

2.9.1. Treatment by authorities of pro-Biafran separatists and perceived pro-Biafran supporters

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For background information on pro-Biafran separatist groups, including their goals, capacity, *modus operandi*, areas of operation and violations perpetrated by them see EUAA COI Report – Nigeria Security Situation November 2025.

While pro-Biafra groups, inspired by the 1967–1970 secessionist movement, share the goal of secession, they differ in approach.596 IPOB,597 a splinter faction from the Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), has been the most active group in the agitation for restoration of an independent Republic of Biafra for the past decade.598 Founded in 2012 by Nnamdi Kanu,599 IPOB has been the most militant expression of post-war Igbo nationalism.600 Citing long-standing grievances of marginalisation,601 the group has gained significant support both domestically and in the diaspora.602 While conservative Igbo nationalists have advocated for gradual, diplomatic efforts towards fair political and economic inclusion within Nigeria, Kanu's interpretation of Igbo nationalism has been grounded in radical separatism, aligning with the confrontational faction of the movement. In 2014, Kanu first introduced the idea of armed struggle, followed by an open call for weapons in 2015.603 In 2020, he founded the Eastern Security Network (ESN),604 allegedly in response to rising security threats, particularly those posed by Fulani herdsmen. IPOB claims the ESN has played a key role in reducing attacks, killings, and farm invasions across the region.605 As the armed paramilitary wing of IPOB, some ESN members include former soldiers who served in the Nigerian army, while others are civilians trained in basic combat skills. Many are armed with military-grade rifles.606

In 2017, the Nigerian Federal Government and South-East Governors proscribed IPOB as a terrorist organisation.607 His leader, Nnamdi Kanu, who has also British nationality, was arrested in Nigeria in 2015 but disappeared while on bail in 2017.608 In 2021, he was detained in Kenya and later reappeared in a Nigerian court that same year, facing seven charges of terrorism, which he denies in his ongoing trial.609 Kanu's trial has faced repeated delays, judicial recusals, and two rejected bail applications.610 In October 2023, the Enugu High Court ruled the designation of IPOB as terrorist group unconstitutional;611 a ruling which was however overturned by Nigeria's Supreme Court the same year.612 In January 2025, a unanimous three-

member panel of the Court of Appeal upheld the proscription, ruling that the government acted lawfully.613 In response, IPOB filed a notice of appeal at the Supreme Court on 7 February 2025, challenging the decision.614

The Nigerian senior security advisor stated that, while initially IPOB backed armed struggle - with its leader urging loyalists to take up arms against the Nigerian state and 'take down' security personnel - in recent years, the group has shifted to a non-violent approach, calling for the realisation of Biafra through peaceful means, particularly through a *referendum*. The source added that such a change in messaging must be seen more as a tactical rather than an ideological shift, namely as a legal strategy tied to Kanu's trial, aimed at softening his image and gaining international support.615

Following the re-arrest of Kanu in 2021, Finland-based Simon Ekpa, a self-proclaimed disciple of Kanu, gained prominence as the new lead broadcaster for Radio Biafra.616 Ekpa was however removed within a few months after refusing to sign the Radio's rules of engagement.617 In July 2021, Simon Ekpa declared that the Biafra movement had entered an 'autopilot phase' 618 and in 2022 he announced the establishment of the Biafra Republic Government in Exile (BRGIE).619 His faction began recruiting fighters, including from the ESN, who became known as 'Autopilot'. BRGIE, a diaspora-led separatist group, is now considered as a more violent group than IPOB, which has distanced itself from it. Since 2023, fighters under Ekpa's rebranded BRGIE group have been linked to rising violence in the region.620

In November 2024, Ekpa was arrested in Finland by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) on suspicion of inciting terrorism and spreading violent separatist propaganda online.621 In March 2025, Nigeria's Sanctions Committee designated Simon Ekpa, several IPOB members, and affiliated businesses as terrorism financiers, citing their role in funding and inciting attacks linked to IPOB's armed wing, the ESN. Ekpa was accused of organising 49 international fundraising campaigns between October 2023 and September 2024, allegedly used to support violence in southeastern Nigeria.622 These actions were reportedly coordinated through social media, particularly X, and linked to a broader digital propaganda strategy,623 also aimed at spreading disinformation and amplifying calls for civil disobedience.624

IPOB and ESN members were killed by Nigerian security forces during special operations625 (see EUAA COI Report – Nigeria Security Situation November 2025). State repression against separatist movements and their perceived sympathisers is described as 'frequent' and 'excessive'.626 Nigerians living in the South-East have been at risk of arbitrary arrests amid the government's campaign against IPOB's armed wing.627 National media reported cases where government security raided communities in the South-East states, harassing and arresting individuals, who were later released,628 as well as cases of harassment and extortion of Igbos at checkpoints in the South-East.629 A 2024 report by local NGO International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law (Intersociety)630 indicated that Nigerian security forces were accused of committing extensive human rights violations in Eastern Nigeria under the pretext of combating 'IPOB/ESN/Biafra terrorism'. These included arbitrary arrests, prolonged detentions without trial, secret abductions, torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and destruction of civilian property. Intersociety further alleged that the security operations affected unarmed Igbo civilians and reported that state forces were responsible for over twice as many

civilian deaths (32 300) compared to those attributed to armed non-state actors (14 500) in the region.631 Similarly, a Nigerian senior security advisor told the EUAA that real or suspected supporters of pro-Biafran agitation are often arrested and detained, sometimes for years and without formal charges or trial. Many are held in military facilities under harsh, inhumane conditions. Often, security forces carry out mass, indiscriminate arrests. According to the same source, Nigerian security forces are 'negatively disposed' to any expression of support, endorsement, or sympathy with the Biafran cause – and not just against the armed groups. 'Hundreds - if not thousands - of young people are frequently stopped at the numerous checkpoints across the South-East, and if anything linked to Biafra is found, such as content on their phones, it is treated as an offense, and they are arrested, detained or otherwise asked to bail themselves – another word for extortion.'632

The Nigerian senior security advisor added that most prominent individuals who are strongly supportive of the Biafran cause - considered 'individuals of concern' by the security system - are being monitored very closely online and offline. However, the state does not have the capacity to track the large number of people who support the cause. 'Therefore, it is unlikely that all supporters are being monitored.'633

During election periods, there have been reports of instances of voter suppression and intimidation targeting Igbo communities,634 including violence against Igbo voters, online and public hate speech, destruction of Igbo-owned businesses and physical attacks.635 At times, the media has portrayed Igbo individuals in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes, associating them with criminality or economic greed. Some Nigerian politicians and social media influencers have reportedly used inflammatory language to incite hostility and violence against the Igbo population.636

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