

Policyweekly

Ending the Sit-At-Home Menace

Pragmatic Solutions to South-East Nigeria's Crisis



Policy Recommendations

- 1 South-East governors must see the security challenge in the region as primarily their problem.
- 2 There should be an immediate move to organise town hall meetings from village to community levels in the rural areas and from streets to ward levels in the urban areas leading to local government and state-level engagements.
- 3 For a realistic solution to the sit-at-home and its attendant challenges in the South East, any group moderating the peace process must engage meaningfully with the IPOB.
- 4 Religious leaders should be integrated into exploring the best option for exiting the tension and lobbying for its implementation.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) had declared [that every Monday, beginning from 9th August 2021](#), would be a compulsory sit-at-home in the entire South-East of Nigeria as a way of protesting the detention and trial of the group's leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, by the Federal government. With a combination of simmering discontent in the South-East and violent enforcement by some persons claiming to act on behalf of IPOB, the 'ghost town' approach in resistance received massive compliance. Were it not for an eleventh-hour [withdrawal of a planned week-long sit-at-home](#), and the Anambra State 2021 governorship election may have been successfully boycotted. Besides, economic activities are grounded every Monday in the South-East and other days that the IPOB leader has a court hearing. In some weeks, South-Easterners spend three to four days at home, under the guise of one sit-at-home situation or the other.

Economic analysis reveals that each day of total shutdown of the South East [Anambra State alone loses ₦19.6 billion or \\$47.70 million. In comparison, Ebonyi State is said to lose ₦10 billion or \\$23.34 million.](#) Overall, there have been thirty-one Mondays to date since 9th August 2021. Besides, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu has had court hearings on other days besides Mondays. Thus, the number of such shutdowns in the region would be at least 33 days. Using the estimates above, Anambra would have lost ₦646.8 billion while Ebonyi State lost ₦330 billion. Similar losses in person-hours affect the educational sector in fundamental ways. Schools open for learning for only four days of the week with an obvious possibility of gaps in curriculum coverage, very likely limited preparedness for standardised examinations and even general learning outcomes. Federal and state public service institutions are equally rendered inoperative on such days.

The above development is troubling because people who are willing to return to normal activities in the South-East fear for their safety as persons who purport to implement the sit-at-home attack or rob those who have tried to engage in economic activities on such days. This development increases anxiety and social stress in the region, and their deeply felt disappointment with governance in the country. Moreover, the hardship engendered by every Monday's sit-at-home resistance is threatening livelihoods and safety. Above all, during the sit-at-home days, state security outfits are largely absent from the various places of economic and administrative activities in a manner reassuring enough to encourage people to return to everyday lives. Hence, in this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly, we discuss the problems occasioned by the imposed sit-at-home protest by IPOB agitators and explore possible exit strategies.

Discordant voices, deepening confusion

The sit-at-home order that IPOB, issued to protest the detention of Nnamdi Kanu was later on 19th August 2021, revised from a weekly sit-at-home protest to a show of solidarity with the IPOB leader any day that he would have a court appearance. By this pronouncement, [IPOB abolished](#) weekly sit-at-home on Mondays. Their rationale for the revision is that they do not wish to hurt the same people they purport to be working to liberate. Nonetheless, a particular group persists in the enforcement of the sit-at-home order. Despite warnings by the IPOB that they [would deal with](#) the enforcers whom they deny are not of the IPOB, the enforcing group continue to forcefully keep people at home with threats and violence issued through social media outlets. In some instances, outright robbery is visited on shops that open on a sit-at-home day.

IPOB leadership's denial about the enforcement of the sit-at-home does not persuade security authorities who accuse IPOB of engaging in deception with the contradictions. These discordant positions and how things play out in the South-East prompt us to make three propositions regarding the persisting sit-at-home order. The first is that IPOB engages in deception by openly denying sit-at-home while its members continue to enforce it. The second one is that IPOB membership has moderates who stand to revise their approach to resistance in favour of an end to Monday sit-at-home and extremists who insist on the ghost town strategy of resistance. The third proposition is that there is probably an organisation that appropriates on the shadow of IPOB to engage in nefarious activities to attract mass opprobrium for IPOB in the South-East. Whichever is the case, the current security situation in the South-East revolves around the internal dynamics of IPOB.

Related to the conjectures above is a curious matter that on declared sit-at-home days, security men like the police, members of the Civil Defence Corps and soldiers are either not available on the road or lack a level of presence, sufficient in number to deter any group that may embark on or have the intent to breach public security. This near-total absence of security forces, together with the discordant voices from IPOB, leaves the South-East population in confusion about whether or not to resume economic activities. Indeed, a little effort at reverting to normalcy in [Enugu](#) on January 2022 was thwarted by pockets of resistible mayhem by enforcers of sit at home. Due to the January 2022 mayhem, people recoiled into their private spaces and left room for a free reign to lawlessness. Thus, the reason people do not go to their everyday businesses on Mondays is not for the sake of any commitment to secession or a wish to sacrifice their daily income in a show of solidarity. Instead, it is for fear of being harmed. Essentially, power has been taken away from both the Federal and State governments in the South-East because citizens prefer to comply with illegitimate orders to stay at home. The government's silence or inadequate response to the matter may tempt a suspicion of either lack of capacity to deal with the situation, resulting in state failure or complicity.

Ending the lawless order and returning to normalcy

There are no quick fixes to the South-East security challenges as we explore a solution, especially those related to separatism. Such a crisis links up with the region's deeply felt sense of exclusion, increasing by the day. On that note, any solution that is not built on the people and based on the synergy of society-federal-state government collaboration is unlikely to

work. However, linking these categories of stakeholders also bears substantial effort. In the search for the return of peace to the South East, the following steps are recommended:

1. South-East governors must see the security challenge in the region as primarily their problem. Therefore, they should adopt a dynamic but quiet approach to solving the problem. Since people do not quickly speak out on matters related to security, the government should collaborate with a firm of security experts to research what the people feel is the best way to restore normalcy in the region. The [previous attempts](#) by the governors of the region at stopping the sit-at-home were hinged more on kinetic solutions, and they have failed. It needs more than applying military solutions.
2. The critical stakeholders that would be important in this restoration are market leaders, president generals of town unions, the leadership of urban communities, women groups, youth groups, street associations, among others. There should be an immediate move to organise town hall meetings from village to community levels in the rural areas and from streets to ward levels in the urban areas leading to local government and state-level engagements. Oliver Kaplan (2018) argued that communities that experience the war between the state and non-state armed groups around them could deploy cohesion social structures to other non-violent means to influence armed groups operating in their domain.
3. For a realistic solution to the sit-at-home and its attendant challenges in the South East, any group moderating the peace process must engage meaningfully with the IPOB. Ignoring them would only yield a temporary scaffold as peace. This is important since IPOB is in denial of supporting the sit-at-home. This becomes a form of rebel social service provisioning, which according to Heger and Jung (2017), it leads to a successful negotiation and peace talk.
4. The effect of religious tenets is similar to ideological ones. In the South East, churches are important centres of community mobilisation. Therefore, religious leaders

should be integrated into exploring the best option for exiting the tension and lobbying for its implementation.

Conclusion

The South East of Nigeria, once known to be the most peaceful part of Nigeria, has been boiling like a cauldron since the arrest and detention of the leader of IPOB. The resort to leaving the entire public space empty every Monday adopted in protest is manifestly counterproductive. It hurts the economy of the region as well as other regions they transact with. Also, there has been a persisting build-up of violence that seemingly overwhelms state institutions. Apart from the civil war of the late 1960s, life in the South East has never been as nasty and brutish in a manner that invites urgent policy attention as now.

Reference

Kaplan, Oliver (2018) *Resisting War: How Communities Protect themselves*. Cambridge University Press.

Heger, L and Jung, D (2017) 'Negotiating with Rebels: The Effect of Rebel Service Provision on Conflict Negotiations' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, volume: 61 issue: 6, page(s): 1203-1229.

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Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

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Weekly Update

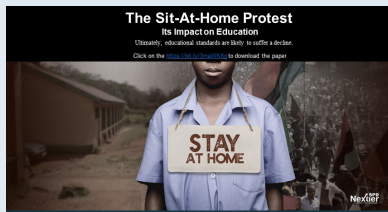


Wed, 16th March 2022
@6:00pm - 7:45pm
Thought Pyramid Art Centre,
18 Libreville Crescent, Wuse II,
Abuja

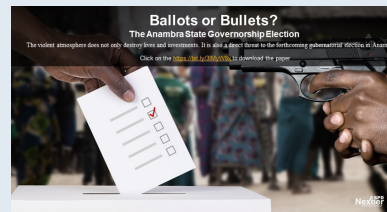
Towards a Decentralised Electricity Market – The Lagos State Electricity Policy



Nextier Sample Publications



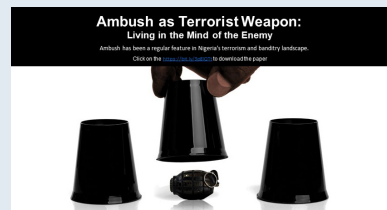
**The Sit-at-home Protest:
Its Impact on Education**
Ultimately, educational standards are likely to suffer a decline.



Ballots or Bullets?
The Anambra State Governorship Election
The violent atmosphere does not only destroy lives and investments. It is also a direct threat to the forthcoming gubernatorial election in Anambra state.



Reviving Cattle Grazing Routes
What are the conflict Potentials?
There are several issues President Buhari did not reckon with regarding the planned restoration of the grazing routes.



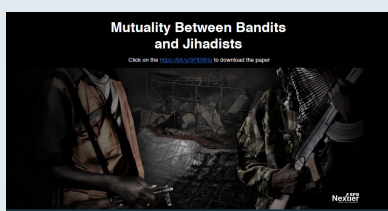
**Ambush as Terrorist Weapon:
Living in the Mind of the Enemy**
Ambush has been a regular feature in Nigeria's terrorism and banditry landscape.



Threats, Fears and Securitised Ballots
The Concluded Governorship Election in Anambra State
Three important spin-offs from the tensions generated before the election include fear, pervasive securitisation, and voter turnout effects.



**Where Vultures Continue to Feast:
Oil Spills and the Niger Delta Region**
The recurrent oil spill has been a significant hallmark in the Nigerian oil and gas sector in the last five decades.



Mutuality between Bandits and Jihadists
The insurgency waged by Boko Haram and its breakaway factions has ravaged much of the Lake Chad Basin for over a decade.



Counting the Costs of Violent Conflicts:
Examining Nigeria's South-East Region (Part 1)
The Federal government's resolve to quell self-determination struggles and separatist agitations has led to the deployment of brutal force.