

PROSCRIPTION AND RADICALIZATION: THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT'S BAN ON IPOB AND ITS SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT: This article critically examines the Nigerian government's decision to proscribe the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and classify it as a terrorist organization. It explores the implications of this designation on the group's radicalization, insecurity, and the resulting effects on the socio-economic development of the Southeast region of Nigeria. Drawing from three theoretical frameworks—labelling theory, grievance-based rebellion theory, and structural repression theory—as well as secondary data collected from newspapers, magazines, and journal articles, the study seeks to determine the extent to which the designation of terrorism and the proscription of IPOB have contributed to the group's radicalization and subsequent increase in insecurity, ultimately destabilizing the socio-economic development of the region. The study found among others that proscription of IPOB has impacted negatively on socio-economic growth of the region. It revealed that the sit-at-home order caused over 80% loss of revenue. The paper concludes with recommendations for fostering dialogue and addressing the underlying grievances in Nigeria's Southeast region.

Keywords: Proscription, Radicalization, Insecurity, Socio-economic Development

INTRODUCTION

Human society has historically been embedded with various forms of conflict (Roberts & Okpan, 2022). They further argued that insecurity has remained as old as human existence. From threats posed by wild animals to adverse climatic conditions, humans have always battled for survival and sustainability. A human population may feel insecure due to dissatisfaction with its relationship with other groups or governing agencies (Chalk et al., 2001). For instance, Nigeria has experienced numerous unconventional insurgencies and conflicts emanating from political distrust, a crisis of sustainable socio-economic development, and a legitimacy crisis (Roberts & Okpan, 2022).

The space for expressing popular aspirations in Nigeria was opened following the return of civilian rule in 1999, although most expressions were ethno-religiously motivated (Ajayi & Duruji, 2008). This sentiment is reflected in the activities of groups such as the Niger Delta militants in the South-South, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) in the Southwest, and the fundamentalist Islamic groups in the North (Enemaku & Tobeckukwu, 2018). Unlike most of these calls, which were

predicated on greater inclusivity and equity (Adebanwa, 2005), other agitations, such as pro-Biafra movements, demand a separate state (Onuoha, 2013).

The defunct Eastern Region of Nigeria was declared the state of Biafra on May 30, 1967, by Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. According to Duruji (2012a), inter-ethnic strife that dominated the politics of the decolonization era in Nigeria led to this declaration. A complexity of factors, ranging from age-old mutual suspicions engendered by the colonial government's divide-and-rule tactics to the coups of 1966 and the resulting pogroms, contributed to the situation. The federal government, under General Yakubu Gowon, responded by launching what it called a police action, which escalated into a bitter civil war that lasted until January 15, 1970, when Biafra surrendered.

However, the separatist idea has recently been revived by different pro-Biafran movements both locally and in the diaspora, particularly in the Southeast geopolitical zone. Early literature has largely focused on the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), but more recent agitations have been driven by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a group alleged to be more confrontational than its predecessors (Adibe, 2015). Since its formation in 2012, IPOB, led by Nnamdi Kanu, has reintroduced and projected the Biafra secessionist ideology. The Nigerian state has responded with military and police crackdowns, including Operation Python Dance, a dusk-to-dawn curfew, and arrests culminating in IPOB's proscription as a terrorist organization. On their part, the IPOB formed the eastern security network, which they claim is to protect the Southeast from attacks by herders, kidnapping and general insecurity within the region. The eastern security network is supposed to replicate the role played by Amatokun, an internal security strategy in southwest Nigeria (Izokpu, 2022). The proscription of IPOB has led to multi-dimensional insecurity, which, to the best of the author's knowledge, has not been adequately interrogated, especially the consequences of these emerging forms of insecurity on the sustained development of the region. Therefore, this study aims to interrogate the implications of IPOB proscription sustained security and development of Southeast Nigeria.

In its quest for separatist self-determination, the IPOB movement claims that its engagement strategy and ambition-pursuing are non-violent. This paper agrees that IPOB activities on their own seldom lead to physical violence. The group, through its radio broadcast, always emphasize its nonviolence posture. However, the verbal expressions of some group members can be interpreted as violent. In line with the postulation of Irvin Janis' Groupthink theory, members of the IPOB believe in the invulnerability of their group. They are highly critical of out-groups, especially those who do not share similar sentiments with them. It was the vituperations of Nnamdi Kanu with reference to the rest of Nigeria and other perceived enemies of Biafra on the Radio that brought IPOB to the limelight in southeastern Nigeria (Abada et al., 2020).

IPOB has always claimed that its primary engagement tools are the media, both electronic (radio) and social media. While the radio is key in promoting group cohesion as members tune in at designated times as directed by their leaders, social media has also been identified as one of their most potent tools for engaging the public. The leadership of the IPOB recognizes this fact and even makes an effort to provide a free Wi-Fi feed for all members on days during which they plan to

hold rallies or protests. They often do this in anticipation of the Nigerian government shutting down the mobile network on such days (Opejobi, 2017). Though the IPOB claims to be physically non-violent, the rhetoric from their broadcast, which has become their primary tool of engagement, has remained provocative and is capable of radicalising members. Its ability to incite violence remains undisputed. Amamkpa and Mbakwe (2015) likened the hate propaganda of Radio Biafra to those of the Rwandan Radio Television Libre de Millie Collines (RTML), which was highly implicit and controversial in the genocide of 1994.

Pertinently, the Nigerian government's designation of IPOB as a terrorist organization has sparked intense national and international debates. IPOB, a group advocating for the self-determination of the Southeast region, argues that its activities are non-violent and constitutionally protected. Conversely, the government justifies its proscription based on alleged acts of violence and threats to national unity. This article seeks to explore whether IPOB's actions meet the criteria for terrorism as defined by international standards. It considers the broader implications of this proscription on democratic governance, human rights, and national security in Nigeria.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a movement advocating for the secession of Southeast Nigeria, has become one of the most contentious issues in Nigerian politics. Established in 2012, the IPOB's primary aim is to achieve self-determination of the Igbo ethnic group, citing historical, socio-economic, and political marginalization (Nwangwu, 2022). While IPOB describes itself as a peaceful organization, the Nigerian government designated it a terrorist group in 2017, alleging that its activities threatened national security and unity (Amnesty International, 2018). In addition, the IPOB is not the only group the government is grappling with, as it's said to have failed in its efforts to eradicate the internationally designated terrorist organization, the Boko Haram insurgency (Roberts, 2023).

This designation has generated widespread debate. Human rights organizations have criticized the proscription as a suppression of fundamental rights, arguing that IPOB has not engaged in acts typically associated with terrorism, such as indiscriminate violence against civilians (Amnesty International, 2018). On the other hand, the government contends that the group's rhetoric and protests often incite violence, disrupting public order and creating insecurity. It is, therefore, pertinent to examine how the proscription and radicalization of IPOB have impacted the security of lives and properties in the southeastern region of Nigeria. This study investigates the validity of IPOB's classification as a terrorist organization and evaluates the broader implications of the government's approach to addressing separatist agitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing scholarship highlights the complexities of state responses to separatist movements in post-colonial Africa. The literature reveals a pattern where governments often employ repressive strategies, including proscription, to suppress dissent. In the case of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), human rights organizations have raised concerns about violations of freedom of expression, association, and protest. Comparative analyses suggest that the use of military force to quell agitations often exacerbates tensions, potentially leading to the radicalization of previously non-violent groups. This review situates the IPOB case within these broader discussions and

provides a framework for analysing the actions of the Nigerian government and their consequences.

The proscription of IPOB can be contextualized within wider discussions on state responses to separatist movements in post-colonial settings. Several studies highlight that governments tend to adopt militarized and repressive strategies to suppress perceived threats to national unity (Ibeanu et al., 2016). These strategies frequently involve deploying security forces, making arrests, and imposing proscription, which can heighten tensions rather than resolve underlying grievances (Annan, 2012). For instance, the Nigerian government's military operations, such as "Operation Python Dance" in the Southeast, have been criticized for human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and unlawful detentions (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Comparative studies on separatist movements indicate that proscription can yield counterproductive effects, such as radicalizing non-violent groups and undermining state authority in affected regions (Boykoff, 2007). IPOB's proscription aligns with this trend, as reports suggest a rise in more radical elements, particularly the emergence of "Unknown Gunmen," who are often linked to violence in the Southeast, despite IPOB's disavowal of these groups (Nwangwu, 2022). This body of literature underscores the need for more inclusive, dialogue-based approaches to managing separatist agitations.

Radicalization of IPOB

According to Nwangwu (2022), the IPOB's recent predisposition to armed struggle in Nigeria is a response to the government's continued deployment of brute force against the activities of nonviolent agitation for a separate state. The separatist agitators, notably the IPOB, largely appear to be nonviolent groups, notwithstanding the government's preference for a confrontational strategy over a conciliatory tone. According to Onuoha (2014), the separatists want to see the power disparity between generations corrected and, eventually, the Igbo ethnic group to relocate to a different political and administrative structure. Although the agitators agree that secession is the only way to address the perceived Igbo victimization, they often disagree on how to go about it. Before the IPOB founded the ESN in December 2020, neo-Biafra separatist groups were closely linked to tactics like calling for a referendum, boycotting important national events like elections, censuses, and the national identity card program, and threatening armed conflict. The Nigerian government's planned attacks on the Biafra agitators have caused them to reconsider their nonviolent approach. Maazi Nnamdi Kanu claimed, among other things, that the IPOB leadership was reevaluating the feasibility of carrying on the separatist war peacefully as late as September 2017, when the Nigerian military launched Operation Python Dance II (Ujumadu, 2017). He also emphasized the necessity of starting the process of self-defence against the Nigerian state's constant attacks. The arrest and killing of Biafra Remembrance Day protesters, excessive military brutality and unprovoked shooting of unarmed protesters, illegal detention of neo-Biafra separatists, unsuccessful attempts to jam Radio Biafra's transmission channels, invasion of Maazi Kanu's home in Afaraukwu, IPOB's proscription, and the extraordinary rendition of the IPOB leader from Kenya are just a few examples of the various forms of state repression. IPOB members and sympathizers staged several demonstrations, marches, and meetings after Kanu was arrested and imprisoned in October 2015 on charges of sedition, ethnic provocation, terrorism, and treason.

The majority of the rallies and protests were scheduled to take place during Kanu's court appearances. The majority of pro-Biafra marches and nonviolent protests are frequently linked to varying degrees of rights violations by Nigerian security personnel, according to Nwangwu et al. (2020).

However, on the 2016 Biafra Remembrance Day, which coincided with the 49th anniversary of the declaration of Biafra, these infractions escalated to an unprecedented level. The security forces shot victims at the Remembrance Day ceremony in several locales, particularly in Asaba, Nkpor, and Onitsha, as numerous reliable media outlets and human rights advocates have extensively reported (Mayah, 2016). Amnesty International (2016) claims that shooting at nonviolent IPOB supporters and onlookers who were obviously not a threat to anyone is a ludicrous use of disproportionate and needless force that caused numerous fatalities and injuries. Other rights groups have also reported that security forces have harassed, tortured, abducted, disappeared, and killed extrajudicially members of pro-Biafra movements (Iroegbu, 2016). According to Amnesty International (2018), during 2017 and 2018, the military participated in extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, and arbitrary arrests of IPOB members in the South-East. Indeed, extrajudicial executions of Biafra sympathizers have a history that predates President Muhammadu Buhari's current administration. For example, fifty bodies thought to be Biafra sympathizers were discovered floating in the Ezu River in Anambra State in January 2013 (Mamah et al., 2013). However, no Nigerian administration has conducted a full investigation into any of the killings, past or present.

The expanding mobilization and penetration reach of IPOB, mainly through "community evangelism" and other forms of civil disobedience, disturbed President Buhari's administration in 2017. "Community evangelism," which involved going into villages to persuade people to abstain from voting, was a successful strategy in the run-up to the Anambra State gubernatorial election in November 2017 (Mbah et al., 2020). Operation Python Dance II saw the deployment of Nigerian forces in the South-East as a result of the increasing acceptance and impact of IPOB messages and civil disobedience. Operation Python Dance II, the codename for the military operation that took place in the South-East from 15 September to 14 October 2017, is also referred to as Egwu Eke II in the Igbo language. Initially used to counter "kidnapping," "armed robbery," "killing of priests," and "violent agitation," the operation later became a tool of repression against unarmed neo-Biafra agitators, particularly IPOB members (Ilozue, 2018). Okafor (2017) noted that the operation subjected defenceless and unarmed Neo-Biafra teenagers to physical torture and other cruel treatment, including telling them to slap one another and making them drink till they drowned in dirty waterways. Nigerian soldiers from Operation Python Dance II not only invaded Maazi Kanu's home in Afaraukwu with roughly ten armoured carrier vehicles and seven Hilux vans, but they also stormed the Nigeria Union of Journalists' Abia State Council in Umuahia, where they attacked some union officials and destroyed valuables like phones, iPads, and laptops (Ayo-Aderele & Ikokwu, 2017). Additionally, Okaisabor (2023), sustained that after years of the Nigerian-Biafran war, the Igbo of Southeast are still gripped by political alienation, which has led to a renewed call for Biafran Statehood. Although several other parts of Nigeria are equally demanding for inclusivity, the Igbos are particularly aggrieved with political marginalization in most prominent political appointments arguing to be internationally side-lined from occupying the office of the presidency several decades after the war. However,

Theoretical Review

The article employs theories of political violence and state repression to analyse IPOB's proscription. The labelling theory is particularly relevant as it examines how state-imposed labels, such as "terrorist," can influence group behaviour and public perception. By labelling IPOB as a terrorist organization, the Nigerian government may have unintentionally contributed to the group's radicalization. Additionally, the theory of grievance-based rebellion sheds light on the socio-political and economic factors driving IPOB's agitation, emphasizing the need to address these root causes to achieve lasting peace and stability. This analysis draws on three key theoretical frameworks: labelling theory, grievance-based rebellion theory, and theories of state repression.

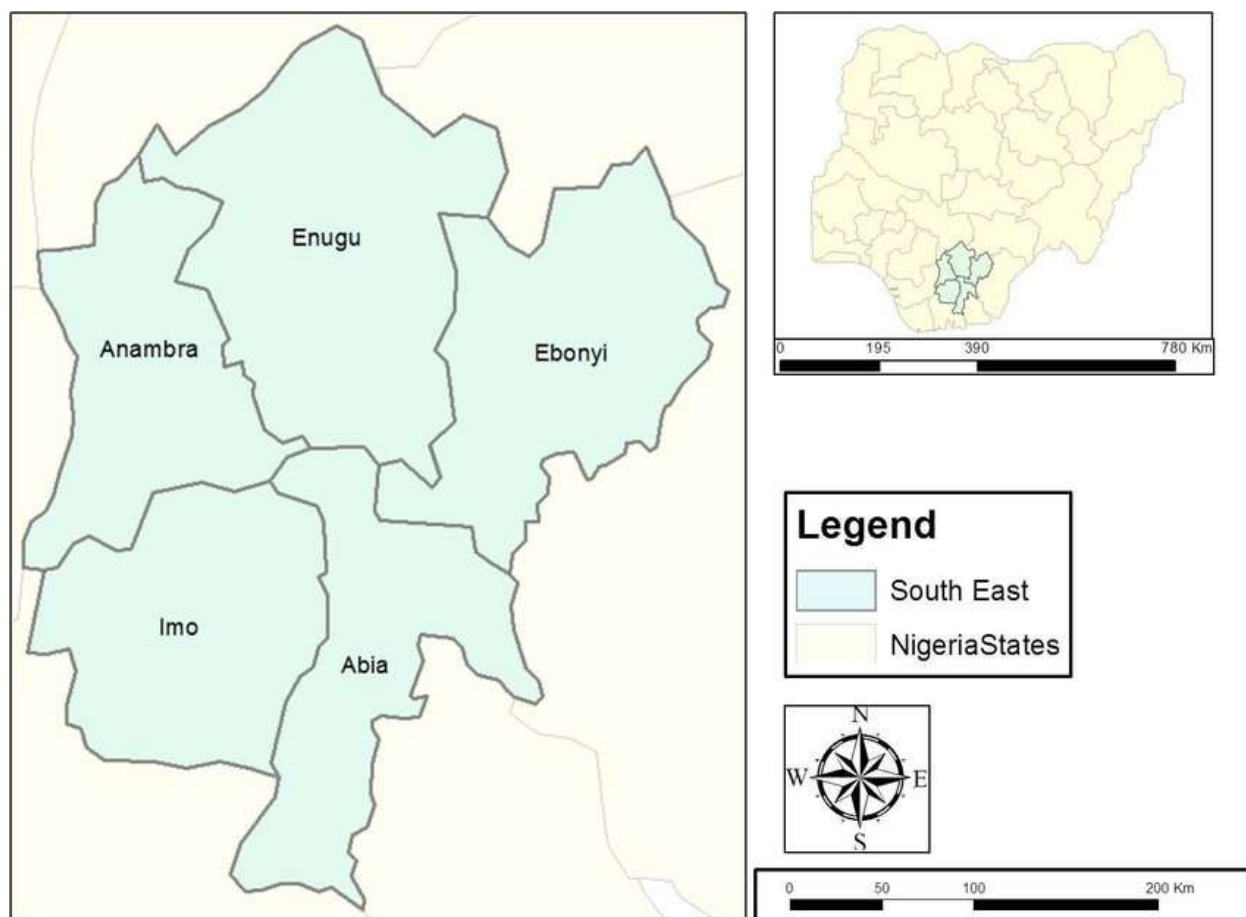
Labelling Theory: Labelling theory posits that the designation of a group as criminal or terrorist can shape its identity and behaviour, often driving members toward more radical actions (Becker, 1963). It is a sociological crime theory that asserts that if a person or group is labelled with crime there are chances overtime the group behaviour would accept and begin to act in accordance to the label. By branding IPOB a terrorist organization, the Nigerian government may have inadvertently legitimized more extreme tactics among some of its members or sympathizers. This theory highlights the risks associated with labels that lack clear evidence or public consensus.

Grievance-Based Rebellion Theory: Grievance-based rebellion theory argues that socio-political and economic inequalities fuel separatist movements (Gurr, 1970). The theory is a strand of rational choice theory. The theory proposes that relative deprivation and the grievance it produces fuels conflict. IPOB's agitation is rooted in the perceived marginalization of the Southeast region, including unequal access to political power, economic opportunities, and public services (Ibeanu et al., 2016). Addressing these grievances is essential for achieving lasting peace. The theory is upheld on its position that grievances could spur conflict as years of bottled-up resentment of the Nigerian government were not expressed due to military rule. With the dawn of democracy, these grievances found expression in the formation of IPOB and other rights groups in Nigeria. However, the theory is criticized on the premise of its inability to analyse continuous conflict in certain situation around the globe. Moreover, Idachaba and Nneli (2018) argues that among all the explanations that popularized the presence of IPOB in the Southeast, the most dominant is the marginalization narrative. Pointing at the current state of infrastructure in the Southeast as evidence of marginalization, although there is obvious infrastructural decay in the Southeast especially the road, however the authors supports the position of Ibarahim (2015) marginalization issue in Nigeria is more of a class issue that affects all Nigerians. Basic social infrastructure are lacking in virtually all parts of Nigeria and this is the conspiracy of the elites irrespective of their region. Additionally, the relationship between the Igbo populace and their elites has been called to scrutiny. For instance, Duruji (2010), argued that the pro-Biafran separatist agitators seldom blame the state and local governments for not performing optimally in terms of addressing infrastructural deficit in the region rather, the always blame the federal government. Also, the agitators mostly fail to question Igbo representatives at the federal level who are unable to attract meaningful developmental projects to the southeast. As against self-marginalization perhaps the IPOB agitators could also begin to scrutinize the performance of those entrusted with state apparatus of influence among themselves.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Southeast of Nigeria, where the IPOB holds swear. The Southeast comprises Abia, Anambra, Imo, Enugu and Ebonyi States. The indigenes are mostly commercial-oriented and involved in diverse trade with few manufacturing firms. The Southeast is said to have a combined estimated population of 36 million people, about 18% of the Nigerian total population (World Population Review, 2022). It is said that close to 70 per cent of the region's population live in rural areas. The area is mostly inhabited in areas stretching from Onitsha through Awka-Orlu-Owerri to Calabar. The people are traditionally attached to land, which is considered a significant inheritance from ancestors, which makes them not easily give it up as it supports increasing population and livelihood (Okali et al., 2001). The study adopted the focus content analysis method identifying sentences, words and phrases that are relevant to the research question.

Map of Southeast region of Nigeria showing the five east States.



Source: Anejionu, Nwilo, and Ebinne, (2013).

The first set data were collected from secondary sources by extracting relevant information from vital documents, including textbooks, journal publication interviews, and the Internet, newspapers,

and research publications. The data were compiled and presented in tables. The study conducted a literature search from data basis such as Google scholar, online libraries and relevant peer reviewed journals. The inclusion criteria were studies that focused on security implications of IPOB proscription.

Secondly, the primary data was collected through qualitative expert interviews. Using a purposive sampling technique, three states, Abia, Imo, and Anambra, were selected from the five states that make up Southeast Nigeria. The IPOB social movement has brought enormous social upheaval in these three states (Adebayo, 2022). The authors visited academic staff in Universities, Security agencies, non-governmental organizations, and Government staff to survey the environments and introduce the study to potential participants through convenience (Atkinson, R. and Flint, 2001). After formal introductions, the study was introduced to them and asked if they would be willing to participate. The process facilitated the recruitment of initial participants through the snowball method (Ghaljaie, Naderifar & Goli, 2017). The first group of participants then encouraged others to participate. Inclusion criteria include working as university staff, public servants, security agencies staff, and non-governmental organizations. All currently residing within the selected States in South East, Nigeria, and 18 years and above.

The researchers conducted a total of twelve expert interviews with the assistance of three research assistants. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured question modeled on security implications of proscription of IPOB. We conducted the interviews using the English language, though some questions were explained in Igbo and Pidgin English for effective comprehension of the issue. The researchers moderated the interview while the assistants took notes and digitally recorded the procedure using a voice recorder with permission from the participants. The researchers preserved the anonymity of the participants by using pseudonyms as their names. The data was analyzed thematically using deductive and inductive methods to identify rich and detailed patterns of meaning in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, read many times, and cross-checked for accuracy. The authors coded ten transcripts using participants' own words and phrases (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). The study was limited by constrain in scheduling appointments to interview the participants. Secondly, the sensitive nature of the study made it that most study participants refused to participate citing fear of government intimidation or harassment.

FINDINGS

The some of the attacks unleashed on Nigerian police by unknown gun men in the South –East Nigeria are compressed and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: List of attacks on Public Infrastructure in South-east Nigeria

Date	Location	Nature of attacks/casualties	Sources
23 Feb. 2021	Abayi Police Station, World Bank	Two police officers lost their lives whilst the gunmen carted away arms	<i>Ripples Nigeria</i> . (2021). “Again, gunmen attack police station in Aba, kill two officers.” 23 February.

	Housing Estate, Aba	and ammunition from the station.	https://www.ripplesnigeria.com/again-gunmen-attack-police-station-in-aba-kill-two-officers/ .
24 Feb. 2021	Ekwulobia in Anambra State	A police officer was killed and a patrol vehicle was razed down.	Yusuf, K. (2021). "Timeline: 10 police officers killed, six stations razed in two weeks." <i>Premium Times</i> , 19 March. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/449892-timeline-10-police-officers-killed-six-stations-razed-in-two-weeks.html
25 Feb. 2021	MCC in Calabar, Cross River	Four police officers were killed.	Yusuf, K. (2021). "Timeline: 10 police officers killed, six stations razed in two weeks." <i>Premium Times</i> , 19 March. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/449892-timeline-10-police-officers-killed-six-stations-razed-in-two-weeks.html
1 Mar. 2021	Essien Udim LGA, Akwa Ibom State	A police station was attacked, including vehicles and motorcycles parked within the station.	Yusuf, K. (2021). "Timeline: 10 police officers killed, six stations razed in two weeks." <i>Premium Times</i> , 19 March. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/449892-timeline-10-police-officers-killed-six-stations-razed-in-two-weeks.html
9 Mar. 2021	Isinweke Police Station, Ihitte/Uboma LGA, Imo State	A police station and several vehicles were burnt down.	Alozie, C. (2021). "Breaking: Another police station, vehicles burnt in Imo." <i>Vanguard</i> , 9 May. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/03/breaking-another-police-station-vehicles-burnt-in-imo/ .
18 Mar. 2021	A police patrol team at Okacha Junction in Neni, Anaocha LGA, Anambra State	A police officer was killed whilst two others sustained gunshot injuries	Ukpong, C. (2021). "Gunmen attack police patrol, kill officer in Anambra." <i>Premium Times</i> , 18 March. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-east/449858-breaking-gunmen-attack-police-patrol-kill-officer-in-anambra.html .
30 Mar. 2021	A police patrol team at Ikot Akpan community, Essien Udim	Killing of the Commander of the state Police Command's Quick Intervention Unit, CSP Ben Ajide and two other officers.	Odey, P. (2021). "CSP, two others killed, four missing in IPOB, police clash – Command." <i>Punch</i> , 1 April. https://punchng.com/csp-two-others-killed-four-missing-in-ipob-police-clash-command/ .

	LGA, Akwa-Ibom State		
5 Apr. 2021	Imo State Police Command and Nigerian Correctional Services	Imo State Police Command headquarters, Owerri was razed; almost all the vehicles parked at the command headquarters were burnt. 1,844 inmates of the Nigerian Correctional Services were also freed.	Kuteyi, E. (2021). "At Least One Dead As Gunmen Attack Imo Prison, Police Headquarters." <i>Channels Television</i> , 5 April. https://www.channelstv.com/2021/04/05/gunmen-attack-imo-prison-free-inmates-and-burn-facility/ .
19 Apr. 2021	Uzuakoli Police Station, Bende LGA, Abia State	The police station was burnt down	Sampson, O. (2021). "Gunmen attack another police station in Abia." <i>The Sun</i> , 19 April. https://www.sunnewsonline.com/gunmen-attack-another-police-station-in-abia/ .
21 Apr. 2021	Adani Police Station, Uzo-Uwani LGA, Enugu State	Two police operatives were shot dead whilst the police station was set ablaze.	Isiguzo, C., Arinze, G. and Nworie, B. (2021). "Gunmen Kill Four Officers in Attack on Enugu Police Station." <i>This Day</i> , 26 May. https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/05/26/gunmen-kill-four-officers-in-attack-on-enugu-police-station/ .
24 Apr. 2021	Four checkpoints from Elele to Omagwa in Ikwerre LGA, Rivers State	Eight operatives were killed: three military personnel, three customs officials and two policemen. Guns and two operational vehicles were also carted away.	Odiegwu, M. (2021). "Updated: How gunmen killed eight security operatives in Rivers checkpoint attacks." <i>The Nation</i> , 25 April. https://thenationonlineng.net/updated-how-gunmen-killed-eight-security-operatives-in-rivers-checkpoint-attacks/ .
27 Apr. 2021	A checkpoint at Urua Inyang, Ika LGA, Akwa Ibom State	Hoodlums killed two police officers, carted away rifles and burnt down a police van.	Daka, T., Abuh, A., Udejah, G., Osuji, C., Nzeagwu, U. and Jegede, A. (2021). "Again, unknown gunmen raze Abia police station, kill two cops in A'ibom." <i>The Guardian</i> , 29 April. https://guardian.ng/news/again-unknown-gunmen-raze-abia-police-station-kill-two-cops-in-aibom/ .
27 Apr. 2021	Naval checkpoint near Enamel Ware Junction, Onitsha-	One naval personnel was killed whilst two others were injured.	Daka, T., Abuh, A., Udejah, G., Osuji, C., Nzeagwu, U. and Jegede, A. (2021). "Again, unknown gunmen raze Abia police station, kill two cops in A'ibom." <i>The Guardian</i> , 29 April. https://guardian.ng/news/again-unknown-gunmen-raze-abia-police-station-kill-two-cops-in-aibom/ .

	Owerri highway		unknown-gunmen-raze-abia-police-station-kill-two-cops-in-aibom/
1 May 2021	Ibiaku Ntok Okpo Divisional Police Office, Ikono LGA, Akwa Ibom State	Two police officers were killed, whilst facilities, vehicles and other valuables at the station were destroyed.	Bassey, O. (2021). "Again, gunmen kill cops, burn police vehicles in A'ibom." <i>This Day</i> , 2 May. https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/05/02/again-gunmen-kill-cops-burn-police-vehicles-in-aibom/ .
1 May 2021	Abaomege Police Station, Onicha LGA, Ebonyi State	A police officer was killed whilst another got injured.	Ezekiel, E. (2021). "Gunmen Attack Ebonyi Police Station, Kill Officer." Channels Television, 2 May. https://www.channelstv.com/2021/05/02/gunmen-attack-ebonyi-police-station-kill-officer/ .
6 May 2021	Obiozara Police Station, Ohaozara LGA, Ebonyi State	A police officer was killed, office of the DPO and admin building were razed down.	Okutu, P. (2021). "Unknown gunmen attack another Police Station in Ebonyi, kill policeman." <i>Vanguard</i> , 6 May. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/05/unknown-gunmen-attack-another-police-station-in-ebonyi-kill-policeman/ .
7 May 2021	A checkpoint at Choba Bridge, Port Harcourt; Rumuji Police Station, Emohua LGA; Elimgbu Police Station, Igwuruta Road, Port Harcourt, Rivers State	At least seven police officers were killed at the checkpoint, two more officers were killed at Rumuji Police Station, a patrol car was set ablaze and five assault rifles were stolen.	News agency of Nigeria. (2021). "Gunmen attack police stations in Rivers kill 7 officers." <i>The Guardian</i> , 8 May. https://guardian.ng/news/gunmen-attack-police-stations-in-rivers-kill-7-officers/ .
8 May 2021	Odoro Ikpe Police Station, Ini LGA, Akwa Ibom State	Five police officers and the wife of a serving police officer were killed. Some police vehicles were also set ablaze.	Bassey, O. (2021). "Again, gunmen attack A'ibom Police, kill five officers." <i>This Day</i> , 9 May. https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/05/09/again-gunmen-attack-aibom-police-kill-five-officers/ .

12 May 2021	Bende Divisional Police Station, Bende LGA, Abia State	Criminal suspects were freed, two vehicles and three motorcycles were burnt.	Nwankwo, S. (2021). "Breaking: Gunmen attack another police station in Abia." <i>The Nation</i> , 13 May. https://thenationonlineng.net/breaking-gunmen-attack-another-police-station-in-abia/ .
25 May 2021	Iwollo Police Division, Ezeagu LGA, Enugu State	Four police officers were killed whilst the police station was set ablaze.	Isiguzo, C., Arinze, G. and Nworie, B. (2021). "Gunmen kill four officers in attack on Enugu Police Station." <i>This Day</i> , 26 May. https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/05/26/gunmen-kill-four-officers-in-attack-on-enugu-police-station/ .
6 Jun. 2021	Ashaka Police Station, Ndokwa East LGA, Delta State	The police station and a patrol vehicle were set ablaze.	Festus Ahon, F. and Akuopha, O. (2021). "Again, gunmen set police station, patrol vehicle ablaze in Delta." <i>Vanguard</i> , 6 June. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/06/again-gunmen-set-police-station-patrol-vehicle-ablaze-in-delta/ .

Source: Nwangwu, 2022.

Table 1, every state in the Southeast and other neighbouring states in the South-south have experienced some form of attack or insecurity, particularly police stations and checkpoints. Since February 2021, a series of deadly attacks have been launched on security formations, especially on police stations and checkpoints. It is worth noting that most of these attacks were fuelled by several attacks unleashed on IPOB, coupled with the continuous arrest and detention of Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of IPOB.

Aside from attacks on public infrastructure in the Southeast, the IPOB declared a civil disobedience protest known as Sit-at-home Order which usually takes place on Mondays as a strategy meant to react spontaneously to the arrest of their leader; but also to commemorate important days in the History of Biafra Struggle in showing solidarity with the leader of IPOB; and also to make Nigerian government free Nnamdi Kanu from what they perceived as unlawful detention/prisons (Omole, 2021; Owioye, Ezeanya, & Obiegbunam, 2022). However, the Sit-at-Home Order has received mixed feelings in the Southeast, especially in terms of political and economic activities.

The Sit-at-home Order which usually takes place every Monday as a major strategy employed by IPOB member cum supporters is not only meant to react spontaneously to the arrest of their leader; but also to commemorate important days in the History of Biafra Struggle in showing solidarity with the leader of IPOB; and also to make Nigerian government free Nnamdi Kanu from what they perceived as unlawful detention/prison (Omole, 2021; Owioye, Ezeanya, & Obiegbunam, 2022). But this Sit-At-Home Order has been received with mixed feelings and reactions with respect to

the impact and consequences for several sectors in the Southeast, especially political and economic activities. The consequences of IPOB Sit-at-home orders within the states are captured in Table 2;

Table 2: Disruption of economic activity in the Southeast by IPOB Sit-at-Home Order

<i>S/N</i>	<i>STATE</i>	<i>Percentage of Opinions</i>
1	Ebony	84%
2	Enugu	74.42
3	Anambra	55
4	Imo	5
5	Abia	42

Source: SBM Intelligence Report, 2021

Based on the opinion percentages of the intelligence reports on disruption of economic activity by IPOB's Sit-at-Home Order in South-East Nigeria by States, the mean or average percentage is $255.42 \div 5 = 51.084\%$ (sum of the percentages divided by five states), approximated to 51%. Out of the five states, only the percentage of opinions in Abia state is below the average; the percentages of opinions for other states are above the average.

Table 3: Lastly, the study compiled and presented the effect of IPOB on socio-economic development according to different sectors

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Sector</i>	<i>Percentage of Opinions</i>
1	Transporters	73.3%
2	Hospitality Industry	71.4%
3	Self-Employed	73.9%
4	Artisans	63.1%
5	Blue-collar formal sector workers	64.5%
6	Students	47.6%
7	White-collar formal sector workers	49.53%

Source: SBM Intelligence Report, 2021

From Table 3 above, it can be observed that all except the educational sector have witnessed more than 50% of socio-economic losses since the inception of the IPOB radical approach following the government attack, arrest and detention of its leader and members. The average percentage for the various sectors is $442.33 \div 7 = 63.19\%$ (sum of sector percentages divided by the seven sectors). It could be observed that out of the seven sectors, only 3 (Education, Artisans and white-collar formal sector workers) failed below the average of 63.19%, the rest of the sectors are above average.

Qualitative data

The implications of proscription on sustained security of the Southeast.

The data revealed several dire consequences of the proscription of IPOB on security. Issues relating to increased tension, human rights abuses escalation of violence were all identified. The

arrest and continuous detentions of some IPOB members highlight human rights abuse. The complications have caused a trust deficit among the people of Southeast the Nigerian state as many are disenchanted from participating even in the electoral process; the popular feeling among the people is they are not part of Nigeria. Some extracts from the interview are as follows,

"I think the proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organization has only succeeded in increasing tensions and radicalising more youths in the Southeast. Instead of addressing the underlying grievances, the government has chosen to use force, which has only escalated the situation." - (Male, 35, Igbo nationalist)

Some of the underlying grievances, as stated earlier, are infrastructural deficit, political exclusion, and deliberate isolation from top armed forces appointments. As much as the southeast does not have a good road network, the study has earlier revealed that some of these issues are a national decimal as such, might not be peculiar to the southeast, although the IPOB interest is mainly focused on improving the circumstances of existence in the southeast. Another study participant highlighted issues on human rights

"The proscription has led to widespread human rights abuses by security forces. Many innocent people have been arrested, detained, and even killed. The government's actions have created a climate of fear and impunity." - (Female, 28, Human rights activist)

The IPOB has consistently distanced itself from violence, emphasising civil disobedience as its strategy. However, the group claimed it formed the Eastern Security Network (ESN) as a security apparatus to combat marauding killer herdsmen and other forms of insecurity in the southeast. Although some have questioned the activities of ESN, describing it as lawless, this is because evidence abounds suggesting abuses. When non-state actors are equipped with instruments of violence, in most cases, abuse is always inevitable. The spate of violent clashes in Nigerian state institutions, especially security outfits, by a group simply described as "Unknown gunmen" is rather strange.

Though the IPOB has vehemently distanced itself from the dangerous activities of "Unknown gunmen", with their leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu condemning and dissociating IPOB from such, some other factions of the separatist agitators led by Simon Ekpa have persistently advocated violence.

The proscription has only emboldened IPOB to become more violent. They see the government's actions as a declaration of war, and they're determined to fight back. The situation is spiralling out of control, and I fear for the future of our region." - (Male, 42, Community leader)

The issue of trust deficit and non-participation in national issues by Southeaster emerged. The IPOB had even issued an order for the Southeasters to boycott national census and elections. Again, some of these acts may have been counterproductive. For instance, the elections went on

with many from the region disenfranchised, secondly the census continuously reflects the under population of the region in national population data.

The proscription has eroded trust in the government's ability to address the grievances of the Igbo people. Many feel that the government is not interested in finding a peaceful solution and is instead using force to suppress dissent. This has created a sense of hopelessness and despair."
- (Male, 50, Traditional ruler)

Another participant explored the fact that the government could have also adopted other options against the proscription of the agitators as terrorist organizations, yet no other nation or global agency has identified them as such...

I think the government should have explored alternative solutions to addressing the IPOB issue. Dialogue and negotiation could have been used to address the underlying grievances and find a peaceful solution. Instead, the government chose to use force, which has only exacerbated the problem." - (Male, 38, Academic)

And lastly, it is said to have weakened the unity of the people of Nigeria as most Southeasters are labelled separatists even though not all belong to IPOB nor approve of their activities. This ethnic profiling has endangered the peaceful co-existence of Nigerians.

"The prescription has created tensions between the Southeast and other regions in Nigeria. Many people in other regions view the Igbo as separatists and traitors, which has created a sense of animosity and hostility. This has made it difficult to build bridges and promote national unity." - (Female, 40, Politician)

Some social, and economic implications

The prescription and its attendant consequences have equally affected the socio-economic development of the area. The study participants highlighted some implications for the economy and education. The region is mostly dominated by people in business and commerce; with the rising spate of insecurity and compulsory Monday-sit at home, many businesses have been forced to close. Similarly, some students from the region had also missed important national exams. This happened at the peak of attacks by "Unknown gunmen". This is because the students avoided going to sit for their exams due to fear of being attacked. Some participants stated thus...

"The proscription has had a devastating impact on the economy of the Southeast. Many businesses have been forced to close, and trade has been severely disrupted. The government's actions have only succeeded in punishing the innocent and exacerbating poverty." - (Female, 32, Business owner)

Another participant highlighted the implications of education

The proscription has disrupted the education sector in the Southeast. Many schools have been forced to close, and students have been unable to attend classes. This has had a devastating impact on the education of our children and the future of our region." - (Female, 30, Teacher)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined the implications of the Nigerian government's ban on IPOB activities, which proscribed them as a terrorist organization. One of the major issues confronting states across the globe is social movements. Social movements appear in diverse forms with different objectives and goals, ranging from animal protection rights to actions against global warming. While these issues might sound very superficial, other rights agitators, such as those advocating for ethnic inclusivity, sexual rights, and rights of religious association, have a more direct effect on social existence. At the extreme end of social movements is the agitation for an independent state. Notably, the IPOB is not a singular separatist agitator globally. For instance, in Europe, the Catalan independence movement seeks independence for Catalonia in Spain, and Kurdish separatists seek independence for Kurdistan in parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. In the Americas, the Quebecois seek independence for Quebec in Canada, and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation seeks autonomy for the indigenous people of Chiapas in Mexico. In Africa, separatist agitation exists in Western Morocco, where the Polisario Front fights for the independence of the Sahrawi people, while the Sudanese, Eritrean, and Somaliland struggles have all existed in the 21st century.

The study found that the proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organisation increased tension in the region. This finding is supported by Nwangwu (2022), who affirmed that the declaration of Operation Python Dance and other government actions not only heightened fear and intimidation but were also linked to the radicalisation of IPOB. Furthermore, the deployment of military forces in response to civil disobedience is perceived as a declaration of war, which even impacted the psyche of non-IPOB supporters. The Nigerian state is accused of employing excessive force to address nonviolent protest. On the other hand, Jaja (2018) affirmed that Operation Python Dance was both necessary and significant, stating that the government was merely upholding the constitution by deploying the military to maintain law and order. Indeed, it is the government's role to maintain law and order; however, a democratic nation might engage in dialogue with IPOB, as this could build trust and confidence in the state, ultimately resolving the conflict without bloodshed.

The major difference between the IPOB separatist agitation and the outcomes of other agitators across the globe lies in the state's approach. While this study found that the state's unleashing of military action and proscription of IPOB caused unrest, disruption of educational activities, and retaliatory attacks on government institutions, other nations adopted a different strategy. Instead of unleashing or proscribing the Catalonians, the Spanish government opted for a referendum, in which the Catalan separatists lost the vote, thereby bringing a peaceful resolution to their agitation

(Penty, 2017). Even though the IPOB had demanded a legitimate referendum as an option, the government continuously rejected it.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organization raises critical questions about the Nigerian government's approach to addressing separatist agitations. While the state has a legitimate interest in maintaining national unity, this must be balanced with respect for human rights and democratic principles. The article concludes that a dialogue-based approach, coupled with policies aimed at addressing socio-economic inequalities and regional grievances, is more likely to yield sustainable outcomes than military repression or blanket proscription. Recommendations include revisiting IPOB's classification, fostering inclusive governance, and implementing targeted development initiatives in the Southeast region. Although seems the government is faced with limited choices in terms of option of action to take especially with regards to continuous detention of the leader of IPOB, the government could consider persuasive appeal with genuine commitment towards addressing the infrastructural deficit not just in southeast rather broadly in Nigeria. Similarly, the IPOB and its hierarchy most demonstrate good faith by accepting the olive branch when it's extended to them.

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