Title: Undead Past: What Drives Support for the Secessionist Goal of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Nigeria?

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of ethnic marginalization and socioeconomic condition on support for secession among members of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria's Eastern Region. Perceived ethnic marginalization at the group level was found to positively correlate with support for secession. Socioeconomic condition was measured at the individual, household, and communal levels. The individual and household measures had no effect on support for secession, but the communal measure did. However, the results contravened the prediction of the Horizontal Inequalities (HIs) theory: improvements in socioeconomic condition at the communal level rather increased the likelihood of supporting secession. The analysis also showed that compared to non-Igbos, members of the Igbo ethnic group were 11 percent more likely to choose the "strongly agree" response category when asked whether Nigeria's Eastern Region should be allowed to secede.

Keywords: *Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, Secession, Horizontal inequalities, Ethnic marginalization, Nigeria*

JEL classification: D74, J15

1.0. Introduction

Since Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999, it has contended with various groups agitating for the independence of the predominantly Igbo Eastern Region to form the Republic of Biafra. This sentiment is tied to the defunct Republic of Biafra, which was in existence from May 30, 1967 to January 15, 1970. The secession of the Eastern Region from Nigeria marked the beginning of the Nigerian Civil War, which is also known as the Biafra War. The collapse of Biafra and its subsequent reincorporation into Nigeria marked the end of the war. Pro-Biafra agitations have largely centered on the topic of marginalization faced by members of the Igbo ethnic group in post-war Nigeria. Although secession had been contemplated by the predominantly Hausa/Fulani Northern Region and the predominantly Yoruba Western Region prior to the Biafra War, these considerations never morphed into action (Imuetinyan, 2017, 216; Orobator, 1987). The Igbos were the first to challenge the entity called "Nigeria" by both words and action. Despite losing the war and being reintegrated into Nigeria, Achebe (1983, 50) warned that unless all Nigerians (especially the Igbo) were treated fairly, the polity risked retrogression and instability.

Two prominent pro-Biafra groups are the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which was established in 1999 (Okonta, 2018, 361), and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement, a splinter group of MASSOB, which was established in 2014 (BBC, 2017). Although both groups are still in existence, MASSOB has diminished in prominence compared to IPOB. IPOB was created to rejuvenate the drive for secession when the head of MASSOB, Ralph Uwazurike, was thought to have compromised in his commitment to the goals of the movement (Adangor, 2018, 144).

The Nigerian government has been resolute in its commitment to keep the country united and has often employed brute force through its security agencies to quell pro-Biafra agitations (Amnesty International, 2016, 2021). Nigeria's former President, Muhammadu Buhari, who was in office from 2015 to 2023, and who had fought on the side of the Nigeran military during the Biafra War, proscribed IPOB as a terrorist organization in 2017 (Ogbonna, 2017; Ezea and Olaniyi, 2017), a move that Adangor (2018) strongly criticized for its politicization of the fight against terrorism. The leader of IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu, is currently in the custody of Nigeran authorities and has been charged with treasonable felony (Jalloh, 2021, The Cable, 2021). This is not the first time he has been arrested on such charges. He was first arrested in 2015 and released on bail after two years of incarceration. The conditions of his release prohibited him from granting interviews, participating in rallies, and being in gatherings of over ten people (Richards, 2017), conditions he flouted when he fled the country shortly after his release and continued his campaign from abroad (Ojoye, 2017; Nasiru, 2018). His lawyers and IPOB, on the other hand, contend that he did not defy his bail conditions, but was rather compelled to flee the country because his life was under threat (Nwachukwu, 2021; Yusuf, 2021; The Cable, 2017).

IPOB's first objective, as stated on its official website, centers on discrimination: "To promote human rights advocacy and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples in all parts of the

world who are facing persecution and discrimination."[1] The relationship between the various ethnic groups in post-colonial Nigeria, especially the major three (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo) has been very competitive, and to some degree adversarial. The overlap between ethnicity and religion adds another layer of complexity to the mix. The Igbos are predominantly Christian, the Hausa/Fulani are predominantly Muslim, while both religions are almost equally represented among the Yoruba (Laitin, 1986, 8). After six decades of independence, the goal of national integration continues to elude Nigeria. Commenting on the prominence of ethnic cleavages after Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule, Falola and Heaton (2008, 159) observed: "when Nigeria became an independent sovereign state in 1960, in many ways it was a state without a nation." In his little book entitled, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, Achebe (1983, 5) pointed out that "Nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more geographically than the chequered fortune of the word tribe in her vocabulary." Whenever the topic of marginalization is mentioned in Nigerian public discourse, it often pertains to the Igbos and their relationship with the other two major ethnic groups (Adewole, 2021; Ede, 2021; Njoku, 2019). Ikepeze (2000, 90) observed: "As a people the Igbo have been systematically disempowered politically, economically, militarily and socially by the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba groups."

Although the state of Biafra ceased to exist in 1970, its memory persists in the minds of many, including those who were born after the war. Despite the government's heavy-handed approach in suppressing IPOB's activities, it has remained active and its ideology has kept spreading. The government's fixation on the group has enhanced its popularity and turned its leader, Nnamdi Kanu, into a "cult hero" (Maiangwa, 2021). Emphasizing the futility of the forceful approach adopted by the Nigerian government, Idachaba and Nneli (2018, 56) observed that it "only strengthens ethno-nationalist movements, radicalize some of her members and attract public sympathy to such groups."

[1] https://www.ipobgovernment.org/our-mission/

Many Igbos migrate from their Eastern homeland to other regions within Nigeria. Such movement is driven by their competitive, individualistic, and entrepreneurial nature, which enables them to perceive and take advantage of opportunities (Ede et al., 2021; Nnadozie, 2002; Coleman, 1958, 333). Also, the infertility of the land in Eastern Nigeria, which makes it unsuitable for agricultural purpose, coupled with its scarcity and a high population density, further drives emigration from the region (Achebe, 2012, 74-75; Ikpeze, 2000, 105-106; Coleman, 1958, 332). Given such interregional dependence, not every member of the Igbo ethnic group would support the secession of the Eastern Region from Nigeria. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

I. What is the effect of perceived ethnic marginalization at the group level on support for secession among members of Igbo ethnic group?
II. What is the effect of socioeconomic condition on support for secession among Igbos?
III. Does belonging to the Igbo ethnic group increase the likelihood of supporting secession?

The third question will be answered using representative survey data for Nigeria, since the reference category comprises of Nigerians who do not belong to the Igbo ethnic group. The former two questions will be answered using the subsample of respondents who belong to the Igbo ethnic group. Much research has been done on the demand for secession by pro-Biafra groups, but most of them are qualitative. The few that use quantitative data employ it descriptively (Idachaba and Nneli, 2018; Obi-Ani, Nzubechi, and Obi-Ani, 2019; Chiluwa, 2018). Furthermore, these studies tend to focus on the leadership of the movements and the response of the Nigerian government, while paying scant attention to the perceptions of the larger Nigerian population. To the best of my knowledge, no study has empirically examined the factors influencing support for IPOB's secessionist goal using representative data for Nigeria and econometric techniques, a gap this study seeks to fill. This study contributes to the broader literature on the determinants of secession, especially those with an empirical focus (e.g. Cunningham and Sawyer, 2017; Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe, 2007; Cunningham, 2013).

This study proceeds as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of the relationship between Nigeria's three major ethnic groups from the 1950s up to 1970 when the Biafra War ended. Section 3 discusses the literature on inter-group conflict. Section 4 discusses the trend of Biafra-related conflicts in Nigeria. Section 5 operationalizes the variables that will be used to estimate the regression model and specifies the general form of the model to be estimated. Section 6 presents the regression results and discusses them, while section 7 summarizes the paper and concludes.

2.0. Ethnic competition and the Biafra War

Nigeria, like most African countries, plummeted into civil war after gaining independence from colonial rule. Nigeria was created by the British when they merged the Northern and Southern protectorates, previously distinct entities administered by the British, on January 1, 1914. The amalgamation report written by Sir. Frederick Lugard, the first Governor-General of Nigeria, shows that the merger was driven by financial expediency and administrative convenience, with little consideration for the cultural differences between the peoples who were brought together (Lugard, 1919, 7-8).

Despite the amalgamation, the British continued administering the Northern and Southern Regions differently. In the Northern Region, which was an Islamic caliphate until its capture in 1903, the British did not change much when they took over. They appropriated the existing institutions and even employed the local Hausa language for administrative purposes. This contrasts with the Southern Region where English was adopted as the administrative language, and the strategies of Westernization and Christianization were pursued ardently (Coleman, 1958, 46-47). The division of the Southern Region into the Eastern and Western Regions in 1939 entrenched ethnic consciousness in the minds of Nigerians. This is because the three administrative divisions were closely associated with each of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups: The Northern Region was dominated by the Hausa/Fulani, while the Eastern and Western Regions were dominated by the Igbo and Yoruba respectively (Ake, 1993, 3; Imuetinyan, 2017, 208-209). This put the minority

ethnic groups in the uncomfortable position of having to fit into the mold of the dominant ethnic group in the regions where they resided (Achebe, 2012, 47).

The heterogenous peoples who constitute Nigeria were able to transcend their differences to confront a common foe – European rule, but then turned against each other after the goal of independence had been achieved. This explains why Geertz (1973, 237) asserted that "removing European rule has liberated the nationalisms within nationalisms." Coleman (1958, 45) observed that "the greatest contribution the British have made to Nigerian unity is the pacification of the country, the establishment of central police forces, and the maintenance of a minimum standard of justice", which points to the fact that precolonial Nigeria was not a haven of stability where the various tribes lived in harmony. Having established their dominance over the colony through brute force and demonstrated their willingness to employ violence in quelling dissent, the British created a superficial semblance of stability within the colony (Falola, 2009, 1-25). In the middle of the twentieth century when Nigeria began taking bold strides towards independence, the ethnic cleavages between the various ethnic groups that had been lurking beneath the surface became more prominent.

Besides the adversarial relationship between Nigeria's three major ethnic groups, the smaller ethnic groups also feared domination from the larger ones (Nigeria comprises of 250 ethnic groups). As the period of independence drew nearer, the minority ethnic groups became apprehensive about their status under the majority ethnic groups in post-independence Nigeria. They appealed to the British government to create more states to mitigate their concerns about ethnic domination. The British Government set up the Willink Commission in 1957 to examine these concerns (Akinleye, 1996).

During the hearings that followed, the minority ethnic groups accused the majority ethnic groups of occupying most of the top positions in the civil service, using the institutions of the state for their benefit, and bias in the allocation of infrastructure and social amenities (Akinyele, 1996, 77-78). Although the commission acknowledged that the minority ethnic groups had genuine

concerns, it did not support the creation of more states because this could create new ethnic minorities, thus failing to address the fundamental problem of ethnic domination. The commission rather recommended constitutional safeguards as a more viable tool for protecting ethnic minorities (Imuetinyan 2017, 217). Nevertheless, the Nigerian government created more administrative regions after independence. Mid-west Region was created in 1963, which increased the number of administrative units to four. In the wake of the Biafra War in 1967, the military government divided the four regions into twelve states. The number states increased to nineteen in 1976, twenty-one in 1987, thirty in 1991, and thirty-six in 1996 (Alapiki, 2005).

Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule on October 1, 1960. Politics in post-independence Nigeria was characterized by stiff competition between the three regions, and by extension the three major ethnic groups. This seriously undermined national integration. Each region had a major political party whose support base largely consisted of the dominant ethnic group residing there. Northern People's Congress (NPC), as can be inferred from the name, was the main party in the Northern Region. It was akin to the party of the Hausa/Fulani. Action Group (AG) in the Western Region was closely associated with the Yoruba, and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) was closely tied to the Igbos (Akinyele, 1996, 75; Laitin, 1986, 6). The fear of domination was not peculiar to the minority ethnic groups. The Hausa/Fulani feared that they would be dominated by the Igbos and Yoruba because they lagged in the area of education and did not have a large pool of educated people to fill up positions in the civil service. The Igbos and Yoruba, on the other hand, feared domination by the Hausa/Fulani because of their influence in the political sphere (Falola and Heaton, 2008, 165-166; Siollun, 2009, 76-77; Diamond, 1988, 49-50; Laitin, 1986, 6).

Nigeria's first six years after independence were tumultuous. Like Falola and Heaton (2008, 159) concisely put it, "Official corruption, rigged elections, ethnic baiting, bullying and thuggery dominated the conduct of politics in the First Republic, which existed from 1960 to 1966." Frustrated with the inability of the civilian government to unite the peoples of the various regions

and maintain stability over the polity, a group of army officers, mostly of Igbo ethnicity, launched a coup on January 15, 1966, which toppled the civilian government. The coup resulted in the deaths of Nigeria's Prime Minister, who was from the Northern Region, the Premiers of the Northern and Western Regions, and some senior military officers, most of whom were from the Northern Region. However, the Premiers of the Eastern and Mid-West Regions, who were Igbos, were not killed (Falola and Heaton, 2008, 172; Achebe, 2012, 64; Siollun, 2009, 79). The coup succeeded in toppling the civilian government, but the plotters were arrested.

The most senior army officer at the time, Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, who was of Igbo ethnicity, took over power and appointed military governors to head the four administrative regions. Lt. Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu was appointed as the Governor of the Eastern Region. Since the perpetrators of the coup were mostly Igbos, it was interpreted as an attempt by the Igbos to dominate the other ethnic groups (Achebe, 2012, 66; Siollun, 2009, 79). Arguiyi-Ironsi's regime lasted for only six months. He was killed in a counter coup orchestrated by soldiers from the Northern Region. This led to the ascension of Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a Northerner, as Head of State. The Northern soldiers' thirst for revenge on the Igbos was not allayed by the killing of Arguiyi-Ironsi and the transfer of power to a Northerner. They systematically targeted and killed their Igbo colleagues. Subsequently, they moved into the civilian sphere, alongside blood-thirsty hoodlums, and unleashed their barbarity on Igbo civilians. Tens of thousands of Igbos were killed and their properties looted and destroyed. This led to the mass exodus of the Igbos to their homeland in the Eastern Region (Siollun, 2009, 117-138). Between 80,000 to 100,000 lives were lost during the pogrom (Ekwe-Ekwe, 1990, 12). Conservative estimates put the death toll at 30,000 (Achebe, 2012, 82).

The Igbos no longer felt safe in a united Nigeria. "It was not until 1966-7 when it [anti-Igbo sentiment] swept through Northern Nigeria like 'a flood of deadly hate' that the Igbo first questioned the concept of Nigeria which they had embraced with much greater fervor than the Yoruba or the Hausa/Fulani." (Achebe, 1983, 45). This led to the Governor of the Eastern Region,

Lt. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, proclaiming the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967. Although Ojukwu was at the forefront in the fight for secession, the decision to secede was a collective one that was supported by the Igbo people (Achebe, 2012, 91). Diplomatic attempts to forestall the secession like the Aburi Summit in Ghana and a visit to the Eastern Region by members of the National Reconciliation Commission, were unsuccessful. The secession of Biafra was soon followed by the Biafra War, which was primarily about the reincorporation of Biafra into Nigeria. After 30 months of fighting and the deaths of over a million people, largely from starvation as a result of the economic blockade imposed on Biafra by the Nigerian military, the war ended on January 15, 1970 with the surrender of Biafra (Achebe, 2012, 222-228).

The Biafrans and the Federal Military Government (FMG) viewed the conflict from different perspectives: The Biafrans saw the war as a fight for the continued survival of the Igbo people and an effort to resist the genocidal tendencies of the FMG. In his speech commemorating the one-year anniversary of Biafra, Ojukwu observed: "We have convinced the aggressors that force alone cannot subdue a people, that Biafrans have chosen independence, the only guarantee of their survival, and are prepared to die defending it." (Biafra Government, 1968, 3). The FMG saw the war as a battle to preserve a united Nigeria. The dynamics of the war was influenced by external actors, especially the British and French governments. Nigeria may have gained independence from British rule in 1960, but it was not economically independent because Britain still played a central role in its economic life. The British had significant investments in the financial sector, oil sector, and extractive industries. Also, Nigeria was an important market for manufactured goods from Britain. The close ties between the two countries made it difficult for Britain to remain neutral in the war, especially because its investments were at stake and the unity and stability of Nigeria was in its economic interest. The six-day Arab-Israeli war, which resulted in the closure of the Suez Canal, further threatened British oil supplies. These factors prompted the British government to renege on its initial decision to not sell ammunition to the FMG. British support skewed the war in favor of the FMG, leading to the eventual defeat of Biafran forces in

1970 (Ekwe-Ekwe, 1990, 27-36). The duration of the war was also influenced by the support that the French offered Biafran forces, which enabled them to better resist attacks launched by the Nigerian military (Ekwe-Ekwe, 1990, 46).

3.0. Theoretical considerations

Not every multiethnic society is embroiled in conflict. The Horizontal inequalities (HIs) theory explains why cultural diversity leads to conflict in some instances but not in others. The crux of the theory is that cultural differences among groups, say along ethnic or religious lines, do not lead to conflict. What causes conflict is the horizontal inequalities that exist among these culturally defined groups (Stewart, 2000). By portraying inequalities among groups as the source of conflict rather than cultural differences, this theory challenges the "Clash of civilizations" perspective which contends that conflict occurs when different cultural groups come into contact (Huntington, 1996). Horizontal inequalities could be economic, social, political or cultural. Social HIs constitute unequal access to services like education, healthcare, housing etc. Cultural HIs could emanate from discrepancies in the recognition ascribed to different languages, norms, customs, and practices (Stewart, 2000, 249; 2010, 1-2). These inequalities, which have the capacity to cause grievances among marginalized groups, are crucial in the mobilization process that precedes the onset of conflict. For or a group to be cohesive, its members need to share certain characteristics like having a common language, tradition, ethnicity, religion, and the same source of hardship. The leaders of these groups often employ the strategy of "reworking historical memories" to accentuate the identity of the group and strengthen cohesion within it (Stewart, 2000, 247). The capacity of the marginalized group to challenge the state also depends on its size: "Where groups are small numerically, their potential to cause conflict on a substantial scale is limited, even when they suffer persistent discrimination." (Stewart 2000, 254).

Although HIs theory is hinged on the constructivist view that identity is malleable, socially constructed, and could change over time, it also acknowledges that some aspects of identity are quite stable and difficult to change. It is often on the basis of these difficult-to-change identities

that grievances are stirred up in the mobilization process. These relatively stable aspects of identity also tend to make ethnic boundaries more salient (Stewart, 2008, 10-11). Sen (2006, 2) echoed this sentiment when he observed: "A strong – and exclusive – sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance from other groups." He also highlighted the tendency for identity to be exploited towards a violent end: "Violence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror." (Sen, 2006, 2). A crucial element in Sen's view of identity is the attribution of responsibility to the individual. He pointed out that while an individual could belong to several groups and have multiple identities, he or she had the capacity to decide on the amount of importance to attach to each of these identities (Sen, 2006, 5-6). Nevertheless, he also acknowledged that people may encounter difficulty in disentangling themselves from certain categories that were ascribed to them by the larger society, take for instance the case of race (Sen, 2006, 6-8).

Country and cross-country studies have found support for HIs theory. Relying on global data for 130 countries, Choi and Piazza (2016) showed that political HIs positively correlate with the incidence of domestic terrorist attacks. Using disaggregated data for Sub-Saharan Africa, Østby, Nordås, and Rød (2009) showed that regions characterized by low levels of education, relative deprivation in terms of asset ownership, as well as intraregional inequalities are more susceptible to conflict. In their study on Indonesia, Østby et al. (2011) found that inequality between religious groups, conditional upon population growth, increased the risk of violent conflict. Langer (2005) found that political HIs among elites and socioeconomic HIs among the masses were crucial in the mobilization process preceding Ivory Coast's descent into violent conflict in the 1990s. This is because the exclusion of some elites prompted them to mobilize their ethnic kin/supporters towards conflict, and the mobilization process was successful because of the socioeconomic HIs that existed among the masses. HIs along ethnic lines were central to the 2007-08 uprisings in Kenya (Stewart 2010a; Muhula, 2009). Mansoob and Gates (2005) found that HIs along the

dimensions of ethnicity and caste are crucial in explaining the Maoist insurgency that occurred in Nepal. Musthtaq and Mirza (2022) have shown that regional inequalities, as well as the Pakistani government's repressive policies, underlie the separatist conflict in Balochistan.

While the existence of grievances – imagined or real – is crucial in linking horizontal inequalities to conflict, the capacity for grievances to cause conflict has been challenged. Collier and Hoeffler (2000, 2004), in their *Greed and grievance* series of publications, argued that most rebellions are driven by greed, and the narrative of grievances is merely a façade used by rebel leaders to conceal their ulterior motive of self-enrichment. Crucial to their argument is the role played by natural resources and the diaspora community in financing the rebel group. They contended that inequality, repression, and ethnic diversity do not increase the risk of conflict onset. A high dependence on primary commodity exports, and ethnic domination which they defined as a single ethnic group accounting for 45 to 90 percent of a country's population, were what caused conflict. In a later publication where they zoomed in on the determinants of secessionist conflicts, Collier and Hoeffler (2006) contended that secession increases the risk of conflict. This is because it reduces the level of ethnic and religious fractionalization, which in turn increases the likelihood of ethnic domination. A low level of ethnic fractionalization makes rebel recruitment less cumbersome for the rebel leader because it becomes easier to unite different peoples towards a shared objective. They concluded thus: "secessionist movements should not in general be seen as cries for social justice. Those few secessionist movements that are able to scale-up to being organizations with a serious political or military capability are likely to occur in rich regions and contain an element of a resource grab." (Collier and Hoeffler, 2006, 52-53).

Cunningham and Sawyer (2017) investigated why claims for self-determination were present in some states but not in others. They found that claims for self-determination were likely to emerge in states that were in spatial proximity to other states where such claims already existed. They pointed out that contagion was the main mechanism through which self-determination claims spread between states. They identified three conditions for a group to make a self-determination

claim: First, the group needed to see its ethno-nationalist identity as relevant, especially in relation to other ethnic groups. Second, there needed to be a common grievance among members of the group; this grievance could be economic, political, or even embedded in the lack of recognition of traditional structures that were peculiar to the ethnic group (e.g., language) by the state. Lastly, there needed to be an expectation among members of the group that the goal of self-determination was achievable.

In another study, Cunningham (2013) investigated why campaigns for self-determination devolved into civil wars in some cases but remained primarily in the political domain in other cases. She found that self-determination campaigns were likely to turn violent when the group seeking secession was large, marginalized in the political sphere, economically disadvantaged, internally fragmented, sought independence, and operated in a country characterized by a low level of economic development. IPOB meets most of the group-related characteristics. With 40.1 percent of its population living below the poverty line of 137,430 naira (approximately US$ 361) per annum (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, 2020), Nigeria meets the criterion of having a low level of economic development. Cunningham and Sawyer (2017) observed that governments are often reluctant to accede to secessionist claims, and tend to address these either by making concessions to accommodate the demands of the group or by repressing the group. Both approaches are likely to foment the demand for secession because making concessions could embolden the group to make further demands of the government, and repressing the group could heighten the feeling of grievances among its members, lending credence to their claim of maltreatment by the government. As will be discussed in section 4, the Nigerian government's response to IPOB has been repressive, and this has led to a shift in IPOB's strategy from one of non-violent resistance (mainly protests) to other forms of resistance that may involve violence.

Relying on the HIs theory, this study will test the following hypotheses:

H_1: Ethnic marginalization positively correlates with support for secession among Igbos

H_2: Socioeconomic condition negatively correlates with support for secession among Igbos

H_3: Belonging to the Igbo ethnic group positively correlates with support for secession.

4.0. Trend of pro-Biafra agitation

Except for the rule of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, which lasted from 1979 to 1983, and the 83-day rule of Chief Ernest Shonekan in 1993, Nigeria was ruled by military dictators from 1970 when the Biafra War ended until May 1999 when the military officially handed over power to a civilian government.[2] Nigeria has remained under civilian rule since then. The transition to civilian rule marked the beginning of pro-Biafra agitations. The absence of such agitations prior to 1999 may be explained by the repressive nature of the military governments and their willingness to employ brute force in keeping the polity under control. Moreover, the way the Biafra War had ended must have shaken the resolve of the Igbos. Biafran forces were defeated, the Biafran leader fled to Ivory Coast, and the war had caused both material and psychological carnage. The transition to civilian rule probably created a semblance of expanded freedoms, which allowed pro-Biafra sentiments that had been simmering beneath the surface to erupt.

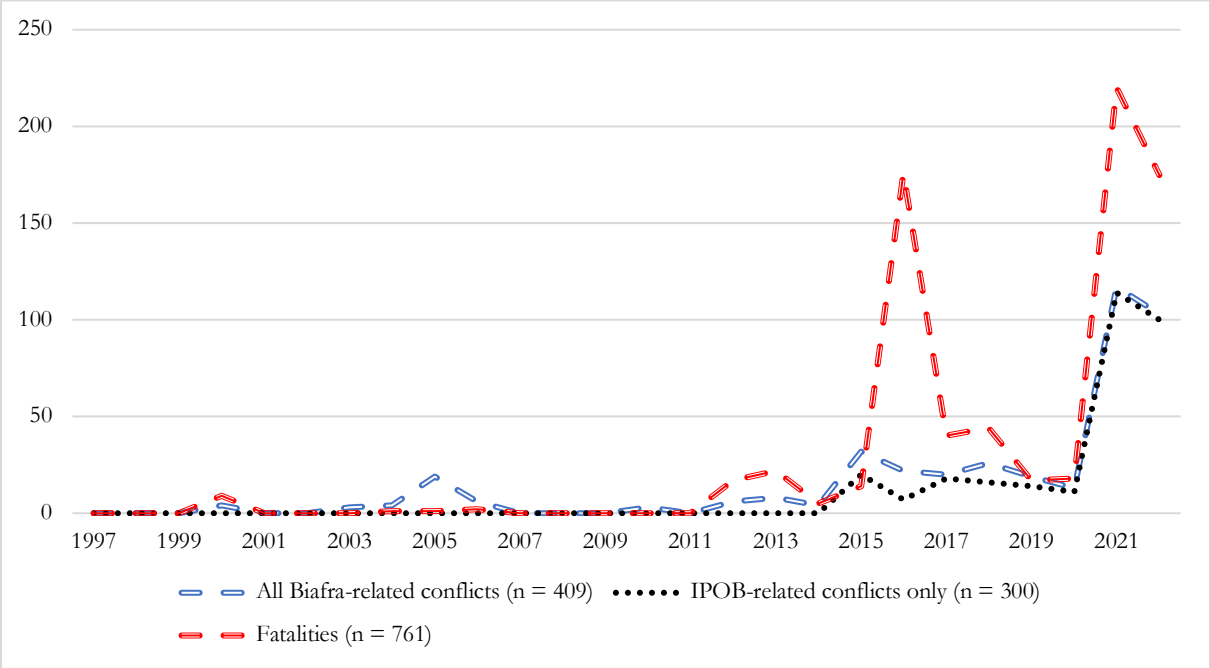

Figure 1: Biafra-related conflicts and casualties, 1997–2022 (ACLED)

[2] Both civilian leaders were deposed through military coups.

Based on the Armed Conflict Location and Events Dataset (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010), Figure 1 shows the trend of Biafra-related conflicts and the accompanying fatalities from 1997 to 2022.[3] A limitation of the ACLED dataset is its heavy reliance on media reports. It is possible that pro-Biafra agitations were present when Nigeria was under military rule, but they were not reported in the media because press freedom was stifled. Nevertheless, the ACLED dataset still remains invaluable in understanding the trend and nature of Biafra-related conflicts because of its disaggregated nature and the fact that it is updated in real time. The blue dashed curve shows the annual trend of conflicts where at least one of the actors is a pro-Biafra group; the black curve shows only the incidents involving IPOB. The latter curve is a subset of the former. The red line shows the annual trend of fatalities associated with the Biafra-related conflicts.

A total of 409 Biafra-related conflicts occurred between January 1 1997 and December 31, 2022. These incidents caused 761 fatalities. IPOB accounted for 73 percent of the total Biafra-related conflicts. The first incident, which involved MASSOB, was recorded in February, 2000. Prior to 2015, MASSOB was the main pro-Biafra movement, but this changed with the advent of IPOB, whose first incident was recorded in 2015. The advent of IPOB appears to be associated with an increase in the number of fatalities. In 2016, a year after IPOB entered the scene, 176 fatalities were recorded. This corresponds to a growth of 1,157 percent when compared to the 14 fatalities recorded in 2015. 2021 was the most violent year both in terms of the incidence and intensity of the conflict. There were 114 incidents and 220 fatalities. The proximity of the black dotted curve to the blue dashed curve from 2019 to 2022 indicates that IPOB alone accounted for almost all the Biafra-related conflicts during this period.

[3] To access the ACLED data visit: https://acleddata.com/

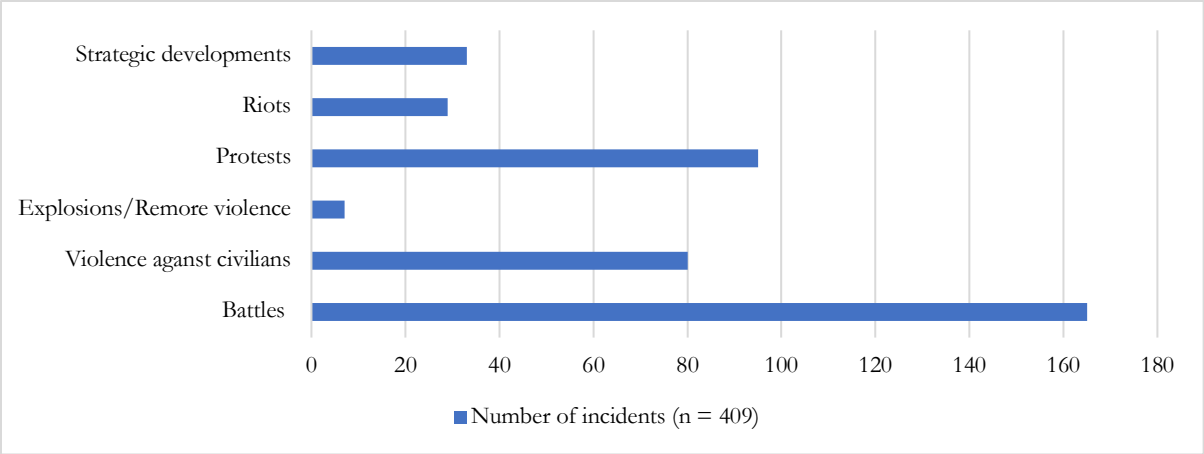

Figure 2: Categories of Biafra-related conflicts, 1997–2022 (ACLED)

Figure 2 shows the categories of Biafra-related conflicts from 1997 to 2022. Battles (40%), Protests (23%), and Violence against civilians (20%) were the main categories. 32 incidents were recorded in 2015, of which 75 percent were protests. A total of 220 incidents were recorded between 2021 and 2022, of which 79 percent were categorized as either Battles or Violence against civilians. There were only 9 protests between 2021 and 2022. This indicates that Biafra-related conflicts have become violent.

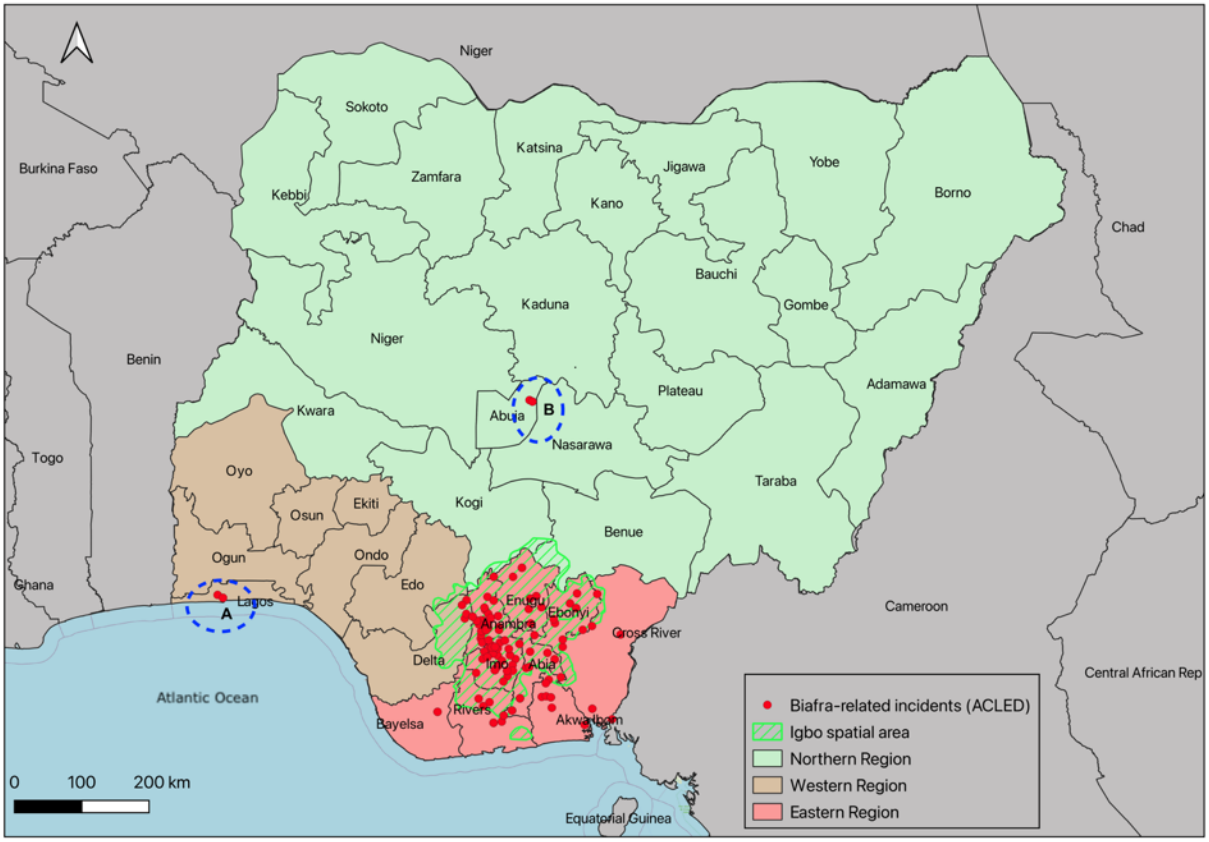

Figure 3: Spatial depiction of Biafra-related conflicts (1997–2022)

Since the ACLED dataset is georeferenced, I rendered the geolocations of the Biafra-related conflicts on a map showing Nigeria's 36 states, the federal capital territory (i.e., Abuja), and Nigeria's three major regions.[4] Relying on the Georeferencing of Ethnic Groups (GREG) dataset (Wiedmann, Rød, and Cederman), I also show the spatial area occupied by members of the Igbo ethnic group.[5] As shown in figure 3, Biafra-related incidents are clustered in Nigeria's Eastern Region and the Igbo spatial area. There were seven incidents in Abuja, which is not surprising, since it is the seat of the Nigerian federal government (See point B on map). Four incidents were recorded in Lagos State (see point A). This may be explained by the concentration of Igbos in the state (See panel 1 in figure 4).

Ethnic settlement patterns have persisted over time in Nigeria. Moreover, ethnicity was considered in the state-creation process in postcolonial Nigeria. Toft (2003) has highlighted the tendency for ethnic identity to be closely associated with the spatial area occupied by members of an ethnic group. "In Nigeria, …territories have traditionally been associated with ethnic groups and the expression, 'owners of the land,' remains viable even to the extent of identifying cities as 'belonging' to particular ethnic group" (Plotnicov, 1972, 001).

[4] The shapefiles containing Nigeria's administrative boundaries was developed by UNOCHA, Nigeria. It can be accessed at https://data.humdata.org/dataset/nga-administrative-boundaries

[5] Relying on maps and data obtained from the 1960s Soviet *Atlas Narodov Mira*, the GREG dataset matches the ethnolinguistic groups across the world with the spatial area they occupy.

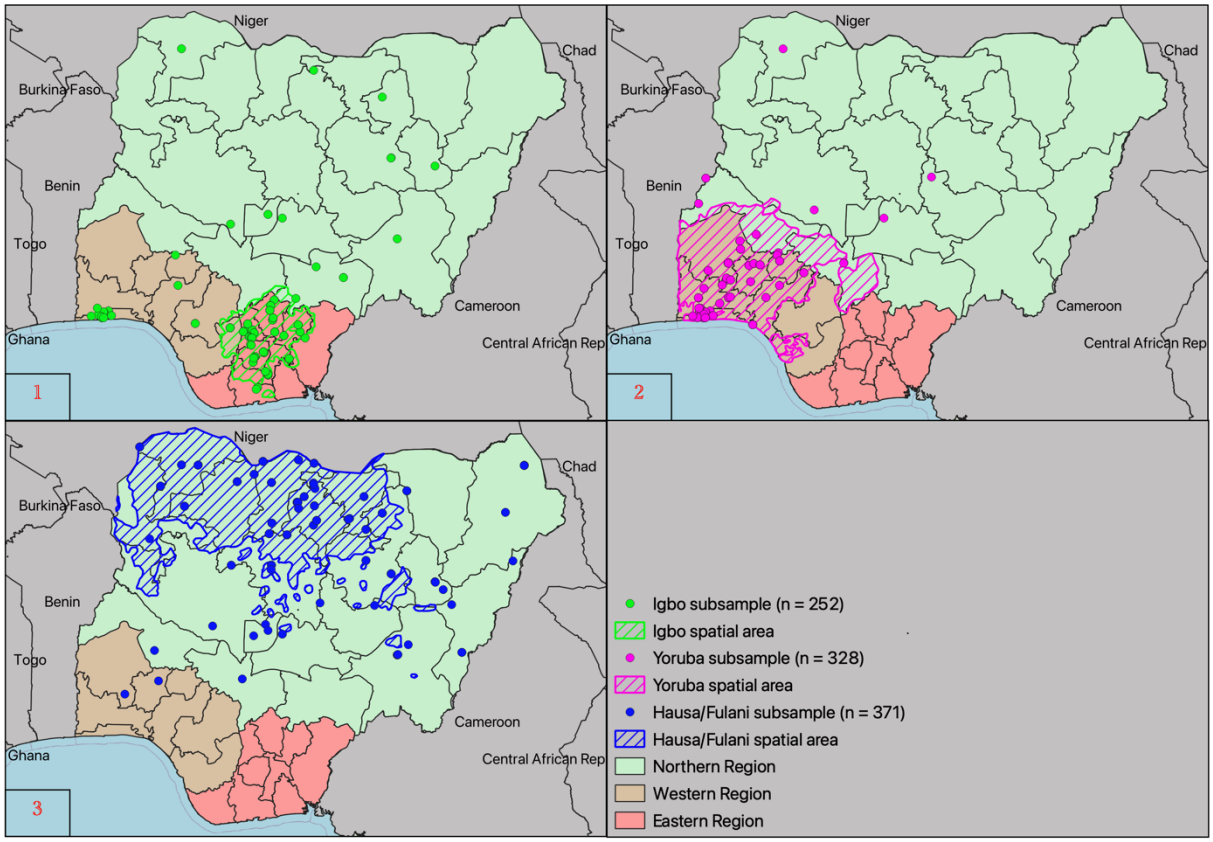

Figure 4: Ethnicity and settlement patterns

Figure 4 renders the geolocations of the survey respondents who belong to Nigeria's three major ethnic groups (i.e., Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) on a map of Nigeria showing it's three major regions and the spatial areas occupied by members of the three major ethnic groups. The figure shows that settlement patterns among Nigeria's ethnolinguistic groups have persisted over time. Panel 1 shows the geolocations of the 252 survey respondents who belong to the Igbo ethnic group, 83 percent of who reside within the Eastern Region and the spatial area occupied by their ethnolinguistic group. As panel 2 shows, 95 percent of the Yoruba respondents reside within the Western Region and the Yoruba spatial area. Panel 3 shows that 99.5 percent of the Hausa/Fulani respondents reside in the Northern Region and the Hausa/Fulani spatial area. The relatively higher number of Igbos residing outside the Eastern Region and the Igbo spatial area mirrors the tendency for them to emigrate to the other regions in Nigerian.

5.0. Data and methodology

This study relies primarily on the Round 7 Afrobarometer survey data for Nigeria which

was collected in 2017 (BenYishay et al., 2017).[6] It contains 1,600 observations and is representative for Nigeria. Observations were drawn from each of Nigeria's 36 states, plus the federal capital – Abuja. The data spanned 147 of Nigeria's 774 local government areas (LGAs) (i.e., municipalities).[7] The dominance of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups was reflected in the data, with the Hausa/Fulani (22.78%), Igbo (17.22%), and Yoruba (23.19%) together accounting for 63 percent of the total respondents. Respondents were at least 18 years old. The data also contains information about the ethnicity of the respondents, which makes it possible for me to breakdown the data based on ethnic affiliation. The variables that will be used to estimate the regression models are discussed below.

5.1. Dependent variables

***Support secession*:** This measures the degree to which respondents support IPOB's secessionist goal. It was derived from the question, "The Indigenous People of Biafra or IPOB, should be given the right to secede from the federation?", with response options on a five-point scale ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly disagree." In the original Afrobarometer dataset, higher ordinal values denoted more disagreement with IPOB's secessionist goal and vice versa. For easy interpretation of the regression results, I have inverted the ordinal values assigned to the response categories by subtracting each of them from 6, allowing higher values to denote higher support for secession and vice versa. "don't know" and "Refused to answer" responses were treated as missing observations. I applied this rule to all the variables derived from the Afrobarometer survey data. I also developed a binary version of the dependent variable where I coded the "strongly agree" and "agree" response categories as 1, and the "strongly disagree," "disagree," and "neither agree nor disagree" response categories as 0. I used it to conduct a robustness check.

[6] To access the Afrobarometer dataset and the survey questionnaire visit: https://www.afrobarometer.org/

[7] Each of Nigeria's 36 states comprises of 3 senatorial districts, which amounts to 109 senatorial districts (i.e. including Abuja which also doubles as a senatorial district). The senatorial districts are comprised of 774 LGAs.

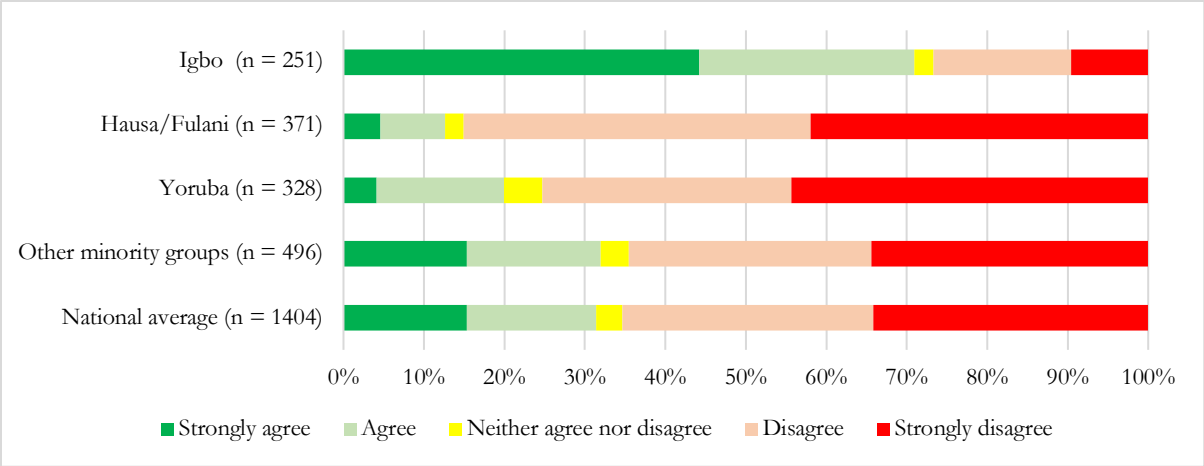

Figure 5: Ethnic distribution of support for secession

Figure 5 plots the responses to the question regarding support for IPOB's secessionist goal on a stacked bar chart. The y-axis shows the number of respondents who belong to the various ethnic categories and the total respondents from the full sample who answered the question. The x-axis shows the percentage of respondents who chose a particular response category. The figure shows that Igbos are more supportive of secession than the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, the minority ethnic groups combined, and the national average.

5.2. Explanatory variables

***Ethnic marginalization*:** The measures the extent to which respondents think members of their ethnic group are marginalized. It was derived from the question, "How often, if ever, are [*Insert respondent's Ethnic Group*] treated unfairly by the government?", with responses having four ordinal categories ranging from "0 = never" to "3 = always." A strength of this variable is its focus on marginalization at the group level rather than the individual level, which fits snugly with the HIs theory. A limitation is that it refers to marginalization in broad terms without focusing on any specific dimension. As shown in figure 6, Igbos have a higher level of perceived marginalization than the other ethnic categories and the national average.

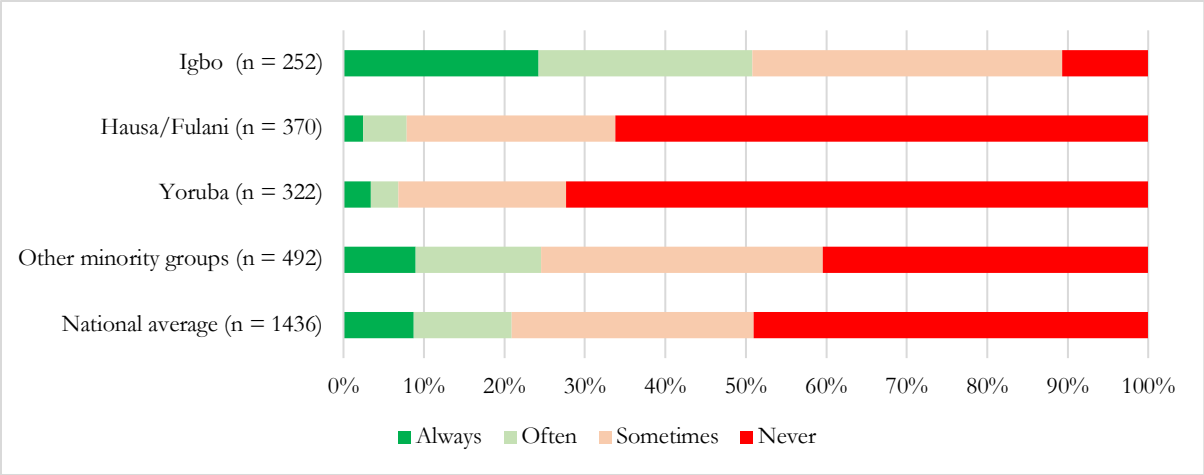

Figure 6: Ethnic distribution of perceived marginalization

Socioeconomic condition: This attribute is measured at the individual, household, and communal levels. I used the educational level of the respondents as a proxy for socioeconomic condition at the individual level. This variable ranges from 0 to 9, with 0 denoting "No formal schooling" and 9 denoting "Postgraduate". Education is central to development, which explains why it constitutes one of the three pillars of UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI). I measured socioeconomic condition at the household level using a deprivation index that ranges from 0 to 4 in incremental units of 0.25. Higher values denote a higher level of deprivation and vice versa. I developed the index by combining the responses to the following four survey questions: "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: (a) Gone without food to eat? (b) Gone without enough clean water for home use? (c) Gone without medicines or medical treatment? (d) Gone without fuel to cook your food?", with responses having four ordinal categories that range from "0 = never" to "4 = always." I summed the ordinal values accompanying the responses across the four items and took the average. The four items had a Cronbach Alpha statistic of 0.78, which shows internal reliability. At the communal level, I measured socioeconomic condition using the mean literacy rate (Bosco et al., 2017) in the LGA where the respondents reside.[8] Because this dataset is gridded, I computed the relevant statistic for the respective LGAs using QGIS software. Literacy rate is expressed in percentage and measures the number of men and women aged between

[8] To access the gridded literacy rate dataset visit: https://hub.worldpop.org/geodata/summary?id=1266

15 and 49 years in the LGA who were literate in 2013. Since the raw data is gendered, I computed the estimates for males and females separately and then took the average. Higher values indicate a better socioeconomic condition and vice versa.

Igbo: This is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent belongs to the Igbo ethnic group and 0 otherwise. I developed a similar variable for the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, and the minority ethnic groups combined.

5.3. Control variables

I consider control variables for the demographic attributes of the respondents and political instability. The demographic attributes of the respondents include age and gender. Gender is measured using a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent is male and 0 if female. I measure political instability using the total number of violent conflicts in the LGA where the respondents reside. Based on the ACLED dataset (Raleigh et al., 2010), I define violent conflicts as incidents that fall under any of the following three categories: Battles, Violence against civilians, and Explosions/Remote violence. Although the ACLED data is available starting from 1997 and is updated in real time, I excluded all the incidents that occurred after 2016 while developing the measure for political instability. This serves as a lag, since the dependent variable is measured in 2017. The rationale for including political instability as a control variable is driven by its capacity to influence both the dependent and explanatory variables. Violent conflict has been shown to worsen socioeconomic condition (Tuki, 2022). Moreover, the persistence of violent conflict might be symptomatic of weak state capacity, which in turn could make people more supportive of secession. The Round 7 Afrobarometer survey dataset shows that 30 percent of Nigerians agree that if the violence perpetrated by extremist groups like *Boko Haram* cannot be resolved, Nigeria should be split into two countries.

5.4. Descriptive statistics and analytical technique

Table 1 presents the summary statistics of the representative data for Nigeria and the subsample of Igbo respondents.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Support secession$^{\phi}$	1404	2.473	1.474	1	5
Support secession$^{\phi\#}$	251	3.789	1.405	1	5
Support secession (binary)	1404	0.314	0.464	0	1
Support secession (binary)$^{\#}$	251	0.709	0.455	0	1
Ethnic marginalization	1436	0.806	0.961	0	3
Ethnic marginalization$^{\#}$	252	1.643	.965	0	3
Igbo	1447	0.174	0.379	0	1
Hausa/Fulani	1447	0.256	0.437	0	1
Yoruba	1447	0.227	0.419	0	1
Ethnic minorities	1447	0.343	0.475	0	1
Educational level	1445	4.513	2.155	0	9
Educational level$^{\#}$	252	5.333	1.582	0	9
Deprivation index	1445	0.853	0.846	0	4
Deprivation index$^{\#}$	252	0.782	0.802	0	3.5
Literacy rate (LGA)	1584	0.644	0.25	0.124	0.976
Literacy rate (LGA)$^{\#}$	252	0.855	0.114	0.251	0.963
Political instability (LGA)	1584	11.241	24.939	0	184
Political instability (LGA)$^{\#}$	252	9.067	16.436	0	184
Age	1448	32.658	12.428	18	80
Age$^{\#}$	252	32.484	12.645	18	80
Gender	1448	0.501	0.501	0	1
Gender$^{\#}$	252	0.52	0.501	0	1

Note: *All values are for the country-level data except for those with the symbol # which are for the subsample of Igbo respondents, ϕ is the dependent variable, "Support secession (binary)" is a reduced form of the dependent variable where it is measured binarily.*

The general form of the model to be estimated could be expressed thus:

$$Y_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D'_t + \beta_2 X'_t + \mu_t$$

Where Y_t is the dependent variable which measures support for secession, β_0 denotes the intercept, D'_t is a vector of explanatory variables measuring socioeconomic condition (i.e., at the individual, household, and communal levels), ethnic marginalization, and Igbo ethnicity. X'_t is a vector of control variables measuring political instability and the demographic attributes of the respondents. β_1 and β_2 denote the coefficients of the explanatory and control variables respectively, μ_t is the error term, while t denotes the year in which the variables are measured. Since the dependent variable has five ordinal categories, I estimated the model using ordered logit regression, which is based on maximum likelihood estimation (MLE). I conducted a robustness check where I treated all the variables used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression as an alternative estimation method. I conducted another robustness check where I used the binary version of the dependent variable and estimated the model using logit regression.

6.0. Results and discussion

6.1. Regression models using the Igbo subsample

Table 2: Correlates of support for secession among Igbos

Support secession$^{\phi}$	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**
Ethnic marginalization	0.722***		0.773***	0.351***	0.636***
	(0.204)		(0.207)	(0.113)	(0.239)
Educational level		-0.062	-0.044	-0.041	-0.16
		(0.107)	(0.107)	(0.075)	(0.141)
Deprivation index		0.049	0.048	0.002	0.084
		(0.299)	(0.323)	(0.182)	(0.337)
Literacy rate (LGA)		22.002***	26.957***	13.895*	28.317**
		(7.827)	(9.173)	(7.632)	(11.219)
Political instability (LGA)			0.169***	0.049**	1.1**
			(0.06)	(0.019)	(0.455)
Age			-0.011	-0.006	-0.008
			(0.014)	(0.008)	(0.016)
Gender			0.619**	0.343*	0.444
			(0.29)	(0.182)	(0.375)
Constant				-9.936	-45.022***
				(7.127)	(14.986)
Intercept 1	-3.024***	16.478**	25.365***		
	(0.266)	(7.529)	(7.846)		
Intercept 2	-1.425***	18.045**	27.021***		
	(0.276)	(7.524)	(7.868)		
Intercept 3	-1.274***	18.191**	27.176***		
	(0.296)	(7.534)	(7.884)		
Intercept 4	0.238	19.627***	28.744***		
	(0.342)	(7.549)	(7.923)		
LGA fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estimation method	Ologit	Ologit	Ologit	OLS	Logit
Observations	251	251	251	251	214
R^2				0.355	
Pseudo R^2	0.159	0.138	0.183		0.164
Log pseudolikelihood	-280.544	-287.586	-272.632		-106.9

Note: *Clustered robust standard errors are in parentheses, ϕ is the dependent variable has five ordinal categories except in model 5 where it is measured binarily, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.* All models are estimated using ordered logit (Ologit) regression except for models 4 and 5 which are estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) and logit regressions respectively.

Table 2 presents the regression results of the models that were estimated using the subsample of Igbo respondents. To allow for the possibility of correlation between observations within the same LGA, I clustered the standard errors at LGA level. I also include LGA fixed effects in all the regression models to account for all the time-invariant variables that might be unique to the respective LGAs. I considered only ethnic marginalization in model 1. It was significant at the one percent level and carried the expected positive sign, which is consistent with the hypothesis that ethnic marginalization positive correlates with support for secession. I considered the three measures for socioeconomic condition in model 2. All the variables, except for literacy rate, were statistically insignificant. Literacy rate carried a positive sign, which suggests that improvements in

socioeconomic condition at the communal level leads to increased support for secession. This contravenes the predictions of HIs theory to the contrary.

In model 3 where I included all the explanatory and control variables in the same model, ethnic marginalization remained significant at the one percent level and retained its positive sign. Keeping all covariates at their mean levels, the analysis showed that a one unit increase in ethnic marginalization increases the likelihood of respondents choosing the "strongly agree" response category by 18 percent, when asked about the extent to which they support secession.[9] Literacy rate also retained its positive sign and was significant at the one percent level. Keeping all covariates at their mean levels, the analysis showed that a one percentage point increase in the literacy rate within the LGA where the respondents reside, increases the likelihood the respondents choosing the "strongly agree" response category by 6.4 percent when asked about the degree to which they support secession. A plausible explanation for this finding could be that Igbos, who are socioeconomically better off than other Nigerians, feel that their association with Nigeria holds them back and they could do better if they secede. An examination of the variables measuring educational level and literacy rate shows that Igbos outperform the other ethnic categories and the national average. The Igbos had a mean literacy rate of 86 percent, while the estimates for the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and the national average were 35, 80, and 64 percent respectively. The Igbos had a mean educational level of 5.33, while the estimates for the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and the national average were 2.96, 5.06 and 4.51 respectively. Although it is often the case that poor and excluded regions seek secession, affluent regions might also do so if they feel that they are contributing disproportionately to the state's coffers relative to the poorer regions (Horowitz, 1985, 249-250). The Nigerian government relies heavily on oil exports for its revenue, and the oil-rich Niger-Delta Region is located within the geographical boundaries of the defunct Republic of Biafra. However, many of minority ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region have dissociated themselves from the IPOB movement (Godwin, 2021; Wahab, 2021). All the control variables in model 3 were

[9] Table A1 in the appendix reports the marginal effects at the mean for model 3.

insignificant, except for political instability and gender which were significant at the one and five percent levels respectively. Political instability carried a positive sign, which indicates that exposure to violent conflict increased the likelihood of supporting secession. Gender also carried a positive sign, which suggests that males were more likely to support secession than females.

I conducted a robustness check where I treated all the variables as continuous and re-estimated the model using OLS regression. As shown in model 4, the results were consistent with those in the preceding models that are based on MLE. I conducted another robustness check where I measured the dependent variable binarily and estimated the model using logit regression. As shown in model 5, the results were consistent with those reported in the earlier models.

6.2. Regression models using the full sample

Table 3 reports the results of regression models that were estimated using the representative sample of Nigeria's population. I also included LGA fixed effects in all the models. In model 1, I considered only a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent belongs to the Igbo ethnic group and 0 otherwise. Igbo ethnicity was significant at the one percent level and carried the expected positive sign. This is consistent with the hypothesis that Igbo ethnicity positively correlates with support for secession. In model 2 where I added control variables, Igbo ethnicity retained its positive sign and remained significant at the one percent level. Keeping all covariates at their mean levels, the analysis showed that compared to non-Igbos, Igbos were 11 percent more likely to choose the "strongly agree" response category by 11 percent when asked about the extent to which they support secession.[10] Ethnic marginalization was significant at the one percent level and carried a positive sign, which suggests that among the Nigerian population, perceived ethnic marginalization at the group level increases the likelihood of supporting IPOB's secessionist goal. Unlike the case of the models in table 2 that were estimated using the Igbo subsample of respondents, literacy rate, political instability, and gender had no statistically significant effect on

[10] Table A2 in the appendix reports the marginal effects at the mean for model 2.

support for secession among the Nigerian population. Age was significant at the five percent level and carried a negative sign, which suggests that people become less supportive of secession the older they get.

Table 3: Correlates of support for secession among Nigerians

Support secession$^{\phi}$	**Full sample**						**Non-Igbo**
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**	**(7)**
Igbo	1.32***	1.229***	0.782***				
	(0.316)	(0.318)	(0.211)				
Hausa/Fulani				-0.189			
				(0.258)			
Yoruba					-0.658**		
					(0.295)		
Ethnic minorities						-0.162	
						(0.219)	
Ethnic marginalization		0.365***	0.229***	0.388***	0.373***	0.394***	0.291***
		(0.075)	(0.049)	(0.075)	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.084)
Educational level		-0.04	-0.023	-0.037	-0.035	-0.034	-0.021
		(0.034)	(0.021)	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.037)
Deprivation index		0.127	0.065	0.114	0.129	0.111	0.179*
		(0.091)	(0.058)	(0.087)	(0.091)	(0.088)	(0.098)
Literacy rate (LGA)		1.646	1.014	1.34	1.162	1.451	0.642
		(1.235)	(0.713)	(1.219)	(1.289)	(1.292)	(1.088)
Political instability (LGA)		0.003	0.001	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.002
		(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Age		-0.009**	-0.005*	-0.01**	-0.009**	-0.009**	-0.01**
		(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Gender		-0.112	-0.05	-0.092	-0.101	-0.097	-0.252*
		(0.129)	(0.082)	(0.129)	(0.129)	(0.127)	(0.149)
Constant			2.648***				
			(0.692)				
Intercept 1	-2.918***	-1.276		-2.745**	-2.903**	-2.593**	0.562
	(0.31)	(1.178)		(1.157)	(1.194)	(1.223)	(0.837)
Intercept 2	-1.265***	0.402		-1.086	-1.238	-0.935	2.28***
	(0.303)	(1.167)		(1.145)	(1.182)	(1.212)	(0.834)
Intercept 3	-1.061***	0.605		-0.886	-1.037	-0.734	2.503***
	(0.305)	(1.171)		(1.149)	(1.187)	(1.214)	(0.839)
Intercept 4	0.255	1.952*		0.449	0.301	0.601	3.846***
	(0.32)	(1.18)		(1.151)	(1.193)	(1.216)	(0.847)
LGA fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1403	1378	1378	1378	1378	1378	1127
Estimation method	Ologit	Ologit	OLS	Ologit	Ologit	Ologit	Ologit
R^2			0.366				
Pseudo R^2	0.135	0.148		0.143	0.145	0.144	0.094
Log pseudolikelihood	-1727.601	-1672.651		-1681.014	-1678.854	-1680.968	-1368.554

Note: *Clustered robust standard errors are in parentheses, ϕ is the dependent variable, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. All models are estimated using ordered logit (Ologit regression, except for model 3 which is estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression.*

As a robustness check, I treated all the variables as continuous and re-estimated the model using OLS regression. As shown in model 3, the results are consistent with those from models 1 and 2 which are based on MLE. In model 4, I substituted the variable measuring Igbo ethnicity with another that takes the value of 1 if the respondent belongs to the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group

and 0 otherwise. Hausa/Fulani ethnicity had no statistically significant effect on support for secession. In model 5, I replaced the variable measuring Hausa/Fulani ethnicity with another that takes the value of 1 if the respondent belongs to the Yoruba ethnic group and 0 otherwise. Yoruba ethnicity took a negative sign and was significant at the one percent level, which suggests a negative correlation between Yoruba ethnicity and support for secession. Keeping all covariates at their mean levels, the analysis showed that compared to non-Yoruba's, members of the Yoruba ethnic group were 6 percent less likely to choose the "strongly agree" response category when asked about the extent to which they support secession.[11] In model 6, I replaced the variable measuring Yoruba ethnicity with a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent does not belong to any of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups (i.e. Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba) and 0 otherwise. Belonging to a minority ethnic group had no statistically significant effect on support for secession.

Figures 5 and 6 show that Igbos are more supportive of secession and have a higher level of perceived ethnic marginalization than the other ethnic categories. It is thus possible that the positive correlation between ethnic marginalization and support for secession present in models 2 to 6 was driven by the inclusion of the Igbo subsample of respondents. To check if this is indeed the case, I estimated model 7 using only the subsample of non-Igbo respondents. Ethnic marginalization remained significant at the one percent level and retained its positive sign, which suggests that among non-Igbos, perceived ethnic marginalization positively correlates with support for secession. A plausible explanation for this finding could be that non-Igbos who feel that members of their ethnic group are treated unfairly by the government have more sympathy for the plight of IPOB, and thus are more supportive of its secessionist goal.

7.0. Conclusion

This study examined the effect of socioeconomic condition and perceived ethnic marginalization at the group level on support for secession among members of the Igbo ethnic

[11] Table A3 in the appendix reports the marginal effects at the mean for model 5

group. Perceived ethnic marginalization was found to positively correlate with support for secession. Socioeconomic condition was measured at the individual, household, and communal levels. The individual and household measures were statistically insignificant, but the communal measure was. However, it carried a positive sign, which suggests a direct relationship between socioeconomic condition at the communal level and support for secession. This contravenes the predictions of HIs theory to the contrary. Although the Igbos outperform the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, and the minority ethnic groups in the socioeconomic sphere, they still report a higher level of perceived ethnic marginalization. Igbo ethnicity was also found to increase the likelihood of supporting secession.

It is likely that the strong feeling of ethnic marginalization among the Igbos is driven by political HIs, a dimension of HIs that is outside the scope of this study. Since Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999, presidential elections have been held seven times. Members of the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba ethnic groups have held the offices of president and vice president, but never a person of Igbo ethnicity. For the most part of Nigeria's history, political power at the center has been controlled by the Hausa/Fulani (Mustapha, 2009; Ukiwo, 2013, 182-184). Some commentators have attributed the secessionist conflict in Eastern Nigeria to the political marginalization of the Igbos (Uroko, Obinna, and Inibong, 2022; Ojoko, 2022; Njoku et al., 2022; Akubo, 2021).

It is unlikely that the Nigerian government would allow the Eastern Region to secede, especially because it houses most of the country's oil reserves, coupled with the government's heavy dependence on crude oil exports for its revenues. Moreover, the secession of the Eastern Region could spur other groups to make similar demands. The persistence of IPOB despite the government's heavy-handed approach towards the group highlights the necessity for a non-violent approach to be adopted. Proscribing IPOB as a terrorist organization, which puts it at par with radical Islamist groups like *Boko Haram*, is counterproductive. This cuts off the channels for dialogue, which could be a precursor to the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

A limitation of this study is the cross-sectional nature of the dataset, which makes it impossible to examine the change in support for secession over time. Also, this study focuses primarily on economic horizontal inequalities. Future studies could investigate the determinants of support for secession using panel data. They could also focus on the other dimensions of HIs, especially political HI.

Data availability

The data underlying this study will be made available upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX

Table A1: Marginal effects at the mean for model 3 in Table 2

Support secession$^{\phi}$	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5
Ethnic marginalization	-0.038***	-0.095***	-0.011	-0.039***	0.183***
	(0.008)	(0.026)	(0.007)	(0.015)	(0.048)
Educational level	0.002	0.005	0.001	0.002	-0.01
	(0.005)	(0.013)	(0.002)	(0.005)	(0.025)
Deprivation index	-0.002	-0.006	-0.001	-0.002	0.011
	(0.016)	(0.04)	(0.005)	(0.016)	(0.077)
Literacy rate (LGA)	-1.31***	-3.322***	-0.398	-1.366**	6.395***
	(0.483)	(1.148)	(0.248)	(0.556)	(2.165)
Political instability (LGA)	-0.008**	-0.021**	-0.002*	-0.009***	0.04***
	(0.003)	(0.008)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.014)
Age	0.001	0.001	0.00	0.001	-0.003
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.00)	(0.001)	(0.003)
Gender	-0.03*	-0.076**	-0.009	-0.031**	0.147**
	(0.016)	(0.037)	(0.006)	(0.016)	(0.069)

Note: *Standard errors are in parentheses, ϕ is the dependent variable, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. The numbers below the response categories are the ordinal values assigned to each of them.*

Table A2: Marginal effects at the mean for model 2 in Table 3

Support secession$^{\phi}$	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5
Igbo	-0.243***	-0.03***	0.02***	0.146***	0.107***
	(0.06)	(0.01)	(0.006)	(0.041)	(0.026)
Ethnic marginalization	-0.072***	-0.009***	0.006***	0.043***	0.032***
	(0.015)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.01)	(0.007)
Educational level	0.008	0.001	-0.001	-0.005	-0.004
	(0.007)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Deprivation index	-0.025	-0.003	0.002	0.015	0.011
	(0.018)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.011)	(0.008)
Literacy rate (LGA)	-0.326	-0.04	0.027	0.196	0.143
	(0.245)	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.148)	(0.107)
Political instability (LGA)	-0.001	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Age	0.002**	0.00**	-0.00**	-0.001**	-0.001**
	(0.001)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.001)
Gender	0.022	0.003	-0.002	-0.013	-0.01
	(0.025)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.015)	(0.011)

Note: *Standard errors are in parentheses, ϕ is the dependent variable, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. The numbers below the response categories are the ordinal values assigned to each of them.*

Table A3: Marginal effects at the mean for model 5 in Table 3

Support secession$^{\phi}$	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Yoruba	0.131**	0.016**	-0.011**	-0.078**	-0.058**
	(0.059)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.036)	(0.026)
Ethnic marginalization	-0.074***	-0.009***	0.006***	0.044***	0.032***
	(0.015)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.01)	(0.007)
Educational level	0.007	0.001	-0.001	-0.004	-0.003
	(0.007)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Deprivation index	-0.026	-0.003	0.002	0.015	0.011
	(0.018)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.011)	(0.008)
Literacy rate (LGA)	-0.231	-0.028	0.019	0.138	0.102
	(0.256)	(0.032)	(0.021)	(0.154)	(0.113)
Political instability (LGA)	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Age	0.002**	0.00**	-0.00**	-0.001**	-0.001**
	(0.001)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender	0.02	0.002	-0.002	-0.012	-0.009
	(0.025)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.015)	(0.011)

Note: *Standard errors are in parentheses, ϕ is the dependent variable, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. The numbers below the response categories are the ordinal values assigned to each of them.*