

Introduction

Successionist agitations remain a global phenomenon, cutting across several regions and subregions of the world. They are movements where groups seek to break away from their original nation-states to form independent entities. These movements can be driven by various factors, including ethnic, cultural, religious, economic, and political grievances. In Europe, for example, the Scottish National Party (SNP) advocates for Scottish independence from the UK. Similarly, the Basque National Liberation Movement seeks independence for the Basque Country from Spain. In Asia, Kurdish groups in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran seek independence or greater autonomy. The Tibetan independence movement seeks independence from China. The Americas is not exempted. The Quebec sovereignty movement seeks independence for the province of Quebec from Canada. Some groups advocate for Puerto Rican independence from the US (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

Africa has also witnessed turbulent secessionist movements, such as the Southern Sudan militias and the Polisario Front seek independence for Western Sahara from Moroccan control. These movements often face significant challenges, including resistance from the central governments, internal divisions, and international diplomatic pressures. The outcomes vary, with some movements achieving partial autonomy, while others remain ongoing struggles.

Nigeria's history is laced with several challenges arising from unresolved national questions which revolve around sensitive national issues like group marginalization, revenue allocation, politicization of religion, ethnic militancy, terrorism and corruption. But, one of the major manifestations of some of these unresolved problems is the emergence of groups demanding self-determination and political independence, such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), in the South-East, which has now manifested into violent extremism. Their recent militant activities

culminating in the forceful enforcement of the imposition of sit-at-home protest throughout the five states of the South East region pose a serious national security challenge and negative impact on human security in the South East region of Nigeria (Ekpo, 2018). The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a separatist group in Nigeria that advocates for the secession of the southeastern region, known as Biafra, from the rest of the country. The group's main objectives include the restoration of Biafra as an independent state, the promotion of Biafran culture and identity, and the protection of the rights of the Igbo people who primarily inhabit the region. IPOB has gained significant attention in recent years due to its violent extremism and its impact on human security in the South East Nigeria region (Thompson, 2016).

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a separatist group in Nigeria that has been advocating for the independence of the South East region. The group, founded by Nnamdi Kanu in 2012, seeks the revival of the defunct state of Biafra. Over the years, IPOB's activities have transitioned from peaceful protests to militant actions, primarily through its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). The agitation for Biafra dates back to the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), which was caused by ethnic, political, and economic disparities. The region remains one of the most restive in Nigeria, with significant impacts on the security and socio-economic conditions of the inhabitants. The persistent militant agitations by IPOB and the subsequent military responses have created a volatile environment in the South East region of Nigeria. This has led to a significant decline in physical security, with frequent reports of violence, kidnappings, and destruction of property. The ongoing conflict has disrupted the daily lives and economic activities of the inhabitants, leading to a heightened sense of insecurity and instability in the region.

Nigeria is witnessing the escalation of violence and conflicts across the board. While the incidents have led to thousands of losses to lives and then the destruction of livelihood, it has seemingly

overwhelmed Nigeria's security operatives. The Southeast region, which used to be one of Nigeria's relatively peaceful zones, has witnessed rising violence. The past couple of months have been dreadful, given the region's rise of violence and security uncertainties. About 254 people were killed in 63 incidents recorded in the first five months of 2021. Ebonyi state topped the incident table with 101 fatalities, followed by Imo state with 60 casualties. While Anambra state recorded 37 deaths, Abia state had 33 deaths. Enugu completed the table with the least casualty figure at 22 deaths (Tribune, 2025).

These incidents and wanton killings stem from the consistency of unknown gunmen violence, clashes between security agencies and self-rule enthusiasts (IPOB), extra-judicial killings, banditry, cultism, land-related and communal conflicts in the region. Despite the presence of increased formal security measures and parallel quasi-security formations, the violence has continued. Indeed, the proliferation of multiple security groups may have added to the security uncertainties in the Southeast. For instance, the Nigerian government has opposed the Eastern Security Network (ESN) through consistent military operations.

According to the Multi-Stakeholder Forum Policy Brief (2022), in the troubled southeast zone, 254 people died in 63 incidents recorded in the first five months of 2021. Ebonyi state recorded the highest statistics with 101 fatalities (92 civilians and nine security agents). Imo state came second with 60 casualties, out of which were 35 civilians and 25 security agents. Anambra and Abia recorded 37 (25 civilians and 12 security agents) and 33 (19 civilians and 14 security agents) deaths, respectively. With 22 fatalities (17 civilians and six security agents), Enugu state is the least violent state in the Southeast for the period under review.

An understanding of the conflict dynamics points to old and new issues in the region. For example, there are clear links between current southeast violence to marginalisation and group

violence that heralded the Nigerian/Biafran civil war. Furthermore, it has also been linked to new perceptions of exclusion, structural violence, government's repressive stance on pro-Biafra secession calls. On a broader scale, the cross-cutting insecurity in Nigeria and apparent ineffectual security measures add to the recurrence of violence and conflict in the region. As mentioned above and detailed in this study, the consistent rise of violence in the Southeast and Nigeria, in general, is evidenced in the Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database. This paper examines IPOB's militant agitations and the physical security of the inhabitants of the South East Nigeria region.

The objectives of this study are therefore;

- i. To examine the impact of IPOB's militant agitations on the physical security of the inhabitants of the South East Nigeria region.
- ii. To evaluate the effectiveness of the Nigerian government's security measures in addressing the threats posed by IPOB and its militant wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN).

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design, where structured questionnaire were administered to 390 respondents who were selected purposively from Aba, Umuahia, Owerri, Onitsha, Nnewi, Enugu, and Abakaliki, representing communities within the study area. The survey collected data on their experiences, perceptions, and impacts of IPOB's militant activities on their physical security. A structured questionnaire was developed, piloted, and administered to the selected sample based on the Likert Five-point Scale. The sample size was arrived at using Yamane's (1967) statistic formular. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 was used to analyze the quantitative data. To make predictions, a simple regression analysis was used.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the relative deprivation theory as framework for analysis. The theory of relative deprivation is one of the most popular behavioural explanatory frameworks in the study of violence. The central thesis of this framework is that aggression is always a consequence of discontent of a kind. Relative deprivation is defined as a perceived discrepancy between man's (groups) value expectation and value capabilities. By Value expectations we refer to goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining and maintaining given the social means available to them (Guur 1970).

The theory as described by Onuoha (2004) assumes that individual and groups have goals of sort that much of their behaviour is purposive in the sense of goal-seeking and if this behaviour is not prevented in some way, the group or individual is likely to behave quite peaceably. Since this condition is unlikely to be regularly or at least always fulfilled in human condition of scarcity, the theory predicts that the result is likely to be aggressive behaviour. Moyer (1976) argues that the normal tendency towards violent aggression is increased by frustration of desires. According to him when a goal is presumably attractive to two or more individuals is made available in such a way that it can be obtained by only one of them, the end result is frustration for the loser.

From this theoretical standpoint it is clear that the people of Eastern Nigeria represent a frustrated group. This group have been denied the opportunity to realise their full potentials within the confines of the federation. Simply put, since 1966 till date both the military and civilian, federal and unitary system of governments that have enjoyed practice in the Nigeria have failed to accommodate and satisfy them. The above scenario has led to the formation of various self-determination groups that aimed at achieving the long-lost Republic of Biafra of 1967 to 1970.

The value good they have been denied include the motorable highways, the presidency, the dredging of River Niger to have a carrying capacity of small ships, a robust international airport, appointment to key position in the political sphere, structural imbalance of being the only region with 5 states instead of 6, etc.

Relative deprivation theory helps explain the motivations behind successionist agitations, including IPOB's actions in Southeast Nigeria. The theory suggests that people become discontented when they perceive a significant gap between their current situation and what they believe they deserve. This sense of deprivation isn't necessarily about absolute poverty or suffering but rather about a perceived disparity in economic, social, or political conditions compared to others or to their own expectations. These factors collectively foster a sense of collective deprivation, which can lead to increased support for movements like IPOB that promise to address these grievances through independence or greater autonomy.

Results and Discussion

Impact of IPOB's Militant Agitations on Physical Safety of the inhabitants of the South East Region of Nigeria.

The opinions of residents of the South East region were solicited to provide an understanding of the Impact of IPOB's Militant Agitations on the Physical Safety of the inhabitants of the South East region of Nigeria. To achieve this objective, 4 items of statement describing the various Impacts of IPOB's Militant Agitations on the Physical Safety of the Inhabitants of the South East Nigeria Region. Data collected and organized are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Respondents' Response on the Impact of IPOB's Militant Agitations on Physical Safety of The Inhabitants of The Southeast East Nigeria Region

Statements	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	N	$\bar{X}$	σ	Decision
IPOB's militant activities have increased the risk of physical harm to residents.	12 (3.1)	13 (3.4)	12 (3.1)	49 (12.7)	300 (77.7)	386	4.59	.939	High Perception
The presence of IPOB militants has led to a higher incidence of violent confrontations.	10 (2.6)	11 (2.8)	16 (4.1)	295 (76.4)	54 (14.0)	386	3.96	.727	Low Perception
Residents feel less safe due to the activities of IPOB militants.	12 (3.1)	13 (3.4)	10 (2.6)	58 (15.0)	293 (75.9)	386	4.57	.935	High Perception
There have been more reports of physical assaults linked to IPOB's militant agitations.	9 (2.3)	9 (2.3)	24 (6.2)	299 (77.5)	45 (11.7)	386	3.94	.692	Low Perception

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Note: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree, (N) Neutral (D) Strongly Disagree (SD), Mean score ($\bar{X}$), Standard deviation (σ), Grand Mean: $17.06/4 = 4.27$

Table 1.1 presents the perceptions of respondents regarding the impact of IPOB's militant agitations on physical safety in the South East region of Nigeria. A majority of respondents strongly agreed (77.7%) or agreed (12.7%) that IPOB's militant activities have increased the risk of physical harm to residents. The mean score of 4.59 (SD = 0.939) indicates a high level of agreement, with only 6.5% expressing neutrality or disagreement. This finding highlights a significant perception that IPOB's militant activities endanger the physical safety of residents. The heightened risk of harm could contribute to widespread fear, displacement, and reduced quality of life for inhabitants in affected areas.

A majority of respondents agreed (76.4%) or strongly agreed (14.0%) with this statement, while 4.1% were neutral and 5.4% expressed disagreement. The mean score of 3.96 (SD = 0.727) reflects a moderate level of agreement. This result indicates a perception that IPOB's militant presence

correlates with an increase in violent confrontations. Such confrontations may exacerbate instability in the region and strain local security forces, leading to greater vulnerability for residents. A significant proportion of respondents strongly agreed (75.9%) or agreed (15.0%) with this statement, yielding a mean score of 4.57 (SD = 0.935). Only 6.5% expressed neutrality or disagreement. The widespread agreement reflects the psychological and physical insecurity experienced by residents due to IPOB's activities. This feeling of reduced safety may disrupt daily life, limit economic activities, and contribute to migration away from the region.

Most respondents strongly agreed (77.5%) or agreed (11.7%) that physical assaults are increasingly linked to IPOB's activities, resulting in a mean score of 3.94 (SD = 0.692). Approximately 10.8% of respondents were neutral or disagreed. This finding suggests that IPOB's militant agitations are perceived as contributing to a rise in physical assaults. Such incidents could further erode public confidence in law enforcement and heighten perceptions of insecurity in the region. The grand mean of 4.27 across all statements indicates that respondents generally perceive IPOB's militant agitations as having a significant negative impact on physical safety in the South East region. The results point to an urgent need for interventions to mitigate the physical risks posed by IPOB's activities. Strengthening security measures, improving law enforcement response, and addressing the root causes of IPOB's agitations could help enhance physical safety and restore stability in the region.

Table 1.2: Respondents' feedback on Efforts in Place to Address IPOB's Militant Agitations and Enhance Human Security in South East Nigeria

Statements	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	N	$\bar{X}$	σ	Decision
Regional efforts to address IPOB's activities have been effective.	24 (6.2)	35 (9.1)	41 (10.6)	261 (67.6)	25 (6.5)	386	3.59	.963	High Perception
National strategies to counter IPOB's militant agitations have improved human security.	19 (4.9)	48 (12.4)	169 (43.8)	136 (35.2)	14 (3.6)	386	3.20	.883	Low Perception
International support has been crucial in addressing IPOB's militant activities.	17 (4.4)	45 (11.7)	136 (35.2)	171 (44.3)	17 (4.4)	386	3.33	.899	Low Perception
Collaborative efforts between regional and national bodies have enhanced security in the South East.	10 (2.6)	27 (7.0)	98 (25.4)	235 (60.9)	16 (4.1)	386	3.57	.791	High Perception

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Note: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree, (N) Neutral (D) Strongly Disagree (SD), Mean score ($\bar{X}$), Standard deviation (σ), Grand Mean: $13.69/4 = 3.42$

Table 1.2 presents the perceptions of respondents regarding efforts to address IPOB's militant agitations and enhance human security in the South East region of Nigeria. A majority of respondents agreed (67.6%) or strongly agreed (6.5%) that regional efforts to address IPOB's activities have been effective. The mean score of 3.59 (SD = 0.963) indicates a high perception of the effectiveness of regional initiatives, although 25.9% expressed disagreement or neutrality. This finding suggests that respondents perceive regional efforts as somewhat successful in addressing IPOB's activities. Strengthening these efforts through increased resources, coordination, and public engagement could enhance their impact on human security.

Approximately 43.8% of respondents agreed with this statement, while 35.2% strongly agreed. However, 17.3% expressed disagreement, and 4.3% were neutral. The mean score of 3.20 (SD = 0.883) reflects a low perception of the effectiveness of national strategies. The low perception of national strategies highlights the need for the federal government to reassess and improve its approach to addressing IPOB's activities. Greater focus on localized and inclusive policies may be necessary to gain the trust and support of residents. While 44.3% of respondents strongly agreed and 35.2% agreed with this statement, 16.1% expressed disagreement or neutrality. The mean score of 3.33 (SD = 0.899) indicates a low perception of the impact of international support. This suggests that international efforts are not perceived as being significantly impactful in resolving IPOB's militant activities. There may be a need for international bodies to collaborate more effectively with local and national actors to provide meaningful support.

A majority of respondents agreed (60.9%) or strongly agreed (4.1%) that collaborative efforts between regional and national bodies have enhanced security in the South East. The mean score of 3.57 (SD = 0.791) indicates a high perception of the effectiveness of collaboration. The perception of positive collaboration between regional and national bodies suggests that joint efforts have made some progress in improving security. Strengthening these partnerships further could lead to sustained improvements in human security in the region. The grand mean of 3.42 across all statements reflects a moderate perception of the overall effectiveness of efforts to address IPOB's militant agitations and enhance human security in the South East region. The results suggest that while some progress has been made, there is significant room for improvement in addressing IPOB's activities and enhancing security. Regional efforts and collaborative strategies are seen as relatively effective, but national and international efforts need to be strengthened. A multi-

stakeholder approach that incorporates input from local communities, national governments, and international organizations may be essential to achieving sustainable security and development.

Impact of IPOB's Militant Agitations on Physical Safety in the South-East Region of Nigeria

The study found that IPOB's activities have contributed to a decline in physical security within the South-East. Frequent clashes between IPOB supporters and security forces, the rise of unknown gunmen, and violent enforcement of sit-at-home orders have created a sense of insecurity among residents. This corroborates the findings of Oladimeji et al. (2012), who noted that militant groups like Boko Haram and IPOB contribute to a heightened sense of fear in conflict-prone regions. The findings align with the Relative Deprivation Theory, which posits that aggressive behavior emerges when a group perceives itself as being deprived of its rights (Gurr, 1970). IPOB members perceive state security forces as enforcers of oppression rather than protectors of their rights. The rise of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) as a vigilante force suggests that IPOB supporters believe they cannot rely on government institutions for security.

From the Social Contract Theory perspective, Hobbes (1651) argued that a breakdown in the state's ability to provide security leads to the rise of alternative security structures. The Nigerian government's inability to curb crime and violence in the South East has led many to support IPOB's ESN as a parallel security force, further complicating the security crisis.

Efforts in Place to Address IPOB's Militant Agitations and Enhance Human Security in South-East Nigeria

The study found mixed reactions regarding the effectiveness of government interventions in addressing IPOB's activities. While some regional peace initiatives have attempted dialogue, the Nigerian government's military approach has been largely ineffective. Respondents argued that heavy-handed tactics, such as Operation Python Dance II, have led to further radicalization rather

than resolving the crisis. This finding aligns with Egwu (2016), who criticized the government's use of force in dealing with IPOB and MASSOB, arguing that military suppression without addressing political grievances only escalates conflicts. Similarly, Ugorji (2012) emphasized that sustainable conflict resolution requires dialogue, economic empowerment, and political inclusion rather than excessive military action.

From a Relative Deprivation Theory perspective, military force without addressing underlying grievances only increases resentment. The use of excessive force against IPOB members has deepened the sense of alienation and victimhood, fueling further resistance. Social Contract Theory also explains the failure of these interventions. Hobbes argued that governments that fail to create an inclusive system of governance risk losing legitimacy. The Nigerian state's approach to IPOB lacks inclusivity, as dialogue and negotiations have been minimal.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that IPOB's militant agitations have significantly undermined human security in the South-East region of Nigeria. The continuous enforcement of sit-at-home orders has crippled economic activities, creating hardships for the local population. The violent confrontations between IPOB members and security agencies have further deteriorated security conditions, instilling fear among residents and leading to human rights violations. Additionally, IPOB's activities have posed a challenge to Nigeria's territorial integrity, as their call for secession has deepened political divisions and heightened ethnic tensions. The study also concludes that the government's approach to handling IPOB has contributed to escalating violence, as heavy-handed military interventions have fueled resistance rather than resolving the underlying issues.

To address these challenges, a more strategic and balanced approach is required. This includes fostering political dialogue, promoting economic inclusivity, and implementing conflict-sensitive security strategies. By addressing the socio-political and economic grievances fueling the agitation, sustainable peace and development can be achieved in the South-East region. A shift from reactive measures to proactive conflict resolution mechanisms will ensure a more peaceful and stable Nigeria.

Recommendations

- i. To mitigate the economic impact of IPOB's activities, the government should implement economic empowerment programs, job creation initiatives, and infrastructural development in the South-East region. Special economic zones and targeted investments should be introduced to encourage business growth.
- ii. Security agencies should adopt a more intelligence-driven and community-centered approach to policing rather than relying on brute force. Ensuring that security measures align with human rights principles will prevent escalations and foster public trust in law enforcement.

