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## Leadership Deficit and the Monday Sit- at-Home in Southeast Region of Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The Southeast region of Nigeria has been grappling with persistent socio-political challenges since the Fourth Republic dispensation started in 1999. However, one of the most enduring challenges is the enforcement of a "Monday sit-at-home" order, initially issued by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a form of protest, but has taken a life of itself since the Federal Government of Nigeria rendered Mazi Nnamdi Kanu from Kenya and incarcerated him in Directorate of State Security dungeon in Abuja since August 2021. The phenomenon which has remained unresolved by the governments at both the region and at the centre has led to significant economic disruptions and heightened insecurity in the region. At the heart of this lingering challenge in the region, lies a critical leadership deficit, characterized by the inability of political and traditional leaders to effectively address the root causes of the unrest and provide sustainable solutions. This paper explored the multifaceted dimensions of the leadership vacuum in the Southeast and attributed the lingering crisis to such a gap. It examined how the phenomenon exacerbated the region's instability and the helplessness of the government to nip it in the bud. The paper analyzes the interplay between ineffective governance, lack of public trust, and the rise of non-state actors filled the leadership void. The paper used documented materials and textual review of the sit-at-home, policy responses, and community impacts, to explain the effect of leadership deficit in the region. The paper underscored the urgent need for robust leadership and strategic engagement of leadership with the people at the grassroot to restore normalcy and foster long-term peace and development that not only impacts positively on the region but in the country as a whole.

**Keywords:** IPOB, Leadership Deficit, Sit-at-home, Southeast, Nigeria

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## Introduction

Sit-at-home as a form of protest in the Southeast region of Nigeria, became a strategy when security operatives began killing of unarmed pro-Biafran agitators engaging in marches to press their demand for the restoration of sovereign state of Biafra (Abads, Omeh & Okoye, 2021). The impunity with which the killings were carried out was going to affect the energy of the agitation and so to sustain the momentum of the agitation and minimize casualties, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) called for sit-at-home in the region as an alternative to marches in the street (Amnesty International, 2021). In this case instead of marching in the streets or major roads and expose their members to brutality of security operatives, people rather stay at home for most of the day and leave the streets empty, thereby shutting down business (Chinedu, 2023). "Monday Sit-at-Home" order was instituted by IPOB, mandating southeastern residents to stay indoors every Monday as a form of protest against the detention of their leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu (Eze, 2022). The persistent observance of this order has profound implications for the region's socio-economic and political landscape, reflecting underlying issues related to leadership deficits. This article delves into the roots of the leadership crisis which has been unable to resolve the crisis, the genesis and impact of the sit-at-home order, and the broader implications for the Southeast region in particular and Nigeria as a whole.

## Review of Related Literature

The agitation for the restoration of the

Republic of Biafra, stems from historical grievances and contemporary socio-political dynamics in Nigeria. The Biafran republic that was declared in 1967 was borne out of the need to provide people of the former Eastern region of Nigeria a place of safety following the mass killing targeted at them in the north and western parts of Nigeria due to the political crisis at the time (Madiebo, 1980). This declaration rather than provide safety escalated the killing as war was brought down to the home front and after a gruelling three years the devastation left by that war is still been felt in the former Biafran enclave (Iwuchukwu, 2021).

The renewed agitation for Biafra presents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. As such, the aim of literature review was to examine scholarly works, articles, and reports to provide insights into the origins, motivations, implications, and potential resolutions of the Biafra question.

The quest for Biafra is imbued in the formation of the Nigerian nation-state which has its root European colonial adventurism in Africa (Achebe, 2012). Nigeria as an entity is a product of that experience. This view was amplified by Mackintosh (1970), who explores the ethnic and regional divides that contributed to the Biafran secessionist movement. Thereby providing context for understanding the resurgence of Biafran agitation in the contemporary period. Similarly, Joseph (1987) examined the challenges of federalism in Nigeria, including the impact of the Biafran war on the country's political structure. The study looked into how the unresolved issues from the civil war continue to fuel

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agitations in the Southeast in the present times.

Nwobodo (2019) in his study examined the perspective of rights of Biafran agitators. The study explores the human rights implications of the Nigerian government's response to the quest for revamping of Biafran republic. It highlights cases of alleged abuses by security forces and also discussed the legal and ethical dimensions of suppressing secessionist movements. Iwuchukwu (2021), examined the legal arguments for and against the right to self-determination in the context of Biafra. He did this by discussing international law, Nigerian constitutional provisions, and the complex interplay between national sovereignty and ethnic self-determination. However, Nkemdilim (2017) introduced the media and communication dimension of the agitation for Biafra. The study examined how IPOB and other pro-Biafran groups have utilized media space, especially social media, to mobilize support and spread their message. It interrogates the effectiveness of these media strategies in shaping public opinion and sustenance of the movement. Also focussing on the same line, Umeadi (2019) posits that the Biafran agitators are using the social media in two ways a tool for advocacy and as a platform for misinformation. The study discusses the implications of digital activism for the movement and the challenges it poses for governance in Nigeria.

Okeke (2018), examines the economic consequences of the Biafran agitation, particularly the "sit-at-home" orders. It explores the impact on local businesses, education, and daily life in the region, highlighting how these protests have both galvanized support for the movement and strained the local economy. But Eze (2020), critically assesses the "sit-at-

home" orders, questioning whether they serve as a legitimate form of civil disobedience or if they cause more harm to the region's socio-economic fabric. The study also explores the tension between the desire for self-determination and the practical challenges posed by these protests.

Looking at the agitation from peace. Adebayo (2020) in his study was concerned with how to resolve the conflict. Drawing lessons from previous secessionist movements and peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria and other countries. The study suggests approaches for dialogue and negotiation that could address the root causes of the agitation. Also in the same vein, Onuoha (2022) discusses the prospects for a peaceful resolution to the Biafran question, focusing on the need for inclusive dialogue, economic empowerment, and federal restructuring. The paper also critiques the current approaches by both IPOB and the Nigerian government, offering alternative pathways to peace.

### **Historical Context of the Renewed Biafran Agitation**

The demand for the creation of an independent Biafran state dates back to the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, which resulted in the deaths of an estimated one to three million people, primarily from the Igbo ethnic group (Chioke, 2022). The war was precipitated by the secession of the Eastern Region, predominantly inhabited by the Igbo, under the leadership of Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, who declared the Republic of Biafra in 1967. The conflict, marked by widespread atrocities and humanitarian crises, ended in 1970 with the reintegration of the secessionist region into Nigeria (Duruji, 2009).

Despite the formal cessation of hostilities, the grievances that fuelled the Biafran secessionist movement persisted, rooted in perceived marginalization, economic disparities, and ethno-political tensions within Nigeria (Chioke, 2022). Over subsequent decades, various groups and individuals have continued to advocate for the restoration of Biafra, viewing it as a means to address systemic injustices and assert the rights of the Igbo people.

One scholarly work that gives us clear historical understanding of the quest for revamped Biafra Republic is Chinua Achebe's "There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra". This book offers a poignant narrative of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), and highlighted the deep-seated grievances of the Igbo people that continue to fuel the Biafran movements at the forefront of the renewed demand for Biafran Republic (Achebe, 2012). The failings of the Nigerian state and the lack of inclusivity in the post-war affairs of Nigeria evokes a narrative of a better life in Biafra by the people that constitute these movements majority of whom never experienced the Nigerian-Biafran war (Duruji, 2010).

Another literary work that provides a historical context to the renewed agitation for Biafra Republic is Falola and Heaton's work titled "A History of Nigeria". This book provides a comprehensive overview of the historical injustices, marginalization, and ethnic tensions that have characterized Nigeria's trajectory, setting the stage for contemporary secessionist sentiments (Falola, 2021). These historical injustice and marginalization are at the forefront in driving agitators who believes that Nigeria has no place for them and that a new Republic of Biafra will offer them a dream that seems hopeless within the confirms of

Nigeria.

## **Historical Context of Leadership in Southeast Nigeria**

### **Pre-Colonial and Colonial Era**

Leadership in the Southeast region of Nigeria, historically known for its acephalous societies, was characterized by decentralized authority. The Igbo people, who are predominant in the region, practiced a system of governance that relied heavily on a council of elders, age grades, and other communal structures (Achebe, 1958). Leadership was based on merit, wisdom, and the ability to achieve consensus. This system of administration which was obtainable at the kinship level, kept the society stable and made it difficult for a centralised administrative system in the area.

The advent of colonial rule disrupted these traditional systems. The British colonial administration introduced warrant chiefs for the area to advance their system of indirect rule in Nigeria (Ekekwe, 1986). The individuals appointed by the British as central authority in the region were people who lacked legitimacy in the eyes of their communities (Isichei, 1976). This imposition created a legacy of mistrust and disillusionment among the people with these imposed leadership structures which could not replicate the success of indirect rule in the other two regions of the north and west of the country (Isichei, 1976).

### **Post-Independence Leadership**

The Southeast region was the epicentre of series of political upheavals that followed attainment of independence by Nigeria in 1960. The most notable was the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), which stemmed from the attempted secession of the region

from Nigeria as Biafra Republic which had international recognition within the period it existed (Duruji, 2009). The war had devastating effects on the region, resulting in significant loss of life, economic hardship, and a deep-seated sense of marginalization (Madiebo, 1980). The promise of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration of the region into Nigeria promised by the victorious Federal leadership are yet to be realised (Duruji, 2010)

Post-war leadership in the Southeast and Nigeria has struggled to address the lingering effects of the conflict. Successive governments have faced challenges in fostering unity, promoting development, and ensuring equitable representation in national affairs. But the perception of the people of the region, see government as using the instrumentality of the state to perpetuate systemic marginalization and exclusion of the people from socio-political and economic activities in the country (Duruji, 2010). This has led to a persistent leadership deficit, characterized by corruption, nepotism, and a lack of accountability (Ekeke, 1986; Onuoha 2024). The inability of leadership in the southeast region of Nigeria to meet the aspiration of the people, has opened the gate for the gap to be filled in by non-state actors providing alternatives to the people. The transition to civil rule in 1999 after many years of military rule, open the gate for the establishment of the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) led Ralph Uwazurike (Duruji, 2012). The Indigenous People of Biafra led by Nnamdi Kanu with his effective use of communication through frequency modulated system and social media, displaced MASSOB to become dominant in the region by 2012.

## **The Emergence of the Monday Sit-at-Home Order**

The Monday Sit-at-Home order was instituted by IPOB, whose agenda is for the independence of Biafra, with significant support among the Igbo population on August 2021, following the rendition from Kenya and incarceration of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu at the dungeon of the Department for State Security Services (DSS). The sit-at-home directive was intended as a non-violent protest to pressure the Nigerian government for Kanu's release and draw international attention to their cause (Okoli & Nnam, 2018).

The adherence to this order has been widespread, despite IPOB's later modification of the directive to specific dates (Ariemu, 2025). The persistence of the sit-at-home reflects deep-rooted frustrations with perceived injustices and neglect by the federal government, coupled with a lack of effective leadership at both regional and national levels (Nwankwo, 2021).

The enforcement of the sit-at-home order has been both voluntary and coerced. In many areas, residents comply out of solidarity or fear of repercussions from IPOB enforcers. Reports of violence, intimidation, and destruction of property for non-compliance have further entrenched the observance of the directive (ICG, 2021). This environment of fear underscores the leadership vacuum and the inability of state authorities to provide security and uphold the rule of law (Amnesty International, 2021).

In recent years, the Monday Sit-at-Home protests have emerged as a potent expression of discontent and resistance within the Biafran agitation. Organized by pro-Biafran groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the

Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), these protests involve the voluntary closure of businesses, schools, and public services every Monday, as a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the Biafran cause.

The decision to stage the protests on Mondays carries historical significance, echoing the spirit of defiance and resilience associated with the Biafran struggle. It also serves as a deliberate disruption of the normal functioning of society, intended to draw attention to the grievances of the Igbo people and exert pressure on the Nigerian government.

### **Motivations and Objectives**

The motivations behind the Monday Sit-at-Home protests are multifaceted, reflecting a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic, and political factors. At the heart of these protests is a deep-seated sense of marginalization and injustice felt by many in the southeastern region of Nigeria (Chioke, 2022). Despite being one of the country's most populous and economically vibrant regions, the Igbo have long complained of being sidelined in the distribution of political power and economic resources (Duruji, 2010).

Furthermore, the protests are driven by a desire to assert the cultural identity and autonomy of the Igbo people within the Nigerian state (Iwu, 2020). Many proponents of the Biafran agitation argue that secession is the only viable solution to address the systemic inequalities and discrimination faced by the Igbo, enabling them to chart their own path towards development and self-determination.

In addition to their domestic objectives, the Monday Sit-at-Home protests also serve to attract international attention to the plight of the Igbo and garner support

from the global community (Nwnkwo, 2024). Through social media and other digital platforms, pro-Biafran activists have been able to amplify their message and mobilize solidarity from diaspora communities and human rights organizations worldwide.

### **Challenges and Controversies**

Despite their widespread participation and symbolic significance, the Monday Sit-at-Home protests have been met with resistance and controversy, both within Nigeria and abroad (Chinedu, 2023). Critics argue that the protests exacerbate divisions and tensions within Nigerian society, undermining efforts to foster national unity and cohesion. Moreover, the disruption caused by the protests has adverse effects on the local economy, particularly for small businesses and vulnerable populations who rely on daily income to sustain their livelihoods (Chinedu, 2023).

The Nigerian government has also responded to the protests with varying degrees of repression, including the deployment of security forces to enforce compliance and crackdown on perceived dissent (Amnesty International, 2021). Human rights organizations have raised concerns about excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests targeting pro-Biafran activists, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and rights-respecting approach to addressing the underlying grievances fuelling the agitation.

### **Implementation and Enforcement**

The enforcement of the sit-at-home order has been both voluntary and coerced. In many areas, residents comply out of solidarity or fear of repercussions from IPOB enforcers. Reports of violence, intimidation, and destruction of property

for non-compliance have further entrenched the observance of the directive (ICG, 2021). This environment of fear underscores the leadership vacuum and the inability of state authorities to provide security and uphold the rule of law. Since 2021, the various governments in the southeast region and security agencies has been assuring residents security on countless occasion, yet the majority has chosen to ignore the government authorities. In some cases, businesses and shop owners were threatened by governors to open their businesses on Mondays as a way of ending the Monday sit-at-home but all those threats seem to fall on deaf ears. Some commentators have attributed the compliance to fear of repercussion by IPOB enforcers but even IPOB is divided with the mainstream announcing that people should go about their normal activities, whereas another faction led by Simon Ekpa who prides himself as Prime Minister continue to urge the people to comply with the order on Mondays. But this view of fear of repercussion from the Simon Ekpa group as reason for the compliance to Monday sit-at-home falls flat because on countless occasions, this group have issued order extending the sit-at-home to other days in the week but were ignored by the people. As such that view might not be correct which proves the assumption of leadership deficit in the southeast that can galvanise the people to a particular direction.

### **Impact on Socio-Economic Activities** **Economic Disruptions**

The sit-at-home order has had a profound economic impact on the Southeast region. Mondays, being a crucial business day, have seen markets, shops, schools, and offices closed, leading to significant financial losses. Small and medium

enterprises, which form the backbone of the region's economy, have been particularly hard hit. The disruptions have also affected transportation, banking, and other essential services, exacerbating economic hardships (Nweze, 2022).

A study by the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) estimated that the Southeast region loses approximately ₦50 billion (about \$120 million) every Monday due to the sit-at-home order. The long-term economic consequences include reduced investor confidence, stunted economic growth, and increased unemployment rates (NESG, 2022).

### **Social and Educational Impact**

The social fabric of the Southeast has also been strained by the sit-at-home order. Schools remain closed on Mondays, disrupting the education of thousands of children. The interruption in academic activities has long-term implications for the region's human capital development and future workforce. Additionally, the sense of insecurity and fear generated by the enforcement of the order affects community cohesion and social interactions (Eze, 2022).

The healthcare sector has not been spared either. Many patients face difficulties accessing medical services on Mondays, leading to delays in treatment and potentially worsening health outcomes. The disruption of routine activities has also placed additional stress on mental health, as residents grapple with uncertainty and economic pressures (Obi, 2021).

### **The Role of Government and Security Agencies**

#### **Government Response**

The response of the Nigerian government to the sit-at-home order has been largely reactive. Security agencies have been

deployed to enforce law and order, but their presence has often escalated tensions rather than diffused them. The government's approach has been criticized for lacking a comprehensive strategy to address the underlying causes of the protests and the leadership deficit that fuels them (Nwangwu & Ezeibe, 2019). Efforts to engage with IPOB and other separatist groups have been minimal, with the government often opting for a hardline stance. This approach has further alienated the populace and reinforced the perception of neglect and marginalization. The lack of effective dialogue and political solutions has perpetuated the cycle of protests and repression (Onuoha, 2021).

### **Security Challenges**

The security situation in the Southeast has been exacerbated by the sit-at-home order. The presence of armed groups, including IPOB's Eastern Security Network (ESN), has led to clashes with security forces. These confrontations have resulted in casualties and heightened insecurity, undermining public confidence in the government's ability to maintain peace and order (Amnesty International, 2021). Moreover, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region has increased the risk of violence. The inability of security agencies to effectively control these arms has contributed to the ongoing instability. The situation calls for a multifaceted approach that includes disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of armed groups (Olonisakin, 2020).

### **Leadership Deficit in the Southeast Political Leadership**

The leadership deficit in the Southeast can be attributed to several factors. Politically, the region has struggled to produce leaders

who command widespread respect and have the capacity to address the needs of their constituents. Many political leaders have been accused of corruption, lack of vision, and failure to deliver on their promises. This has eroded public trust and created a leadership vacuum that groups like IPOB have sought to fill (Agbo, 2019).

The political landscape is also characterized by factionalism and infighting, which weaken the region's collective bargaining power at the national level. The inability of Southeast leaders to present a united front on critical issues has undermined their effectiveness and contributed to the sense of marginalization felt by the populace (Iwu, 2020).

### **Traditional Leadership**

Traditional leaders in the Southeast, who once played pivotal roles in governance and conflict resolution, have also seen their influence wane. The erosion of traditional authority started during the colonial period with imposition of central figure as a symbol of leadership which was resisted, resulting in the failure of indirect rule system in the east. But post-independent Nigeria the traditional system has evolved with town union system firmly rooted in most part of Igboland. The town union is led by a President General whose power rest with the council of each town and limited by constitutional provisions governing the town. In most of the town a traditional chief as custodian of the town is also vested with authority by the political institutions in the southeast region. But in recent times, the politicization of chieftaincy titles, has diminished their capacity to provide credible leadership. In some cases, traditional leaders have been co-opted by political elites, further alienating them from their communities



(Okere, 2021).

This situation has significantly whittled-down the authority of the traditional institutions to inspire confidence among their subject. Even when the political leaders in the region threatened to hold them accountable for the observance of the sit-at-home in their domains, it has not gone far in taking the oxygen of agitation and Monday sit-at-home away.

### **Civil Society and Youth Leadership**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and youth movements have emerged as critical voices in the leadership landscape of the Southeast. These groups have been instrumental in advocating for human rights, good governance, and social justice. However, their efforts are often hampered by limited resources, lack of coordination, and repression by state authorities (Odo, 2020).

Youth leadership, in particular, faces significant challenges. While young people constitute a large proportion of the region's population, they are often excluded from formal decision-making processes. The frustration with the status quo has driven many youths to support radical movements like IPOB, seeking alternative avenues to express their grievances and demand change (Nnamani, 2022).

### **The Way Forward**

#### **Enhancing Political Leadership**

Addressing the leadership deficit in the Southeast which has created the gap for the crisis of insecurity plaguing the region, requires a concerted effort to promote accountable, transparent, and visionary political leadership. The problem of the southeast which is largely that of the whole Nigeria is the fact that the people are

alienated from choosing their leaders, particularly through elections which has been franchise to the highest bidder and the most violent. Definitely, leaders recruited through this process end up as self-serving most of the times.

To reverse this trend, there must be a concerted effort to foster a political culture that prioritizes public service over personal gain is imperative. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting internal democracy within political parties, and encouraging the emergence of credible leaders through fair and transparent electoral processes are crucial steps (Okeke, 2021). The emergence of a people-oriented leadership in the southeast and by extension in Nigeria would approach the Monday sit-at-home and the sundry matters associated with it differently.

#### **Empowering Traditional and Civil Society Leaders**

Reinvigorating traditional leadership and empowering civil society organizations can also play a pivotal role in addressing the leadership crisis. Traditional leaders should be supported to reclaim their roles as impartial mediators and community leaders. Capacity-building initiatives for CSOs and youth movements can enhance their effectiveness in advocacy and governance (Eke, 2020).

#### **Dialogue and Reconciliation**

Promoting dialogue and reconciliation is essential to resolving the ongoing tensions and fostering lasting peace. The government should engage in meaningful dialogue with IPOB and other separatist groups to address their grievances. Establishing platforms for inclusive dialogue that involve political, traditional, and civil society leaders can help build

consensus and chart a path towards sustainable development (Onyeizugbe, 2019).

### Economic and Social Development

Addressing the socio-economic challenges facing the Southeast is critical to mitigating the impact of the sit-at-home order and fostering stability. Investment in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and job creation can provide economic opportunities and improve living standards. Targeted interventions to support small and medium enterprises, as well as social safety nets for vulnerable populations, are essential (Obinna, 2022).

### Conclusion

The Monday Sit-at-Home order in the Southeast region of Nigeria is a symptom of deeper issues related to leadership deficits and socio-political marginalization. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that includes enhancing political leadership, empowering traditional and civil society leaders, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, and driving economic and social development. By addressing the root causes of the leadership crisis, the Southeast region can move towards a more stable, prosperous, and inclusive future.

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