Abstract
This paper is an exploratory reconnaissance on the sit-at-home order, its related issues, experiences and inherent challenges on the people of southeast, Nigeria. The sit-at-home commandment borne out of the separationist agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), foists enormous fear and anxiety that keep some people indoors and others minimally mobile, and undermines life activities in the region. This two year old precarious Mondays sit-at-home issue, kidnappings, farmers/herdsmen clashes and other forms of criminality with their attendant fatal violence and conflicts constitute sources of severe psycho-social, political and economic challenges to the southeast inhabitants. This paper dwells on the issues surrounding the political and economic effects and implications of this non-state order on the security and economy of the southeast and national development. It interrogates the divergent and critical ramifications of the sit-at-home imbroglio, its potentials as precursor of self-inflicted economic setback within the historical context of marginalization and obscurity of a people characteristic of age long industrial enterprise. Moreover, good governance sensitive to the plights and interests of the southeasterners (Ndigbo), set-up of effective community based vigilante groups to counter the order, town-hall meetings for mass orientation on ills of the order were advocated as measures out of this national development crisis.

Keywords: Political, Social, Economic, Sit-At-Home, Development, Crisis.
INTRODUCTION

The southeastern part of Nigeria has been under terrorism in terms of security, and this situation continues to worsen as the country prepares for another general elections in 2023. The anarchic atmosphere of the southeast is further exacerbated by the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and other somewhat clandestine and nefarious groups and organizations that seem to terrorize people in different life threatening manners. The popular “unknown gunmen” who often dress in black and the various government law enforcement agencies as well as the Eastern Security Network (ESN) and Ebubeagu Security Outfit formed by southeast states’ government are all involved in continued attacks and counter attacks, reprisal games and crossfires that have left the southeast a shadow of its former self (The Leader, 2022). It is believed that IPOB placed the sit-at-home order sometime in early 2020, and directed that people stay indoors on Mondays or get killed throughout the entire southeast region (Igboland). From the moment this unusual order took effect people try as much as possible to stay indoors with only minimal intra and intercity movements for the past two years. This development has crippled social, political and economic activities in the southeast, and has also created enormous fear (if not phobia), anxiety, panic and a general state of uncertainty in the region. This situation seems to adversely and tremendously affect the day-to-day life of the people. The sit-at-home order has made people to become extremely careful about their movements not only on Mondays but even on other days of the week.

It is known that this order was announced by the IPOB as way of galvanizing support, awareness and solidarity for the secessionist agenda of the Igbo as a means to disrupt the southeastern part of Nigeria; and also to put some pressure on the federal government to consider its political demands (Anyanwu, 2022). IPOB in its agitations over perceived marginalization, subjugation and social injustices against the Igbo, has sort of declared offence against the federal government and its agencies. This is what led to the present precarious situation in the southeast. Most parts of the zone, if not its entire area, witness incessant attacks and killings, as well as frequent crossfires between government security agencies and unknown gunmen that have continued to hamper the peace of various communities; making innocent citizens to live in fear in recent times (The Leader, 2022). The crisis of violence in the southeast cuts across the five main states of the region, including Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Abia. It is not only affected by the activities of law-enforcement agencies, IPOB, ESN, Ebubeagu outfit and the infamous unknown gunmen but also the herdsmen/farmers clashes that have affected many rural communities. Also, attributing to this anxious and deadly situation is the spate of kidnappings, armed robbery, extortion and other forms of criminality. For instance, the Orlu Community in Imo State has been one of the most violent attacked and warred community in the entire country for over two years due to unending clashes between government security forces and different criminals/unknown gunmen who are suspected groups out to make the southeast inhabitable and chaotic for different interests. Ukwuoma (2022) cited in The Leader (2022) observes that the continued killings and wanton destruction of lives and properties despite numerous interventions, including prayers to find lasting solutions and restoration of peace to the painful condition that has engulfed Imo State, especially Orlu and its environs, yet the violence has continued unabated.

In as much as this order is believed to have originated from political outcry and agitations, it seemingly appears to be inflicting severe social and economic crunch and pain on most southeasterners especially those engaged in mobile businesses who now fear to travel freely. This raises the questions: Is this a political sit-at-home or an economic sit-at-home, and to what extent does the two scenario hamper the growth and development of the southeast and Nigeria economy as it were? Observably, the sit-at-home syndrome is a multi-dimensional crisis that obviously has different impacts and implications on the people, business and life activities in the southeast. This is giving rise to many untold issues that are evidently affecting the peaceful coexistence of people in many ramifications. Issues undermining southeast and national socio-political and economic development. This paper, therefore, aims at looking at the political and economic effects and implications of the sit-at-home commandment and its structure as a major crisis (development crisis) in the country. It seeks to unravel the political and economic nature of the order and the extent it poses serious security challenges to the people of the southeast and the nation. The paper employs logical argumentation and theoretical framework to expound its discuss; and also proffers short-term and long-term measures for individuals, communities, institutions, organizations and government to put an end to this catastrophic social malaise in the southeast, Nigeria.

SIT-AT-HOME SITUATION IN THE SOUTH-EAST: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Whichever way the issue of the sit-at-home order is perceived or examined, it is a regional-based issue that has critical national implications, and therefore a Nigerian problem. Like its equivalent crises such as the terrorism and banditry in the North, it is a worrisome and unhealthy development. They all constitute serious security threat and sources of unrest, devastation and underdevelopment. The sit-at-home order has for two years made the southeastern part of Nigeria look like a lawless and warring zone with no clear signs of hope or assurances of a peaceful resolution of its causal issues (Anyawu, 2022). Within the scope of this paper, we find the Marxist Conflict Theory invaluable not only in terms of its analytical strength and utility in explaining and predicting cause-effect of the sit-at-home crisis and the systemic inequity and injustice that characterize the Nigerian society. It also adds to illuminate the surrounding issues of the sit-at-home order and other concomitant criminal activities creating miserable living in the southeast and Nigeria as a whole. Marxist Conflict Theory provides more concrete insight and appreciation of the plight of the people and dwellers of the southeast and the imperative for amicable resolution of the causal issues of the sit-at-home situation in order to foster the development of the area as well as national development in Nigeria.
The Marxist Conflict Theory is a central sociological theory which emphasizes a materialistic interpretation of history, a dialectical method of analysis; a critical stance towards existing social arrangements and political programme of revolution or at least, reform (Ritzer, 1996). As a theoretical paradigm, it offers an alternative explanation to functionalism. It asserts that society is characterized by flux and change, and not by stability and inertia. It sees change as an orderly observable process in men's relationships with the economic order. The theory places emphasis on social change, and claims that most societies are experiencing dynamic changes, because they are in a state of conflict. It asserts that members of most societies have a conflict of interest. Therefore, Marxist Conflict perspective maintains that the basic condition of social life is dissension, which is brought about through the struggle and competition for power and advantages arising from hegemonic group positions (Iwarimie-Jaja, 2001). Marxist theory with its historical context and approach dutifully helps to interrogate and explain the observable issues that contributed to the emergence and growth of secessionist groups and their agitations over two or more decades without any meaningful and coordinated strategies to avert these issues. There have been a number of issues before and after the civil war that gave rise to many ethnic minorities and some of the large ethnic groups to feel nostalgic and unfairly treated within Nigeria. Issues of failed Federal character system, social injustice, inequity, lack of rule of law, marginalization and more explosively, that of the fear of domination and manipulation of other ethnic groups by one ethnic group or the other (Okafor, 2014). The sit-at-home issue portrays a clear case of severe tension and conflict emanating from dissension by a group fighting for the interests of their people in a nation. This dissension is perceived to be caused by prolonged feeling of marginalization, domination and exploitation of the people of southeast by successive governments in Nigeria. Although, the sit-at-home order is illegal since it was given by a proscribed organization (non-state actor), the continued adherence to it due to fear of conflicts are evidence that the causal factors must be addressed urgently and in line with fairness and justice for the immediate and future stability and development of not only the southeast but Nigeria at large.

CONCISE REFLECTIONS ON PRE SIT-AT-HOME STATUS OF SOUTHEAST ECONOMY

A cursory look at Southeast pre-sit-at-home status in terms of socio-economic and political development cannot be logical without dating back to the unfortunate civil war in Nigeria. The civil war experience was a big setback to southeast development. Toni-Duruku and Chukwu (2012) disclose that the civil war, which the Igbo people prosecuted and lost, came on the heels of an end to the colonial experiences, this dealing a double blow on the psyche of a people who were still battling to recover from the dislocation of values attendant to war situations. At the end of the Nigerian Civil War, the Igbo people lost cohesion, there was virtually no need to retain an identity which had been eroded by the war and which had become a barrier rather than a tool for survival. One of the aftermaths of the war was that their homes and landed properties in Rivers State were declared abandoned and confiscated by the natives of the various towns that make up this state. The struggle for reintegration led to mass exodus from Igbo environment (Southeast, Nigeria).

More devastating was the human losses of the civil war, Igbos died in millions and many families were disorganized and in some cases completely wiped out. There was severe economic destruction that eroded Igbo mercantile establishments and businesses that were, prior to the war, sustaining southeast regional economy and contributing to national development; and with a population of over 22 million people and around 10% of the total population of the country, southeast Nigeria constitutes a major population with immense capacities in the Nigerian economy (Ekeopara, 2016). As one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, the southeast that is made of the Igbo who are known for their industrious and enterprising nature has continued to play significant roles in the economic development of the country. Onyenechere and Osuji (2012) observed that “South eastern Nigerian people regard every part of the federation as home and invest heavily in all parts of Nigeria, whether urban or rural”. This statement underscores the incontrovertible fact that the Igbos through their ingenuity, industry and adventurous business acumen and nature has, and is still, contributing immensely to national economic growth and development. This is against the backdrop of Igbos assertion that they are being marginalized, subjugated and dominated by the major ethnic groups, in the affairs of the nation.

Although Gowon’s government after the civil war up to the military regimes of General Murtala Mohammed and others, to the inception of democratic rule in May 1999, Igbos exploit in palm oil business, trade and commerce, mercantile endeavours, entrepreneurship capacities and industrious appeal has been quite up and rising to the extent of adding concrete value to national economic expansion and development (Okoroafor, 2018). The Igbos are known for their age long characteristic industry that is not only respected in Nigeria but even beyond Africa. However, from the era of 1999 democratic governance in Nigeria, the southeast has gradually changed in terms of its business and social life atmosphere due to a number of dynamic issues and happenings, particularly in the area of security of life and property. By 2010, a number of entrepreneurs have been gruesomely murdered, and Imo and Anambra are among the states of south eastern Nigeria that top the list of violent crimes in the entire Nigeria according to statistics from Police Headquarters at Abuja (Anaba, 2010). Between 2010 and 2022 has been more than a decade of incessant and rising violence ranging from the tension and conflicts associated with IPOB’s sit-at-home issue, kidnappings, armed robbery, and other forms of criminality that seem unending. This situation has left the southeast a shadow of its former self, with so much fear, anxiety and attendant socio-economic and political challenges.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS IT POLITICAL SIT-AT-HOME OR SOCIO-ECONOMIC SIT-AT-HOME, AND HOW?
The sit-at-home situation is entirely a new phenomenon in Igbo society and by extension Nigeria as a whole. It is not on clear record anywhere that there has been such an order for people to stay indoors on a particular day or a number of
The sit-at-home order is political to the extent that it was set off as a result of IPOB agitations and confrontations against the federal government of Nigeria. For an order enforcing residents of southeast communities to sit-at-home to be in place in Nigeria that is a sovereign state and federal system, in which such authority can only come from the Presidency is a political issue (Onyemachi, 2021). All the states and regions of Nigeria are constitutionally under the security, control and administration of the federal government. An order contrary to the expectations of government or one that aims at disobeying or neglecting the powers of the federal government is a political order. The desire of its creators appear to be confrontational, non-state like and secessionist, and therefore embedded in political flavour. To ask the entire people of a region not to come outside and move freely to do their legitimate businesses on a particular day or periodically is to say to the people of that region that they are not under federal control or power but rather under the authority of the sit-at-home order proponents. This is basically why the sit-at home order is generally perceived as a political issue. Many ideas as to what can be achieved through this particular order keep running through the minds, comments, and public opinion of many people in this region; affecting the future expectations and hope of what the region may become. This state of mind and perception further gives credence to its political character and possible political implications over time (The Ambassador, 2022). It is also pertinent to note that the root of the sit-at-home order can be directly traced to the separatist agenda and agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which became more vicious since the group was proscribed in 2017 and its known leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu was declared and treated as a terrorist. It is believed that this is where the audacity to engage the federal government in authority contest emerged. Since the IPOB is an outlawed political organization that is mainly fighting and advocating for freedom of the Igbo's from perceived, and to some extent real persecution, marginalization, exploitation, inequity and unfair treatment within the Nigerian federation; whatever decisions, actions and plans they put up can be attributed to political motivation and design (Okorocha, 2022). If the ultimate aim of IPOB’s activities, including the sit-at-home order is to actualize a new Biafran state, then it is obviously and practically a political affair. Given IPOB’s antecedents and their programmes of pursuits for a united and independent Biafra land, it is credible to observe their actions as a sort of political revolution. To this extent, all of their activities and plans, and particularly the sit-at-home order are politically motivated. However, political or not, the sit-at-home issue is generally a social problem likened to the lockdown era of Covid-19 in 2020; when people were asked to stay indoors and obey various Covid-19 restrictions/protocols including avoiding crowded spaces and maintaining social distance. This can be seen as the first direct impact of the unpopular sit-at-home order. The restriction of people at home out of fear of being attacked and killed outside. This is where its political hemisphere extends into human degradation and socio-economic palaver.

On a more critical and dangerous dimension is the growing economic cost of the sit-at-home order. It is totally nonsensical to ask if it is having significant economic effects or implications on the people and area of southeast, Nigeria. In as much as it is a politically-borne separatist movement initiated order, its economic impact in the last two years can hardly be quantifiable. From the micro-level losses of individuals and families to the macro level colossal losses and damages of properties of organizations, institutions, governments and corporate agencies, the sit-at-home order and its related violent attacks and mayhem have been monumental. Firstly, human lives have been lost in thousands and families have become disorganized with some children becoming orphans (The Leader, 2022). The loss of human capital is the first major economic cost and waste of this perceived obnoxious situation. When a society loses its people as a result of violence, whatever value those individuals would have added to the economy of their own families and that of the society is completely lost forever. This is a huge and irreplaceable loss of human capital and development. And this adds to lower the productivity of the region in a country under severe economic hardship. Again, the sit-at-home practice has now become part of the mainstream culture in the southeast having been on since 2020. For over two years, people are not free to go about their individual businesses and corporate organizations and institutions including government activities and logistics have been at low ebb. People stay indoors and only move around within streets and suburbs even when they need to go far for business interests or social engagements (Ekekwe, 2022). People intentionally avoid long distance travels or journeys for fear of being attacked or killed or having their vehicles burnt to ashes. This situation does not only occur on Mondays but also on days designated and declared through the grapevine or other unconfirmed sources as sit-at-home day/s. This is a worrisome development with severe economic downtown effects. Large scale organizations like Dangote Group of Companies, ABC Transport Ltd, The Young Shall Grow Transports, God Is Good Transports, etc, and other business outfits and firms doing business in the southeast have been made to stay of operation on Mondays or risk deadly attacks and burning of their trucks, buses and vehicles with the goods inside them.

The fear generated by this supposed vicious order cannot be over-emphasized. In fact, it is now no longer fear but extreme phobia, which has crippled inter-city movements and hampered trade, commerce and human interactions significantly. Markets and places of exchange of goods and services have been shut down or attacked as a result of enforcing the sit-at-home order. For example, the burning of Eke Ututu Market in Orsu-Ihite Ukwa Community in Orsu Local Government Area on Saturday, September 7, 2022 borne out of the unrest and military expedition in the area was not only economically devastating but also had loss of human lives. Ibekaeme (2022) quoted in the Leader (2022) laments that we lost everything including our youths, our homes, our heritage and our market. It is with a deep sense of
agony that we gather today to mourn the destruction of our community Orsu-Ihite Ukwa, Orsu L.G.A., in the light of the sustained military attacks, bombing of our communities, killings of defenseless civilians and youths, and devastation of Eke Ututu Market”.

Apart from the above scenario, many other markets and business spaces have been destroyed and arson has been on the increase both on government and individual properties, and agencies including Police Stations, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices, Correctional Centers, etc. All these attacks worsen the economic crunch in the southeast. Many private transporters have been attacked enroute to major cities where people do businesses, including along Owerri-Onitsha route, Aba-Owerri, Enugu-Abakaliki, Owerri-Umua and Okiugwe axis. These routes are the main routes connecting various communities in the southeast and linking them to Lagos and the northern part of the country. The continued manifestations of this inglorious acts of violence including the rising incidences of kidnapping, armed robbery, banditry, etc., undermine socio-economic activities immeasurably. The economic cost of the sit-at-home situation and the state of the southeast is alarming and probably difficult to quantify (Unegbu, 2022). Losses are incurred almost on daily basis by individuals and some companies have closed down or now operate skeletal. Most disturbing is the non-operation of night businesses such as night clubs, restaurants, pubs, cinemas, crusades, and other night socio-economic ventures. The crisis situation in the southeast has totally changed night life to the extent that in some cities and towns, people go to bed as early as 6:00pm because of fear of losing their lives to unknown gunmen or being cut up in a crossfire, or even kidnapped. It is known that some businesses flourish at nights and are more profitable only at nights but the sit-at-home order and its related issues and violence have put an end to the “good old days” night life of most Igbo communities and towns (Okoroafor, 2022).

SIT-AT-HOME IMBROGLIO AS A NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CRISIS IN NIGERIA

The unwholesome nature of the impact of this unwarranted order is most significantly observable, and practically damaging when viewed with an economic lens. Its economic costs and implications are not only far-reaching but a historical passport of recent southeast trajectory in the Nigerian project. Okeke and Aduma (2020) state that “development essentially suggests progress and prosperity and some self-evident transition from conditions of neediness to a state of comparative adequacies. This comparative character of development illustrates the fact that development is not a particular permanent condition”. Development as a concept is the attainment of an ever -shifting but always higher levels of equilibrium between the positive (functional) and negative (dysfunctional) elements within the society and the individual. As a practice and process, development entails simultaneous disrupting and reordering of society to achieve material and non-material abundance, and as a strategy, development aims at restructuring and reinforcing the society to maintain or equilibrate the socio-psychological balance of the individual (Okoli and Onah, 2002). The states of southeast are not in any way currently experiencing real development both in the sense of the socio-psychological balance of individuals (inhabitants) or the economic and political progression of the region. Rather, the situation can best be described as a state of development crisis. It may have started as a political sit-at-home order but obviously has metamorphosed into a profound socio-economic sit-at-home order with its attendant expansive issues, and monumental human and corporate losses.

Moreover, the order can be said to be more economically damaging than political in the sense that not much may have been achieved by its initiators in the course of its prevalence when its aims are investigated. Also, it is on record that the rest of the country, that is the other five regions do not observe the sit-at-home order and Mondays in Abuja are normal working days; and there are no signs of human restrictions or disorder on such days as a result of the order. On this premise, the order is not as active as it is economically, in the political sense. It is not only undermining southeast economy but also affects national productivity, economic growth and development because of the huge economic activities that go on in some major cities of the southeast, particularly Aba, Onitsha, Nnewi and other towns. These three cities are nationally and internationally acclaimed business hubs that prominently contribute to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Nigerian economy (June, 2020). There is no doubt that whereas the sit-at-home order and the crisis situation in southeast are mainly politically induced, they constitute a sort of self-inflicted severe and unfavourable economic setback to the southeast, and national stability and progress. It is simply a clear case of development crisis in a critical region of the nation, and as a matter of fact strangulating southeast economy and limiting its outreach, growth and contributions to national productivity and development in an era of competitive global march towards sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) sit-at-home order came as an unusual order, being a non-state order, and has been a major issue that has been, and it is still, a source of tension, conflicts and deadly disorder with deep psycho-social, economic and political effects and challenges on southeast inhabitants. This situation is further worsened by the alarming rate of mindless kidnappings, armed robbery, arson, farmers/herdsmen clashes and other forms of criminality that are being perpetuated almost on daily basis. The region is now a poor shadow of its former self due to frequent gun battles, attacks and counter attacks, deadly reprisal games between law enforcement agencies, unknown gunmen, kidnappers and other clandestine criminal gangs that terrorize the people of southeast for different interests.

This paper interrogated if this is a political sit-at-home or socio-economic sit-at-home, and elaborated on its potentials as being more of a devastating economic setback than political challenge; but also profoundly a southeast problem with the
impact of a national development crisis. The continuous tension, deadly conflicts and crimes are strangulating the region and limiting the once fast growing, and nationally supportive economy’s capacity for greater outreach and growth that can engender national productivity and development in Nigeria. Moreover, the need for governments rejig of the security architecture to ensure effective law enforcement operations, set up of truth-finding panel to unravel the causes of the agitations and the sit-at-home order, town hall meetings for mass orientation on the ills of the order; good governance, youth empowerment and more importantly, call for immediate ceasefire by all agitators whether IPOB members or other warring groups and the law enforcement agencies for peace and normalcy to return to the southeast (Ala Igbo) were advocated. The purpose for the IPOB agitations is completely eroded if Ndigbo are terrorized and killed in the course.

SOUTHEAST CRISIS AND NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: THE WAY ONWARD

The South-east crisis (sit-at-home order, all its related issues and other criminal activities) have been ongoing for more than 36 months and seems unending with more tension and conflicts arising by the day. In order to put an end to this regional predicament that has profound implications in social, political, economic and national ramifications, the following are some effective strategies and measures:

- Governments (both federal and states) particularly in the southeast must rejig the security system or architecture in the region. Take a critical look at the operations of all law-enforcement agencies, including the Army, Police, Navy, Nigerian Civil Defence Corps, etc. All military operations must be restructured, re-organized and reformed in order to ensure that they carry out their law enforcement duty with diligence, care, respect for fundamental human rights, and most importantly within the limits of their rules of engagement and the constitution of the country. They must desist from wanton and reckless use of firearms and always apply caution and respect for human life.
- The federal government should immediately form an unbiased and truth-seeking panel consisting of detribalized and honourable individuals to critically explore all issues related to the perceived grievances, marginalization, deprivation, inequity, social injustice and undue treatment of the people of the southeast, and make clear-cut, well-articulated and factual recommendations for immediate and long term resolution and return of peace and tranquility in the south-east region.
- Wide consultations and townhall meetings with open and direct interactions with opinion leaders, women leaders, youth organizations, age grades, religious organizations, market women associations and community-based vigilantes should be employed for the sensitization of people on the ills of perpetuating violence. People should be encouraged to be extra security conscious, and collaborate with the law-enforcement agencies by reporting suspicious activities or individuals and being brothers’ keepers.
- The federal and state governments in the south-east must endeavor to deliver good governance in real terms. Ensure improved infrastructures such as good roads, electricity, schools, healthcare, etc., and work with the law enforcement agencies to curtail or eradicate the menace of kidnapping, armed robbery and other forms of criminality that have made life in the southeast difficult and anxious.
- Most of the perpetrators of criminal acts such as kidnapping, advance fee fraud (a.k.a 419), cybercrimes, armed robbery, theft, extortion, arson, etc., are youths who are unemployed and idle. Government must intensify efforts towards community-based skills acquisition, training on entrepreneurship and capacity building that will engage the youths and redirect their time and energy to more resourceful ventures for their own good and that of national economy.
- All separationist agitators must immediately desist from taking up arms against the state because the whole situation is destroying the socio-economic and political future of the same people they are, or claiming to be, fighting for their interests. It is against the law of the nation, and therefore they should tow the line of peace by seeking for legitimate means of resolving issues and making their grievances, rights and expectations known for better and amicable settlement. This should be the focus of the agitators fighting and seeking for equity, fairness and social justice for southeasterners (Ndigbo) in Nigeria.
- The traditional rulers, community managers and opinion leaders must as a matter of exigency be more committed and selfless in dealing with security related issues. There is need for the traditional council (Ndi Ichie, Priests, herbalists and other local affair influencers) to be more effective in leaving no room for any form of criminality in their domain.

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