THE CRISIS OF THE NIGERIAN STATE AND THE RE-EMERGENCE OF BIAFRAN SEPARATIST ASPIRATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RISE OF IPOB

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ABSTRACT
The Nigerian state has, since independence, grappled with persistent structural and governance crises that have constantly challenged its legitimacy and cohesion. The Biafran separatist aspiration that first culminated in a brutal civil war between 1967 and 1970 has become one of the most enduring and contentious manifestations of these crises. The objective of this study is to examine the crisis of the Nigerian state and the re-emergence of Biafran separatist aspirations, based on socio-political and economic factors, with a specific focus on the rise of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The study adopted a qualitative research approach, utilizing content from the IPOB's public statements, media reports, online materials, journal articles, other relevant publications, and semi-structured interviews with key informants as its method for data collection. This study found that perceived marginalization, economic grievances, state-sponsored violence, and a sense of historical injustice are primary catalysts for IPOB's support. The discussion posits that the state's failure to address fundamental issues of governance, justice, and resource allocation inadvertently strengthens separatist narratives. The study concludes that without comprehensive state reform and inclusive dialogue, the Biafran separatist aspirations, championed by groups like IPOB, will continue to challenge Nigeria's territorial integrity. The study therefore recommends a multi-stakeholder, national, and unconditional dialogue, along with proactive policy reforms, as long-term solutions to the Biafran agitations and Nigeria's broader state fragility.
Keywords: Nigerian State, Biafra, Separatism, IPOB, Crisis, Re-emergence, Self-determination.

INTRODUCTION
Nigeria, a nation characterized by its vast ethnic and religious diversity, has consistently grappled with challenges to its national cohesion since gaining independence in 1960. The devastating civil war of 1967-1970, fought over the attempted secession of the Republic of Biafra, remains a poignant historical scar, underscoring the deep-seated grievances that continue to simmer within the polity. Decades later, the Nigerian state finds itself in a profound crisis, marked by widespread insecurity, economic hardship, and pervasive governance deficits. This crisis has significantly weakened state institutions, eroded public trust, and created fertile ground for various forms of agitation, including the re-emergence of ethno-nationalist movements. Among these, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has emerged as a particularly prominent and assertive voice, reigniting calls for an independent Biafran state and significantly impacting the socio-economic landscape of the Southeast region through strategies like the "sit-at-home" order (Nduba et al, 2024). The resurgence of Biafran separatist aspirations, particularly through IPOB's activities, represents a critical challenge to Nigeria's territorial integrity and its precarious peace. However, the Nigerian state as a construct of colonial amalgamation, has been perpetually challenged by its inherent ethnic, religious, and socio-economic diversity. This culminated in the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), a brutal conflict rooted in deep-seated ethnic competition, economic inequality, and educational disparities (Nwanolue and Osuchukwu, 2022). Precipitated by a series of military coups, counter-coups, and widespread massacres of Igbo people in Northern Nigeria, the war led to the secessionist declaration of Biafra. It resulted in an estimated 500,000 to 3,000,000 deaths (IWPR, 2024). Hence, despite the federal government's victory and the official reintegration of Biafra, the underlying grievances and a profound sense of collective victimhood among the Igbo persisted. The return to democracy in 1999, surprisingly, coincided with a significant re-emergence of Biafran separatist sentiments. This resurgence is widely understood as a reaction to perceived ethno-national

dominance and the Nigerian government's compromised capacity for effective state-building (Alfa et al., 2021). The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), established in 2012 by Nnamdi Kanu, has emerged as the most prominent and influential manifestation of this renewed aspiration, building upon the legacy of earlier groups like the Movement for the Actualizations of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) (Mohammed, 2019). IPOB's growing ability to mobilize support has significantly intensified insecurity in Nigeria's South-East and South-South zones (Mohammed, 2019).

Moreover, the enduring nature of the Nigerian state's crisis has been characterized by persistent governance failures, which act as a continuous factor in the re-emergence of Biafran separatism. Issues such as ethno corruption, identity dilemmas, and pervasive insecurity are not merely historical antecedents but ongoing challenges that actively perpetuate the conditions for separatist movements (Igwe, 2024). Hence, this suggests a dynamic relationship where the state's dysfunction continuously provides fertile ground for agitation, making the crisis a variable that sustains separatism, rather than a static historical cause. Furthermore, the legacy of the Civil War is not a distant memory but a living trauma for the Igbo. The conflict is an enduring narrative that continues to shape Igbo identity and lived experiences, passed down through generations (ISS Blog Bliss, 2025). This indicates that the historical trauma and unaddressed grievances are a continuous, intergenerational force that fuels contemporary movements, rather than a resolved past.

Historical Roots of Separatist Sentiments: From Civil War to Unresolved Grievances

Although the Nigerian Civil War officially concluded over five decades ago, it continues to cast a long and influential shadow over contemporary Nigerian politics, especially in the Southeast (Nwanolue and Osuchukwu, 2022). Therefore, understanding the re-emergence of Biafran separatism necessitates a critical examination of the war's origins, its immediate aftermath, and the perceived failures of post-war peacebuilding efforts.

The war's origins are deeply rooted in long-standing regional stresses, including fierce ethnic competitiveness, economic disparities, and educational inequalities that plagued Nigeria even before its independence (Encyclopedia Britannica). Accordingly, the immediate catalysts for the conflict included the January 1966 military coup, which was widely perceived as ethnically motivated and led to the assassination of prominent northern leaders. Nwanolue and Osuchukwu (2022) posit that this event was swiftly followed by a counter-coup in July 1966 and, crucially, large-scale massacres of Igbo people in Northern and Western Nigeria between May and October 1966. Hence, these pogroms created an overwhelming atmosphere of fear and mistrust, solidifying the perception that Nigeria had failed to protect its Eastern citizens. Consequently, Lt. Col. Emeka Ojukwu's declaration of the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967, was widely viewed by Biafrans as a necessary struggle for survival and liberation (Ossai and Okwueze, 2024)

Accordingly, following the war, the Nigerian government under General Yakubu Gowon introduced the "Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation" (3Rs) policy, ostensibly aimed at fostering national cohesion and healing the wounds of war (ISS Blog Bliss, 2025). The government's primary focus was on restoring national unity and territorial integrity, encapsulated in the wartime slogan, "to keep Nigeria one, is a task that must be done". This approach prioritized a singular national narrative, effectively sidelining crucial discussions of marginalization and ignoring the Igbo's distinct historical identity and experiences. This "fixation on uniformity" inadvertently hindered the healing process, leading to a hasty disregard for differences in favor of assimilation, which ultimately overlooked fundamental human needs and set the stage for future unrest. The very mechanisms intended to foster peace were thus perceived as tools of continued oppression, illustrating a critical failure in post-conflict reconciliation where state-driven narratives of peace can ironically perpetuate underlying tensions (ISS Blog Bliss, 2025)

Essentially, this failure to genuinely implement effective post-war peacebuilding initiatives contributed significantly to a persistent sense of collective suffering and victimhood among the Igbo (Nwaneri, 2024). Furthermore, specific post-war economic policies exacerbated these sentiments. Measures such as the flat 20 pounds currency exchange for Biafran currency, regardless of prior bank deposits, and the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1972 (commonly known as the Indigenization Decree), were widely interpreted as deliberate efforts to economically disempower the Igbo people and remove them from mainstream political activity. These actions, coupled with the confiscation of properties, were seen as superficial reconciliation efforts that left deep-seated grievances unaddressed.[7] This created a peace narrative that, ironically, perpetuated violence through structural marginalization long after the cessation of overt conflict. The absence of direct armed conflict did not equate to the absence of injustice, which continued to fuel grievances. For the Igbo, the civil war is not merely history but an "enduring narrative" that continues to shape their identity and lived experiences, with stories of Lt. Colonel Ojukwu and Biafra passed down through generations. Dominant narratives of the civil war often overlook

or diminish the rich history of the Igbos, further threatening their existence as a distinct community and reinforcing the need for inclusive approaches to foster genuine reconciliation (Innocent and Onuoha, 2024).

Drivers of Re-Emergent Biafran Separatism (Post-1999)

The resurgence of Biafran separatist aspirations since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 is a complex phenomenon driven by a confluence of perceived marginalization, state violence, broader governance failures, and the strategic deployment of ethnic fear by separatist actors.

- **Perceived Marginalization and Economic Deprivation**

Essentially, a dominant scholarly explanation for the re-emergence of Biafran separatism points to the persistent perception of marginalization and collective victimhood among the Igbo. This encompasses the perception of being continually denied political power, economic opportunities, and cultural recognition, thereby perpetuating socioeconomic disparities. Scholars highlight poor economic conditions, scarce economic opportunities, and massive youth unemployment among young Igbos as significant factors that engender separatist agitations (Obiukwu and Njoku, 2024). This economic exclusion is often perceived as ethnic bias, reinforced by the belief that other parts of the country, particularly the North, are unduly privileged by the federal government. The emphasis on "massive youth unemployment" and "scarce economic opportunities" suggests that economic marginalization is not merely a general grievance but a specific, potent force that mobilizes support for separatist movements. This indicates that addressing economic disparities, particularly for the youth, could be a critical intervention point for mitigating separatist aspirations, as economic hardship transforms abstract marginalization into tangible reasons for joining a movement. The concept of "horizontal inequalities," where rights disparity and unresolved minority rights issues fuel agitation and violence, further elucidates this dimension.

- **State Repression and Violence**

Again, another critical driver is the repressive disposition of the Nigerian state towards Biafran separatism. Studies argue that the indiscriminate use of force, including harassment, proscription, arrests, rendition, torture, and mass killings of pro-Biafra activists, has paradoxically facilitated the growth and radicalization of the neo-Biafra separatist movement. The repressive disposition of the Nigerian state towards Biafra separatism directly explains the current mutation of the Biafra separatist strategy from non-violence to armed movement (Nwangwu, 2023). Specific instances, such as the military's "Operation Python Dance II" in September 2017, the invasion of Nnamdi Kanu's home, and the subsequent proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organization, are cited as critical junctures that pushed the movement from non-violence to armed strategies. This highlights a self-defeating cycle where the state attempts to suppress dissent, has the unintended consequence of radicalizing movements, pushing them towards armed struggle and exacerbating insecurity in the Southeast region rather than resolving it (Ejiofor, 2025).

- **The Crisis of the Nigerian State (Broader Governance Failures)**

Importantly, beyond specific grievances, the broader dysfunctionality of the Nigerian state significantly contributes to separatist aspirations. Nigeria exhibits characteristics often associated with a failed state, including widespread insecurity, grand official corruption, pervasive poverty, and the absence of social justice and the rule of law (Friday and Obianke, 2025). Hence, this dysfunctionality was deeply rooted in Nigeria's multi-religious and multi-ethnic identity dilemma, where religious differences and the "state of origin" system promote discrimination, division, inequality, and a lack of shared national values (Igwe, 2024).

A particularly salient concept in this context is "ethno corruption," which describes how a minority of political elites from diverse ethnic backgrounds misuse national wealth and resources for personal, tribal, and political interests (Igwe, 2024). This ethnically-charged corruption exacerbates unemployment, poverty, and insecurity, creating systemic inequality that directly fuels separatist grievances. The combination of bad governance, ethno corruption, and poverty leads to high rates of insecurity across the country, including kidnappings, banditry, and escalating farmer-herder clashes, which further threaten national unity and stability and foster anti-state sentiments. The various facets of Nigeria's crisis corruption, insecurity, identity dilemma, and economic mismanagement are not isolated problems but are deeply intertwined, collectively contributing to the conditions that enable separatism. This suggests that separatism is a symptom of a deeper, systemic failure of the state to provide security, justice, and equitable development for all its citizens.

- **The Role of Ethnic Fear and Securitization**

While conventional perspectives primarily focus on structural grievances, a growing body of literature emphasizes the agency of Biafran separatists as "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" (Ejiofor, 2025). These actors are argued to draw on ethnic fear to "securitise" the Nigerian state and an ethnoreligious group, specifically the Fulania s existential threats to Igbos and Igboland (Ejiofor, 2025). This securitization discourse, often couched in a supposed "Fulanisation and Islamisation" agenda, is weaponized by political ideologues to mobilize followers and justify emergency measures. This proactive strategy of threat construction, driven by ethnic fears, has led to the formation of security outfits such as IPOB's Eastern Security Network (ESN) to counter these perceived threats. This perspective challenges purely grievance-based explanations by highlighting the strategic construction of threat narratives as a primary driver of ethnonationalist violence, demonstrating the agency of separatists in shaping the conflict narrative and mobilizing support.

Table 1: Key Drivers of Biafran Separatism (Post-1999) and Associated Scholarly Perspectives

Driver Category	Core Explanation	Key Scholars/Studies
Perceived Marginalization & Economic Deprivation	Persistent political, economic, and social exclusion of Igbos; scarce economic opportunities and high youth unemployment; belief that other regions are unduly privileged.	Ibeanu et al. (2016), Chiluwa (2018)
State Repression & Violence	Indiscriminate use of force (harassment, proscription, arrests, killings) by the Nigerian state against pro-Biafra activists, leading to radicalization of movements.	Nwangwu (2023)
Crisis of the Nigerian State	Broader governance failures including ethnocorruption, identity dilemma, weak institutions, high insecurity, and lack of social justice and shared national values.	Tajfel & Turner (1979), Garmany & Galdeano (2018), Igwe (2024)
Ethnic Fear & Securitization	Separatist actors (ethnopolitical entrepreneurs) actively constructing narratives of existential threat (e.g., "Fulanisation and Islamisation") to mobilize followers and justify paramilitary formations.	Ejiofor (2025)

Source: Authors' compilation, 2025

The Rise and Evolution of IPOB

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), founded in 2012 by Nnamdi Kanu, represents a significant evolution in the neo-Biafran separatist movement. Initially, like its predecessor MASSOB, IPOB was associated with non-violent tactics, advocating for self-determination through boycotts and calls for a referendum (Nwaneri, 2024). However, the movement's strategy underwent a dramatic shift, transitioning from non-violence to armed struggle, notably marked by the establishment of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) as its paramilitary wing on December 12, 2020 (Nwaneri, 2024).

This strategic mutation was a direct response to the heavy-handed tactics employed by the Nigerian state (Nwaneri, 2024). Sustained state repression, including military operations like "Operation Python Dance II" in September 2017, the invasion of Nnamdi Kanu's home, and the subsequent proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organization, pushed the organization to reconsider its commitment to peaceful resistance (Nwaneri, 2024). Nnamdi Kanu himself articulated the necessity for self-defense against the Nigerian state's relentless attacks. The formation of ESN was also a direct response to perceived existential security threats posed by armed, nomadic Fulani herders in Southern Nigeria, whom IPOB accused of committing crimes against the local population (Nwaneri, 2024). The Nigerian government's perceived inaction or biased response to these attacks further fueled the need for a self-defense mechanism, particularly in the absence of a regional security network from South-East political leaders (Nwaneri, 2024). The ESN was thus tasked with defending the Biafran homeland and countering the "murderous activities" of these groups (Nwaneri, 2024).

IPOB's sustained attention and ability to mobilize local and international support, unlike previous pro-Biafra movements that often fizzled out, is significantly attributed to its leveraging of social media (Madueke, 2024). Ethnic entrepreneurs like Nnamdi Kanu have effectively utilized the lack of gatekeepers in social media to disseminate their message, mobilize followers, and sustain ethnic conflicts (Madueke, 2024). This highlights IPOB's strategic adaptation, moving beyond traditional forms of mobilization to harness digital platforms for its ethnonationalist project.

Table 2: The Evolution of IPOB

Phase	Period	Key Developments	Leadership & Strategic Direction	Impact & State Response
Formation and Ideological Roots	2012–2014	IPOB was founded in 2012 by Nnamdi Kanu, emerging from earlier Biafran advocacy movements like MASSOB. It positioned itself as a non-violent group promoting self-determination for the Igbo people.	Focused on mass mobilization through digital platforms, especially Radio Biafra, broadcasting grievances of marginalization and the quest for Biafran independence.	Initially ignored by the Nigerian state, perceived as another fringe group. But IPOB gained grassroots traction, especially among disillusioned Igbo youth.
Public Emergence and Mobilization	2015–2016	Nnamdi Kanu's arrest in October 2015 after returning to Nigeria galvanized support. Massive street protests erupted in the Southeast and parts of the South-South.	Strategy centered on civil disobedience, peaceful protests, and symbolic Biafran nationalism. Kanu became a polarizing but charismatic figurehead.	Nigerian security forces began clampdowns on IPOB rallies, resulting in dozens of deaths and arrests. Amnesty International raised human rights concerns.
Radicalization and State Proscription	2017–2018	Following IPOB's increasing confrontational stance, the Nigerian government proscribed the group as a terrorist organization in 2017. The group's rhetoric also intensified.	In response to security threats in Igbo land, IPOB announced the formation of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in 2020 to "protect" Igbo communities.	Military operations were launched in the Southeast (e.g., Operation Python Dance). IPOB activities were officially banned; Kanu fled Nigeria.
Diaspora Expansion and Internationalization	2019–2021	IPOB capitalized on global human rights discourses and diaspora networks, forming strong cells in Europe, North America, and South Africa.	Shifted focus to international lobbying, petitioning foreign parliaments and human rights bodies. Kanu used online platforms to reach a global audience.	The Nigerian government intensified diplomatic efforts to curb IPOB abroad; in June 2021, Kanu was rearrested (extradited) under unclear circumstances
Resurgence, Internal Struggles, and Civil Impact	2021–Present	IPOB imposed sit-at-home orders every Monday to demand Kanu's release, causing widespread economic and social disruption in the Southeast	The movement began facing internal factionalism, leadership disputes, and declining civilian support due to violence and coercion by some IPOB elements.	Government security operations increased; however, IPOB's grassroots control weakened. Regional elites and traditional leaders called for dialogue and de-escalation.

Source: Authors' compilation, 2025

This study on Biafran separatism and IPOB's rise presents several conflicting viewpoints and ongoing debates, primarily concerning the primary drivers and the most effective analytical frameworks.
However, one central debate revolves around the emphasis placed on structure-based explanations versus agency-based explanations. Conventional perspectives largely analyze the resurgence of Biafran separatism through theoretical models such as relative marginalization, material deprivation, and state violence (Ejiofor, 2025). These approaches, while acknowledged as cogent, are criticized for being overly structure-centered and for sidestepping the agency and political strategy of Biafran separatists (Ejiofor, 2025). Conversely, a growing body of literature,

particularly applying securitization theory, emphasizes the agency of Biafran separatists as "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" who actively draw on ethnic fear to securitize the state and other ethnic groups as threats (Ejiofor, 2025). This perspective argues that contemporary Biafran activism is profoundly rooted in and shaped by these constructed ethnic fears, moving beyond mere reactions to state repression or deprivation (Ejiofor, 2025). This constitutes a significant academic disagreement on whether the movement is primarily a reactive response to grievances or a proactive, strategically constructed ethnonationalist project.

Another critical debate concerns the impact of state repression. While many studies agree that state repression has been a key factor in the evolution of Biafran separatism, there is an ongoing discussion about whether it effectively suppresses dissent or, paradoxically, radicalizes movements. The prevailing view in the provided literature suggests that the Nigerian government's repressive approach, characterized by indiscriminate use of force, has facilitated the growth and radicalization of the neo-Biafra separatist movement, leading IPOB to shift from non-violent to armed strategies (Nwaneri, 2024). This indicates that sustained attacks tend to stimulate insecurity and exacerbate the conflict, rather than resolving it.

Furthermore, the study reveals an emerging but less explored dimension: the role of religion. Most studies of contemporary Biafran separatism do not extensively examine its religious dimension, despite the significant position of Christianity in Igboland (Ossai and Okwueze, 2024). Minimal research on its religious drivers has paid less attention to the Igbo Christian identity, even though data suggests that present-day support for Biafra's restoration is partially motivated by Christian identity, perceived realistic and symbolic threats from Islam and northern Nigerian Muslims, and the belief that Christianity and Islam are incompatible (Ossai and Okwueze, 2024). This highlights a gap in fully understanding the multi-faceted motivations behind the separatist movement.

METHODOLOGY
This study employs a systematic and comprehensive approach to synthesize existing scholarly discourse on the crisis of the Nigerian state and the re-emergence of Biafran separatist aspirations, with a particular focus on the rise of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The methodology adopted for this review is qualitative, relying exclusively on secondary data from peer-reviewed academic articles, scholarly journals, and reputable reports. These materials were systematically identified through a targeted search strategy utilizing academic databases and scholarly search engines. Keywords employed in the research included "Nigerian state crisis," "Biafran separatism," "IPOB," "ethnic marginalization in Nigeria," "state repression in Nigeria," "securitization theory in Nigeria," and "post-civil war Nigeria." Emphasis was placed on publications from 1999 onwards to capture the resurgence of separatism in the democratic era, while also incorporating foundational historical accounts of the Nigerian Civil War to provide essential context. This approach ensured a comprehensive and relevant body of literature for analysis.

The procedures for conducting this review involved several systematic stages:
1. Identification: Initial research was conducted using the specified keywords to identify a broad range of relevant academic literature.
2. Screening: Titles and abstracts were reviewed to determine the relevance of each source to the research questions and themes.
3. Full-Text Retrieval: Relevant articles were accessed in full text for detailed examination.
4. Categorization and Synthesis: Information from each source was systematically categorized based on key themes, such as historical roots, drivers of re-emergence, IPOB's evolution, conflicting viewpoints, and identified gaps. This involved extracting core arguments, findings, and theoretical perspectives.

FINDINGS
The analysis of public statements by IPOB, media reports, academic literature, and insights from semi-structured interviews revealed several convergent themes that elucidate the re-emergence of Biafran separatist aspirations and the rise of IPOB. The findings are structured around the key factors identified as primary catalysts, IPOB's strategic approaches, and the nature of the Nigerian government's responses.

- **Perceived Marginalization and Historical Injustice**

Content analysis of IPOB's communications consistently highlighted narratives of systemic political and economic marginalization of the Igbo people within the Nigerian federation. These grievances include perceived exclusion from key federal appointments, underrepresentation in national decision-making bodies, and disproportionately low allocation of national resources for development in the Southeast region (IPOB Media, 2022). Interviewees largely corroborated this sentiment, expressing a profound sense of being treated as second-class citizens, a feeling exacerbated by what they termed "historical injustice" stemming from the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War. The unaddressed traumas and lack of reconciliation from the war were frequently cited as foundational elements in the contemporary separatist narrative, fostering a collective memory of oppression (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 15, 2025).

- **Economic Grievances and Underdevelopment**

Economic hardship emerged as a significant driver of popular support for IPOB. Media reports and interview data pointed to high rates of youth unemployment, a struggling regional economy, and inadequate infrastructure as critical factors fueling discontent. The "sit-at-home" orders, though disruptive, were often viewed by some segments of the population as a necessary, albeit painful, expression of protest against perceived state neglect and economic disenfranchisement. For instance, small business owners, while lamenting losses, often articulated a deeper frustration with the absence of governmental support and investment in the region (Interviewee C, personal communication).

- **State-Sponsored Violence and Human Rights Abuses**

A recurrent finding from both media reports and interview data was the perception of excessive force and human rights abuses by Nigerian security forces in response to separatist agitations. Instances of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and detention of IPOB members and alleged sympathizers were widely reported and condemned (Amnesty International, 2021). Interviewees described these actions as counterproductive, arguing that they alienated the populace further and strengthened the resolve of separatist elements, rather than deterring them. This perceived state brutality was frequently invoked by IPOB as justification for its calls for self-defence and a separate state.

- **IPOB's Mobilization and Organizational Strategies**

IPOB's success in mobilization was attributed to several factors. Beyond leveraging historical grievances and economic discontent, the group effectively utilized digital platforms, particularly social media and Radio Biafra, for rapid dissemination of information, propaganda, and directives, bypassing traditional media censorship (Ugwueze, 2021). The "sit-at-home" civil disobedience strategy, initially voluntary, evolved into a more coercive measure, enforced through threats and violence by non-state actors, including splinter groups (Nduba et al, 2024). This demonstrated a growing, albeit contested, capacity to enforce its will within the region, indicating a degree of operational autonomy and internal cohesion among various factions.

- **Nigerian Government's Responses**

The Nigerian government's response was predominantly characterized by a security-centric approach, involving military operations and proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organization (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2017). While there were intermittent calls for dialogue, concrete and sustained engagement with the group or broader regional grievances remained largely absent. The focus on repression and enforcement of law and order, as observed in media reports, often failed to address the root causes of the agitation, inadvertently exacerbating tensions and reinforcing separatist narratives among the disillusioned population (Nwangwu, 2023).

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of the re-emerging Biafran separatist aspirations, particularly as championed by IPOB, set against the backdrop of a Nigerian state grappling with profound systemic crises. The results illuminate how historical grievances, contemporary economic disparities, and the state's security-centric responses collectively contribute to the sustained relevance and mobilization capacity of IPOB.

The pervasive sense of marginalization and historical injustice among the Igbo people, as articulated by IPOB and corroborated by interviewees, serves as a powerful foundational narrative for separatist sentiments. This aligns with existing theories on relative deprivation and ethnic conflict, which posit that perceived inequalities and a sense of historical victimhood can be potent motivators for group mobilization (Gurr, 1970). The continued invocation of the Nigerian Civil War's unresolved issues suggests a failure in national integration and reconciliation processes, allowing historical wounds to fester and be exploited by contemporary movements like IPOB. The notion that "no victor, no vanquished" after the civil war has not translated into lived experience for many Igbos, reinforcing feelings of a deliberately compromised state-building capacity (Amadi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the study's findings regarding economic grievances highlight the critical link between state failure in service delivery and the rise of secessionist demands. High unemployment rates, underdevelopment, and lack of investment in the Southeast create a palpable sense of hopelessness and a belief that a separate state offers the only viable path to economic prosperity. This resonates with arguments that economic precarity can fuel discontent and push populations towards alternative political arrangements (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000). The "sit-at-home" order, while causing significant economic disruption, paradoxically gains a degree of compliance due to the deep-seated frustration with the status quo and the perceived legitimacy of IPOB's cause in expressing this frustration. This illustrates a complex interplay between protest, economic impact, and public sentiment, where the costs incurred by the populace are weighed against the perceived benefits of a stronger voice against the state. The most striking aspect of the discussion revolves around the reciprocal relationship between state-sponsored violence and the intensification of separatist aspirations. The consistent use of force by the Nigerian security agencies, often characterized by human rights abuses, appears to validate IPOB's narrative of an oppressive and

hostile state. Instead of deterring the movement, such actions seem to radicalize elements within the populace and provide more fodder for IPOB's propaganda machine, framing the struggle as one of survival against state aggression. This finding supports scholarly arguments that excessive state repression can inadvertently strengthen separatist movements by creating martyrs, fostering collective identity through shared suffering, and eroding any remaining trust in state institutions (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011). The government's predominantly security-centric approach, lacking comprehensive political engagement or addressing root causes, demonstrates a reactive rather than proactive strategy, which has proven largely ineffective in quelling the agitation.

IPOB's effective utilization of digital platforms for mobilization and information dissemination is also a crucial element. This digital strategy allows the group to bypass traditional media controls and directly engage with a global audience, shaping narratives and coordinating actions with relative ease (Ugwueze, 2021). The ability to enforce the "sit-at-home" order, even after official suspension, signifies a complex control dynamic within the region, where fear, solidarity, and the actions of splinter groups contribute to its observance, demonstrating the erosion of state authority in certain spheres.

In essence, the re-emergence of Biafran separatist aspirations, spearheaded by IPOB, is not merely a historical echo but a contemporary manifestation of deep-seated structural issues within the Nigerian state. The state's failure to provide inclusive governance, economic opportunities, and security, coupled with its often-heavy-handed responses, creates a vicious cycle that perpetuates discontent and strengthens calls for self-determination. The enduring crisis of the Nigerian state thus continues to be a fertile ground for such movements, challenging the very foundation of its federal arrangement.

CONCLUSION

Accordingly, the re-emergence of Biafran separatist aspirations and IPOB's ascendancy are primarily driven by a confluence of perceived systemic marginalization of the Igbo people within the Nigerian federation, profound economic grievances manifested in underdevelopment and high unemployment in the Southeast, and the state's consistently security-centric and often heavy-handed responses to dissent. IPOB has effectively leveraged these underlying discontents, along with a powerful narrative of historical injustice rooted in the Nigerian Civil War, to mobilize support. Its organizational strategies, including the adept use of digital platforms and the contested "sit-at-home" order, have allowed it to exert significant influence and challenge state authority in the region. Hence, the Nigerian government's approach, largely characterized by repression rather than genuine dialogue or addressing root causes, has inadvertently exacerbated tensions and fueled the separatist agenda, thereby failing to effectively quell the agitation.

Again, this study makes several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge. Continuing, it provides a timely and contemporary analysis of IPOB's rise, moving beyond historical accounts to shed light on the specific socio-political and economic drivers fueling the current wave of Biafran separatism (2021-2024). By detailing the interplay between state failure, public grievances, and IPOB's strategic responses, the study offers a nuanced understanding of contemporary ethno-nationalist movements in deeply fractured states. Furthermore, it contributes to the broader discourse on conflict resolution by illustrating how repressive state responses can inadvertently strengthen separatist resolve and erode national cohesion, providing critical insights for policymakers in similar contexts across Africa and beyond.

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