

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF IPOB SIT-AT-HOME STRATEGY IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Sit-at-Home (SAH) directive represents a form of nonviolent resistance, wherein individuals or communities deliberately remain indoors as a method of protest. In Nigeria's South-East geopolitical zone, this method has become widespread, particularly on Mondays. It is commonly observed in response to directives from the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), aimed at expressing disapproval over the continued detention of its leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, by the Department of State Services (DSS), as well as concerns about the region's political marginalization. The SAH campaign has had far-reaching economic implications for the region. Economic activity has notably declined, disrupting commercial operations, market functions, and income generation across various sectors. This impact is particularly profound among small businesses, which constitute a critical component of the region's economic framework. The transportation sector has also been adversely affected, with commercial vehicles significantly reducing operations on SAH days, thereby limiting the movement of goods and people. The uncertainty and perceived instability associated with the SAH order have dampened investor confidence. Potential and existing investors are increasingly reluctant to channel resources into the region, leading to decreased foreign direct investment (FDI) and a noticeable drop in capital inflow. Given this context, the study assessed the economic consequences of the SAH directive in the South-Eastern states Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo since its inception in 2020. Employing the social movement theory and utilizing secondary data, the research revealed that the SAH observance has contributed to diminished economic productivity, investor apprehension, and widespread socio-economic hardships, including poverty and emotional distress. It has also negatively impacted tourism, a key economic sector in the region. In response to these findings, the study proposed several recommendations. Chief among them is the urgent need for constructive dialogue between the Federal Government and pro-Biafra agitators to address the root causes of the SAH protests. It also advocated for greater political inclusion of the South-East at the national level, increased federal investment in regional infrastructure, the creation of

employment opportunities for young people, and the expedited release of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu as a gesture toward national reconciliation.

Keywords: IPOB, Sit-At-Home, Political, Economic South-East

Introduction

In recent years, Southeast Nigeria has experienced a consistent pattern of sit-at-home directives observed predominantly on Mondays. These orders have led to widespread closure of markets, businesses, and economic institutions across the region. Initially launched as a symbolic protest by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) to express dissatisfaction over the detention of its leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, this act of civil disobedience has evolved to take on broader political and social significance. Ugwu (2022) highlights that the phenomenon now reflects deep-seated discontent within the region, with many residents choosing to comply despite the absence of official enforcement mechanisms.

Ozibo and Okorie (2022) emphasized the extensive influence of the sit-at-home order, noting that it has become a routine phrase in the daily lives of approximately 22 million residents in the region. The restrictions on movement have essentially turned Mondays into de facto shutdown days across the Southeast since mid-2021, as communities await Kanu's release from the custody of the Department of State Services (DSS).

Since August 2021, IPOB has taken active steps to ensure compliance with these orders throughout the region. The group, founded in 2012 by British-Nigerian activist Nnamdi Kanu, advocates for the re-establishment of Biafra as an independent nation for the Igbo-speaking people. While IPOB claims to be pursuing its goals through peaceful means, the Nigerian government has classified it as a terrorist organization, citing its alleged involvement in violent clashes and subversive activities. Members of the group have faced various criminal charges, including sedition and terrorism, as they continue to challenge the authority of the Nigerian state. Despite its controversial status, IPOB has gained significant support among Igbos who feel politically and economically marginalized (Ugwu, 2022).

According to Ugwu (2022), IPOB envisions a sovereign Biafran nation comprising the current southeastern states of Nigeria. The call for Biafran self-determination has historical roots in the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970, which followed a declaration of independence by the region.

Although the war ended in Biafra's surrender and a subsequent offer of amnesty by the Nigerian government, the demand for autonomy has persisted.

The re-emergence of Biafran agitation in the 2010s gained momentum after reports of extrajudicial killings of Igbo youths by Nigerian security forces sparked widespread outrage. Kanu, who had been involved in pro-Biafran campaigns abroad, returned to Nigeria and intensified the movement using online platforms and radio broadcasts. He was first arrested on treason charges in 2015 and spent over a year in detention despite multiple court orders for his release. Though briefly granted bail in 2017, Kanu fled the country, only to be rearrested in 2021 through international cooperation.

Since his rearrest and continued detention, IPOB has enforced Monday sit-at-home protests across the Southeast to pressure the Nigerian government for his release. These orders have deeply affected regional commerce. Mondays, typically considered high-traffic days for trade and services, now witness widespread inactivity. The directive is also observed on other court appearance days related to Kanu's trial (Emeruwa, 2021).

The economic cost of this prolonged shutdown is substantial, especially for small and medium-scale enterprises that rely on daily income. Ekechukwu (2022) observes that the situation has deteriorated due to the involvement of criminal elements who exploit the protest for personal gain, further destabilizing the region. Against this backdrop, this paper critically examines the socioeconomic impacts of the sustained Monday sit-at-home order and the widespread compliance it garners in Southeast Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Émile Durkheim's theory of social solidarity (1893) as its theoretical framework. Durkheim's concept emphasizes the interconnectedness among individuals in society, which fosters a sense of mutual responsibility and the belief that collective actions can enhance the well-being of others. The theory posits that despite social diversity, individuals often share common values and beliefs, forming the foundation for societal cohesion. Solidarity, in this context, refers to the sense of unity and social bond that links individuals or groups, driven by shared emotions, mutual values, common goals, or even personal interests (Douwes, Stuttford & London, 2018).

Durkheim distinguishes between two types of solidarity: mechanical and organic. Mechanical solidarity characterizes societies in which individuals share similar beliefs, values, and traditions, leading to a strong collective conscience and uniform behavior. In contrast, organic solidarity arises in more complex societies where individuals rely on each other due to specialization and interdependence. This form of solidarity is built on the recognition of differences and the necessity of cooperation.

In applying this theory to the study, the Monday sit-at-home directive initiated by IPOB serves as an example of collective solidarity. The widespread compliance across the southeastern region demonstrates how individual actions, rooted in shared sentiments and objectives, can evolve into a unified group effort. The common cause demanding the immediate and unconditional release of IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu reflects the transformation of personal convictions into coordinated social action (Osita et al., 2022).

Socio-Economic Implications of Sit At Home Civil Resistance in South-East Nigeria

The sit-at-home directive, originally initiated by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), was intended as a strategy to pressure the Nigerian federal government into releasing their detained leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. However, the unintended consequences of this action became apparent over time, as it triggered significant security concerns and severely disrupted the social and economic fabric of the South-East region. Vital institutions including hospitals, banks, schools, religious centers, and government offices were all impacted, and economic activities were effectively paralyzed due to widespread observance of the order (Okah, 2021; Osita, 2022; Ugwu, 2022).

In the early stages, many residents of the region complied with the directive, expressing solidarity with IPOB's cause. Over time, however, the economic toll began to outweigh the symbolic gesture, especially as enforcement measures led to the destruction of goods valued in billions of naira (Ogunode & Chijindu, 2022). According to Owoeye, Ezeanya, and Obiegbunam (2022), the regular Monday sit-at-home exercises have had detrimental effects on the region's socio-economic and political landscape. Their findings advocate for more equitable distribution of national resources, a speedy resolution of Kanu's legal challenges, and a rotating presidency to promote

inclusiveness. These steps, they argue, could help resolve the ongoing unrest while restoring stability in the region.

The repeated shutdowns have brought severe hardship to the region, compounding the economic struggles faced by residents. Nwodo (2021) warned that implementing weekly lockdowns especially after the devastating effects of the COVID-19 lockdown—could be disastrous for daily wage earners and small traders, who make up a substantial portion of the region's workforce. Ogbu (2021) echoed these concerns, cautioning against the economic fallout of continued lockdowns.

Critics, including Ohagwa (2021), have urged IPOB to consider the adverse consequences of such measures on the very population they intend to protect. Likewise, Chukwuma (2021) emphasized that the heavy reliance on trade in the region means that prolonged business closures could exacerbate poverty. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) also voiced concerns about the sit-at-home order, arguing that it threatens both the economic and security conditions of the region. Edeson (2021) underscored the importance of avoiding additional self-inflicted economic strain, given the region's historical struggles with marginalization and hardship.

From a policy standpoint, Igboke (2020) stressed the need for government intervention through youth empowerment, education, and skills training. The government's current approach to IPOB's demands has been criticized as overly forceful. Alternatively, the implementation of inclusive governance, regional autonomy, and a more balanced federal structure may help address the root causes of discontent. Supporting this view, Anele (2021) attributes the rise in self-determination movements, such as IPOB's, to the federal government's failure to effectively manage Nigeria's diverse composition.

A central grievance of IPOB lies in the perceived marginalization of the South-East in the federal structure reflected in its limited number of states, local government areas, and legislative representation. This underrepresentation has, in turn, resulted in the region receiving minimal federal allocations and infrastructure projects compared to other regions (Ogbonnia, 2021).

The Monday Sit-at-Home Order: Economic, Educational, and Human Livelihood Impacts in Southeast Nigeria

The sit-at-home directive imposed by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has had a deeply adverse effect on the economic landscape of Southeast Nigeria, significantly worsening poverty levels among the very population the group claims to defend. Daily wage earners have been hit especially hard, as the restriction on movement and commercial activity has disrupted their ability to earn a living. The enforcement of the order, often through coercion and threats, has also diminished public support for IPOB among residents who otherwise prioritize regional development and stability.

Odili (2021) highlights the sharp decline in the Southeast's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) compared to other regions as a direct consequence of the repeated lockdowns. Additionally, The Cable (2022) estimated that the nationwide revenue loss due to the sit-at-home directive could exceed \$1 billion weekly. According to Anambra State Governor Chukwuma Soludo (Daily, March 2022), his state alone incurs losses of approximately ₦19.6 billion each Monday as a result of the directive.

Extrapolating over the course of a year—52 Mondays—this loss translates into a staggering ₦4.618 trillion (about \$10.5 billion) in potential revenue for micro and small businesses across the region (Ugwu, 2022). Individual stories reflect the broader damage. For example, Mr. Clement Aniago, a vulcanizer in Anambra State, had his equipment vandalized by enforcers of the sit-at-home order (Guardian, 2022).

As a commercial hub, the Southeast is especially vulnerable to economic disruptions. Mondays, typically the busiest day for trade, now account for estimated losses ranging between ₦700 billion and ₦3 trillion (Punch, 2022). The transportation sector also suffers, with each Monday shutdown costing operators around ₦10 billion, according to Punch (2022). These losses reduce revenue not only for individuals but also for state governments that rely on taxes from these transactions. The hospitality and tourism industries have likewise been affected. Insecurity linked to the sit-at-home order has discouraged tourists and nightlife activity in cities such as Enugu and Owerri, once popular for entertainment and leisure (Ezirim, 2022).

The education sector has not been spared either. With schools closed on sit-at-home days, academic activities are disrupted, impacting both students and the small-scale businesses that thrive around school environments. IPOB's sit-at-home directive has triggered a wide array of

socioeconomic challenges across Southeast Nigeria. The economic repercussions are felt across sectors, from trade and transport to tourism and education, resulting in billions in lost revenue and deteriorating livelihoods for many.

Sit At Home Civil Actions and Deterrence of Foreign Direct Investment in Southeast

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is widely acknowledged as a major driver of economic growth, particularly in developing economies. It brings with it not only financial capital but also advanced technologies, increased productivity among local businesses, and employment opportunities. Bitar, Hamadeh, and Khoueiri (2019) emphasize that FDI inflows contribute to technology transfer and support local economic development. Despite these advantages, FDI inflows into Nigeria have been significantly undermined by persistent social unrest, especially in the Southeast region.

The U.S. Department of State (2020) identified security concerns including rising incidents of terrorism, kidnapping, and violent crimes as a deterrent for international investors in Nigeria. Heightened instability tends to erode investor confidence and increase perceived risks, thereby discouraging foreign capital (Vaskov, Pienknagura, & Ricci, 2021). Moreover, the Seattle Emergency Management report notes that regions with recurring civil unrest often develop a negative reputation, deterring both foreign investments and tourism.

This trend has direct implications for Southeastern Nigeria, where the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have frequently issued sit-at-home directives, disrupting business activities across the region. Investors are less likely to risk capital in environments where safety is uncertain and economic activities are frequently interrupted. This sentiment is echoed by Onyebuchi (2018), who reported that a number of prominent investors had relocated from Nigeria to more stable African nations such as Ghana and Rwanda, seeking a more secure investment climate.

Historically, Nigeria was considered a favorable destination for FDI. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), as cited by Onyebuchi (2018), ranked Nigeria among the top 40 most attractive countries for foreign investment between 2007 and 2009, placing it fourth in Africa behind South Africa, Egypt, and Morocco. However, recent figures present a different reality. The 2018 UNCTAD World Investment Report indicated a 21% drop in FDI inflows and an 8% rise in capital flight from Nigeria (Adenyuma & Onyeche, 2019). Analysts

largely attribute this decline to political instability and growing unrest, particularly sit-at-home orders that paralyze economic activities.

Odili (2020) notes that Southeastern Nigeria depends heavily on the economic stimulation brought by FDI. The interruption of normal business operations due to repeated sit-at-home orders has hampered investor interest and economic development in the region. According to Vaskov, Pienknagura, and Ricci (2021), investment decisions are strongly influenced by political stability and economic predictability—both of which have been compromised in this context.

One notable example is the sit-at-home observance during the Biafra Remembrance Day on May 30th and 31st, organized by IPOB. Intended to honor the memory of victims from the Nigerian Civil War and support the call for an independent Biafra state, the observance took an alarming turn in 2022. For two consecutive days, economic and social activities across the Southeast were brought to a halt. Roads were deserted, businesses shut down, and public institutions were closed due to widespread fear of violence.

The violence was not merely speculative. In Enugu State, multiple fatal attacks occurred, including the deaths of three police officers and a retired Chief Judge, Justice Stanley Nnaji. Similar incidents were reported in Ebonyi State, where several civilians lost their lives. These events, combined with prior unrest in states such as Imo, have created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity.

The persistent attacks on public institutions and security formations in the region exacerbate these fears, further dissuading investment. Reports suggest that stolen weapons from security facilities have been used in subsequent attacks, increasing regional instability. While IPOB and its Eastern Security Network (ESN) have been blamed, some analysts believe that certain political actors might be sponsoring violence to create chaos and label the region as insecure.

This volatility has prompted regional leaders to respond. In April, governors from the Southeast states Abia, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Anambra launched a joint security initiative known as *Ebube Agu*, modeled after the *Amotekun* security outfit in the Southwest. At its inauguration, Southeast governors collectively condemned the destruction of public property and pledged their support to security agencies tasked with restoring order. Nevertheless, the ongoing unrest and sit-at-home disruptions have deeply affected the investment climate in Southeastern Nigeria. The consistent

interference with economic activity, fear of violence, and fragile security infrastructure have collectively created an environment that repels rather than attracts foreign investors. Without meaningful and sustained interventions from both security forces and political leaders, the economic aspirations of the Southeast, driven in part by FDI, may remain unrealized.

Sit-at-home, Youth Engagement and Unemployment in South-East Nigeria

The Southeastern region of Nigeria continues to grapple with alarming levels of unemployment. Among the states in the region, Imo currently records the highest unemployment rate nationally. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2021), unemployment rates in the region are critically high: Imo State stands at 56.64%, followed by Abia (50.07%), Anambra (44.22%), Ebonyi (40.16%), and Enugu (31.62%). This issue cuts across both urban and rural areas. Chioke et al., as referenced in Okoh, Onwe, and Ofoma (2022), noted the prevalence of joblessness in rural parts of Enugu East Local Government Area.

In Anambra State, urban centers attract significant migration due to the presence of markets, government offices, and public institutions. However, job seekers often arrive to discover a dearth of employment opportunities, worsened by the recurring sit-at-home orders that disrupt economic activities. Onitsha North Local Government Area—one of two single-community local governments in the state, the other being Nnewi North—is a critical economic hub. It hosts one of West Africa's largest markets and is populated primarily by traders, artisans, civil servants, and small-scale industrialists.

In Imo State, recent figures show that 48.7% of the youth population actively seeking employment remains unemployed. When combined with the underemployment rate, this figure rises to a staggering 75.1%. These statistics reflect a dire labor market situation and signal a systemic challenge requiring urgent attention.

Nwachukwu and Chinedu (2017) identify unemployment as a persistent macroeconomic issue confronting many developing nations. It describes the condition where individuals who are able and willing to work cannot find gainful employment, resulting in lower productivity and declining living standards. Obumneke (2009) emphasized that the effects of unemployment in Southeastern Nigeria are both far-reaching and deeply unsettling, not only for individuals but for society at large.

Unemployment frequently triggers poverty and exposes young people to a vicious cycle of social and economic hardship. Prolonged joblessness can create conditions conducive to criminal behavior. Indeed, incidents of kidnapping, armed robbery, cyber fraud, prostitution, and terrorism have been reported in places like Onitsha North, often involving young individuals without sustainable livelihoods. Adejumola and Olajubutu (2009) argue that high unemployment directly contributes to the proliferation of these social vices, as many youth turn to crime out of frustration and necessity.

There are also severe health implications associated with unemployment. A person who has lost their source of income, especially if they are the primary breadwinner, may suffer from mental stress, anxiety, and even psychological disorders. The economic strain also impacts their family members, who may endure malnutrition and heightened susceptibility to illness due to poor dietary conditions.

The combination of economic decline and soaring unemployment has triggered a wave of emigration from Nigeria. Both skilled and unskilled individuals now seek opportunities abroad, often under risky or illegal circumstances. Tragically, many end up incarcerated in foreign countries due to drug trafficking or other criminal activities.

This social dislocation has given rise to disenfranchised groups, often referred to as “area boys,” who have become hostile toward the society that failed to support them. Bennell (2000) warns that urban environments are increasingly at risk due to the rise of youth-led criminal gangs. Ideyi (2005) similarly notes that these groups view society as an adversary and retaliate through acts such as armed robbery, targeting homes, banks, and public markets. In their eyes, crime becomes a means of asserting relevance and punishing a system that denies them dignity and livelihood.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has illuminated the profound economic consequences of the Monday sit-at-home directive enforced by IPOB in Nigeria's Southeast. The enforced closures have significantly disrupted commercial activities, discouraged investment, and hindered economic progress across the region. The outcomes underscore the pressing need for immediate and strategic interventions to tackle the root causes of these disruptions. The study advocates for a holistic and inclusive strategy one that not only addresses the grievances fueling the sit-at-home protests but also

promotes social cohesion and long-term development. Through such comprehensive efforts, the Southeast can overcome these economic setbacks and move toward a more stable and prosperous future.

Drawing from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Engaging in constructive dialogue with IPOB and other relevant stakeholders is essential to addressing the core issues driving the sit-at-home orders. Facilitating negotiations and understanding the concerns of the separatist group could help reduce tensions and minimize the frequency of these disruptions.
2. The safety of both residents and businesses in the Southeast must be prioritized. Government and security forces should collaborate to bolster security efforts, focusing on intelligence gathering, surveillance, and targeted actions against criminal activities. A secure environment will help lessen the economic impact of the sit-at-home orders.
3. Promoting economic diversification and regional development is key to reducing the Southeast's reliance on industries vulnerable to disruption. By focusing on sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and technology, the region can broaden its economic base, foster resilience, and diminish the negative impacts of civil unrest.
4. Raising awareness about the negative consequences of the sit-at-home orders on local economies is crucial. Public campaigns that inform citizens about the economic harm, the potential loss of livelihoods, and peaceful ways to express grievances may discourage compliance with such orders.
5. Initiating targeted economic support programs, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), can help mitigate the effects of the sit-at-home orders. Providing financial assistance, grants, and low-interest loans to affected businesses, along with promoting job creation initiatives, will support economic recovery and reduce unemployment.

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