government victimisation and exclusion. The timeline of selected security threatening incidents are as follows:

**Table 5**

*Showing Suspected Cases of IPOB Anti-State Establishment and Institution Attacks as Threat to National Security*

S/N	Date of Incident	Location/State	Description of Crime Incident
1	22/8/2019	Imo	Gunmen went on rampage killing a retired police officer, four other persons in Ilile community in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State.
2	23/8/2020	Enugu	The patrol team of the Department of State Security Services was attacked by members of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Two of its operatives were killed by IPOB at Emene, Enugu State.
3	1 Feb. 2021	Abia	Omoba Police Station, Isiala Ngwa North LGA, A police inspector was killed.
4	23 Feb. 2021	Abia	Abayi Police Station, World Bank Housing Estate, Aba
5	24 Feb. 2021	Anambra	A police officer was killed and a patrol vehicle was razed down in Ekwulobia
6	25 Feb. 2021	Cross River	MCC in Calabar, Four police officers were killed.
7	26 Feb. 2021	Imo	A police station was razed down in Aboh Mbaise Divisional Police Station.
8	1 Mar. 2021	Akwa Ibom	In Essien Udim LGA, a police station was attacked, including vehicles and motorcycles parked within the station.
9	1 Mar. 2021	Ebonyi	In Iboko Divisional Police Station, Izzi LGA, The police station was attacked.
10	2 May 2021	Akwa Ibom	South-South region in Essien Udim LGA, Hoodlums/unknown gunmen attack
11	9 May 2021	Abia	South-East region in Ohafia LGA Arsonists/unknown gunmen attack
12	13 May 2021	Enugu	South-East region in Udenu LGA, Arsonists/unknown gunmen attacked
13	16 May 2021	Enugu	South-East region in Enugu State headquarters Unknown gunmen/hoodlums attacked
14	18 May 2021	Ebonyi	South-East region in Ebonyi, Ezza North and Izzi LGAs Three INEC offices attacked
15	23 May 2021	Enugu	South-East region in Igboeze South LGA, Unknown gunmen/hoodlums attacked
16	23 May 2021	Anambra	South-East region in Anambra State headquarters Unknown gunmen attacked
17	23 May 2021	Imo	South-East region in Ahiazu Mbaise LGA, Unknown gunmen attacked
18	9 Mar. 2021	Imo	A police station and several vehicles were burnt down in Isinweke Police Station, Ihitte/Uboma LGA.
19	18 Mar. 2021	Anambra	A police patrol team at Okacha Junction in Neni, Anaocha LGA, a police officer was killed whilst two others sustained gunshot injuries.
20	30 Mar. 2021	Akwa-Ibom	Killing of the Commander of the state Police Command's Quick Intervention Unit, CSP Ben Ajide and two other officers. A police patrol team at Ikot Akpan community, Essien Udim LGA,
21	5 Apr. 2021	Imo	Police Command and Nigerian Correctional Services Imo State Police Command headquarters, Owerri was razed; almost all the vehicles parked at the command headquarters were burnt. 1,844 inmates of the Nigerian Correctional Services were also freed.
22	19 Apr. 2021	Abia	In Uzuakoli Police Station, Bende LGA the police station was burnt down
23	21 Apr. 2021	Enugu	Adani Police Station, Uzo-Uwani LGA Two police operatives were shot dead whilst the police station was set ablaze.
24	24 Apr. 2021	Rivers	Four checkpoints from Elele to Omagwa in Ikwerre LGA, eight operatives were killed: three military personnel, three customs officials and two policemen. Guns and two operational vehicles were also carted away.
25	27 Apr. 2021	Akwa Ibom	A checkpoint at Urua Inyang, Ika LGA, Hoodlums killed two police officers, carted away rifles and burnt down a police van.
26	27 Apr. 2021	Imo	Naval checkpoint near Enamel Ware Junction, Onitsha-Owerri highway. One naval personnel was killed whilst two others were injured.



27	28 Apr. 2021	Abia	Nkporo Police Station, Ohafia LGA. The police station, motorcycles and cars were set ablaze whilst some suspects in detention were released.
28	1 May 2021	Akwa Ibom	Ibiaku Ntok Okpo Divisional Police Office, Ikono LGA. Two police officers were killed, whilst facilities, vehicles and other valuables at the station were destroyed.
29	1 May 2021	Ebonyi	A police officer was killed whilst another got injured. Abaomege Police Station, Onicha LGA,
30	6 May 2021	Ebonyi	A police officer was killed, office of the DPO and admin building were razed down. Obiozara Police Station, Ohaozara LGA,
31	7 May 2021	Rivers	At least seven police officers were killed at the checkpoint, two more officers were killed at Rumuji Police Station, a patrol car was set ablaze and five assault rifles were stolen. A checkpoint at Choba Bridge, Port Harcourt; Rumuji Police Station, Emohua LGA; Elimgbu Police Station, Igwuruta Road, Port Harcourt,
32	8 May 2021	Akwa Ibom	Odoro Ikpe Police Station, Ini LGA, five police officers and the wife of a serving police officer were killed. Some police vehicles were also set ablaze.
33	12 May 2021	Abia	Criminal suspects were freed, two vehicles and three motorcycles were burnt. Bende Divisional Police Station, Bende LGA,
34	17 May 2021	Abia	The police station was set ablaze whilst two policemen were killed. Apumiri Ubakala Divisional Police Station, Umuahia South LGA,
35	25 May 2021	Enugu	Iwollo Police Division, Ezeagu LGA. Four police officers were killed whilst the police station was set ablaze.
36	6 Jun. 2021	Delta	Ashaka Police Station, Ndokwa East LGA. The police station and a patrol vehicle were set ablaze.
37	26 Feb. 2021	Imo	Aboh Mbaise Divisional Police Station. A police station was razed down.
38	5/4/2021	Imo	Ehime Mbanjo Police Station was burnt by hoodlums. They also freed some of their members in the police custody. They sang Biafra songs of victory. They also carted away some ammunitions
39	12/5/2021	Abia	Burning down of Bende Divisional Police Station. The gunmen were over 100.
40	29/5/2021	Imo	Burning of a magistrate court and Police Station.
41	11/10/2021	Enugu	The Police Divisional Headquarters Umulokpa in Uzouwani L.G.A was attacked by unknown gunmen.
42	11/1/2022	Imo	Passengers in a commercial bus heading to Lagos from Uyo, were kidnapped when gunmen intercepted the bus in Isiala Mbanjo, Imo State.
43	10/2/2022	Enugu	Gunmen attacked a police check point in Enugu and killed eight policemen.
44	12/2/2022	Enugu	Four police men on stop and search were shot dead by gun men. The incident happened in Obiagu community, Amaechi Ekeotu-Agbani Town Road leaving the road deserted
45	23/2/2022	Enugu	Five persons were killed on this day when gunmen suspected to be IPOB militia attacked two polling units in Enugu communities during Local Government elections.
46	15/3/2022	Imo	Two prison warders were killed and several others wounded, vehicles burnt by gunmen in Okigwe town in Imo State.
47	18/3/2022	Imo	Gun Men Attacked The Umuguma Police Station In Owerri West L.G.A.
48	27/3/2022	Imo	Gun men attacked the Ofoko Divisional Police Headquarters situated in the Obowo Local Government Area of Imo State.
49	30/3/2022	Anambra	Several security operatives were killed and several buildings set ablaze when a gang of armed IPOB men attacked the headquarters of Nnewi South Local Government Area at Ukpok, Anambra State
50	1/4/2022	Ebonyi	Police officers reported an attack by gunmen in the Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The gunmen attacked the policemen who were attached to a construction company working in the area.
51	2/4/2022	Imo	Gun men stormed the Orsu Local Government Area headquarters and bombed it with an Improvised Explosive Devices (IED).
52	7/4/2022	Abia	Soldiers on patrol in Aba in the morning came under attack by unknown gunmen who set ablaze a military tank after an early morning raid.
53	10/4/2022	Imo	Gun men burnt the residence of the commissioner for Justice and Attorney General of Imo State - Cypril Akaolisa.
54	12/4/2022	Anambra	Gun men invaded the Atani Police Station in the Ogaru Local Government Area of Anambra State. Four police men, a female police officer reportedly lost their lives in the shootout.



55	19/4/2022	Anambra	Gunmen attacked the zonal Police Headquarters, zone 13, Ikpo in Dunukofia Local Government Area of Anambra State. A building in the compound was set ablaze while vehicles on the premises were also burnt.
56	29-30/4/2022	Anambra	Gun men killed six persons including a soldier in the Anaocha and Nnewi South Local Government Areas of Anambra State.
57	30/4/2022	Imo	Gun men shot dead and beheaded a couple who were operatives of the Nigerian Army. A.M Linus, a sergeant first class in the Army and his lance corporal wife were on their way to Imo State when the incident happened
58	3/5/2022	Imo	There was uproar in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State as gunmen killed a Police Officer. The gunmen also chopped off the private part of the victim identified as Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Ukam Efut.
59	8/5/2022	Anambra	Gun men set ablaze a truck loaded with cows along Uga-Ezinifite Road in the Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State.
60	16/5/2022	Anambra	At Eke-Oko, an identified middle aged man wearing a police vest with the inscription "Say No To Crime" and riding on a motorcycle was shot dead by unknown gunmen
61	17/5/2022	Ebonyi	The chairman Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State Elder Steve Orogwu escaped death as unknown gunmen invaded his country home killing three of his brothers.
62	22/5/2022	Anambra	Militants alleged to be members of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) killed a woman, her four children and six others all of them of Northern extraction in Anambra State.
63	29/5/2022	Imo	The Izombe Police Station in Oguta L.G.A of Imo State was burnt down by hoodlums.
64	31/5/2022	Anambra	Gunmen killed four naval men and three policemen in different locations in Anambra State.
65	20/6/2022	Imo	There was pandemonium at Izombe Market in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State on Monday as gunmen believed to be enforcing sit-at-home protest detonated a bomb in the densely populated market, forcing both traders and buyers to scamper for safety.
66	25/6/2022	Enugu	There was tension in Enugu as gunmen invaded a drinking joint at Akwuke, Enugu South Local Government Area of the State.
67	29/6/2022	Enugu	Masked gunmen attacked a police checkpoint in Enugu killing two officers on the spot. The incident happened at Garki MTD area in Enugu south local Government Area of the State capital.
68	13/7/2022	Enugu	Gunmen attacked officials of the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Igboeze North Local Government Area of Enugu State.
69	26/7/2022	Abia	Six mobile policemen attached to the 28 PMF Umuahia and counter terrorists Unit, base 4 Aba were attacked.
70	1/8/2022	Imo	Gunmen killed seven security guards in Umuafom, Orogwe, a community in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo State.
71	5/8/2022	Imo	Hours after killing four police officers in Imo State, gunmen invaded Izombe community in Oguta Local Government Area of the state shooting sporadically and destroying properties.
72	13/8/2022	Abia	A police officer was abducted when gunmen invaded Mbala Divisional police headquarters in Isuochi Community Umunneochi Local Government Area of Abia State.
73	15/8/2022	Imo	Gunmen shot dead a commercial motorcyclist at Ogbaku market on Owerri Onitsha Road in Owerri Imo State.
74	18/8/2022	Abia	Two gunmen and a soldier attached to the 14 Brigade Ohafia, Abia State were killed in a gun duel in Ohafia.
75	21/8/2022	Anambra	A major of the Nigerian Army Churchil Orji was shot dead in Anambra State.
76	7/9/2022	Enugu	An attack by unknown gunmen left at least six policemen dead in chime Avenue, New Haven, Enugu North Local Government Area of the State.
77	11/9/2022	Anambra	Three escorts in the convoy of senator Ifeanyi Ubah representing Anambra South senatorial zone were feared dead when he was attacked at Enugwu Ukwu in Njikoka Local Government Area of the state.
78	17/7/23	Imo	The traditional ruler of Nguru community in Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State Eze James Nnamdi was shot dead by hoodlums suspected to be sit-at-home enforcers.