

# Biafra and Multitude of Secessionist Movements in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The essence of this paper is to interrogate Biafra and secessionist movements in the Nigerian State. It examines reasons for the eruption of secessionist groups and its implications to the survival of the Nigerian State under democratic dispensation. To achieve these objectives, the study adopts case study methodology for data analysis. It relies on both primary sources such as archival materials and newspapers, and secondary sources such as books, journal articles and internet sources for data collection. The study indicates that, Biafra's secessionist movements has reignited debates on the viability of Nigeria's statehood or sovereignty giving its persistent encroachment by non-state actors. It argues that, secessionism ought not to have rising in Nigeria if there was equity and fairness in the distribution of national wealth and regular restructuring of the country. Adoption of defiance approach instead of soft or tolerance approach have turned once a peaceful movement into a chaotic gathering metamorphosing into an infringement of fundamental human rights and endangerment of the nation's democracy and national security. It concludes that, while the government has taken steps to quell the rising secessionist agitations in the country, efforts have not been made to initiate strong dialogue that would ensure that the movement never resurfaced again. Rather, a forceful approach is being adopted to address the menace.

**Keywords:** Agitation, Biafra, Civil War, Multitude, Movement, Secession, Nigeria

## Introduction

**S**ecession is the ultimate assertion of sovereignty by a subunit of a national group over the territory which they inhabit (Aleksandar & Radan, 2003). The conciseness to embark on a secessionist adventure is always stemmed from the

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perceived feelings of injustice and non-accommodation in the socio-economic and political power distribution from the centre. As a result, secessionist movements have risen to prominence over time across the globe. The collapse of the Soviet Union has led to fierce struggles for independence in areas like the Kurds, Tibetans and Quebec (Percy, 1998) Flanders and Catalonia in Spain (Klaus et al., 2022). Secessionist movements are also predominant in the Caribbean and in some cases, Indian society and Africa (Matthew, 2022).

Total fragmentation in Sub-Saharan Africa occasioned by colonialism, which diminished the social harmony existing among the indigenous people, leads to secession that is hardly achieved without some degree of conflict (Andrés & Marko, 2014). Nigeria is the major case where secessionist attempts led to a civil war from 1967-1970. The civil war was precipitated by the dysfunctional British colonial system bequeathed to the nation and subsequent post-independence political crisis, military coup d'état and the pogrom that occurred in the North following the 1966 counter coup d'état.

The secessionist arguments are centered on the subunit's outright refusal to belong to the same groups within the forced political entity and now tried to be alone under their territory with the intension to create their identity, race and foster a common front for the sake of achieving their future dreams and aspirations (Klaus, 2022). Many groups within the State felt that they were not getting what they deserved and so questioned the true essence of belonging to the larger country where they had been relegated and disrespected, and denied access to resources and internal development just like other groups within the same country. These feelings trigger provocative reactions that create the ground for secessionist agitations to pull out of the commonwealth and forge a new future for themselves by simply seceding from the country. Some secessionist movements challenge the frontiers of existing states on liberal and democratic grounds (Ferran and Klaus-Jürgen, 2017).

The essence of this chapter is to interrogate Biafra secessionist movements in the Nigerian State. It examines reasons for the eruption of secessionist groups and their implications for the survival of democracy in the Nigerian State. To achieve these objectives, the study adopts a case study method for data analysis. It relies on both primary sources, such as archival materials and newspapers, and secondary sources, such as books, journal articles and internet sources for data collection. This study is significant because secessionist agitation is part of the contributing factor to the total fragmentation and shrinking of socio-political and economic institutions in the Nigerian State. It critically reveals the extent of extreme fragmentation of the social-

political foundation upon which the nation was founded. It is a major discourse driving the contours of governance, political and security reforms and human rights in the country.

Previous studies have examined the issue of secessionist movements in Nigeria since the post-independence period, when it was practically attempted and led to a brutal civil war. Ved P. Nanda (2001) analyses the concepts of self-determination and secession in a historical context and the Canadian Supreme Court's opinion on Quebec's claim unilaterally to secede; and the Kosovo and East Timor cases with a recommendation in determining the validity of claims to secede. Amadi, R.N., JNjoku, J.C. and Nosike, E. O. (2024) examined piracy and radio broadcasting and separatist agitation in Nigeria, a case study of Radio Biafra. It revealed that the signal of Biafra radio is received in the entire South-East Region of Nigeria. The study recommends the need for the Government to employ for the youth to tone down the threats of crumbling the agitation in the country. Scholastica, N. A. and Ayokunle, O. O. (2019) discussed the symbolism of Biafra protest songs in South-Eastern Nigeria and that the protest songs depict cultural and group ideology which fosters the Igbo identity cohesion in the Biafra struggle. The paper argues that Biafra protest songs are a non-material culture that contextualizes the meanings attached to Biafra in achieving identity capital, identity-cohesion, struggle sustenance and commitment during protests.

George N. N., Udoudo A. J. and Nwachukwu, F. G. (2024) examine the understanding of the South-East people on the Indigenous People of Biafra's propaganda to find out the extent of South-East people's awareness of the Indigenous People of Biafra's propaganda and functions of the Eastern Security Network. The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey design. The study indicated that South-East people understood the propaganda inherent in the message of Indigenous People of Biafra hinged on the notion of the Igbo as victims of historical marginalization with recommendation for comprehensive education and dialogue initiatives by federal government to address historical grievances to mitigate the influence of divisive propaganda and promote unity among all Nigerians.

Ikenna, M. A., Stephen, N. A. and Emeka, C. I. (2019) interrogates the Nigerian State and the resurgence of separatist agitations: the case of Biafra where they argued that certain actions, inactions and policies of the Nigerian government, which are perceived to be targeted against the Igbo, have created the feelings of collective

victimization among the people which sustains and reinforces the separatist agitations.

Kingsley et al. (2022) explain the IPOB's home and its adverse effect on the economy of the south-east geo-political zone of Nigeria, vis-à-vis her economic development and its implications on the economy of the South-east geo-political zone of Nigeria. The paper recommends, among others, that dialogue is a tangible tool that will go a long way in melting the heart and mind of the presidency, which will yield a fruitful result than the sit-at home. Judith (2023) discusses Biafran agitations for statehood during the Nigerian civil war, and in recent times, this paper makes the case for a framework within which self-determination claims can be addressed within existing territorial arrangements. The paper argues that in the case of Biafra, forms of internal self-determination such as autonomy may cater for the agitations of the people of Biafra better than secession.

The above literature shows the high level of conversation and discourse on the renewed Biafra secessionist agitation. Some of them have focused on specific secessionist groups, others have interrogated the impact of the renewed call for the restoration on the development of the Nigerian State. However, there has not been a holistic interrogation of the entire secessionist groups showcasing their multiplicity and the similarity of their agenda. This paper therefore argued that, adoption of the defiance approach instead of the soft or civil approach to address the secessionist quagmire has contributed to the escalation of the movement. There exists the reluctance of the authorities to engage the secessionist movement in a round table discussion with the view to address their demands instead threatening tactic involving the security and law enforcement agencies turned once a peaceful movement into a chaotic gathering with resultant destruction of lives and properties metamorphosing into infringement of fundamental human rights and endangerment of the nation's democracy and national security.

The first section of the paper examines how the fragmentary and dysfunctional foundation of the Nigerian State led to the emergence of the Biafra secessionist movement in the country, thereby paving the way for the contemporary agitation for Biafra restoration. The second section discusses the post-civil war and emergence of secessionist movement in Nigeria, the third section analyses factors that triggered secessionist movements in Nigeria, and fourth section looks at the measures taken by the government against the secessionist groups plus the impact of the secessionist movement on Nigeria's democratic governance.

### **Fragmented Foundation: The Nigerian State and Biafra Secession**

Before, the geographical location and boundaries that made up the entity Nigeria were inhabited by different ethnic nationalities under well-structured city-states and empires ruled by noble kings that were ascribed different native names by their respective tribes. These kingdoms and city-states operated under effective social-political organisations that dispensed rules and regulations which the people obeyed and practised in the form of indigenous culture. As from the 19th century, all the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria came under the tutelage of British colonialism, though at different points in time (Hakeem, 2018).

The so-called 1914 amalgamation that brought Nigerians together did not care about the cultural differences of the people; rather, it fostered an administrative system that boosted the implementation of the colonial agenda. For instance, the late Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of Northern Nigeria, speaking to the Central Legislature on March 31 1953 said “...Nigeria consisted of several large and small communities all of which were different in their outlooks and beliefs...in 1914, and the North and South were amalgamated though the administration of the two sections are distinctly different. Since then, no serious attempt has been made by the British or by the people themselves to come together and each section has looked upon the other with suspicion and misgiving” (Mark Press News Feature Service, 1968). Views expressed by this high-profile Nigerian political leader have been repeated at different quarters by popular commentators and analysts in the country.

Several political moves were initiated by the indigenous people to resist colonial domination and finally worked towards the independence of the country, which was granted on October 1 1960. The fact that Nigeria gained its independence from British colonialism did not demolish the colonial structures bequeathed to it, as the British government continued to hold sway in whatever the new leaders of the country did, both in politics and the economy. Established as a federal state, postcolonial Nigeria was split into three main regions, each dominated by one or two ethnic groups: Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the west, and Igbo in the east. Hundreds of other ethnic minorities of different sizes made up the rest of the population. In 1963, the federation became a republic and was separated into four states when the multi-ethnic Midwestern State was carved out of parts of the Western Region. Partly parallel with these political borders, what many perceived as a religious divide cut through the territory: the south was predominantly Christian, whereas the north was widely Islamic-dominated (Lasse & Moses, 2014). While party politics became the theatre of scheming for leadership positions in the

country, it became the center of political crisis and internal antagonisms that introduced a secessionist quagmire in Nigeria, giving that the political parties were regionally based, everyone was just fighting for its region and not for the betterment and unity of the country.

The military takeover of governance machinery of the country further deepened the socio-political and economic strangulation of Nigeria as different ethnic groups accused one another of master minding the military control of the country. On January 15, 1966, young army officers, filled with patriotic zeal and the hope of preventing the nation from drifting toward disaster, took over the government in a military coup. This military coup d'etat ushered in the regime of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Ibo, as the Head of State. The new regime of Major General Ironsi promulgated Decree 34 of 1966, which abolished the federal government structure and introduced a unitary system of government. In retaliation, on May 29, 1966, the Northerners massacred thousands of Easterners living in the Northern region. On July 29, 1966, exactly two months after the massacres, Northern army officers responded to the coup, where Major General Ironsi, along with several other military officers of the Eastern region, was killed. Yakubu Gowon, the new Head of State, together with the leaders of the coup, initially demanded freedom to withdraw the North from Nigeria.

On September 29, 1966, another pogrom took place against Eastern Nigerians living outside the East Nigerian region. A riot in the Northern region triggered the killings. Those responsible were disappointed that the North had not seceded and resented the idea of further involvement of the North with other parts of Nigeria. Between May and October, over 30,000 Easterners lost their lives. The Easterners perceived the May, July, and September massacres as a deliberate plan, supported by the federal government, to eliminate them. They believed the massacres were premeditated acts because they all occurred on the twenty-ninth day of the month. Furthermore, the Northerners' violations of the Easterners' human rights went unpunished and uninvestigated (Pius, 2002).

The military summit held in Aburi, Ghana, in February 1967 was aimed at the peaceful reconciliation of the crisis in the country. The meeting was attended by the majority of the Supreme Military Council and civilian leaders, but it failed to yield concrete results as it was highly controversial. The implementation of secessionist policy by the Eastern Government became the only option for the region to assert its destiny in the already divided Federation. As a result of May 30, 1967, Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu officially declared the Eastern region

the Republic of Biafra as mandated by the Eastern Consultative Assembly during its meeting on 27th May 1967 (Arthur, 1972).

Convinced that secession was dangerous to the so-called general well-being of the Nigerian people, Yakubu Gowon, in collaboration with Nigeria's foreign allies like Britain and the Soviet Union, declared war against Biafra to reunite the region back to the colonial-created political entity Nigeria (Mark Press News Feature Service, 1968). Secessionist actions tend to generate support or condemnation by sections of the public opinion that justifies it as a good or bad move, particularly when the secessionists begin to clamour for recognition of their declared sovereign state. Biafra began to generate massive support and sympathy for its secessionist cause both locally and internationally following the outbreak of the civil war in 1967.

During the civil war, a plethora of pro-Biafra groups that canvassed for recognition of the independent state of Biafra were formed to campaign against the untold hardship and killing of innocent civilians in the conflict. Save Biafra Committee was an emergency committee set up to champion the cause of Biafra in the wake of the civil war. It included individual members of the Britain-Biafra Association, the Biafra Union, the Friends of Biafra Association, the Biafra Club 250 and other interested people. The Voice of Biafrans was another important association formed to advocate for the cause of Biafra's right to self-determination. Action Biafra International was formed on 16 March 1969 and led by Peter Cadogan, who was also the Secretary of the Save Biafra Campaign. The Friends of Biafra Association, led by Peter Hogg, formed a Convening Committee on Biafra, joined by volunteers from the Save Biafran Campaign, the Haringey Action Committee for Peace in Nigeria-Biafra and the Biafra Christian Crusade and the Biafra 69 and the Biafra Community in Washington DC championed the Biafra cause during the civil war. The Britain-Biafra Association was inaugurated in December 1967 to work towards bringing in all possible sympathizers of the Biafran cause. Owen Davies was the chairman of the Britain-Biafra Association. Other members of the association were Margaret Green, David Jowitt and Joan Mellors. The group were very concerned about the indigenous people of Biafra who were believed to have suffered so much in the Nigerian State since the 1966 military coup d'état up to the civil war that brought about increased hardship and suffering placed upon them (Britain-Biafra Association, 1968).

The formation of pro-Biafra groups was based on the ideological leanings of Biafra leaders who played an active role during the civil war. Their overwhelming dedication and experience with Biafra inspired the subsequent Biafra secessionist movements in the post-civil war. Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu

Ojukwu was very dedicated and determined towards the establishment of Biafra despite the ongoing civil war. In his speech delivered on 20 July 1967, Ojukwu maintained that Biafra means a total rejection of all that was bad, obnoxious and repugnant of old ways of life and that the young nation stood for the restoration and preservation of the dignity of the individual, protection of personal liberty, life, and property, and guarantee of social equality and justice (Ojukwu, 1967). The struggle is the people's assertion of their rights to self-determination (Republic of Biafran Government, 1968). Therefore, Biafra's only hope of survival is to continue the struggle until their rights to self-determination are respected and their desire to live in peace (Mark Press News Feature Service, 1968).

Another important Biafra personality whose voice contributed to the formation of Biafra ideology was the Commissioner for Information and Ojukwu's closest personality, Ifeawgu Eke, who was a vocalist and messenger of Biafra, who facilitated daily releases of information about the progress of the Biafra movement and developments during the civil war. His public statements contributed to the solidification of the Biafra ideology (Williams, 2011). Eke propounded the concept of "Give Us Biafra or Nothing" which many of the contemporary secessionist groups are using to spread their ideology to the public domain. He believed that only true independence of Biafra would salvage the Easterners from the appendages of neocolonialism and maltreatments (Biafran Information Ministry, 1968).

Uchechukwu Merije was another renowned individual who nurtured Biafran propaganda. He served as the Director of the Directorate of Propaganda. He was a very deep individual who prided himself as a great thinker and often deployed solutions that went above the commonness of a fray. His tongue of propaganda thundered in Nigeria and potently echoed the voice and tragedy of Biafra across the globe and thereby rattling the conscience of the world (Ogbu, 2016). He and his team internationalized Biafran propaganda. Uchechukwu Merije was a brilliant propagandist who used his skills to defend what he perceived as a neo-colonialist onslaught against Biafran sovereignty. He was a great man, an articulate and intellectual politician, and a man of ideas (Obi, 2015).

E.N. Njoku and Louis Mbanefo were amazons who lit the touch of Biafra all over the world, spreading its messages to the international public opinion. The peace summit of the civil war in Kampala Uganda allowed Loius Mbanefo to state the reasons why the Eastern region of Nigeria seceded from the rest of the Federation. he made it clear that the tribal divisions and ethnic sentiments that beclouded the party politics of the Nigerian state during the early post-independent period and



internal crisis arising from who would rule the nation heightened the violent that plunged the nation into military coup and later a civil war. Against this background, only the endorsement of the declaration of Biafra by great powers and other nation's mainly African countries, would guarantee the peace needed in Nigeria (Mark Press News Feature Service, 1968).

The efficacy of Biafra ideology was made possible by the dedication and determination of these renowned individuals who used their talents and innovative ideas to disseminate the message of Biafra to the world. The thickness of Biafra ideology was ignited by these individuals who invested their intellectual prowess in driving the message of Biafra and ensured that it was domesticated and internationalized. Biafra ideology also became very attractive because of the overwhelming support and sympathy it generated by the people in the territory who believed in the cause of secession, having been dissatisfied with the development and events in Nigeria that led to the declaration of Biafra. If not for the support given to it by the masses, Biafra would not have lasted much longer and continue to resonate in contemporary times.

### **Emergence of Secessionist Groups in Contemporary Nigeria**

There is no evidence to show that the end of the civil war indicated the termination of Biafra agitation; rather, evidence abounds that Biafra secession would continue even after the civil war, but depending on the nature of the political condition in Nigeria. For instance, the United States Government, through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British Government, conducted a series of assessments on post-civil war Nigeria, which attested that the Biafra idea would continue to be kept alive, depending on the future political condition in Nigeria. A CIA Brief Notes released on 1 November 1967 argued that "The Eastern Region called Biafra appeared to have lost its bid to break away...but it was impossible to hold out any great hope for the future unity of a country (Nigeria) where feuds are so bitter..." (Central Intelligence Agency, 1967). Again, according to the Special Memorandum No. 2-68 of the CIA Office of National Estimates titled "Outlook for Nigeria" released on 26 January 1968: "We believed that no matter the military outcome of the protracted civil war, the political upheavals which preceded it have already considerably damaged Nigeria's postwar prospects for national development... However, we estimate that political instability will plague Nigeria for some considerable time to come, and that tribal and regional strife will seriously threaten the country's unity" Central Intelligence Agency, 1968). Winning the war in itself was a considerable achievement for General Gowon's Government, but the basic

problems that brought about the political upheaval in the first place remained unsolved (Central Intelligence Agency, 1970). No wonder the CIA warned that “any future civilian government will have to deal with, among other issues Biafran problem which admits of no easy solution (Central Intelligence Agency, 1970).

The return of democratic rule in Nigeria further cemented the ground for the rise of indigenous agitators for self-determination and the formation of different pro-Biafra groups. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) was the first secessionist movement (Godwin, 2018). In the country established in 1999 in Lagos that seeks the restoration of the independent Biafra. Its leader, Ralph Uwazuruike, claimed it is a non-violent movement and it was inspired by Gandhi (Oudenhuijsen, 2019). In 1999, the organization made it clear that it tended to achieve the restoration of the Biafran State not through going to war with Nigeria again, but through non-violent means (Ikenna 2019). On 22 May, 2000, In a statement at the occasion, MASSOB leader, Ralph Uwazuruike explained the basis of their struggle as follows: “As you may remember, about 30 years ago, there arose the need to save our people from total annihilation that attempt could not materialize; rather we lost over one million of our people, in the process. Today, we are faced with a similar situation. The unprovoked and organized killings of our people in Nigeria have remained unabated” (Chinyere, 2021).

The IPOB is an offshoot of Raph Uwazuruike's MASSOB. The latter group had the same objective as the IPOB but was very diplomatic in approach when juxtaposing its activities with those of the IPOB in recent times. The sole aim of the group is to secede from Nigeria and achieve the Republic of Biafra through a peaceful process (Osita et al., 2022). The IPOB rose to prominence after the previous Biafran independence organisations were weakened (Chike, 2021). Kanu declared his readiness to fight for the Biafra restoration. He regretted that, despite the declaration of the “No Victor, No Vanquish” after the Nigeria/Biafra civil war in 1970, successive governments had continued to deliberately marginalize and make life unbearable for the Igbo nation and its people. He called on all genuine Igbo people across the globe to rise and join the crusade of putting in place the Biafran Republic, for it was time for the Igbos to pull out of Nigeria, which he described as a failed nation, where nothing works. He warned the Nigerian Federal Government not to be an obstacle in the wheel of progress of the proposed Republic (Emmanuel, 2014).

Between 2015 and 2020, IPOB engaged in massive protests across the Southeastern region, canvassing for the Nigerian Government and the United Nations to grant them the approval to conduct a referendum for the declaration of the Independent

State of Biafra. (Ikenna, 2015). The protest later changed direction when Nnamdi Kanu was arrested by the State security forces and charged with treasonable felony. These protests thickened the security situation in the Southeastern region and endangered lives and properties, including the disruption of vehicular movements, economic stagnation and breaches of fundamental human rights.

The sit-at-home was another strategy that IPOB designed to drive home the campaign for self-determination of the Southeast in Nigeria. The sit-at-home orders are usually observed on Mondays and other days of the week. Nnamdi Kanu is to appear before the court of competent jurisdiction. Economic activities are halted on days the orders are to be observed, as no one is allowed to carry any transaction intra- and inter-state. Anyone found to flout the orders is either killed or forced to submit. The sit-at-home orders are binding on the five states (Ebonyi, Enugu, Anambra, Imo and Abia States) in the Southeastern part of Nigeria, some states in the South-South (Delta, Rivers) and some states in the North Central, such as Benue and Kogi States. Sit-at-home protest ordered by IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, on 30th May 2017, economic and social activities in the entire south-eastern states and some south-south states were completely grounded. This has enormous implications on the economic development of the region, considering the number of man-hours lost during the protest on that day alone (Ikenna et al., 2019).

Another group known as the Igbo-Biafra Nationalists, IBN, is also championing the right to self-determination of the Southeastern Nigeria as a last resort to address the issue of marginalization. The convener of the group is Uche Mefor. It bases its argument on the culture of discrimination, suppression, underrepresentation and marginalization of the Southeast region in the political arrangement of Nigeria (Mathew, 2024). The Igbo-Biafra Nationalists Movement made a case for review and redrawing of the Biafra map as part of the self-determination agenda of the region. According to Mazi Uche Mefor, the convener of the Biafra group, the call for redrawing of the Biafra map was because of the gang up against the Southeast by component states. There was no need to impose Biafra ideology on unwilling partners; rather the Biafra would ally with only willing partners (Chinonso, 2024).” The Igbo-Biafra Nationalists Movement is described as a case of marginalization where the South East region has only five states, while other geopolitical regions have six and seven states. The Igbo-Biafra Nationalists argue that Nigeria has systematically violated the human rights of the Igbo population. Documented cases of discrimination, violence, and marginalization against the South-East,

predominantly Igbo communities, provide a basis for their assertion (Opinion Nigeria, 2024).

The Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) was founded by a United Kingdom-based lawyer, Benjamin Onwuka, to give seriousness to the Biafran dream. Onwuka, who hails from Item in Bende local government area of Abia state, said the dilemma of Ndigbo in Nigeria informed the birth of the BZM. He said the movement has the backing of Igbo intellectuals in the Diaspora, particularly those residing in the United States and South Africa. He had, before then, shuttled across Nigeria, Europe, and America. Having found its teeth, the group sent an application to the United Nations (UN) for observer status for the Republic of Biafra (The Nation, 2012).

On August 6 2012, Ben Onwuka took the Biafra struggle to the UN when he filed an application to the UN and the African Union for the recognition of the Republic. Onwuka further claimed that it is against international law for the Nigerian state, through the president, governors, and security operatives, to use force to kill any Biafran, either as an individual or as a group, as the offender could face the UN tribunal on war crimes based at the Hague, The Netherlands. He said further that the UN would send observers to the Biafra re-declaration of independence on November 5, 2012, just as another application had been made for Biafra to be accorded the same observer status at the African Union, AU, through its secretariat at Addis Ababa (Vincent, 2012).

The Biafra Government in Exile (BGIE) is also another pro-Biafran movement championing the cause of self-determination in the southeast. The group was formed by the Finnish-based personality Simon Ekpa. Ekpa had said that all the activities of Biafran supporters and agitators were to make sure that “Biafra will be free from Nigeria in 2023 and forever.” He announced an alliance and activation of the Biafra Government In Exile (BGIE) with the IPOB-Autopilot.” IPOB under Mazi Nnamdi Kanu did not recognise the BGIE (Sahara Reporters, 2022). The Biafra Republic Government in Exile, BRGIE, on 21st October 2023, unveiled the Biafra Liberation Army and Resistance Fighters during a convention in Finland. Mazi Simon Ekpa, the Prime Minister Biafra Republic Government in Exile and a Finland-based lawyer, disclosed this in a statement after its just-concluded two-day extraordinary self-referendum convention in Helsinki, Finland. He noted that the Biafra Army is to defend the Biafra territory against external aggression and invasion by oppressors (Vanguard, 2023). The Simon Ekpa-led Biafra Republic Government In-Exile has said they have commenced talks with the United States Government

over Biafra's liberation. Ekpa disclosed, "The call for Biafra self-determination is deeply rooted in historical grievances, economic disparity, and socio-political marginalization; our struggle has become a struggle for the survival of the Biafra people (Ogaga, 2024).

The following organizations under the coalition of pro-Biafra groups have strengthened the secessionist agitation for the restoration of Biafra. These were Eastern People's Congress (EPC), Igbo Youth Cultural and Restoration Initiative (IYCRI), Bilie Human Rights Initiative (BHRI), Movement of Biafrans in Nigeria (MOBIN), Biafran National Liberation Council (BNLC), Biafran Revolutionary Organization (BRO), Biafran Liberation Crusade (BLC), Joint Revolutionary Council of Biafra (JRCB), Biafra Revolutionary Force (BRF), Customary Government of Biafra (CGB), Biafran Central Council (BCC) and Biafran United Liberation Council (BULCO). The coalition of pro-Biafran groups speaks with one voice and a unity of purposes on the restoration of Biafra, anchoring their main argument on injustice and marginalization of the Biafran people after the civil war (Olu 2018).

Uchenna Madu, one of the leaders of the organizations revealed that the group are achieving the quest for referendum under the leadership of Mazi Kanu. They are to work under the umbrella of the Biafran People's National Council (BPNC), to speak with one voice on all issues concerning the realization of Biafra (Abimbola, 2017). The pro Biafra groups held a meeting in Nnewi, the home town of the late Biafra leader; Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu and concluded that all pro Biafra groups should maintain their status, name and internal running of their affairs, but should jointly as one body, execute all national and international engagements, programmes and commitments to Biafra, including its diplomatic affairs (Vincent, 2018). There exists an overwhelming and unquenchable indigenous solidarity for secession in Southeastern Nigeria, for the political and military actions taken by the existing national government have proved futile in shifting the people's position from the agenda.

### **Exploring the Bug Issues: Factorization of Secession Movements in Contemporary Nigeria**

Secessionist movements are the product of a dysfunctional system that is historically entrenched in Nigeria. In the Nigerian State, one of the situations that created secessionist tendencies was the weak structural foundation upon which the country was founded, mainly during the colonial period. It was the quest to get detached from the lopsided structures that colonialism created that triggered secessionist

movements in the Southeast with a strong disposition to govern themselves in line with the social-cultural dictates bequeathed to them by their ancestors. For them, secession was a necessity needed to define their core identity as a race that was joined together with other ethnic groups.

The absence of quality leadership to remedy the institutional dysfunctional system in the country strengthened the secessionist appetite for separation. It was necessary to struggle for national leadership as any region that successfully dominates has access to the natural resources of the country, for that would make it easier for it to develop more than others. So, in this power struggle, the Southeast has always felt that it has been sidelined and disenfranchised by another region, even without any consideration. So they were left to fend for themselves by taking the remaining resources that come from the center.

The enormous political power that other regions wielded cannot be compared with that of the Southeast, which has lowered their status as second-class citizens in the Federation. As people who see themselves as progressive and hardworking, the absence of Federal presence in the region relegates the pride of the southeasterners as members of the political fold of Nigeria. That is why they think deeply about their origin and wish to separate from Nigeria to build a national home for themselves.

Ethnic divisions and consciousness that predominates the political lexicon of the nation are another driver of secessionist agitation. While all the ethnic groups have, through colonial arrangements, found themselves in one political fold, it has become difficult for all of them to fuse. Each of the ethnic groups has continued to stereotype one another and make mockery of their origin. Xenophobic tendencies exist among major tribes like Fulani, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, including the minorities of Ibibio, Edo, Ijaw, Urohobo, Idoma, Igala, Nupe, among others. These attacks undermined national unity and integration and fostered secessionist ideology across the nation.

The weak federal system has continued to aid secessionist agitations in Nigeria. Under a federal system of governance, it is expected that all the federating units are entitled to equal sharing of the natural resources of the Federation. This includes the development of different regions, such as the siting of industries, allocation of financial resources, and revenue sharing. Since the 1960s, the federal system has not been able to fulfil the purpose as established by its founding fathers. The Southeast believed that they were not getting what was expected from the center under the

federal system instead, the region had not felt more federal presence, unlike other regions.

Lack of infrastructural development and revenue sharing is uneven and does not favour the region. With this situation, they feel that they are not treated fairly as enshrined in the constitution and in line with the principle of federal character, which means effective representation which could be given to the various component units and communal groups in the country's institutions, agencies and positions of power, status, and influence. Federal character has become problematic because some states or regions are more advanced in urbanization and formal western education than others.

As a result, the more advanced zones tend to be much more predominant in federal institutions and agencies, especially in bureaucratic and economic positions. This phenomenon has, over the years, elicited reactions against the unfairness and injustice from the relatively less advantaged or disadvantaged areas of the country. Similarly, some states which are very large in population gain more in terms of project allocation, which communities with small population tend to lose out in national development, including unregulated competition and struggle for federal power, status, and influence (Report of the Political Bureau, 1987). So if they are not treated equally with other regions of what use it is to remain as a member of the political entity, Nigeria, where there is consistent existence of the eschewed allocation of development projects and employment.

The unemployment and poverty situation in contemporary Nigeria energize secessionist agitations in the country. Despite the indigenization policy formulated in the 1970 as part of the post-civil war economic revitalization and promotion of local content that would foster indigenous ownership of industrial, financial and commercial enterprises and control of the economy to boost employment generation unemployment has continued to rise in the country contributing to the striking renewed secessionist agitations (Report of the Political Bureau, 1987). In the Southeast, the secessionist agitators have leveraged the unemployment situation to recruit many youths to join them in the campaign for secession, given them assurances of better days once Biafra is actualized. Youths are easily lured with the notion that Nigeria can't salvage the youths from so many problems hindering their success and prospects, but it is only when they join hands and contribute to the actualization of Biafra that they will be able to achieve maximum success.

Biafra: Reactions of the Nigerian Government to the Secessionist Movement

Since the outbreak of the secessionist campaign in the contemporary Southeastern region, important steps were taken by the Nigerian government to curtail the excesses of the secessionists that are gaining ground across the region. Among the actions was the proscription of the secessionist groups as terrorist organizations and the arrests and detention of their leaders. The leader of MASSOB, Ralph Uwazurike and that of IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu, have on several occasions been arrested and detained by the government security agencies for embarking on the campaign for the restoration of the Republic of Biafra. The arrests of the secessionist leaders have, on several occasions, triggered heavy protests by their supporters, who embarked on an anti-government campaign to drive the demands for the immediate release of their leaders.

The arrest of Nnamdi Kanu, who is standing trial at the Federal High Court in Abuja, was one of the factors that triggered the sit-at-home exercise being observed in the Southeastern zone. The court of competent jurisdiction has, on several occasions, ruled on the need for the IPOB leader to be released from prison. Not obeying the court order towards setting free the IPOB leader is clear evidence of the extent to which the justice system, as a major component of the ethics of democratic governance, has been captured by the oligarchs or ruling elites who decided how it is administered at any given time. The consequence is the continued sit-at-home exercise that has gradually grounded the economy of the region, including the social and political activities that are detrimental to the general well-being of the people. Apart from the leaders of the group, many supporters of MASSOB and IPOB and other pro-Biafra groups have also been arrested by the security agencies for embarking on protests that led to the blocking of highways and the prevention of freedom of movement by the people (Bayo, 2024). The security agencies have often accused members of the pro-Biafra group of hiding under the # Endsars protests to kill their officers in the Southeastern states. The groups, however, declared that their movement is non-violent and only wanted to Biafra through a referendum (Cletus, 2020).

Another measure taken against the secessionist agitators is the banning of secessionist social media channels. One of the major channels that pro-Biafra secessionist groups are using to operate and disseminate their information has been social media. When the Nigerian Government saw the massive support of the secessionist cause across the country through social media, it declared a ban policy on social media platforms in Nigeria to deny the secession activists the opportunity to relay their message to the entire world (Samuel, 2017). While such action was



viewed as a human rights violation and an undermining of free speech, the Nigerian Government regarded it as an important step to protect the country from further violence. But it is impossible to sustain the banning of social media policy as it is now part and parcel of international communication and information sharing in human society.

Though the approach of the government towards combating secessionist agitations is forceful, the best method of tackling the menace is adoption of dialogue approach and peaceful resolutions where the agitators are invited for a roundtable discussion with the higher echelon of leadership to state their demands and reason with the government on how to address the stated issues. The government would equally inform the agitators of their position and what they feel should be done to settle the matter. This approach is necessary because a good number of the agitators are young people without quality employment in the society, and so are frustrated over the state of affairs in the country, thus, they decided to toe the line of campaigning for Biafra secession. Above all, effective dispensation of justice is paramount in addressing secessionist agitations in the country. Justice is very paramount within the democratic setting because it is expected that once it is served objectively, peace and tranquility are established, as well as development.

## **Conclusion**

Since secessionist agitations developed from the fragmented system in Nigeria, its impact on the socio-political and security landscape of the nation is unimaginable. It has contributed to the rising insecurity ravaging the entire Southeast and the country in general. Secessionist agitations have polarized political views in the Southeast, as those who did not agree with their message are viewed as traitors who did not have the interests of the region at heart. The activities of the pro-Biafra have undermined the economic development of the Southeast region through certain actions that they have undertaken, such as the sit-at-home order and numerous protests that hugely targeted law-abiding citizens in their respective markets. Pent-up antagonism and contestation with other ethnic groups in the country have characterized the secessionist agitations. Pro-Biafra groups believed that other ethnic groups that criticize their activities are perceived as their enemies who never wished the Southeast well, and therefore such ethnic groups are often hated and attacked. Social activities have been brought down in a manner that freedom of movement has been curtailed to protect lives and property, at the same time preventing situations where hoodlums take advantage of the secessionist agitations to launch mayhem on the innocent citizens. While it has created an atmosphere of

insecurity and social distress in the region, secessionist agitations are also indirectly a strong avenue of yearning for change in the governance system and quality leadership based on fairness and equality. It was being used to project the interest of the reign to the national leadership, geared towards attracting physical development to the region, having been deprived of national projects compared to other zones in the country. Secessionist agitations seek to urge the Nigerian government to initiate reforms and make series changes in the national constitution in a manner that would accommodate different parts of the country. While it is good for the secessionist activities to be curtailed, it was equally significant for the voice of the agitators to be heard and some of their demands to be met, particularly those that seek good governance and reforms in the leadership of the country. Security agencies even when there are concerns about the dangerous nature of the secessionist operations are to take cognizance of the fundamental human rights of the agitators in dealing with the secession issue because the more they use a brutal force to handle the matter the greater their image is being damaged all over the world an action do not portend of good posture for the country among the comity of nations.

### **Recommendations**

- The attraction of developmental projects that empower the people of the southeast towards fulfilling their dreams and aspirations is a very important antidote in quelling secessionist agitations in the region. Development across communities and towns in the region can go a long way in demolishing secessionist inclinations in the zone.
- Addressing the root causes of poverty and unemployment is essential in arresting the engagement of the youths in secessionist activities. Since ninety-nine per cent of members of secessionist agitators are youths, national, state and local governments should develop vibrant initiatives that would create employment for the youths to scare them away from secessionist ventures.
- Adequate inclusion of the Southeast in the governance structures of the Nigerian State is another solution to secessionist agitations. Sidelining the Southeast from the national governance deepens the secessionist quagmire; instead, the region needs to be brought very close to the power at the centre for equity and fairness.
- The security sector needs to be better equipped in a way that it should be civil enough in addressing social menace like secessionist agitators.

- Quality leadership and good governance devoid of sectional tendencies but rather takes cognizance of the needs of the entire regions across the country is highly needed to curb secessionist agitations in Nigeria.

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