

# STATES RESPONSES TO SECESSIONIST GROUPS AND SEPARATIST AGITATIONS IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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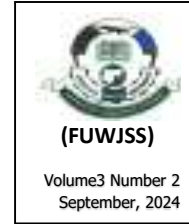
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## Abstract

This paper assessed the upsurge in separatist agitations in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, particularly the pro-Biafra movements seeking the actualization of a sovereign state of Biafra. The study explores state's responses to the challenges posed by the separatist agitations emphasizing their implications for the nation's security and sustainable development in the region. The research utilizes secondary data from documentary sources. The theory of relative deprivation was used as a lens to intellectually navigate this research which posits that feelings of discontent and agitation arise not only from objective material deprivations but also from the perception of being disadvantaged or deprived in comparison to others to shed light on the underlying causes and dynamics behind the renewed agitations. The paper established that the deteriorating material conditions of the people in South-East Nigeria, coupled with actions, inactions, and policies of the Nigerian government have fuelled feelings of marginalization, and deprivation and sustained the separatist demands. The study concludes that there is need for the framing of a social structure that ensures a more comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of separatist agitations and promotes reconciliation and social inclusion in order to achieve lasting peace and stability in the region.

**Keywords:** Separatist agitations, South-East Nigeria, marginalization, government policies

## Introduction

Nigeria's history of separatist agitations can be traced back to its pre-independence era, with the country's ethnic and cultural diversity being a significant contributing factor. Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with its language, culture, and aspirations (Tukumo, 1970). The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by the British colonial administration in 1914 brought together these diverse groups into a single entity without adequate consideration for their differences. During the colonial period, the British adopted a policy of indirect rule, which allowed for the preservation of traditional institutions and power structures but also reinforced ethnic divisions. The colonial authorities used divide and rule that favored certain ethnic groups over others, leading to feelings of marginalization and inequality among those who were excluded from power and resources. This created a fertile ground for ethnic tensions and rivalries (Ukiwo, 2005; Mazrui, 1993; Lynch, 2002; Tukumo, 1970).

Following independence in 1960, Nigeria experienced a series of political crises, including a civil war from 1967 to 1970. The war was fought primarily between the Nigerian government and the secessionist state of Biafra, led by the Igbo ethnic group. The conflict resulted in significant loss of life and deepened the divisions between ethnic groups (Tukumo, 1970; Ezemenaka and Prouza, 2016). The military regimes that followed the war sought to maintain unity through a centralized power structure, suppressing dissent and limiting the autonomy of ethnic groups. However, these repressive measures did not address the underlying causes of separatist sentiment, and grievances continued to simmer beneath the surface (Achebe, 2012).

With the return to democratic rule in 1999, there was hope that Nigeria would experience a more inclusive and equitable political system. However, the reality has been marked by recurring cycles of ethnic tensions, often exacerbated by political manipulation and economic disparities. The resurgence of separatist agitations in recent years reflects a deep-seated frustration with the perceived failure of the Nigerian state to address the needs and aspirations of its diverse population. The lack of trust between ethnic groups and the perception of ethnic domination by the majority groups have hindered efforts to forge a common national identity and foster unity (Awofeso, 2017).

Groups like MASSOB and IPOB in the southeast have raised demands for greater self-determination. The rise of these separatist movements has

further polarized the Nigerian federation along ethnic, regional, and religious lines, exacerbating mutual mistrust and acrimony. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) are two secessionist groups in the South East region of Nigeria that advocate for the independence of Biafra. While both organizations share a similar goal, they have distinct leadership and approaches (Simpson, 2014).

MASSOB, led by Ralph Uwazurike, was founded to revive the defunct Biafran Federation. They claim to pursue their objectives through peaceful means, drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence philosophy. However, there have been concerns about the group's potential to resort to violence if their demands are not met (Simpson, 2014). The Nigerian government arrested Uwazurike on treason charges in 2005 but released him in 2007. Additionally, MASSOB introduced a Biafran 'International Passport' in 2009, which further raised concerns about their intentions and potential impact on national security (Simpson, 2014).

IPOB, led by Nnamdi Kanu, also seeks the sovereignty of Biafra and calls for secession from Nigeria. Kanu, based in the United Kingdom, is a prominent political activist and has faced arrest by the Nigerian government. IPOB questions the legality and feasibility of Nigeria's unity, citing their distinct values and aspirations. The group operates a radio station in London to disseminate their secessionist ideas (Nwangwu, 2023).

Kanu's alleged request for guns and ammunition at a gathering in the United States indicates readiness for escalation of violence in the southeast region. The Nigerian government has held Kanu in custody despite court orders for his release. Some non-governmental organizations have called for his release on bail, while the government has been cautious due to the perceived dangers of his release and the potential for inciting a civil war (Mbachu, 2021). It is within this context that this paper attempts to interrogate state responses to secessionist groups in Nigeria and the contradictions that orchestrated the resurgence of separatist agitations in the Southeast Nigeria.

### **Separatist Agitations in Southeast Nigeria**

The term "separatism" has different meanings, ranging from demands for greater regional autonomy within a federal state to outright secession and the declaration of political independence. Separatism can be broadly defined as the desire of a specific portion of a population within a

sovereign state to loosen or break the political and legal bonds that connect it to the whole (Siroky and Abbasov, 2021; Kamanu, 1974). If the goal is only to loosen the bonds, it is referred to as autonomy. If the aim is secession, there may be goals of independence or union with another sovereign state. In a narrower sense, separatism refers to agitation by a distinct political unit within a polity for enhanced decentralization of authority by the central government, guaranteeing greater autonomy in specific activities. The two concepts represent forms of political instability or disintegration, with secession resulting in the breakup of the polity (Okpaku, 1972; Kamanu, 1974).

Separatist agitations have been a recurring phenomenon in Nigeria since its unification in 1914. These movements aim to achieve state secession, with the most notable being the Biafran secessionist movement from 1967 to 1970. While separatist movements are a global phenomenon, they are particularly pronounced in low-trust, multi-ethnic, and multicultural societies like Nigeria. Regarding Nigeria, numerous perspectives have been articulated regarding both the immediate and underlying reasons behind separatist movements, dating back to its inception as a British Colony and Protectorate. As posited by Tamuno, the inclination towards separatism in Nigeria can be traced to factors such as the nation's diverse ethnic makeup, cultural heterogeneity, expansive geographic size, diverse administrative approaches, and contentious political and constitutional structures. Additionally, Tamuno highlights the absence of a compelling ideological unifier as a contributing factor to separatist tendencies in the country (Tamuno, 1970). Contrary to this, Rothchild has contended that Nigeria's federal system, initially characterized by three sizable and semi-autonomous regions, does little to discourage separatist notions. This is because each of these regions inherently possesses all the essential elements of nationhood (Rothchild, 1961).

Virtually all the major ethnic groups have exhibited separatist tendencies in Nigeria. For example, the series of negotiations conducted among representatives of diverse ethnic groups during the constitutional conferences organized by the British Colonial Office faced a near-collapse due to separatist inclinations displayed by most delegations. The Northern delegation, in particular, adopted a resolute and non-negotiable stance during the General Conference on the Review of the 1946 Constitution held at Ibadan in 1950. They insisted that unless the North was allocated 50 percent of the seats in the proposed House of Representatives—equivalent to the combined representation of the

Western and Eastern regions—reflecting its predominant population, they would pursue separation from the rest of Nigeria based on the arrangements pre-existing before 1914. Initially, the Southern delegation resisted this demand, but the stance shifted when members of the Legislative Council from the Eastern Region yielded to the pressure, aiming to prevent the country from disintegrating. According to Ezera (1964), the decision made by Eastern members in the Legislative Council to withdraw their opposition to the North's demand for parity of representation in the legislature with the two Southern provinces played a vital role in saving the country from disintegration. Recently, the Northern region has also displayed separatist inclinations. In response to the activities of MASSOB and IPOB, a coalition of Northern Youth Groups issued the "Kaduna Declaration," wherein they purportedly issued a "quit notice" to all Igbos currently residing in Northern Nigeria, with the deadline set for on or before October 1, 2017

The Yoruba had also issued a warning to withdraw from the planned federation of Nigeria unless the British colonialists reversed their decision to designate Lagos as the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. In response, the Colonial Office swiftly addressed this threat, interpreting it as tantamount to a potential use of force. Recently, there has also been evidence of a secessionist threat from the Yoruba community. In 2015, prompted by continuous violent attacks on numerous Yoruba farming communities by Fulani herdsmen and the kidnapping of a prominent Yoruba politician, Olu Falae, by the same group, influential Yoruba leaders convened an emergency summit in Ibadan. Following the summit, they issued a secessionist threat, expressing the intention of the Yoruba people to reassess their position within the Nigerian federation. The Yoruba leaders asserted that, due to the inability of Nigeria's federal arrangement to ensure the security of lives and properties, they felt compelled to explore the possibility of political independence for the Yoruba. To complete the cycle of separatist movements within Nigeria's three prominent ethnic groups, according to Adangor, (2017) the Igbo, following the 1966 pogrom, advocated for the restructuring of the federation. Recognizing the potential failure of their plea for restructuring but determined to end perceived Hausa/Fulani dominance, the Igbo made an unsuccessful secessionist attempt to proclaim an independent Republic of Biafra in July 1967. This action led to the onset of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War of 1967-70, marking the country's first war of secession. Arguably, the most intense separatist movement since 1999 has been initiated by two grassroots Igbo groups: the Movement for

the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB). Led by distinct leaders, these groups have consistently advocated for the establishment of the sovereign "State of Biafra," unequivocally identifying them as secessionist entities (Adangor, 2017).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of relative deprivation was adopted to intellectually navigate feelings of discontent and agitations arise not only from objective material deprivations but also from the perception of being disadvantaged or deprived in comparison to others. The concept was first used in social-psychological studies of the United States armed forces in the late 1940s to understand the factors affecting motivation and morale among troops (Stouffer, et al, 1949; Kingston, 2015).

The initial concept of relative deprivation was straightforward, indicating that individuals or groups may feel deprived in various aspects relative to their past conditions, others, specific social categories, or even certain ideals. This notion of relative deprivation has evolved into a theoretical direction focused on intergroup comparison, used to explain social phenomena, particularly group agitations.

In the context of social movements or group agitations, the theory of relative deprivation suggests that when individuals or groups perceive significant discrepancies between their current situation and what they believe they deserve or see others enjoying, it can lead to grievances and motivations for collective action. These perceived disparities may drive people to demand changes, seek greater rights, or push for more favourable conditions (Saleh, 2013).

Overall, the theory of relative deprivation situates the separatist's agitations in the south East region on their subjective perceptions of deprivation from power and resources, inequity, marginalization and inequality perpetrated by the Nigerian State against the Ibo nation of Nigeria. According to Adagbor, (2017) the fear of ethnic dominance has generated an increasing wave of discontent among members of different ethnic groups, including the Igbo, which constitutes the third-largest group in the federation. As ethnic groups within the political system come to view the State as a symbol of favoritism towards one group over another, the appeal of separatism grows as a visible expression of disloyalty toward the State.

### **Research Methodology**

This study relied on a qualitative research method which includes assessment of data from previous literature on the topic under examination. It involved systematic literature review on books, journals and online based articles among other materials from library and internet were retrieved, reviewed and deployed.

### **Amplified Disillusionments and Separatist Agitations in the South East**

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, the state has faced numerous challenges. One common factor is a sustained sense of domination and deprivation among members of a culturally homogenous group within a polity. If a distinct group within a federation feels that their region is not receiving a fair share of the benefits from the central government or is being marginalized and neglected, their loyalty to the state can erode, alienating them from the larger polity. The causes of separatist agitations in the South East region of Nigeria can be attributed to the following reasons bellow:

**State Failure, Poor Governance and Poverty:** State failure is the breakdown or inability of a government to fulfil its basic functions, including providing security, maintaining law and order, and delivering public services. State failure leads to the erosion of trust in the government. Corruption, poor leadership, undemocratic government, and poor governance characterized by social, economic, and political woos with a lack of government presence account for one of the reasons for agitations for separatism in the southeast region. The federal and state governments in Nigeria have been ineffective to respond to security challenges, including terrorism, ethnic conflicts, and criminal activities in Nigeria. The failure of the government to provide critical physical infrastructure and other needed requirements for the attainment of human development aspirations of the citizen fuels agitations for separatism (Isa, 2016). Not adhering to democratic principles and constitutionalism has undermined political stability in Nigeria particularly the failure of the government to release Nnamdi Kanu after a constituted court has freed him (Oko, 2023). Also, poverty has been adduced as one of the drivers for separatism in Nigeria. According to Cheta Nwanze, the head of research at SBM Intelligence consultancy in Lagos, cited in Mbachu, (2021) highlights a significant demographic divide within the Igbo community regarding support for separatism. According to Nwanze, the strongest support for separatism is found among the poor and

unemployed individuals, whereas it diminishes among those who have achieved more economic success. This perspective suggests that addressing the economic disparities and providing opportunities for socio-economic advancement could potentially mitigate the drive for separatism in the southeast and other regions of Nigeria.

**Ethnic Marginalization, Local Grievances, Ethnic Nationalism and Inequality:** Feelings of marginalization and exclusion among certain groups or regions can breed resentment and fuel agitations which may further exacerbate insecurity in a country. The perception of ethnic inequality, where some groups consider themselves superior to others or the classification of certain ethnic groups to be more relevant for “juicy” appointive and elective positions particularly at the federal level while others are deemed “irrelevant” can create a sense of marginalization and fuel demands for separate political entities (Fadile, 2013, Akpan, 2023, Nwangwu, 2023). The perception is that certain groups or individuals are violating the law with impunity and the government either directly or indirectly supports them like the herdsman and farmers crises in Nigeria. Ethnic nationalism and local grievances have played a significant role in the resurgence of Biafra separatism in Nigeria. The Biafra separatist movement seeks to establish an independent state for the Igbo people, who are the dominant ethnic group in the South East region (Nwangwu, 2023). Separatist movements feed on local grievances by magnifying them or making obvious benefits their region gets from the Nigerian state seem insignificant.

Also, the state and local government play significant roles in the distribution of revenue and resources in Nigeria, as they serve as crucial intermediaries between the federal government and the grassroots level (Adesopo, and Asaju, 2004). The distribution of revenue and resources at the state and local government levels is essential for fostering development, addressing local needs, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources across the country. It is apparent from the table below of the disparity in the number of states and local governments among the six geo-political zones, with the South-East having the lowest has indeed contributed to feelings of marginalization and group victimization.



**Table 1: Distribution of States and Local Government Areas in Nigeria**

S/No	Zone	No. of States	No. of Local Governments
1	North -Central	6	116
2	North-East	6	110
3	North-West	7	181
4	South-West	6	138
5	South-South	6	127
6	South-East	5	94
	<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>774</b>

Source: Alumona, Azom, & Iloh, (2019).

Socioeconomic factors: High levels of poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic inequality particularly when it is perceived that certain groups are deliberately sidelined for political reasons can contribute to insecurity and create an environment where criminal activities thrive (Alumona, Azom, & Iloh, 2019). The failure of the government to address these issues, particularly in the southeast region and provide opportunities for socioeconomic growth and development has undermined its legitimacy and re-ignited the clamour for separatism in Nigeria (Mavric, 2012).

Equitable access to education is essential for fostering national unity, promoting social cohesion, and ensuring that every citizen has an equal opportunity to reach their full potential. If certain regions face discriminatory policies in educational access, it can contribute to feelings of marginalization and fuel grievances that may manifest in various forms, including separatist movements.

**Table 2: Cut-off Marks for Entrance into Federal Unity Schools for all 36 States and FCT**

S/N	State	Male	Female
	<b>North</b>		
1	Adamawa	62	62
2	Bauchi	35	35
3	Benue	111	111
4	Borno	45	45
5	Gombe	58	58
6	Jigawa	44	44
7	Kaduna	91	91

8	Kano	67	67
9	Kastina	60	60
10	Kebbi	9	20
11	Kogi	119	119
	Kwara	123	123
12	Nasarawa	58	58
13	Niger	93	93
14	Plateau	97	97
15	Sokoto	9	13
16	Taraba	3	11
17	Yobe	2	27
18	Zamfara	4	2
19	FCT Abuja	90	90
	<b>South East</b>		
20	Abia	130	130
21	<b>Anambra</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>139</b>
22	Ebonyi	112	112
23	<b>Enugu</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>134</b>
24	<b>Imo</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>138</b>
	<b>South South</b>		
25	Akwa-Ibom	123	123
26	Bayelsa	72	72
27	CrossRivers	97	97
28	Delta	131	131
29	Edo	127	127
30	Rivers	118	118
	<b>South West</b>		
31	Ekiti	119	110
33	Lagos	133	133
34	Ogun	131	131
35	Ondo	126	126
36	Osun	127	127
37	Oyo	127	127

Source: Alumona, Azom, & Iloh, (2019).

The table as shown above appears to disproportionately disadvantage south east region on educational equity and access to opportunities in the country. When states like Anambra, Imo, and Enugu, etc in the southeast region are required to achieve significantly higher scores compared to

students from other states or regions to gain admission to Federal Unity Schools will act as a harbinger for crises and disunity.

### **State Responses, increased Agitations and Insecurity in South East**

The Nigerian government has taken several measures to address the impact of separatist agitations in the Southeast region. However, these measures have been criticized for their limited effectiveness and for exacerbating the situation.

**Aggressive Militarization and the Use of Force by the Federal Government:** The government's response to insecurity in the southeast involves various strategies, operations, and collaborations with different security agencies to address the complex security challenges in the region. The government has responded to separatist agitation through aggressive militarization, security crackdowns, and mass arrests of supporters and agitators (Ojewale and Onuaha, 2022). The agencies involved are the combined efforts of the Nigerian Army, Nigeria Police, and the Department of State Services (DSS).

The government securities have been involved in arresting and killing armed enforcers of the sit-at-home campaigners. On 17 July 2023, two armed fighters that fled Anambra State were killed in Asaba, Delta State while the following weapons were recovered from them including one AK 47 Rifle, one Pump Action Semi-Automatic Rifle, 15 Live Cartridges, one AK 47 Rifle Magazine, and a Baofeng Radio Receiver (Odeniyi, 2023). This military approach has been criticized for exacerbating the situation and fueling further unrest. According to Amnesty International cited in Mbachu, (2021) the federal government has deployed "ruthless excessive force" in its response to the resurgence of separatist agitations in the southeast region.

The human rights organization has carefully documented the deaths of at least 115 individuals at the hands of security forces from March to June 2021 (Mbachu, 2021). It fears that there could be hundreds more casualties, with many of the victims having no connection to the ESN (Eastern Security Network). The southeast region is currently heavily patrolled by soldiers, who have set up checkpoints on the bumpy roads. There are reports of inspection of drivers and passengers passing through sandbagged positions. Additionally, the air force has been reported to be conducting operations, targeting alleged ESN hideouts even in a densely populated area (Mbachu, 2021).

**The use of threat to enforce government directives by the sub-national governments in the region:** The government of Enugu State has directed

all government establishments to monitor attendance and start surcharging staff who fail to come to work on sit-at-home days. The Enugu State University Teaching Hospital (ESUT-Parklane) implemented the directive by requiring workers to sign attendance between 7:30 to 8:30 am and sign off after 4 pm for those on full-day work and 2 pm for those on shifting work to maintain a daily register. Any worker who comes to work after 8:30 am is considered absent and those who didn't come to work on Mondays will be surcharged 25 per cent of their salary. According to the Enugu state government, traders and other businessmen will risk losing their shops for failing to obey government directives. However, some workers have reportedly started coming to work on Sundays to sleep over to avoid any repercussions for not attending work on Mondays due to fears of being caught in the crossfire or difficulties with transportation (Ede, 2023).

The response of the Anambra government and security agencies in the state involved efforts to reassure residents of security to promote normalcy. Despite the assurances, the sit-at-home has continued due to fear of being attacked or having one property destroyed.

The Abia State Government's response to insecurity involves reassuring the residents of its commitment to tackling all forms of criminality within its domain. The Chief Press Secretary to Governor Alex Otti, Kazie Uko, emphasized according to Njoku and Osibe (2023) the government is in partnership with security agencies to address security challenges in the state. This collaboration aims to checkmate criminal activities and ensure the safety and well-being of the residents.

The Imo State government's response to insecurity and the sit-at-home order involves imposing penalties on state absentee workers. While some government workers at the state level still go to work on Mondays due to penalties imposed by the state government other sectors experience significant disruptions such as banks, schools, markets, offices, and business centres do not open on Mondays. Major markets such as the new market at Douglas Road, wood markets at Umuonyeali and Naze, Alaba market, Orlu Market, and Orlu building materials market have announced their closure on Mondays according to Njoku and Osibe, (2023).

The Ebonyi State Government's response to insecurity and the sit-at-home order has been firm and assertive. Governor Francis Nwifuru and the Commissioner for Information, Jude Okpor denied reports of any sit-at-home observance in the state according to Njoku and Osibe (2023). The state government denied the existence of such activities taking place in the state. The state government however stated that some individuals

might have attempted to create tension, but the government stood firm to continuously maintain the position of being the most peaceful state in the South-East. Ebonyi state government emphasized that they are determined to maintain that status by resisting any form of dissidence and terror from unlawful and proscribed organizations (Njoku and Osibe, 2023).

The military or state-centric approach in the southeast region has proven to be ineffective in resolving the conflict and has instead exacerbated the situation. There is a pressing need for the government to adopt a more comprehensive and inclusive strategy that addresses the root causes of the conflict and prioritizes dialogue and reconciliation over violence.

### **Impact of the Separatist Agitation on the South East Region:**

The impact of separatist agitations and the consequent sit-at-home orders in the South East region of Nigeria has been significant, affecting various aspects of the economy and daily life. The following are the impacts of the resurgence of separatists' agitations on the southeast region of Nigeria according to Anudu, (2023), Nnachi, Ibianeri and Nwakanma, (2023) Njoku and Osibe (2023).

1. **Dwindling Economic Losses:** The sit-at-home orders have resulted in significant economic losses for businesses, especially micro and nano businesses that heavily rely on daily sales. The loss of revenue over the 71-Monday period was estimated to be around N5.375 trillion (Anudu, 2023). Many businesses have been severely affected, with some shutting down completely or struggling to survive due to the lack of economic activities. The continuous disruption of economic activities affects the livelihoods of the people in the region. The economic impact of the sit-at-home orders is also reflected in the region's gross domestic product (GDP). While the exact figures for the South-East states' GDP are not available, estimates suggest that the revenue loss from the sit-at-home orders is equivalent to around 30% of the GDP of the region. The negative economic consequences have also affected investor perception and confidence, deterring potential investments in the region. The prolonged sit-at-home orders and the associated disruptions have created a negative perception of the region, both domestically and internationally. The perception of the South East as an unsafe and unstable investment destination can deter potential investors and further hinder economic growth and development.

2. Insecurity, Fear, intimidation, Loss of Lives and Property: The emergence of various factions of armed groups and enforcers within the pro-Biafra movement, each with its agenda, has led to further complicating the security situation in the region. The sit-at-home orders have disrupted daily life, with people staying at home and businesses remaining closed every Monday. While some individuals may enjoy extended holidays, employers and workers are affected by the loss of productive hours. Meetings and critical business decisions are often postponed, leading to inefficiencies and reduced productivity. Non-state actors associated with the separatist agitations have been reported to engage in acts of violence and intimidation. Some business owners are afraid to speak out against the sit-at-home orders due to the potential threats they may face.

There have been instances of attacks on businesses and individuals who defy orders, leading to a climate of fear and insecurity (Njoku and Osibe, 2023). The enforcement of the sit-at-home directives has led to violence and attacks in various parts of the region. Security agents, civilians, and even members of the separatist groups have lost their lives during clashes and confrontations. Additionally, attacks on security formations, government institutions, and properties belonging to government officials. This has contributed to the erosion of government authority. The inability of the government to effectively counter the sit-at-home orders and enforce normalcy has eroded public confidence in government institutions. The terror in the region has led some government institutions, such as the Enugu State Governorship Election Tribunal not to function due to the sit-at-home orders which will hamper the timely resolution of legal matters. The activities of these enforcers have disrupted daily life and made residents vulnerable to violence and attacks in the southeast region. Also, according to Babatunde, (2023), the activities of the separatist agitators have worsened Nigeria's security situation. This year 2023, Nigeria has been ranked 8th among the top 10 countries with the highest level of terrorism in the world, according to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2023. The assessment evaluated terrorism impact in 163 countries, and Nigeria received a high score of 8.065, indicating a significant impact of terrorism in the country. Notably, the Indigenous People of Biafra, a secessionist group designated as a terrorist organization by the Nigerian government in 2017, saw an escalation in their activities in 2022. They were responsible for 40 attacks and 57 deaths, a notable increase from the previous year's figures of 26 attacks and 34 deaths (Babatunde, 2023).

3. **Social Impact:** The sit-at-home orders have disrupted normal social activities and interactions in the region. The closure of schools and businesses on Mondays affects the education of students and access to essential services for residents. The inability of primary six pupils to write their First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) examination and the postponement of the exam multiple times reflect the challenges posed to the education system and the human development aspirations of the citizens. Also, the sit-at-home orders have contributed to a loss of social interactions and a strain on community ties. The prolonged disruptions of normal activities have psychological and social impacts on individuals and communities. People have been compelled to stay indoors, leading to the closure of schools, markets, and government institutions impacting the social activities of the southeast region in Nigeria.

Overall, the separatist agitations in the South East have created a complex and volatile situation, with far-reaching implications for the region's social cohesion, economic stability, and security. The continuation of separatist agitations and sit-at-home orders has further exacerbated these challenges, hindering the region's economic recovery and development (Njoku and Osibe, 2023).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Overcoming Nigeria's history of separatist agitations is a complex and long-term endeavour. It is essential for the country's stability, development, and peaceful coexistence. It requires a commitment to inclusive governance, respect for diversity, and the promotion of social justice and equality for all Nigerians.

Addressing the issue of separatism in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach. It entails addressing the root causes of grievances, such as socio-economic disparities and political exclusion. A more comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of separatist agitations and promotes reconciliation and inclusion necessary to achieve lasting peace and stability in the region, equitable resource distribution, and respect for the rights and aspirations of all ethnic groups. It also requires promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and understanding among different ethnic and religious communities to build trust and foster a sense of shared national identity. The governments at all levels should engage in dialogue and negotiation with separatist groups, and critical stakeholders in the region.

Furthermore, the government should initiate economic development programs aimed at addressing the root causes of separatist agitations in the region with the establishment of a southeast special economic zone. There is a need for government to start investing in education, infrastructure development and economic opportunities across the country to help bridge the gaps between regions and reduce the appeal of separatist movements. Building strong institutions, upholding the rule of law, and ensuring accountability and transparency in governance are also crucial for fostering a sense of citizenship and national unity

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