



Article

“Rights” in a “Might” System: The United Nations’ Approach To Self-Determination in the Case of the Indigenous People Of Biafra (IPOB)

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Abstract

This article titled "Rights in a 'Might' System: The United Nations Approach to Self-Determination in the Case of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)" examines the role of the United Nations in addressing self-determination movements, particularly focusing on the IPOB's agitation for independence from Nigeria. The study adopts a qualitative research method, utilising a descriptive design to explore the complex interplay between international law, state sovereignty, and human rights. The research relies on a documentary method for data collection and employs content analysis to systematically examine the subject matter through predefined themes. The study reveals a significant disconnect between international principles of self-determination and the Nigerian government's rigid stance on sovereignty. The United Nations, while generally supportive of self-determination, has remained indifferent to IPOB's call for a UN-supervised referendum. This inaction, rooted in the interests of powerful member states on the UN, has emboldened the Nigerian government to continue its repressive tactics against IPOB, resulting in human rights violations, mass atrocities, etc. The study also highlights how economic and geopolitical interests, particularly of key UN member states such as the U.S. and China, have led to the international community's reluctance to intervene in the IPOB situation.

Keywords

United Nations, Self-determination, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Indifference.

Introduction

The United Nations Charter, which became operational in 1945, introduced references to self-determination in Articles 1 and 55, marking the first instance of this principle being acknowledged in an official international legal document. This recognition established self-determination as a legitimate right. However, the Charter's lack of clarity and detail regarding the scope of self-determination significantly limited the practical application of this right, particularly in relation to secession. Subsequently, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights altered the discourse by providing a more comprehensive definition of the right to self-determination: 'All peoples have the right to self-determination.' This formulation emphasises the autonomy of individuals in selecting their political orientation, thereby enabling their economic, social, and cultural advancement as a result of this freedom. Consequently, self-determination was categorised as a human right; however, this classification was intended to confer rights upon peoples rather than individuals (Hannum, 1998). The primary rationale for establishing this right during this period was to create a significant avenue for decolonisation. Between 1945 and 1970, fifty-five states achieved independence through the process of self-

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determination, underscoring the principle's importance during this era. The 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations represented a notable expansion of the concept of self-determination by the U.N. General Assembly, broadening its relevance beyond the context of decolonisation. Article 1 of the United Nations Charter stipulates that one of the organisation's objectives is to "develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples."

Over the past three decades, the right to self-determination and the rights of indigenous peoples have become integral components of international law and policy. This development has been driven by collaborative efforts involving indigenous communities, civil society, international frameworks, and various states across domestic, regional, and global spheres. The human rights framework established by the United Nations, including its mechanisms, laws, and policies, has played a pivotal role in these advancements. Notably, entities such as the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations have spearheaded these efforts, a legacy that persists through the Human Rights Council and its various mechanisms, in conjunction with significant contributors like the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. A noteworthy achievement was the General Assembly's endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, which, by 2010, had garnered support from the vast majority of United Nations Member States and faced no opposition. This declaration represents the culmination of decades of dialogue between states and indigenous communities, reflecting a collaborative approach aimed at advancing the Indigenous Declaration. This framework addresses the human rights of indigenous populations, taking into account their unique circumstances and contributing to the rectification of their historical marginalisation within the global legal system.

In the case of the Secession of Quebec, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that "[a] right to external self-determination (which in this case potentially takes the form of the assertion of a right to unilateral secession) arises only in the most extreme cases and, even then, under carefully defined circumstances..."*Secession of Quebec*, 2 S.C.R. 217, 1998. It is feasible to categorise "extreme cases" and "carefully defined circumstances" in which secession may be considered a viable option by examining state practices and academic literature, despite the infrequency of formal decisions regarding secession. Any attempt to claim legal secession—that is, where secession trumps territorial Integrity—must *at least* show that:

- a) The secessionists are a "people" (in the ethnographic sense);
- b) The state from which they are seceding seriously violates their human rights; and
There are no other effective remedies under either domestic or international law (Borgen, 2006).

Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) states:

1. "All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.
2. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic cooperation based upon the principle of mutual benefit and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of their own means of subsistence.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant, including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories, shall promote the realisation of the right of self-determination and shall respect that right, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations."

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2004) states:

"Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present, non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system."

The codification of international principles in law and their endorsement by the United Nations have not prevented the Federal Republic of Nigeria from being granted flexibility in enforcing compliance with international human rights, particularly concerning self-determination in relation to sovereignty. This perspective is aptly expressed by Igbaniho (2017): "The right to self-determination does not exist and is unexercisable in Nigeria, and if recognised and exercised, will only be at the cost of sacrificing the supremacy of the constitution on the altar of upholding international obligations." Despite having ratified various human rights treaties, Nigeria's emphasis on state sovereignty has consistently sought to evade any enforcement initiatives. This evasion has been most evident in its refusal to acknowledge any responsibilities regarding the rights of indigenous peoples, as highlighted in chapter one of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria, which declares, "Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state to be known by the name of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" (Igbaniho, 2017). Nigeria refrained from voting on the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (U.N. General Assembly, 2008).

In 2012, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) emerged as a movement advocating for self-determination and the separation of the former eastern region from Nigeria. IPOB's agitation is fundamentally rooted in grievances related to the perceived marginalisation of the Igbo people following the Nigerian civil war, unresolved demands for reparations, and feelings of political exclusion (Ugorji, 2017). The IPOB leadership's attempts to communicate their grievances to the Nigerian government have consistently been met with repressive measures and responses from the authorities (Nwangwu, 2023). The organisation's correspondence to the United Nations dated 19 December 2013 supports the argument for victimisation as a justification for secession (Obi-Ani, Nzubechi & Obi-Ani).

IPOB advocates for the restoration of the statehood of the former Republic of Biafra through non-violent methods and civil disobedience. Their ideology is framed as the right to self-determination, as outlined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, the United Nations Convention on Civil and Political Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. IPOB operates with a decentralised, cell-like organisational structure, with Nnamdi Kanu serving as the supreme leader and the Directorate of State issuing directives. To garner support, express grievances, and disseminate pro-Biafra narratives to a large audience within Nigeria and internationally, IPOB utilises social media platforms and Radio Biafra (Ojukwu & Oni, 2017). Initially, IPOB employed sporadic non-

violent mass protests, marches, and rallies to advance its objectives. However, it subsequently shifted to a strategy of sit-at-home civil disobedience, encouraging the Igbo population to abstain from work and close businesses on designated days as a form of symbolic protest (Ekechukwu, Uzoh & Udeji, 2023).

Nnamdi Kanu, who leads the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), has experienced multiple arrests and incarcerations by Nigerian authorities. These recent detentions have led to considerable unease regarding potential breaches of human rights and the government's commitment to upholding legal principles and fair procedures. On 14 October 2015, Kanu was initially taken into custody by Nigeria's Department of State Services (D.S.S.) in Lagos (Amnesty International, 2016). He faced allegations of criminal conspiracy, intimidation, and membership in an illegal organisation (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2015). This arrest followed Kanu's emergence as the director of Radio Biafra, a station that broadcast pro-Biafran messages and advocated for the separation of Nigeria's south-eastern region (Aghedo & Eke, 2013). Following his apprehension, Kanu was held for over a year without trial, disregarding multiple court directives for his release on bail (Amnesty International, 2016). This prolonged detention without legal proceedings has raised significant concerns about violations of Kanu's rights to freedom and security, as well as his right to a fair trial, as outlined in international human rights legislation (Donnelly, 2013).

After being granted bail in April 2017, Kanu continued his advocacy for the Biafran cause and IPOB (Oduah, 2017). The Nigerian government officially labelled IPOB as a terrorist group in September 2017 (Adebayo, 2017). That same month, Nigerian military forces conducted an operation targeting Kanu's residence in Afaraukwu Ibeku, Abia State, Nigeria, resulting in five fatalities and numerous injuries (Daily Post, 2017). Kanu managed to escape this assault and sought refuge elsewhere. He resurfaced in Israel in October 2018, continuing to lead IPOB remotely (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2018). On 29 June 2021, Nigerian authorities announced Kanu's arrest and subsequent extradition to Nigeria for trial (Akinwotu, 2021). The circumstances surrounding his arrest and extradition remain unclear, with allegations of an "Extraordinary Rendition" that violates international law (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Kanu's legal team asserted that he was forcibly taken from Kenya and returned to Nigeria without proper legal procedures (Adeoye, 2021). In October 2022, the Court of Appeal in Abuja issued a verdict acquitting him (Osaji, 2022). Despite an ultimatum from The Working Group on arbitrary detention under the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) demanding his immediate release, the Nigerian government continued to keep him in custody. On 15 December 2023, Kanu appeared before Nigeria's Supreme Court, a development worthy of attention. The Court ruled that Kanu would remain in detention pending the outcome of his hearing, effectively overturning the 2022 Court of Appeal decision that had ordered his release. Justice Lawal Garba determined that while Kanu's extradition was unlawful, the federal terrorism trial could proceed. As reported by Reuters, Garba concluded that the alleged impropriety of the extradition did not provide sufficient grounds to dismiss all charges against Kanu (Africanews, 2023).

Despite the harrowing experiences of Sudan and South Sudan, which resulted in millions of lives lost and extensive property destruction, the United Nations has yet to implement preventive measures. The situation in Nigeria is volatile, presenting a genuine risk of escalating into widespread violence. The United Nations has a critical responsibility to safeguard human rights, and in this instance, it is failing to fulfil that duty. This scenario is particularly concerning given the lessons learned from the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan, which led to devastating loss of life and widespread property damage.

The United Nations remains unresponsive to IPOB's calls for a UN-supervised independence referendum, despite the growing tensions in Nigeria stemming from this movement and the government's response to it. This lack of action is corroborated by The Whistler (2021), which reports, "checks by our correspondent on the UN official website revealed that 'Biafra agitation' or 'Biafra' has not been brought forward to the general assembly by any country." A search for these terms on the UN website yields no results, indicating that there has been no documentation, article, or statement addressing the IPOB regional agitation at the UN to date.

Furthermore, the demand issued by The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention under the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) in 2022 for Nnamdi Kanu's immediate release was not an initiative aimed at promoting the right to self-determination. Rather, it was a directive to the Nigerian government to "immediately release Kanu unconditionally" and provide him with appropriate compensation for the arbitrary violation of his fundamental human rights (Adeleye, 2022). The Nigerian government's failure to comply with this directive is evident, and it is noteworthy that the United Nations has yet to take any action to enforce the ultimatum issued.

Research Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach, and employs descriptive research design to capture the complexity of the issue without oversimplification. This approach allows for an unbiased presentation of facts in a politically charged context and provides a longitudinal perspective on the movement's evolution.

The study focuses on Nigeria's south-eastern region, comprising Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states. This area, historically part of the defunct Eastern Nigeria, is characterized by its Igbo ethnic majority, tropical savanna climate, and agricultural economy. The region's unique history and ongoing political dynamics make it significant for studying self-determination movements in Nigeria and Africa. The research analyses key UN documents, IPOB's strategies, and the Nigerian government's responses. It defines self-determination as the right of peoples to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development, as per the UN Charter.

Data collection relies on the documentary method, using sources such as scholarly literature, academic discourse, research papers, NGO reports, official correspondences, and credible media reports. The study focuses on documents published within the last 20 years, emphasizing the most recent decade.

For data analysis, the study uses Content Analysis, specifically the Deductive Category Application approach. Pre-defined categories based on key themes are established, and a coding scheme is developed for systematic analysis. The credibility of sources is rigorously evaluated based on criteria such as author/organization credibility, publication date, methodological rigour, potential biases, and corroboration with other sources. The analysis reveals a disconnect between international principles of self-determination and Nigeria's stance, examines IPOB's strategies in light of the Nigerian government's responses, and highlights the lack of substantive UN intervention in the IPOB situation. This approach provides a structured examination of the complex issue, contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between national sovereignty, self-determination rights, and international intervention in this context.

Theoretical Framework

This research employs the Realist Theory of International Relations as the theoretical framework. Realism is a theoretical perspective in international relations that emphasizes the primacy of power, self-interest, and state-centric behaviour. According to realist theory, states are driven by their pursuit of national security, survival, and the maximization of their own interests in an anarchic international system. Realism spans a diverse range of perspectives and is rooted in a longstanding theoretical history. Among its founding fathers and major theorists are, Thucydides, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Hans Morgenthau, E.H. Carr, and Kenneth Waltz. This theory places significant focus on the competitive and conflictual aspects of international affairs. Realists place significant emphasis on the inherent conflictual dynamics within international politics, which they attribute to the egoistic character of human beings and the lack of a centralised international governing body. Within the context of this conflict-ridden environment, the primary participants are nation-states that constantly strive for power and security in order to advance their own national interests.

The primary premise of realism is that the nation-state sometimes referred to as the 'state,' serves as the principal entity in the field of international relations. Additional entities, such as persons and groups, also exist; however, their authority is constrained. Furthermore, the state might be seen as a single actor. For realists, the highest goal is the survival of the state, which explains why states' actions are judged according to the ethics of responsibility rather than by moral principles (Antunes and Camisão, 2018). During periods of armed conflict, the state is compelled to express and execute its policies in a unified manner, driven by its national interests. Furthermore, it may be argued that decision-makers exhibit rational behaviour since their decision-making processes are driven by rationality, ultimately resulting in the pursuit of the national interest. In this context, engaging in behaviours that might compromise the strength or security of one's state would not be considered a sensible course of action. Realism posits that leaders, irrespective of their political ideology, acknowledge this premise as they endeavour to govern their nation's affairs to ensure survival within a competitive milieu. States exist inside a framework of anarchy where there is a lack of centralised international authority. The often-used comparison of lacking a reliable point of contact during an international emergency serves to emphasise this assertion. In most jurisdictions, there are law enforcement agencies, armed forces, judicial systems, and other such institutions. During times of crisis, there is prevailing anticipation that these institutions will take appropriate action in response. Globally, there is a lack of consensus about the anticipation of action from any entity or individual, since an established hierarchical structure is absent. Consequently, governments are finally compelled to depend solely on their resources (Antunes and Camisão, 2018).

Realism offers a sceptical view of international institutions, arguing that their effectiveness is limited in achieving their stated goals. According to Mearsheimer (2001), realists question the ability of institutions to overcome the self-interest and power-seeking behaviour of states. They argue that institutions are often used as tools by powerful states to advance their own interests, rather than promoting collective goals. Realists emphasize the state-centric nature of international relations and the primacy of national interest in shaping state behaviour (Waltz, 1979). According to Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999), proponents of the realist perspective contend that nations strategically use legal frameworks and norms to promote their interests. The argument put out is that the application and enforcement of international law often exhibit selectivity, hence reflecting the existing power disparities between nations. Realism underscores

the inherent constraints of international legal institutions in successfully regulating and restraining state conduct.

Realism highlights the significance of power dynamics within international institutions. Major Powers exert a disproportionate influence on decision-making processes, shaping the outcomes to align with their interests. Keohane (1984) argues that power disparities among states translate into power differentials within institutions, leading to the dominance of powerful states. This realist perspective emphasizes the role of power in shaping institutional behaviour and outcomes.

Furthermore, Realists contend that states often instrumentalise international institutions to further their own power and interests. Barnett and Finnemore (2004) argue that states strategically manipulate institutions to achieve their objectives, using them as platforms for power projection and influence. Realists provide case studies illustrating instances where states have utilized international institutions to advance their national interests, such as the United States' use of the United Nations Security Council during the Iraq War. This offers a critical assessment of the United Nations (U.N.) and its limitations. Realists argue that the Security Council, with its permanent members and veto power, reflects power disparities among states (Hurd, 2007). The influence of major powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia, shapes the decision-making process and can hinder the effectiveness of the U.N. in maintaining international peace and security. Realists highlight the challenges faced by the U.N. in reconciling divergent national interests and achieving collective action.

From a realist perspective, the Nigerian government's response to IPOB's agitation can be understood as driven by its pursuit of national security and the preservation of state sovereignty. The Nigerian government sees IPOB's calls for secession as a threat to the territorial integrity and stability of the country. As a result, it takes a firm stance against the agitation, using its authority and power to suppress what it perceives as a challenge to its authority and control. The government prioritizes maintaining its centralized state structure to ensure its survival and maintain control over its territory.

Furthermore, realism helps us understand the United Nations' indifferent attitude towards IPOB's agitation for (external) self-determination by considering its member states' interests and priorities. The U.N. may be hesitant to intervene in the IPOB agitation due to several reasons:

- a) **Sovereignty and non-interference:** The principle of state sovereignty is highly valued in international relations, and states are generally reluctant to interfere in the internal affairs of other states. The U.N. may view the IPOB agitation as a domestic issue within Nigeria's jurisdiction, and thus, it may be hesitant to intervene and potentially violate the principle of non-interference.
- b) **Lack of consensus among member states:** The U.N. is a diverse organization with member states holding varying interests and perspectives. Some member states may have close ties with the Nigerian government or prioritize stability and territorial integrity, leading to a lack of consensus on how to address the IPOB agitation. This lack of consensus can result in an indifferent attitude from the U.N.
- c) **Limited resources and competing priorities:** The U.N. has limited resources and must prioritize its interventions based on the severity and urgency of conflicts and crises worldwide. With numerous ongoing conflicts and crises globally, the U.N. may allocate its resources and attention to more pressing issues, perceiving the IPOB agitation as a lower priority.

The U.N.'s indifference towards IPOB's agitation can have significant implications for the protection of the right to self-determination in Nigeria. The lack of international pressure and intervention may embolden the Nigerian government to continue suppressing the agitation without fear of significant consequences. This can result in the violation of the rights of IPOB members and supporters, including their right to freedom of expression, assembly, and self-determination. Furthermore, the U.N.'s indifference can contribute to a sense of frustration and disillusionment among IPOB supporters, potentially fuelling further tensions and conflicts. Without international mediation or support for a peaceful resolution, the situation may escalate, leading to increased violence and instability in Nigeria.

The United Nations' Indifference towards IPOB's Agitation for Self-Determination Through an Independence Referendum

Indigenous peoples were left as "the unfinished business of decolonisation" (Henderson, 2008). Like many indigenous groups, IPOB is seeking to address what they see as incomplete decolonization, arguing that the Igbo people were forcibly incorporated into Nigeria without their consent. According to Nwangwu (2019), international law does not have any apparatus or tool with which to sit over the liquidation of an independent state. It does not recognise the right of national groups, as such, to separate themselves from the state of which they form a part by the simple expression of a wish, otherwise a street would have acquired the status of a state, with grievances the only basis for separation. Secession is not a right under international law but it is equally not prohibited, thus, it maintains legal neutrality, making secession not so much of matter of law but fact based on the capability of its purveyors. By capability of its (secession) purveyors, it means that in terms of adjudication, it was only in the Kosovo secession declaration of 2008 that the International Court of Justice disfavoured the territorial integrity of a parent state in support of a secessionist group. The Kosovo case even further proved that secession is more political than legal; this is because 'Western' actors were heavily involved in the breakdown of Yugoslavia and ultimately sought to defend their own breach of territorial integrity which occurred with the NATO intervention in 1999.

The failure of secession attempt by Somaliland in 1991, Crimea in 2014 and Saharawi Peoples Republic in 1984 shows that reliance on law has infinitesimal value when it does not sit with political preference of Western nations. The fact that Kosovo provides the only case in which recognition has had a basis in the principles of remedial secession in international law is demonstrative of this. It has also been observed (as the case with IPOB) that in the process of agitations for secession some actors have gone ahead to destroy federal institutions in their domain like police stations, court premises, correctional facilities and even killings, likely, under the assumption that this ruction will one day serve as basis of rejection of the Nigerian state. In this light, The ICJ has consistently provided a solid legal position against the emergence of any state with terror background. The failure of the Kurdish referendum of 2017 provides further clarity on the position of international law and not providing effectiveness for terror organisations and group, much less, using it as a tool to establish a terror state (Lawal, 2021).

In both recent and past years, many of those who agitate for secession or self-determination in both the eastern and western Nigeria have variously opined that such endeavour is not necessarily a call for war, and have appealed to international organisations like the United Nations through the International Court of Justice, and even diplomatic missions and foreign affairs secretaries, to adjudicate on the issue (Lawal, 2021). Ikeanyibe et al. (2021) opine that the United Nations' reaction to the pursuit of self-determination by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a significant lack of formal recognition.

According to Onuoha (2019), the UN has failed to recognize IPOB as a legitimate representative of Igbo people seeking self-determination. Since the resurgence of separatist agitations in the south east region of Nigeria, there has been little or very limited discussions in UN forums around IPOB secessionist agitations. In other words, there has been minimal public debate or resolutions specifically addressing IPOB's claims at major UN bodies like the General Assembly or Security Council. Regarding why the United Nations has not yet recognized IPOB demands for secession, Ezirim (2021) gave five reasons why UN has not recognized the IPOB: The UN operates on the principle of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states. Recognizing IPOB, which seeks to establish an independent state of Biafra within Nigeria, would undermine Nigeria's sovereignty and territorial integrity; while the UN supports the right to self-determination, it typically applies this principle to territories that are under colonial rule, foreign occupation, or in situations where distinct peoples are denied meaningful participation in governance. In the case of Nigeria, the country is recognized as a sovereign state with an elected government, and the situation of IPOB does not fit the usual criteria for self-determination recognized by the UN; the UN generally refrains from interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states unless there are significant violations of international law, such as genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. The Nigerian government considers IPOB a domestic issue and has labelled it a terrorist organization, making it difficult for the UN to intervene without a clear mandate or widespread international consensus; recognition of independence movements or separatist groups often requires substantial international support. IPOB has not garnered enough support from influential UN member states or international organizations. Most countries, including major powers, recognize Nigeria's territorial integrity and are reluctant to support a movement that could lead to instability in the region; and the UN prioritizes maintaining international peace and security. Recognizing IPOB could potentially escalate tensions and conflict within Nigeria, leading to broader regional instability. The UN's focus is on promoting dialogue and peaceful resolutions to such conflicts, rather than taking sides. Furthermore, Berg and Nowak's (2020) observation that "State interests generally prevail over the subjective interests of groups in society" is particularly relevant. The international community, including the UN, tends to prioritize the stability of existing states over the aspirations of sub-state groups. This bias is deeply ingrained in the international system and serves as a significant barrier to IPOB's recognition and support at the UN level.

The "conspiracy of silence" highlighted by Bull (1977) is a fundamental obstacle to UN support for IPOB's self-determination efforts. This concept suggests that states implicitly agree not to interfere in each other's internal affairs, especially regarding human rights issues. In IPOB's case, this translates to a reluctance among UN member states to criticize Nigeria's handling of the Biafran separatist movement. External pressure is needed to break this silence and expose the illegitimacy of state domination of Indigenous Peoples." However, such pressure is rarely applied due to the prevailing international norms. As Pitty (2020) notes, "states still routinely tolerate the structural violence of racism in order to uphold the principle of not interfering in another state's internal politics." This directly applies to IPOB, as other U.N. member states view their struggle as an internal Nigerian matter, regardless of any potential human rights violations or legitimate claims to self-determination.

The lack of strategic interest from powerful states in the U.N. is another reason for the indifference of the U.N. towards IPOB's agitation for self-determination in Nigeria. The East Timor case offers valuable insights into how the strategic interests of powerful states shape UN responses to self-determination movements. As Avgustin (2020) notes, East Timor was not of strategic interest to any of the UN Security

Council permanent members. However, Indonesia, as the occupying power, was a strategic ally for Western nations and Australia.

This scenario bears striking similarities to IPOB's situation. Nigeria, like Indonesia in the East Timor case, is a significant regional power and an important strategic ally for many Western nations. It's Africa's largest economy and a key player in West African politics. Just as the international community initially turned a blind eye to human rights violations in East Timor, there's a similar reluctance to engage with IPOB's claims against the Nigerian government. As Avgustin (2020) asserts, "the UN cannot be a friend or a foe to self-determination as such until its members, particularly the UN SC permanent members, or a strong enough 'outsider'... make it one or the other." In East Timor's case, the tide only began to turn when Australia's public opinion shifted dramatically, forcing a change in government policy.

It should be noted that the effectiveness of Security Council vetoes in deterring governments from persisting in their actions has not always been guaranteed, as shown by the 2003 United States invasion of Iraq (Morris & Sheeler, 2007: 221). This observation highlights that some nations' private interests might result in departures from institutional limits, therefore exposing the limitations of liberal institutionalist views that underpin the United Nations. These instances raise concerns about the legitimacy of the United Nations and its Security Council, while also disrupting the equilibrium that the makeup of the Security Council aims to maintain. The aforementioned issue poses a significant challenge to the preservation of peace and security (Oguejiofor, Okafor, & Nwago, 2023). The problem is often said to be the monopolisation and manipulation of the main UN bodies by world powers with their stakes in these conflicts (Crivellente, 2020). For IPOB, this suggests that without a similar shift in the strategic calculations of a major power, or significant public pressure in influential countries, the UN is likely to remain indifferent to their cause.

According to Emeka (2019), "in cosmopolitics, economic power blocs uphold their interests as objective." This Economic interests of the powerful nations of the U.N. Security Council are critical influencers of the United Nations' stance regarding the Indigenous People of Biafra's push for self-determination. Concertedly, the economic interest of nations like the United Kingdom (UK), United States (US) and China doing significant trade with Nigeria often weighs on U.N.'s stance on IPOB. Powerful member states of the U.N. like the United States, Russia, United Kingdom, China and France usually tailor their positions on self-determination movements according to their national economic and geopolitical interests. The case of Tibet is particularly illustrative. As noted by Moore and Quinn (2013), "the USA pursues its economic self-interest" in its dealings with China, which leads to a reluctance to support Tibetan independence. Similarly, Russia's stance is influenced by its own concerns about Chechen separatists. Neither the USA nor Russia – both major powers in the world – would wish to set the agenda and engage directly with the power of the People's Republic of China (PRC) over an issue such as self-rule for the indigenous Tibetans (Dickinson, 2020). To discourage international backing for the Tibetan cause, the United Kingdom faced significant backlash from the People's Republic of China after Prime Minister David Cameron met with the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, in 2013 (Moore and Quinn 2013). In May 2012, British Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg met with the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet, at St Paul's Cathedral in London. This meeting was part of the Dalai Lama's visit to receive the Templeton Prize. The Chinese government reacted strongly, stating that the meeting "seriously interfered with China's internal affairs" and "hurt the feelings of the Chinese people" (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2012). As a consequence, the Chinese

government expressed its displeasure by summoning the British ambassador in Beijing and issuing a formal protest (South China Morning Post, 2013). This diplomatic tension led to a significant cooling of relations between the United Kingdom and China. In response, the UK government, under the influence of Finance Minister George Osborne, decided to distance itself from the Dalai Lama to restore full business and diplomatic relations with China. This shift was evident during Cameron's visit to China in late 2013, where he avoided raising the issue of Tibet and the Dalai Lama (South China Morning Post, 2013).

Applying this to IPOB, how economic and geopolitical considerations has led to UN indifference becomes obvious. Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer and has significant economic ties with many UN member states. The United States is one of the largest foreign investors in Nigeria, particularly in the petroleum/mining and wholesale trade sectors. China has extensive investments in Nigeria's infrastructure and is a major importer of Nigerian oil. European countries like the UK, France, and the Netherlands have significant trade relationships with Nigeria. These economic ties create a disincentive for these nations to support IPOB's cause, as doing so could jeopardize their economic interests in Nigeria. This economic calculus translates into a lack of pressure on the UN to address IPOB's claims. Brown (2020) highlights that the recognition of independence movements is often affected by powerful states' self-interest, particularly in democratic nations. From the standpoint of the United Nations, it is important to recognize that the United States is less inclined to exercise its Security Council veto to prevent the admission of a new state if such admission aligns with its national interests (Brown, 2020). The likelihood of an independence movement receiving official recognition depends on the internal workings of third-party states. In IPOB's case, the absence of strong support from influential democratic nations within the UN suggests that their self-interest does not align with recognizing or supporting IPOB's aspirations.

China has become one of Nigeria's largest trading partners, with bilateral trade reaching approximately \$23.9 billion in 2022 (Economic Confidential, 2023). This relationship extends beyond mere trade. Chinese investment in Nigeria's oil and gas industry has reached \$16 billion. The China National Offshore Oil Corp. (CNOOC) is the largest Chinese entity investor in Nigeria, producing 800,000 barrels per day with ambitions to reach 1.2 million (Oduah, 2019). Chinese firms play a prominent role in Nigeria's infrastructure projects, including:

- \$874 million Abuja-Kaduna rail,
- \$1.2 billion Lagos-Ibadan expressway,
- \$1.1 billion Kano-Kaduna railway lines,
- \$600 million airport terminals in Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Kano.

Foreign Direct Investment: Nigeria is one of Africa's top destinations for Chinese FDI, estimated at about 5% of Chinese FDI stocks in Africa. As of March 2020, Chinese loans to Nigeria stood at \$3.121 billion, representing 11.28% of Nigeria's external debt (The Conversation, 2021).

While not as extensive as China's, the US-Nigeria trade relationship is substantial. In 2022, the total trade volume between Nigeria and the US was approximately \$7.55 billion (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2024). Major US companies like Chevron and ExxonMobil are significant players in Nigeria's oil and gas industry. Companies like Coca-Cola and Procter & Gamble have extensive operations in Nigeria (Nigerian Finder, 2018).

The UK, as one of Nigeria's oldest trading partners, maintains significant economic interests. In 2022, the trade volume between Nigeria and the UK was approximately \$6.7 billion (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2024). Major UK companies operating in Nigeria include Shell (oil and gas), Unilever (consumer goods), British Airways (transportation), and PZ Cussons (consumer products) (Nigerian Finder, 2018).

The UK, US, and China have vested interests in Nigeria's economic stability. An independent movement like IPOB threatens this stability, potentially disrupting trade relationships, investments, and ongoing projects. Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer. The secession of the Biafra region could jeopardize access to these valuable resources, particularly affecting China's growing energy needs and the operations of US and UK oil companies. With a population of over 200 million, Nigeria represents a significant market for Chinese, American, and British goods. The potential fragmentation of this market would be detrimental to these countries' economic interests. China, in particular, has made substantial investments in Nigerian infrastructure. The success and returns on these investments depend on Nigeria's continued stability and unity. China's loans to Nigeria are significant. A fragmented Nigeria might struggle to repay these debts, posing a risk to China's financial interests. IPOB, representing a smaller region with less economic potential than the whole of Nigeria, cannot offer these nations advantages that outweigh their current benefits from relations with a united Nigeria.

The extensive economic ties that the UK, US, and China have developed with Nigeria create a strong incentive for these nations to support Nigeria's territorial integrity. The potential disruption to trade, investments, resource access, and geopolitical stability that an independent Biafra might cause far outweighs any potential benefits these countries might gain from supporting IPOB. Therefore, it is in the economic and strategic interests of these major powers to oppose IPOB's independence movement and continue supporting a united Nigeria, where their investments and economic interests are more secure and profitable.

Moreover, Nigeria's role as a regional powerhouse in West Africa adds a geopolitical dimension. Many Western nations view Nigeria as a crucial partner in maintaining stability in the region and combating issues like terrorism. Supporting IPOB could be seen as potentially destabilizing Nigeria and, by extension, the entire region. Supporting an independence movement like IPOB could set a precedent that these nations might not want to encourage, given their own internal separatist issues or global strategic interests. Without a powerful advocate willing to consistently raise IPOB's issues in international forums, their cause is likely to be overlooked. Independence movements need "regular and direct access to 'agents outside the state' with 'the authority and power' to influence how the state treats them" (Young, 2004). IPOB obviously lacks such powerful external advocates. "The emphasis on state interests is also reflected in the UN's involvement in peace agreements and negotiations following conflicts concerning claims of self-determination" (Berg and Nowak, 2020). This suggests that even if IPOB's agitation leads to conflict, UN involvement would likely prioritize maintaining Nigeria's territorial integrity rather than seriously considering Biafran independence.

The UN's historical approach to decolonization, as outlined in the document, poses a significant challenge for groups like IPOB. The "'saltwater' or 'blue water' thesis" adopted by the UN in the 1960s limited decolonization efforts to "overseas territories, non-contiguous to the colonial power." This narrow interpretation effectively excludes groups seeking self-determination within existing state boundaries. IPOB's claim to self-determination doesn't fit neatly into this framework. Biafra is not an overseas

territory of Nigeria but an integral part of the country's geography. This makes it much harder for IPOB to leverage the UN's decolonization mechanisms or to gain recognition as a people with the right to self-determination under UN frameworks. Furthermore, as Lightfoot and MacDonald (2020) point out, "Indigenous peoples were not however considered 'peoples' for the purposes of self-determination and thus had a more difficult time accessing these rights." While IPOB argues that the Igbo people constitute a distinct indigenous group, the UN's historical reluctance to recognize such groups as 'peoples' with self-determination rights presents another barrier.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Agnes Callamard, conducted a visit to Nigeria in 2019 and issued a statement highlighting numerous human rights violations and extrajudicial killings in the country (Callamard, 2019). Her report documented deeply concerning patterns of violence against various groups, including members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). However, the Rapporteur's recommendations failed to adequately address the root causes of the conflict or acknowledge IPOB's claims to self-determination.

Callamard (2019) reported that since 2015, IPOB members have faced arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial executions, particularly in the context of demonstrations. The report cites allegations that law enforcement officials killed at least 100 IPOB members between 2015 and 2016 in events in Aba, Awka, and Onitsha. A particularly egregious incident occurred on May 29-30, 2016, when the Nigerian military allegedly opened fire on IPOB demonstrators and bystanders in Onitsha, killing at least 60 people and injuring over 70, many of whom were shot in the back (Callamard, 2019).

The report also details a military operation on September 14, 2017, at the family home of IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu in Afara-Ukwu, which allegedly resulted in the deaths of 150 persons participating in a peaceful vigil. Notably, no Nigerian soldiers were reported killed in this operation (Callamard, 2019). Following this event, the Federal High Court in Abuja proscribed IPOB and designated it as a terrorist group, a move that has been criticized by international human rights bodies.

Despite these grave allegations, Callamard's (2019) recommendations focused primarily on procedural improvements, stating that "Every death or serious injury in police custody, and every alleged extrajudicial execution, ought to be adequately and impartially investigated by an independent body." While these recommendations are important, they fail to address the underlying political tensions and the IPOB's claims to self-determination.

The report's failure to mention the right to self-determination or suggest ways to address the root causes of the conflict is a significant oversight. This omission is particularly glaring given that on March 8, 2018, the African Commission issued Provisional Measures asking the Nigerian government to rescind its decision branding IPOB and its members as terrorists (Callamard, 2019). The Commission's intervention suggests a recognition of the political nature of the conflict that is absent from the UN Rapporteur's recommendations.

By focusing solely on accountability for individual acts of violence without addressing the broader political context, the UN risks perpetuating a cycle of conflict. The right to self-determination is recognized under international law, and IPOB's claims deserve serious consideration. A more comprehensive approach would involve recommending dialogue between the Nigerian government and IPOB representatives, potentially with international mediation, to address the group's grievances and explore peaceful solutions to the conflict.

Furthermore, the Rapporteur's recommendations do not address the systemic nature of the violence against IPOB members. Callamard (2019) noted that not a single conviction against IPOB members has been secured since 2015, due to discontinuance or dismissal of charges, and none of the killings of IPOB members have been investigated. This pattern suggests a systemic failure of the Nigerian justice system that goes beyond individual instances of misconduct.

In conclusion, the UN's indifference to IPOB's agitation for self-determination is deeply rooted in the structure and functioning of the international system. The conspiracy of silence among states, the primacy of strategic and economic interests of the neo-colonial powerful member states of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that are beneficiaries on the "One-Nigeria" status-quo, the narrow interpretation of decolonization, the protection of territorial integrity, all contribute to an environment where IPOB's claims are being overlooked. This indifference is not unique to IPOB but reflects broader patterns in how the UN and its member states approach self-determination movements, particularly those within existing state boundaries. The East Timor case demonstrates that change is possible, but often requires a significant shift in the strategic calculations of powerful states or overwhelming public pressure. Without such a catalyst, the structural biases within the UN system are likely to continue working against IPOB's aspirations for self-determination.

Impacts of the U.N.'s indifference towards IPOB's agitation on self-determination in Nigeria

The principle of self-determination has long been a cornerstone of international law and a key tenet of the United Nations Charter. However, the practical application of this principle remains fraught with complexity, particularly in post-colonial states with diverse ethnic compositions. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, presents a compelling case study in the tensions between national unity and ethnic self-determination movements.

In recent years, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement has emerged as a prominent advocate for the secession of the predominantly Igbo South-Eastern region of Nigeria. IPOB's agitation for an independent Biafran state, rooted in historical grievances dating back to the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), has sparked intense debate both within Nigeria and in the international community.

Despite the movement's growing prominence and the Nigerian government's often heavy-handed response, the United Nations has maintained a notably detached stance on the issue. This perceived indifference by the UN towards IPOB's calls for self-determination raises important questions about the organization's role in navigating complex ethno-political conflicts and its commitment to upholding the principle of self-determination in practice. Based on the foregoing, the multifaceted impacts of the UN's hands-off approach to the IPOB independence movement are examined under the following subheadings:

Escalating Human Rights Violations

One major concern for scholars of international law is that in spite of its legal neutrality, there should be some concern for cases of gross violations of human rights of individuals belonging to a specific group. The lack of some concern from the UN regarding cases of gross violations of human rights of individuals in the South-East region of Nigeria who are sympathetic to the course of IPOB, have to a significant extent exacerbated ethnic tensions in the South-East region of the country.

IPOB has increasingly called for referendum largely for three reasons. First is to put the UN on notice regarding their course, second to mount pressure on the UN to recognize them and facilitate their demand for secession from Nigeria, and thirdly is make the Nigerian government to give in to their demand due to international supports and pressures. IPOB's inability to get referendum has made the group to increasingly rely on demonstrations, violence and criminality

The Nigerian government's harsh response to IPOB's agitation for independence, characterized by proscription, arbitrary arrests, killings, and human rights abuses, is a consequence of the indifference of the United Nations and the broader international community. This lack of international scrutiny and intervention has arguably emboldened the Nigerian government to intensify its repressive actions against IPOB without fear of significant diplomatic or economic consequences. Between 2015 and 2017, as IPOB's popularity and influence grew in South-Eastern Nigeria, the UN and other international bodies remained conspicuously silent. As exposed by The Whistler (2021), no U.N. agency publicly condemned Nigeria's violent suppression of IPOB protests or called for accountability from senior officials responsible for human rights violations against the group. This silence from respected global institutions sent an implicit message that the Nigerian government's actions were not of significant international concern. This international indifference effectively gave the Nigerian government a green light to escalate its crackdown on IPOB. Without external pressure or the threat of diplomatic repercussions, Nigerian authorities likely felt emboldened to employ increasingly harsh tactics, including extrajudicial killings, mass arrests, and the use of military force against civilians.

FIGURE 2: Excerpt from United Nations Annual Results Report on Nigeria 2023



Source: <https://nigeria.un.org/>

The figure above clearly shows that in discussing security, human rights and marginalised groups, the U.N. conspicuously omits the mention of IPOB, which translates to a tacit support for the measures

adopted by the Nigerian government against IPOB a dismissal of the aspirations of the group. The UN's failure to address IPOB's claims and the Nigerian government's heavy-handed response have led to an escalation of violence. For instance, the military operation "Python Dance II" in September 2017 resulted in numerous casualties and heightened tensions (Callamard, 2019). This escalation has created an environment of fear and instability in the region. Amnesty International documented at least 150 killings of IPOB members and supporters between August 2015 and August 2016, with a particularly deadly incident on May 30, 2016, resulting in approximately 60 deaths. The lack of international outcry or calls for investigation following these events has contributed to the continued use of lethal force, as evidenced by the additional 115 killings documented between March and June 2021. The tenacity of this link is confirmed by Krasner (2004) who opines that it is not a rare occurrence that self-determination is followed by violent conflict.

The UN's silence on these matters has had far-reaching consequences beyond just enabling the immediate human rights violations. It has undermined the UN's legitimacy in the eyes of many Igbos, reinforcing IPOB's claims that the international system is indifferent to Igbo rights and aspirations. This perception of abandonment by global institutions may have fuelled further resentment and separatist sentiment among IPOB supporters, potentially escalating the conflict. Moreover, the UN's inaction can be seen as a tacit undermining of the internationally recognized right to self-determination. While the UN Charter and other international instruments affirm this right, the organization's failure to engage with or even acknowledge IPOB's calls for a referendum sends a message that this right is selectively applied or easily ignored when politically inconvenient.

The UN's indifference to IPOB's situation has created a permissive environment for ongoing human rights violations against the group's members. By failing to hold the Nigerian government accountable or push for a more measured response to IPOB's activities, the international community has inadvertently contributed to the escalation of tensions and the entrenchment of a cycle of violence and repression in South-Eastern Nigeria.

United Nations' Indifference towards IPOB Agitation for Independence Referendum and Security in South-East Nigeria

The arrest and rendition of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of IPOB, from Kenya on 29 June 2021 has heightened security concerns in the South-East region. Following their leader's detention, IPOB has implemented a weekly Monday sit-at-home order as a means of protest. The apprehension engendered by this directive cannot be overstated. It has evolved from mere trepidation to an acute phobia, severely impeding inter-urban mobility and significantly hampering trade, commerce, and interpersonal interactions. Marketplaces and venues for the exchange of goods and services have been forcibly closed or subjected to attacks in the enforcement of the sit-at-home mandate. A poignant illustration of this is the conflagration that consumed the Eke Ututu Market in Orsu-Ihitte Ukwa Community, Orsu Local Government Area, on Saturday, 7 September 2022. This incident, precipitated by regional unrest and military intervention, not only inflicted substantial economic damage but also resulted in the loss of human life.

Ibekaeme (2022), as cited in The Leader (2022), laments, "We have suffered the loss of everything: our youth, our domiciles, our cultural heritage, and our marketplace. It is with profound anguish that we convene today to mourn the devastation of our community, Orsu-Ihite Ukwa, Orsu L.G.A., in light of the

sustained military assaults, bombardment of our settlements, extermination of defenceless civilians and youth, and the obliteration of Eke Ututu Market".

Beyond this specific incident, numerous other commercial spaces and marketplaces have been decimated, with acts of arson escalating against both governmental and private properties, including law enforcement facilities, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices, and correctional institutions. These assaults exacerbate the economic hardship and insecurity prevailing in the South-East.

Many private transportation operators have fallen victim to attacks whilst en route to major commercial centres, particularly along the Owerri-Onitsha, Aba-Owerri, Enugu-Abakaliki, Owerri-Umuahia, and Okigwe corridors. These routes serve as critical arteries connecting diverse communities within the South-East and linking them to Lagos and the northern regions of the country.

The persistent manifestation of these ignominious acts of violence, including the rising incidence of kidnapping, armed robbery, and banditry, profoundly undermines security and socio-economic activities. The economic ramifications of the sit-at-home situation and the overall state of the South-East are alarming and potentially inestimable (Unegbu, 2022). Individuals incur losses on an almost daily basis, while some enterprises have ceased operations or now function at a reduced capacity.

Particularly distressing is the cessation of nocturnal commercial activities, including nightclubs, restaurants, pubs, cinemas, religious gatherings, and other night-time socio-economic ventures. The crisis in the South-East has so drastically altered nightlife that in certain urban and rural areas, residents retire to their homes as early as 18:00 hours, fearing for their lives due to the threat of unknown assailants, the risk of being caught in crossfire, or the possibility of abduction.

It is well-established that certain businesses thrive and achieve peak profitability during night-time hours. However, the sit-at-home directive and its associated issues and violence have effectively terminated the "halcyon days" of nightlife in most Igbo communities and towns (Okoroafor, 2022).

Socio-Economic consequences of the United Nations' Indifference towards IPOB Agitation for Independence Referendum

The complex interplay between self-determination movements, governmental responses, and the eruption of violence is a recurring theme in global politics, particularly evident in the current situation in South-Eastern Nigeria. Self-determination and independence movements often arise from a deep-seated desire for autonomy, recognition, and the right to govern one's own affairs. However, as history has shown, these movements frequently encounter resistance from established power structures, leading to tensions that can escalate into violent conflict. The case of South-Eastern Nigeria exemplifies this pattern, with the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) advocating for the region's autonomy and the Nigerian government's alleged repressive response.

The assertion by Krasner (2004) that self-determination is often followed by violent conflict highlights a fundamental challenge in the pursuit of freedom and autonomy. When a group feels that its rights and aspirations are being suppressed or ignored, the potential for conflict increases. In the context of South-Eastern Nigeria, the perception that the government is actively working to destabilize the region through violence and repressive actions has created a volatile environment. This perception of governmental repression aligns with the historical pattern of authorities attempting to maintain control over regions

seeking autonomy. Such actions, whether real or perceived, can serve as catalysts for increased resistance and, in some cases, the emergence of armed groups. The unknown gunmen enforcing IPOB sit-at-home orders in South-Eastern Nigeria can be seen as a direct response to this perceived oppression.

As it was captured in Cohen (2003), Patrick Henry's impassioned speech, "why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!", resonates strongly with this situation. His words encapsulate the fervour and conviction that drive self-determination movements, emphasizing the lengths to which people will go to secure their freedom. In the context of South-Eastern Nigeria, this sentiment is echoed in the actions of those who support IPOB and resist what they perceive as governmental oppression. The emergence of unknown gunmen enforcing sit-at-home orders can be seen as a manifestation of this "liberty or death" mentality. These individuals, driven by a belief in the righteousness of their cause, are willing to engage in violent acts to assert their vision of freedom and autonomy for the region.

The proscription of IPOB and the Nigerian army's intrusion into the home of Nnamdi Kanu in Umuahia caused a considerable amount of social unrest, leading to the unfortunate loss of lives among many IPOB members (Adonu, 2018). Kanu was forced to find safety in Britain as a result of the military intervention. Nevertheless, his arrest and rendition from Kenya on 27th June, 2021 has heightened security concerns in the South-East region. Following their leader's detention, IPOB has implemented a weekly Monday sit-at-home order as a means of protest. This order has had significant economic consequences in the region (Ekechukwu V. I, Nwogu J.N, Ugwukwu V.O, Emerho G. E, 2022).

The recurring pronouncement of sit-at-home on Mondays and certain other days has considerable repercussions on the socio-economic and commercial activities in the principal business districts of the South-East region of Nigeria. This encompasses the ingress of merchants from other parts of the nation, interruptions to market functions, and the operations of financial establishments in key urban centres such as Aba, Onitsha, Awka, Enugu, Nnewi, Abakaliki, and Ihiala, amongst others. The socio-political and cultural existence of the populace in the five states of the South-East, specifically Abia, Anambra, Ebony, Enugu, and Imo State, has been markedly affected. Political congregations, funerary and matrimonial ceremonies, and other festivities no longer transpire in the majority of communities in the South-East, particularly in locales where armed men commonly called unknown gunmen are known to forcefully enforce these sit-at-home orders. The emergence of these unknown gunmen represents a critical escalation in the conflict. By enforcing sit-at-home orders, these groups assert a form of parallel authority, challenging the Nigerian government's control over the region. This development illustrates how attempts to suppress self-determination movements can inadvertently lead to the very instability and violence that governments seek to prevent.

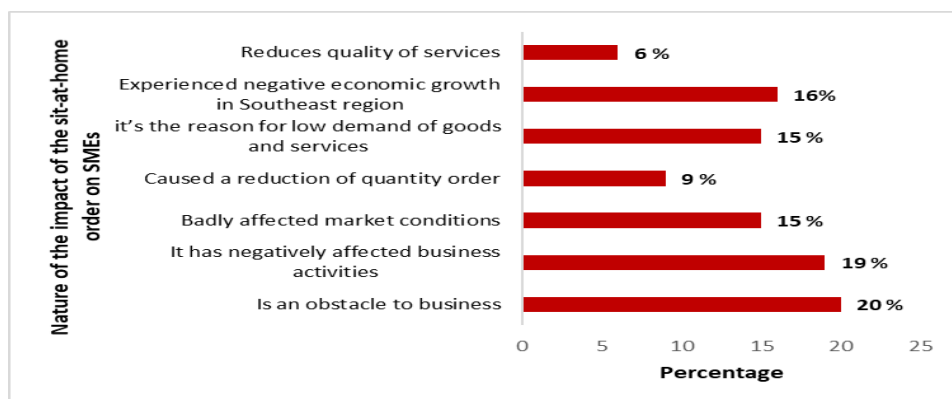
Research undertaken by Ibeanu, Orji, and Iwuamadi (2016) scrutinised the ramifications of Biafra Separatism on the South-East region. Their investigation, which amalgamated qualitative and quantitative methodologies, uncovered that pro-Biafra demonstrations and security disturbances adversely affect economic activities in the area, thereby dissuading investments. Their study advocated for the establishment of a prominent Peace and Reconciliation Commission to address the grievances articulated by IPOB.

A contemporary study by Morgen (2021) probed the consequences of Sit-at-home protests declared by IPOB, on the social and economic activities in the South-East region. The research employed a Survey Research design to amass pertinent data and evaluate the impact. The study ascertained that the implementation of sit-at-home orders substantially influenced the region's economy, precipitating the temporary cessation of commercial activities such as banking operations and other enterprises. This, in turn, detrimentally affected productivity and overall economic performance.

Ikeh (2021) explored the repercussions of sectional agitation on a nation's holistic progress. The research specifically examined the activities of IPOB and MASSOB in Nigeria's South-Eastern region. The study disclosed that a substantial majority of respondents, 62.8 percent precisely, identified the disruption of economic activities engendered by IPOB's sit-at-home as the most severe impact on the region. The study propounded that the government undertake compassionate measures to address the group's concerns.

Mark, Obi & Chibuzor (2022) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the effects of IPOB's Sit-at-home orders on the economy of the South-East geo-political zone. They employed the Relative Deprivation theory to elucidate the situation. The study deduced that the disruptions precipitated by IPOB are detrimental to the economy, particularly in business activities and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The paper posited that engendering dialogue between IPOB and the Nigerian government could serve as an efficacious approach to addressing the problem.

FIGURE 3: Nature of the impact of the sit-at-home order on the SMEs



Source: (Mark K. C, Nweke C.C Igweike O.J, Eze, K. K 2023)

Based on the data provided by Mark C., Nweke C.C., and Eze K.K. (2023), it becomes clear that the Sit-At-Home order has had a significant negative impact on small and medium-sized enterprises in the South-East region of the country. As per the findings of Ezewudo, Ukwuoma, and Uroko (2022), Okwesilieze Nwodo, the former chairman of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), has voiced his opinion that the sit-at-home measure does not bring any benefits to the Igbo community. Dr Emmanuel Chukwuma, the Archbishop of Enugu Ecclesiastical Province, Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, also highlighted the detrimental impact of the sit-at-home practice on the region's economy and the resulting hardships faced by the Igbo people. According to reports, the sit-at-home actions have resulted in significant financial losses for chambers of commerce, business owners, and traders, totalling approximately 8 billion naira. In addition, Chief Moses Ezukwo, the first vice president of the Nnewi Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NCCIMA), highlighted the significant economic losses experienced in the South-East zone. The private sector, in particular, has been severely impacted, with a

decline of over 60 percent. In addition, the transport sector incurs significant financial losses whenever there is a lockdown in the region, amounting to at least 6 billion naira per day.

Data on internally Generated Revenue (IGR) of various state governments in Nigeria for Q1 2021 indicated that the South-East region generated approximately N53 billion in the following order: Abia (N7.550b), Anambra (N12.773b), Enugu (N14.140b), Ebonyi (N7.753b), and Imo (N9.991b). This data was collected a few days before the start of the Monday sit-at-home in the region. Further analysis revealed that none of the states in the zone met their revenue targets in the previous year. Dataphyte, a media, research, and data analytics organization, reported that during Q1 2023, aside Anambra state achieving 27% of its projected revenue, other states in the region, including Imo, Enugu, Abia, and Ebonyi, generated less than 15% of their projected internal revenue.

The Governor of Anambra state, Prof Charles Soludo, emphasized that each day of the sit-at-home resulted in an estimated loss of N19.6 billion for the poor masses of the state. He listed various categories of people affected, including artisans, Keke drivers, vulcanizers, hairdressers, petty traders, bricklayers, and others whose daily livelihoods were impacted. Governor Peter Mbah of Enugu state also recognized the adverse effects of the sit-at-home order, which resulted in a loss of N10 billion every Monday (Guardian Newspapers, July 2023).

The consequences of the prolonged sit-at-home declared by IPOB since August 9, 2021, include declining productivity, job threats, reduced investor confidence, increased insecurity, and a near collapse of the region's infrastructure with a rise in social vices. A sponsored investigation revealed a loss of N5.375 trillion by businesses between August 9, 2021, and December 19, 2022 (Njoku, 2023). Economic and financial expert, Dr. Chiwuike Uba, stated that the South-East had lost approximately N7.646 trillion between August 2021 and July 2023, with around 101 days lost during this period. The South-East region's revenue profile is also adversely affected, ranking as the region with the least internally generated revenue according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics for the first quarter of 2021 (Njoku, 2023)

In Iyora (2021), a statistical survey report carried out by SBM Intelligence, a political risk analysis firm based in Lagos, revealed that 61.4 percent of the 876 residents in the South-East of Nigeria who observed the Sit-at-home order on August 9 reported a decline in their productivity. Conversely, around 11 percent of the residents, predominantly teachers on summer vacation, indicated that the sit-at-home order did not influence their business engagements.

In a statement quoted in Owoeye, Ezeanya, & Obiegbunam (2022), Chief Moses Ezukwo, the First Vice President of the Nnewi Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture (NCCIMA), asserted that the IPOB sit-at-home order has deprived the South-East zone of over 50 billion naira within four weeks, with the private business sector bearing over 60% of the loss. These statements underscore that the Sit-at-home order has persistently disrupted commercial activities and business engagements in the South-East region of Nigeria, which are critical for socio-economic development.

FIGURE 4: Markets, Small and Medium Enterprises shutdown in different locations of the South-East-Nigeria during enforcement IPOB Sit-at-home order



Source: Adeshina (2021)

FIGURE 5: Commercial Banks, Retail Outlets cum SMEs closed during the enforcement of IPOB Sit-at-home order in various locations in the South-East Nigeria



Source: Olumide (2021).

The implementation of the IPOB Sit-at-home order has led to the closure of commercial banks and retail shops in South-East Nigeria, causing weekly disruptions to financial institutions and market activities in the region. Eze, Chijioke, and Amechi (2021) confirmed that the sit-at-home order has significantly affected various business sectors in the South-East. They noted that chambers of commerce, business owners, and traders are continuously assessing their losses, with the cost of the Monday sit-at-home days estimated to be around 8 billion Naira.

A statement from Mr. Ndu, a business person dealing in electronic gadgets, highlights the adverse effects: "We are experiencing a gradual decline." He elaborated that the ongoing sit-at-home is severely impacting businesses, rendering many unable to sustain themselves without the revenue from regular market operations. Products are remaining on shelves for prolonged periods due to the restricted business hours imposed by the current sit-at-home order. According to Ugwu (2022), he incurs a significant financial loss of N200,000 on each sit-at-home day. Ugwu (2022) further reported that a business owner dependent on bank loans voiced their concerns to Premium Times, stating, "In the past, I used to generate 80 percent of the loan amount through sales. However, nowadays, I struggle to reach even 40 percent. Our business is declining steadily." As businesses continue to collapse, there is a risk that individuals may turn to desperate measures for survival. A recent study raises concerns that insecurity and crime rates may see a significant rise in the near future (Ugwu, 2022).

There is also an increasing situation of capital flight and relocation of businesses from the South-East Nigeria currently. Popular socialite Pascal Okechukwu, also known as Cubana Chief Priest, revealed that the insecurity in the South-East made him move his business to Lagos (Vanguard, 2024). In another development, Obi Cubana, an astute business man from South-East Nigeria, went ahead to establish a tricycle assembly plant outside the South-East in Lagos State, in June 2024, stating that "business decisions aren't driven by emotions, but by strategy and what works" (Global Upfront Newspaper, 2024).

The economic ramifications of social unrest are well-documented, with evidence suggesting that such disturbances invariably constrain economic growth and impoverish populations. This phenomenon has been observed in various contexts, including the recent #EndSARS protests in Lagos State, as analysed by Emenike (2020). Further corroboration comes from a survey conducted by SB-Morgan Intelligence, which revealed that during periods of conflict and mobility restrictions, businesses experience a decline in both clientele and revenue, whilst others suffer resource depletion or alternative forms of loss (Odutola, 2021).

Ozibo & Okorie (2022) posit that the sit-at-home directive, when examined from an economic perspective, proves detrimental to both Nigeria's overall economy and the South-Eastern region in particular. This directive has also significantly impacted foreign direct investment (FDI) in the South-East. FDI, a category of international investment, reflects an investor's intention to acquire a lasting interest in an enterprise situated in an economy other than that of the investor. This concept of lasting interest implies a long-term relationship between the investor and the enterprise, with the investor exerting substantial influence over the enterprise's management. Technically, such an interest is deemed to exist when a direct investor holds 10 percent or more of the voting power on the board of directors (for an incorporated firm) or the equivalent (for an unincorporated enterprise).

FDI serves as an alternative economic strategy for enterprises seeking to establish new facilities or offices, or to acquire existing assets from foreign businesses. These enterprises aim to augment or supplant international trade by producing (and often selling) goods and services in countries other than their country of origin. In an evaluation study, Danjuma (2021) notes that Nigeria continues to grapple with significant concerns regarding the impact of political risk on FDI inflows. Despite Nigeria's attractive economy and market size, the nation struggles to attract the necessary FDI inflows for economic growth. This predicament may be attributed to the high investment risk and low investor confidence resulting from the nation's persistent turmoil and security issues, including the IPOB challenge in the South-Eastern region. Owuamanam et al. (2022) argue that FDI is crucial for the growth of the South-

Eastern economy, as such influxes of FDI result in enhanced technology transfer, domestic production, financial capital development, and job creation (Bitar et al., 2019). A statement issued by the US Department of Trade in 2020 explicitly identified the South-Eastern region of Nigeria as one of many areas where investor confidence is undermined by insecurity. The nature and execution of the sit-at-home order by IPOB have made foreign investors wary of investing in the South-East, as criminals have exploited this situation to perpetrate various violent and social crimes, including kidnapping and organ harvesting. Consequently, the sit-at-home directive discourages FDI, harms businesses, and negatively impacts tourism, as investors are reluctant to commit capital to industries where the security of their investments is uncertain (Asogwa & Ochie, 2023).

Furthermore, the imposition of sit-at-home orders by IPOB and the militarization of the region, characterised by pervasive police and military checkpoints that subject youths and innocent civilians to unwarranted harassment—has significantly impeded the development of social infrastructure throughout the South-Eastern region. Okeoma (2021) reports that the Nigerian government has alleged that the paramilitary component of IPOB, known as the Eastern Security Network (ESN), has destroyed 18 INEC offices and 136 security installations in the country's South-Eastern region.

In a study by Ijeoma & Ibeh (2023) it is reported that political activities have been hijacked by some sponsored agents of insecurity. Unemployment soars to a new height. It said as businesses find it difficult to meet up with sales volumes, “they are faced with no option other than to retrench some of their employees.” (Igbinadolor, 2022); there is an increase in rural-urban migration to escape from the areas the faceless people have absolute control over. Some parts of Ebonyi, Imo and Anambra are under siege by faceless criminals and the onslaught of state security agencies, but any crime committed is attributed to IPOB. These observations demonstrate how social unrest of all forms compromises social infrastructure and impedes economic development.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the UN's failure to address IPOB's claims legitimately emboldened the Nigerian government's repressive actions. This repression escalated tensions and violence in the South-East. The resulting insecurity disrupted economic activities and created an unstable environment for businesses. Consequently, businesses began relocating, investments declined, and people started leaving the region. This exodus has further weakened the economic fabric of the South-East, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of economic decline, mass exodus of Igbo people to other parts of Nigeria and outside Nigeria, and reduction in foreign direct investment (FDI) within the South-East region of Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing, it is obvious that the nature of the Nigerian government's response to IPOB's unrelenting agitation for self-determination via an independence referendum is not dialogue oriented, but highly repressive and based on military response. This indeed is contrary to the United Nations charter (1945) and the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), which provide for the right to self-determination, to which Nigeria is signatory. Invariably, since Nigeria is expected to obey international law arising from the U.N. Charter, it is disappointing that U.N. has maintained passivity *viz-a-viz* the Nigerian-IPOB degenerating conflict (as was the case in South Sudan until after a protracted war that cost enormous lives and properties), rather than compelling Nigeria (via sanctions) to resort to dialogue and respect international obligations it is signatory to. This pattern of behaviour from

the Nigerian government, exacerbated by U.N.'s passivity, not only contravenes international human rights standards but also exacerbates tensions and undermines the prospects for peaceful resolution.

The study's finding on the causes of the United Nations' indifference towards IPOB's continued agitation for self-determination as well as Nigerian government's brutal military oriented response to the agitation indicates the prevalence of the selfish national interest of powerful state actors within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), such as United Kingdom, and her neo-colonial allies who are beneficiaries of the "One-Nigeria" status quo. These states, in their realist approach to international relations, sacrifice IPOB's U.N.-recognised right to self-determination on the altar of National Interests. It is unfortunate that the UNSC that is supposed to ensure global peace and security, usually delay in taking necessary actions as regards self-determination in the third-world until enormous loss of lives and properties is registered in the years on ensuing fatal conflict as was seen in the case of South Sudan's emergence from Sudan as an independent state after years of protracted violent clash.

Worthy of note are the far-reaching retrogressive domestic and external adverse effects of this continuing conflict. The cycle of violence, compounded by IPOB's sit-at-home orders and the militarisation of the South-East by the Federal Government of Nigeria, has led to significant loss of lives, economic disruptions, declining internally generated revenue, a troubling trend of business relocation away from the South-East, dwindling foreign direct investments (FDI) in the South-East, and ongoing damage on Nigeria's external image. All these outcomes are overtly and covertly ensured by the "One-Nigeria" neo-colonial leaders and their foreign collaborative overlords in the U.N. to ensure the continued existence of Nigeria as a single geopolitical entity for their geostrategic and economic interests, - the U.N.-backed right to self-determination notwithstanding. This has precipitated a self-reinforcing cycle of decline potentially setting the stage for long-term developmental challenges in the South-East.

Given the situation stated above, it is obvious from the findings of this research that the United Nations has incentives to remain indifferent to IPOB's agitation for self-determination, which will continue to give room to Nigerian government's repressive response to IPOB's legitimate agitation. Thus, it behoves IPOB to look inwards, take their destiny into their hands and consider redirecting their efforts towards aligning efforts with other pro-Igbo groups advocating for restructuring and true fiscal federalism within Nigeria. This approach would involve:

- a. Building internal cohesion by uniting its various factions like the Chika Edoziem led Directorate of State (DOS) and Simon Ekpa's Biafra Republic Government in Exile (BRGIE).
- b. Drawing inspiration from successful models of regional autonomy within federal systems, such as Bavaria in Germany, to develop a vision for internal development and autonomy within the Nigerian federal structure. This will help IPOB develop a comprehensive regional development plan that addresses:
 - i. Economic development and job creation
 - ii. Infrastructure improvement
 - iii. Education and skills development
 - iv. Security and rule of law

- c. IPOB should also consider engaging professional lobbyists and advocacy firms with experience in international affairs to make their case to influential nations, particularly the P5 members of the UN Security Council. The lobbying efforts could focus on demonstrating how an independent Biafra could potentially offer a stable business environment and protect foreign economic interests in the region. Lobbying may focus on the following key areas:
 - i. Emphasis on economic stability: Present economic plans and policies that would attract and safeguard foreign investments in an independent Biafra.
 - ii. Addressing corruption concerns: Outline proposed anti-corruption measures and transparency initiatives.
 - iii. Highlighting regional stability: Explain how Biafran independence could potentially reduce regional tensions and conflicts.
 - iv. Respect for existing agreements: Affirm commitment to honouring existing international business agreements and treaties.
 - v. Gradual transition: This implies a phased approach to independence that allows for economic continuity.

This approach aims to reframe the independence movement in terms of mutual economic benefits and stability, which may be more persuasive to foreign powers than purely political arguments.

- d. Also, pro-Igbo groups like *Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo* should broker political solution with the Nigerian government that will lead to the unconditional release of the leader of IPOB, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, from detention should be explored by state governors in the South-East. This will bring an abrupt end to the sit-at-home protest instituted by IPOB for the release of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu.

These strategies have the potential to address critical grievances and accomplish meaningful autonomy. A federal system that has been restructured to provide more autonomy to states or regions would enable local control over security forces and resources, particularly the police. IPOB has the potential to establish a broader coalition of pro-Igbo groups that are also pursuing decentralisation of power by transitioning to constitutional reform. This will potentially decrease the probability of violent conflict while simultaneously promoting the interests of the Igbo people, which IPOB seeks to advance and protect.

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