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IPOB AGITATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN SOUTH- EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the link between the agitation of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and economic development in Southeast Nigeria, with attention to pathways for sustainable peace. IPOB's activities have transformed the region into a hotspot for violence and criminality, causing significant losses to lives, property and businesses. While existing studies explore the causes of agitation, security impacts, and socio-economic effects, few have addressed how the unrest affects economic engagements from other regions to the Southeast. This study fills that gap using a qualitative design, drawing mainly on secondary data supplemented by key informant interviews. Data were analyzed through thematic content analysis. Findings reveal the economic ramifications of IPOB agitation and provide practical recommendations to restore peace and promote stability in the Southeast.

Keywords: IPOB, Southeast, Biafra, Economic Development, Peace

Introduction

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a separatist group led by Nnamdi Kanu that emerged in the early 2000s. Rooted in historical grievances, political marginalization, and economic neglect of the Igbo people since the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), IPOB calls for the secession of Nigeria's South-East. Through demonstrations, media campaigns, and demands for referendums, the group has significantly affected the region's sociopolitical stability and economic landscape, straining relations with the federal government and disrupting trade and security.

The roots of this agitation trace back to Nigeria's post-independence era, marked by political and ethnic unrest. In September 1966, violent clashes in Northern Nigeria killed an estimated 30,000 Igbos. Efforts to ease tensions failed, prompting Eastern Nigeria's declaration of the Republic of Biafra in May 1967, triggering a civil war that claimed one to three million lives (Home Office, 2022). By January 1970, after Biafran leader Odumegwu Ojukwu fled to Cote d'Ivoire, remaining forces surrendered, ending the first Biafra struggle (Owoeye, Ezeanya&Obiegbunam, 2022). Although General Yakubu Gowon's government introduced a "no victor, no vanquished" policy and the 3Rs—

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reconciliation, reconstruction, rehabilitation—poor implementation left deep grievances (Osita & Anoke, 2022).

These unresolved issues, particularly perceived political and economic marginalization of the Southeast, gave rise to new movements, notably the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and IPOB. IPOB evolved from MASSOB, sharing its secessionist goals but adopting more confrontational strategies (Ekpo &Agorye, 2019). Its resurgence is driven by perceived exclusion from power and inequities in Nigeria's governance structure.

Tensions escalated after Nnamdi Kanu's arrest in Kenya and repatriation to Nigeria. In response, IPOB introduced a weekly "sit-at-home" directive, beginning August 9, 2021, initially to demand Kanu's release and honor Biafra war victims. Over time, this evolved into a protest mechanism to raise broader awareness of Igbo marginalization (Mark, Obi & Chibuzor, 2022). The order, usually observed on Mondays and other symbolic dates, disrupts business activities in a region where commerce is central to livelihoods. Mondays, the start of the business week, are particularly critical for economic performance, and the directive has had significant consequences for trade and productivity. Against this backdrop, this study examines the relationship between IPOB agitation, economic development, and prospects for lasting peace in Southeast Nigeria.

Evolution of Biafra agitation

Nigeria's turbulent post-independence years in the 1960s laid the foundation for the call for an independent Biafran state. Deep-seated ethnic tensions worsened political and economic instability, particularly affecting the Igbo people of the Southeast, who felt marginalized within the Nigerian state. The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) deepened these grievances, leaving a legacy of loss, economic ruin, and perceived neglect of the region. Decades later, feelings of exclusion and inadequate federal investment persisted, fueling renewed separatist sentiments (Owoeye, Ezeanya & Ogbebunam, 2022). With Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, pro-Biafra groups resurfaced. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), led by Ralph Uwazuruike, championed self-determination through civil disobedience and nonviolence (Nwobashi, 2019). Yet, the government's often heavy-handed response—arrests and alleged crackdowns—deepened resentment and a sense of victimization (Gbenemene, 2022). Economic stagnation, poor infrastructure, and high youth unemployment created fertile ground for more radical agitation.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), under Nnamdi Kanu, emerged as the most prominent group, appealing especially to younger generations. Kanu's confrontational rhetoric, amplified by Radio Biafra, called for resistance against the state and struck a chord with those frustrated by unaddressed Igbo grievances. Other separatist actors also appeared, sometimes embracing violence. The Biafra Zionist Federation (BZF), led by Benjamin Onwuka, occasionally staged disruptive actions. A notable example occurred in June 2014 when BZF briefly seized the Enugu State Broadcasting Service to declare independence, demonstrating the undercurrent of militancy despite limited reach. IPOB, however, gained significant traction. After Kanu's rearrest, the group imposed sit-at-home orders in June 2021, beginning as weekly Monday actions from August 9, 2021. Initially intended to commemorate Biafra War casualties, the sit-

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at-home evolved into a tool for political expression and pressure, disrupting economic life across the Southeast (Ikeh, 2021). It became a symbolic protest against marginalization, a call for Kanu's release, and an assertion of collective frustration and aspirations for self-rule. The sit-at-home strategy illustrates the endurance of Biafran identity and the region's deep-seated discontent, underscoring how historical wounds, economic exclusion, and perceived political sidelining continue to drive separatist agitation.

IPOB Activities and Economic Development: An empirical review

A study of IPOB's domestic problems and their effects on the economy of Nigeria's South-East Geopolitical Zone was conducted by Mark, Obi, and Chibuzor in 2022. Based on Relative Deprivation theory, the qualitative study thoroughly examined the information acquired from secondary sources. The study concluded that IPOB has persisted in targeting the Southeast, which has had a negative impact on the region's economy through commercial operations, including those of SMEs. The report suggested communication between IPOB and the Nigerian Federal Government as a practical means of putting an end to the threat. Morgen (2021) conducted research on the impact and perception of sit-at-home protests ordered by IPOB. The purpose of the study was to investigate how IPOB sit-at-home affected the social and economic life of the South East region of Nigeria. The study used a survey research design and used a questionnaire to collect data. The study found that, among other productivity and economic activities in the South East zone, IPOB sit-at-home has led to the suspension of commercial activities, such as banking operations and other corporate ventures.

A study of IPOB and MASSOB in South-Eastern Nigeria was conducted by Ikeh (2021) to examine the effects of sectional agitation for self-determination on national development. The study specifically looked at how IPOB/MASSOB affected the socioeconomic advancement of southeast Nigeria. The survey approach was used in the study, and a questionnaire was used to collect data. According to the report, among other things, 62.8 percent of respondents thought that the IPOB's disruption of economic activity through sit-at-home had the most significant negative impact on the area. The report called on the Nigerian government to take into account the group's complaints and handle them humanely.

Ibeanu, Orji, and Iwuamadi (2016) studied the causes, effects, and solutions of Biafra separatism. The study, which is both qualitative and quantitative, used information gathered from media publications, interviews, opinion surveys, and documentary sources. The report concluded, among other things, that regular protests by security forces and pro-Biafra groups frequently impede economic activity in the Southeast and deter investment, including from SMEs in the area. Among other things, the research suggested that a high-level Peace and Reconciliation Commission be established as a means of resolving IPOB's agitation.

A study on separatist tactics was conducted by Owoeye, Ezeanya, and Obiegbunam (2022), who evaluated the impact of IPOB Monday sit-at-home order political economy (socio-political and economic activities) in the South-East Region of Nigeria. The research is qualitative, descriptive, and based on systems theory. The study proved that the market, transportation, and educational systems have all suffered as a result of the IPOB Sit-at-Home Order.

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According to the paper, the Nigerian government must move quickly to guarantee a just and equal allocation of resources throughout the country's six (6) geopolitical zones through an appropriate federal character structure.

An empirical assessment into the impact of IPOB agitations on political stability in Nigeria was conducted by Chukwudi, Gberebvie, Abasilim, and Imhonopi (2022). The study specifically looked at how IPOB activities affected sociopolitical activities related to education, investments, and election participation. Both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) data were used in this study, which used a survey research methodology. The study found, among other things, that the South East area and Nigeria as a whole experience socio-political instability as a result of the IPOB's sit-at-home agitation rate.

A study of separatist movements, wars, and insecurity in South East Nigeria was carried out by Gbenemene (2022). The purpose of the study was to investigate how the IPOB sparked disputes and security issues in the South East region of Nigeria. With cities like Aba, Onitsha, and Nnewi acting as commercial and industrial centers, the South-East has long been recognized for its entrepreneurial culture (Obi-Ani, 2020). Nonetheless, IPOB's actions have had a number of effects on economic activity: Firstly, disruptions caused by orders to stay at home. The implementation of weekly "sit-at-home" orders, initially in support of Nnamdi Kanu's trial, has been a noteworthy IPOB tactic. These orders frequently halt business operations in the largest cities in the Southeast.

According to studies, the region loses billions of naira every week as a result of lost productivity, transportation disruptions, and business closures (Iwuoha & Chukwuemeka, 2022). The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), for instance, has frequently bemoaned the detrimental effects of IPOB's orders on regional supply chains and output. Secondly, it has affected the Climate of Investment and Insecurity. Insecurity in the South-East has increased as a result of clashes between Nigerian security forces, IPOB, and its paramilitary component, the Eastern Security Network. Due to the perception of instability in the region, both foreign and indigenous investors have been deterred (Okonkwo, 2021). Because of the increased demand for security and insurance, insecurity also drives up operating expenses for enterprises. Thirdly, it impinges on Remittances and Diaspora Influence. It is interesting to note that IPOB has also garnered financial backing from the Igbo diaspora. Although the South-East still relies heavily on diasporic remittances for economic resilience (World Bank, 2020), the fact that money is being diverted to support IPOB's operations rather than long-term investments in industry or infrastructure raises concerns about sustainable development (Eze, 2022). Fourthly, there are tense links between the State and the community. The South-East and the federal government have a strained relationship as a result of the IPOB conflict, which has an impact on infrastructure development and the distribution of federal resources. Some claim that IPOB-caused instability undercuts calls for economic inclusion, while others argue that the agitation highlights the region's lack of development (Omeje, 2021).

The "security-development nexus" approach helps explain the obstacles IPOB presents to South-East economic growth (Duffield, 2001). Long-term insecurity impedes economic expansion, erodes investor confidence, and prolongs unemployment, all

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of which contribute to increased unrest. The cycle is self-reinforcing: separatist sentiment is fueled by underdevelopment, and underdevelopment is exacerbated by separatist actions. Since 2020, IPOB sit-at-home orders have been common in South East Nigeria, especially on Mondays, the first working day of the week. Out of 876 South East Nigerians who observed the sit-at-home order on August 9 in their various states throughout the region, 61.4 percent confirmed that their productivity was greatly impacted, while approximately 11 percent, who are primarily teachers and were on summer vacation, claimed that the sit-at-home order had no effect on their business engagements, according to a survey report conducted by Lagos-based political risk analysis firm SBM Intelligence in the South East, Nigeria, cited in Iyorah (2021).

According to Eze, Chijioke, and Amechi (2021), the South East region's commercial sectors have all been affected by the IPOB sit-at-home directive. They claim that "the chambers of commerce, business owners, and traders are still computing their loss even though they put the cost of every Monday sit-at-home at about 8billion Naira," which makes this clear. In a similar vein, Chief Moses Ezukwo, the First Vice President of the Nnewi Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture, or NCCIMA, stated in a statement quoted in Owoeye, Ezeanya, and Obiegbunam (2022) that the IPOB sit-at-home order has stolen over 50 billion dollars in four weeks, with the private sector bearing more than 60% of the loss. These claims make it clear that the sit-at-home order has persisted in interfering with business dealings and commercial activity in the South East region of Nigeria, which are crucial and necessary for socioeconomic development. During a town hall meeting with the leader of the market and transport unions, Anambra State Governor Chukwuma Soludo made the following statement in an attempt to address the IPOB sit-at-home crisis and other social and economic issues: "The state's (Anambra state) economy loses about 19.6 billion Naira to Monday Sit-at-home order." In contrast, the governor of Ebonyi State was more conservative and estimated that the state's economy lost 10 billion Naira on each IPOB sit-at-home day. Furthermore, the research asserted that the state's commercial sector's key stakeholders were transporters, business owners, and market leaders.

In a same vein, Igbo Business Forum spokesperson Chief Ndubuisi Ehibundu told reporters for the Daily Trust that more than 25 billion dollars are lost every day in Onitsha alone because to IPOB sit-at-home. "When you have nothing to manage the effect of hunger in the land, you tell people to sit at home," the spokesperson said. "For those of us in the business sector, we lose an average of N25 billion in Onitsha alone, and I believe we also lose the same sum in Aba, Nnewi, and others, and this is not good for our economy" (Eleweke, 2022). According to a special report published by Premium Times on May 17, 2022, traders, transporters, and hoteliers in the South East of Nigeria bemoaned the disruptive and destructive effects of the IPOB's sit-at-home order on their businesses. This highlights the impact of the IPOB's order on social and economic activities in the region. The study claims that businesses in Nigeria's southeast are suffering from the sit-at-home policy.

Furthermore, one of the businessmen, Mr. Ndu, who sells electronic devices, said in a statement that "we are dying gradually." Our business is being destroyed by the sit-at-home culture; some of us are unable to eat without visiting this market. Since we can only conduct business from home five days a week, goods now remain unsold for

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longer. I lose almost N200,000 every day that I spend at home. "I used to make 80 percent of the bank loan from sales, but today, I cannot make up to 40 percent, we are going down every day," bemoaned another businessman who utilized bank loans to finance his venture and was interviewed by Premium Times. Companies have failed, and people whose companies have failed can eventually turn to violence to protect themselves. The rates of crime and insecurity will double (Ugwu, 2022). "The current situation of the South-East shutdown every Monday has continued to inflict collateral damage on the economy of the South-East States," according to a report by Okoye (2021) on Vanguard (Online). The South-East's weekly shutdown disproportionately affects the Hoi Polloi, who make a living by selling sachet beverages, fruits, vegetables, and other items. The scholar's claim makes it clear that the IPOB Monday sit-at-home edict has persisted in interfering with business operations throughout Nigeria's South-East States. According to the same source, "the majority of Igbo people, whose survival depends on their daily earnings, had gone to bed on empty stomachs because they had no money with which to buy food since the commencement of the observation of the sit-at-home order on Mondays."

This claim implies that because many people were unable to carry out their regular activities on Mondays, the first business day of the week, and other IPOB sit-at-home days, the South-east region has continued to experience misery, hunger, and poverty as a result of the IPOB Monday sit-at-home order. Essentially, the IPOB Monday sit-at-home plan is sabotaging economic activity. Furthermore, according to a statement made on September 18, 2021, by Chief Moses Ezukwo, the First Vice President of the Nnewi Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NCCIMA), as reported by Ogbonnaya, Nwosu, and Ogbodo-Iwuagwu (2021), traders and business owners continued to calculate their losses, although they estimated that each Monday sit-at-home cost roughly N 8 billion. The zone that includes the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo has already lost over N 50 billion as a result of the incident; the private sector has also suffered losses of more than 60%. Every day there is a lockdown in the area, the transportation sector loses at least N 3 billion of this total. At a rate of 3,000 per passenger, one million people move in and out of the South East on a daily average.

Without a doubt, it is believed that the sit-at-home movement has seriously damaged the economies of the five Southeast states. Chief Moses Ezukwo insisted in the same report that "people continued to observe the sit-at-home order despite the announcement of its suspension because every Monday, streets, markets, offices, motor, parks, banks, etc. were closed and deserted." It was found that this was sparked by two factors: first, the fear of being attacked by criminals posing as IPOB members, and second, the general sympathy for IPOB's cause. The combination of these elements, according to the same survey, "makes the people in the zone stay at home every Monday." In fact, the cities in the area were abandoned ghost towns with deserted streets, highways, avenues, closes, etc. when the action began in August. The situation continued in Umuahia, Awka, Enugu, Abakaliki, Onitsha, and Owerri, where many streets remained deserted despite the closing of banks and stores on the previous Monday.

According to reports from Aba in Abia State, traders were not present in their stores even though some marketplaces had opened. Economic and social activities have ceased

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in Imo due to the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) enforcing a sit-at-home order out of fear of potential attacks, according to a report published by Agency Report (2021) on Premium Times (Online). Furthermore, the state's citizens have fled the state capital's streets and marketplaces for safety, according to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), which kept an eye on the situation in Owerri. According to the same source, Okechukwu Nnaji, a commercial driver, told NAN that the IPOB's sit-at-home edict has caused the driver to receive little business. Furthermore, a food dealer named Angela Eze bemoaned the possibility that "the situation might affect the state economy drastically." The aforementioned claims make it clear that the IPOB Monday sit-at-home strategy/order has posed a number of risks to business and economic activity in every state in southeast Nigeria.

According to Onwuka (2021), "the sit-at-home has persisted due to fear." Others stayed indoors out of fear after some were attacked while attempting to go about their regular lives. Markets and offices have also stayed closed. The same report also claimed that people stayed at home whether they wanted to follow the IPOB's sit-at-home order or not. "The organization (IPOB) recently upped the ante by ordering a weekly sit-at-home protest in all the states in the zone," according to a report published by THIS DAY Nigeria (Online). Every Monday, companies and regular work and social activities in the area are prohibited by the order. Similar to how marketplaces and stores have been closed, banks have also been closed to the public. While educational institutions have deemed it prudent to observe one mandatory holiday per week (Monday), interstate transportation has also been impacted. Furthermore, according to the same source, Senator Chimaroke Nnamani stated: "There is no evidence that the sit-at-home has brought IPOB and its supporters any closer to achieving their larger political objective of a 'Biafran nation.'" It has had a negative impact on the zone's economic life and feeling of order. The region's population's well-being has been negatively impacted by days without banking services, closed markets, and government offices, which have resulted in significant financial losses.

To put it simply, the Southeast region's Monday weekly sit-at-home rule has impacted practically every industry and aspect of life, not just business. According to a related article by Njoku, Ogugbuaja, Osuji, Udeaja, Akpa, and Akhaine (2021), "in a fresh drive by the separatist Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), markets and highways were vacant in the major cities of Aba, Owerri, and Awka, core of the erstwhile "Republic of Biafra"." The same report also said that because everyone stayed inside, Imo's social and economic activities in all 27 local councils experienced a severe setback. In addition to those who chose to adhere to IPOB's "sit-at-home" directive, many others chose to stay away out of concern that security guards would arrest them. Markets were shut down, the roads were empty, and operators of public transportation stopped operating. In order to allow students to stay at home with their parents, several school administrators declared a mandatory midterm holiday. Both Aba, the state commercial nerve center, and Umuahia, the capital of Abia, had the same story of vacant highways, closed shops, and empty streets. The sit-at-home edict was largely obeyed by the residents. The sit-at-home edict provided government institutions with knowledge, even though there was no official sanction of the day in the Southeast. For fear of being attacked by thugs, banks and other corporate enterprises also close their doors to clients. According to a

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Vanguard News Nigeria online report from 2021, "Human and commercial activities were grounded in the South-Eastern States on Monday as residents obeyed sit-at-home order by the proscribed Independent People of Biafra (IPOB)" regarding the impact of IPOB Monday sit-at-home on the socio-political and economic activities of the region. The same source reportedly said that residents stayed at home, leaving the streets deserted, particularly in Umuahia, the capital of Abia State, and the busiest neighborhood known as Isigate. In addition, it was stated that the IPOB Monday sit-at-home order caused "government offices, schools, banks, shops, business centers, markets, malls, plazas, and petrol outlets to remain closed and also, private and commercial vehicles to be kept off the roads, leaving the metropolis like a ghost town." "Enforcers of the sit-at-home order have inadvertently been dealing a fatal blow to education in the area (Southeast region)," according to a statement found in Okoye's (2021) report on the effects of IPOB Monday sit-at-home on national development and political activities of the Southeast Region. Many test takers had missed their exams because the sit-at-home order enforcers prevented them from getting to the testing locations on the days we enforced the sit-at-home order in a timely manner.

This claim makes it clear that the IPOB Monday sit-at-home order/strategy has continued to negatively impact the state's sociopolitical activities since it is interfering with the right to education. “In Imo State, there was a news report about the invasion and violent dispersal of examination candidates by gun men on the days their examinations coincided with the shutdown of the South-East,” the article stated, citing a real-world example. In essence, denying people access to western education is a blow to political activity because it is one of the elements that contribute to national and political development. There have been isolated incidents of violence in certain places, according to a report by Ogbonnaya, Nwosu, and Ogbodo-Iwuagwu (2021) that was posted on Independent Nigeria (Online). For instance, a bus carrying bread around the historic Orie Emene Market was attacked by some thugs in Enugu throughout the week. Although it was discovered that the driver had escaped by whiskers, the thugs robbed and burned the bus that was completely stocked with loaves of food. Prior to security personnel arriving on the scene to restore peace and order, two tricycles were also set on fire in the vicinity.

According to the same source, a tricycle driver on Awka's well-known Arthur Eze Road was stopped, matcheted, and his vehicle was reduced to ashes. In Nsukka, Enugu State, a trailer containing spare parts valued at #30 million was set on fire two weeks ago. How can fear keep people from going out and risking their lives and money when there is such massive destruction? Indeed, while the sit-at-home trend persists, the Southeast states' economies suffer. Many people who depend on their daily labor to make a living end up dissatisfied and unemployed. According to a recent, unverified survey, the Southeast is losing between N 8 and N 10 billion every Monday as a result of the action. In summary, the southeast region's sociopolitical and economic activities have been seriously threatened by the IPOB Monday sit-at-home tactic, but all aspects of human activity have been impacted.

Theoretical framework

This study is theoretically based on Talcott Parsons and David Easton's systems theory. Talcott Parsons created the theory in the 1950s to analyze our social structure, and

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David Easton adopted it in the 1960s to analyze our political structure. Among the most prominent proponents of the theory are Karl Deutsch, David Singer, and Morton Kaplan (Akinboye&Ottoh, 2005). The theory's main contention is based on the observation that different interest groups, including IPOB, Arewa, ASUU, Odua People's Congress, NUT, and NLC in Nigeria, exert pressure on the system that requires attention.According to Talcott Parson, the socio-political system is not as unique as David Easton claims and can occasionally be disastrous because it is not immune to terrorism, violent protests, revolutions, insecurities, excessive demands, and pressures. As a result, the system must constantly adapt to changes in its environment to prevent overloading or, in the worst case scenario, complete disintegration, collapse, or failure.

The theory's applicability to our investigation stems from its capacity to deepen our comprehension of the ways in which IPOB's Sit at Home Order is impacting the economic stability of Southeast Nigeria. The group has developed a strategy (Sit-at-home order) to continue pressuring the political system as a whole, which will affect other parts of the system like education, commercial activities, transportation, and security, among other things. If the demands and pressures from the Igbos and the IIPOB regarding the alleged marginalization and arrest of their leader are not sufficiently addressed, the group will continue to spread to other parts (regions) of the system.Therefore, in order to preserve system equilibrium or stability, the Nigerian government must either take into account or adequately respond to the IPOB's demands; failing to do so will eventually cause all sectors of the system to fail completely or the system as a whole to disintegrate.

Methodology

The study uses a documentary research design and is qualitative in nature. Key informant interviews will be used to enhance the secondary sources of data, which include documented evidence from media outlets (newspapers) and journal articles. Thematic content analysis will be used to examine the data. The entire South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, which includes the Igbo-dominated regions of Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, and certain areas of the Rivers and Delta, is included in the research area.

IPOB agitation and economic relations with other regions

Southeast Nigeria's socioeconomic ties have been profoundly impacted by the agitation of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), with interstate trade, investment flows, and transportation being severely affected. Despite being largely a political demand, IPOB's practical effects have affected the economy through strained corporate confidence, migration limitations, and insecurity.

IPOB-related "sit-at-home" orders and security conflicts have caused disruptions to interstate transportation infrastructure, particularly between the Southeast and adjacent states like Rivers, Delta, Benue, and Kogi. Due to highway insecurity, police harassment, and ambush dangers, transport companies claim higher expenses. A transport union leader in Enugu stated in an interview that "buses stay at the park and passengers cancel their trips whenever IPOB announces a sit-at-home. Nearly 40% of our weekly income is lost. Security checks impose delays even when we are able to travel, and the cost of petrol continues to rise since suppliers are reluctant to enter the area."

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States in the Southeast mostly depend on interstate markets for wholesale distribution, manufacturing goods, and agricultural products. Markets like Ariaria International Market (Aba) and Onitsha Main Market, which act as distribution centers for products arriving from Lagos, Kano, and Port Harcourt, have less operating days as a result of the agitation, especially on Mondays. "We now pay double for transport from Lagos because truck drivers fear traveling through the East," a trader in the main market of Onitsha said in an interview. Some people even won't come until we pay for security guards. This deters buyers from other states and raises the cost of items for our clients.

Investors from outside the Southeast are becoming hesitant due to instability related with IPOB activities. Maintaining supply chains is difficult for interstate companies, including manufacturing and logistics firms with facilities in Nnewi, Enugu, and Aba. Economic integration with other regions has slowed as a result. A company owner in Aba remarked that:"My colleagues in Port Harcourt are unwilling to deliver raw supplies. . They always wonder, 'What if IPOB blocks the road or there is violence?' Our production capacity has been lowered by around 30% as a result of this uncertainty.

In order to go to southern markets, farm products from Benue, Kogi, and Northern states frequently travels via Southeast routes. Price increases, spoiling, and delays have resulted from IPOB agitations. When vehicles become stranded because of roadblocks or sit-at-home compliance, farmers and traders claim losses. "Yams and tomatoes coming from Benue sometimes rot in the trucks because drivers cannot move on Mondays," said a food vendor in Abakaliki. Prices have already doubled by the time the goods arrive, and customers are complaining.

Many participants in the informal sector have adapted coping mechanisms to deal with disruptions, including moving markets to different days, storing items in nearby states, and using nighttime transportation. Nevertheless, these adjustments frequently result in lower profit margins and higher operating expenses. "People are adjusting by moving goods on Sundays before sit-at-home, or storing them in warehouses across the border in Asaba," said a community leader in Owerri. However, this is unsustainable because it causes more stress and expense for already troubled companies.

The IPOB agitation has weakened the Southeast's position as a commercial hub and decreased economic confidence by having an impact on interstate economic activity. According to interviews, common issues include market disruptions, investor hesitancy, transportation delays, and higher expenses. Although there are adaptive techniques, they are frequently expensive, which lowers competitiveness and increases regional economic hardship. In order to overcome these obstacles, communication, enhanced security, and laws that reestablish trust in interstate trade are necessary.

Conclusion and recommendations for sustainable peace

Although IPOB's agitation is a reflection of long-standing political and historical grievances, it has had a major negative impact on South-East economic development. The Igbo question has been successfully internationalized by the movement, but the region's potential has been limited by the financial costs, interrupted trade, decreased investment, and increased insecurity. Long-term stability and the unlocking of the South-East's

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entrepreneurial potential depend on addressing the underlying causes of IPOB's agitation through inclusive government and focused economic policy.

Based on findings, the paper made the following recommendations:

i. The Federal Government of Nigeria must act immediately to guarantee a just and equitable allocation of resources among Nigeria's six (6) geopolitical zones through an appropriate federal character system. This will significantly lessen the perception of marginalization held by IPOB.

ii. Given that the Monday sit-at-home order was used as a tactic to compel the Federal Government to release IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu from custody, the Nigerian government should make every effort to act quickly on the matter.

iii. Rather than being a problem of the Southern and Northern Nigeria, there ought to be a rotation of authority (presidential post) among the six (6) geopolitical zones of Nigeria. This will allow the Igbo-dominated IPOB to feel like they belong in Nigerian federalism.

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