SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATION OF IPOB'S SIT-AT-HOME ORDER IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) sit-at-home order has significantly impacted the socio-economic fabrics of Southeastern Nigeria. The order was declared to press for the release of their leader Nnamdi Kanu who was extradited from Kenya by the Buhari led administration in 2021. The order has resulted in substantial economic losses, reduced economic activities and increase poverty level in the region. Business activities, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, have been severely affected leading to loss of revenue. The order has also disrupted the education sector, causing school closures, loss of academic hours and increase dropout rate. The social welfare of citizens has also been impacted with increase insecurity, fear and anxiety. Every effort by leaders from the region to appeal to these non-state actors to sheath their sword and allow for political and legal solution to address their concerns has proved abortive and these individuals have continuously ensured the total obedience to the order by the residence of the region. The paper concludes that the sit-at-home order has had devastating socio-economic implications for the people of the region and calls for stakeholders to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis. The paper recommended the need for the federal government and critical stockholders from the region to engage in genuine dialogue and negotiation towards addressing underlying factors that triggered sit-at-home order in the region.

Keywords: Socio-economic, Sit-at-Home Order, IPOB, Insecurity, Southeast, Biafra.

Introduction

The quest for sovereignty by the Igbos of the Southeastern Nigerian is an age-long agitation which can be traced to the colonial days of 1914 when different ethnic groups that hitherto were administratively independent socially, politically, economically and culturally were forcefully annexed into the southern protectorate for colonial socio-economic and political imperialistic tendencies and administrative convenience. Many of the ethnic groups, particularly the Igbos protested the false marriage on the ground that there were no socio-cultural and political similarities that justified the unification (Nwafor, Onwe, Onyejelem, Ujebe, Omojunikanbi, Chime-Nganya & Oshibe 2024). Their yearning for self-independence was however defeated due to the stronger strength and sophisticated weapons in the possession of the colonial masters as against the locally made Dane guns by the Igbos and other ethnic groups in Nigeria (Duru & Adindu, 2024). Dissatisfied with the Nigerian State

and quest for sovereignty by the Igbos, who have been economically and politically marginalized, informed the decision of the late Biafra leader, Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, to declare the exit of the Republic of Biafra from Nigeria in May, 1967

The declaration however, led to the Nigerian Civil war which lasted two and half years as the Nigerian state under the then Head of State, Yakubu Gowon, battled to unify the soul of the country using the military might to ensure the unity of the entity called Nigeria. The Nigerian-Biafran Civil War started in July 6, 1967 and ended on 15th January, 1970 with the Southeast region back in Nigeria, but the civil war left a ghoulish imprint on Nigerian history with squalid tales of death, blood, hunger, horror, sorrow and more death (Oyero, 2021). According to Campbell (2017), 3.5 million people died as a result of the conflict, majority of them were civilians who were malnourished and starved, which hindered Nigeria's socio-political and economic advancement. Since the war ended, the wounds of the war have been consistently scratched through series of injustices and marginalisation meted against the Igbos, including, not being allowed to rule the country 55 years after the war.

However, decades after the civil war, secessionist agitation resurfaced in the South-East led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu through the formation and activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). It is worthy to note that, before the emergence of IPOB, there are other secessionist movements such as the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) with shared common goal with IPOB but less radical in carrying out their secessionist movement. Ekpo and Agorye (2019) assert that the inability of the previous secessionist group to achieve sovereignty for the people of Biafra paved way for the emergence of IPOB which is more radical in their call for Biafra independence. However, the Buhari regime in September, 2017 outlawed IPOB activities and declared them a terrorist group. Before then, the leader of the group, Nnamdi Kanu was arrested on 14th October 2015 on 11 count charges bordering on terrorism, treasonable felony, managing an unlawful society, publication of defamatory matter, illegal possession of firearms and improper importation of goods among others (Premium Times, 2021). He was later granted bail after meeting bail conditions. He later escaped to the United Kingdom following an assassination attempt during a military exercise christened Operation python dance in his home town. He was then operating from oversea until 19th October, 2021 when he was re-arrested in Kenya through the conspiracy of the Kenyan and Nigerian security operatives and extra-ordinarily brought back to Nigeria (Emeruwa, 2021).

The re-arrest and continue detention of Nnamdi Kanu despite various valid court orders discharging him of the seven-count charge pending against him before Federal High Court in Abuja has continued to give rise to social upheavals which included protests, riots and civilian clashes with the security personnel in most Igbo speaking states of Imo, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra and some other Igbo speaking parts of Delta and Rivers. The agitation for the release of Nnamdi Kanu has resulted in the death and injury of many young people and prominent sons of the region among was Dr. Chike Akunyili, the husband of the late D.G of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) who was shot dead while returning to Enugu from an event to honour his late wife (Ayitogo, 2021; Premium Times 2021).

In July 2021, the IPOB spokesperson, Emma Powerful declared that every Monday effective from August 9th, 2021, shall be a sit-at-home throughout Biafra land as civil disobedience in demand for the release of Nnamdi Kanu. The group further stated that the agitation for the separation of Biafra from Nigeria is occasioned by marginalization of Igbo people in politics, economy, resources sharing formula, and other unmerited policies against Igbo people. The marginalization which made manifest by Buhari's administration included political alienation, uneven distribution of resources, maiming and killing of civilians by the cohesive agents of the government, covert and overt activities of Fulani herdsmen among other similar factors (Owoeye, Ezeanya and Obiegbunam, 2022). Since the introduction and enforcement of the sit-at-home order by IPOB, the Southeast has become a "hostage" region with all businesses shut down on every Monday as residents stay at home mainly out of fear of attack by IPOB operatives. These IPOB operatives that have come to be known as "unknown gun men" or operatives of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), the militant wing of IPOB, have on several instances attacked traders and commuters across the region who flout the order. The government has responded to the activities of the group by deploying more security forces to decimate the activities of the IPOB sit-at-home enforcers but this strategy by government has not yielded the desired results as IPOB operatives have become more brazen and audacious in their enforcement order. In the fight for supremacy between IPOB and government, many innocent citizens in the region have been killed and goods worth billions of naira destroyed (Asogwa and Ochie, 2023). The escalation of the sit at home order due to its hijacking by criminal elements and turning the region into a theatre of war and becoming a thorn in the people's flesh as it affects their daily living led to the suspension of the sit at home order in a press statement released the spokesperson of the group.

However, the sit at home order continued unabated as a Finland based disciple of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, Simon Ekpa insisted the sit-at-home order is still in force threatening that anyone found flouting the order would be summarily dealt with. The purported suspension of the order notwithstanding, loyalists of Simon Ekpa have continued to enforce the order in the Southeast (Asogwa & Ochie, 2023). Ekpa was however arrested in November, 2024 by the Finnish authority for coordinating violent actions against civilian and authorities in Nigeria's Southeast region from Finland, using social media platforms to further his separatist agenda in Nigeria (Punch, 2024). The sit-at-home order has severely impacted socio-economic and other activities in the southeast. The paper, therefore, seek to explore the impact of the sit-at-home order on the socio-economic activities of the southeast region and advance practicable recommendations to put an end to the sit-a- home order in the region so as to allow for the socio-economic rejuvenation of the region.

Conceptual Clarification

South Eastern Nigeria

The Southeast Nigeria is one of the six (6) geopolitical zones of the country with Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo as the five states that make up the region. The region has a population of 22 million inhabitants which makes up around 10% of the country's total population. Aba, Enugu, Onitsha, Umuahia, Owerri, Nnewi, Awka and Abakaliliki are the most populated commercial cities of the region. The region shares boarders with the River Niger, the Niger Delta, the flat North Central region, and the Cross River. In terms of social

structure, the Igbo people dominate both the Southeast zone and their ancestral country. Socio-economically, the Southeast of Nigeria contributes significantly to the country's economy despite being the smallest of the country's six (6) geopolitical zones because of its oil and natural gas reserves as well as its expanding industrialized economy (World Population Review, 2022).

The recent wave of agitations for a sovereign state of Biafra by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and other separatist groups in the past is largely due to the inability of successive Nigerian Governments to implement the 3Rs (Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation) policy that was introduced after the end of Nigeria-Biafra civil war. While Federal Government is yet to implement as little as 0.5% of the 3Rs policy, the perceived injustice and marginalization against the Igbos of the southeast remained over the last 5 decades, hence the resurgence of Biafra separatist agitation in the region (Igboayaka, 2022). The people's perception of history, identity, and past or present discrimination or exclusion from highly political and economic rewarding opportunities is a major factor in the social movement's emergence in the Southeast. This perception motivates privileged groups that have attained social power to adopt self-protective offensive strategies in order to avert future hardships before they arise (Gardner, 2002). The demand and belief of the secession movement is undoubtedly that Nigeria can function and endure as independent states in the international community if it cannot be brought together in a spirit of justice, fairness, and equity. These exclusive systems are said to have made it more difficult for the people of the southeast to live in peace and equality as equals inside the state of Nigeria, leaving them constantly on the lookout for a more meaningful alternative.

In general, grievances related to self-determination, which are related to opposition to resource control, treaty tenure, or development projects that have an impact on and significantly alter the indigenous landscape, has resulted to violent agitation and restrict the rights of people in affected areas to freely associate, assemble, and express their opinions and do business in the Southeast. These grievances are also linked to environmental degradation, human rights violations, militarization of traditional land, discrimination, and exclusion from the larger political system. Similar to this, the political class in Nigeria has exploited disparities pertaining to actual or perceived variations in social status, income, education, political engagement, or economic access among people of this region, which have stirred violence and social action. However, the desire for secession and the establishment of the State of the Independent People of Biafra have recently caused a crisis and security danger to the zone's business activity. Hence, the activities of IPOB have left the region in untold hardship, loss of lives and properties, and fear of the unknown.

Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) emerged in 2012 under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu a British Nigerian political activist known for his advocacy for the contemporary Biafran independence movement in his open declaration of his intention to restore the defunct Biafra means of secession from Nigeria. Kanu had, through his radio broadcast as the director Radio Biafra situated in the UK, sought to make people of Igbo extraction aware of the obvious institutional marginalization and exploitation of the Biafrans in the hands of Nigerian governments, piloted by northern oligarchy. He established Radio

Biafra through which he reaches millions of IPOB supporters throughout the entire old Eastern region of Nigeria. Mazi Nnamdi Kanu was believed to have garnered enough followership through his radio program that exposed the "evil" meted out on his people.

The group is said to have originated from similar groups such as the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) led by Ralph Uwazuruike and Benjamin Onwuka respectively (Onichabor, 2022). IPOB is a nationalist separatist group that aims to restore the Republic of Biafra, a country which seceded from Nigeria prior to the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and later rejoined Nigeria after its defeat by the Nigerian military. Since 2012, IPOB and other Biafran separatist groups have been fighting a low-level guerilla conflict in southeastern Nigeria against the Nigerian government (Ekpo & Agorye, 2019).

It could be argued that until 2015, the activities of IPOB was, at best, subdued. However, with the ascension to power of President Muhammadu Buhari, IPOB became more audacious, brazen and daring in its activities. This, according to Nwankwo (2018) could be explained from diverse angles. The first is the Igbos perception of the person of President Buhari as a “hater of the Igbos”. This perception of Buhari by the Igbos is anchored on what many Igbos described as his “partial” treatment of the Igbos when he was the military head of state in relation to the distribution of developmental projects when compared with other regions in the country. This feeling of “hate against the Igbos” was the major reason Buhari lost woefully in the southeast in the 2015 general election. The President made the matter worse when he declared on national media chat that he was going to give “97percent” attention to those regions that voted for him and “5percent” attention to the regions that did not vote for him, invariably referring to the Igbos. The third factor was the brazenness, arrogance and audacity with which the Fulani herdsmen began to conduct themselves fueling fears and anxiety of hidden agenda of Fulanization or Islamization of the country. All these developments provided IPOB with stunts to escalate damaging propaganda against the government in such a way that hundreds of thousands of the Igbos became persuaded by the IPOB narrative (Asogwa & Ochie, 2023).

It was deemed a terrorist organization by the Nigerian government in 2017 under the Nigerian Terrorism Act. As of May 2022, the United Kingdom started denying asylum to members of IPOB who engaged in human rights abuses, though the U.K. government clarified that IPOB had not been designated as a terrorist organization (Mark, Obi & Oham, 2022). IPOB has criticized the Nigerian federal government for poor investment, political alienation, inequitable resource distribution, ethnic marginalization, and heavy military presence, extrajudicial killings in the South-Eastern, South South and parts of North-Central regions of the country (Owoeye, Ezeanya & Obiegbunam, 2022). They equally note that in recent years, it has gained significant media attention for becoming a frequent target of political crackdowns by the Nigerian government. It also has numerous sites and communication channels serving as the only trusted social apparatus educating and inculcating firsthand information and news to its members.

In December 2020, IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu announced the launched of Eastern Security Network (ESN) to defend the people of the region from terrorists and bandits allegedly trooping in from the North. He blamed the political leaders from the region,

especially the governors for the upsurge of killing, maiming and raping by bandits and herdsmen in Igboland (Sahara Reporters, 2020). However, since its establishment, the ESN activities have been shrouded in controversy, with allegation of violence, human right abuses and separatist agendas. Reports show that, the ESN has been involving in several violent clashes with the Nigerian security forces resulting in the death of several people. They have been accused of forced conscription, with young men being coerced into joining the organization. Additionally, the ESN has been accused of extorting money and resources from local businesses and communities. In order to curb their excesses, the security agencies launched crackdowns on suspected ESN members and their supporters in the region (Obinwannem, 2024).

Sit at Home Order

The Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) introduced a sit-at-home order in August 2021 as a means of putting pressure on the Nigerian government to release its leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu who is standing trial for alleged treasonable felony and terrorism. The sit-at-home order is a law instituted by the (IPOB) to respect their leader by staying at home every Monday of the week and any other days Nnamdi Kanu is appearing in court. This implies that everybody in Southeast will all be in the house for twenty four hours in honour of their leader that is in the custody of the DSS in Abuja (Mark, et al 2022). Sit-at-home is therefore seen as a day set aside and unanimously agreed as a principle to honour the leader of Indigenous people of Biafra. Owoeye, et al (2022) noted that the principle of sit-at-home has been made a normal routine in the lives of every Igbo man and woman in the Southeast which the group believe to be a guiding strategy to show Nigerian government that they are due to be politically free to be an independent nation.

The sit-at-home has been turned to a day in Igbo land to be more honorably valued and specially termed as precious to be respected. It has been christened a memorable day in the entire Igbo land and the Indigenous People of Biafra has continued use such days to commemorate some events that happened during the Biafra –Nigerian war that lasted between 1967 to1970, where millions of Igbo were massacred in a civil war (Osita, Anoke & Eze, 2022). Among this commemoration are to remember the past heroes who worked assiduously to free Biafra from negative situation in the past. These were people who truly lost their precious lives in order to protect the integrity of the independence Igbo race during the Biafra-Nigerian civil war. The sentiments attached to the sit-at-home order, other than to honour Nnamdi Kanu, has generated a comfort occasion in the lives of the Igbos that people tended to embrace it.

Akpan (2021) assert that sit-at-home order became comfortable in the mind of people of Igbo extraction as they see it as a day of celebration. Since people are not expected to step out of their homes in those days, every economic and social activity in Southeast cease to operate during the period as people sit-at-home to celebrate the fallen heroes. Akpan equally note that sit-at-home is turned to festival and respected day in the Southeast. Collaborating this position, Ejikendu (2022) regards sit-at-home as the days set aside by the people of Southeast to honor the gods of Igbo land and in respect to the leaders who are fighting to ensure Igbos are freed from the black hand of Nigeria, while to some people it is remarkable day and a sign to show that Igbos are due to gain freedom from Nigeria (Owoeye et al (2022).

However, Osita et al (2022) note that while the people initially embraced the order, the continued sit-at-home for years now has turned the minds of the people to believe that the order has become very uncomfortable to the people due to its socio-economic impact on the people.

Socio-Economic Implications of Sit- At- Home Order

The sit at home order by IPOB in the southeast was declared with the impression that such order will arm-twist the federal government into releasing Nnamdi Kanu. The group feels that by inflicting such economic pain on the people, the entire Southeast will be galvanized to see IPOB's agitation as Igbo agitation and thus compel the high and mighty in the Southeast into joining the clamour for the release of the IPOB leader (Asogwa & Ochie, 2023). There are historical evidences that show how the IPOB-type of agitations and imposition of sit-at home order can cause great human misery as well as significant economic and social costs. In the first instance, investment and economic progress have been hindered by sit-at-home order because its enforcement by IPOB and the associated clampdown by the government have naturally led to loss of lives. It has also led to destruction of infrastructure, human capital, and institutions, cause political instability, and increased level of uncertainty, thereby affecting socio-economic development of the region.

The IPOB agitation and the attendant sit-at-home order have complicated the total budget of the Southeast in terms of reducing tax revenue; wiping off a portion of the tax base and increasing security spending. As a result, fiscal deficits and public debt increase, resources are diverted away from social and developmental spending, amplifying the crippling effects of such agitations and sit at-home orders. Many scholars agreed that in any conflict situation, the economy is gravely affected. For instance, since the imposition of the sit-at-home order by IPOB, economic activities have been grossly dislocated in the region basically because on every Monday all productive assets and resources in the region are disrupted. Okeoma (2021) assert that the southeast cannot quantify the economic cost of disrupting all the productive assets and resources in terms of lost man-hours.

According to the report of an investigation funded by the International Centre for Investigative Report (ICIR), the Southeast micro businesses wasted 71 Mondays between August 9, 2021 and December 19, 2022, losing N5.35trillion (USD12.215 billion) in the process. The losses arose from Monday sit-at-home exercises being implemented by IPOB (Amudu, 2023). According to Charles Soludo, the present Governor of Anambra State, state loses an estimated ₦19.6billion every day of sit-at home (Punch, 2021). It must also be noted that, in Southeast Nigeria, transportation is an important sector in the region as the region hosts the Onitsha main market and Aba market and some of the major markets in the country. This necessitates a huge inflow and outflow of people in the region. Report however shows that, the states in the region lose a huge sum of ₦10bn (Euro18.5m) for each sit-at-home day. This has become a double tragedy for a country whose national economy is already on its knees, as reduced income means less purchasing power for transporters in the region, with the attendant reduction in tax remission to the state government. Okafor (2022) submitted that social unrest in Nigeria has resulted to cumulative decline in GDP from 2011 to 2015. Odili (2021) remarked that the sit-at-home order has caused the economy of the Southeast a massive decline in GDP relative to other geopolitical zones in the country.

Another important sector being impacted by the sit-at-home order in the region is the trading sector. The South-East Nigeria has always pride itself as a trading hub of the country. Unfortunately, traders are compelled to stay at home on Mondays which is usually the busiest day of the week and the most productive for some. This has translated to a trading loss that amounts to something between ₦700bn ((Euro1.3bn) and ₦3tn (Euro 5.55bn) (Aligwekwe, 2022). The growth of the social infrastructure in the Southeast has also been impacted by this imposition of sit-at-home order. The Nigerian government alleged that the paramilitary component of IPOB known as the Eastern Security Network (ESN) had destroyed 18 INEC offices and 136 security installations in the region. These ideas demonstrate how social discontent of all kinds harm social infrastructure and retard economic development (Okeoma, 2021)

Sit-at-home order in Southeast has also impeded Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The relevance of FDI to the economy of Southeast cannot be overemphasized. However, the sit-at-home order has to a large extent impacted negatively the flow of FDI to the region. According to the US Department of State (2020), the problem of insecurity threatens investors' resolve to make investment decisions in Nigeria. The restriction of movement on Mondays has added to the list of security challenges bedeviling Nigeria as unscrupulous elements utilize sit-at-home days to perpetrate evils such as kidnapping for ransom, violent conducts of different magnitudes and terrorism attacks on anyone who fall prey of the order. FDI is attracted to business environments devoid of low confidence and alarming rate of uncertainties, hence the sit-at-home order is not a promoter of FDI in the eastern region of the country (Vaskov, Pienknagura, and Ricci, 2021). This assertion implies that, the sit-at home order stifles FDI, causes stigma to businesses and tourism in the region as no foreign or even local investor would want to invest their resources in business environments where there is crisis. A careful examination of myriads of outcomes and tensions associated with the sit-at-home orders, foreign investors would undoubtedly be afraid to invest in such volatile business environment.

According to the Archbishop of Enugu Ecclesiastical Province Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Emmanuel Chukwuma, the shutting down of the Southeast region this time would destroy their economy and impoverish the Igbo. He calls on all pro-Biafra groups to have a rethink on the continued lockdown, since it will further impoverish the people, who are mostly traders, and create more hunger in the land. According to him, Igbos in the Southeast "just struggle each day to make a living and have something to put bread on their tables. The move will be unfair to us, Ndigbo, who are engaged in various businesses. If carried out, it is wrong since when you are locking up your zone or region, other zones will be engaging in their businesses and daily human activities meant for their growth and progress. It is a way of destroying the economies of our brothers. We must be very careful about the way we are going about it (Ezewudo,Ukwuoma,and Uroko, 2022).

The order has also affected the education sector as the sit-at-home order have prevented the children in the region from participating in the National Examinations Council (NECO) for junior secondary schools. In some of the Southeastern states, students have been made to stay indoors and skip school on Mondays due to the Monday sit-at-home order, which is fully effective in Enugu, Anambra, Abia, and Imo. As a result, some schools in this

region have compelled their teachers and students to come to work on Saturdays for academic lessons, thereby depriving students and teachers of their rest day and attending other activities usually undertaken on Saturday. Speaking on the academic implications of the sit at home order, Kanunta Kanu, the younger brother of the leader of IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu said that IPOB realized the academic deprivation the already marginalized Biafra students would suffer adding that it would amount to assisting enemies of Biafra to inflict more injuries on her children (Ujumadu, Nwaiwu, Alaribe, Alozie and Okonkwo, 2021). In Nsukka, the vicinity of the prestigious University of Nigeria, there are usually few vehicle movements on Mondays and any other day that IPOB declares as sit-at-home. The shuttle buses are usually not found operating on the days of sit-at-home out of fear that mayhem may occur. Again, the world watched a video of unknown gunmen shooting sporadically, chasing students of Comprehensive School, Nkume in the Njaba local government area of Imo State and invigilators out of the examination hall and even destroying part of the school building (Uzoari 2021). All these affect the school system and academic calendar academic institutions from primary to tertiary level.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The sit-at-home order in Southeast has had devastating economic effects for the region. The order which was intended to compel the release of IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, has resulted in significant losses in the various sectors of the economy, including commerce, industry, transport, education and agriculture. The region economy which was before the sit-at-home order was struggling due to years of neglect an underinvestment by the successive governments. The sit-at home order has further weakened the economy of the region. The order has also impacted negatively on the livelihoods of inhabitants of the region which further exacerbate poverty and inequality in the region. Efforts must therefore be put in place to mitigate the challenges posed by the sit-at-home order in the region. The paper therefore recommended that;

- The federal government and critical stockholders from the region should engage in genuine dialogue and negotiation towards addressing underlying factors that triggered sit-at-home order in the region.
- The Nigerian government should consider and release IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kalu as a measure to end the sit-at-home order as well as restore peace in the region
- Government at all levels should implement policies and programs towards economic empowerment of the young Igbo people through entrepreneurships, access to credit facility and infrastructural development.
- The 3R policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction should be revived and properly implemented as a reassurance strategy to stop the agitation in the region.
- The federal government should also address the perceived marginalization of the Igbo people by enduring equal representation and opportunities in all sectors of Nigeria economy. This may also include creation of additional state for the region to complete 6 states like other regions of the country.

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