

STAY-AT-HOME ORDER AND INSECURITY CONUNDRUM: IMPLICATIONS ON SOUTH EAST GEOPOLITICAL ZONE

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ABSTRACT

The South-East geopolitical zone in Nigeria has continued to experience issues of insecurity that have had challenging results within the economic, social and political structures of the South Eastern states. The foremost obvious sign of insecurity is the stay-at-home orders by non-state actors under the auspices of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). This article seeks to look at the multifaceted impact of these stay-at-home orders on the South-East region, analyzing the socio-economic disturbances, political consequences, as well as the threats it poses to national security. The paper adopted qualitative analysis by using oral interviews in eliciting relevant data that informed the conclusion of this paper. The paper asserts that the insecurity within the South-East and the incessant sit-at-home orders have exacerbated the already existing economic hardships of the individuals in the South Eastern geopolitical zone and has increased the political pressures rather than advancing national unity.

Keywords: insecurity, sit-at-home, geopolitical zone

Introduction

The Nigerian state is divided into six geopolitical zones. The South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, comprises of Anambra, Imo, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Abia states. Customarily, the zone has been a region of critical social and financial significance and known for its wealthy social legacy and entrepreneurial soul. This region has been confronted with a complex cluster of challenges, especially during the Nigerian-Biafran war. Uncertainties occasioned by the recent stay-at-home orders, characterized by wanton destructions of lives and properties have gotten to an alarming stage in the South Eastern zone, affecting its socio-economic and political texture.

In later times, the South East has been hooked with expanding insecurity, stamped by rough clashes, aggressor exercises, and other shapes of distress. This uncertainty has not only disturbed lifestyle but has also had far-reaching implications for regional advancement. Concurrently, the inconvenience of stay-at-home orders, regularly related with calls from nearby bunches such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), has encouraged and complicated the circumstance by disturbing financial exercises and social administrations (Eze, 2021). This by implication has continued to impact

negatively on the economy of the zone. It is no longer news that every Monday in the southeastern states economic activities are grounded such that banks and major markets are shutdown. This growing conundrum if unchecked will metamorphose or even snowball into a more serious security challenge beyond the southeastern geopolitical zone.

The Rise of Insecurity in the South East: Historical Context and Background

The rise of insecurity within the South East can be followed to different components, counting socio-economic alterations, political pressures, and chronicled grievances. The region has seen a multiplication of activist bunches and separatist developments, with IPOB being one of the foremost groups. Established in 2012, IPOB has progressively utilized stay-at-home orders as a device to challenge against seen treacheries and political marginalization (Umejei, 2022). These orders have added up to a critical perspective of the regional insecurity scene, influencing both the economy and the everyday lives of inhabitants of the zone. The roots of the current insecurity can be connected to an authentic setting of marginalization and struggle. The Biafra War (1967-1970) cleared out an enduring legacy of doubt and uncertain grievances, which proceed to impact modern political and social elements. The disappointment to address these verifiable issues satisfactorily has contributed to the ongoing tensions and the rise of aggressor exercises within the region (Okafor, 2020).

To understand the current issues of insecurity and stay-at-home orders in Nigeria's South East geopolitical zone, it is essential to delve into the historical and socio-political context that has shaped the region. This context includes the historical evolution of the South East, the impact of colonial and post-colonial developments, and the lingering effects of historical conflicts and grievances. By examining these historical factors, we can gain insight into the root causes of present-day challenges and the complexities surrounding them.

Emergence of Militancy and Secessionist Movements

In the early 21st century, the South East witnessed the emergence of various militant and secessionist movements. The most prominent of these is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), led by Nnamdi Kanu. IPOB's activities have been driven by a desire to address perceived injustices and advocate for the secession of the South East from Nigeria (Umejei, 2022). IPOB's activities have included protests, demonstrations, and the imposition of stay-at-home orders. These actions are intended to highlight grievances and demand greater autonomy or secession. The group's activities have been met with resistance from the government, leading to clashes and further insecurity in the region (Nwokoro, 2021).

The Nature of Insecurity in the South East

Insecurity in the South East is marked by several key features, including violent clashes, militant activities, and socio-political unrest. It is imperative to observe that these

minority agitations did not start with the IPOB but with the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) led by the Ralf Uwazurike and has since transformed into IPOB. The nature of insecurity can be broadly categorized into the following areas:

1. Militant Activities and Armed Groups

Militant activities are a prominent feature of insecurity in the South East. The region has seen the rise of various armed groups, most notable is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). IPOB, led by Nnamdi Kanu, advocates for the secession of the South East from Nigeria, and its activities often involve demonstrations, protests, and confrontations with security forces (Nwokoro, 2021).

The ESN, established in December 2020, is tasked with defending the Igbo people against alleged attacks by security forces and other groups. This armed wing has been involved in violent clashes with the police and the military, leading to increased instability and insecurity in the region (Chukwuma & Eze, 2021). The presence of these armed groups has led to an escalation of violence, including attacks on police stations, military barracks, and government facilities.

2. Political Violence and Clashes

Political violence is another significant aspect of insecurity in the South East. The region has experienced clashes between rival political factions and ethnic groups, often fueled by political rivalries and disputes over power and resources. These clashes result in violent confrontations, property damage, and loss of life (Eze, 2021).

Political violence in the South East is often linked to the broader national political landscape. Electoral contests and political appointments can exacerbate existing tensions, leading to violence and instability. For example, disputes over election outcomes and political representation can trigger violent reactions from various groups (Onuoha, 2022).

3. Socio-Economic Instability

Socio-economic instability is a critical driver of insecurity in the South East. Economic disparities, high unemployment rates, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to social unrest and instability. The lack of economic opportunities and the marginalization of certain communities can lead to frustration and agitation (Nwankwo, 2021).

Economic factors are intertwined with political grievances, as many of the militant groups and secessionist movements are motivated by perceived economic injustices. The sense of economic exclusion and deprivation can drive individuals towards violent activism and support for militant groups (Okafor, 2022).

4. Ethnic and Sectarian Tensions

Ethnic and sectarian tensions are prevalent in the South East and contribute significantly to insecurity. The region is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group, but there are also minority groups with distinct identities and interests. Tensions between different ethnic groups can lead to conflicts and violence (Egbe, 2022). The historical legacy of ethnic rivalries, combined with contemporary political dynamics, creates a volatile environment. Ethnic and sectarian divisions can exacerbate conflicts and contribute to the overall insecurity in the region (Udeh, 2020).

Implications of the Stay-at-Home Orders

Stay-at-home as a new lexicon operating within the zone is a concept which implies that there should be no movement of goods and persons within the restricted area. Stay-at-home orders within the South East are essentially driven by groups like IPOB, which has leveraged these orders to specific discontent and request more noteworthy independence or secession from Nigeria. These orders are aimed at expressing political discontent and raise awareness of dissatisfactions with the present political arrangement of the Nigeria state. No doubt, the implications of these orders are significantly growing to a momentous and gigantic destabilizing crescendo affecting the region. Whereas they point to draw considerable attention to grievances, they moreover result in critical financial and social disturbances (Nwachukwu, 2021).

The economic impact of stay-at-home orders is extreme. Businesses, particularly small and medium-sized ventures are confronted closures and misfortunes due to reduced operational days. Those who dare to act contrary to the order have had their businesses destroyed and have suffered different degrees of casualty. There is no gainsaying the fact that this sector is a major component of the South East economy and are struggling helplessly in the face of these incessant stay-at-home orders. Also, the disturbance in financial exercises leads to work misfortunes and influences the jobs of numerous inhabitants (Anyanwu, 2022). The socio-economic affect is compounded by the dwindling public wellbeing as access to basic needs gets to be restricted amid these implemented sit-at-home orders.

Within the educational sector, stay-at-home orders disrupt academic activities, leading to disruptions of the academic calendar and influencing students' learning outcomes. Schools and colleges are constrained to shutdown, affecting the instruction of thousands of undergraduate and postgraduate studies. This scenario is felt more by institutions that are located within the flashpoints. The healthcare sector is not also immuned to this phenomenon hence healthcare administrations are disturbed, as individuals are less likely to look for restorative offer assistance amid periods of uncertainty and vulnerability (Iheduru, 2020).

The socio-economic implications of the sit-at-home and the insecurity within the southeast is compounded by the setting up of different military checkpoints across the southeastern states thereby increasing the social and economic pressure experienced within the zone. It is no news that commuters are forced to alight their vehicles to trek across all military checkpoints with the attendant extortions of divergent forms. The level of humiliation that commuters within this zone are subjected to is worse than that experienced in war situation.

Causes of Insecurity in the South East

The causes of insecurity in the South East are complex and multifaceted, rooted in a combination of historical, socio-economic, and political factors. The following sections provide an in-depth analysis of these causes:

1. Historical Grievances and Ethnic Tensions

Historical grievances play a significant role in shaping the current security landscape in the South East. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), also known as the Biafran War, left deep-seated scars and unresolved issues. The conflict was driven by demands for secession by the Igbo people, who felt marginalized and oppressed by the central government (Akinola, 2020). The aftermath of the Civil War saw the reintegration of the South East into Nigeria, but the region continued to experience political and economic marginalization. The failure to address these historical grievances adequately has contributed to ongoing tensions and a sense of injustice among the population (Okafor, 2022). The legacy of the war and the perceived lack of reconciliation and justice continue to influence the current security situation.

2. Economic Marginalization and Poverty

Economic marginalization and poverty are significant drivers of insecurity in the South East. The region has historically faced economic challenges, including underdevelopment and limited access to resources. Despite its rich cultural and entrepreneurial heritage, the South East has struggled with inadequate infrastructure, high unemployment rates, and economic disparities (Njoku, 2021).

The lack of economic opportunities and the persistence of poverty can lead to social unrest and instability. Individuals who feel excluded from economic benefits are more likely to support militant groups or engage in violent activities as a means of expressing their grievances (Chukwuma & Eze, 2021).

3. Political Imbalance and Corruption

Political imbalance and corruption contribute to the insecurity in the South East. The political landscape in Nigeria is often characterized by imbalance, with frequent and intolerable unequal distribution of political appointments and resource allocations.

These imbalances have created several forms of agitations leading to conflicts and insecurity especially within the southeast. The need to accommodate the southeast in the political architecture of Nigerian state is a clarion call of utmost importance that should be considered. This no doubt will be in the interest of the continuing survival of the Nigerian state.

Corruption within the political system exacerbates the situation by undermining governance and the delivery of public services. The perception of corruption and mismanagement can lead to frustration and anger among the population, fueling support for militant groups and exacerbating insecurity (Onuoha, 2022).

4. Weak Security Apparatus and Governance Challenges

The effectiveness of the security apparatus and governance structures in the South East is another critical factor influencing insecurity. The region has experienced challenges related to the capacity and effectiveness of security forces, including issues with personnel training, resource allocation, and coordination (Nwokoro, 2021). Weak governance and inadequate law enforcement can result in a lack of accountability and an inability to effectively address security threats. This can create an environment where militant groups and criminal elements can operate with relative impunity (Okeke & Eze, 2021).

5. Influence of External Actors and Regional Dynamics

External actors and regional dynamics also play a role in shaping the security situation in the South East. The influence of regional conflicts, transnational criminal networks, and external political actors can contribute to the instability in the region (Umejei, 2022).

For example, the involvement of foreign actors in supporting or financing militant groups can exacerbate existing conflicts and contribute to the overall insecurity. Regional dynamics, such as conflicts in neighboring areas, can also impact the South East by creating spillover effects and contributing to instability (Nwankwo, 2021).

Stay-at-Home Orders: Origins and Impact

Stay-at-home orders in Nigeria's South East geopolitical zone have emerged as a significant aspect of the region's contemporary socio-political landscape. These orders, which mandate residents to remain in their homes, are typically enforced by various groups and authorities as a response to specific grievances and security concerns. Understanding the origins of these stay-at-home orders and their subsequent impact provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of insecurity and social unrest in the region.

Origins of Stay-at-Home Orders

The origins of stay-at-home orders in the South East can be traced back to a combination of historical, political, and social factors. The region's historical experiences, including the Nigerian Civil War and subsequent political marginalization, have laid the groundwork for contemporary grievances and unrest in the southeast (Akinola, 2020). The Biafra conflict, which resulted in significant loss of life and economic devastation, has left a lasting legacy of mistrust and agitation among the Igbo people (Nwankwo, 2021).

In the post-war era, political marginalization and socio-economic neglect have fueled a sense of injustice and exclusion. The failure of successive Nigerian governments to address these issues adequately has led to the rise of various groups advocating for greater autonomy or secession. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), led by Nnamdi Kanu, is one such group that has actively employed stay-at-home orders as a tool to express their grievances and demand political change (Umejei, 2022).

The stay-at-home orders frequently issued by IPOB and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), are a direct response to perceived injustices and security concerns. IPOB, founded in 2012, seeks to address historical grievances related to the marginalization of the Igbo people and to advocate for the secession of Biafra (Chukwuma & Eze, 2021). The group's stay-at-home orders are often timed to coincide with significant dates related to Biafra's history or in response to specific events or government actions.

The ESN, established in late 2020, was created to provide security for the Igbo people in the face of alleged attacks by security forces and other groups (Eze, 2021). The group's activities include enforcing stay-at-home orders to demonstrate solidarity and exert pressure on the government. These orders are part of a broader strategy to highlight the perceived inadequacies of the government's response to security concerns and to mobilize support for IPOB's political objectives (Onuoha, 2022).

Government Response and Enforcement

The Nigerian government's response to the stay-at-home orders has been marked by attempts to counteract and suppress the activities of IPOB and the ESN. Security forces have been deployed to enforce law and order, leading to clashes and confrontations with IPOB members and other militants (Nwokoro, 2021). The government's approach includes deploying military and police personnel to enforce curfews and arrest individuals involved in the implementation of stay-at-home orders. The present government in the southeast appear to indirectly obey the sit-at-home as most government offices are shutdown while the law enforcement agents desert the roads only to resurface at the expiration of the order. The government's stance has been controversial, with critics arguing that the heavy-handed response exacerbates the situation and contributes to further instability (Okafor, 2022). The clash between

government forces and IPOB supporters has led to an ongoing cycle of violence and unrest, impacting daily life in the South East. The situation is made worse by the declaration of the IPOB as a terrorist organization.

Impact of Stay-at-Home Orders

The impact of stay-at-home orders in the South East is multifaceted, affecting various aspects of life in the region, including economic activities, social dynamics, and political relations. This section explores these impacts in detail.

Economic Impact

The economic impact of stay-at-home orders in the South East is profound and far-reaching. The enforcement of these orders disrupts business operations, affects livelihoods, and impedes economic activities. Major markets and business centers are closed on the days of the sit-at-home order no matter how long it is imposed and it has become normal that within the southern region all economic activities are grounded on Mondays.

The closure of businesses, both formal and informal, markets, and small enterprises have had far-reaching economic consequences on the economy of the region. This disruption affects not only business owners but also employees who depend on daily wages for their sustenance (Eze, 2021). The cumulative effect is a significant loss of income and economic hardship for many residents.

The South East is known for its vibrant trade and commerce, with bustling markets and trading hubs. Stay-at-home orders disrupt supply chains and hinder the movement of goods and services. The resulting stagnation in trade often leads to shortages of essential goods and increase the cost of living for residents (Chukwuma & Eze, 2021). The impact on trade is particularly severe in rural areas, where access to markets and goods is already limited.

Loss of Income and Job Opportunities

Many individuals in the South East rely on informal sector jobs, which are highly susceptible to disruptions caused by stay-at-home orders. The loss of income from these jobs contributes to financial insecurity and poverty. Additionally, the overall economic slowdown affects job creation and investment, further exacerbating unemployment rates in the region (Okeke & Eze, 2021).

2. Social Impact

The social impact of stay-at-home orders is also significant, affecting various aspects of community life and individual well-being. Educational institutions, including schools and universities, are often forced to close in response to stay-at-home orders. The disruption of educational activities affects students' learning and academic progress. Prolonged closures can lead to a loss of instructional time and hinder educational attainment (Nwankwo, 2021). The impact is particularly severe for students preparing

for important examinations and those in critical stages of their education. There evidences of this ugly phenomenon affecting major examinations such as West African School Examinations and other national examinations. For instance, Abia State University for its located proximity to one of the flashpoints has suffered serious setback in her educational calendar because they are the first to observe the order and the last to resume. Presently no activity goes on the campus on Mondays thereby reducing institutional activities to only four days in the week.

Healthcare Access

Access to healthcare services can be limited during periods of stay-at-home orders. The closure of healthcare facilities or restrictions on movement can impede individuals' ability to seek medical care. This is particularly concerning for individuals with chronic conditions or urgent medical needs (Eze, 2021). The overall strain on healthcare services during periods of unrest can exacerbate public health challenges.

Community Well-being and Social Cohesion

Stay-at-home orders can affect community well-being and social cohesion. The enforcement of these orders may lead to increased tensions between residents and security forces. The stress and anxiety associated with prolonged periods of uncertainty and instability can impact mental health and community relations (Okafor, 2022). The sense of isolation and insecurity can weaken social bonds and contribute to social fragmentation.

3. Political Implications

The political implications of stay-at-home orders are significant, influencing national and regional politics and governance dynamics. The imposition of stay-at-home orders by militant groups challenges the legitimacy of the government and its ability to maintain order. The government's response to these orders, including the deployment of security forces, can affect public perception and trust. The effectiveness and fairness of the government's approach to handling the situation are scrutinized, impacting its legitimacy and public support (Umejei, 2022).

Regional Autonomy and Secessionist Threats

Stay-at-home orders are often associated with broader demands for regional autonomy or secession. The actions of groups like IPOB reflect ongoing grievances related to political and economic marginalization. The enforcement of stay-at-home orders serves as a tool for these groups to assert their demands and pressure the government for political concessions (Nwokoro, 2021). The political discourse around secession and regional autonomy is influenced by the dynamics of these orders.

Security Challenges

The enforcement of stay-at-home orders poses significant challenges for security and law enforcement agencies. The need to balance maintaining public order with

respecting citizens' rights creates complex governance dilemmas. The response to these orders involves coordinating security operations, addressing public grievances, and managing the impact on daily life (Chukwuma & Eze, 2021). The effectiveness of law enforcement in addressing the underlying issues and restoring stability is a key factor in the overall security situation.

Strategies and Solutions

Addressing the insecurity and stay-at-home orders in Nigeria's Southeast requires a multifaceted approach that tackles both immediate concerns and long-term underlying issues. Effective strategies must incorporate security measures, socio-economic development, political engagement, and community involvement. This section outlines comprehensive strategies and solutions aimed at mitigating the crisis and fostering stability and progress in the South East region.

1. Strengthening Security Infrastructure

Enhancing security infrastructure is crucial for addressing the immediate threats posed by militant activities and ensuring public safety. This includes increasing the capacity and capability of security forces through better training, equipment, and resources (Eze, 2021). Implementing advanced surveillance systems, improving intelligence gathering, and fostering coordination between federal and regional security agencies can help in effectively countering insurgent activities and maintaining order (Okeke & Eze, 2021).

2. Community Policing and Local Engagement

Community policing plays a vital role in improving security at the local level. Engaging local communities in security efforts can enhance trust between residents and security forces, leading to more effective crime prevention and intelligence sharing (Onuoha, 2022). Establishing community policing programs that involve local leaders and residents in decision-making processes can help address security concerns and reduce tensions between communities and law enforcement (Chukwuma & Eze, 2021).

3. Addressing Root Causes of Insurgency

To achieve long-term security, it is essential to address the root causes of insurgency and unrest. This involves tackling issues such as political marginalization, economic deprivation, and social inequalities that fuel discontent and violence (Nwankwo, 2021). Developing strategies that promote social justice, equitable resource distribution, and inclusive governance can help mitigate the underlying grievances that contribute to instability (Umejei, 2022).

4. Socio-Economic Development Initiatives

Economic development is critical for addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by the South East region. Implementing initiatives to stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and support local businesses can help alleviate poverty and reduce the appeal of militant groups (Eze, 2021). Investment in infrastructure projects, industrial

development, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can drive economic progress and enhance livelihood opportunities (Okeke & Eze, 2021).

5. Enhancing Education and Skill Development

Improving access to quality education and skill development programs is vital for empowering the youth and preparing them for meaningful employment. Expanding educational opportunities, vocational training, and skills development programs can provide young people with alternatives to joining militant groups and contribute to long-term socio-economic stability (Nwankwo, 2021). Collaboration between government, private sector, and educational institutions can help develop programs tailored to the region's needs and promote educational advancement.

6. Inclusive Governance and Political Reform

Promoting inclusive governance and political reform is crucial for addressing grievances related to political marginalization and fostering stability. Engaging diverse stakeholders, including regional leaders, civil society organizations, and local communities, in decision-making processes can help ensure that all voices are heard and considered (Chukwuma & Eze, 2021). Implementing reforms that address issues of representation, resource allocation, and regional autonomy can contribute to more equitable and effective governance (Nwokoro, 2021). Facilitating national dialogue and reconciliation efforts can help address historical grievances and promote unity. Initiating discussions between the federal government, regional leaders, and representatives from various communities can help build trust, resolve conflicts, and develop strategies for addressing underlying issues (Umejei, 2022). Reconciliation programs that promote understanding, forgiveness, and cooperation are essential for healing divisions and fostering national cohesion (Okafor, 2022). Managing ethnic and regional tensions requires a nuanced approach that recognizes and respects the diverse identities and interests within Nigeria. Promoting inter-ethnic dialogue, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and addressing historical injustices can help mitigate tensions and build a more inclusive national identity (Nwankwo, 2021). Efforts to bridge divides and promote national unity are crucial for maintaining social harmony and stability.

7. Community Involvement and Empowerment

Empowering local communities to take an active role in addressing security and development challenges is essential for achieving sustainable solutions. Supporting community-based initiatives, encouraging grassroots involvement, and providing resources for local development projects can enhance community resilience and foster local ownership of solutions (Okeke & Eze, 2021). Engaging community leaders and residents in decision-making processes can lead to more effective and context-specific interventions (Chukwuma & Eze, 2021).

8. Promoting Social Cohesion and Integration

Fostering social cohesion and integration is essential for building a united and resilient society. Initiatives that promote dialogue, collaboration, and mutual respect among diverse groups can help reduce social tensions and strengthen community bonds (Umejei, 2022). Encouraging inclusive activities, cultural exchanges, and community events can contribute to a more cohesive and harmonious society, supporting overall stability and development (Nwankwo, 2021).

Conclusion

The insecurity and stay-at-home conundrum in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria present significant challenges that require a comprehensive and multifaceted response. The socio-economic and political implications of the situation are profound, not only for the South-East but for Nigeria as a whole. To address these challenges, there is a need for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to governance in the South-East. This includes addressing the underlying grievances that fuel insecurity, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, and ensuring that the region is adequately represented in the national political discourse. Economic empowerment initiatives are also crucial to mitigating the impact of the stay-at-home orders and revitalizing the region's economy. The federal government should work with local stakeholders to create opportunities for economic growth and development, particularly for SMEs that have been hardest hit by the shutdowns. Finally, the Nigerian government must prioritize the protection of human rights and the rule of law in its response to the security challenges in the South-East. This includes holding security forces accountable for any abuses and ensuring that all actions taken are in line with Nigeria's constitutional and international obligations. The resolution of the insecurity and stay-at-home conundrum in the South-East is critical to the stability and prosperity of Nigeria. By addressing the root causes of the conflict and promoting a more inclusive and just society, Nigeria can pave the way for a more peaceful and united future.

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