BIAFRAN NATIONALISM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA: HISTORICAL GRIEVANCES, IDENTITY POLITICS, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND PROSPECTS FOR DIALOGUE

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Abstract
Biafran nationalism remains one of the most persistent expressions of political grievance in postcolonial Nigeria. Although the Republic of Biafra was defeated in 1970, the ideas, memories, and identities associated with Biafra have continued to shape political mobilisation in South-East Nigeria, particularly through the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and related pro-Biafra groups. This article examines Biafran nationalism as a product of historical grievances, contested identity politics, perceived marginalisation, and demands for self-determination. It argues that the resurgence of Biafran agitation cannot be reduced to secessionist extremism; rather, it reflects unresolved consequences of colonial state formation, the 1966 political crisis, the Nigerian Civil War, post-war reintegration failures, and contemporary anxieties over security, federalism, and political inclusion. The article further assesses prospects for dialogue and conflict resolution. It contends that military repression alone cannot produce durable peace. A sustainable resolution requires acknowledgment of historical harm, protection of civil liberties, inclusive federal reforms, economic investment in the South-East, diaspora engagement, and a structured national dialogue grounded in justice, dignity, and mutual recognition. The study concludes that Nigeria's unity is more likely to endure when it is based on negotiated consent and equitable citizenship rather than coercion.
Keywords: Biafran nationalism, IPOB, self-determination, South-East Nigeria, conflict resolution

1. Introduction

Nigeria's diversity has often been described as both a source of strength and a source of instability. The country contains hundreds of ethnic and linguistic communities, yet its political institutions were historically structured around competition among large regional and ethnic blocs. In this context, Biafran nationalism represents one of the most enduring challenges to the Nigerian state's claim to provide equal citizenship, security, and political belonging to all its peoples. The attempted secession of the Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra between 1967 and 1970 produced one of Africa's most devastating civil wars, but it did not end the underlying grievances that had made secession conceivable in the first place.

The Nigerian Civil War arose after a sequence of coups, counter-coups, ethnic violence, and political breakdown in 1966. Following attacks on Igbo people in Northern Nigeria, the Eastern Region, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, declared independence as the Republic of Biafra on 30 May 1967. The federal government under General Yakubu Gowon rejected the declaration and prosecuted a war to preserve Nigerian territorial unity. The conflict ended in January 1970 with Biafra's surrender, but its legacies have remained politically active. As Aguene, Ngene, and Ndufu (2025) observe, the federal government declared "no victor no vanquished" after the war and promised reintegration through "reconstruction", "rehabilitation" and "reconciliation" (p. 1). However, many scholars and communities in the South-East argue that these promises were only partially fulfilled.

More than five decades after the war, Biafran nationalism has re-emerged in new forms. Movements such as the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and, more prominently, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), have mobilised around claims of marginalisation, insecurity, political exclusion, and the right of the Igbo people to determine their political future. The persistence of these movements demonstrates that the Biafra question is not merely a historical memory; it is also a contemporary conflict over citizenship, resources, dignity, and the terms of Nigerian unity.

This article examines Biafran nationalism and conflict resolution in South-East Nigeria through four interconnected themes: historical grievances, identity politics, self-determination, and prospects for dialogue. It argues that a durable resolution must move beyond security responses and address the structural and symbolic causes of alienation. The central argument is that Biafran nationalism persists because many Igbo people continue to experience the Nigerian state as unequal, unsafe, or unresponsive. Therefore, conflict resolution requires not only the management of separatist agitation but also the reconstruction of trust between the state and South-East communities.

2. Conceptualising Biafran Nationalism

Biafran nationalism may be understood as a political ideology and collective identity that seeks either the restoration of Biafra as a sovereign state or greater recognition, autonomy, and protection for Igbo people within Nigeria. It combines ethnic identification, historical memory, territorial imagination, and political protest. Although Biafra is often associated with the Igbo, the wartime Republic of Biafra also included other Eastern Nigerian groups. Contemporary pro-Biafra activism, however, is predominantly associated with Igbo communities in the South-East and parts of the Igbo diaspora.

Nationalism is not simply an attachment to an ethnic group. It is also a claim about political community: who belongs, who decides, whose interests are protected, and whose suffering is recognised. In the Nigerian case, Biafran nationalism emerged from the belief that Igbo people were being denied full membership of the Nigerian political community. This belief was strengthened by the pogroms of 1966, the civil war, the wartime blockade and famine, and the perceived failure of post-war reconciliation.

Ethnicity in Nigeria has never been politically neutral. Nnoli (1978) demonstrates that "ethnic politics in Nigeria developed through competition over access to state power, employment, education, trade, and regional resources." Ethnic identity became politically significant because the colonial and postcolonial state distributed opportunities through regional and communal channels. In such a system, groups that feel excluded from federal power may interpret their disadvantage not merely as economic hardship but as collective political rejection.

Biafran nationalism therefore has both material and symbolic dimensions. Materially, it responds to concerns about infrastructure, federal appointments, security, investment, and revenue allocation. Symbolically, it responds to memories of violence, loss, displacement, and humiliation. The two dimensions reinforce one another. When communities believe that their historical suffering is denied or minimised, present-day grievances become more emotionally powerful and politically mobilising.

It is also important to distinguish Biafran nationalism from violent extremism. While some armed groups have used Biafran symbolism, many supporters of Biafran self-determination have historically engaged in rallies, advocacy, commemorations, civil disobedience, and diaspora campaigning. A conflict-resolution approach must therefore avoid treating all pro-Biafra sentiment as criminality. Such an approach risks deepening the very alienation it seeks to suppress.

3. Historical Roots of Grievance

3.1 Colonial State Formation

The origins of Nigeria's regional and ethnic tensions predate independence. British colonial rule amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914, creating a large and diverse state without necessarily building a shared national political culture. Colonial administration strengthened regional identities by governing the North and South through somewhat different institutional arrangements. The indirect-rule system also reinforced ethnic and religious boundaries, particularly in the North.

The colonial economy and administrative structure encouraged competition among regional elites. Political parties in the First Republic were largely regionally based, and struggles over the census, revenue allocation, elections, and control of the federal centre intensified ethnic suspicion. Osaghae (1998) analyses "Nigeria's post-independence crisis as a product of the country's political culture, economy, colonial inheritance, and neocolonial location." The implication is that Biafran nationalism did not emerge spontaneously; it developed within a state whose institutions often rewarded ethnic and regional competition.

The creation of regions also meant that political power was closely tied to territorial control. The Eastern Region, dominated politically by the Igbo, the Northern Region, dominated by the Hausa-Fulani political establishment, and the Western Region, associated with Yoruba political leadership, became the principal units of political competition. Minority groups within these regions often felt trapped between larger ethnic blocs. Thus, the Nigerian federation inherited a structural problem: it was diverse, but its federal arrangements did not consistently guarantee smaller groups meaningful autonomy or protection.

3.2 The Crisis of 1966

The immediate background to Biafran secession was the political crisis of 1966. On 15 January 1966, a group of young army officers staged a coup that killed leading politicians, including Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Northern Premier Ahmadu Bello, and Western Premier Samuel Akintola. Because several of the coup leaders were Igbo officers, many in Northern Nigeria interpreted the event as an Igbo-led action, even though the coup's motives and participants were more complex.

In July 1966, a counter-coup brought General Yakubu Gowon to power. The counter-coup was followed by violent attacks against Igbo people in Northern Nigeria. Thousands of Igbo civilians were killed, while many others fled to the Eastern Region. These attacks, commonly described as pogroms, became foundational to Biafran collective memory. They convinced many Eastern leaders and citizens that Igbo people could not rely on the Nigerian state for protection.

The crisis also included the abortive Aburi talks in Ghana in January 1967. The meeting between Gowon and Ojukwu produced agreements intended to reduce centralisation and reassure the Eastern Region. However, the two sides later disagreed over the interpretation and implementation of the Aburi Accord. The failure of these negotiations deepened mistrust and made war more likely.

Daly (2023) notes that "the Republic of Biafra was created after pogroms against Igbo populations in 1966, and that the new state built its own army, currency, institutions, and courts." This shows that Biafran statehood was not only a military or diplomatic project; it was also an attempt to create political institutions capable of protecting a population that felt abandoned by Nigeria.

3.3 Secession and Civil War

On 30 May 1967, Ojukwu declared the Eastern Region the independent Republic of Biafra. The federal government regarded the declaration as an unconstitutional act of secession and launched a police action that became a full civil war. The war lasted from July 1967 to January 1970 and devastated the Eastern Region.

One of the most traumatic features of the war was the federal blockade of Biafra. The blockade restricted food, medicine, and other essential supplies, contributing to severe famine. Heerten and Moses (2014) describe the "Nigeria-Biafra war as globally significant because of the famine caused by the federal military government's blockade of Biafra. The humanitarian crisis attracted international attention and made images of starving Biafran children central to global human rights and humanitarian advocacy."

The scale of civilian suffering remains contested, but estimates commonly suggest that between one and three million people died during the conflict, many from starvation and disease. Springer Nature (2021) states that "the blockade of food and supplies resulted in extensive famine and that an estimated one to three million people died, most from starvation. For many Igbo families, these deaths were not abstract wartime casualties; they were personal losses that shaped family histories, religious practices, political attitudes, and intergenerational memory."

The war ended on 15 January 1970, when Biafra surrendered. Gowon's declaration of "no victor, no vanquished" was intended to signal national reconciliation. Yet the phrase has remained controversial because many South-East Nigerians believe that the reality of post-war policy did not match its rhetoric. Aguene et al. (2025) argue that "the inability of successive federal governments to reintegrate Igbos and provide a level playing field has been a major catalyst for renewed Biafran secessionist agitation."

3.4 Post-War Reintegration and Its Limits

After the war, the federal government announced a policy of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation, commonly called the "3Rs." Reconstruction referred to rebuilding damaged infrastructure; rehabilitation referred to restoring livelihoods and social services; reconciliation referred to rebuilding political trust and national unity. In principle, these policies offered a path away from revenge and exclusion.

In practice, many Igbo communities experienced the post-war period as incomplete reintegration. The war had destroyed homes, schools, hospitals, roads, markets, and businesses. Bank accounts and assets had been affected by wartime financial policies, including the change of currency shortly before the end of the war. Many Igbo people felt that compensation and restitution were inadequate. The perception that the federal government did not fully implement the 3Rs became an important source of continuing resentment.

Post-war reconciliation also lacked a formal truth-and-reconciliation process comparable to those later adopted in some other African countries. There was no comprehensive public accounting of wartime atrocities, no systematic reparations programme, and no institutional mechanism through which victims could narrate their suffering and receive acknowledgment. As a result, the war remained a private family memory for many people rather than a nationally acknowledged historical wound.

This absence of acknowledgment matters for conflict resolution. In divided societies, peace is difficult to sustain when past violence is either denied or treated as closed. Lederach (1997) argues that "sustainable reconciliation in divided societies requires the rebuilding of relationships and the creation of spaces in which divided communities can encounter one another. Without such processes, historical trauma may be transmitted across generations and become available for political mobilisation."

4. Identity Politics and the Igbo Question

4.1 Igbo Identity and Political Mobilisation

Igbo identity is central to Biafran nationalism, but it is not identical with it. Not all Igbo people support secession, and Igbo political opinion is diverse. Igbo communities are found across the South-East and South-South, as well as in major Nigerian cities and the diaspora. Igbo society is also internally differentiated by class, religion, generation, locality, and political affiliation.

Nevertheless, the experience of the civil war created a powerful collective identity. Biafra became a symbol of Igbo survival, resistance, and historical injustice. For older generations, memories of air raids, displacement, starvation, and loss remain vivid. For younger generations, Biafra may be encountered through family stories, social media, music, commemorations, and online activism. This intergenerational transmission of memory helps explain why Biafran nationalism has survived even among people born long after 1970.

Identity politics in Nigeria is often shaped by the perception that political power is distributed according to ethnic, regional, and religious calculations. When Igbo people perceive that they are underrepresented in key federal institutions, excluded from strategic appointments, or disproportionately affected by insecurity, these experiences are interpreted through the historical lens of Biafra. The result is a political narrative in which present grievances confirm older wounds.

Onyemechalu and Ejiofor (2024) examine "long-distance nationalism and diaspora mobilisation in the struggle for Biafran self-determination." Their work highlights the importance of diaspora communities in sustaining Biafran political consciousness through advocacy, funding, media, and transnational networks. The diaspora is particularly important because it connects local grievances in Nigeria with international human rights discourse and global attention.

4.2 Marginalisation and the Politics of Recognition

A recurring claim in South-East political discourse is that the region has been marginalised within the Nigerian federation. This claim includes limited federal infrastructure, fewer strategic appointments, insecurity, poor federal presence, and the perception that South-East concerns receive less attention than those of other regions.

Marginalisation is difficult to measure precisely because different groups use different indicators. However, the subjective experience of marginalisation is politically real even where statistical evidence is disputed. People's willingness to accept state authority depends partly on whether they believe the state treats them fairly. When a region feels excluded, its citizens may interpret ordinary political conflicts as evidence of a deeper pattern of discrimination.

The politics of recognition is therefore crucial. Recognition means more than symbolic praise; it involves acknowledging a group's history, protecting its security, respecting its cultural dignity, and including its representatives in decision-making. In the South-East, demands for recognition often include calls for a Nigerian president of Igbo origin, equitable infrastructure, federal presence, security reform, and respect for civil liberties during pro-Biafra activism.

The danger of non-recognition is that it can transform reformist demands into radical ones. If citizens believe that peaceful engagement produces no results, some may become more receptive to separatist or confrontational narratives. This does not mean that every grievance justifies secession, but it does mean that states must take recognition seriously as part of conflict prevention.

4.3 Youth, Unemployment, and Alienation

Contemporary Biafran activism has drawn substantial support from young people, including unemployed and underemployed youth. This is not unique to the South-East; youth alienation is a major feature of political violence across Nigeria. However, in the South-East, youth grievances intersect with historical narratives of exclusion and with contemporary insecurity.

Nwangwu, Ononogbu, and Odoemelam, as cited by Onyemechalu and Ejiofor (2024), describe "the second generation of Igbo nationalists as a collaboration between the Igbo petty bourgeoisie and the underclass, with poor and unemployed young Igbo people forming a disproportionate part of the movement's driving force" (p. 535). This observation suggests that Biafran nationalism is not only an elite ideological project. It also provides a language through which economically excluded young people express frustration with unemployment, police brutality, insecurity, and limited opportunity.

For many young people, Biafran activism offers identity, belonging, and an explanation for hardship. It converts personal frustration into collective political meaning. This does not automatically make such activism violent, but it creates a reservoir of mobilisable sentiment that armed actors or opportunistic politicians may exploit.

Conflict resolution must therefore include youth employment, education, digital civic engagement, and credible channels for political participation. Security responses that target young activists without addressing unemployment and political exclusion may reduce visible protest temporarily while increasing resentment.

5. Self-Determination and the Biafran Question

5.1 The International Legal Framework

Self-determination is a foundational principle of international law. Article 1(2) of the United Nations Charter states that "one purpose of the organisation is to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples" (United Nations, 1945, Art. 1, para. 2). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights similarly declares: "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (United Nations, 1966, Art. 1, para. 1).

These provisions establish that self-determination is a serious legal and moral principle. However, they do not automatically create a right of secession for every ethnic group within an existing state. International law generally protects the territorial integrity of states, while recognising self-determination in contexts such as decolonisation, foreign occupation, and, in some interpretations, severe and systematic oppression that leaves a people no realistic internal alternative.

The Biafran case is therefore legally and politically complex. Supporters of Biafran self-determination argue that the historical violence of 1966, the wartime blockade, and continuing marginalisation demonstrate that Igbo people cannot obtain justice within Nigeria. Critics respond that secession would create further instability, endanger minorities, and weaken Nigeria's federal system. Both positions raise important questions about sovereignty, minority protection, and the limits of state power.

5.2 Internal and External Self-Determination

A useful distinction can be made between internal and external self-determination. Internal self-determination refers to a people's ability to participate meaningfully in the political, economic, and cultural life of the state to which they belong. External self-determination refers to separation from that state and the formation of a new sovereign political entity.

For South-East Nigeria, internal self-determination would include fair political representation, respect for civil liberties, security reform, infrastructure development, fiscal federalism, and protection of Igbo cultural and linguistic rights. External self-determination would mean an independent Biafran state or some form of negotiated separation.

Many pro-Biafra activists demand external self-determination, but the practical route to peace may begin with strengthening internal self-determination. If citizens feel secure, represented, and economically included, demands for secession may lose part of their urgency. Conversely, if internal self-determination is denied, demands for external self-determination are likely to persist.

Recent scholarship has directly addressed this issue. "A study published in the *Journal of African Law* examines the right to external self-determination of the South-East people of Nigeria from the perspective of international law, noting that agitation reached a crisis point in 2015 when military action escalated into violent confrontation" (Journal of African Law, 2025, pp. 441–457). This indicates that the legal debate is now closely tied to the practical question of how the Nigerian state responds to political mobilisation.

5.3 The State's Response and Its Consequences

The Nigerian state has often responded to pro-Biafra activism through arrests, proscriptions, military operations, and restrictions on public assembly. These measures are sometimes justified on security grounds, particularly where groups are accused of violence or where public order is threatened. However, repression can also produce counterproductive outcomes.

When the state treats nonviolent advocacy as rebellion, it may confirm activists' belief that Nigeria will not tolerate Igbo political expression. When security operations harm civilians, destroy property, or restrict everyday life, they may generate new grievances. The sit-at-home orders associated with IPOB illustrate this dynamic: they disrupt education, commerce, transportation, and healthcare, but they also reflect a broader crisis of authority and trust.

A state that relies mainly on coercion may achieve short-term control while weakening its long-term legitimacy. Durable peace requires that citizens see the state not only as a coercive authority but also as a protector of rights and provider of public goods. This is particularly important in a region with a living memory of state violence.

6. Contemporary Conflict Dynamics in the South-East

6.1 IPOB, MASSOB, and Pro-Biafra Movements

The contemporary Biafran movement is not monolithic. MASSOB emerged in the late 1990s and advocated for Biafran independence through political mobilisation and civil resistance. IPOB, founded in the early 2010s under Nnamdi Kanu, became especially prominent through radio broadcasts, social media, street protests, and international advocacy.

IPOB's appeal lies partly in its ability to connect historical memory with present-day grievances. Its messaging emphasises Igbo victimhood, state repression, political exclusion, and the need for self-determination. At the same

time, the movement has faced internal divisions, leadership disputes, and disagreements over strategy. Some supporters favour nonviolent advocacy; others have embraced more confrontational tactics.

The Nigerian government's designation of IPOB as a terrorist organisation and subsequent security operations have further complicated the conflict. Supporters view these measures as persecution; the government views them as necessary responses to insecurity. This mutual mistrust makes dialogue more difficult because each side interprets the other's actions through a narrative of hostility.

Ikenga, Oluka, and Ativie (2025) argue that "the main reasons for continued Biafran secessionist demands have remained largely unchanged more than fifty years after the civil war." Their analysis links contemporary unrest to the 1966 coups, anti-Igbo violence, and perceived marginalisation in federal administration. This continuity suggests that Biafran nationalism is not simply a reaction to current leadership but a long-term structural problem.

6.2 Insecurity, Sit-at-Home Orders, and Civilian Costs

The South-East has experienced increasing insecurity, including attacks on security personnel, prisons, electoral infrastructure, and civilians. Criminal violence, kidnapping, and armed robbery have also affected the region. These problems cannot all be attributed to Biafran activism, but Biafran politics and criminal violence have become intertwined in public discourse.

Sit-at-home orders have become one of the most visible expressions of the conflict. Originally associated with commemorations or protests, they have sometimes been enforced through intimidation. Their effects are severe: markets close, schools shut, transport stops, and daily income is lost. The burden falls especially heavily on traders, artisans, students, and low-income households.

The civilian cost of insecurity is a major obstacle to peace. Citizens may sympathise with grievances while rejecting methods that harm their livelihoods and safety. This creates an opportunity for conflict resolution: civic, religious, traditional, and community leaders can distinguish between legitimate political demands and coercive or criminal methods.

6.3 Diaspora Mobilisation and Transnational Politics

The Igbo diaspora plays an important role in contemporary Biafran nationalism. Diaspora communities in Europe, North America, Asia, and elsewhere have organised protests, raised funds, produced media content, and engaged international institutions. Social media has amplified these efforts, allowing local events in Nigeria to reach global audiences rapidly.

Diaspora activism can serve peaceful purposes by drawing attention to human rights concerns and advocating dialogue. However, it can also intensify polarisation when online discourse becomes inflammatory or when distant actors encourage risks that local communities must bear. Conflict resolution should therefore include diaspora voices while encouraging responsible speech, nonviolence, and realistic engagement with Nigerian institutions.

Onyemechalu and Ejiofor (2024) show that "diaspora mobilisation is central to the struggle for Biafran self-determination." Their work suggests that any peace process that excludes the diaspora will be incomplete. At the same time, diaspora engagement must be balanced with the priorities and safety of communities living in Nigeria.

7. Conflict Resolution: Why Past Approaches Have Not Been Enough

7.1 The Limits of Military Solutions

Military force can suppress armed activity, but it cannot resolve political grievances. This is a central lesson of the Nigerian Civil War. Biafra was defeated militarily in 1970, but Biafran nationalism did not disappear. Instead, it adapted to new political conditions and re-emerged in later decades.

Security operations may be necessary to protect civilians and uphold the law, but they must be lawful, proportionate, and accountable. Indiscriminate raids, arbitrary arrests, and excessive force can radicalise communities and strengthen separatist narratives. A conflict-resolution strategy must therefore combine security with human rights protection.

The central problem is legitimacy. A state may win a war but lose the trust of a population. If citizens believe that the state sees them as enemies rather than citizens, they may withdraw cooperation, resist authority, or support alternative political projects. Legitimacy is built through fairness, accountability, service delivery, and respect for dignity.

7.2 The Incomplete "3Rs"

The post-war policy of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation was an important starting point, but it was insufficient. Reconstruction focused on physical rebuilding; rehabilitation focused on restoring livelihoods; reconciliation focused on political reintegration. Yet these efforts did not adequately address memory, justice, and structural inequality.

The absence of a robust truth process meant that wartime suffering was not publicly acknowledged in a sustained and inclusive manner. The absence of comprehensive reparations meant that many victims felt their losses were

forgotten. The absence of institutional reform meant that the political conditions that had contributed to the war were not fully transformed.

Aguene et al. (2025) argue that "the no victor, no vanquished" slogan became mere rhetoric where reintegration and equal opportunity were not achieved." This assessment highlights a key conflict-resolution principle: reconciliation requires follow-through. Declarations of peace must be supported by policies that visibly change people's lives.

7.3 Federalism Without Trust

Nigeria operates as a federation, but many citizens perceive its federalism as overly centralised. Control over security, revenue, policing, and major appointments remains heavily concentrated at the federal level. This concentration can make regions feel powerless, especially where they believe their interests are not represented at the centre.

In the South-East, demands for restructuring often include state police, fiscal decentralisation, resource control, stronger local government, and more equitable representation. These demands are not necessarily secessionist. They may represent attempts to make Nigerian federalism more meaningful and responsive.

A conflict-resolution framework should distinguish between demands for restructuring and demands for secession. Treating all decentralisation proposals as threats to unity may push moderate reformers toward more radical positions. Conversely, genuine federal reform can create incentives for communities to invest in Nigerian democracy.

8. Prospects for Dialogue

8.1 Acknowledgment and Historical Truth

The first step toward dialogue is acknowledgment. The Nigerian state should formally acknowledge the suffering caused by the 1966 pogroms, the civil war, the blockade, and the famine. Acknowledgment does not require assigning collective guilt to any ethnic group. It requires recognising that civilians suffered and that the nation has a responsibility to remember and learn.

A credible truth and reconciliation process could include public hearings, documentation of wartime experiences, preservation of archives, support for victims and survivors, educational reforms, and commemoration. Such a process should be independent, inclusive, and sensitive to the trauma of participants.

Historical truth is not merely about the past. It shapes the present. When a community believes that its suffering is denied, it may conclude that dialogue is pointless. When its suffering is acknowledged, it becomes more possible to discuss the future without treating every disagreement as a continuation of war.

8.2 Inclusive National Dialogue

A national dialogue should include federal and state governments, South-East governors, traditional rulers, religious leaders, civil society organisations, women's groups, youth representatives, business leaders, academics, security institutions, and diaspora representatives. It should also include critics of Biafran separatism, because peace cannot be built only with the most vocal activists.

The dialogue should address concrete issues: security reform, policing, federal character, revenue allocation, infrastructure, electoral fairness, political inclusion, human rights, and the status of political prisoners. It should produce actionable commitments, timelines, and mechanisms for monitoring implementation.

Dialogue must not become a symbolic event that ends without change. Communities in the South-East have seen numerous committees, conferences, and policy statements. If dialogue is to be credible, it must lead to measurable reforms. Otherwise, it may deepen cynicism.

8.3 Security Sector Reform

Security reform is essential. The South-East needs policing that protects all residents without profiling or abusing them. Community policing, civilian oversight, transparent investigation of abuses, and accountability for misconduct can help rebuild trust.

Security agencies should distinguish between criminal violence, armed insurgency, and peaceful political advocacy. Peaceful pro-Biafra expression, including commemoration and advocacy, should be protected within the limits of the law. Where violence occurs, responses should target responsible individuals through due process rather than stigmatising entire communities.

Security reform should also address the roots of violence: unemployment, arms proliferation, drug abuse, weak local governance, and criminal networks. A purely militarised approach may displace violence rather than end it.

8.4 Federal Reform and Equitable Development

Economic and political reforms are central to conflict resolution. The South-East requires improved federal infrastructure, reliable electricity, transportation links, ports and trade corridors, industrial investment, educational institutions, and healthcare. These investments would demonstrate that the region is valued as part of Nigeria.

Fiscal federalism should be reviewed to ensure that states have sufficient resources to meet their responsibilities. Revenue allocation, minimum wage obligations, security funding, and infrastructure financing should be transparent and equitable. Political reforms should ensure that no region is permanently excluded from the highest offices of the state.

Development policy should be designed with local participation. South-East communities should help identify priorities rather than receiving projects imposed from above. Participatory planning can improve outcomes and strengthen the perception that government is responsive.

8.5 Protecting Civil Liberties

Peace cannot be built through repression of speech. Citizens must be free to discuss Biafra, criticise government policy, commemorate historical events, and advocate constitutional reform. Criminal law should target violence, incitement, extortion, and coercion, not peaceful political opinion.

Protecting civil liberties would reduce the perception that the state fears Igbo political expression. It would also create space for moderate voices to challenge violence without being accused of betrayal. Civil society, journalists, lawyers, and academics need protection to document abuses and mediate disputes.

8.6 Role of Traditional and Religious Institutions

Traditional rulers, church leaders, town unions, market associations, and community development organisations have significant influence in the South-East. They can promote nonviolence, discourage criminality, mediate local disputes, and encourage participation in dialogue.

However, these institutions must be independent and credible. If they are seen as instruments of political parties or security agencies, they may lose the trust needed for mediation. Their role should be to represent community interests, protect civilians, and insist on accountability from both state and non-state actors.

8.7 Diaspora Engagement

The diaspora should be included in peacebuilding through structured consultations, academic exchanges, investment initiatives, and human rights advocacy. Diaspora communities can contribute skills, capital, professional networks, and international attention. They can also help counter misinformation and promote nonviolent engagement.

A diaspora peace platform could bring together Igbo professionals, entrepreneurs, scholars, faith leaders, and activists to develop practical proposals for South-East development and political reform. Such a platform should be connected to institutions in Nigeria so that recommendations can be implemented.

9. Toward a Framework for Sustainable Peace

A sustainable peace framework for the Biafra question should rest on five pillars.

First, **truth and acknowledgment**. Nigeria must confront the history of the civil war honestly. This includes recognising civilian suffering, preserving memory, and educating future generations.

Second, **justice and accountability**. Where abuses occurred, whether during the war or in contemporary security operations, there must be credible investigation and accountability. Impunity reinforces the belief that some lives matter less than others.

Third, **political inclusion**. The South-East must have meaningful representation in federal institutions and a credible path to the presidency. Inclusion should be institutional, not merely symbolic.

Fourth, **equitable development**. Federal investment, infrastructure, industrial policy, and job creation should address the material conditions that make alienation attractive.

Fifth, **nonviolent civic space**. Citizens must be able to advocate, protest, commemorate, and organise peacefully. The state should respond to violence through law and evidence, not collective punishment.

These pillars do not resolve every disagreement about Nigeria's constitutional future. Some people will continue to support independence, while others will support a restructured Nigerian federation. But a peace framework does not require immediate agreement on sovereignty. It requires creating conditions in which disagreement can be expressed without violence and in which all citizens experience the state as fair.

Lederach (1997) emphasises that "peacebuilding in divided societies is a long-term process of rebuilding relationships." Applied to Nigeria, this means that peace cannot be achieved through a single conference, election, or military operation. It requires patient institutional work across generations.

10. Conclusion

Biafran nationalism in South-East Nigeria is the product of unresolved historical trauma, contested identity, perceived marginalisation, and demands for self-determination. The Nigerian Civil War ended in 1970, but it did not resolve the political question that produced it: how a diverse federation can guarantee security, dignity, and equal citizenship to all its peoples.

The persistence of Biafran agitation shows that military victory alone does not create peace. The post-war promise of "no victor, no vanquished" and the 3Rs of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation were important symbolic commitments, but many South-East communities believe they were not fully realised. This perceived gap between promise and practice has allowed historical grievances to remain politically alive.

Contemporary Biafran nationalism is also shaped by youth unemployment, insecurity, diaspora activism, social media, and dissatisfaction with Nigeria's centralised federal system. These forces cannot be addressed through repression alone. A durable resolution requires a combination of acknowledgment, accountability, political reform, equitable development, civil-liberties protection, and inclusive dialogue.

The prospects for dialogue are real but conditional. They depend on whether the Nigerian state is willing to treat South-East grievances as legitimate subjects of national debate rather than as security threats to be silenced. They also depend on whether pro-Biafra leaders and communities are willing to reject violence, criminal coercion, and ethnic hatred. Peace requires responsibility on all sides.

Ultimately, Nigeria's unity should not be defended merely as a territorial fact. It must be renewed as a political bargain based on justice, mutual recognition, and shared opportunity. If Nigerian citizenship becomes meaningful for the people of the South-East, Biafran nationalism may lose much of its mobilising force. If it does not, the Biafra question will remain a recurring challenge to Nigeria's peace, democracy, and territorial integrity.

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