



## Arms Proliferation and Separatist Agitations in Nigeria: Challenges and Potential Solutions

### Šírenie zbraní a separatistické nepokoje v Nigérii: Výzvy a možné riešenia

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#### Abstract:

*The study focused on the serious threats to stability and unity in Nigeria are posed by arms proliferation and increased separatist agitations. Some of the historical grievances underpinning these challenges, such as economic inequalities and political marginalization. The study also noted the main protagonists in this discussion are the separatist leaders Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho, whose activities have brought these issues to the fore. The study employed qualitative study and data were sourced thorough secondary sources, data obtained from historical documents, government reports, and scholarly literature. The paper found out that there is a nexus, between arms proliferation, separatist movements, and Nigeria's security. The paper identifies various mechanisms such as opening lines of communication, devolution of power, constitutional reforms, and economic development with equity as interventions to these challenges. Third, international cooperation will be brought into the equation to defeat the transnational dimensions of arms trafficking and separatist activities. Success in this interlinked set of challenges opens up a window toward a more stable, united, and prosperous future for Nigeria.*

**Key words:** arms proliferation, separatist agitations, Nigeria, security.

#### Abstrakt:

*Štúdia sa zamerala na vážne hrozby pre stabilitu a jednotu Nigérie, ktoré predstavujú šírenie zbraní a narastajúce separatistické hnutia. Niektoré historické krivdy, ktoré sú základom týchto problémov, zahŕňajú ekonomické nerovnosti a politickú marginalizáciu. Štúdia tiež konštatovala, že hlavnými protagonistami tejto diskusie sú separatistickí lídri Nnamdi Kanu a Sunday Igboho, ktorých aktivity tieto otázky dostali do popredia. Štúdia použila kvalitatívny*



*výskum a údaje boli získané zo sekundárnych zdrojov – historických dokumentov, vládnych správ a vedeckej literatúry. Práca zistila, že existuje spojitosť medzi šírením zbraní, separatistickými hnutiami a bezpečnosťou Nigérie. Identifikuje rôzne mechanizmy, ako napríklad otvorenie komunikačných kanálov, decentralizáciu moci, ústavné reformy a spravodlivý ekonomický rozvoj ako intervencie k týmto výzvam. Navyše, do rovnice bude zapojená aj medzinárodná spolupráca na porazenie transnacionálnych aspektov obchodovania so zbraňami a separatistických aktivít. Úspech v tejto prepojenej skupine výziev otvára možnosti pre stabilnejšiu, jednotnejšiu a prosperujúcu budúcnosť Nigérie.*

**Kľúčové slová:** šírenie zbraní, separatistické hnutia, Nigéria, bezpečnosť.

## 1. Introduction

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, a West African country, is a country of diversity, rich in cultural heritage and great economic potentials. However, critical challenges also beset the nation on arms proliferation and separatist agitation. Omemma (2017). Arms proliferation and separatist agitations pose critical challenges to the stability and unity of Nigeria. The unabated flow of arms into Nigeria, both legally and illegally, and the increase in separatist movements have posed serious threats to the security, unity, and social fabric of the nation. Arms proliferation in Nigeria has led to increased violence, terrorism, and crime in the country. (Nte, 2011, Adisa, 2019). These arms find their way into the hands of various non-state actors, including armed groups, militants, criminal gangs, and insurgents (Schneckener2010). They then use these arms to perpetrate acts of violence, including armed robberies, kidnappings, communal clashes, and attacks on security personnel. The easy access to weapons has created a culture of violence that worsens the already fragile security situation in Nigeria (Jekada, 2005, Akinyetun et al, 2023). Increased separatist agitation has been reported in Nigeria, deepening divides within society. Various self-determination demands have emerged amid ethnic and regional discontent and economic and political marginalization. Examples include the secessionist Biafra Movement from the southeast, the Oduduwa separatist movement from the southwest, and the Arewa secessionist movement from the north (Okaisabor, 2023; Ajisebiyayo & Agara 2022). These movements strive to promote self-governance based on ethnic or regional identities, challenging the unity and stability of Nigeria as a nation (Madubuike 2015). The proliferation of arms and separatist agitation in Nigeria has far-reaching implications for the country and its people. It undermines national security, hampers economic development, and exacerbates social tensions. Besides, the degraded security situation has discouraged foreign investment, retarded infrastructural development, and hindered the reduction of poverty. The various challenges that have been identified as stumbling blocks in the way of Nigeria's becoming a united, stable, and prosperous nation must be addressed. The efforts should be directed to stemming the flow of arms through improved border control, the Enforcement of an arms embargo, and dealing with corrupt practices that encourage illicit arms trade. Any separatist agitation, therefore, has to be addressed by engaging its root causes in an inclusive manner, covering the underlying socio-economic, political, and cultural grievances. This involves the promotion of national cohesion, equitable sharing of resources and opportunities for hitherto marginalized groups, and strengthening institutions for responsive governance.

Arms proliferation and separatist agitation are serious threats to national security, stability, and development in Nigeria. The government of Nigeria, in collaboration with regional and international partners, has to develop a holistic policy framework that limits arms proliferation, addresses the root causes of separatist agitations, and promotes unity among the diversely ethnic and regional groups. Otherwise, these challenges will continue to rise and keep Nigeria behind other countries in pursuance of its path toward peaceful coexistence and prosperity

### ***1.1. Methodology***

The study examines historical and contemporary drivers of change that impact the connection between the spread of weapons and separatist agitations in Nigeria using a qualitative research design. The analysis helps to make more sense out of such complexities and linkages to the evolution of Nigeria's socio-political landscape. A review of existing data from secondary sources, including academic literature, policy documents, and media reports, was conducted. This wide collection gives a broad basis of understanding the context within which different groups in Nigeria have engaged in separatist movements amidst an increasing proliferation of arms. Actions taken by state and non-state actors are discussed in the paper through the analysis of those sources, elaborating on a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic and political motivations occurring. Qualitative analysis identifies key themes that reflect changes in the dynamics of security and governance: pointing out a rise of non-state actors and the realization of local autonomy. the research seeks to determine the way regions prone to separatist sentiments have been asserting autonomy through redefinition of their relationships with the central government amidst arms proliferation. The broader development faced by the states in Nigeria in their quest for stability and equality are also highlighted. the study will finally consider possible solutions to the linked issues of arms proliferation and separatist agitations through disarmament, improved local governance, and dialogue among parties in conflict. This study aims to add to the increasing body of work on peace and stability in Nigeria by going into a detailed discussion of these vital issues.

### ***1.2. Proliferation of arms and separatist agitation towards a conceptual orientation***

Nigeria's colonial past can be traced back to the late 19th century when European powers engaged in the "Scramble for Africa." (Kanu 2012). The British Empire emerged as a dominant force and established control over the region, including what would later become modern-day Nigeria. This colonial rule laid the foundation for the socio-political and economic dynamics that continue to shape the country today. In 1914, the British amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates, forming the entity known as Nigeria (BBC, 2021). This amalgamation was primarily driven by British administrative convenience rather than considering the diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious differences within the region. The union of the different ethnic groups was by force, which resulted in a weak and complex nation-state that later became one of the sources of internal conflicts and tensions. The colonial era also sowed the seeds of disharmony among the ethnic groups in Nigeria (Awotayo 2013). To administer the

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territories under their control, the British had to rely on local chiefs and traditional leaders through what is termed indirect rule. This system only served to widen the gaps in power that already existed, since some ethnic groups were given preference over others. These divisions, which were further exacerbated by the arbitrary demarcation of borders and the unequal distribution of resources, formed the groundwork for future ethnic wars and tensions. Furthermore, some tribes in Nigeria were further marginalised as a result of the country's military dictatorship (Adangor, 2017).

Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria has been the scene of several military coups and epochs of military dictatorship. The said military regimes mostly marginalized certain ethnic groups and regions, engendering the feelings of exclusion and rancor (Ihonvbere 1994). For instance, the Igbo ethnic minority in southeast Nigeria sought to establish their own sovereign state during the Biafra secession movement in the late 1960s. The Nigerian government's violent military response, which was controlled by other ethnic groups, resulted in a catastrophic civil war and the widespread marginalisation of the Igbo people.

Apart from ethnic marginalization, military rule reproduced economic inequalities in Nigeria. The military elites, who normally hail from specific regions or ethnic groups, controlled and benefited from the huge oil wealth of the country while neglecting the development of other sectors and regions. The "Scramble for Africa," which began in the late 19th century, was the beginning of Nigeria's colonial past, which ultimately created the intricate sociopolitical dynamics that persist in the nation to this day. In addition to their policy of indirect rule, which sowed the seeds of strife and caused ethnic differences, the British compelled the union of the Northern and Southern Protectorates. Nigeria's cyclical military rule is another significant element that further marginalises some populations and widens economic gaps. These historical elements continue to influence Nigeria's present struggles and its struggle for wealth and unity.

Several factors have driven the proliferation of arms in Nigeria. First is the regional conflicts and political instability that have driven demand for weapons. Conflicts such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast and farmer-herder clashes in central Nigeria have been a few among several others that have raged on for many years, heightening the demand for arms by the various armed groups (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Several factors anchor the rise of separatist movements in Nigeria. Drivers to feature strongly include political marginalization, economic disparities, cultural, ethnic tensions, and, at times, calls for the creation of autonomous governance. These have combined with historical injustices and the attendant feeling of being left out of the political process by the separatist agitations (Kyuka & Jwan, 2021). Regions in Nigeria where these secession movements have picked up speed over time include: The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, created in 1999, sought secession by the Igbo-dominated southeast to establish an independent Biafra (Dudley, 2014). Similarly, there is the Indigenous People of Biafra, founded in 2012, which has been agitating for the secession of Biafra and demanding the right to self-determination for the Igbo people (Osuji, 2020). There are also groups like the Oduduwa Republic Agitators, demanding an independent

Oduduwa Republic as a way of representation for the Yoruba ethnic group (Ojelabi, 2021).

### ***1.3. Understanding Arms Proliferation and Separatist Agitation in Nigeria the Social Identity Theory***

The framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, explains how people divide themselves into social groups according to shared traits, which results in in-group bias and out-group discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This identity division breeds conflict and tension and is, therefore, particularly relevant to the theory in analyzing the dynamics at play within societies, such as that of Nigeria. The Nigerian population is ethnically, religiously, and regionally diverse, with strong collective identities. Such diversity occasions the creation of in-groups and out-groups, which forms fertile ground for intergroup conflict, especially when exacerbated by political marginalization, economic disparities, and historical grievances. One other aspect is that armament in Nigeria could be related, in a function of the availability of weapons on one hand and for what motives such groups opt to defend or struggle for what they think stands in their best interest on the other. Usually, these are groups seeking more autonomy or independence, actual autonomy, that feel so negligible against the broader working in light of the prevailing political order, mobilizing on questions of identity, demands for self-determination. On the other hand, strong identification from an ethnic or regional perspective can have a very powerful influence on developing collective grievances in the Nigerian context, as identified by the theory of Social Identity. Strong identification mobilizes groups in the expression of their rights and interests amidst resources, power, and representation, often culminating in upsurges of tension and conflict manifested in separatist movements or armed resistance.

Research has pointed out the implications of these identity dynamics. For example, Brown (2000) reflects on the relevance of SIT when analyzing intergroup relations and emphasizes the theory for explaining the processes that underlie the mechanisms of group behavior, and conflict. Hogg (2006) further develops the complications of identity formation and group dynamic processes by showing how these factors influence both conflict escalation and cooperative behavior among groups. The interplay of social identities, according to Social Identity Theory, provides a very vital clue toward the arms proliferation-separatist agitation phenomena in Nigeria. It stresses the need for redressing of identity-based grievances and resultant competition from them, laying a foundation for tension and conflict. Recognition of such dynamics allows the framing of strategies to mitigate conflict more effectively and promote inclusive governance.

## **2. Separatist Movement in Nigeria**

Adesanya 2023: Separatist agitations have been a reoccurring problem in Nigeria, as the country tries to force different goals. Such agitations are further being driven by unresolved national questions like perceived marginalization and lately insecurity. The study assesses the resurgence of separatist movements in Nigeria, focusing on the IPOB and Ilana Omo O'odua. Nigeria is a multicultural nation with more than 250 ethnic groups, and as such, several separatist movements have taken place across different regions. (Ayomola & Oketokun 2021). Some notable separatist movements. According to Nwobashi, 2019, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra -MASOB-, was founded in 1999 and also aims for an independent state to be known as Biafra in the South-east Zone of Nigeria, which happens to be its area of operation. Indigenous People of Biafra: IPOB is another pro-Biafran separatist organization founded in the year 2012, believed to advocate for the secession of Igbo people from Nigeria and to restore the so-called the Republic of Biafra (Abada et al, 2020). OODUA People's Congress: OPC, formed in 1994, largely advocates for self-determination of the Yoruba ethnic group in the southwest part of Nigeria (Abdulazeez 2013). Niger Delta Avengers: Formed in 2016, the NDA is a militant group in the Niger Delta region that demands greater control over the region's oil resources and improved development for its marginalized communities (Aniche 2019). The causes and motivations of separatist agitation are different from region to region within Nigeria, but some generally recognized causes are: ethnic and cultural grievances; usually, subjugated ethnic groups, where there is exclusion from political power and economic resources, create a mindset and attitude of marginalization, hence the need for self-determination. Unequal distribution of resources: Inequality in the sharing of resources, especially from areas with much natural resource potential has generated demands for greater control and benefit sharing. Political marginalization: Actual or perceived exclusion from political positions and decision-making processes has, in some instances, led to demands for autonomy or independence (OSAGHAE & SUBERU 2005). Past grievances: Memories of past conflicts-such as the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War which prompted the secessionist bid by Biafra-still inform the narratives and goals of separatist movements. The government has been responding to separatist agitations through various approaches, including the following: Military and security crackdowns: The government employs the security apparatus in suppressing separatist activities such as arrests, raids, and the deployment of troops to affected regions. Discussion and negotiation: As a nonviolent means of resolving disputes, the government holds discussions with separatist leaders or starts talks. Proscription and legal actions: The Nigerian government has also attempted to outlaw or designate specific separatist movements as terrorist organisations. One example of this was the proscription of IPOB in 2017. Initiatives for development and peacebuilding: To address socioeconomic inequality and promote national cohesion, the administration has proceeded to execute development programs and peacebuilding initiatives.

### **3. Political, Social, and Economic Consequences of Arms Proliferation in Nigeria**

Given the well-documented use of firearms by political thugs to intimidate opponents and influence election outcomes, political instability must actually be one of the biggest causes of arms proliferation, particularly during election seasons. The possible consequences might intensify into a vicious cycle where people turn to self-defence, which would encourage the proliferation of weapons. This has been an upward trend in violence and insecurity in Nigeria. The easy availability of arms has empowered militant groups, such as Boko Haram in the northeast and bandit groups in the northwest, to wax strong. By the Global Peace Index, in 2021, Nigeria was ranked 148 out of 163 countries, reflecting a high level of violence and conflict incidence. The availability of arms has made the attacks by these groups deadlier and undermined the authority of states in the creation of an atmosphere of terror in the hearts of the citizenry (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021). State institutions, especially the police and military, have been so weakened by arms proliferation that they have not been able to put up an effective challenge against the armed groupings. This has shaken public confidence in the government. The National Bureau of Statistics 2020 reports that over 60% of Nigerians feel insecure in their various communities, an exposure of the loss of legitimacy of the state. Political instability, especially around election periods, is, therefore, another major cause of weapon proliferation, evidenced by the widely reported activities of political thugs using guns to threaten and influence elections. The apparent need to defend one's self in such instances may lead to the formation of vicious cycles that quicken the rate at which weapons are acquired. The 2019 general elections were no less violent, with armed groups attacking both polling stations and voters. This is an affront to the democratic process and may become the source of a self-sustaining cycle of violence that can destabilize the political environment. Besides, arms proliferation has been linked to the commission of wide-scale human rights violations in Nigeria. Most of the time, armed groups are behind extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, and sexual violence, mostly against women and children. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of kidnapping for ransom in the world, with armed groups exploiting firearms availability (UNODC, 2020). This fosters a culture of impunity, whereby those responsible for such violence hardly get punished. Arms proliferation has led to massive displacement internally within Nigeria. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, as of 2021, over 3 million persons were internally displaced in the country due to the activities of armed groups. This indeed has created a humanitarian crisis; among those internally displaced, many face difficulties in meeting basic needs such as food, shelter, and health care. It destroys the social fabric of the community and creates tension and mistrust among various ethnic and religious groups.

Equally impacted, as always in such cases, was education. Schools in those conflict areas were targeted by militant armed groups, which led to the closure of schools and the decline in enrolment rates. According to a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report in 2020, more than 1.3 million children in the northeast region have been out of school since the Boko Haram insurgency started. Without education, the youth become victims of the recruited armed groups, which in turns lead to a

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vicious circle of poverty and violence. Economically, the bearing of the proliferation of arms is very serious on Nigeria: the violence and insecurity driven by the armed groups deters foreign investment and disrupts local economies. The World Bank, in its report, projected that the GDP growth rate for Nigeria would be a paltry 1.8% in 2021, partly because of the effects of insecurity on economic activities. This inability to attract investment, though, hampers economic development and increases poverty levels, mainly in the areas affected by conflicts. However, perhaps in response to the threats occasioned by arms proliferation, military spending by the Nigerian government increased impressively. For instance, from about \$1.5 billion in 2015, it reached more than \$2.5 billion by 2021 alone (Budget Office of the Federation, 2021). Such increased military spending, as is apparently needed to remedy insecurity, is at a cost in terms of under-resourcing other vital areas like education, health, and infrastructure—everything that stands in the way of long-term economic progress. Arms proliferation has also impacted agriculture, one of the very essential sectors of the economy of Nigeria. Farmers in areas of conflict are threatened by such armed groups, leading to low productivity and food insecurity. According to FAO, over 13 million people suffered from acute food insecurity in 2021 due to various factors, one of which was conflict. Such a decrease in agricultural output can have negative implications not only on food security but also on exacerbating poverty conditions in rural communities. The proliferation of arms has enormous, wide-ranging consequences on the security situation in Nigeria: political, social, and economic. Increased violence and insecurity compromise the state's authority and weaken state institutions, while human rights abuses and displacements have turned it into a humanitarian crisis. It inhibits investment, heightens military expenditure, and causes disturbance in agricultural productivity. It thus calls for a multi-dimensional approach ranging from strengthening state institutions to disarmament initiatives that target the very causes of violence. Only then can Nigeria appropriately address arms proliferation and head towards stability and prosperity.

### ***3.1. Secession: The Conflicts and Contradictions in Nigeria's Law and International Laws***

Secession is defined as an area or group separation from a larger political body to constitute themselves into a new independent state. Nigeria is ethnically complex and replete with historical grievances against the backdrop of various secessionist movements, most recently the Biafran War, 1967-1970. The paper discusses the conflicts and contradictions that exist between Nigeria's laws and international laws on secession, with recent developments and case studies. The colonial history of Nigeria set the stage for the present ethnic and regional tensions. A multiethnic state was artificially created when the British colonial administration amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914, with different peoples having distinct cultural identities. It has often clashed with others since independence, hence leading to political instability and civil unrest. The Biafran War, caused by a secession desire of the Igbo people, is extremely wrenching with lots of blood let, dramatizing how complex an issue secession is in Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2020).

The Constitution of Nigeria does not provide for the right to secession. Section 1(1) of the 1999 Constitution states that Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble

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sovereign state. This provision reflects the government's stance against any attempts at secession. Furthermore, Section 2(1) emphasizes the unity of the nation, reinforcing the idea that Nigeria is a single entity (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Such a notion of national unity has also been kept up by the Nigerian judiciary. In *A.G. Abia State v. A.G. Federation* (2002), the Supreme Court held that the unity of Nigeria is not negotiable. By such a judicial interpretation, the legal impediments against secession have been further entrenched since courts have always rejected such claims which are presented to challenge the constitutional framework regarding the unity of the state (Ogunbiyi, 2021).

International law acknowledges this right through the Charter of the United Nations and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. According to Article 1 of the documents, all peoples have the right to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development (United Nations, 1966). However, this right is invariably interpreted in the context of decolonization and is not universally applied to secessionist movements in established states. The African Union has a policy of territorial integrity which complicates the application of self-determination in the context of secession. The AU's Constitutive Act emphasizes the inviolability of borders inherited from colonial rule, thereby discouraging secessionist movements (African Union, 2000). This no doubt reflects a broader concern with stability and unity in African states at the expense of minority rights.

This is a paradox for secessionist movements in Nigeria, considering that international law on self-determination is summarily denied legitimacy by Nigeria's legal framework. This inconsistency has spawned tensions, especially among ethnic groups with ambitions of autonomy or independence. The most well-known of these secessionist groups is the Indigenous People of Biafra, which seeks independence for the southeastern part of Nigeria. IPOB was founded in 2012 and has since garnered enormous support, especially among the Igbo people, who feel highly marginalized by the Nigerian state. The reaction of the Nigerian government has been military, tagging IPOB a terrorist group in 2017, though (Omenazu, 2021). This brings to question the issue of how much countries can balance national security with the right to self-determination. The Nigerian government has come under increasing pressure in recent years from secessionist movements. The 2020 #EndSARS protests bore witness to general discontent with government policies and the perceived marginalization of some ethnic groups (Ogunleye, 2021). Protests like #EndSARS have reignited discussions on self-determination and the legitimacy of secessionist claims in view of police brutalities and human rights violations. It will also put to question the effects of separatist movements on human rights, and such an issue can be brought up by the international community. Reports from organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have pointed out the abuses by the Nigerian security forces against separatist movements relating to issues of freedom of peaceful assembly and speech. Amnesty International (2021) How the international world reacts to these violations will alter the dynamics within Nigerian separatist movements. Addressing the fundamental truth that underlies separatist ideology requires diplomatic engagement on a global scale. Facilitating communication between the Nigerian government and separatist groups through the international community can promote

peaceful conflict settlement. But the Nigerian government has to be willing to accept and act upon the input of the marginalized communities for involvement to pay off.

### ***3.2. KANU AND IGBOHO: Nigerian Government's Tough Stance on Secessionists***

Antagonistic secessionist feelings began to rise in Nigeria two years ago, with the southeastern and southwestern parts of the country being at the forefront of the agitations. The movements have been led by high-profile personalities, including Nnamdi Kanu of the Indigenous People of Biafra and Sunday IGBOHO, a prominent activist of the Yoruba tribe. Calls for secession are not strange in Nigeria. An instance of Igbo marginalisation in post-colonial Nigeria and a significant historical reference was the 1967–1970 Biafran War. IPOB, which Kanu founded in 2012, has embraced the Biafran cause for Southeast independence. Kanu has occasionally used harsh language, condemning the Nigerian government for perceived injustices against the Igbo people and demanding a referendum on Biafra's independence (Omenugha, 2021). Equally, Sunday IGBOHO has emerged as the leading figure in the Yoruba nation's struggle for self-determination. His activism gained momentum in 2020, particularly after he called for the establishment of a Yoruba nation in response to rising insecurity and neglect by the federal government (Adebayo, 2021). Both Kanu and IGBOHO have garnered substantial support from their respective ethnic groups, reflecting deep-seated grievances regarding governance, security, and resource allocation in Nigeria.

The government has been responding in several ways to these movements: through military operations, through courts, and by publicly disparaging the leaders and their causes. It has embraced a no-tolerance approach to separatism in whatever form, considering it a threat to the unity and security of the nation. Specifically, IPOB was confronted with the military operation in 2017, tagged "Operation Python Dance," after tensions in the southeast area mounted into violent clashes and the killing of many people until Kanu was arrested (Ugochukwu, 2021).

In the case of Sunday IGBOHO, for example, there was a government crackdown early in 2021 through a raid on his residence in Ibadan, leading to his arrest in the Benin Republic in July 2021. The military response has been part of a broader strategy to quell dissent that challenges federal authority. Legal measures have also been utilized in fighting secessionist movements. Kanu faced charges of treasonable felony, leading to his detention and trial (Nwankwo, 2021). The legal proceedings against him have been contentious, with allegations of irregularities and calls for his release from various human rights organizations. Similarly, in the case of IGBOHO's arrest, he faced legal challenges, although the government of Nigeria sought his extradition because of alleged terrorism charges (Ogunleye 2021). Political rhetoric has proven to be an important medium through which public perception over these movements has been greatly influenced. Government officials have framed Kanu and IGBOHO as threats toward national security, often through the invocation of the memory of the Biafran War. President Muhammadu Buhari has emphasized the need for unity, warning against the dangers of ethnic nationalism (Buhari, 2021). This narrative resonates with segments of the population who fear that secessionist movements could

lead to further fragmentation of the country. However, it has also sparked resentment among those who feel their grievances are being overlooked.

The government's tough stance has significant implications for national unity. While aiming to project strength and resolve, these actions may inadvertently increase tensions. The heavy-handed approach has led to polarization along ethnic lines, with perceptions of discrimination (Omenugha, 2021). Moreover, the suppression of secessionist movements raises questions about Nigeria's federal structure. The critics further insist that the centralization of power in Abuja has alienated regional voices, thereby deepening feelings of alienation among the many ethnic groups. According to Adebayo (2021), failure by the government to address root causes of secessionist sentiments-e.g., economic inequality, security challenges, and political exclusion-may eventually undermine national cohesion.

The hardline stance by the Nigerian government against such secessionists as KANU and IGBOHO reflects a wider struggle for national identity and unity. While it seeks to maintain territorial integrity and suppress separatist aspirations, the approach raises concerns on human rights, political repression, and marginalization of ethnic groups. In order to address the underlying frustrations that are fuelling these views, the government must engage meaningfully with all stakeholders. Otherwise, a nation already beset by a host of socio-political issues could become much more fragmented and unstable.

## **Conclusion**

Arms proliferation and separatist agitation are interlinked phenomena; both are twin threats to world peace and security. Advanced weaponry imparts the necessary impetus to separatist movements for achieving the desired goals with added lethal and sophisticated means. The resultant impact of this positive correlation manifests itself in the prolongation of conflicts, destabilisation of entire regions, and humanitarian crises. Finally, in the light of containing or minimising the risks of separatist agitation, a beginning for arms control should be made. In this regard, violence can be checked only through effective international cooperation, strict arms control, conflict resolution mechanisms, and promoting comprehensive dialogue. Besides, the international community needs to contribute to inclusive political solutions and address the root causes of the grievances of separatist groups for sustainable peace and stability. The spiral of violence can only be broken and a more secure world created through disarmament, diplomacy, and development combined.

## **Recommendations**

1. Dialogue and Negotiation: The Federal Government should maintain an open and all-inclusive dialogue with secessionist groups to understand their grievances and concerns. This may be helpful in finding common ground and possible solutions that could answer their demands within the framework of a united Nigeria.
2. Power devolution: In view of these, there is the need to look into decentralizing powers from the central authority to the regional or state governments, such that

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the regions, feeling sidelined, can have those perceptions of marginalization addressed and become more influential over their affairs through discretion and decision-making mechanisms.

3. **Resource Control:** Control over resources has to be considered with due care to national resources in an equitable manner, which could bring down the gap in regional economic disparities, thereby feeding such feelings of marginalization.
4. **Constitutional Reforms:** Pursue broad-based constitutional reforms on structural imbalances and power dynamics feeding secessionist tendencies—maybe in relation to the federal system, protection of minority rights, and inclusiveness in governance.
5. **Economic Development:** There is a need to raise a discussion on the issue of economic development and job creation in parts of the country. This would reduce economic disparities, which are always cited for fuelling secessionist movements, and create a feeling of shared prosperity.
6. **Education and Awareness:** Invest in education and awareness programs that will promote national cohesion, tolerance, and understanding, transcending divisive narratives, letting a sense of belonging to and shared identity among all Nigerians prevail.
7. **Good Governance:** Instills, good governance practices at all levels of government and reinforce institutions; ensure transparency, accountability, and the rule of law are applied in a manner that instills, confidence in the Nigerian state.
8. **Social Integration:** Bringing in the dimension of social integration and cultural exchange among the different ethnic and religious groups will be felt. It could be realized through a number of activities that provide inter-ethnic dialogue, cultural events, and community building.
9. **Security and Conflict Resolution:** The addressing of security challenges and conflicts feeding secessionist movements shall be through the entrenchment of appropriate security measures, community policing, and mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts.
10. **International Involvement:** Secessionist movements will require a lot of international cooperation and assistance in meeting the challenge. This can be sought to be pursued by way of sharing experience with various regional and international organizations concerned with mediation and peaceful resolutions. This can be sought to be pursued by way of sharing experience with various regional and international organizations concerned with mediation and peaceful resolutions. Each of these steps has to be contextualized and framed within the specific context and dynamics of Nigeria. The approach has to be holistic and must include a process that will effectively uproot the roots of secessionist movements leading to national unity.

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