

# **A Comparative Analysis of the Operational Strategies and Security Implications of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Enugu State, 2015–2025**

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## **Abstract**

**T**his paper examines the operational strategies and security implications of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in Enugu State. It argues that although both groups share the ideological objective of Biafran self-determination, they differ significantly in their operational strategies, organisational structures, and engagement with the Nigerian state. The study adopts a qualitative research approach, drawing on primary data from interviews with traders, teachers, transport operators, community leaders, students, and public officials in Enugu State, as well as secondary data from relevant academic and policy sources. The study is anchored on Social Movement Theory, particularly the contributions of Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Alain Touraine, to explain the strategies and security implications of both movements. Findings indicate that MASSOB largely relied on non-violent civil resistance, whereas IPOB adopted a more confrontational and hybrid approach involving digital mobilisation, sit-at-home directives, and the emergence of the Eastern Security Network (ESN). The paper concludes that these divergent strategies have produced distinct socio-economic and security consequences in Enugu State. While MASSOB was associated with relatively limited security threats, IPOB's operational strategies were associated with increased insecurity, economic disruption, fear, and heightened militarisation within the state.

**Keywords:** *Enugu State, Social Movement, IPOB, MASSOB, Security Implication*

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### **Background to the Study**

Secessionist agitations have remained a recurring feature of global politics, particularly in multi-ethnic states where groups perceive marginalization, exclusion, or domination by central governments. Across different regions of the world, separatist movements have emerged with varying operational strategies aimed at achieving political autonomy, independence, or self-determination. While some groups adopt peaceful approaches such as civil disobedience, political negotiations and symbolic nationalism, others employ confrontational tactics, armed struggle, propaganda, and coercive enforcement mechanisms. The nature of these operational strategies often determines the scale and intensity of their security implications within affected societies. Separatist organizations like the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, the Basque Homeland and Liberty (ETA) in Spain, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka adopted militant and violent operational strategies that generated severe security crisis, including terrorism, assassinations, bombings, militarization, and prolonged state instability. In contrast, some separatist movements such as the Scottish National Party in the United Kingdom and the Catalan National Assembly in Spain, largely relied on political mobilization, referendums, and civil advocacy. These contrasting approaches demonstrate that the operational methods of separatist groups significantly shape their security consequences.

In Africa, separatist agitations have similarly emerged in response to colonial legacies, ethnic tensions, uneven political representation, and struggles over resource control. The Katanga secession in Congo, the activities of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, and the Ambazonian separatist crisis in Cameroon illustrate how separatist struggles can transform from political agitation into violent security threats. In many African states, government responses to separatist demands have often involved militarization, thereby intensifying violence and insecurity. Nigeria has also experienced multiple separatist agitations since independence. Ethnic nationalism, perceived marginalization, inequitable distribution of political power, and unresolved historical grievances have contributed to the emergence of separatist movements across different regions of the country. The declaration of the Republic of Biafra in 1967 and the subsequent Nigerian Civil War remain the most prominent manifestations of separatist conflict in Nigeria's history. Although the war ended in 1970, agitations for Biafran self-determination persisted among sections of the Igbo population.

In the post-Civil War era, different pro-Biafran organizations emerged with varying operational strategies. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), founded in 1999 by Ralph Uwazurike, adopted non-violent civil resistance and peaceful demonstration. However, the emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu, introduced a more radicalized phase of separatist agitation. These strategies significantly altered the security environment in Southeast Nigeria, particularly in Enugu State, where economic activities, public mobility, and state security operations became heavily affected by separatist activities and counter-security responses.

Enugu State occupies a strategic position in the history and politics of Biafran nationalism. As the headquarters of the defunct state of Biafra, it became a critical operational base for both MASSOB and IPOB between 2015 and 2025. During this period, the contrasting operational strategies of the two groups produced different security outcomes. While MASSOB's activities generated relatively limited security concerns, IPOB's activities contributed to fear, militarization, economic disruption, violent confrontation, and growing insecurity within the state. It is against this background that this paper comparatively examines the operational strategies and security implications of IPOB and MASSOB in Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. The paper seeks to demonstrate how differences in operational methods shaped the security realities experienced within the state during the period under review.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts the Social Movement Theory as a framework for analyzing the operational strategies and security implications of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) in Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. The theory explains how organized groups emerge, mobilize supporters, and sustain collective action in pursuit of social, political, economic, or ideological objectives. The theory developed through the works of scholars such as Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Alain Touraine. It argues that social movements arise when groups experiencing existing political structures, demand social change, or pursue self-determination. According to the theory, the operational methods adopted by a movement are shaped by political opportunities, leadership structures, organizational capacity, ideology, public support, and state response. The theory is relevant to this paper because MASSOB and IPOB are understood as social movements organized around the collective goal of Biafran self-determination. Both groups emerged from longstanding grievances among sections of the Igbo population concerning political marginalization, economic exclusion, insecurity, and perceived injustice within the Nigerian federation. MASSOB, founded by Ralph Uwazurike in 1999, adopted operational strategies consistent with non-violent social movements. It relied mainly on peaceful demonstrations, symbolic nationalism, civil disobedience, grassroots mobilization, and public sensitization. Its activities reflected an attempt to challenge state authority through peaceful collective action rather than militarized confrontation. Social Movement theory explains MASSOB's operational style as characteristic of movements operating with limited organizational capacity and seeking legitimacy through non-violent resistance. In contrast, the IPOB led by Nnamdi Kanu, adopted more radicalized and confrontational operational strategies. IPOB utilized social media propaganda, radio Biafra broadcasts, digital mobilization, sit-at-home enforcement, mass protests, and the establishment of the Eastern Security Network (ESN).

Social Movement Theory explains this transformation as a result of changing political opportunities, increasing frustration among supporters, evolving leadership style, and intensified state repression. As confrontations between IPOB and Nigerian security agencies increased, the movement gradually adopted more coercive and militant operational strategies. The theory also explains the security implications generated by the activities of

both groups. Social movements often provoke state responses when their activities challenge state authority or public order. In Enugu State, the activities of IPOB and MASSOB triggered arrests, military deployments, surveillance operations, and confrontations with security agencies. However, IPOB's more confrontational operational methods produced more severe security consequences including economic disruption, fear and psychological insecurity, militarization, violent clashes, and destruction of property. Furthermore, Social Movement Theory helps explain the role of youth mobilization in separatist agitation within Southeastern Nigeria. High unemployment, poverty, frustration, and perceptions of political exclusion created favorable conditions for collective mobilization among youths in Enugu State. IPOB particularly succeeded in transforming these grievances into sustained mass mobilization through emotional propaganda and digital communication networks. The theory therefore provides an appropriate analytical framework for understanding the emergence of MASSOB and IPOB, the differences in their operational strategies, the evolution of separatist agitation, and the resulting security implications in Enugu state between 2015 and 2025.

### **Synopsis of the Biafran Agitation**

The Biafran agitation is the persistent struggle for the self-determination and possible independence of the Igbo-dominated Southeastern region of Nigeria. The agitation originated from political, ethnic, and economic tensions that intensified after Nigeria's independence in 1960 and culminated in the declaration of the republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967 by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. The declaration led to the Nigerian Civil War between the Nigerian federal government and Biafra from 1967 to 1970. The war resulted in massive destruction, humanitarian crises, and loss of lives, particularly in Southeastern Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> Although the civil war officially ended in 1970 with the reintegration policy of "No Victor, No Vanquished" introduced by Yakubu Gowon, feelings of political marginalization and economic exclusion persisted among many Igbo people.<sup>2</sup>

The unresolved grievances contributed to the emergence of various pro-Biafran separatist movements in post-civil war Nigeria. One of the most prominent post-war separatist organizations was the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), founded in 1999 by Ralph Uwazurike. MASSOB adopted non-violent operational strategies such as peaceful protests, civil disobedience, and symbolic nationalism in pursuit of Biafran independence. However, dissatisfaction with the perceived slow progress of non-violent agitation contributed to the emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu. IPOB introduced a more radicalized phase of Biafran agitation characterized by digital propaganda, mass mobilization, sit-at-home orders, and confrontational engagement with the Nigerian state.<sup>3</sup> Through platforms

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<sup>1</sup> F. Forsyth. *The Biafran Story* (Penguin Books, 1969), p.182.

<sup>2</sup> C. Achebe. *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (Penguin Books, 2012), p.98.

<sup>3</sup> I. J. Onuoha, C. Ezeibe, and G. Onuoha. "Inflammatory Narratives and Escalation of IPOB Separatist Agitation in Nigeria." *African Renaissance*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2025, p.115

such as Radio Biafra and the social media, IPOB expanded separatist consciousness among youths in Southeastern Nigeria and the diaspora.<sup>4</sup> In Enugu State, the activities of MASSOB and IPOB significantly influenced the security environment between 2015 and 2025. While MASSOB's largely peaceful operational methods generated limited security concerns, IPOB's confrontational and coercive strategies contributed to economic disruption, fear, militarization, and violent clashes with security agencies.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the Biafran agitation evolved from symbolic non-violent resistance into a more complex security challenge within Southeastern Nigeria.

### **Operational Strategies of MASSOB in Enugu State, 2015-2025**

The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) adopted largely non-violent and symbolic operational strategies in pursuing its objective of Biafran self-determination in Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. Although the organization remained active during the study period, its influence gradually declined with the emergence and expansion of IPOB. In spite of that, MASSOB continued to maintain a presence within Enugu State through peaceful mobilization, symbolic nationalism, and civil resistance activities. Members frequently staged rallies and public gatherings aimed at promoting awareness of the Biafran cause and expressing dissatisfaction with the Nigerian state. These protests were usually conducted without armed confrontations. MASSOB's protest strategy was influenced by the philosophy of non-violent resistance associated with Mohandas Ghandi. The organization consistently projected itself as a peaceful movement committed to achieving Biafran independence through dialogue, civil disobedience, and public sensitization rather than violent insurgency. Interviews with traders at the Ogbete Main Market indicated that MASSOB's demonstrations in Enugu were generally less disruptive compared to later IPOB's activities. "MASSOB people only carried flags and marched peacefully. Their protests did not stop us from opening our shops or doing our businesses."<sup>16</sup>

From data gotten at Old Park, MASSOB also relied heavily on symbolic nationalism as an operational strategy. The organization promoted Biafran consciousness through flags, identity cards, commemorative events, and publications. These symbols according to a newspaper vendor, were "intended to sustain collective ethnic identity and reinforce support for Biafran nationalism among the Igbo population in Enugu State. The organization occasionally organized memorial activities related to the Nigerian Civil War and honored individuals perceived as Biafran heroes."<sup>7</sup> Such symbolic activities helped preserve historical grievances and sustain separatist sentiments within the region. Civil disobedience constituted another important aspect of MASSOB's operational strategy. Members occasionally engaged in peaceful boycotts, symbolic processions, and refusal to recognize

<sup>4</sup> M. I. Obichili, C. Eze, and U. Okeke. "Radio Biafra and Participation in IPOB Activities in South-East Nigeria." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 58, no. 5, 2023, p.7.

<sup>5</sup> H. Onapajo and U. O. Uzodike. "The Indigenous People of Biafra, State Response and Insecurity in South-East Nigeria." *African Security Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2022, p.38.

<sup>6</sup> J. Amadi. 50 years, trader, Ogbete main market (May, 2026).

<sup>7</sup> U. Ezenwa. 37 years, Newspaper vendor, Old park (May, 2026).

certain state authorities as a form of protest against perceived political marginalization. Interviews with members of the Enugu North Secretariat reveals that compliance to the civil disobedience was largely voluntarily. “Unlike IPOB, MASSOB did not have the capacity to forcefully ask everybody to comply, people joined the MASSOB activities on their own without anybody ordering them, it was only based on persuasion.”<sup>8</sup> MASSOB employed grassroots mobilization through local meetings, community interactions, and interpersonal communication networks. The organization operated through relatively decentralized structures across Southeast Nigeria, including Enugu State. Its mobilization efforts focused mainly on youths, traders, artisans, and unemployed persons who were sympathetic to the Biafran cause. However, its mobilization capacity remained relatively limited due to inadequate technological resources and weaker media presence compared to IPOB. According to a respondent at New Market, “MASSOB people will come to you face to face and talk to you about Biafra and tell you why you should join the movement. They said that people are joining even in Anambra and other states in Igboland because Biafran will create jobs and give us a better life.”<sup>9</sup>

Another defining feature of MASSOB's operational strategy was its relatively cautious relationship with Nigerian security agencies. Although arrests and occasional clashes occurred, the organization generally avoided direct militarized confrontation with the state. A staff at the Ministry of Information said that “MASSOB was more peaceful. There were arrests sometimes, but they were not creating the kind of fear we later experienced.”<sup>10</sup> Although MASSOB adopted largely peaceful strategies, its activities still generated certain security concerns within Enugu State, including periodic tensions during protests, clashes with security agencies, temporary disruption of public activities, and heightened separatist sentiments among sections of the population. However, the overall security implications of MASSOB's activities remained relatively limited when compared to the later activities of IPOB. The organization's non-violent operational approach produced lesser scale of violence and economic disruption within Enugu State. MASSOB's operational strategies between 2015 and 2025 were characterized by peaceful protests, symbolic nationalism, grassroots mobilization, and civil disobedience. The organization relied primarily on persuasion and symbolic resistance rather than coercion or militarization. Consequently, while MASSOB contributed to the persistence of separatist sentiments in Enugu State, its activities generated comparatively lower levels of insecurity and public disruption than those associated with IPOB.

### **Operational Strategies of IPOB in Enugu State, 2015-2025**

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) adopted more radicalized, coordinated, and confrontational operational strategies than MASSOB in pursuing the objective of Biafran self-determination in Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. The organization expanded

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<sup>8</sup> K. Alaga. 41 years, Civil servant, Enugu North secretariat (May, 2026).

<sup>9</sup> B. Nnochie. 29 years, Cloth seller, New market, (May, 2026).

<sup>10</sup> C. Ogbeyalu. 48 years, Civil servant, Ministry of Information, (May, 2026).

rapidly across Southeast Nigeria through aggressive mobilization, digital propaganda, and the use of coercive enforcement mechanisms. Its activities significantly transformed the security environment of Enugu State during the study period. One of IPOB's most important operational strategies was its effective use of digital communication and propaganda. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter), IPOB disseminated pro-Biafran messages, mobilized supporters, and coordinated activities across Southeast Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> The organization also utilized Radio Biafra as a major propaganda and mobilization tool. Broadcasts frequently emphasized themes of political marginalization, injustice, and Igbo nationalism, thereby attracting large number of youths to the movement. According to a respondent in Obiagu, "many of us listened to Radio Biafra every day from 10am to know what our leader has to say to us because Biafra is our only hope out of the zoo, other people get the message through the net (internet) and newspapers."<sup>12</sup> Digital mobilization enabled IPOB to spread information rapidly, coordinate protests, mobilize supporters internationally, and sustain separatist consciousness among the Igbo population. Unlike MASSOB, IPOB successfully utilized diaspora networks and modern communication technology to strengthen its organizational reach and influence.<sup>13</sup>

One of IPOB's most influential operational strategies in Enugu State was the sit-at-home order which required residents to remain indoors and businesses to be shut down, particularly on Mondays and during significant anniversaries related to the Biafran struggle.<sup>14</sup> Although IPOB often claimed that the sit-at-home order represented civil disobedience and solidarity with their detained leader Nnamdi Kanu, compliance was frequently enforced through fear and intimidation.<sup>15</sup> The sit-at-home strategy produced major socio-economic disruptions in Enugu State including closure of markets, reduced transportation activities, disruption of schools, decline in commercial activities, and restrictions on public movement. "Every Monday, people stayed indoors because nobody wanted problems. Businesses suffered seriously and violence increased especially for people who came out during sit-at-home days."<sup>16</sup> Unlike MASSOB, IPOB increasingly relied on coercive enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with its directives. Residents who violated sit-at-home orders were sometimes threatened, attacked, or intimidated by suspected enforcers.<sup>17</sup> This coercive strategy contributed significantly to fear and insecurity within Enugu State. Many

<sup>8</sup> K. Alaga. 41 years, Civil servant, Enugu North secretariat (May, 2026).

<sup>9</sup> B. Nnochie. 29 years, Cloth seller, New market, (May, 2026).

<sup>10</sup> C. Ogbeyalu. 48 years, Civil servant, Ministry of Information, (May, 2026).

<sup>11</sup> M. I. Obichili et al..., p.6.

<sup>12</sup> O. Akagbue. 25 years, Unemployed, Obiagu road, (May, 2026).

<sup>13</sup> C. C. Ezeibe. "Hate Speech and Electoral Violence in Nigeria: The Rise of IPOB and Ethnic Nationalism." *African Studies Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2019, pp.93.

<sup>14</sup> I. S. Orji, and N. O. Anaukwu. "Enforcement of IPOB Sit-at-Home Order and Public Compliance in South-East Nigeria." *South East Political Science Review*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2023, pp.44.

<sup>15</sup> M. T. Eze, C. Okafor, and E. Nwankwo. "Effects of Sit-at-Home Order on Economic Development in south-East Nigeria." *international Journal of Management and Allied Research*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2023, pp.51.

<sup>16</sup> E. Uzochukwu. 38 years, Spare parts dealer, Coal camp, (May, 2026).

<sup>17</sup> I. S. Orji, and N. O. Anaukwu..., pp.47

residents complied with directives not necessarily out of ideological support but because of concerns over personal safety.<sup>18</sup> A transport operator in New Haven said that “people obeyed mostly because they were afraid of attacks or destruction of their properties.”<sup>19</sup> The use of coercion distinguished IPOB sharply from MASSOB's largely voluntary mobilization methods. IPOB also organized large-scale protests and demonstrations in Enugu State, especially following the arrest and detention of Nnamdi Kanu in 2015. These protests often attracted large number of youths and supporters demanding Biafran independence and the release of detained IPOB members.<sup>20</sup> However, unlike MASSOB's demonstrations, IPOB's protests frequently resulted in confrontations with Nigerian security agencies. Clashes between protesters and security personnel occasionally led to arrests, injuries, destruction of properties and loss of lives.<sup>21</sup> These confrontations heightened tensions and contributed to the militarization of Enugu State.

The creation of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) marked a major shift in IPOB's operational strategy. Established as a regional security outfit, ESN was presented by IPOB as a mechanism for protecting Southeastern communities from insecurity.<sup>22</sup> However, the existence of ESN introduced a paramilitary dimension to IPOB's activities and intensified security concerns within Enugu State and the wider Southeastern region. Nigerian security agencies frequently associated ESN with armed confrontations, attacks on security facilities, and violent enforcement activities.<sup>23</sup> A respondent in Eke Emene recounted that “The ESN was established to protect our communities from attacks from Fulani herdsmen, you can see what is happening in Uzo Uwani, but since the ESN came on board, the problem has increased because of intimidation and force, everybody is tired.”<sup>24</sup> The emergence of ESN significantly increased the militarization of the separatist struggle compared to MASSOB's earlier operational model. IPOB's operational strategy increasingly involved direct confrontation with Nigerian security agencies. Security operations against IPOB's activities often resulted in violent clashes, arrests, raids, and deployment of military personnel across Southeast Nigeria.<sup>25</sup> Enugu State experienced heightened security presence due to fears of separatist violence and attacks. This atmosphere contributed to public fear, restrictions on movement, decline in nightlife activities, and growing distrust between residents and security agencies.<sup>26</sup> A student at Godfrey Okoye University stated that “there was tension everywhere because security forces and IPOB supporters were constantly suspicious of each other.”<sup>27</sup> The

<sup>18</sup> I. J. Onuoha et al ..., p.119.

<sup>19</sup> C. Odo. 40 years, Transport operator, New haven, (May, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> C. C. Ezeibe..., pp. 95

<sup>21</sup> International Crisis Group. From Marginalization to Insurrection: The Rising Threat of IPOB in South-East Nigeria. *international Crisis Group Africa Report No. 297, 2021. Pp.12.*

<sup>22</sup> International Crisis Group..., pp.15

<sup>23</sup> B. Umoh. “Insecurity and Economic Consequences of Separatist Agitations in South-East Nigeria.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2025. Pp.17.

<sup>24</sup> U. Kalu. 41 years, Pharmacist, Eke Emene, (May, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> International Crisis Group..., pp.18.

<sup>26</sup> H. Onapajo and U. O. Uzodike..., p.39

<sup>27</sup> W. Okaibe. 23 years, Student, Godfrey Okoye University, (May, 2016).

operational strategies adopted by IPOB generated significant security implications in Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. These included;

1. Economic disruption: Sit-at-home orders severely affected business, transportation, school, and public service.<sup>28</sup>
2. Fear and Psychological insecurity: The enforcement of the IPOB sit-at-home order in Enugu State unfolded through a complex mixture of voluntary compliance, symbolic loyalty, fear-driven adherence compliance, and coercive action by both IPOB members and criminal opportunists.<sup>29</sup> Residents experienced fear due to threats, uncertainty, and violent incidents associated with separatist enforcement activities.
3. Militarization of the State: The deployment of military and security personnel increased considerably across Enugu State.<sup>30</sup>
4. Violent Clashes: Confrontations between IPOB supporters and security agencies contributed to casualties and destruction of properties.<sup>31</sup>
5. Decline in public confidence: Many residents expressed declining confidence in both separatist actors and state security institutions due to persistent insecurity.<sup>32</sup>

IPOB adopted operational strategies that were more technologically advanced, coordinated, confrontational, and coercive than those of MASSOB. Through digital propaganda, sit-at-home enforcement, mass protests, and the establishment of ESN, IPOB significantly expanded the scale and intensity of separatist agitation in Enugu State. consequently, the security implications associated with IPOB's activities were far more severe than those generated by MASSOB during the study period.

### **Comparative Analysis of the Operational Strategies of MASSOB and IPOB in Enugu State, 2015-2025**

The activities of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) reveal both similarities and significant differences in their operational strategies within Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. Although both groups pursued the restoration of Biafra and emerged from similar grievances relating to political marginalization and ethnic nationalism, their methods of mobilization, enforcement, organizational structure, and engagement with the Nigerian state differed considerably. Both MASSOB and IPOB were fundamentally separatist movements advocating self-determination for the Igbo. They promoted Biafran consciousness and identity through Biafran flags, public rallies, commemorative events, and pro-Biafran publications. The activities were designed to sustain separatist sentiments among the Igbo population and reinforce collective identity.<sup>33</sup> Both groups organized protests and public

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<sup>28</sup> M. T. Eze, C. Okafor, and E. Nwankwo..., pp.56

<sup>29</sup> A. H. Obinna. "The Socio-Economic Implications of the Sit-At-Home Order in Enugu State, 2012-2014." *The Calabar Historical Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 2, ISSN: 23158816, 2023, pp. 52.

<sup>30</sup> International Crisis Group..., pp. 20.

<sup>31</sup> H. Onapajo and U. O. Uzodike..., pp. 41.

<sup>32</sup> B. Umoh..., pp. 21.

<sup>33</sup> C. C. Ezeibe..., pp. 91.

demonstrations to express dissatisfaction with the Nigerian government and attract public attention to the Biafran cause. Such demonstrations were particularly common in urban centers within Enugu State. MASSOB and IPOB also targeted unemployed and frustrated youths who perceived political and economic exclusion within Nigeria. youth participation formed a major component of the membership structure of both organizations.<sup>34</sup> Both groups propagated narratives centered on marginalization, injustice, and the alleged political exclusion of the Igbo from the Nigerian federation.

Despite the similarities, MASSOB and IPOB differed significantly in their operational methods and levels of confrontation. MASSOB relied mainly on physical mobilization through community meetings, interpersonal communication, and grassroots sensitization. Its operational methods were largely decentralized and localized. IPOB, however, adopted more technologically advanced mobilization strategies through social media, Radio Biafra broadcasts, diaspora networks, and digital propaganda platforms.<sup>35</sup> This enabled IPOB to mobilize supporters more rapidly and across wider geographical areas than MASSOB. MASSOB largely maintained a philosophy of non-violent resistance inspired by Mohandas Ghandi's civil disobedience principles. The organization generally avoided militarized confrontation with the Nigerian state. In contrast, IPOB evolved into a more radicalized and confrontational organization. Its activities increasingly involved coercive enforcement, aggressive rhetoric, and confrontations with security agencies.<sup>36</sup> One of the most significant differences between the two groups was their approach to enforcement. MASSOB depended largely on voluntary participation and persuasion. Although members occasionally clashed with security agencies, the organization did not systematically compel compliance with its directives. IPOB, however, enforced compliance with sit-at-home orders through intimidation, fear, and threats of violence against defaulters.<sup>37</sup> This coercive strategy significantly increased public fear and insecurity within Enugu State. According to a respondent, "MASSOB persuaded people, but IPOB enforced compliance through fear."<sup>38</sup> MASSOB operated through relatively loose and decentralized structures with limited technologies and financial resources. IPOB possessed stronger organizational capacity due to diaspora funding, digital communication networks, coordinated propaganda, and broader youth mobilization.<sup>39</sup> This greater resource mobilization enabled IPOB to sustain more sophisticated operational strategies than MASSOB. Another major difference was the establishment of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) by IPOB. MASSOB did not establish a structured armed wing or paramilitary organization. IPOB's creation of ESN introduced a militarized dimension to separatist agitation in Southeastern Nigeria and heightened security concerns in Enugu State.<sup>40</sup> MASSOB generally maintained limited confrontation with

<sup>34</sup> I. J. Onuoha, C. Ezeibe, and G. Onuoha ..., *pp.* 116.

<sup>35</sup> M. I. Obichili, C. Eze, and U. Okeke ..., *pp.* 7

<sup>36</sup> H. Onapajo and U. O. Uzodike ..., *pp.* 37.

<sup>37</sup> I. S. Orji, and N. O. Anaukwu ..., *pp.* 45.

<sup>38</sup> K. Abani. 45 years, Tailor, Agbani road, (May, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> I. J. Onuoha, C. Ezeibe, and G. Onuoha ..., *pp.* 118.

<sup>40</sup> International Crisis Group ..., *pp.* 15

Nigerian security agencies despite periodic arrests of its members, IPOB however, frequently engaged in direct confrontations with state security forces. This resulted in raids, arrests, shootings, destruction of properties, and increased military deployment across southeastern Nigeria.<sup>41</sup>

The differing operational strategies of IPOB and MASSOB produced varying security implications within Enugu State. MASSOB's activities caused relatively limited economic disruption because its protests were mostly peaceful and voluntary. In contrast, IPOB's orders significantly disrupted transportation, trade, education, banking, and public administration.

<sup>42</sup> While MASSOB generated moderate political tension, IPOB's coercive strategies created widespread fear and uncertainty among residents. IPOB's activities contributed to increased deployment of military and security personnel across Enugu State, thereby intensifying militarization and public anxiety.<sup>43</sup> Violent clashes associated with IPOB activities resulted in greater casualties and destruction of properties compared to MASSOB's activities. The comparative analysis demonstrates that although IPOB and MASSOB pursued similar separatist objectives, their operational strategies differed significantly in terms of mobilization methods, enforcement mechanisms, organizational capacity, and degree of confrontation. MASSOB largely adopted peaceful and symbolic operational approaches, whereas IPOB embraced more confrontational, technologically advanced, and coercive methods. Consequently, IPOB generated more severe security implications within Enugu State between 2015 and 2025, including economic disruption, fear, militarization, and violent confrontations. The transition from MASSOB's peaceful separatism to IPOB's radicalized operational strategy therefore marked a major transformation in the nature and security consequences of Biafran agitation in Enugu State.

### **Security Implications of IPOB and MASSOB Activities in Enugu State, 2015-2025**

The activities of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) produced varying security implications in Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. While both organizations contributed to separatist consciousness and political tensions within the state, the intensity and nature of their security impacts differed significantly due to their contrasting operational strategies. MASSOB's activities were largely associated with peaceful protests and symbolic resistance, resulting in relatively limited security disruptions. IPOB, however, adopted more confrontational and coercive operational methods, which intensified insecurity, economic instability, fear, and militarization within Enugu State. One of the most significant security implications of IPOB activities in Enugu State was economic disruption caused by the enforcement of sit-at-home orders. Weekly lockdowns and movement restrictions negatively affected markets, transportation, banking activities, schools, and public institutions. Commercial centers such as Ogbete Market, Gariki Market, and major transport routes within Enugu metropolis

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<sup>41</sup> H. Onapajo and U. O. Uzodike..., pp. 40

<sup>42</sup> M. T. Eze, C. Okafor, and E. Nwankwo..., pp. 54.

<sup>43</sup> International Crisis Group..., pp. 19.

frequently experienced reduced economic activities during the sit-at-home period.<sup>44</sup> “Every Monday, business activities almost stopped completely. Many traders lost income because customers stayed at home.”<sup>45</sup> Weekly shutdowns in Southeastern urban economies such as Enugu led to “direct commercial paralysis,” with cumulative losses running into billions of naira in transportation revenues, market turnover, and industrial operation hours.<sup>46</sup> Unlike IPOB, MASSOB's activities generated relatively minimal economic disruption because the organization relied mainly on voluntary participation and peaceful demonstration.

The persistent economic losses associated with IPOB activities contributed to unemployment, declining commercial confidence, reduced productivity, and worsening living conditions for many residents of Enugu State.<sup>47</sup> Another major security implication of separatist activities in Enugu State was the widespread atmosphere of fear and psychological insecurity created particularly by IPOB's coercive enforcement mechanisms. Residents frequently feared attacks by suspected enforcers, violent clashes, arbitrary arrests, and military raids. The fear associated with non-compliance during sit-at-home periods forced many residents to remain indoors regardless of personal opinions about separatist agitation.<sup>48</sup> A civil servant at the Ministry of Works explained that “people were constantly afraid because nobody knew when violence or security raids might occur.”<sup>49</sup> MASSOB activities, although politically sensitive, generally produced lower levels of fear because the organization did not systematically employ violent enforcement strategies. The atmosphere of fear negatively affected social interactions, nightlife activities, public mobility, and general psychological well-being within Enugu State. The escalation of IPOB activities contributed significantly to the militarization of Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. Increased deployment of soldiers, police officers, checkpoints, armored vehicles, and security patrols became common across the state as security agencies attempted to contain separatist activities.<sup>50</sup> The establishment of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) further intensified security concerns and strengthened state security responses. Frequent military operations and raids in communities suspected of harboring IPOB or ESN members contributed to heightened tensions between residents and security agencies. A trader at Kenyatta market observed that “there were soldiers and checkpoints everywhere. The state became heavily militarized.”<sup>51</sup> The militarization of Enugu State created an atmosphere of tension and contributed to distrust between civilians and security institutions.

Violent confrontations between IPOB supporters and Nigerian security agencies resulted in casualties, destruction of properties, arson, and injuries to civilians and security personnel.

<sup>44</sup> M. T. Eze, C. Okafor, and E. Nwankwo ..., pp. 53.

<sup>45</sup> P. Ekene. 50 years, Trader, Mayor market, (May, 2026).

<sup>46</sup> A. C. Okoli. “Insurgency and Socioeconomic Disruption in Nigeria: The Case of IPOB.” *Journal of Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2015, pp. 48.

<sup>47</sup> B. Umoh ..., pp. 18.

<sup>48</sup> I. S. Orji, and N. O. Anaukwu ..., pp. 46.

<sup>49</sup> M. Madubugo. 57 years, Civil servant, Ministry of Works, (May, 2026).

<sup>50</sup> International Crisis Group ..., pp. 18.

<sup>51</sup> N. Ogbuefi. 59 years, Trader, Kenyatta market, (May, 2026).

Security facilities and government infrastructure occasionally became targets of attacks attributed to separatist actors or armed groups associated with IPOB activities.<sup>52</sup> The resulting violence contributed to instability, displacement fears, destruction of businesses, and declining public safety within Enugu State. Compared to IPOB, MASSOB recorded fewer violent confrontations because its operational strategy largely avoided militarized engagement with the state. The persistence of separatist activities and violent confrontations contributed to declining public confidence in state security institutions. Many residents perceived security agencies as excessively militarized, reactive rather than preventive, and sometimes abusive during security operations. Simultaneously, some residents also expressed frustration with separatist groups due to the hardship and insecurity associated with their activities. This dual distrust weakened cooperation between civilians and security institutions, thereby complicating efforts to maintain public order in Enugu State.<sup>53</sup> The IPOB strategy also affected educational and social activities across Enugu State. Schools, universities, and public institutions frequently suspended activities during sit-at-home orders due to safety concerns. Students and workers experienced interruptions in academic calendars, examinations, transportation, and workplace attendance. According to a teacher at Queen's School, "the tension and security implication of the agitations especially that of IPOB, was something else. Our students missed WAEC as a result of, and even within our school system, academic calendars were regularly adjusted and readjusted."<sup>54</sup> Social events, religious gatherings, and nightlife activities were similarly affected due to fears of violence and insecurity. "MASSOB's activities did not produce comparable levels of sustained disruption because the organization lacked the coercive enforcement capacity associated with IPOB."<sup>55</sup> IPOB's aggressive propaganda and digital mobilization strategies contributed to increased youth radicalization within Enugu State. Through social media campaigns and emotionally charged narratives relating to marginalization and injustice, many youths became increasingly attracted to separatist ideology.<sup>56</sup> High unemployment, poverty, and frustration among youths further increased vulnerability to separatist mobilization. This radicalization contributed to growing anti-state sentiments, increased hostility toward security agencies, and the expansion of separatist support networks within the region. The security implications of MASSOB and IPOB activities in Enugu State differed significantly due to the contrasting operational strategies adopted by both organizations. MASSOB's largely peaceful and symbolic operational methods generated relatively limited security challenges. IPOB's confrontational, coercive, and militarized strategies, however, contributed to severe security implications including economic disruption, fear and psychological insecurity, militarization, violent clashes, destruction of property, social disruptions, and declining public confidence in security institutions. The transformation from MASSOB's non-violent strategy to IPOB's more radicalized operational approach therefore marked a significant shift in the security dynamics of Enugu State between 2015 and 2025.

<sup>52</sup> H. Onapajo and U. O. Uzodike..., *pp.* 40.

<sup>53</sup> I. J. Onuoha, C. Ezeibe, and G. Onuoha..., *pp.* 120.

<sup>54</sup> S. Ezechi. 40 years, Teacher, Queen's School, (May, 2026).

<sup>55</sup> A. Oba. 52, Business man, Independence Layout, (May, 2026).

<sup>56</sup> C. C. Ezeibe..., *pp.* 96.

## **Conclusion**

This paper comparatively examined the operational strategies and security implications of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) in Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. The paper established that although both organizations pursued the common objective of Biafran self-determination, their operational strategies differed considerably, thereby producing varying security outcomes within the state. The study found that MASSOB largely adopted peaceful and symbolic operational methods such as non-violent demonstrations, civil disobedience, grassroots mobilization, and symbolic nationalism. Its activities were primarily persuasion-oriented and involved relatively limited confrontation with Nigerian security agencies. Consequently, the security implications associated with MASSOB's activities in Enugu State remained comparatively minimal and largely restricted to periodic political tensions and localized disturbances. In contrast, IPOB adopted more radicalized, technologically driven, and confrontational operational strategies. Through digital propaganda, social media mobilization, Radio Biafra broadcasts, sit-at-home orders, mass protests, and the establishment of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), IPOB significantly transformed the nature of separatist agitation within Enugu State. The study revealed that IPOB's operational methods generated severe security implications including economic disruption, fear and psychological insecurity, militarization, violent confrontations, destruction of properties, educational disruptions, and declining public confidence in security institutions.

The study further demonstrated that the transition from MASSOB's non-violent strategies to IPOB's more coercive and militarized operational strategies marked a major shift in the security dynamics of Enugu State. IPOB's superior mobilization capacity, enhanced by digital communication networks and diaspora support, enabled the organization to sustain broader influence and more coordinated activities than MASSOB. The paper explained that differences in organizational resources and mobilization capacity largely accounted for the contrasting operational strategies adopted by both groups. IPOB's access to wider communication networks, propaganda platforms, and diaspora support enabled it to adopt a more aggressive and confrontational strategy than MASSOB did. The study concludes that while separatist grievances relating to political marginalization and historical injustice remains significant factors in Southeast Nigeria, the operational methods adopted by separatist groups greatly influence the scale and intensity of security implications within affected societies. The comparatively peaceful methods of MASSOB generated lower security threats, whereas IPOB's confrontational operational strategies contributed substantially to insecurity and instability in Enugu State between 2015 and 2025. Finally, the paper argues that addressing separatist agitation in Southeast Nigeria requires not only security responses but also political dialogue, economic inclusion, youth empowerment, and institutional reforms aimed at addressing the underlying grievances that sustain separatist mobilization within Enugu State in particular and the Southeast region in general.

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