HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE IPOB CONFLICT

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Abstract

This study examined human rights violations in South-East Nigeria arising from the conflict between Nigerian state security agencies and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), including its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). Although both actors have been widely implicated in abuses against civilians, existing studies have tended to examine state repression and separatist agitation separately, leaving limited empirical evidence on how their interaction shapes civilian experiences. The study adopted a quantitative survey design, grounded in Social Movement Theory, Human Rights Theory, and State Repression Theory. A structured questionnaire was administered to 250 respondents, 50 from each of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States, selected through multistage sampling that combined purposive and random techniques. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and anonymity was preserved. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, namely frequencies and percentages. The results indicate that 55.5% of respondents regarded human

rights violations in the region as very prevalent, while 58.8% held the Nigerian government and its security agencies primarily responsible. Arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention, restriction of movement, and intimidation were the most frequently reported violations, and the enforcement of IPOB sit-at-home orders was associated with disruptions to movement, livelihoods, and education. The study concludes that these violations are not attributable to a single actor but reflect a self-reinforcing cycle of state repression and non-state resistance, rooted in poor governance and historical marginalisation. It recommends accountability for both state security forces and IPOB, sincere and inclusive dialogue, human rights training for security personnel, and a shift from militarised responses towards a rights-based approach to conflict management.

Keywords: human rights, IPOB conflict, state repression, South-East Nigeria, non-state actors

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Emmanuel Tochukwu Mbah

DEDICATION

I hope my future self is pleased with the person I have become, and I dedicate this Independent Study to my future self.

DECLARATION

I, Emmanuel Tochukwu Mbah, with the ID number 6517802004, do hereby certify that this work is entirely my own and original, except where acknowledged. I did this Independent Study all by myself, under the careful guidance of an advisor.

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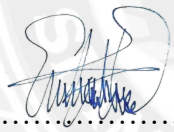
Advisor: 

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The violation of human rights is cited by Clement et al. (2021) as one of the greatest challenges of a global nature in the present day. This issue is even more urgent in areas of conflict, where the attitude of the state and non-governmental entities leaves room for doubt as to whether the violations are of human rights or acts of policing.

This phenomenon can occur in the context of power struggles, ideological confrontations, and governance issues. The matter becomes especially complicated in the case of Nigeria's Southeast, composed of the following states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The problem arises in connection with the emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which is an extremist group fighting for the creation of the Republic of Biafra, also called the "Land of the Rising Sun".

The reasons for the rise of the movement are connected with perceived political marginalisation, economic marginalisation, and the problems of security in the region (Ejiofor, 2024). From a scholarly perspective, the revival of the pro-Biafran struggle cannot be dissociated from these factors. According to Onyemaobi et al. (2023), this is linked with the legacy of post-war grievances, political marginalisation, economic neglect, and limited federal government presence in the zone, which create favourable conditions for the separatist movement. IPOB claims that their struggle represents the fight for self-determination and

justice for the Igbo people as a response to the long-standing discrimination and neglect. Despite being a reaction to decades of marginalisation, the activities of the movement provoked conflicts with the Nigerian state, which grew into a lasting conflict between the two sides, both of which accused each other of human rights violations.

There is a tendency for human rights abuses to be witnessed in conflict-ridden countries, especially where there is contestation of political power between state and non-state actors (Gibson & Boswell, 2022). In Nigeria, the South-East region, which includes Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States, has increasingly become volatile due to increased secessionist agitation. The background information is an important part of the topic being discussed here. South-East Nigeria has the scars of the Nigerian Civil War, during which people have continued to suffer political exclusion and economic deprivation. Olaosebikan and Aziken (2022) argued that *"*memories of the civil war and the perception of marginalisation of the Igbo people continue to inform political consciousness and drive renewed calls for secessionism in southeastern Nigeria*"* (p. 515).

The quoted statement indicates how perceptions of marginalisation lead to the development of secessionist sentiments. Among the movements formed due to perceived marginalisation is the IPOB, formed by Nnamdi Kanu in 2012 for the purpose of restoring Biafra. Nnamdi Kanu has internationally popularised the group through media platforms like Radio Biafra. Onuoha (2018) noted that *"*the emergence and increasing popularity of IPOB are very much rooted in the long-held belief by many Igbo that they are still politically marginalised and economically excluded from the Nigerian federation*"* (p. 31).

Marginalisation of the Igbo people has therefore been a rallying point for the IPOB movement and their calls for the restoration of an independent Biafran State. IPOB is a self-determination group seeking restoration of the former Republic of Biafra through mass mobilisation and other measures (Ezeibe et al., 2023). However, following its proscription as a terrorist organisation by the Nigerian government in 2017, the group adopted increasingly securitised tactics, including the establishment of the ESN, aimed at defending Igbo communities against external threats (Asogwa & Iloh, 2024).

The Nigerian government initiated many military operations throughout the Southeast in reaction to the IPOB's expanding activities. One of the most notable operations was Operation Python Dance (also known as Operation Egwu Eke), a military security operation launched by the Nigerian Army in 2016 in the South-East region of Nigeria, which aimed to restore order and curb separatist activities in the region. However, these operations have generated widespread allegations of human rights violations. Amnesty International (2023) reported that Nigerian security forces have been implicated in serious human rights violations in the South-East, including arbitrary arrests, excessive use of force, and extrajudicial executions of suspected pro-Biafra members and supporters.

The actions of IPOB have also affected civilian life in great measure. The sit-at-home directive issued on a weekly basis has often interfered with economic and social activities within the area by limiting movement and restricting access to services and other day-to-day activities. Okafor and Udechukwu (2024) pointed out that “the imposition of sit-at-home directives through intimidation by pro-Biafra groups has instilled fear in the citizens,

compelling business organisations, educational institutions and means of transport to shut down to escape intimidation*"* (p. 84).

Such occurrences have also contributed to greater insecurity and economic hardships for civilians in the region. Such a conjunction of coercive measures by both state and non-state actors has made civilians central to the conflict and not just passive victims of abuses. However, existing literature mostly focuses only on one side and attributes such abuses to one side, conversely framing resistance movements as wholly legitimate. A few pieces of literature address both concerns together. This study attempted to assess the role of state and non-state actors in committing these violations in Southeast Nigeria using a paradigm that assesses conflicts in terms of human rights.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

First, a significant instance of a human rights problem in the Southeast region of Nigeria is the long-standing conflict between the government and the IPOB. Although the government uses the need to defend the country's sovereignty from insurgents as justification for its actions, these actions have consistently been connected to grave human rights abuses like extrajudicial executions, torture, arrests, and individual disappearances (Amnesty International, 2023). However, the IPOB and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), are accountable for a number of violent acts, including the use of force to enforce sit-at-home orders, attacks on security personnel, intimidation of civilians, and business disruption (Asogwa & Iloh, 2024). Civilians are thereby placed between state repression and non-state coercion, leading to negative results in terms of deaths, restricted movement, closure of schools and businesses, and increased insecurity (Gibson & Boswell, 2022). Despite this, current literature on the subject

of the study reveals an unhelpful dichotomy in which the focus has been on state repression or IPOB victimisation alone. It has seldom taken into consideration both aspects at the same time (Ezeibe et al., 2023).

1.3 Research Questions

These fundamental questions were addressed by the study.

1.3.1 What role did the security forces of the Nigerian government play in violating human rights during the IPOB conflict in Southeast Nigeria?

1.3.2 In what ways have human rights violations occurred in the area as a result of the actions of the IPOB and its armed branch, the ESN?

1.3.3 What effects do these violations of human rights have on Southeast Nigeria's socioeconomic stability, peace, and civilian security?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follow:

1. To examine how Nigerian government security agencies contributed to human rights abuses in Southeast Nigeria during the IPOB conflict.

2. To examine how the IPOB and its armed wing, the ESN, are involved in human rights abuses in the area.

3. To examine how these violations of human rights affect Southeast Nigeria's peace, socioeconomic stability, and civilian population.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study compared and contrasted the IPOB conflict in southeast Nigeria with human rights abuses committed by the Nigerian government. The focus was on the five main Igbo-speaking states, which include Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The study spanned the years 2017 through 2024, beginning when the Nigerian government designated IPOB as a terrorist organisation. The declaration of IPOB as a terrorist organisation is a major turning point that escalated militarisation and resistance. Two main sets of actors were taken into account in this study. First, actions of the Nigerian state security bodies were evaluated in terms of military operations against IPOB. These security organisations included the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services (DSS), and joint military actions like Operation Python Dance.

Moreover, the activities of IPOB and its paramilitary organisation (the ESN) were analysed. To keep the focus clear, other unrelated criminal organisations operating in the same territory were not considered, and only the actors involved in the conflict were analysed (Asogwa & Iloh, 2024). Regionally, the geographical scope of the study was limited to the southeast of Nigeria and did not include the rest of the South-South region and Biafra movements in the diaspora. This limitation was explained by the fact that the South-East is the main operational territory of the IPOB and the most appropriate geographical scope to evaluate human rights issues related to the movement.

Methodologically, the study used a conflict–human rights analytical framework. It prioritised civilian experiences, dynamics of dual perpetration, and implications for peace, stability, and governance.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study adds to academic knowledge by looking into how state and non-state actors' activities affect human rights violations in Nigeria's Southeast region. It provides significant ways in which state and non-governmental actors can support peacebuilding in Southeast Nigeria. This research also gives a voice to the people of Southeast Nigeria, who are frequently victims of violence.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The scope and interpretation of this study's findings may be impacted by a number of limitations that are acknowledged. First, it was difficult to collect data and conduct in-depth fieldwork in Southeast Nigeria because of the unstable security situation brought on by the conflict between the IPOB and Nigerian security agencies. The sensitivity of the situation can create biases on behalf of the government and pro-Biafra groups who have their own platforms for communication. In such a setting, the presence of multiple narratives reduces the likelihood of gathering objective data, particularly when it comes to allegations of extrajudicial activities, kidnappings, and violence against various parties (Ezeibe et al., 2023). Moreover, the time frame of the research was limited to 2017 to 2025 and started with the banning of the IPOB by the government of Nigeria.

The selected period included an important phase of intensification, which involved security operations, including Operation Python Dance. However, it failed to capture earlier phases of pro-Biafra unrest, which affected the overall dynamics of the conflict (Olaosebikan & Aziken, 2022).

Independent verification of all reported incidents was further hampered by restricted access to official government records, classified security documents, and extensive human rights databases. Despite these gaps, the study maintains academic rigour by consulting multiple credible sources to ensure that the findings are as balanced and reliable as possible.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Key concepts used in this study are defined below.

- **Human Right Violation: A**rbitrary detention, extrajudicial executions, torture, disappearances, and restrictions on freedom of movement or assembly, among other acts or inactions on the part of the state or any non-state actor that violate a person's fundamental civil, political, economic, social, or cultural rights.

- **State Actor:** Government institutions and their security apparatuses, which include the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Nigerian Police Force, and the Department of State Services (DSS) as coercive agencies of the Nigerian state.

- **Non-State Actors:** Groups acting outside the official government machinery that still exercise coercive control over civilians; in this study, it refers to the IPOB and their paramilitary force.

- **Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB):** A separatist group that has been banned by the Nigerian government as a terrorist organisation in 2017 in favour of re-establishing the state of Biafra in Southeast Nigeria.

- **Eastern Security Network (ESN):** Paramilitary force of IPOB formed in 2020 and referred to as a community security arrangement of Igbo communities by IPOB.

- **Sit-At-Home:** A command issued by IPOB, which demands people living in Southeast Nigeria to stay at home and refrain from engaging in economic and social activities. It is usually carried out on certain days using both voluntary participation and coercion.

- **Secession/Separatism:** The striving of a particular group of people to achieve political independence or self-determination and become independent from the current state, like IPOB's claims regarding Biafra.

- **State Repression:** Using coercion to deal with dissent or the threat for the government by means of censorship, arbitrary arrest, and military involvement.

- **Fragile State:** The state, which possesses weak institutions, poor service provision, and inadequate law enforcement, is thus unable to ensure security for its citizens or to resolve conflict internally.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The chapter explores the related literature on human rights violations and conflict dynamics in Southeastern Nigeria, specifically focusing on IPOB activities and the Nigerian government's response. This chapter not only summarizes the previous research results, but also critically reviews the results and places this current study in the context of the current research discussions as they exist in the literature by looking for commonalities and differences in the previous research, and identifying areas where further research is needed. Drawing on theories and concepts in political science, conflict studies and human rights, the literature review seeks to analyze concepts and theories such as state repression, non-state actor mobilisation and civilian vulnerability in their definition and usage to explain the case of Nigeria. This chapter is organised logically into four sections: research gaps, an empirical review of previous research and findings, theoretical framework which provides the theoretical underpinning for this research, and conceptual framework, which outlines the key concepts used throughout this study.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

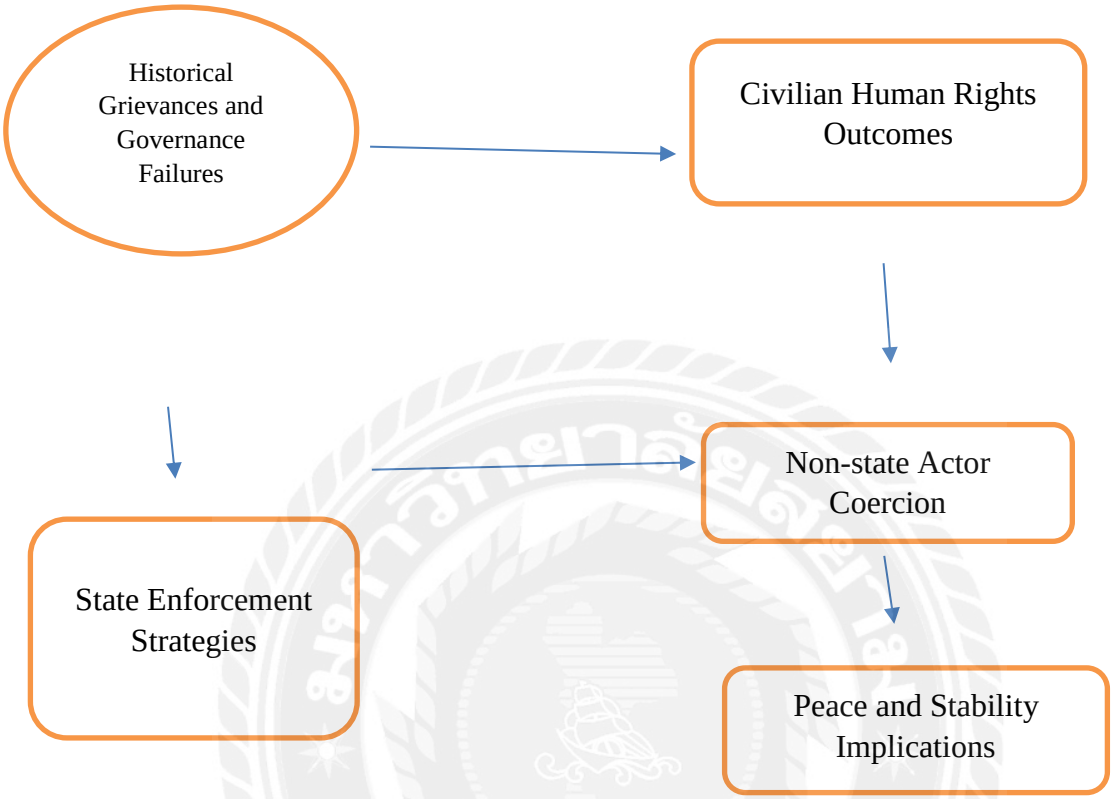

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

With an emphasis on the dispute between the IPOB and the Nigerian government, this section reviews the scholarly literature on human rights abuses in Southeast Nigeria. The literature review is based on an analysis of existing literature on the political and security factors influencing the development of the conflict and the implications of these for human rights and peacebuilding. The literature review is organised thematically around the five main themes of the study corresponding to the theoretical framework: historical grievances and poor governance; state repression; civilian human rights; coercion by non state actors; impact of the

conflict on peace and stability. The literature review essentially gives a summary of the intricate relationship between state action, non-state actors, and governance shortcomings that leads to violence and human rights abuses in Southeastern Nigeria.

Historical grievances and governance failures are critical to both the emergence and sustainability of the IPOB conflict. The majority of the existing literature locates the separatist movement in the context of historical grievances and unresolved issues stemming from the Nigerian Civil War. Baxter (2015) observed that “the contemporary Biafran agitation reflects unresolved tensions from the civil war period, especially among communities that perceive themselves as having suffered injustice during that time" (p. 34).

Similarly, according to Onyemaobi et al. (2023), the revival of IPOB is because of continued perceptions of political exclusion, disparities in development, and lack of representation of people in the South-East part of Nigeria. From the above literature, it is clear that governance failure and grievances play a central role in providing the ideological basis for mobilisation. In addition to history-based grievances, scholarly work has been done regarding how IPOB has been able to mobilise through communication strategies. IPOB has employed radio broadcasting, the use of digital media, and the diaspora community to communicate its messages. According to George et al. (2024), the communication strategy used by IPOB is highly persuasive and emotional. This is because it is tailored towards people who feel marginalised by the state.

2.3 State Repression and Human Rights Violations

However, whereas the rise of IPOB can be largely attributed to the history of grievances and politicisation, the academic literature points out that reactions from the state have also played a substantial role in influencing the development of the conflict in question. The repressive approach applied by authorities in many cases not only fails to address any underlying causes but also increases them, causing recurrent episodes of violence. As noted by Adigun (2018), the excessive use of coercive tactics in suppressing activist campaigns often leads to estrangement of moderate followers and even radicalisation.

In Southeastern Nigeria, the accusations of human rights abuses in connection with security actions taken by government troops were found to emerge in several research papers. For instance, Hansen (2020) stated that the use of force against protesters campaigning for Biafran independence cost several unarmed activists their lives. Obiukwu and Njoku (2024) also noted that the Nigerian army was responsible for the civilian deaths in clashes with pro-Biafra activists.

In reaction to increasing unrest, the Nigerian government authorised the use of military operations such as the Python Dance operation to curb separatist activities. According to Reader (2020), these operations aimed at disintegrating pro-Biafra groups and asserting state power. Reports suggest that the activities have led to the arrest of people who might not even be members of the movement. The significant turning point came in 2017 when the Nigerian government classified IPOB as a terrorist organisation. According to Nwankpa (2021), the classification of IPOB as a terrorist organisation enhanced the security measures targeted against the movement. The classification has faced criticism in regard to its political and legal

aspects. Chukwudi et al. (2019) argued that the use of military force to address the issue has been ineffective, as it continues to fuel the repetitive cycle of repressive and resistant violations of human rights. Despite criticism of the government on the use of force, the contemporary research highlights the deviation from the approach used by IPOB. As stated by Odigbo (2023), the movement started out as a peaceful movement of secession but has shifted to a different approach since the establishment of ESN in 2020.

The militarisation has caused considerable suffering to the civilian population. While the leaders of IPOB portray the ESN as a defence strategy for protecting the Igbo population, the presence of armed individuals has increased tension and insecurity among civilians. Civilians are caught up in the clash between state security operations and militia groups within the pro-Biafra movement. Attacks on police stations, kidnappings, and intimidation reported in relation to the group show that the human rights abuses in the area cannot be blamed on one party only.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The theories outlined in this study represent the theoretical paradigms on which the discussion of human rights abuses in South-East Nigeria is based, with emphasis on the clash between IPOB and the Nigerian government. These theories fall under the peace and conflict theories, which present the analytical framework through which the genesis of political grievances and collective action is examined and analyzed. They are Social Movement Theory, Human Rights Theory, and State Repression Theory. These theories offer an understanding of how the above factors culminate in cycles of repression, resistance, and human rights abuses directed against the civilian population. It is argued in academic literature that separatist movements and the related conflicts cannot be explained by one factor only.

Instead, they result from interactions between political grievances, collective mobilizations, and government reactions (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). For this reason, these theories were utilized in order to gain a narrower but more comprehensive analytical framework. Together, the above perspectives provided an explanation of the genesis and mobilization of the IPOB movement, enforcement actions taken by the Nigerian state against the separatist movement, and the implications of the actions of both state and non-state actors for the protection of human rights in Southeast Nigeria.

A different perspective is generated by each theoretical approach. The formation of separatist movements such as IPOB can be understood through the prism of Social Movement Theory. The Human Rights Theory provides a framework for evaluating the behavior of both states and non-state actors in light of international standards. State Repression Theory investigates government responses to opposition, with a focus on repression. In general, these viewpoints aid in comprehending the dynamics and ramifications of the interactions between state and non-state actors in the IPOB conflict.

2.4.1 Theory of Social Movement

The Theory of Social Movement is an excellent tool for analysing the rise, organisation, and mobilisation of collective actors such as the IPOB. According to Diani (1992), a social movement is "a system of informal interactions among individuals, groups, and organisations in political and/or cultural struggles based on common collective identities" (p. 4). This definition aids in comprehending the connection between shared grievances, collective identities, and organisational ties that enable the continuation of political and social actions

(Della Porta & Diani, 2006). The importance of identity, communication, and group action in the formation of social movements is thus highlighted by Social Movement Theory.

Relative deprivation theory and mass society theory are examples of earlier viewpoints that have been greatly expanded upon by Social Movement Theory. Framing theory emphasises how movements acquire and utilise resources, frame grievances, and construct narratives to attract support and sustain participation (Tilly, 2004). Theories assert that social movements are not merely propelled by grievances but also by their organisational potential, their ability to articulate common goals and to mobilise material as well as symbolic resources. With respect to IPOB, the perceived historical marginalisation of the Igbo community from the political and economic sphere provides the base for mobilisation, while social media and networks help in communication and recruiting members as well as propagating the message of the movement (George et al., 2024). One of the main advantages of Social Movement Theory is its ability to explain the process of formation of the separatist movement and its endurance despite all the political and institutional obstacles. This theory proves that not only grievances but also the organisational ability, leadership, identity, and mobilisation opportunities have an influence on collective action. However, the theoretical model does not sufficiently account for the role of the use of force by the government and the violation of the human rights of the citizens associated with it. Thus, although it explains the origin and mobilisation of IPOB, it fails to adequately capture the patterns of violence and violation of civilian rights.

The analytical basis for comprehending the formation and mobilisation of IPOB as a separatist movement in Southeast Nigeria for this study is provided by Social Movement Theory. It clarifies how the movement's expansion and ongoing support have been impacted

by collective identity, communication networks, and historical grievances. At the same time, its limitations justify the incorporation of complementary theoretical perspectives that examine state responses and their implications for human rights. Therefore, Social Movement Theory is mainly used within the overall theoretical framework to analyse the non-state aspects of the conflict and the ways in which collective mobilisation influences the dynamics of human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria.

2.4.2 Human Rights Theory

The Theory of Human Rights provides a normative framework for evaluating the behaviour of state and non-state actors in relation to fundamental rights. The concept, which is based on John Locke's natural rights theory, maintains that all people, regardless of social status, nationality, race, or gender, have inherent rights due to their humanity (Locke, 1988). These rights are essential to human dignity and well-being and cover civil, political, cultural, social, and economic domains.

The Human Rights Theory enables an assessment of both state and non-state actors in the IPOB dispute, including IPOB and its armed faction (the ESN). The issues of universality and indivisibility of rights are addressed, as are the relevant guarantees for the right to life, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, and freedom of assembly. In order to better understand the situation in Southeast Nigeria, this study uses this framework to ascertain whether the aforementioned actors adhere to or violate human rights norms. The Human Rights Theory framework offers a foundation to analyse the survey results in Chapter Four. Regardless of the perpetrators (state security forces or IPOB/ESN), all reported instances of arbitrary arrests,

relocations, intimidation, or other acts that violate universal and non-derogable rights as defined by the Human Rights Theory are regarded as violations.

2.4.3 State Repression Theory

The Theory of State Repression explains how governments typically respond to perceived political threats. In cases involving dissident groups like IPOB, coercive measures are frequently used to maintain control (Davenport, 2007).

Davenport argued that these tactics are designed to buy time and consolidate state power, but they often have counterproductive effects as they tend to escalate opposition, escalate tensions and extend the conflict. These military exercises include Operation Python Dance in Southeastern Nigeria, which has been attributed, although it was claimed as a security exercise, to extrajudicial killings, arrests, and disruption of civilian life. These repercussions demonstrate the presence of a dynamic between state repression and non-state resistance.

By applying the above theoretical approach, this research examined the role of state responses in dealing with the present threat but, at the same time, in sustaining conflict and the gradual destruction of human rights. The primary proposition in the theory is that repression is not an end solution because it explains why there exists a coexistence between Operation Python Dance, designed to suppress IPOB, and the survey results showing sit-at-home compliance and remobilisation but no reduction. Therefore, State Repression Theory informs the analysis of the results from the respondents about the increase in human rights violations due to government actions since coercion is theorised to incite opposition.

2.5 Analytical Framework

The theoretical approach that is used in this research was developed through an analysis of the interaction between Human Rights Theory and Social Movement Theory and provided a platform for analysing the impact of the dispute between the Nigerian state and IPOB on the pattern of human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria. Instead of looking at the violations as separate instances, the theoretical approach sees them as products of the interaction between the approaches taken by the state and those taken by the armed non-state movement. It therefore enables an evaluation of the behaviour of each party as well as the way their interaction creates situations of insecurity for civilians.

This means that the theoretical approach is anchored in three analytical constructs. Firstly, the state response and security enforcement examine the extent to which government counter-insurgency operations, policing practices, and security policies conform to constitutional and international human rights standards.

Secondly, the non-state actor mobilisation and coercion study examines how IPOB's directives, coercive tactics, and methods of mobilisation affect the human rights landscape in the area.

Thirdly, human rights outcomes for civilians assess the consequences of competing actions by focusing on violations such as arbitrary arrests, unlawful killings, movement restrictions, enforced disappearances, torture, and disruptions to livelihoods.

The framework allows the study to go beyond solely assigning blame to the state or IPOB by connecting these constructs. Instead, it provides an analytical basis for examining how the

interaction between both actors generates conditions under which civilian rights are undermined. Accordingly, the conceptual framework becomes the main interpretative lens through which the data gathered is examined and analysed to answer the research questions relating to the issues of human rights abuse in Southeast Nigeria.

2.5.1 State Response and Security Enforcement

The state response and security enforcement emerge as the first analytical construct in analysing the dynamics of human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria. Whereas it is the constitutional obligation of the Nigerian government to maintain the country's security and sovereignty, the methods adopted by the Nigerian state in addressing the operations of the IPOB have been subject to many controversies as far as their implications for the protection of fundamental human rights are concerned. The analytical construct, therefore, focuses not only on the presence of security measures but also on the conformity of their implementation with the legal provisions of Nigeria and international human rights laws.

The analysis focuses on the variety of security measures implemented by the Nigerian state, including the use of military and police forces, intelligence services, the prohibition of IPOB organisations, arrests, detentions, checkpoints, curfews and other counter-insurgency measures. Though such measures are aimed at restoring public order and ensuring national security, their implementation has been accompanied by accusations of abuse of power, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, extrajudicial killings, restrictions of freedom of movement and assembly, and lack of due process of law. Hence, the first analytical construct evaluates the conformity of the conduct of security agencies with the legal, necessary, proportional and accountable character of their actions.

In addition to providing an assessment of the effect of security operations, the analysis framework used to examine patterns in state response considers its impact on the wider human rights situation in Southeast Nigeria. The framework recognises the possibility of negative repercussions from counter-insurgency operations on civilian populations, especially where enforcement goes beyond those who have been tagged as IPOB members and affects ordinary citizens through displacements, disruptions of livelihood, intimidation, and restrictions on access to public facilities. With this in mind, the framework provides the analytical grounds for considering whether or not state responses have improved security without compromising human rights, or vice versa.

2.5.2 Non-State Actor Mobilisation and Coercion

This component of the analytical framework examines the mobilisation and coercion strategies employed by the IPOB and its military wing, ESN, to determine the impact of non-state actors on the human rights situation in Nigeria's southeast. Although the movement is separatist in nature, advocating for self-determination, how it is mobilised and coerced has far-reaching consequences for civilian protection and regional conflict dynamics. As a result, the framework assesses how the movement's actions, either independently or in combination with the state's security measures, impact the patterns of human rights violations. The framework examines how IPOB uses historical grievances, sentiments of political discrimination, ethnicity, and local ties to mobilise support. However, it is crucial to remember that mobilisation cannot fully account for the movement's impact on the dynamics of the conflict.

Thus, in its analysis, the degree of voluntary compliance, social coercion, or coercion by means of force of these directives issued by IPOB is assessed. Specific attention is paid to

phenomena, such as coercion with respect to ‘sit-at-home’ orders, intimidation of those who oppose the group, attacks on infrastructure, and other acts of coercion related to restrictions on movement, education, economic activity, and security. Whereas most literature on this conflict assumes that civilians either wholly approve of or wholly oppose the actions of the movement, this approach acknowledges that the reactions of civilians may vary from active participation and ideological alignment to coercion and non-participation.

This is an extremely important point to make, as it allows for distinguishing between the mobilisation of civilians and their victimisation. In addition, studying how the tactics of IPOB and ESN affect people’s ability to exercise their basic human rights provides an added dimension to the study of security state response and results in a fuller picture of the ways through which human rights violations happen in Southeast Nigeria.

2.5.3 Human Rights Outcomes for Civilians

The main subject of this analytical framework is the civilian human rights outcomes, considered as the basic unit of analysis. Consistent with the objectives of the research, the experiences of civilians provide empirical evidence in order to determine the consequences that can result from either state security measures or the activities of the IPOB.

Instead of examining the impact of the two factors separately, the framework seeks to understand the degree to which the combination of the two contributes to the realisation of rights and international human rights standards that have been provided for by the constitution. The framework includes both direct and indirect elements of human rights outcomes. Indirect outcomes relate to the broader socio-economic consequences of conflict, including disruptions

to education and healthcare, restrictions on freedom of movement, loss of livelihoods, displacement, and the weakening of social cohesion. Examining these dimensions together enables the study to capture the multidimensional nature of human rights violations and their implications for civilian well-being.

Analytically speaking, the relationship between the three constructs is seen to be reciprocal in nature and not linear. Security responses on the part of the states could shape the strategies of the non-state actors, who, in turn, could impact the intensity and nature of the state response. In this relationship, civilians form the population through which these dynamics will have visible results. For this reason, the framework assumes that there is no unidirectional cause-and-effect relationship, but rather, there are mutually reinforcing patterns, which should be analysed together. Such an approach is consistent with the theoretical paradigms underlying the study. Specifically, Human Rights Theory allows for assessment of the violations of basic rights; Social Movement Theory helps understand the collective mobilisation process, and State Repression Theory enables evaluation of the consequences of the coercive policies on the part of the government agencies. The combination of these theoretical perspectives allows going beyond the one-sided attribution of blame and analysing the interconnection between the state institutions, non-state actors, and the civilian population in the context of human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria. Therefore, the framework served as the tool with the help of which the empirical findings of the study are evaluated.

2.5.4 Analytical Pathways

The analytical framework is operationalised through the three mutually reinforcing pathways, which help interpret empirical evidence on the subject matter. The pathways

provided a structured means of analysing the connections between the responses of the state security apparatus, the actions of the IPOB, and structural conditions on patterns of human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria. Instead of treating these three aspects as separate independent variables, the theoretical framework considers them as interrelated processes, which together generate a more nuanced account of civilian human rights consequences.

The first pathway analyses the connections between state security responses and civilian human rights outcomes. The pathway seeks to establish whether the development of counter-insurgency measures is related to the patterns of allegations of human rights violations and whether these responses meet the criteria of legality, necessity, proportionality, and accountability in accordance with democratic and international human rights norms.

The second pathway examines the link between the mobilisation tactics and the coercive methods employed by IPOB and their implications for civilians. The pathway takes into consideration the effects that mobilisation tactics and coercion through enforcement of organisational policies, among others, have on the enjoyment of basic human rights such as freedom of movement, livelihoods, and security. By taking into consideration the above issues, the study seeks to distinguish between political mobilisation, coercion, and the implications of these on civilian well-being.

Thirdly, the pathway explores the structural environment in which the interactions between state and non-state actors take place. It examines the effects of governance gaps, political exclusion perceptions, institutional capacities, and grievances on the emergence of separatist mobilisation as well as the government response to the conflict situation. The above structural

issues are viewed not as separate explanatory variables but as structural elements that affect conflict actors' behaviours and the human rights environment.

Taken together, these analytical pathways provide an integrated framework for examining the complex relationship between state authority, non-state mobilisation, structural conditions, and civilian human rights outcomes. The framework therefore facilitates a multidimensional analysis of the conflict by recognising that patterns of human rights violations emerge from the interaction of institutional responses, movement strategies, and contextual factors rather than from the actions of a single actor. In this way, the analytical pathways provide the methodological structure through which the empirical evidence generated in this study will be analysed and interpreted.

2.6 Empirical Framework

The empirical basis for this research was derived from previous empirical studies that have attempted to explore the link between security measures undertaken by the state, the operations of IPOB, and human rights abuses in South-Eastern Nigeria. This research incorporates insights gained from empirical studies in order to establish existing patterns, methodology, and lacuna in the field, which would justify the need for this current investigation.

The studies have been classified based on their focus on either state, non-state, or civilian perspectives. There has been an increase in empirical studies concerning human rights abuse and conflict situations in South-Eastern Nigeria in recent times, mainly due to the increasing tension between the Nigerian state and the IPOB. The literature broadly agrees that violence in the region involves both state and non-state actors. However, scholars differ in their

explanations of the root causes, patterns of violence, and implications for civilians and regional stability.

Nwosu and Anene (2023) explored the link between state coercion and human rights protection in counter-secessionist efforts in Southeast Nigeria. Utilising a mixed-methods approach, the research combines documentary analysis of human rights reports from an international context and interviews held in the states of Enugu and Imo. The results show that the military intervention, such as Operation Python Dance, is always connected with claims about extrajudicial killings, detentions without justification, and intimidation. Nwosu and Anene (2023) suggested that an over-reliance on military action has strengthened the gap between the local community and the state and reduced the possibility of peaceful settlement.

Opara (2024) assessed security governance and civil resistance in the region using a qualitative methodology. It becomes clear from the results of the research that the counterinsurgency methods of the government are not always proportional and properly supervised, which leads to a cycle of revenge between the security forces and IPOB-affiliated individuals. Impunity of the security forces only adds to the problem.

While some studies focus on state actions, others examine non-state actors. Eze and Ijeoma (2023) analysed the socioeconomic effects of IPOB's sit-at-home orders in Anambra and Ebonyi States using survey data from 300 respondents. They found that enforced shutdowns severely disrupted economic activity, education, and mobility. The respondents reported fear, coercion, and threats of punishment for non-compliance. The authors concluded that IPOB's enforcement methods constitute a form of non-state coercion that violates civilian rights.

In their 2024 research, Duru and Akintola used the conflict-human rights approach to examine the violations carried out by both state and non-state actors. They triangulated information obtained from human rights organisations, community organisations, and media archives. The results show that both state and non-state actors used violence to show their supremacy and legitimacy. The two claim that in many instances civilians become “dual victims” of military suppression as well as retaliation from the separatists. Measures of transitional justice were suggested to deal with impunity and increase accountability (Duru, & Akintola, 2024).

Other researchers focus on vulnerable groups. In 2025, Nnamani and Ezeibe conducted an ethnographic study of rural communities of Imo State, in which they examined the experiences of women in the conflict period. Different forms of vulnerability for women in terms of military engagements were outlined, which included displacement, poverty, and harassment. Moreover, women were made to adhere to different instructions provided by IPOB militants, including the sit-at-home order. Comparing different experiences from other African regions offers useful knowledge. For example, Mugisha (2023) conducted a study on the state–non-state conflict in the Buganda region of Uganda and identified similar cases of violence and victimisation among civilians, which proves that poor governance and unfulfilled grievances may escalate peaceful political engagement into continuous violence. According to the researcher, these circumstances lead to cycles of repression and resistance. In summary, the above discussion shows that the human rights abuses in South-East Nigeria result from the actions of both governmental and non-governmental institutions, as well as an evident gap in the literature. Much of the literature examines either state repression or non-state militancy in isolation, with few studies exploring how both interact. There is also limited integration of

conflict analysis with the lived experiences of affected civilians. This study addresses these gaps by adopting an integrated conflict–human rights approach that examines both sets of actors simultaneously while centring the experiences of civilian populations in the region.

2.7 Summary of Chapter 2

This chapter reviews the relevant literature and theoretical concepts regarding the human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria, especially in regard to the IPOB and Nigerian State conflict. The literature covers the conceptual, theoretical, analytical, and empirical issues, thus creating an extensive platform for the study. The conceptual literature examines secessionist movements, the state reaction, and human rights violations. The discussion highlights how both the state and non-state actors have an impact on insecurity in the region through mutual actions that increase the vulnerability of civilians in the region. The analysis framework applies the theories and converts them into observable variables, which are categorised into three categories, namely state strategies of enforcement, non-state organization and coercion, and human rights effects for the civilians. This study identified the key variables and laid down clear analysis pathways, showing the relationship of the factors and how they affect the civilians in the conflict.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology used to investigate human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria in relation to the activities of the IPOB and Nigerian government security agencies.

3.2 Design of the Study

The study adopted a quantitative survey approach using a questionnaire to collect data for analysis.

3.3 Area of the Study

The capital cities of the five states that comprised the research region in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo are Umuahia, Awka, Abakaliki, Enugu, and Owerri. The region is made up of rural, urban, and suburban areas. It has a rainforest climate with dry and rainy seasons and rich soils that are ideal for farming. The Niger River, which divides the Southeast from the other regions, is a notable feature. Other geological features in the area are Oguta Lake, the Nsukka Hills, and the Enugu coal mines.

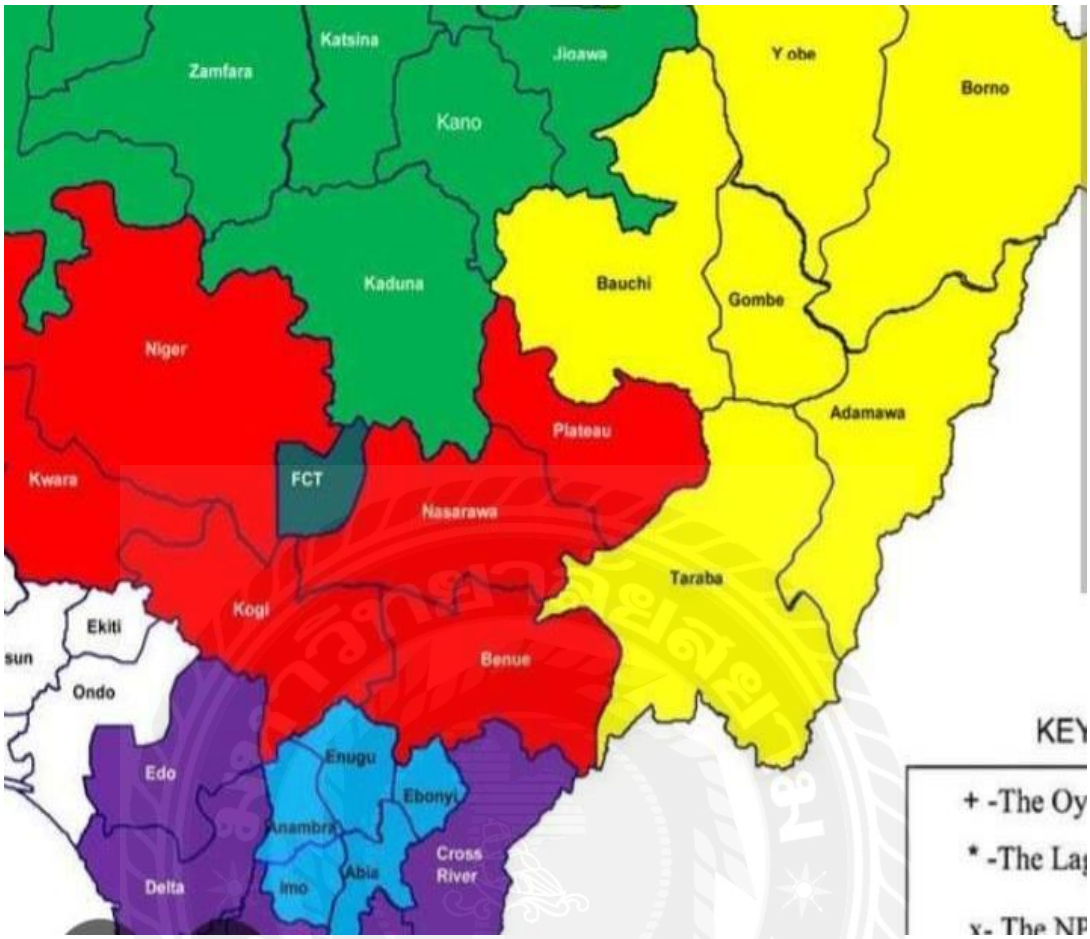

Figure 2. Nigerian Geopolitical Region Map. (Source: Geoinfotech, 2026)

3.4 Population of the Study

The study area is dominated by the Igbo ethnic group, which is one of the dominant and powerful ethnic groups in Nigeria. This region is especially important because of its rich history, cultural significance, and current sociopolitical dynamics, especially the IPOB movement and government responses. Traders, farmers, civil servants, and craftsmen/artisans dominate the area, and they work in a variety of industries. According to the Nigerian Population Commission, the 2021 population was is as follows in Table 1:

Table 1: Igbo State Population (2021)

Ebonyi State	3080383
Anambra State	5827809
Imo State	5708756
Abia State	3927347
Enugu State	4611119
Total	23155414

3.5 Sample Size and Procedure

The study included 250 respondents. This was ascertained by surveying fifty individuals from each of the five (5) states in the southeast. The goal of this strategy was to achieve a unique balance in terms of respondent numbers, age differences, gender, and level of conflict experience or knowledge.

Different sampling techniques were employed in selecting the respondents for the study.

- **Multistage:** Purposive and random sampling techniques were employed in a multi-stage sampling procedure to guarantee that the five different states were represented.

- **Purposive Sampling:** To make sure that different groups from different states were represented in the survey, purposive sampling was employed. They comprised government officials, IPOB activists, students, traders, and civil servants.

- **Random Sampling:** To select respondents from the study area's population, random sampling was employed. It included people from the Southeast region's various rural, urban, and suburban areas. This method, which guarantees variation in socioeconomic groups, was used to select different individuals from the various communities within the five (5) states.

3.6 Questionnaire Design

The IPOB group, the government crisis, and the areas most impacted by the conflict were the focus of the questionnaire design. It included towns, cities, and rural areas where the conflict is prevalent. Because the study was sensitive, the respondents' anonymity served as a guide. A high level of confidentiality was maintained throughout the study ensuring no personal identifying information was collected, and respondents' consent was obtained before they completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of five sections. Section A: Socio-Demographic Characteristics collects data on gender, state of residence, age, occupation, highest educational qualification, and place of residence. Section B: Perceptions of Human Rights Violations covers awareness and understanding of IPOB, prevalence of violations, attribution of responsibility, forms of violations observed, and perceived severity. Section C: Government Responses to IPOB Activities covers the effectiveness of government responses, the

institutions involved, the measures used, their impact on human rights violations, and respondents' personal exposure. Section D: Role of IPOB and Its Supporters in Human Rights Violations covers IPOB's overall impact on security, its contribution to violations, the forms of violations attributed to it, the extent of its role, and whether its actions are perceived as justified. Section E: Recommendations and Possible Solutions covers government priorities, the possibility of a peaceful resolution, and the steps IPOB and other stakeholders should take.

3.7 Methods of Data Collection

A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed, with 56 administered in each of the five states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo). The questionnaires were administered in person. Of the 280 distributed, 264 were returned, and 250 were found valid for analysis after incomplete and inconsistently completed copies were excluded.

3.8 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents in the study area. Frequencies and percentages were among the statistical methods used to analyse some of the responses. The distributions and frequencies of different human rights violations, along with the actors involved, were represented using pie charts and bar charts as data visualisation techniques.

3.9 Summary of Chapter 3

Different sampling strategies were utilised in order to capture the participation of different subgroups of the population, including multi-stage sampling, purposive sampling and random

sampling. Respondents information was gathered using semi-structured questionnaires where respondents could give structured answers but still elaborate on the answers if needed. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse and interpret the data using different frequencies and percentages, in order to interpret the results. Ethical guidelines were followed during the research process; important principles as informed consent and confidentiality were observed throughout the whole process of research.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Sociodemographic Features of Respondents

The sociodemographic profile of the surveyed respondents is described in this section. Gender, age, occupation, education, state of residence, and place of residence are among the variables examined.

Table 2: *Demographic Information of Respondents*

Characteristic	Percentage (%)
Gender	
Female	77.8
Male	22.2
Age	
Under 18	–
18–29	77.8

30–39	16.6
40–49	–
50 and above	5.6
State of Residence	
Imo	20.0
Abia	20.0
Ebonyi	20.0
Anambra	20.0
Enugu	20.0
Occupation	
Civil servant	25.0
Unemployed	6.3
Trader	6.3

Student	25.0
Self-employed	37.4
Educational Qualification	
No formal education	–
Bachelor's degree	83.3
Master's degree and above	11.1
Secondary school certificate	5.6
Diploma/NCE	–
Primary school certificate	–
Place of Residence	
Urban	61.1
Rural	22.2
Suburban	16.7

Note. Percentages are based on responses obtained from the field survey conducted in 2025. A dash (–) indicates that no respondent was recorded in the category.

It is evident from the results that female respondents dominate the sample. Female respondents accounted for 77.8%, while males only made up 22.2%, which indicates that the number of females responding to the survey was more than that of males. In terms of age, the largest age group was people aged 18-29, who formed 77.8% of the respondents. Respondents between the ages of 30 and 39 made up 16.6%, and those above the age of 50 comprised 5.6%. There were no respondents who were below 18 or aged 40-49 years. Therefore, the sample mainly consists of young adults who are the most politically engaged in the region.

The sample represented an equal distribution of respondents in the five Southeast states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo). Each state provided 20% of the respondents. Self-employed respondents formed the biggest category with 37.4%. Students and civil servants were both 25%, while traders and unemployed respondents made up 6.3%. The sample comprised mainly economically engaged respondents, possibly as a result of the security situation in the region and sit-at-home orders.

Most respondents were highly educated, with 83.3% of the respondents having obtained their bachelor's degree and 11.1% having postgraduate qualifications. Only 5.6% had a secondary level of education. The sample included people who were well-educated enough to give informed opinions regarding governance, conflict, and human rights. Moreover, the urban population dominated the sample. Rural residents were 22.2%, and suburban residents were 16.7%. The strong urban presence may influence perceptions of human rights issues. Urban dwellers often have greater access to media, civil society groups, and political debate.

4.2 Perception of Human Rights Violations in South-East Nigeria

This section highlights results on the perceptions held by the respondents concerning the violation of human rights in Southeastern Nigeria. It uncovers the struggle that is going on between the government of Nigeria and the IPOB. It shows how the respondents perceive, experience, and understand the abuse of human rights.

Table 3: *Respondents' Perceptions of Human Rights Violations*

Perception of Human Rights Violations	Percentage (%)
Awareness of the IPOB movement	
Yes	100.0
No	–
Understanding of the IPOB movement	
Combination of peaceful and violent activities	5.6
Peaceful protest movement	50.0
Originally peaceful, currently violent	5.6
Violent separatist group	27.6
Not defined	5.6
Not too certain	5.6
Perceived prevalence of human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria	
Slightly prevalent	27.8
Very prevalent	55.5
Unsure	5.6
Not prevalent	11.1
Perceived primary responsibility for human rights violations	
IPOB	–
Nigerian government	58.8
None of the parties	5.9
Both parties	35.3

The results show that all respondents (100%) were aware of the IPOB movement. This suggests that IPOB's activities and the wider conflict with the Nigerian government are widely known in Southeast Nigeria. The unanimous awareness points to the movement's strong social and political presence in the region.

When asked about their view of IPOB, respondents gave different answers. Half (50%) described it as a peaceful protest movement. Around 27.6% saw the organisation as violent and separatist in nature. Another percentage had a mixed perception. In this regard, 5.6% felt that the group was non-violent initially and turned out to be violent, while another 5.6% believed that the group was both non-violent and violent at the same time. This made up a total of 11.2% who did not know how to perceive the group. Overall, it is a case of public disagreement on perceptions.

As far as human rights violations are concerned, 55.5% of those surveyed considered violations to be very common in the region, 27.8% said they happen sometimes, 11.1% thought violations are not common, and 5.6% were uncertain. In conclusion, 83.3% of the respondents admitted human rights violations take place. Such a result indicates that the matter is viewed rather seriously by most people. As far as the attribution of responsibility is concerned, 58.8% thought the government of Nigeria is mainly to blame for violations, 35.3% believed in joint responsibility of the government and IPOB, and 5.9% did not see anyone responsible for the violations. Thus, it can be seen that state security operations are viewed as a key factor in violations; at the same time, many subjects realise the role of non-state actors in the process of violations.

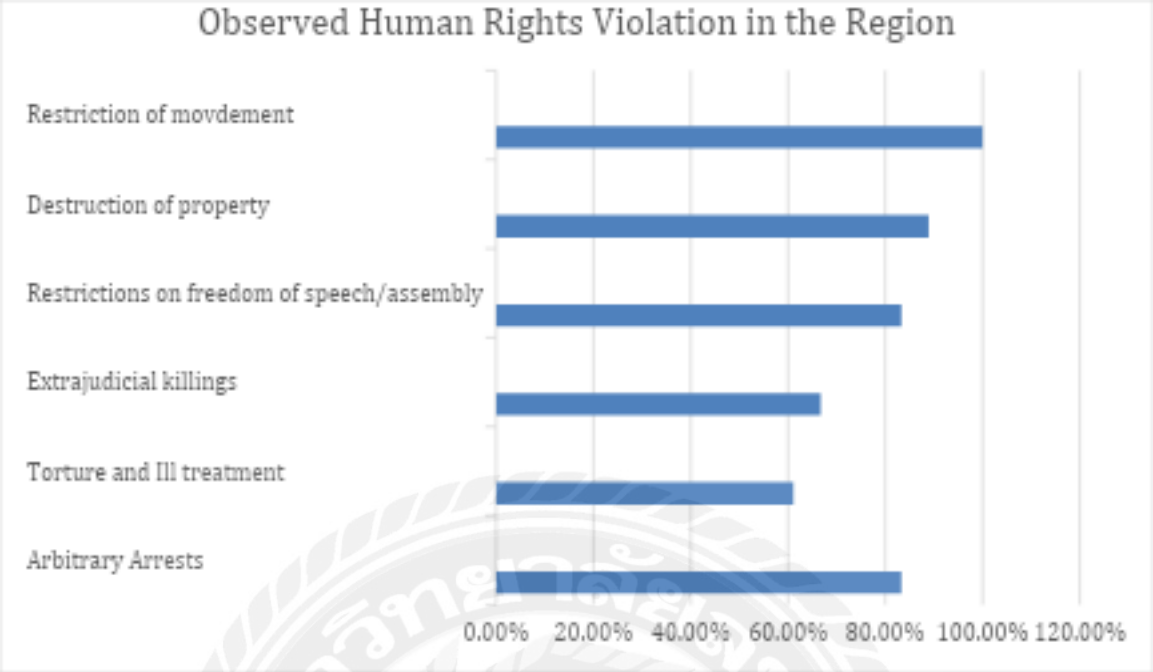

Figure 3: Observed Human Rights Violation in the Region (Source: Field Survey, 2025)

Figure 3 depicts the various types of human rights abuses experienced by the respondents in Southeast Nigeria amidst the conflict between the state of Nigeria and the IPOB. The results reveal several forms of abuse experienced to varying degrees by the respondents. The most common abuse suffered according to the respondents is the curtailment of freedom of movement (100%). This is because the government has been issuing weekly "sit-at-home" orders, especially on Mondays, thus limiting movement across the various towns and cities within and outside the state. It has been made worse by roadblocks and checkpoints.

The second most reported issue was destruction of property. About 88.9% of respondents noted this problem. They said property damage often happens during clashes between security forces and separatist groups. There were also reports of acts of arson targeting shops, vehicles,

and private property during the sit-at-home directive implementation. The above events caused financial losses and increased insecurity in the affected areas. Restrictions to the freedom of speech and expression, as well as arbitrary arrests, were mentioned by 83.3% of the survey respondents.

The above statistics reflect perceptions of significant civil liberty restrictions in the region. Arbitrary arrests were seen by the respondents as part of the state strategy to curb the IPOB actions, since many people believed that there were many arrests of those suspected to be involved in the movement. This view is supported by the case of the June 2021 arrest of Nnamdi Kanu, which continues to shape the discourse of the conflict and state actions against it. Extrajudicial killings (66.7%) and torture or ill-treatment (61.1%) happened less frequently than restrictions of movement and freedom of speech but still exceeded the midpoint, which means that human rights abuses continue to be an issue in this situation.

A considerable number of people believe that they are an inevitable part of the conflict. On the whole, movement and economic restrictions prove to be the most obvious manifestations of the crisis in question, while security actions and violence add to the human rights abuse. Civilian populations of Southeast Nigeria are subject to several human rights violations due to their intersection.

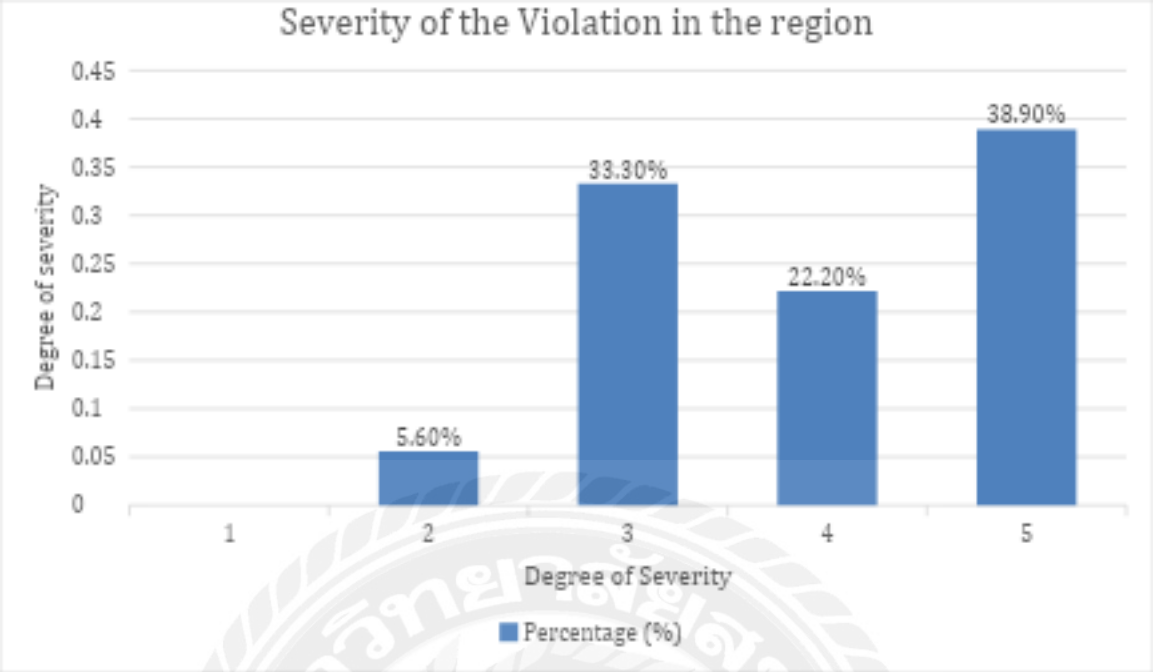

Figure 4: Perceived Severity of the Violation in the Region (Source: Field Survey, 2025)

As depicted in Figure 4, the assessment of respondents about the seriousness of human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria is based on the conflict situation between the government of Nigeria and the IPOB. 38.9% of the respondents perceived it to be extremely serious (rated 5). This was the most common answer. It suggests that many people see the situation as highly critical and troubling.

Notably, a considerable number of respondents (33.3%) regarded the violations as mildly severe, while 22.2% viewed the situation as moderately severe. Despite the different levels of intensity attached to the violations, the general agreement is that there are serious problems relating to human rights in the area under discussion. Together, almost 90% of the respondents viewed the violations as moderately severe or extremely severe, indicating general recognition

of the ongoing struggle against the violation of civilians' rights by the conflict. The conflict entails state security forces and non-state security activities. Generally, the results show awareness among citizens of the severity of the violations, with the largest share of responses falling under "extremely severe" and "mildly severe". The perceptions are similar to those obtained earlier in this research project. The combination of state security actions and non-state actors' activities has increased the vulnerability of civilians in Southeast Nigeria.

4.3 Government Roles in Addressing IPOB Activities

This section seeks to examine the opinions of the respondents regarding the role of the government organisations in dealing with the activities of IPOB in the South-East part of Nigeria. The discussion takes into consideration three main aspects: (i) Effectiveness of the actions taken by these government organisations; (ii) Organisations involved in handling the issue; and (iii) Impact of these actions on human rights in the area.

Table 4: *Respondents' Perceptions of Government Roles in Addressing IPOB Activities*

Survey Item	Percentage (%)
Effectiveness of government actions in addressing IPOB-related activities	
Very effective	–
Somewhat effective	–
Unsure	33.3
Not effective	66.7
Government institutions perceived to have played the most significant role in handling the IPOB situation	
Nigerian Military (Army)	50.0
Nigeria Police Force	16.7
Department of State Services (DSS)	33.3
Perceived effect of government responses on human rights violations	
Increase	66.7
Reduction	–
Unsure	22.2
No change	11.1
Personal or indirect exposure to government actions in response to IPOB activities	
No	33.3
Yes	50.0
Prefer not to say	16.7
Maybe	–

These findings reveal that 66.7% believed that the measures taken by the government towards the activities of IPOB are ineffective, while the remaining 33.3% were unsure about the efficiency of the measures. Not a single participant found the measures taken by the government to be very effective or somewhat effective. This finding implies the general belief among the participants that the measures being taken by the government have not been able to resolve the conflict and improve regional security. As far as the institutional actors are concerned, 50% named the Nigerian military as the main actor involved.

This finding reveals the importance of the military in the strategies being taken by the government. The Department of State Services was regarded as an important institution by 33.3%. The Nigerian Police Force is recognised as an important actor by only 16.7%. In relation to the question regarding the impact of the measures taken by the government on human rights violations, 66.7% thought that there has been an increase in the violations, while 22.2% of them are unsure.

About 33.3% reported no personal impact. Another 16.7% chose not to disclose their experiences. This reluctance seems to be related to the delicate nature of addressing the issue of security. From a general perspective, the results suggest that the government's reactions are viewed as being overly militarised, ineffectual, and human rights-violating. Given the significance of the military, it is apparent that the government prioritises security rather than dialogue. It is alarming to note that governmental action contributes to the violations, thus raising the question of the effects that militarisation may have on civilians. In other words, the conclusions prove the research aim of analysing human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria based on state responses and non-state actors' actions.

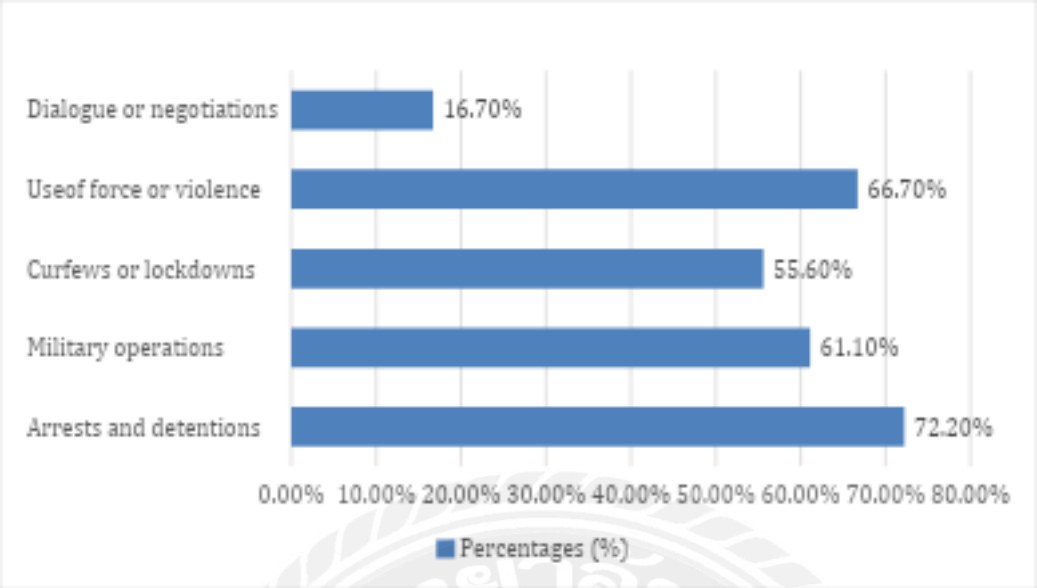

Figure 5. Reactions to the Government's Actions Against the IPOB Group (Source: Field survey, 2025)

Figure 5 shows how respondents view the measures used by the Nigerian government to respond to the activities of the IPOB and its supporters in South-East Nigeria.

The results show that arrests and detention are the most common government response. About 72.2% of respondents identified this measure. The use of force or violence (66.7%) and military operations (61.1%) were also widely reported. Such results clearly show that there is significant use of coercive actions in the government's approach. However, only 16.7% of people referred to dialogue or negotiation in their responses.

Such a relatively small percentage can be considered a sign of the insignificant effect of non-violent techniques in dealing with conflicts. In general, a high number of arrests and detentions and military interventions can be regarded as evidence that respondents view the approach of the government mainly in terms of security, which may serve as an attempt to maintain law and order and face threats.

Simultaneously, the use of dialogue is seldom used, implying that peaceful dispute settlement remains a neglected method, hence reducing chances of reconciliation and stability in the region. The above observations support the previous findings in this study. It shows that the government's response is highly militaristic in nature.

4.4 IPOB Group Roles

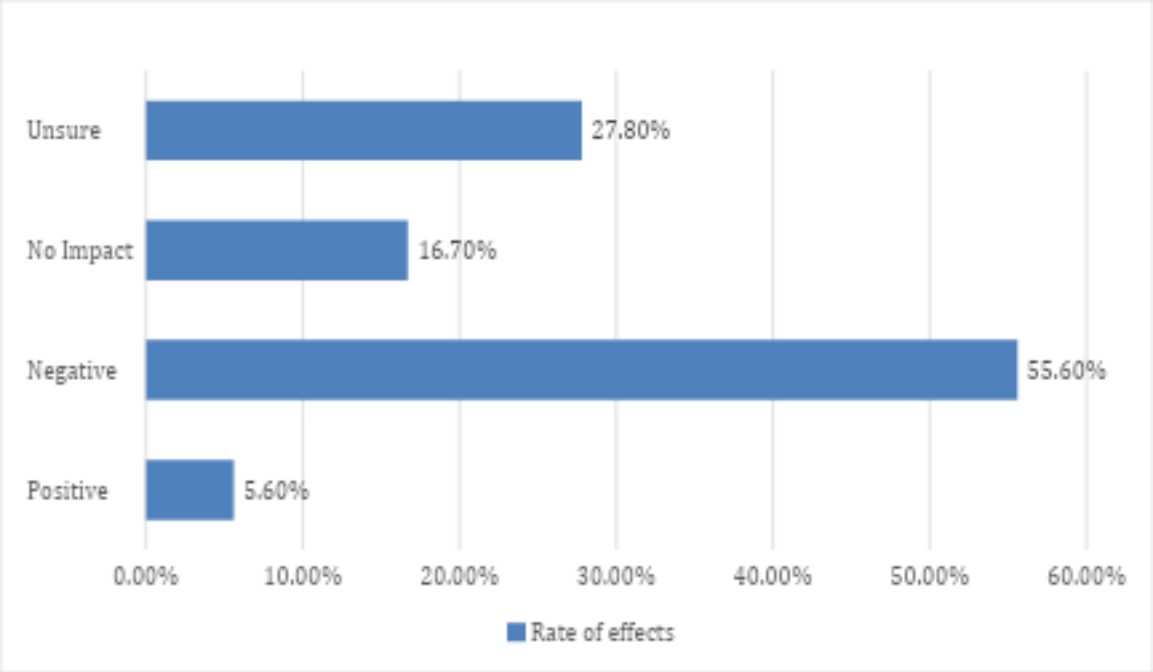

Figure 6: Responses on the Impact of the IPOB Group in the Region (Source: Field Survey, 2025)

Figure 6 shows how respondents view the impact of the IPOB on security in Southeast Nigeria. The results show that 55.6% of respondents believe IPOB's activities have hurt security. This was the most common view. It suggests that many residents link the group's actions to rising insecurity and instability.

About 27.8% were unsure about IPOB's influence on regional security. Furthermore, a further 16.7% felt that the organisation had had no impact at all, while only 5.6% viewed its impact as positive. On the whole, one can conclude that a majority of respondents connect the activities of IPOB with the worsening of the situation regarding security in Southeast Nigeria.

The obvious negative perceptions suggest that the directives of enforcement and clashes with security authorities are generally considered factors that lead to insecurity. At the same time, the considerable level of uncertainty suggests the complexity of the situation. Different perspectives on the objectives and activities of the organisation persist and influence the public perception. All in all, these results confirm the main assumption of the study: the interplay of security policies at the state level and the activities of non-state actors leads to the conflict dynamic.

Table 5: ***Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of IPOB Activities in the Region***

Survey Item	Percentage (%)
Perception of whether IPOB activities have contributed to human rights violations in the region	
No	16.7
Yes	72.2
Unsure	11.1
Perception of whether IPOB activities are justified in response to the government's treatment of South-East Nigeria	
Not justified	27.8
Somewhat justified	44.4
Unsure	22.2
Strongly justified	5.6

Table 5 is an assessment of respondents' views on the involvement of the IPOB in the violation of human rights in Southeast Nigeria. There is also an evaluation of the justification of IPOB's conduct in consideration of the government of Nigeria.

The results show that 72.2% of respondents believed IPOB's activities have contributed to human rights violations in the region. About 16.7% disagreed with this view. Another 11.1% were unsure. Overall, this indicates that most respondents link the group's actions to human rights problems in South-East Nigeria.

The opinions about justification were also divided. Around 44.4% reported that IPOB's actions are partially justified, which means that a considerable number of people believe that

this organisation acts out of political or socio-economic problems in the region. Around 27.8% said that the actions are not justified, while 22.2% were unsure. A small part (5.6%) believed that the actions are fully justified. In general, the data show that there is a multi-layered public opinion about the situation.

Despite being aware that the IPOB campaigns are responsible for human rights violations, quite a few people believe that these violations have been partly committed as a result of their grievances. It clearly shows how complicated the scenario is, in which the human rights violations that happen in Southeast Nigeria are caused by the reactions of both state and non-state actors.

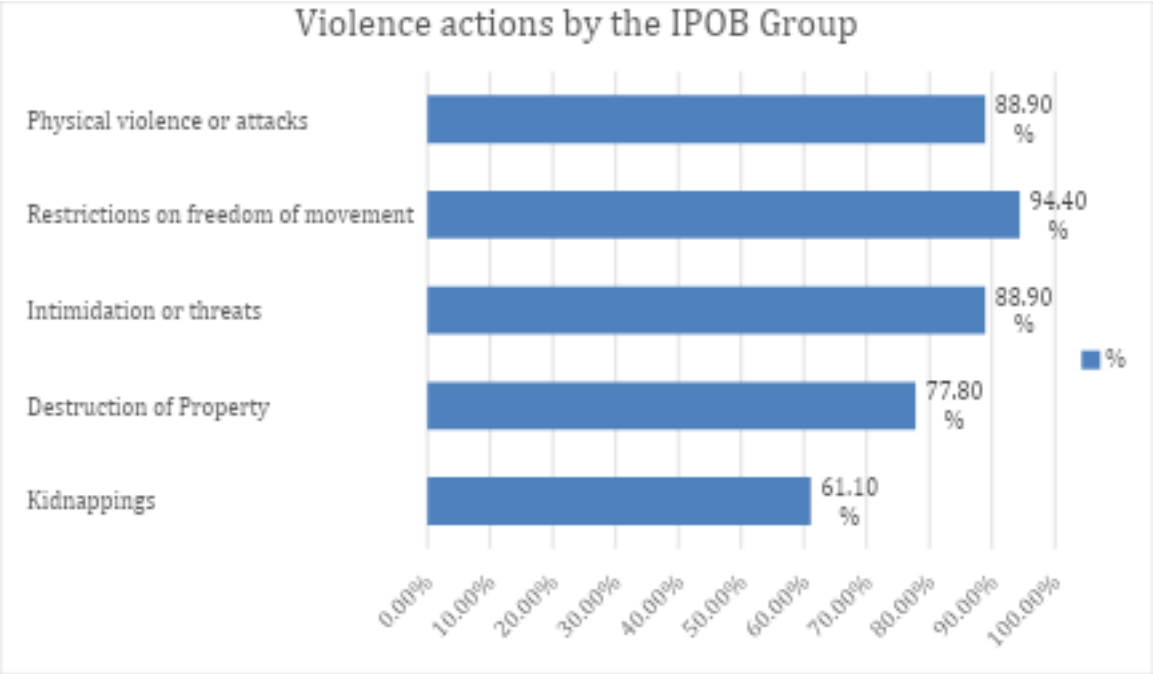

Figure 7. Reactions to the IPOB Group's Human Rights Violations (Source: Field Survey, 2025).

Figure 7 demonstrates perceptions regarding the different forms of human rights abuses linked to the actions of IPOB in Southeast Nigeria. As the results suggest, limitation on freedom of movement is the most commonly mentioned form of abuse, since about 94.4% of respondents point to this problem. It proves the widespread effect of sit-at-home days.

Regularly conducted Monday lockouts limit mobility, interfere with economic activities, and restrict social interactions; thus, they make mobility a major problem because of its direct influence on people's lives and basic civil rights. Physical violence or attacks was mentioned by 88.9% of respondents and became the second most common form of abuse. Such results mean that people believe that coercion is one of the main methods used to force their compliance.

Threats or intimidation, were viewed as tools for ensuring compliance.

In general, from the analysis of the data, it is possible to observe that IPOB enforcement strategies are seen by the respondents as coercive. These enforcement strategies affect both the security situation in the area and the rights of civilians. Restriction of movement, along with incidents of intimidation and the use of violence against people who are not compliant, demonstrate the way non-state actor strategies affect the lives of people in the region. The results of the research confirm the focus of the research – human rights abuses in Southeast Nigeria involve not only state actors but also non-state actors.

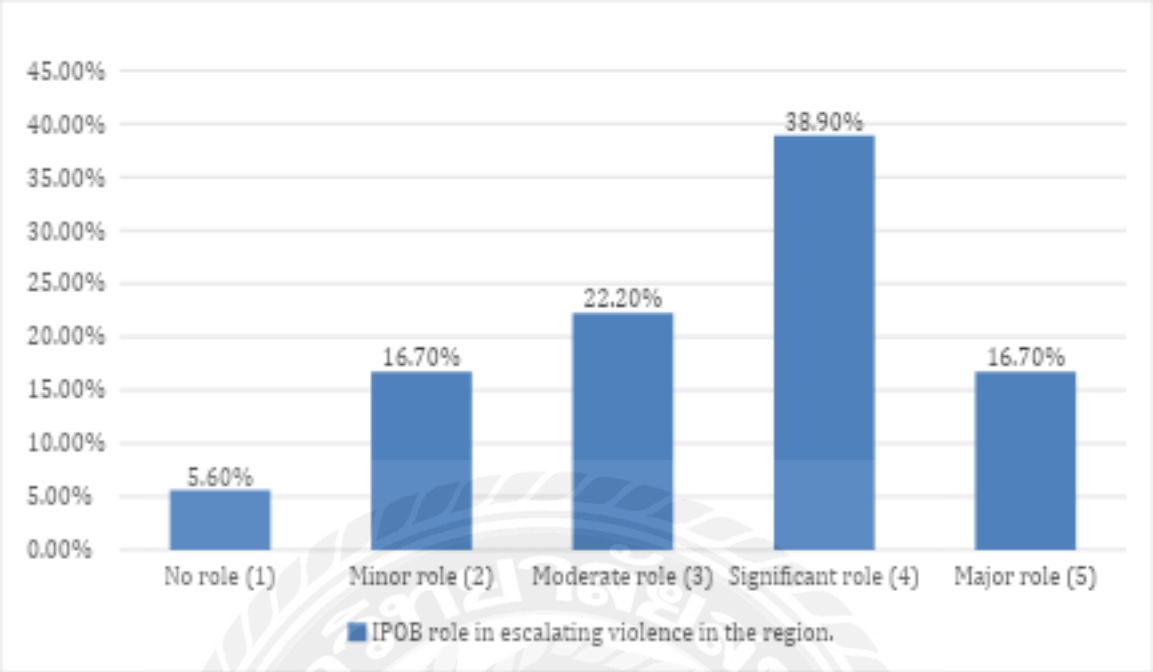

Figure 8: Responses on the Rate of the Role of the IPOB Group in Human Rights Violations in the South-East Region (Source: Field survey, 2025.)

Figure 8 shows how respondents assess the extent to which the IPOB contributes to human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria. The findings indicate that 38.9% of the respondents saw IPOB role as significant. This represented the highest proportion of responses. It implies that a lot of people believe that the group's activities are an important cause of rights violations. Nearly 22.2% of the respondents perceived that IPOB's role as moderate, understanding its influence but to a lesser degree. Only 5.6% of the respondents claimed that IPOB has no role at all in perpetrating the human rights violations in the region. Overall, the results of the research indicate that more than half of the respondents saw IPOB as a crucial player in the escalation of violations of their rights. Southeast Nigeria, which suggests that its practices are considered as a part of conflict dynamics. in the region. The data collected supports the core

claim of this study, which states that human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria arise as a result of the interaction of the state security measures and the actions of non-state actors.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the human rights abuses in Southeast Nigeria by analysing the role played by both government security agencies and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the current conflict situation. This study aimed to shed light on the way their behaviour has contributed to the human rights abuses and further discuss the implications this has on peace, stability, and development in the region. The research responds to the increased human rights abuses in the area and the lack of empirical literature on the combined influence of the two parties in human rights abuses. Past studies have mostly examined state repression and separatist movements independently. In this way, this study examined the two parties' interactions in relation to their impact on the people.

The findings suggest that human rights abuses were not perpetrated by a single entity in this instance and that Southeast Nigeria was involved. IPOB and ESN have been campaigning for sit-at-home orders and threats against civilians, and attacking governmental organisations which added to tension. All of these activities have impacted people's livelihoods, their ability to move and their fears. Meanwhile, government security has been alleged to have breached people's rights in numerous instances. It is manifested in enterprises being disturbed, along with schools and transportation. People's livelihoods are affected and production in the region decreases. The current tension in the state makes it harder to achieve stability, which weakens trust in state. These constant encounters just perpetuate themselves. Therefore, there is a need

for adopting a more balanced approach towards the management of the conflict. This strategy will have to ensure security concerns and the protection of human rights at the same time. The study shows that a relationship between State and non-State actors affects human rights in Southeast Nigeria. IPOB claims the right of self-determination, but some of its violent actions have rendered the area unstable.

The Nigerian government also used heavy security at the same time, such as extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests and civil rights violations. These operations exacerbated the level of dissatisfaction and exacerbated the cycle of violence on the part of both sides. The findings indicate that the human rights violations in the region have not been committed by any single actor, but rather by a complex and long-term dynamic between repression by the state and resistance by non-state actors. The study has important implications because it helps to better understand the nature of human rights violations triggered by conflict.

The study argues that a response strategy to human rights abuses requires an equally balanced response. Accountability must be achieved on both the IPOB and state security forces sides. Additionally, there is a need for dialogue that is authentic and recognizes the suffering of the impacted communities. Improvements are needed in respecting international human rights standards. Southeast Nigeria would have a better human rights situation and sustainable peace if the democratic institutions were strong, and the response to crisis was not militaristic.

5.2 Recommendations

The results of this study reveal that many of the respondents have thought about the possibility of a peaceful solution. This implies the continued use of dialogue and policy approaches. These are

considered as potential solutions to the problem. Still, to resolve the conflict and deal with the related human rights violations in South-East Nigeria, the Nigerian government should focus on the following steps:

1. Promote economic growth in the area to dispel any notion of socioeconomic exclusion.
2. Engage in conversation with supporters and the IPOB group.
3. Give security forces training on human rights.
4. Bolster the legal system.
5. Demilitarise the area and take down all checkpoints and curfews that have been imposed.

To guarantee that human rights abuses in the area cease, the IPOB group is not excluded from the following:

1. IPOB should remove the enforced curfew.
2. State security forces should stop using arms and excessive force against civilians.
3. IPOB and other non-state actors should commit to dialogue.

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Appendix A: Research Questionnaire

Human Rights Violations in South-East Nigeria: A Case Study of State and Non-State Actors in the IPOB Conflict

Introduction

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to collect information on perceptions and experiences relating to human rights violations associated with state and non-state actors in South-East Nigeria, with particular attention to the Nigerian government and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

The information collected will be used solely for academic purposes as part of this dissertation. Participation is voluntary, and respondents are encouraged to provide honest responses based on their knowledge, observations, and experiences. The information provided will be treated confidentially and will not be used to identify individual respondents.

Please select the response that best represents your opinion or experience. Where indicated, you may select more than one response.

Thank you for your participation.

Section A: Socio-Demographic Characteristics

1. Gender

Please select one:

- Male
- Female

2. State of Residence

Please select one:

- Abia
- Anambra
- Ebonyi
- Enugu
- Imo

3. Age

Please select one:

- Under 18 years
- 18–29 years
- 30–39 years
- 40–49 years
- 50 years and above

4. Occupation

Please select one:

- Student
- Civil servant
- Trader
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Other: _____

5. Highest Educational Qualification

Please select one:

- No formal education
- Primary school certificate
- Secondary school certificate
- Diploma/NCE
- Bachelor’s degree
- Master’s degree or higher

6. Place of Residence

Please select one:

- Urban
- Rural
- Suburban

Section B: Perceptions of Human Rights Violations

1. Are you aware of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement?

- Yes
- No

2. If yes, how would you describe your understanding of the IPOB movement?

- Peaceful self-determination/separatist movement
- Violent separatist movement
- Both peaceful and violent activities
- Other: _____
- Unsure

3. In your opinion, how prevalent are human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria?

- Very prevalent
- Somewhat prevalent
- Not prevalent
- Unsure

4. Which of the following do you believe bears the greatest responsibility for human rights violations associated with the conflict in Southeast Nigeria?

- The Nigerian government and its security agencies
- IPOB and/or its supporters
- Both state and non-state actors
- Neither

- Unsure

5. Which of the following forms of human rights violation have you observed, experienced, or heard about in your area?

Select all that apply.

- Arbitrary arrest or detention
- Torture or other forms of ill-treatment
- Extrajudicial or unlawful killings
- Restrictions on freedom of expression or peaceful assembly
- Destruction or seizure of property
- Restrictions on freedom of movement
- Kidnapping or abduction
- Intimidation or threats
- Physical attacks or violence
- Other: _____

6. On a scale of 1–5, how severe do you consider human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria to be?

- 1 – Not severe
- 2 – Slightly severe
- – Moderately severe
- – Very severe
- – Extremely severe

Section C: Role of Government and State Security Actors

1. In your opinion, how effective have government responses been in addressing activities associated with the IPOB conflict?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Not very effective
- Not effective at all
- Unsure

2. Which government or security institution do you believe has played the most significant role in responding to the IPOB conflict?

- Nigerian Military
- Nigeria Police Force
- Department of State Services (DSS)
- Other: _____
- Unsure

3. Which of the following measures have been used by government or security agencies in responding to IPOB-related activities?

Select all that apply.

- Arrests and detention
- Military or security operations

- Curfews or movement restrictions
- Use of force
- Dialogue or negotiations
- Surveillance or intelligence operations
- Other: _____

4. In your opinion, have government responses to IPOB-related activities contributed to an increase or decrease in human rights violations in the region?

- Significant increase
- Some increase
- No significant change
- Some decrease
- Significant decrease
- Unsure

5. Have you, a family member, friend, colleague, or other person known to you been personally affected by government or security-force actions related to IPOB activities?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure
- Prefer not to say

Section D: Role of IPOB and Its Supporters in Human Rights Violations

1. How would you rate the overall impact of IPOB-related activities on the security situation in South-East Nigeria?

- Very positive
- Somewhat positive
- No significant impact
- Somewhat negative
- Very negative
- Unsure

2. Do you believe that activities attributed to IPOB and/or its supporters have contributed to human rights violations in Southeast Nigeria?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

3. Which of the following forms of human rights violations have been attributed to IPOB and/or its supporters?

Select all that apply.

- Kidnapping or abduction
- Destruction of property
- Intimidation or threats
- Restrictions on freedom of movement
- Physical violence or attacks

- Unlawful killings
- Forced compliance with directives or orders
- Other: _____
- Unsure

4. On a scale of 1–5, how would you rate the role of IPOB and/or its supporters in the escalation of violence in Southeast Nigeria?

- 1 – No role at all
- 2 – Minor role
- – Moderate role
- – Significant role
- – Major role
- Unsure

5. To what extent do you believe activities associated with IPOB are justified as a response to the treatment of Southeast Nigeria by the Nigerian government?

- Strongly justified
- Somewhat justified
- Neither justified nor unjustified
- Not justified
- Unsure

Section E: Recommendations and Possible Solutions

1. What should be the government's priorities in addressing human rights violations and insecurity in Southeast Nigeria?

Select all that apply.

- Dialogue with IPOB and other relevant stakeholders
- Strengthening the rule of law and judicial processes
- Reducing excessive militarisation and ensuring proportionate security responses
- Promoting economic development and employment opportunities
- Providing human rights training and accountability mechanisms for security personnel
- Strengthening independent investigation and prosecution of alleged human rights violations
- Improving community–security agency relations
- Other: _____

2. Do you believe that a peaceful resolution to the conflict between the Nigerian government and IPOB is possible?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

3. In your opinion, what steps should IPOB and its supporters take to reduce human rights violations and insecurity in Southeast Nigeria?

4. What other measures or recommendations would you suggest for addressing human rights violations and insecurity in Southeast Nigeria?

Thank You.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Your responses will contribute to the academic assessment of human rights, state responses, non-state actors, and conflict dynamics in Southeast Nigeria.