

Research Article
**National Unity Questions and the IPOB Movement in South-East
Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the underlying causes of the separatist movement led by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which calls into question the unity of Nigeria and calls for its secession. According to the investigation, the military coup d'état in 1966 and the counter coup that occurred seven months later, which was followed by the genocide against people of Igbo ancestry were the main causes of the unrest. Additionally, it is said to have contributed to alleged marginalisation of the Igbos in the Federal Republic of Nigeria's (FRN) administration. In this study, descriptive analysis was employed. The study used secondary sources of data, especially those from books, journal articles, daily and periodicals, and the internet. The Choice theory, also known as the plebiscitary theory of secession by Allen Buchanan (2004) served as the basis for the study's framework. The investigation suggests that the 1999 Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) Constitution, as amended, be reviewed in order to address the grave national concerns brought up by the IPOB's call for secession. Overall, the paper recommended that immediate and necessary steps should be taken by the Executive arm of Government and the National Assembly to restructure the country's self-styled federal system of administration which may put an end to this form of agitation, not only of the IPOB secessionist scheme, but also of such designs of other aggrieved ethnic nationalities in the country.

Keywords: National Unity, Separatist Group, IPOB, South-East Region, Secessionist Movement

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INTRODUCTION

The primary causes of the internal crises in Nigeria, including the pro-Biafra agitations for secession, have been linked to the absence of regional resource management practices and a lack of respect for the federal character code as the tenets of a true federal system. Nigeria has undergone numerous constitutional reforms since Frederick Lord Lugard, the Governor-General at the time, merged the North and South Protectorates in 1914. Hugh Clifford's constitution, which went into effect in 1922, was praised for being the first to apply the elective principle in Nigeria. The Nigerian Legislative Council (NLC), which has three members from Lagos and one from Calabar, was established under this constitution. The Clifford Constitution was not a democratic form of government, but it was the first colonial statute to lay the groundwork for Nigerians to become involved in politics at the outset of colonial. Additionally, it served as a springboard for additional constitutional reforms under colonial rule. The achievements of the Lord Lugard amalgamation constitution were improved upon by the succeeding constitutions, such as the Sir Arthur Richards Constitution of 1946, the Sir John Macpherson Constitution of 1951, the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954, and the 1957 Constitution Reform Conference, which took place before the country gained its independence. Additionally, Nigeria was granted sovereign state status by the Republican Constitution of 1963 and the Independence Constitution of 1960.^{1,2}

The breakdown of law and order that followed Nigeria's 1964 federal election and the 1965 Western regional elections served as the impetus for the coup d'état that overthrew the country's first elected civilian government on January 15, 1966. The Constitution was suspended by the coup plotters, who also erected a military government with the Supreme Military Council (SMC) at its core. A pro-Biafra group started calling for secession from the Nigerian State as a result of the counter coup of July 1966 and the protracted conflict among members of the rank and file of the Nigerian Armed Forces (NAF), particularly between officers from the East of the country and those of the Hausa/Fulani extraction of the North. Unfortunately, this development became the reason for the full blown civil war which occurred in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970.¹ Despite the emergence of other constitutions in the First and Second Republics, such as the Independence Constitution in 1960, the Republican Constitution in 1963, and the 1979 Constitution, all of which were subsequently discarded by military intrusions into politics, the 1999 Constitution as adopted in the Fourth Republic's has clear flaws that have led to more secessionist movements in the

Niger Delta region today that are comparable to the 1967–1970 Biafra agitation in the region.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF), the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Niger Delta Revolutionary Crusade (NDRC), and the Niger Delta Avenger (NDA) are examples of newer organisations that have emerged in the Niger Delta as a result. The Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the latter of which was established in 2014 by Nnamdi Okwu Kanu, all emerged as a result of flaws and other shortcomings in the 1999 Constitution.⁶ The uninvited amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914 resulted in the creation of the entity known as Nigeria, and attributed to the emergence of the secessionists groups in South-East Nigeria. The colonial administration's forced amalgamation of the various regions became the main cause of Nigeria's current national crises. The Igbos' attempt to thwart the government's efforts to promote national unity under the name "Biafra" was one of the causes of the civil war that broke out in 1967.⁷

Originally based in Imo State, in Nigeria's South-East geopolitical region, MASSOB was a secessionist movement led by Mr. Ralph Uwazurike. Although both MASSOB and IPOB share the same ideology, but MASSOB was founded in 1999 and is associated with Igbo nationalism, which supported the establishment of an independent state of Biafra even before the emergence of IPOB. In addition, Benjamin Igwe Onwuka led the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), which was founded in Enugu State in 2012.^{7, 8} These developments did not only question Nigeria's national unity but also her cultural integration, as well as its social and economic development. Maina (2020) referred to this form of national issue as "minoritarian nationalism" which has consistently continued to question Nigeria's unity in diversity.

The struggle for secession, first by MASSOB, and now IPOB, in addition to the prolonged state detention of the leader of the group, Mr Nnamdi Kanu, has taken the frontline of national dailies. Nigeria has experienced ongoing internal political crises for more than a century of its existence, which has spanned the time of her British colonial occupation through the time of her independence up to the present period of self-rule. The nation has been caught in a struggle between maintaining national unity and caving in to secessionist demands from groups seeking independent states. The emergence of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), regarded as the armed wing of the secessionist IPOB, has turned the previously polemical secession movement into a

violent one, particularly in Imo State. This group initially started a string of deadly attacks against the security forces of the government, but more recently they have started targeting the state's civilian population.^{4,3} According to Ibrahim and Chaminda (2017), the once united Nigeria project that was adopted through amalgamation in 1914 has faced serious threats of collapsing or disintegrating since 1966 as a result of the actions of some union parties who do not believe in the retention of the union because they believe it is no longer effective. While some believe that the union should be maintained at all costs, others are in favour of dissolution.⁵

The parties that make up the union known as Nigeria must still reposition the nation in order to lessen the threat of secession and any other national problems that may result from this development. In light of this, some groups in society are calling for a review of the 1999 Constitution in order to establish "true-federalism" by allowing for things like resource control and a rotating presidency, among other things that should aid in the nation's development. People and organisations have made the case that Nigeria's implementation of true federalism will be an alternative method for resolving all national problems that persistently endanger the country's fabric of unity. Although the IPOB group and others appear to question the justification for maintaining the self-described federal system practice in the country, they firmly believe that the dissolution of Nigeria is the only way to address this national ill. According to Abubakar (2021), despite Nigeria's abundant natural and human resources and its promising early prospects for greatness in Africa, the marriage that was created by the British colonial masters has always been in danger of disintegrating. The first decade of independence was associated with ethnic tensions, including the failed Biafra secession attempt ... [which led to] the bloody two and a half-year civil war, and the resurgence of IPOB secessionist movement in the South-East geopolitical zone. There are also the usual traditional security challenges in North-East, North-Central and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria".⁹

As of the present, three different self-determination movements have been identified in the South of Nigeria. These groups are the South-East based IPOB with its security arm known as the ESN; the Oduduwa Republic Separatist Agitation Movement based in South-West; and most recently, the Biafra Customary Government (BCG), also based in the South-East. In the Northern parts of Nigeria, there is the persistence of the Fulani herder-farmer conflict which has expanded beyond North-Central and has continued to worsen the security challenges in the land. This has increased calls for a referendum rather than allowing some ethnic nationalities to secede while also exacerbating the need for regional security networks to be established

through constitutional means.¹⁰ The IPOB movement, in fact, reflects the Igbo ethnic consciousness discordant co-existence with other significant and minor ethnic groups in Nigeria. The ethnic groups in the nation have not yet learned how to live side by side without mistrust and suspicion, which has more often than not led to the sporadic brewing of hostility between them.

This development has repeatedly called into question the rationale behind the continued co-existence of the various cultural, religious, and social groups that the Lugard led colonial government merged in 1914, while it is becoming increasingly clear that the "forged" union between nationalities from the north and south regions of Nigeria has failed. This study makes the case that the quasi-federalism practice that has been a Nigerian tradition since the military's entry into politics in 1967 is the root cause of national crises, including pro-Biafra secessionist movements. But the excessive tribal consciousness of each group and the open, unrestrained discord between Nigeria's three main ethnic groups are what are really to blame for the country's problems. This is fuelled by the inclination for a political federalism which is a self-styled military-type quasi federal system practice in post-independence Nigeria.

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Nature of the Problem

Since 1966, Nigeria's polity has struggled to achieve unity and growth, two indicators of development. This is as a result of Fredrick Lord Lugard's 'amalgamation' of the protectorates of the North and South of Nigeria in 1914, which was poorly managed. Another issue is the nation's propensity for political federalism after independence. The fact that democratic federalism is the best option for a country like Nigeria, which has numerous ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic groups dispersed throughout the nation, is true whether or not the Nigerian narrative is in disarray. The forced union known as amalgamation, however, is not the issue with Nigeria's federal system. Instead, the flawed provisions in the 1999 Constitution (as amended) are the result of physical administrative enactments that fail to adhere to the proper principles of federalism and federal character. This is accompanied by ethnocentrism, tribalism, mediocracy instead of meritocracy, and corruption, all of which are pervasive in the nation. Federalism in and of itself does not ensure fair distribution of the rewards of social and economic production. Instead, effective government does. Under a strict federal or unitary system with numerous ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, some federal states in the world have been able to promote national unity and cohesion while ensuring a higher level of development.⁴In fact, fostering sustainable unity in diversity, achieving an equitable wealth distribution across the country, building infrastructure, and having a disciplined, patriotic, and honest leadership are all essential elements of any democratic federalist state. These characteristics are all predicated on good governance.¹¹

On the contrary, these fundamental tenets of unity and development have evolved into albatrosses that fuel and heighten tension in the nation. The country's constitution has flaws that have led to marginalisation, ethnic consciousness, mistrust between ethnic groups, and most importantly, the resurgence of agitations for restructuring, resource control, and enduring federalism from a variety of organised ethnic, religious, individual, and criminal groups across the nation. The obvious is that the call for negotiation and restructuring in itself could be dishonest. The greater part of this dishonesty is the reason for agitation by the pro-Biafra groups, notably by the IPOB dissenters in the South-East geopolitical zone.¹²These unsettling conditions have undermined Nigeria's unity and raised important national security issues. This development has increased tension between the government and IPOB group members in the South-Eastern region, while the apparent solution to this security conundrum is

overhauling the nation's political system and decentralising governmental power.⁴This study focuses on these issues and the political solutions that have been proposed to address them. The study therefore discusses the causes of the pro-Biafra movements' ongoing threat to Nigeria's national unity and corporate existence, with a focus on the IPOB's activities. This study also focuses on the implications of the IPOB's ongoing activities and its threats to national unity.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the recent posture of the secessionist group in the South-East Nigeria. While the specific objectives are to:

- a. Examine the reasons for the agitation for secession by the IPOB group,
- b. Ascertain the extent to which the IPOB secessionist movement threatens Nigeria's national unity; and,
- c. Proffer political solutions to the national security challenges posed by the secessionist agitators.

Research Questions

The following questions provide direction to this study:

- a. What are the reasons for the IPOB campaign in Nigeria?
- b. To what extent has the IPOB secession movement threatened Nigeria's internal security?
- c. What is the best solution to this national security challenge?

METHOD OF STUDY

This study adopted the descriptive analysis. It used the qualitative method of data collection extensively. This suggests that the study's primary data sources, such as books, articles in scholarly journals, newspapers and periodicals, and internet sources, were secondary. The study also used secondary sources of information, which are pieces of already published or extant literature rather than materials created by the researchers themselves. This approach is pertinent because it gives researchers the ability to analyse historical patterns and occurrences to get a better understanding of the present.¹³

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CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

The Concept of National Unity and National Security

Due to the term's importance in contemporary societies, several conceptual clarifications have been made. An uncoordinated nation with a diverse population of ethnic and religious backgrounds is doomed to experience conflicts that could lead to secession or the dissolution of its constituent parts. Such endangers a nation-state's union and frequently causes the union to completely dissolve. National cohesion, national integration, nation building, and social solidarity are additional terms that are used interchangeably with national unity.¹⁴ Thus, national unity refers to a situation in which individuals from various socio-economic, political, and cultural backgrounds come together to pursue a common objective. It is a concept that aims to bring together various entities so that they can work together, understand one another, have trust in one another, and love one another. Thus, the process of bringing together a variety of people from various cultures, ethnic backgrounds, tribal affiliations, and social backgrounds in a particular setting or polity for the benefit of all is defined as national unity.¹⁵

It could be described as that which involves the amalgamation of different peoples into a single nation-state from diverse social, economic, religious, ethnic and geographic settings.¹⁶ The process of combining formally separate groups of people into a single unit or group while erasing any prior social and cultural group differences could also be described as one that involves their reflective and contemplative activity. There are numerous conceptual definitions for the term "national security," which is also known as "internal security." In order for a country to achieve admirable national security, it must be supported throughout every aspect of its structure, including the availability of food and other socioeconomic factors. A crucial element of national security is the safety of people and their possessions, which must be maintained through national integration, cohesion, and purposefulness.

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15. Ngafi, E. W., Afolabi, S. A., & Welgba, R. Y. (2022). Education and National Unity. *Sapientia Foundation Journal of Education, Sciences & Gender Studies*, 4(3), 165-171 pp.165

16. Weiner, M. (1967). *Political culture and political development*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

The Concept of Secession

The term *secession* has been defined to mean self-determination or dissolution of existing state structure; though, in itself, the term is interconnected with self-determination and dissolution even though these words are not synonyms with each other. Strictly speaking, the term sometimes refers to a unilateral process engaged upon by a group of people.¹⁷ The term ‘secession’ is also defined as the process by which a group of people seek separation from the state to which they belong, and decide to create a new independent state.¹⁸ Secession is the act of breaking away from a state, region, or organisation to become independent. It is the act of leaving a group or a government, or it is a state's decision to break away from the current one.¹⁹ It could be explained as a group leaving a bigger organisation, usually a political one, or a union, organisation, or military alliance. Only when secession is approved by the state from which it is demanded can it be carried out successfully.²⁰ Secession is viewed from the perspective of an internal armed conflict where one ethnic group seeks to secede from other groups in the nation, as was the case in Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslavia, and Chechnya in the 1990s. Therefore, secession as a process needs to be planned and carried out by a group of people rather than a single person. The group seeking secession must be connected on a territorial level.²¹ The phrase can also refer to a method by which a group of individuals seeks to secede from the state to which they were born, whether motivated by ancestry, tribal affiliation, or ethnicity. To establish a new state and gain independence from others is the goal. Therefore, it is true to say that a party seeking secession wants to be legitimate and sovereign in its own right. Contrarily, secession opens the door to numerous conflicts or confrontations, as demonstrated by the armed conflict that took place in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970, in order to accomplish the aforementioned goals and bring about peace.

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Theoretical Framework

In this study, plebiscitary theory of secession, also known as choice theory, is used. According to this theory, it is necessary to give a section of a multinational state the freedom to break away from the existing political system and, if they so choose form their own independent state, even if the majority of the state is against it. The choice or plebiscitary theory of secession, put forth by Allen Buchanan in 2004, thus asserted that a portion of the population in a multinational state has the right to decide their political relations in the multinational state.^{22,23} Theorists who advocate choice or plebiscitary believe that any group of people with a similar ancestry and culture have the right to vote to secede from the larger country, or to allow a portion of a state's geographical expression to do so.²³ This could imply that secession is subject to majority decision. The theory emphasized how each person or group within a multinational state must choose their own political alliances.

According to Buchanan, in the context of liberal democratic theory, the state cannot be the ultimate right holder. Because the state derives its rights from the people in ideal circumstances, the state should be viewed as the people's agent, with the people having the right to revoke the agency relationship they share with the state.²⁴ Due to the way this theory expresses the need for a group of people to secede from a multinational state structure, it appears to be the prerequisite for secession. The IPOB movement in the South-East of Nigeria and other separatist movements to leave the Federal Republic of Nigeria are thus covered by this theory. The nation's unity is in danger due to pro-Biafra groups' demands for secession from the Nigerian State. This theory also explains why IPOB is pushing for secession in the wake of the insurgency that has been roiling Nigeria's North East region for years and taken on new dimensions. As the country has recently transited on the 29th of May 2023 from one civil rule to another much is expected from the newly sworn-in administration, headed by Bola Ahmed Tinubu, to take Nigeria to new height.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reasons for the Agitation for Secession by the Nigerian South-East IPOB Movement

The main reason Biafra has continued to call for secession since the late 1960s to the present has largely not changed, even more than 50 years after the end of the civil war in Nigeria. However, there are additional justifications offered by the younger generation of agitators for maintaining the movement and these justifications are either distinct from or a continuation of those offered by their forebears and the agitators of old. The current protesters uncover new justifications for the exclusion of the Igbo from political power. They support old grievances based on this premise. In fact, Igbos in the diaspora as well as Eastern Nigeria provides energy for the neo-Biafran movements. Since the return to civil rule in 1999, the IPOB, which was founded in 2012 by its current leader, Nnamdi Kanu, has become a symbol of the Biafran activism that was first embodied in the Ralph Nwazurike-led MASSOB. Like MASSOB, the IPOB is centered on two main goals: defending Igbo interests and attempting to secure their political independence. Additionally, it aims to completely turn the coexistence of different nationalities on its head. IPOB and its military wing, the ESN, like their predecessor groups, criticised the federal government for little or no investments in the South East, for political alienation, ethnic marginalisation, heavy military presence, inequitable distribution of resources and extrajudicial killings in its region.²⁵ However, the inability of MASSOB to achieve its goal is traced to the emergence of IPOB, which is considered as a more radical group.²⁶ Earlier, a leading factor had been the colonial merger of the differing cultures and peoples in the protectorates of South and North of Nigeria which has continued to make national integration a hard feat to achieve.²⁷ There is also disunity among the ethnic groups traced to the unification of the protectorates of the north and south which led to the creation of Nigeria.²⁸ It is a truism that the political structure and the super structure built and developed as a colonial vestige by the British has become the source of the present post-independence national challenge in the country, and the pro-Biafra agitation for secession is not left out.²⁹ Years of military rule and the Northern political elite's continued egocentrism and attitude in office, which has gradually taken over the entire Nigerian political landscape, are some of the factors that have exasperated the aforementioned and caused the reemergence of the post-Biafra groups. Therefore, the dominant power brokers in the North illegally take for export a significant portion of Nigeria's crude oil and funnel the proceeds into private pockets using resources taken from the Southern parts of the country, particularly the Niger Delta region, along with some military collaborators from both divides of the country.

In addition, the dominant political elite from the North controls the entire network of government patronage, which they use to marginalise groups in the South,

particularly the Igbo people, for whom the "powers that be" frequently display open animosity and outright discrimination. The Eastern Security Network (ESN), the armed wing of IPOB, rose to power in response to the federal governments and its security forces' failure to address emerging threats to the nation.³⁰ Since the central government's actions continue to demonstrate its authoritarian tendencies in office despite the return of the nation to democratic rule in May 1999, the ESN has grown more assertive. In the North of Nigeria, there have been ongoing and violent uprisings by armed groups, such as Boko Haram terrorism and its sister ISWAP insurgency, armed banditry, and herdsmen-farmers' conflicts throughout all regions of Nigeria, which have been continuously orchestrated by herdsmen, mostly of the Fulani tribe in the North. These uprisings have occurred despite the occurrence of several ecological crises throughout the country and the events in the South. The failure of previous governments to officially disarm former soldiers in Biafra as part of demobilisation efforts, as well as the failure to reintegrate the Igbo secessionists into a post-civil war Nigeria through the policy of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation (referred to as the 3Rs), which was mocked by the government of Nigerian civil war leader, General Ali Modu Sheriff, are associated with reasons for the recent agitation for separation by IPOB.³¹

Thus, Nnamdi Kanu's arrest and continued detention by the Muhammadu Buhari administration, as well as the designation of his movement as a terrorist organisation in September 2017, also played a significant role in the Movement's ongoing cries for secession from the polity. When the federal government forbade and designated them as terrorist organisations, unlicensed gun-toting members of the Miyetti Allah Kautta Hore, a tribal cattle breeders group (of the same stock and business association with Muhammadu Buhari, the then-reigning Nigerian president, and the group's life patron), as well as the Fulani herdsmen group, did not suffer the same fate as IPOB. Indeed, while grazing their cattle as nomads across the length and breadth of the nation and causing significant collateral damage everywhere, the vicious Fulani herdsmen of the Miyetti Allah group have frequently committed wanton killings of law-abiding innocent Nigerians. Even worse, they assert that they have the right to use all of the country's grazing routes. In this regard, it should be noted that throughout Nigeria's eight-year Buhari administration, the IPOB, Boko Haram, ISWAP, and armed bandits have all committed far more acts of terrorism than the Fulani herdsmen have, primarily with crop farmers as they graze their animals. The Fulani herdsmen have also been directly responsible for more cold-blooded killings and property destruction than any other group.³²

The issue of nepotism and ethnic division, which is related to the nation's post-independence politics, is another issue. The result has been a variety of things, such as distrust between people, ethnic consciousness, fear of economic and political marginalisation, a lack of a unified voice in national struggles, and ultimately, a struggle for political power that determines which ethnic group should produce a leader at the center of governance in independent Nigeria. In support of the Igbos being marginalised to discourage them from aspiring to that lofty office in the land, it should also be noted that no South-Easterner of Igbo ancestry has ever run for president.³³ Another reason for the emergence of IPOB can be linked to the politics of imbalance in the social, economic, political and co-operate governance of Nigeria, as well as in the management, sharing, and allocation of the national commonwealth.^{32,36} IPOB's terror campaign for secession also rests on the persistent leadership failure of governments at all levels, including years of social neglects of the citizenry, and the economic and political isolation of the people in the region of the South East in particular.³⁸

The Buhari-led federal government's declaration of IPOB as a terrorist organisation in September 2017 has relentlessly driven the group's effort to secede, in addition to the arrest of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu, in 2021, which has continued to escalate tension in the Eastern parts of Nigeria. However, the same government failed to designate the Fulani herdsmen group of the Miyetti Allah Kaute Hore Association as a terrorist organisation. In response to this development, Ukong (2021) cited Enyinnaya Abaribe, who was serving as the Senate Minority Leader in Nigeria's Upper Legislative Chamber at the time and represented the Abia South Senatorial District in the South East region of Abia State. Abaribe argued that the administration of President Buhari's administration's double standards in handling the security challenges in the South East, North East, and North West, as well as its branding of IPOB. While the seemingly [sic] most dangerous insurgency of the Fulani [group of] herdsmen brandishing dangerous weapons and committing mayhem [around the country] has not been profiled as a terrorist organisation, IPOB members ... [have been] profiled as terrorists, [which is] a leading reason for the heightened tension between the federal government and the IPOB members".³⁵

Again, the failure of the central government to address the political power sharing crisis and sundry other lopsided national issues in the country is another attributive factor for the post-independence challenges which the country is facing from the South East geopolitical zone.¹ Political differences, coupled with latent feelings of disunity among the ethnic groups add to the reasons for uprising in Nigeria.³⁴ This

development, inarguably, has changed the country's narratives and what it has become today; thus, producing the pro-Biafra movement as a consequence of its existence. Similar to MASSOB, the IPOB grievances originated in the 1967–1970 crisis that sparked the Nigeria–Biafra armed conflict, which many regard as the period of Biafran genocide during which the Nigerian military government is alleged to have massacred over one million people.³⁹ Due to the ongoing threats from Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency in the North East and North Central, armed banditry and cattle rustling in the North West, Fulani herdsman attack/herders-farmer conflicts throughout the country, and incidents of armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, ritual kill, this development has become one of the top national issues that threatens internal security and complicates the already divisive Nigerian polity.

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IPOB and the Threats to National Security

More harm has been done to the Igbo people in the South-East region, particularly in Anambra and Imo States, by the current pro-Biafra movements of the IPOB and ESN groups. In addition to endangering Nigeria's unity, these groups' activities have increased security concerns in Nigeria, similar to the tensions brought on by Boko Haram, ISWAP, armed banditry, Fulani-herdsmen militancy, etc. Although the IPOB started out as a movement to express ethnic grievances against the Nigerian government, it has evolved into a stronger ethnically conscious group with a sense of oneness that is based on the premise that the Igbo people are the most marginalised group in a nation that is at the center of affairs.⁴⁰ Due to marginalisation and a sense of shared victimhood, the movement's core grievance has recently shifted to the consensus notion of oneness.⁴¹ In the past, the pro-Biafra movements had grievances against the war government led by Army General Yakubu Gowon (and subsequent military regimes in the nation), which they believed to have been hostile to the Igbo people of Nigeria. On the basis of this conviction, the civil war, also known as the "Biafran war," which was fought between 1967 and 1970 and was led by Lieutenant-Colonel and later General Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, was waged.²⁵

The recent political unrest in the nation, which has been polarised by a false perception of Islamic jihadism and spread by self-proclaimed Northern Nigerian security insurgents, is the foundation for IPOB's call for self-rule. In particular, the IPOB has continued to be dissatisfied with the actions of the Nigerian government in denouncing and uprising its group while the same government turned a blind eye to the dishonorable activities of the Fulani herdsmen. As a result of the government security forces' use of coercion, this government's insensitivity eventually led to armed confrontations with the ESN.⁴² Undoubtedly, this development poses a threat to national unity and exacerbates the country's current security threats. The rise of the Unknown Gunmen, a clandestine armed group, has made them the most feared militia in the area. A counter-group against the militancy of Fulani herdsmen operations in the South-East is seen and regarded as another military wing of the secessionist IPOB. In

the South-East region, the Unknown Gunmen are infamous for being ruthless in killing and causing mayhem at the slightest provocation, regardless of whose ox is gored. Contrary to popular belief, IPOB members think that the Nigerian state security forces are actually the "unknown gunmen" who are killing innocent locals in the area. It has been claimed that the real unidentified gunmen who have been murdering and displacing Igbo people are security agency agents in Nigeria.⁴³

Sadiq-Bamgbopa et al. (2022) stated that, "the rampaging targeted attacks against farmers and communities in South East by Fulani herdsmen from northern extraction leading to the death of several persons was the reason for the establishment of the ESN on 12th December 2020 by Nnamdi Kanu to guarantee safety of lives and properties in the geopolitical zone".³⁸ Under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu, IPOB openly declared their intentions to restore the defunct Biafra agitation by means of secession. This is happening alongside the activities of other pro-Biafra groups which continuously make national integration a difficult task to achieve. Numerous lives have been lost among civilians and security personnel since the creation of ESN in December 2020 as the IPOB's armed security wing. ESN and the Unknown Gunmen have targeted state infrastructures. One of the factors contributing to IPOB's movement's designation as a terrorist organisation by the federal government in 2017 was its renewed push for secession. The most infamous group among all IPOB factions and affiliate organisations is still ESN. As a result, the United Kingdom (UK) designated this affiliate body as a terrorist organization and barred IPOB members from submitting asylum applications in the UK beginning in May 2022.²⁷

After the Nigeria-Biafra civil war ended several years ago, separatist movements have persisted in exerting pressure on Nigeria's unity and posing a threat to the nation's security; in response to IPOB's activities since 2012, Biafra separatist organisations have emerged abroad. A few of these organisations are the Biafra Foundation (BF), Biafra Actualisation Forum (BAF), Igbo USA, Ekwe Nche, Biafra Nigeria World (BNW), Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), and on the home front, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). Although the IPOB and ESN have radical positions in favor of making Biafra a sovereign state, MASSOB and the other organisations are thought to have nonviolent strategies for making the Biafran dream a reality. The national security of Nigeria has been impacted by the IPOB's apparent hardline stance. Any individual, group, or government that disagrees with their actions or who opposes the display of the Biafra Secret Service (BSS) and Biafra National Guard (BNG) constitutions inside the Nigerian sovereign state is threatened with death by the group. In addition, they have been forced to resort

to calculated hate speech that can spark riots and violent protests, such as calling the nation a zoo and the former president Muhammadu Buhari an evil terrorist.³² Indeed, the IPOB separatists operate in similar manner like MASSOB, which acted as a franchised social justice movement with a flag of convenience under which several groups operated.⁴⁴

Several active police officers have died since the militant ESN started its wave of attacks against state security forces in the East of the nation. Over 1,800 prisoners were released after an ESN invasion in April 2021 at the federal prisons in Imo State. A few weeks later, rocket-propelled grenades were used to attack Mr. Hope Uzodinma, the state governor, and destroy his preferred Rolls Royce car. The government security forces responded by using excessive force and dealing ruthlessly with the terrorists. Due to this development, there was a significant military presence on the roads to inspect users on all highways throughout the Imo State. The Air Force military strafing alleged hideouts of ESN members in highly populated areas which further heightened threats to peace and security in the State and beyond.⁴⁵ Fundamentally, Nigeria's continued existence as a cohesive, functional state or as a single entity is unquestionably in jeopardy due to recent national problems, such as the actions of IPOB secessionists and the brutality of its ESN group in the South East, the actions of violent Islamic extremists, particularly those of Boko Haram and ISWAP in the North East geopolitical zone, and the dishonorable actions of Fulani herdsmen across the country. Other disruptive forces that have put Nigeria's unity in jeopardy include racial and communal land conflicts, organised crime groups that support militancy in the Niger Delta, pirates engaged in significant crude oil theft operations, and other widespread piracy activities along the Gulf of Guinea.⁴⁶ Despite widespread support for the creation of an independent Biafra state, the ESN and federal security forces continue to have a pitiful impact. As a result of the numerous daily fatalities among the civilian population, many citizens are no longer able to operate their businesses as small business owners and petty street traders. A Monday once a week, seemingly endless Sit-at-Home order has been imposed on the populace by the ESN group in some major South-East commercial towns and cities, which has complicated matters. The roving ESN militants ruthlessly attack citizens who disobey this order from the ESN and attempt to carry on with their regular activities on Sit-at-Home days under the pretext that they do not support the movement's effort to win support for the creation of Biafra. Due to the failure of such Monday sit-at-homes to bring the area to complete lockdown as instructed, defaulters are now lucky to escape with their lives. It is important to note

that this has its own economic effects that have now worsened for residents of the South-East and of Nigeria as a whole.

There is no doubt that a larger segment of the business population in and outside the region is affected by the activities of members of the IPOB and ESN. Since the Biafran agitators frequently issue threats, which directly harm the business community in the East of Nigeria, many people in that region are actually unable to continue operating their businesses. As was previously mentioned, there have been instances of militant attacks and the murder of innocent bystanders while carrying out the sit-at-home orders. In particular, the Imo State government, federal security forces, and some civilians assert that many of the killings were committed by ESN members who allegedly always target people who aren't supporters of the movement. The ESN has been accused of extorting money and material goods from this group of people. Federal security forces completely destroyed the homes and businesses of alleged separatist supporters on August 2, 2021. On the other hand, ESN group members accused some citizens of failing to support the movement and then started destroying their neighbors' properties.⁴⁷ In addition to drawing a strong response from the federal security forces, this action by the ESN actually caused more harm to the civilian population that the government security forces were supposed to protect. Unfortunately, the civilian population, which neither supports the ESN nor the government, is left to bear the consequences of the actions of the ESN and state security forces; however, many people in the area and elsewhere call for a roundtable discussion to pave the way for the peaceful creation of a Biafran state in South East Nigeria.

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Conclusion

While the pro-Biafran movement's efforts to secede from Nigeria continue, the central government has not done enough to give in to their demands or to use national dialogue to address the troubling national security issues brought on by IPOB and ESN. Instead, the government uses intimidation and, on occasion, excessive force to pressure the agitators into giving up their goals. Therefore, this study draws the conclusion that the IPOB's renewed call for Nigeria's secession is a result of successive governments' failure to address thorny national issues like ethnic imbalance and regional marginalisation since independence. Additionally, since the end of civil hostilities in Nigeria in 1970, federal character appointments have been lopsidedly made to important military and civilian government positions. Once more, it appears that the federal government's plans and implementation of development projects exclude the Eastern part of Nigeria. This includes 'blacking out' the Eastern regions of the nation from the multi-million dollar Nigerian rail project initiated by the Muhammadu Buhari administration, from which other regions of the nation were already benefiting.

Instead, the Buhari-led administration decided to extend this Nigerian mega project far into Maradi Town, a Fulani settlement that is located in about 177 kilometers from Katsina State in Nigeria into the coast of the Republic of Niger, while purposefully excluding the South-East from the rail project. The central government's treatment of the Igbos in this way, as well as in many other ways, has incited youth in the South East region to rebel and given rise to various pro-Biafra movements. Accordingly, it has been argued that the union of the North and South of Nigeria in 1914 was only planned for British colonial convenience and interest, which at the time aimed to take the resources available in Nigeria they needed to run their industries in England. They did this despite failing to realise that the cultures and traditions of the peoples from the region's North and South, which they forcedfully combined, were diametrically opposed to one another.

Coleman (1958) in Ativie (2013: 822) cited Tafawa Balewa, who would later become Nigeria's first prime minister after independence, as saying the following to support this: "Many [Nigerians] deceive themselves that Nigeria is one, This is wrong. I am sorry to say that this presence of unity is artificial.... The Southern tribes ... do not mix with the Northern people ... and we in the North look upon them as invaders". And this has continued to this day to be the main cause of instability in Nigeria. Despite the pledge made on the 3Rs in 1970, Nigeria's current and former leaders, particularly the sanctimonious leaders from the North, have consistently demonstrated bias against the Igbo people. Undoubtedly, this has emerged as one of the main elements that, among other things, challenges Nigeria's national unity and fosters internal insecurity. However, if subsequent Nigerian governments are unable to address this national ill through constitutional means, this issue may continue to exist.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are necessary solutions to the Nigerian national issues, especially the renewed agitation of the IPOB South-East secession from the Nigerian State:

- a. The executive and legislative branches of government in Nigeria should urgently take the necessary steps to restructure the nation from its lopsided federal system by devolution of powers from the center. In terms of the control of the resources that are abundant in the regions inhabited by the people in their various lands, the quasi-federal system has failed to grant autonomy to the federating regions or states. By taking this action, it's possible to put an end to agitations coming not only from the Igbo people but also from other ethnic nationalities who feel wronged in the nation. It means that achieving "true federalism" through the decentralisation of power is a necessary step toward achieving national integration and long-term unification.
- b. The federal character principle enshrined in the Nigerian constitution should be respected and genuinely adopted at the time of hiring and promotions in the federal civil service, the armed forces, the police force, and in school enrollment into federal colleges and institutions without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, tribal affiliations, religion, gender, and/or sexuality.
- c. Nigerian leaders should also exert more effort to foster national consciousness, integration, and unification among the populace across the nation. This is essential if ethnic prejudice that has pitted one region against another since independence is to be eliminated.

- d. Based on past experience, the federal government's repressive approach to dealing with some pressing national issues will only make things worse and increase ethnic consciousness, which is contrary to the harmonious coexistence of the various peoples in the union known as Nigeria. As a result, the central government should implement more palatable approaches to resolving the issue of marginalisation through constitutional means.
- e. The constitutional option of rotating the presidency should be viewed as a necessary step in resolving the national problem brought on by the movement to secede from IPOB. If this is accomplished, it will establish justice, unity, and equity among the nation's various North, South, West, and East regions.

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