

# THE DEVASTATING CYCLE: THE IMPACTS OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BIAFRA'S SIT-AT-HOME PROTESTS ON THE INFORMAL ECONOMY OF NORTHERN IGBOLAND

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## *Abstract*

*This article examines the connection between the Sit-at-Home protest of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the impact on the informal economy of rural dwellers in Enugu State, Nigeria. While existing scholarship has focused on the overall impact of IPOB activities on the economy of South-Eastern Nigeria as a whole, the secessionist movement's effect on the local economy in rural communities has remained understudied. Drawing from a purposive and random sampling of respondents, including traders at Ogige and Igbo-Eze markets, as well as selected Artisans, motor drivers, Okada riders, and Keke riders in Nsukka, the study found that the declaration of a sit-at-home order by the IPOB has strangled the rural economy of the northern Igbos in southeastern Nigeria. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on the impact of ethnic nationalism on the rural economy.*

**Keywords:** IPOB, sit-at-home, northern Igbo, informal economy, rural dwellers, ethnic nationalism

## INTRODUCTION

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) initiated the "sit-at-home" order to pressure the Federal Government of Nigeria for the release of their leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. This study investigates the profound economic impact of the Indigenous People of Biafra's (IPOB) "sit-at-home" orders on Northern Igboland (primarily Enugu state) from 2021 to 2025. Using mixed methods, findings reveal that mandated weekly lockdowns have crippled local commerce, agricultural transportation, and SMEs, resulting in significant revenue losses, soaring food prices, and increased local poverty. The study highlights that the directive has led to massive economic contraction, causing a substantial drop in weekly earnings for rural and urban traders, shutting down informal trade sectors (market days), and hindering the transport of agricultural products from rural areas to urban centers. We argue that this has led to income erosion among residents

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who rely on daily earnings, effectively hampering regional economic development. Furthermore, we argue that the sit-at-home order has transitioned from a political protest to a self-inflicted economic challenge for the Igbo people, undermining local economic resilience. The study calls for urgent dialogue between local stakeholders, the government, and pro-Biafra groups to restore economic normalcy.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE CRISIS

The youth of southeastern Nigeria framed the new quest for Biafran autonomy and exit from the Nigerian state as an ethno-nationalistic struggle. Its immediate context was towards the emancipation of a people who risked extinction by the various ethnocidal administrations in Nigeria after the Biafran War. The struggle was therefore dressed in the garb of messianism to address the collective grievance of a people (Akeem Idowu, 2023; Tuki, 2024; Ojo, 2024; Osuchukwu et al, 2025; Njoku, 2025). Often framed as a struggle against marginalization and economic exclusion, the struggle sought to restore the threshold that Biafrans had crossed in the technological and economic spheres during the three-year Biafran war.

The nurturing of ethnic consciousness in Nigeria owes significantly to the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates (Abejide, 2022; Chukwu & Okoji, 2024). Before the amalgamation, both the designated major and minor ethnic groups cohabited without their ethnic affiliations being politicized. Nonetheless, it is important to note that ethnic minorities in Nigeria are not simply numerically lesser linguistic groups. This is because these categories did not become a topical issue in Nigerian politics until after the onset of regionalization during the colonial period (Ikre, 2023). Before regionalization, all ethnic groups in Nigeria were equal, notwithstanding the subordinate-superordinate relationships that may have existed among them in the pre-colonial past (Ikre, 2023). Nigeria was formally bifurcated into three main ethnic regions—Northern, Western, and Eastern—by the British colonial administration in 1946 under the administration of Arthur Richard. The Constitution introduced by Macpherson in 1951 and the one introduced in 1958 by Lyttleton further consolidated the move toward Nigeria's practice of federalism as a power-sharing mechanism (Omoigberale, 2025). While it reflected the historical trends through which the British gained control and managed Nigeria, the regionalization arrangement was fundamentally divisive, leading to fragmentation and instability. Specifically, the tripartite system entrenched the political dominance of the Hausa-Fulani-led northern region (Orji, 2022), which accounted for over half of the nation's population and two-thirds of its land (Omoigberale, 2025). This has fostered the idea of one ethnic group exerting control and escalating tensions among ethnic

minorities as it left out the security of their areas; and promoted a significant level of ethnic-regional division due to the disproportionate tripartite ethno-regional setup which increased the imbalance after the inclusion of the Mid-West area in the southern part in 1963, which inevitably resulted in a conflict between two opposing sides between the south and the north.

In response to these ethnic tensions, the colonial authority introduced the system of indirect rule. It reinforced socioeconomic and political rivalry among Nigerian ethnic groups (Korieh, 2013; Ediagbonya, 2020). The system of indirect rule was based on the principle of divide-and-rule, whereby certain ethnic or regional elites were empowered at the expense of others. This led to considerable mistrust between the state and the masses, as well as among the major ethnic nationalities—Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba (Etefa, 2019). The political and economic rivalry among the three regions of North, South, and West was reflected in the ethnicization of the political parties that emerged at that time such as the National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons (later National Council of Nigeria Citizens) NCNC was formed in 1944 by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe from Igbo ethnic stock, the Action Group (AG) was formed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo 1951 to pursue and protect the interest of the Yoruba people, while the Northern People's Congress (NPC) formed in 1950, by northerners and for northerners thus making ethnicity the base of Nigeria politics (Ojo, 2012).

By the time the early post-colonial leaders had settled down, 'ethno-centrism, nepotism, and religious intolerance, social injustice, ethnic persecution' (Okoye & Asogwa, 2021, p. 71) had taken into the fabrics of the political ecology, thus culminating into the ethnic riots of 1964, the Federal and Regional election crisis of 1964, the killing of the Igbo in Northern Nigeria in 1966. The seeming lukewarm nature of the state response to the crisis, especially to the massacre of the Igbo in parts of Northern Nigeria, dramatically led to the collapse of the First Republic and the first military coup on January 15, 1966. The coup, which led to the killing of many Northern leaders, saw the installation of General John Aguiyi Ironsi as the head of the Nigerian government (Duruji, 2012). The result of the 1966 military coup re-echoed and seemingly confirmed the long-held view by the northern political elite of the Igbo domination of Nigeria's politics and economy.

This fear of Igbo domination of Nigeria's politics, primarily among its northern neighbors, created an atmosphere of resentment against the Igbo by their Northern neighbors and indeed by other Nigerian ethnic nationalities, and resulted in the massacre of the Igbo upon any slightest or no provocation (Obumselu, 1968, p. 142; Madubuike, 2012; Achebe, 2013). The foregoing conditions of instability, wanton killings, and ethnic strife resulted in the January 15, 1966, coup (Ojukwu, 2005). However, the acri-

mony generated by the Nzeogwu coup of January 1966 resulted in the countercoup of July 29, 1966, which overthrew Aguiyi Ironsi after 194 days in power (Aro & Ani, 2017). The countercoup resulted in a wave of 'pogrom, massacre, misplaced aggression, and targeted genocide' on the Igbo, which further drummed the echo of Igbo self-determination and eventual resolution of the Igbo leaders to exit Nigeria by formal declaration of the sovereign state of Biafra in 1967 (Achebe, 2012; Duruji, 2012).

This declaration of Biafra's independence by the Igbo leaders led by Odumegwu Ojukwu opened another wave of police action against the Igbo people by the Federal Government of Nigeria. By the end of the war on January 15, 1970, more than three million Igbo had died, and properties and economic livelihood in all the major cities of Igbo land were destroyed (Asogwa & Okoye, 2021). The failure of Yakubu Gowon's administration to achieve post-war reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation, which were intended to reintegrate the Igbo, properly set the stage for a new phase in the struggle for Igbo self-determination in Nigeria. The lack of political and economic inclusion of the Igbo resulted in collective grievance and victimhood within post-Biafran Igbo nationalism (Ibeanu, Orji, & Iwuamadi, 2016). The Igbo and the Southeast region were increasingly alienated and sidelined by the federal government of Nigeria in its policies and programs, which were promised at the war's end in 1970 (Ikpeze, 2000). This left the Igbo with the feeling that the post-civil war policies of the Federal Government were designed to undermine their capacity to compete with other ethnic groups in the Nigerian political economy. Policies like the 20-pound flat rate on bank lodgement for every Igbo after the war, the indigenization policy that privatized the foreign shares of fully owned foreign companies in Nigeria after the war, and the infamous abounded property saga were some of the perceived anti-Igbo policies in the post-Biafra era, which further sustained the quest for self-determination by the Igbo (Ojukwu, 2005).

The political marginalization of the Igbo in the Second and Third Republics prompted further agitation by Igbo elites, setting the stage for the emergence of the neo-Biafra movement in the years that followed. Since Dr. Alex Ekwueme served as Vice President under Alhaji Shehu Shagari between 1979 and 1983, before General Buhari overthrew the regime in the 1983 military coup, the Igbo have not had the opportunity to elect a Nigerian president. This was compounded by an unbalanced state structure, in which the Southeast was allocated only five states – the fewest of the country's geopolitical zones – fuelling feelings of marginalization and exclusion among the Igbo in the wake of the 1999 democratization. The Igbo hoped that the emerging democratic transition led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar between June 9, 1998, and May 29, 1999, would produce an Igbo presidency, a hope that was never realized. This hope was

truncated following the humiliation of Igbo frontline politician Dr. Alex Ekwueme at the PDP convention in Jos in 1999, where the collaboration between Northern and Western politicians resulted in Olusegun Obasanjo being named the PDP flagbearer (Aro & Ani, 2017). The foregoing narrative scenario revived the sense of Igbo marginalization and exclusion in Nigeria's fourth republic, leading to the articulation of a demand for a Biafran re-secession in Nigeria's post-war history. This perceived injustice against the Igbo people in the wave of the new democratic order rekindled the agitations for self-determination and the emergence of new Biafrans with the launching of the Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) by Chief Raph Uwazurike on "September 13, 1999" (Okoye & Asogwa, 2021, p. 73). The formation of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the emergence of the neo-Biafra Movement seem to be a direct response to the failure of the Nigerian government to tackle the lingering issue of Igbo political, economic, and social inclusion since the civil war (Onuoha, 2011). The introduction of the old Biafran currency by MASSOB, the launch of the Biafran passport, and the hoisting of the Biafran flag in parts of Igbo land soon brought it into conflict with the Nigerian security forces (Ikeh, 2021). This led to the arrest and detention of Uwazurike from 2005 to 2007, when the group had significantly been factionalized. The movement for Igbo self-determination received a new twist in 2012, when a faction of MASSOB, led by Benjamin Onwuka, launched the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) in Enugu. Onwuka and his group, however, did not last long as he was arrested on November 5, 2012, following the aborted attempt to seize the state-owned radio station, ESBS Enugu, to re-declare the Republic of Biafra (Oketokun, Ayomola & Adesiyani, 2021).

The protests and arrest of pro-Biafra agitators by the security agents characterized the atmosphere in which the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was formed in 2012 by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu (Nwangwu, 2022). The official launching of IPOB in the year 2012 "resurrected the struggle for self-determination" "waged by the Igbo that led to the bloody civil war in Nigeria (Nduba, Nnamdi & Ofodu, 2020, p. 7). Due to the confrontational and radical rhetoric of Kanu (Asogwa et al, 2024), he was incarcerated by the Nigerian state. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has employed various protest strategies designed to pressure the Nigerian political leadership to grant its demand for Igbo self-determination. IPOB, in furtherance of its goal, has adopted strategies such as the declaration of sit-at-home in the Southeast Region on Mondays and any other days that its leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, goes to court, armed guerrilla attacks against state institutions and security formations, engaging in acts of civil disobedience, such as election boycott and refusal to participate in the national census exercise.

Scholars, commentators, and analysts have grappled with the root causes of the Nigeria-Biafra War, the dynamics of the war itself, and the long-term implications for the region and Nigeria's future (Korieh, 2018; Uche, 2008; Raji & Abejide, 2013). Discussions have centered on the impact of colonial legacy and the failure of post-independence nation-building efforts. Others have focused on the role of ethnicity, political marginalization, and economic disparities in fueling the conflict (Ekwe-Ekwe, 1990; Stremiau, 1977). These narratives, though complex, have been preoccupied with examining the events that led to the declaration of Biafran independence and the subsequent police action against the Igbo in southeastern Nigeria. Scholars have also devoted considerable attention to discussing post-war conditions and the intersection of various factors that contributed to the emergence of neo-Biafran movements and the ongoing struggle for self-determination (Falola & Heaton, 2008). These movements have sought to rekindle the Biafran identity, address perceived injustices, and advocate for greater autonomy or secession from the Nigerian state (Atogu, 2016; Muzan, 2014).

The outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War in 1967 and the continued agitations for Biafra have been widely attributed to the complex legacy of British colonial rule in the region and the failure of post-independence nation-building efforts (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Korieh, 2018; Ojibara, 2016). As Afigbo (1981) succinctly explained, prior to colonization, the area that later became Nigeria was home to diverse ethnic groups and political structures. Ethnic nations existed in their own distinct enclaves, ranging from the centralized Sokoto Caliphate in the north to the decentralized Igbo communities in the east. Thus, according to Falola & Heaton (2008), British colonial administrators, in their efforts to consolidate control, implemented policies that exacerbated existing tensions and laid the groundwork for conflict, including the Biafran War. This informs the assertion by Korieh (2018) that the Nigerian-Biafran War was the culmination of the political problems created by the colonial authorities in Nigeria when Frederick Lugard merged different parts of the territory in 1914. According to him, this problem was further complicated by the 1954 regional constitution, which divided the country into three provinces: Western, Eastern, and Northern. This, he argued, led to the introduction of "ethnic and regional parochialism" that resulted in a 1966 military coup and countercoup (Korieh, 2018, p. 80). Scholars such as Olusanya (1980) and Ribadu (2015) have supported the above account by arguing that the most significant factors leading to the Nigerian-Biafran War and numerous other inter-ethnic conflicts in post-independence African states were the failure to consider the complexities of local identities and power structures in colonial state formation. According to Ribadu (2015), this resulted in a power imbalance and competition for resources between the regions,

which later became a significant point of contention. For Ojibara (2016), the structural imbalance of the Nigerian federation results from the colonial asymmetrical distribution of power among ethnic and geographical groups. He continued that the above factors resulted in a cobweb of events that catalyzed the outbreak of the Biafran War, such as the January 15 and July 29, 1966, coups and countercoups, respectively, and the killing of the Igbo in the north from May to September 1966.

In a related account, Das (2021), in a paper titled “The Inseparable Ties of the Past: Indirect Colonial Rule in Nigeria and the Biafra War,” has advanced the argument that the enthronement of the system of indirect rule by the British destabilized all the Indigenous political structures and laid the groundwork for ethnic rift and tension. This resulted in what he called the “campaign of ethnic cleansing” in 1966, which was the immediate precursor to the Biafra declaration in 1967. According to him, the British system of amalgamation and the prolonged practice of indirect governance only ensured the grouping of hundreds of ethnic communities into one nation, without any attempt to build a culture of national unity. Thus, ethnic tensions and regional affinities persisted because each ethnic nation was more strongly affiliated with its ethnic heritage than with its national identity. However, while the colonial legacy undoubtedly contributed to the structural problems Nigerians faced at independence, it would be an oversimplification to attribute the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War solely to this factor. The interplay between post-independence economic conditions and the actions of Nigerian leaders played an important role in the conflict. For instance, according to Okolie (2003), in his work *Oil, Politics, and Conflict in Nigeria*, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region heightened regional disparities and economic competition among Nigeria's ethnic groups. According to him, this fueled the Eastern region's secessionist impulse to secure control over its oil resources. Additionally, Das (2021, pp. 46-47) notes that “although petroleum was discovered in the Niger Delta in 1958, it has instead generated revenues for economic independence.” Instead, it led to rising ethnic resentments, which, according to him, ultimately culminated in the outbreak of a three-year-long Nigeria-Biafra war. Das also argued that the Federal Government of Nigeria, under Yakubu Gowon's resistance to the formation of the Biafra nation, was based not on the ground of national unity but on the ground of losing revenue that came from the oil discovered in the Niger Delta in 1958. This narrative is crucial to understanding the dynamics of the political and economic environment that led to the civil war, suggesting that immediate economic interests and power struggles, rather than solely colonial legacies, contributed to the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran war.

Scholars have also been preoccupied with explaining the link between the post-war conditions of the Igbo and the continued agitations for Biafra in contemporary Nigeria. As Uzoigwe (2012, p. 234) states, there is no doubt that "the state of the Igbo nation since the fall of Biafra has not been good and has been getting increasingly bad." This obvious precarious post-Biafra war condition of the Igbo has been attributed to the failure of the promised reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation program by the General Yakubu Gowon-led military government. As documented by Omenka (2021), "the subsequent actions of the Federal Military Government (FMG) and its cohorts stood glaringly at variance with the declarations of the promises made." According to him, there was no systematic effort by the Nigerian government to rebuild Igboland. This, however, explains why the missions pioneered the postwar reconstruction of Biafra, apparently due to neglect by the government of the day. Thus, KorieH (2021) explains that the Nigerian government did not adopt any meaningful strategy to enshrine durable peace in the post-Biafran period. For him, the rhetorical proclamation of 'no victor, no vanquished' was not followed by a proactive strategy to ensure integration or any form of transitional justice. This, according to Ihunna (2021), has continued to make the conditions of the Igbo in Nigeria a dominant topic in contemporary Nigerian political discourse, thereby explaining the resurgence of a new wave of consciousness among many Igbo toward Biafra.

The above position suggests that the recent wave of agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra is a direct response to perceived failures in the Nigerian government's post-war policies. The failure of the No Victor, No Vanquished program can therefore be seen as a catalyst for the resurgence of the neo-Biafra movements. The neo-Biafra movements, such as the emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), with its radical approaches, are a manifestation of the unaddressed grievances and numerous unmet promises of the Nigerian government's post-war reconciliation and reintegration of the Igbo. While the above view has sufficiently explained the intersection of post-war conditions among the Igbo with the emergence of the neo-Biafra movements, it falls short of addressing the historical grievances that contributed to that emergence. This perspective often overlooks the impact of contemporary socio-political dynamics on the resurgence and persistence of the neo-Biafra movements. The movement also reflects the broader dissatisfaction of Nigerians and Igbo alike with the contemporary decline in state capacity and efficiency. As argued by Suberu (2001), the failures of successive governments to address systemic issues at all levels, such as corruption, poor governance, insecurity, and the growing inequality between those in power and the governed, have the potential to fuel separatist sentiments not only among the Igbo but also in other regions. Implicit in the above view is the idea that eco-

conomic marginalization, political exclusion, identity politics, and contemporary political dynamics intersect to ignite the neo-Biafra movement.

Scholars hold divergent views on what may have accounted for the rise of separatist Movements in Nigeria, particularly the emergence of IPOB. In explaining this trend in secessionist movements, three explanatory strands emerged- those who tend to situate it on the colonial origin of the Nigerian state, the ethnic politics and ethnic mobilization point of view, and finally, those who argue that the exclusionist politics of the Nigerian ruling class informed the eruption of IPOB separatism. The colonial state perspective centers on its account of the Nigerian state's role in the emergence of inter-class struggle and conflict arising from the struggle for hegemony among ethnic groups. They thus attribute the eruption of the neo-Biafra Movement and the formation of pro-Biafra separatist groups in the wake of the return to democratic governance in 1999 to the progressive marginalization of the Igbo in Nigeria that is akin to the nature of the Nigerian state (Ikpe, 2012; Okafor & Udalla, 2018; Maigari & Umar, 2018; Taiwo & Ariyo, 2020; Nnoli, 2003; and Ikelegbe, 2013). They argue that in Nigeria, the interplay of state dynamics and marginalization was a result of colonial manipulation of the African Indigenous ethnic nationalities, which has resulted in the zero-sum nature of inter-ethnic relations and the mobilization along ethnic lines. Ikpe (2009) has argued that the patrimonial nature of the Nigerian state, occasioned by the colonial fabrication of Africans along ethnic lines, has continued to shape the dynamism of ethnic relations in Nigeria. He explained that the colonial division of the Nigerian state along ethnic lines and the policy of divide and rule sowed the seed of competition for hegemony among the three major ethnic groups and the resultant exclusion and crisis of marginalization that has continued to divide the people of Nigeria. He disagrees with the prevailing view that separatist groups arise from ethnic competition. Instead, he argues that the systemic chaos in the Nigerian state stems from its patrimonial nature, in which state power and resources have been commodified and personalized. The commoditization of the state, therefore, leads to competition and occasional exclusion of some ethnic groups that often respond by mobilizing in the form of separatist agitation.

The end of the war, however, ushered in another phase of state-organized destabilization of the Igbo people and economy. The Igbo in Nigeria before 1999 had endured the harsh realities of post-civil war government policies, which were designed to undermine their economy and political participation. With the hope that the democratisation process of 1999 would open a window of opportunity, the Igbo sought to accommodate and eventually integrate into the Nigerian political economy. This explains the enthusiasm that greeted the wave of democratization among the Igbo elite and masses, which presented an ample opportunity for the

Southeast, predominantly composed of the Igbo ethnic stock, to have a commensurate stake in the political economy of the Nigerian state. The political transition in 1999 raised the hopes of the Igbo elite, who had paid a huge price during the heyday of the military dictatorship. It informed the enthusiasm that marked the participation of the Igbo political and economic class in the transition process.

The predominant feeling among the Igbo was that the 1999 democratisation process would address the issue of marginalization that had pervaded the long period of military rule, particularly in areas such as post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation, state creation, infrastructure development, and general economic disempowerment. Drawing from the above view, it is compelling to argue that the renewed agitations for Biafra are related to the post war marginalisation of the Igbo and the feeling of collective deprivation occasioned by the inability of the Igbo political elite to occupy the Nigerian highest office in 1999 as widely expected by the majority of the Igbo (Onwubiko & Ugborji, 2022) given the pedigree and popularity of Dr. Alex Ekwueme, a foremost Igbo politician was widely expected to emerge as president by majority of the Igbo people at the time. The belief among some sections of Igbo that the result of the 1999 election, which eventually produced Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo as president, would continue the propagation of the progressive marginalization they had suffered for years was the primary cause for the renewal of the agitation for Biafra and prepared the ground for the emergence of MASSOB and the subsequent rise of IPOB in 2012.

Consistent with the above position, Ibeanu, Orji, and Iwuamandi (2016) found in their study of Biafran separatism that there is a nexus between feelings of collective victimization and the separatist Movement in Nigeria. They explained that the feeling of collective victimization among the Igbo and other ethnic groups in Nigeria could only be understood in the peculiar context of the nature and character of the Nigerian state. The multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian state stems from the colonial construction of states in Africa, which has occasioned primordial contestation among the ethnic nations and the resultant feelings of marginalization, as well as the aggregation of collective victimhood among regions that felt marginalized. According to scholars, these contestations arise from feelings of exclusion and deprivation stemming from the country's unfair and inequitable state structure. The long years of social, political, and economic imbalance against the Igbo have enshrined feelings of marginalization and a sense of being collectively victimized in Nigeria, thereby pushing them to think of the resurrection of defunct Biafra. Impliedly, therefore, IPOB emerged due to the failure of the Nigerian Government to address the lingering issue of marginalization of the Igbo. The above position suggests that the Igbo are being denied their share in both the politics and the

economy of the Nigerian State and explains the tendency to seek a separate state of their own – the Sovereign State of Biafra. This position, however, failed to explain the reasons for the noticeable divide between the Igbo political class and most underclass youth, who form the fulcrum of the neo-Biafra agitation in the Southeast.

Scholars have also linked the rise in IPOB and other ethnic-based organizations in Nigeria to economic discrimination, inequality, and unfair inequitable distribution of national resources by the Nigerian government. In the view of Obiegbunam & Abah (2023), the immediate trigger of the rise in separatist agitation and the formation of separatist organizations in Nigeria is the wilful discriminatory practices of the Nigerian political leaders who use their positions of power to allocate political values in the form of resources and appointments to their favoured ethnic group. This scenario breeds inequality and exclusion as one tribe or ethnic nation is positioned for the greater benefit of power, thereby edging other ethnic groups out. Saleh (2013) attributes the growing quest for secession in Nigeria to inter-ethnic competition and deprivation, as outlined in his work on relative deprivation theory, ethnic nationalism, and conflicts over ethnicity and identity. He explains that the desire to secede becomes inevitable when the major ethnic community in a country exercises unfair control over all economic opportunities, leaving members of other regions, ethnic groups, or tribes at a disadvantage. This will result in expressions of discontent over marginalization, which are often silenced or ignored by the leading ethnic elites, thereby fuelling agitation for autonomy and a separate state. This view was further elaborated by Obiegbunam and Abah (2023), who explained that the unfavourable policies of President Muhammadu Buhari, which excluded the Igbo ethnic group from his appointments and projects, provoked the emergence of IPOB to seek a separate state for the Igbo, where their political and economic interests would be guaranteed.

Okoye & Asogwa (2021) have argued that the Igbo's ongoing struggle for self-determination is sustained by the Nigerian state's refusal to address the feelings of deprivation engendered by perceived socio-economic marginalization and inequalities in the distribution of power. According to them, IPOB emerged from frustration. As a last resort, pressure the government to streamline revenue-sharing processes, political appointments, and other structural imbalances. Furthermore, Oyetunde (2021) aligns with this view, positing that the primary impetus for separatist agitation in Nigeria is power sharing. He explained that Nigeria's diverse ethnic and geographical composition has made the equitable distribution of political power and economic benefits within the country difficult. The result has been the emergence of new forms and ways of expressing disenchantment among disadvantaged ethnic groups. This issue of the dis-

tribution of political and bureaucratic offices becomes imperative in a diverse country like Nigeria to prevent the monopolization of state institutions by a few privileged ethnic groups. The collapse of zoning and the federal character principle in Nigeria due to the ambitious nature of the political elites to use their positions to advance their personal and tribal interests has resulted in the eruption of groups representing various ethnic groups to agitate for ethnic balancing and just distribution of national resources, hence the rise in IPOB agitation (Oyetunde, 2021).

While acknowledging the intricate role of state dynamics and marginalization in the rise of the IPOB separatist movement in Nigeria, it is important to scrutinize the oversimplification of these factors. The assertion linking the state, marginalization, and the rise of the IPOB separatist movement in Nigeria provides a valid framework; however, we view that the impact of the crisis on the rural economy of the people targeted for salvation has not been satisfactorily examined.

#### THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE SIT-AT-HOME ORDER AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS TO THE CIVILIAN POPULATION IN NORTHERN IGBO OF SOUTHEAST, NIGERIA

Since the declaration of a sit-at-home order, the Southeast has become a ghost region, with all businesses shut down on such days and every Monday, as residents stay at home, mainly out of fear of attack (Ukwa, 2022). The foregoing observation revealed circumstances in which the residents of the Southeast found themselves following IPOB's sit-at-home protest in the region. The region is awash with reports and cases of attack by the purported enforcers of the protest on the residents who attempted to go to their normal businesses on Monday. Recent data show a rise in violent separatist agitation and counter-separatist violence in the Southeast Region, claiming so many lives and property worth millions of naira to have been destroyed (Chime, 2022). The violence in the region has been attributed to the clash between the pro-Biafra militias and the Nigerian security forces (Okeoma, 2021). The IPOB paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), which was created by the group in 2020, has been variously implicated in the deaths of civilians and members of the security forces as well as attacks on state infrastructures and property. According to Emma Powerful, all institutions, public and private, transport companies, schools, banks, markets, airports, and seaports in Biafra must shut down every Monday beginning from August 9, 2021 (Eleke, 2021). Consequently, findings have shown that the enforcement of sit-at-home in the Southeast by the IPOB has resulted in untold hardship in the region, severe economic loss, loss of earnings and jobs, and unemployment and poverty. This has been corroborated by Ujumadu (2022), who observed

that the strict enforcement of the sit-at-home order has led citizens to endure unpleasant experiences every Monday. It has also been observed that the unknown gunmen crisis in the Southeast region originated from forcing people to comply with the sit-at-home order by pro-Biafra supporters. A tricycle rider in Ogurute, Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area, explained that ‘it was indeed in order to enforce the sit-at-home that led to the emergence of unknown gunmen in our community here’ (anonymous, 2024i). He stated that, prior to the sit-at-home declaration, the area was peaceful, despite the presence of many pro-Biafra supporters. According to him, the normal IPOB protest of marching on the streets with their flags changed over time, and gunmen started killing people to force them to stay at home on Mondays. To make the whole situation worse, IPOB also declares and indeed enforces sporadic sit-at-home at one time or another in the region. Njoku (2023) reported that, in addition to the weekly Monday sit-at-home, the IPOB also declared sporadic sit-at-homes on other days it deemed necessary, with little regard for residents’ plight. For instance, in 2022, IPOB declared four days of sit-at-home on December 9th, 10th, 12th, and 13th, and on May 16th to 18th. During these days, those who tried to defy this order were met with a volley of bullets from the IPOB enforcement gang.

Due to the sit-at-home order, the Southeast is under a total lockdown, with all banks, government offices, markets, and shops closed every Monday (Abba et al., 2023). The sit-at-home order imposes a complete ban on all forms of interstate movement and travel within the Southeast Region. Okon-Ekong, Isiguzo, and Arinze (2021) have observed that Sit-at-Home enforcers are the militant wing of the IPOB known as the Eastern Security Network. As observed, due to fear of being attacked by the pro-Biafra militias, roads, shops, markets, and all forms of enterprises are closed on Mondays and other designated days. The Southeast is greeted every Monday by empty streets, deserted roads, closed shops, and locked business premises.

The enforcement of the sit-at-home order in the Southeast has increased the spate of violence and attacks by unknown gunmen, thereby inflicting fear and death on the citizens. As one informant reported, “Every sit-at-home is a terror day in our area as there is always the likelihood of masked men with guns attacking those who try to come out, not minding the urgency of their mission.” This agrees with the statement of the former Kaduna Central Senator, Shehu Sani, in *Sahara Reporters* on December 11, 2022, that “sit-at-home is a peaceful and legitimate means of dissent or civil protest; but once it is enforced by force, violence or threats, and complied with, out of fear, it has become another form of terror and tyranny.” The spate of violence and casualties recorded in the Southeast every Monday and other days, as represented in Table 4.1 below, suggests

that the armed men force residents to stay indoors against the wishes of the people and also points to the level of suffering and loss of livelihood in the form of destruction of lives and property as a result of the sit-at-home enforcement.

Table 1: Selected Cases of Armed Attack by the Enforcers of Sit-At-Home in Enugu State between 2021 and 2023.

No	Reported IPOB-Related Attacks	Date	Place of attack	Source
1	Two operatives of the Neighbourhood watch group were killed, and two operational vehicles were burnt.	Tuesday, October 6, 2021	Ogurute, Igbo-Eze North LGA	<i>The Guardian</i> <a href="https://guardian.ng/news/police-confirms-killing-of-2-neighbourhood-watch-operatives-in-enugu/">https://guardian.ng/news/police-confirms-killing-of-2-neighbourhood-watch-operatives-in-enugu/</a>
2	Many people were injured, and valuable items were destroyed and looted as masked men on motorcycles invaded Ogrurute headquarters of Igbo-Eze North LGA.	Monday, 9th August 2021.	Ogurute, Igbo-Eze North LGA	The Sunnews <a href="https://sunnewsonline.com/6-killed-as-ipob-sit-at-home-grounds-south-east/">https://sunnewsonline.com/6-killed-as-ipob-sit-at-home-grounds-south-east/</a>
3	Masked men attacked traders who came early to display their wares with various weapons.	Monday 9 August 2021	Nkwo Aji Market, Igbo Eze North LGA	Sun News <a href="https://sunnewsonline.com/6-killed-as-ipob-sit-at-home-grounds-south-east/">https://sunnewsonline.com/6-killed-as-ipob-sit-at-home-grounds-south-east/</a>
4	Gunmen enforcing the IPOB Sit-at-home order attacked shops, markets, and schools in Enugu.	Wednesday 5 July, 2023	Enugu Areas: Asata, Trans Ekulu, New Heaven, Artisan Market, Coal Camp, and Uwani Enugu.	BBC: <a href="https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/articles/cqvqjxwz97o">https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/articles/cqvqjxwz97o</a>
5	An INEC official was injured, and electoral machines were destroyed as gunmen attacked a registration center in Enugu.	Wednesday, July 13, 2022	Community primary school Umuopu, Igbo-Eze North LGA	Daily Nigerian <a href="https://dailynigeria.com/inec-official-injured/">https://dailynigeria.com/inec-official-injured/</a>
6	Unknown gunmen burnt down the INEC office in Ogurute.	Sunday, July 3, 2022	Ogurute, the headquarters of Igbo-Eze North LGA.	Daily Nigerian: <a href="https://dailynigeria.com/inec-official-injured/">https://dailynigeria.com/inec-official-injured/</a>
7	Gunmen killed at least seven police men in Enugu state capital	11-12 February, 2022	Enugu	Crisis Watch Group: <a href="https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/database?page=2&amp;location%5B0%5D=28&amp;da=">https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/database?page=2&amp;location%5B0%5D=28&amp;da=</a>
8	Unknown gunmen killed two persons and injured three with	Monday, January 17, 2022	Nkpologwu in Uzo-Uwani	Vanguard: <a href="https://www.vangu">https://www.vangu</a>

	machete in Nkpologwu, Uzo-Uwani LGA. One of the dead is a member of the neighborhood watch.		LGA	ardngr.com/2022/01/sit-at-home-enforcers-wrakhavoc-in-s-east/
9	A trailer loaded with motorcycle spare parts was set on fire by unknown gunmen who claimed to be enforcing IPOB's Sit-at-Home order.	Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> September, 2021	Eluagu Junction Obukpa, Nsukka LGA.	SB Morgen Intelligence. <a href="https://www.sbmin.tel.com/2021/09/im-pact-of-ipob-ordered-sit-at-home-protests/">https://www.sbmin.tel.com/2021/09/im-pact-of-ipob-ordered-sit-at-home-protests/</a>
10	Gunmen set ablaze a bus conveying tomatoes, vegetables, and other foodstuffs to Enugu for violating the Monday Sit-at-Home order.	Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> September 202.	Edem Junction, Ibagwa Nike, in Enugu East LGA of Enugu State.	Punch Newspaper  <a href="https://punchng.com/hoodlums-allegedly-enforcing-ipob-sit-at-home-set-ablaze-bus-carrying-foodstuffs-in-enugu/">https://punchng.com/hoodlums-allegedly-enforcing-ipob-sit-at-home-set-ablaze-bus-carrying-foodstuffs-in-enugu/</a>

Compilation from the IPOB Conflict Dataset, 2014-2022.

From the data in Table 1 above, it can be deduced that gunmen have been attacking traders and commuters across the region who flout the order. These attacks, as shown in the table, have resulted in the death of many people, and as reported by Ugwu (2022), goods worth millions of naira being sold or transported on such days have also been set ablaze by these mask-wearing men. Thus, a statement by the President General of the Pan Igbo socio-cultural organization, Ohaneze Ndigbo, Chief Emmanuel Iwanyanwu, published in Punch on August 2, 2023, revealed that over 250 people have been killed since 2021 in the implementation of the Sit-at-Home order by its enforcers. According to Chief Iwanyanwu, alluding to the emergence of unknown gunmen, he said, "Unfortunately, several non-state actors, in an attempt to enforce order, have unleashed mayhem on the people. As a result, many people have been killed, maimed, and properties worth millions of naira destroyed" (Iwanyanwu, 2023).

Apart from the civilian population, the personnel and emblems of the Nigerian state, which protect various businesses of the Igbo people, have also become objects of attacks. Since 2021, when IPOB launched its sit-at-home strategy, the group and its paramilitary wing, the ESN, have reportedly committed a series of organized attacks on both security personnel and civilians across the Southeast states. According to the *Daily Trust* security report for 2022, a total of 148 deaths and 111 attacks occurred in the single year under review. The breakdown of the casualties showed 43 policemen, 20 soldiers, 71 civilians, and two officials each of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Nigerian Customs Services, Nigerian Correctional Service, and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). The Table below highlights the attacks on policemen and sta-

tions in the Southeast in 2021, the year that the IPOB declared the sit-at-home in the region. A report by Raphael Ede published in *Punch* newspaper on October 27, 2021, said that between February and October 2021, no fewer than 255 citizens, including security agents, had been killed in an undignified manner, while property worth billions of naira was destroyed.

Table 2: Timeline of attacks on policemen and Police Stations in Southeast in 2021

SN	Details of the Attack	DATE
1.	3 policemen killed by armed men at Onueke Police Station in Ezza LGA, Ebonyi State	January 8, 2021
2	Two policemen killed by unknown gunmen in Aba, Abia State	January 23
3	Gunmen numbering 20 attacked and killed one policeman at Omaba Divisional police station in Ngwa South, Abia State.	February 1
4	Unknown gunmen burnt Isu police station in Onicha LGA Ebonyi State.	February 4
5	Two policemen killed at Umulowo Police Division in Obowo LGA, Imo State.	February 5
6	A policeman was killed as gunmen attacked Abayi Police Station in Osisioma Ngwa LGA in Abia State	February 23
7	Gunmen killed a police officer and burnt a patrol vehicle in Ekwulobia, Anambra State	February 24
8	A policeman was killed when gunmen attacked the Aboh Mbaise Police Station in Imo State.	February 25
9	Gunmen attacked and burnt an Izzi Police Station in Ebonyi State	March 1
10	A police station was burnt in Ihitte Uboma LGA in Abia State	March 9
11	Many policemen were killed by organized attacks in Ekwulobia, Anambra State.	March 18
12	Gunmen attacked the Divisional Police Headquarters at Isiala Mbano in Imo State.	March 20
13	3 policemen killed by gunmen attackers at Abariba Police Division in Ohafia LGA in Abia State	March 22
14	3 policemen attached to Charles Soludo were killed in Isuofia, Anambra State	March 31
15	Gunmen attacked the Imo Police Command Headquarters and the Nigerian Correctional Center in Owerri, Imo State, looted the armory, burnt vehicles, and freed 600 detainees and 1,844 inmates.	April 5
16	Gunmen set ablaze four operational vehicles at Ehime Mbano Police Division in Imo State.	April 6
17	Gunmen attacked Ugbodo Police Station in the Ebonyi LGA of Ebonyi State	April 6
8	Gunmen attacked the Mberi Divisional Police Headquarters in Mbaitoli LGA, Imo State. Some suspects were freed.	April 8
19	3 policemen of the Safer Highway Patrol Team in Ebonyi State were killed on the Ogoja/Abakiliki Express Road.	April 14
20	Gunmen attacked and killed two policemen in the Zone 13 Police Headquarters in Ukpo-Dunukofia LGA in Anambra State.	April 19
21	Gunmen burnt a police station in Uzoakoli, Bende LGA, Abia	March 19.

	State.	
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Source: Adapted from Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED), 2022.

From Table 2 above, it can be deduced that the attacks on the police personnel and the police formations, as well as other security agents within the Southeast Region in 2021, took place in most of the major cities and towns in the affected states on Monday and other days, being enforced as a sit-at-home within the Southeast Region. This invariably had unprecedented socio-economic consequences like those of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, where the base of the Igbo economic structure was destroyed. This is even clearer as these attacks by unknown gunmen on security formations were always immediately followed by reprisal attacks by the strike team of the Nigerian security forces, targeting both the suspected IPOB members and the perceived supporters of the movement, who are all members of the community involved. This is severely affirmed in reports of the destruction of private properties and the killing of civilians, thus forcing residents to desert the place for fear of being attacked or unduly arrested (Ikem, 2022). This was reaffirmed in the report by the International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), which explained that the attacks on police formations in the Southeast render the communities vulnerable (ICIR, 2023). After such attacks, residents are usually scared for safety, and all economic activities, such as shops, workshops, and other public offices like banks and markets, are deserted for fear of being killed. As further observed, the police officers were not the only victims; the attack also had a telling effect on the residents who now live at the mercy of criminals and can no longer sleep with both eyes closed as police officers have stopped patrolling the streets (Oyedeji, 2021). In essence, the attacks on perceived violators of the sit-at-home order heightened security in the affected area, disrupting local transportation and the economy.

#### EASTERN SECURITY NETWORK AND MARKET OPERATIONS IN THE NORTHERN IGBO OF SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

Another area most affected by the IPOB sit-at-home protest is the closure of markets. A market, according to Good, is a designated and authorized place where people assemble regularly to buy or sell goods and services. He explained that the market occupies a central place in Igbo culture and economy, serving not only as a site of commerce but also as a social and cultural meeting point. It is the center of commerce in society, often bustling with the economic activities of buying and selling goods and services. In the Southeast Region, well-structured markets exist across major cities, rural communities, and villages, where traders come daily and

spend weeks conducting financial and commercial transactions. Southeast is known for its micro, small, and medium-scale enterprises, and is populated by traders, artisans, and numerous other small-scale traders and hawkers (Sulaimon, 2023). Studies have shown that among all ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Igbo have demonstrated the highest skill in modern entrepreneurship, controlling and dominating trades not just in the Southeast but also in other regions and states outside Igbo land (Mudashir & Alade, 2021). Igbo traders are present in every sector of small and large-scale business enterprises in modern times. The market therefore serves as a meeting point for small-scale and wholesale trading, as well as for other forms of service exchange among traders, including shop owners, hawkers, and kiosk operators. Undoubtedly, as our findings reveal, the continued enforcement of the IPOB Sit-at-Home order in the Southeast has undermined this long-standing business orientation among the Igbo. One of the critical areas the sit-at-home has impacted is the forceful closure of markets in the entire region every Monday and on any other day designated as a sit-at-home.

Consequently, traders are compelled to stay out of the business on the first business day of the new week. As reported by Aligekwe (2022), the most devastating impact of the sit-at-home in the Southeast is the forced closure of the entire market. According to him, Monday is the busiest day of the week for traders, as they begin their week-long business plans on this day. Closing markets on Mondays due to fear following IPOB's declaration and enforcement of a sit-at-home order in the Southeast has disrupted traders' income and that of the zone at large. Reports from our informants indicate that the shutdown of markets every Monday in the Southeast due to IPOB's sit-at-home order has affected the income and businesses of both low- and high-income earners in the region. A trader in Abakpa Nike Market in Enugu East Local Government Area explained that the market serves as the rallying point for all forms of business activities in the Southeast Region. He averred that the continued closure of all markets in the Southeast due to the IPOB order is detrimental to the survival and livelihood of the people in the zone, many of whom rely on daily earnings from business transactions (Anonymous, 2024a).

Another trader, Nkechi, who deals in foodstuffs in Enugu Ezike, stated that since the enforcement of the sit-at-home order, her income has declined, and her usual daily earnings have decreased. She explained that the market is the mother of other economic activities in society. Whenever it is closed, other sectors, such as transportation, wheelbarrow pushing, hawking, and trading, will become inactive (Nkechi, 2024). This aligns with Okoye's (2021) view that the shutdown of the Southeast every Monday inflicts collateral damage on the local economy. He observed that whenever the markets in the region are closed on Monday, those who

depend on daily income, the hawkers, the kiosks' business owners, and other small business holders, who eke out their daily livelihoods by hawking their products, are disengaged and their income line is disrupted.

The Transport sector is also affected by the order, as deduced from the field response. A tricycle rider in Nsukka stated that “whenever Ogige market is closed, the passengers remained in their houses and even if he tried to come out, he would certainly waste his petrol for nothing, in addition to risking his life for the unknown gunmen (Anonymous, 2024h). He reported that every Monday, because he stays at home for fear of being killed or having his Keke burnt by IPOB enforcers, he would resort to whatever he saved the previous day before his family could see what to eat. This corresponds with the statement by Owoye, Ezeanya & Obieg-bunam (2022, 95) that “IPOB Monday sit-at-home order has continued to inflict suffering, hunger, and poverty in the Southeast Region, as many people could no longer engage in their daily activities on Mondays and other IPOB sit-at-home days”. In essence, people’s economic interests are being undermined due to the IPOB’s Monday sit-at-home order.

#### CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND RESTRICTION OF MOVEMENT IN NORTHERN NSUKKA IGBO OF SOUTHEAST

The Constitution of Nigeria, in its various provisions, recognizes the importance of the free movement of people and goods within the country. Accordingly, section 41(1) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria, as amended, provides that “every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry thereby or exit therefrom”. The scope of this right is also reinforced in sections 15(3) and (4) of the constitution, which provides that ...it shall be the duty of the state to provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of people, goods, and services throughout the federation. The above provisions underscore the importance of freedom of movement in society. A study by Caraka et al. (2020) has also revealed a relationship between restrictions on movement and economic decline in a society. They explained that large-scale restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic led to severe economic losses across the industry, companies, and society at all levels, disrupting the economic chain. Similarly, research has shown that restrictions on movement during COVID-19 have negatively affected global stock markets and economic activity (Chowdhay, Khan, & Dhar, 2022). They observed that a series of lockdown days and restrictions on movement had a detrimental impact on economic activities and, if unchecked, would have a catastrophic effect on individuals' and corporate bodies' incomes.

However, due to the declaration of sit-at-home by the IPOB in the Southeast as a protest to the continued detention of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu by the Nigerian Government, the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo have been observing lockdown every Monday and on other days that Kanu appears in court. This has restricted the freedom of movement within the region (Ozibo & Okorie, 2022). It also halted all forms of movement, including that of persons, goods, and services of any kind, on every Monday. To achieve total compliance, there have been reported cases of attack by the pro-Biafra militias on traders, vehicle owners, and other commuters who flout the order. Hundreds of persons and property worth millions of naira have been reportedly destroyed as a result of these attacks, and victims are either killed or forced to submit, so most of the cities in the region are deserted, with all forms of business and enterprises closed.

Findings have revealed that restrictions on movement have hurt every sector of the economy in the Southeast. For instance, according to a policy brief by Civil Society Legislative Advocacy (CISLAC) in August 2022, transportation is grounded every Monday in the Southeast due to sit-at-home enforcement by IPOB militias. It stated that the sit-at-home has restricted the free flow of people and goods in and out of the Southeast Region on Mondays, as drivers and commuters are afraid to travel for fear of being attacked by the militias, also referred to as the unknown gunmen. Media reports indicate that suspected IPOB militias have burned down several vehicles, as the ESN enforces the sit-at-home order in many parts of the Southeast Region. A report by Ede (2021) in Punch News online showed that armed men attacked and set ablaze a bus conveying tomatoes, vegetables, and other foodstuffs from the northern part of the country to Enugu for violating the Monday sit-at-home order. Similarly, a report by Njoku, Ogugbuaja, Nzegwu, Daka & Ameh (2021) in the Guardian online newspaper indicates that persons suspected to be sit-at-home enforcers on Monday, September 6, 2021, set ablaze a truck fully loaded with motor spare parts in Eluagu Junction, along Nsukka-Enugu Ezike Road, Obukpa in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. The restriction on movement has also affected the low-income transportation sector, including tricycle riders and motorcycle riders, popularly known as Keke and Okada, respectively. Nwaeze (2022) reported that enforcers of the sit-at-home set Keke and Okada ablaze in Nsukka on May 26, 2022, for daring to come out on Monday. Also, as reported by Ikem (2022), a trailer was set ablaze on Monday by gunmen believed to be enforcing a sit-at-home order at Beach Junction, close to the University of Nigeria's second gate. According to the report, the trailer, which was fully loaded with BUA cement, was heading to Nsukka from the Obollo-Afor axis of

the Enugu-Makurdi express road when it was attacked and set on fire around 5:30 am.

These incessant attacks on both commercial and private vehicles, as reported by our respondents, have left major roads and streets deserted, with citizens, especially those in the metropolis, staying indoors. For instance, a Keke rider in the Abakpa area of Enugu explained that on Mondays and other sit-at-home days, there are usually no commercial buses or tricycles on the roads. This, according to him, is partly due to fear of being attacked by gunmen and to the fact that most residents stay indoors, as shops, markets, banks, fuel stations, and every business premises are shut. This restriction undermines the stability of the supply chain in the Southeast Region (Ozibo & Okorie, 2022), as most perishable goods and groceries are transported into the region from other parts of the country. This has been corroborated by the 2022 report of the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy (CISLAC) on the socio-economic impact of the IPOB sit-at-home in the Southeast, which noted that the order, specifically the restriction on movement, disrupts the transport of goods from other regions into the Southeast and vice versa. It reported that interstate transportation breaks long trips of 11-12 hours into two and continues in the morning to avoid arriving in the Southeast after the curfew commences. This means that, in addition to attacks and the destruction of goods by IPOB enforcers, traders of perishable goods, such as vegetables, tomatoes, fruits, and other farm products, will experience increased spoilage due to the extended off-market days.

#### SIT-AT-HOME PROTEST AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON NORTHERN IGBO OF SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

The enforcement of IPOB sit-at-home has impacted the Southeast socio-economy over the years. A study by SBM Intelligence (2023) shows that IPOB's enforcement of sit-at-home protests and the associated insecurity in the Southeast have led to massive economic losses, estimated at 4 trillion naira over two years. It linked the losses to factors such as the loss of four to five working days per week, job losses due to business owners' cutbacks in response to reduced working hours, and other lost opportunities, including the loss of clients and customers who found alternatives because of the region's unstable business environment. Others include losses due to incurred service-delivery costs, fear, insecurity, and uncertainty.

In its 2022 report on the economic implications of the IPOB sit-at-home in the Southeast, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy (CISLAC) found that the region lost approximately 327.6 billion naira in a year. According to its analysis of businesses in the Southeast, the region generated

between 5.56 billion naira and 31.39 billion naira per day during the period under review. It was further noted that, due to the sit-at-home, the region lost approximately 5 days per month, totaling 60 days per year. This results in an estimated annual loss of 327.6 billion in lost earnings on sit-at-home days (CISLAC, 2022). This is like the statement made by Governor Peter Mbah of Enugu State, who claimed that the state loses 10 billion naira every Monday due to a sit-at-home order issued by IPOB (Olafusi, 2023). Mbah further explained that the sit-at-home order disrupted economic activities and hurt the citizens. If it continued, the state would not be able to meet its revenue target. Additionally, a report by Ndukuba (2022) states that Anambra State Governor Prof. Chukwuma Soludo estimates the state's economy lost approximately 19.6 billion due to Monday's sit-at-home order.

Further estimates of the economic loss in the region due to the sit-at-home have revealed declines in productivity and investments. Njoku (2023) estimated that the Southeast lost a total of 105 Mondays from August 9, 2021, to July 2023 due to compliance with the IPOB sit-at-home order. This, he explained, had grounded the regional economy, resulting in an estimated loss of N7.6 trillion in productivity and potential investment, as well as the loss of lives and property. He further found that since the Monday sit-at-home order was implemented, regional productivity has declined significantly, and jobs are at risk. According to him, there is also a loss of investor confidence, heightened insecurity, and a near collapse of the region's infrastructure. Another finding by the International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), published in May 2023, on the economic impact of the sit-at-home order in the Southeast Region, revealed that businesses lost a whopping N5.373 trillion between August 2021 and December 2022 (ICIR, 2023). Interviews with businesspeople, artisans, and transporters also revealed that the enforcement of the sit-at-home order has undermined the economic interests of the Igbo in Nigeria. According to a businessman in the Abakpa market in Enugu, "the current wave of sit-at-home has crippled the economy of both the low-income and that of corporate businesses in Igbo land" (Anonymous, 2024a). When asked to describe how the sit-at-home order affects Abakpa Nike and its environs' economic activities, he responded:

This place you see now, bubbling with heavy traffic of both people and vehicles, is usually a ghost town on Mondays; nobody dares come out, or the men in masks will attack the person or even kill him. Markets, as you see, everybody now in his or her shops, will remain deserted and unlucky. Economy is halted and in Enugu here, and even in other states like Abia, where my customers in Aba will call me

to say they are only watching televisions at home” (Anonymous, 2024a).

Traders interviewed have also confirmed that the closure of markets in the Southeast Region on Mondays has disrupted the daily economic sustenance of millions of Igbo people. They explained that the market is the place where economic activities take place, where traders and buyers meet to exchange goods and services. A trader in the Ogige market in the Nsukka Area retorted “Without market, what are we doing here, pointing at other traders in their shops; it is this market that offered us the opportunity to survive economically, and this crisis is trying to destabilise it completely” (Anonymous, 2024b). A middle-aged hawker of assorted vegetables in Ogige Market explained that the worst hit by the sit-at-home is those who survive on their daily income. According to her “closing the market means strangulating the poor and the petty traders who eat from their daily struggle” (Anonymous, 2024c). While explaining the impact of the closure of markets on daily income earners, she averred:

We have only been able to sustain ourselves through this vegetable hawking business since my husband fell ill. I buy from farmers who bring produce from their farms, and I start my day by pushing this wheelbarrow from one edge to the other. As it happens, I make enough to buy food. Following the sit-at-home being forced on us by the unknown gunmen, it became challenging to feed, especially on Mondays, when everywhere is empty (Anonymous, 2024c).

The restriction on movement imposed by the sit-at-home order has also affected the socio-economic interests of the Igbo. No doubt situations like this reduced the flow of income in society and exacerbated poverty and unemployment. Commenting on the impact of the sit-at-home of Monday on the economy, a market woman in Eke Ozzi in Ogurute in Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area explained that ‘it has made many people live in poverty and fear’ (Anonymous, 2024e). She further said that “Igbo people are known for their business all over the place, and so anything negatively affecting this business is like taking the life out of the people.” Another middle-aged dealer of motorcycle spare parts in Eke Ozzi, Enugu Ezike, lamented that his business has been severely affected and that his income has declined significantly. According to him, “my business has been badly affected by this IPOB order, especially in an area like this where the support of IPOB is high” (Anonymous 2024f). He explained that his income has been affected by the market closure on Mondays, a day that is particularly important for business. He added that “my customers, most of whom come from neighboring Kogi state, have

stopped coming due to insecurity, leaving me with low turnover and income." These responses confirmed Alaribe's (2023) observation that the sit-at-home order has become a permanent fixture on Mondays, resulting in revenue losses and a decline in investor confidence in the region.

## CONCLUSION

We set out to investigate the implications of IPOB's protest strategy on the economy of the northern Igbo in Southeastern Nigeria. It was observed that IPOB emerged as a political movement to champion the political and economic inclusion of the Igbo in Nigeria. The rise of IPOB was due to the long years of socio-economic and political marginalization of the Igbo in Nigeria. The group, thus, in a bid to achieve Igbo self-determination in Nigeria, has adopted various strategies designed to compel the federal government of Nigeria to do its bidding and grant the Igbo its long-cherished sovereign state of Biafra. We observed that, rather than improving the economic conditions of the Igbos, the protest inadvertently harmed the economic conditions of rural dwellers through various mechanisms. The sit-at-home declaration and its militant enforcement have far-reaching implications for the Igbo economy. The closure of markets in the region has disrupted the Southeast Region's economy, as traders, motorists, and artisans have incurred significant losses due to restrictions on the movement of goods and services on Mondays. There have also been increased attacks on violators of the sit-at-home order in the Southeast region of Nigeria. These attacks have resulted in human casualties and the destruction of economic livelihoods, as both private and corporate businesses have often been targeted for attacks by unknown gunmen. IPOB's adoption of a confrontational strategy has, therefore, radicalized the neo-Biafra movement and undermined the Igbo economic interests in Nigeria.

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