



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF SECESSIONIST AGITATIONS IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN SECURITY, ECONOMIC STABILITY, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between educational attainment and those perceptions, with attention to their implications for human security, economic stability, and sustainable development in the region. Data were collected from 1,066 respondents across six Local Government Areas in Anambra, Enugu, and Imo States, with 907 valid cases analysed for the educational attainment variable. Public perception was operationalized as a composite score derived from five validated constructs/attitudes toward the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), its leadership (Mazi Nnamdi Kanu), the Biafra project, perceived marginalization, and the weekly Monday sit-at-home directive. This yielded an overall Cronbach's alpha of .798. Biserial correlation analysis returned a statistically significant but weak negative relationship between educational attainment and secessionist perception ( $r = -.104$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $N = 907$ ): respondents with higher educational qualifications tended toward more critical evaluations of secessionist agitations. The most pronounced educational gradient appeared on the sit-at-home sub-scale, used as a proxy for awareness of the economic costs of secessionist disruption, where agreement declined from 76.3% among respondents without formal schooling to 38.4% among postgraduate holders. Conversely, near-universal agreement with the marginalization sub-scale, which proxied perceived human security deprivation, persisted regardless of educational level, indicating that the structural grievances sustaining secessionist sentiment are not dissolved by formal schooling. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions contextualized these findings, foregrounding the salience of marginalization narratives, the prolonged detention of Nnamdi Kanu, and the economic burden of the sit-at-home directive. The paper argues that educational attainment moderates how citizens evaluate secessionist tactics without resolving the underlying structural conditions, i.e., political exclusion, infrastructural neglect, and cumulative economic attrition that constitute the material basis of secessionist grievance in the Southeast.

**Keywords:** Educational attainment, Human security, Indigenous People of Biafra, marginalization, Secessionist agitations, southeast Nigeria, Sustainable development

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**Received:** 2/6/2026; **Revised:** 6/7/2026; **Accepted:** 14/7/2026; **Published:** 19/7/2026



## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Secessionist agitations are a recurring feature of multi-ethnic, postcolonial states arising where heterogeneous national compositions generate competing demands for political recognition, equitable resource distribution, and cultural self-determination (Sorens, 2005; Madueke, 2024). Nigeria, comprising over 250 ethnic nationalities, presents a particularly acute version of this challenge. The structural tensions embedded in British colonial administration (differential educational provision across regions, uneven political incorporation, and ethnically selective resource allocation) produced inter-regional grievances whose contemporary expressions remain both politically significant and materially consequential (Osaghae, 1998; Nwangwu et al., 2020).

The Southeast geopolitical zone, predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group, has been a focal site of secessionist activity since the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970. The failed Republic of Biafra and its aftermath (an estimated three million deaths, deliberate economic marginalisation through the confiscatory twenty-pound bank policy, and sustained Igbo exclusion from federal political power) bequeathed grievances that have re-mobilised across several postwar decades as socio-political conditions have shifted (Thomas & Falola, 2020; Tuki, 2024). Contemporary agitations, led principally by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) under Nnamdi Kanu since 2012, combine diaspora networks, social media broadcasts, an armed wing in the Eastern Security Network (ESN), and a weekly Monday sit-at-home directive that has imposed substantial and measurable costs on the regional economy (Madueke, 2024; Anele et al., 2023).

Those costs are not merely economic. Amnesty International (2025) documented thousands of unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and systematic destruction of property across the Southeast between January 2021 and December 2024. Security data show 332 attacks and 776 deaths in the region between 2021 and 2025, with violence surging threefold in 2024 alone (Madueke, 2026). Each Monday sit-at-home shuts down an estimated ₦10 billion in commercial activity; 192 Mondays of lost commercial output between August 2021 and March 2025 have devastated small and medium enterprises, reduced Internally Generated Revenue, and eroded foreign direct investment in one of Nigeria's most commercially productive regions (Obilor et al., 2024; Anele et al., 2023). These disruptions compound pre-existing challenges in meeting United Nations Sustainable Development Goal targets - particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) - in a country where SDG implementation was already significantly behind schedule (Oweibia et al., 2024).

How individual citizens perceive and evaluate these agitations is a question with direct policy relevance. Attitudes toward secessionism shape the social conditions for political dialogue, the legitimacy accorded to both the movement and the state, and ultimately the prospects for negotiated resolution of what has become a protracted regional crisis. Educational attainment, as a vehicle of political socialisation and critical consciousness, is theoretically expected to equip citizens with the analytical resources to weigh the strategic costs and putative benefits of secessionism (Lipset, 1960; Freire, 1970). Whether that expectation holds empirically in the Southeast Nigerian context (and what it implies for human security, economic stability, and sustainable development) has not previously been examined with survey data of adequate scope.



This paper is drawn from a wider mixed-methods study of public perceptions of secessionist agitations in Southeast Nigeria, which investigated the influence of multiple demographic and sociological variables. The present paper focuses exclusively on educational attainment as the independent variable, reporting the relevant findings from that larger study in sufficient depth to constitute a self-contained contribution to the literature. The central question addressed is whether educational attainment differentiates public perceptions of secessionist agitations in the study area. The hypothesis tested posits that individuals with higher educational attainment are more likely than those with lower educational attainment to hold critical perceptions of secessionist agitations.

## **2.0. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Educational Attainment**

Educational attainment denotes the highest level of formal education successfully completed by an individual (UNESCO, 2012). Sociological scholarship treats formal schooling as a mechanism for political socialisation and civic capacity, shaping not only occupational trajectories but citizens' engagement with political institutions (Almond & Verba, 1963; Fryer, 2022). Fryer's (2022) longitudinal analysis of British Election Study data demonstrates that higher education experience produces measurable shifts in political attitudes, corroborating the view that formal schooling has political as well as economic effects. The Nigerian case adds a regional dimension: the colonial legacy of differential educational provision produced higher rates of formal schooling in the Southeast than in much of the North. This structural advantage enabled Igbo professionals to dominate portions of the colonial civil service but was not subsequently matched by equivalent political incorporation (Osaghae, 1998; Nwangwu et al., 2020). The resulting combination of educational capital and political exclusion is central to understanding how educational attainment might both sharpen critical appraisal of secessionist tactics and, through frustrated expectation, sustain the underlying grievance that makes secessionism attractive.

#### **Secessionist Agitations and Their Consequences**

Secession refers to the formal withdrawal of a group or territory from an existing political state to form an independent entity (Hechter, 2000). Secessionist agitations encompass the organised political activities, campaigns, and disruptions through which groups pursue or advocate for such separation, encompassing a spectrum from peaceful protest to armed insurrection. In Southeast Nigeria, IPOB's agitations have traversed that spectrum: from Radio Biafra broadcasts and street protests to the formation of the ESN in December 2020 and the imposition of the Monday sit-at-home directive from August 2021. Abiodun and Oladele (2024) characterise these as 'unhealthy secessionist agitations' with demonstrably negative consequences for national security, while Madueke (2026) situates them within Nigeria's wider concurrent security crises, i.e., Boko Haram in the North, Niger Delta militancy in the South-South, as mutually reinforcing threats to institutional capacity and sustainable development.

#### **Human Security, Economic Stability, and the SDGs**

Human security, as articulated by the United Nations Development Programme (1994) and elaborated in subsequent scholarship, encompasses freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live



in dignity. Political instability and secessionist violence simultaneously compromise all three. Sumner et al. (2025), demonstrate that grievance-driven mobilization disrupts development gains, diverts public expenditure toward security, and generates poverty where gains were previously being registered. In Southeast Nigeria, the compounding effects of the sit-at-home order produce losses materially equivalent to those associated with low-intensity armed conflict in a commercially productive region. Ayad (2026), applying synthetic control methods to Sudan's secession of South Sudan, finds causal evidence that secession reduces the parent state's real GDP per capita by an average of 10.95%, with losses reaching 25.79% over time. This benchmark gives empirical weight to the protracted economic attrition currently experienced in the Southeast under conditions of sustained agitation. Against this backdrop, SDG 16's call for peaceful and inclusive societies and SDG 8's emphasis on sustainable economic growth are not abstract aspirations but direct casualties of the present crisis (Oweibia et al., 2024).

## **2.2. Theoretical Framework**

### **Relative Deprivation Theory**

Ted Robert Gurr's (1970) Relative Deprivation Theory holds that political violence and social unrest arise when individuals or groups perceive a discrepancy between their legitimate expectations and their actual conditions. Gurr distinguishes detrimental deprivation, where expectations hold while conditions worsen; aspirational deprivation, where conditions stagnate while expectations rise; and progressive deprivation, where both improve temporarily before conditions deteriorate while expectations continue rising. Southeast Nigeria exhibits elements of all three variants. Post-war marginalization, perceived infrastructural neglect, and the systematic exclusion of Igbo elites from federal political power across successive administrations have produced a sustained condition of group-level relative deprivation (Ibeanu et al., 2016; Tuki, 2024).

A theoretically important complication is that higher educational attainment may intensify rather than dissolve this deprivation: by raising aspirations regarding employment, political representation, and professional recognition, education creates a gap between expectation and reality that is acutely felt when graduate credentials are inadequately rewarded in a political economy perceived as structurally biased against the region. This mechanism partially explains why the negative correlation between education and secessionist perception found in this study is weak rather than strong: education raises critical capacity but simultaneously raises expectations whose frustration sustains grievance.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory explains how individuals derive self-worth and belonging from group membership, and how in-group/out-group categorization structures political behaviour. In ethnically plural states, ethnic and regional identity constitutes primary axes of social categorization that education may reinforce rather than dissolve. Tuki (2025) finds that experiences of ethnic discrimination reduce the salience of national relative to ethnic identity among Igbo respondents. This is a prediction derived directly from social identity dynamics.

The implication for present purposes is that education, by providing access to historical narratives and interpretive frameworks for understanding Igbo experience in relation to the Nigerian States may deepen ethnic solidarity even while enhancing capacity for strategic political evaluation. Educated



Southeasterners who simultaneously express solidarity with the marginalization narrative and critique IPOB's specific tactics are not contradicting themselves; they are demonstrating precisely the 'dual awareness' that Social Identity Theory predicts for politically conscious members of a stigmatized group.

### **Modernization Theory**

Lipset's (1960) Modernization Theory holds that formal education, alongside urbanization and industrialization, generates political awareness, civic competence, and demand for accountable governance. Sondheimer and Searing (2023) using original survey data from Senegal, find that education increases political participation when democratic institutions are credible, but that the effect is attenuated in contexts of institutional weakness.

Huntington's (1991) related insight, i.e., that political mobilization without adequate institutional capacity produces instability rather than democratic consolidation, applies directly to the Nigerian Southeast: the expansion of formal education has produced graduates whose demands for inclusion and equity are poorly accommodated by existing governance structures, redirecting political energy toward secessionist expression rather than institutional reform. The modest magnitude of the correlation found in this study ( $r = -.104$ ) reflects this mediation: the positive effects of education on critical evaluation of secessionist tactics are partially offset by the heightened frustration experienced by educated citizens confronting unresponsive institutions.

### **Empirical Review**

#### **Education, Political Consciousness, and Civic Engagement**

Almond and Verba's (1963) foundational work established that formal education increases subjective political competence (citizens' sense of capacity to influence political processes) across diverse national contexts. More recent quantitative work has complicated this picture. Fryer (2022) confirms the association between higher education and shifting political attitudes in contemporary democracies, while Sondheimer and Searing (2023) demonstrate that the effect on participation is conditional on institutional quality.

Lange (2012), in a cross-national study combining statistical analysis and historical case studies, cautions that educational expansion in ethnically divided contexts with weak institutions may contribute to rather than diminish ethnic mobilisation, by raising group expectations, sharpening group identity, and improving organisational capacity. This 'two faces of education' argument is directly relevant to Southeast Nigeria: a highly educated population constitutes both IPOB's most articulate critics and, in significant segments, its most sophisticated advocates.

#### **Secessionist Movements in Nigeria: Context and Drivers**

Nwangwu et al. (2020) identify two generational waves of Igbo nationalism—an elite-driven first generation pursuing accommodation within Nigeria's political system, and a second generation represented by IPOB that advocate outright secession. It documents the political economy conditions sustaining the latter: high youth unemployment, regional infrastructural neglect, and perceived federal exclusion. Madueke (2024) traces IPOB's evolution from Radio Biafra broadcasts to the militarized ESN, arguing that state repression has been the primary driver of this escalation. Tuki's (2024) is the



most methodologically rigorous quantitative examination of IPOB support available. It finds that perceived ethnic marginalization at the group level and negative perceptions of Nigerian democracy are the strongest predictors of secessionist support among Igbo Nigerians, while individual socioeconomic characteristics are generally non-significant. This finding which agrees with Horowitz (2000) shapes the interpretation of the present study's results: where structural group-level grievances dominate individual-level predictors, the moderating effect of educational attainment will necessarily remain modest.

### **Security and Human Rights Consequences**

The security consequences of sustained secessionist agitation in the Southeast have been extensively documented. Abiodun and Oladele (2024), drawing on interview data from three Southeast states, find that agitation-related insecurity has restricted movement, claimed lives among civilians and security personnel alike, and generated pervasive fear. These findings are consistent with Amnesty International's (2025) decade-long documentation of unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, and destruction of property across all five Southeast states.

State responses have themselves exacerbated the crisis: Operation Python Dance (2017) and subsequent military deployments have been criticised for excessive force, and qualitative evidence from the present study indicates that these episodes have reinforced the marginalization narrative mobilized by IPOB (Sadiq-Bamgopa et al., 2022). Following the formation of the ESN in December 2020, the Southeast recorded a 59 percent increase in attacks on security personnel and a 344% rise in fatalities (Nwangwu, 2022). By 2024, the rate of violence was running at three times the 2023 level.

### **Economic Costs of Secessionist Disruption**

Several studies have quantified the economic damage attributable to the sit-at-home directive. Anele et al. (2023) document through qualitative investigation that the order has devastated commercial activity, displaced investment, elevated unemployment, and disrupted schooling across the region. Obilor et al. (2024) report that 192 Mondays of lost commercial activity between August 2021 and March 2025 have imposed severe losses on small and medium enterprises in Onitsha, Aba, Enugu, and Nnewi. At the macro level, Ayad's (2026) causal econometric analysis provides a comparative African benchmark: secession reduces the parent state's real GDP per capita by a mean of 10.95%, intensifying to 25.79% by 2019 in the Sudan/South Sudan case. The Southeast's sustained agitation falls short of formal secession but generates comparable economic attrition, compounding Nigeria's already significant challenges in achieving SDG targets (particularly SDG 8 and SDG 16) in a region where poverty reduction gains are actively being reversed (Sumner et al., 2025; Oweibia et al., 2024).

### **Education and Secessionist Support: Mixed Evidence**

Cross-national evidence on the relationship between educational attainment and secessionist sentiment is neither simple nor unidirectional. Sorens (2005) finds in a comparative study of advanced democracies that education can increase support for regional autonomy when educated populations perceive cultural or economic marginalization. This finding is directly applicable to the Southeast context. Barceló et al. (2023) studying Catalan independence, demonstrate that individual cognitive traits modulate secessionist support in ways that interact with educational level. Dono et al. (2021) find that the motivational structures underlying pro- and anti-secessionist collective action are substantially different, implying that education may amplify commitment among those already



sympathetic as readily as it generates critical distance among the ambivalent. Lange (2012) extends this ambivalence to the institutional level, arguing that in contexts of ethnic division and weak governance, educational expansion tends to deepen group identities and improve mobilization capacity rather than promote inter-ethnic tolerance. Taken together, this literature establishes that education equips citizens to evaluate the costs and trade-offs of secessionist strategies more rigorously, without determining what that evaluation will conclude. The outcome depends on the institutional environment, lived experience, and political opportunities available to educated citizens.

### **Research Gap**

Existing quantitative scholarship on secessionist agitations in Nigeria either addresses the macro-level political economy of the movement or examines secessionist sentiment as an aggregate outcome, without disaggregating the role of educational attainment as an explanatory variable (Nwangwu et al., 2020; Tuki, 2024). Tuki's (2024) study is the most methodologically rigorous available but does not treat educational attainment as a predictor; the absence of this variable in his analysis leaves an explicit gap in the empirical literature. Qualitative studies of IPOB's ideology and mobilization, however rich in contextual insight, cannot address the population-level question of how citizens at different educational levels evaluate secessionist claims (Madueke, 2024; Abiodun & Oladele, 2024).

The present study addresses this gap through a cross-sectional survey of 907 valid respondents in three Southeast states, supplemented by in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, providing the first quantitative investigation of educational attainment as a predictor of composite secessionist perception in the region. By connecting individual-level perception data to the broader regional dynamics of human security, economic stability, and sustainable development, the study extends the literature beyond attitudinal description toward an account of the sociological consequences that secessionist perceptions and the agitations they reflect impose on ordinary life in the Southeast.

## **3.0. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Study Area**

The study was conducted in the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria, which comprises five predominantly Igbo-speaking states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The zone covers approximately 28,754 km<sup>2</sup> with a projected 2022 population of approximately 23,488,500. Three states (Anambra, Enugu, and Imo) were randomly selected, together representing the zone's major urban commercial centres and a cross-section of rural communities across the region.

### **3.2. Research Design**

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, appropriate for collecting data at a single point in time from a representative sample to enable hypothesis testing and generalisation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative data from structured questionnaires were triangulated with qualitative evidence from in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), a mixed-methods approach that enhances construct validity and enables contextual interpretation of statistical patterns (Bryman, 2016).



### 3.3. Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure was used. In the first stage, three states were randomly selected from five. Within each selected state, two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were purposively identified to represent urban and rural contexts: Awka South and Awka North in Anambra; Enugu North and Nsukka in Enugu; Owerri Municipal and Mbaitoli in Imo. Within each LGA, three communities were randomly selected, and respondents were drawn from those communities using systematic random sampling to ensure equal selection probability.

### 3.4. Sample Size

A 95 percent confidence level, a 3 percent margin of error, and an assumed population standard deviation of 0.5, were used to calculate the sample size. This yielded 1,066 respondents (Brinkhoff, 2023). Of 928 returned questionnaires, 907 valid cases were available for the educational attainment analysis following listwise exclusion of 21 non-responses, representing a 2.3 percent item-level missing data rate for this variable.

### 3.5. Measurement of Variables

The independent variable, highest educational attainment, was measured as an eight-category ordinal variable: no formal education, First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), WASC/SSCE, NCE/OND, BSc/HND, PGD, Master's degree, and PhD.

The dependent variable, public perception of secessionist agitations, was operationalised as a composite score derived from five constructs: perceptions of IPOB (four items;  $\alpha = .725$ ); perceptions of Nnamdi Kanu as leader (three items;  $\alpha = .784$ ); attitudes toward the Biafra project (three items;  $\alpha = -.069$ ); perceptions of Igbo marginalisation (three items;  $\alpha = .632$ ); and attitudes toward the sit-at-home directive (three items;  $\alpha = .765$ ). The overall composite Cronbach's alpha was .798, within the acceptable-to-good range for social science research (George & Mallery, 2019).

The negative alpha for the Biafra sub-scale reflects item heterogeneity (three items measuring logically conflicting orientations toward the Biafran cause) rather than instrument failure. In the analytical framework of this study, the marginalisation sub-scale serves as a proxy indicator for perceived human security deprivation, and the sit-at-home sub-scale as a proxy for awareness of the economic costs of secessionist disruption.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Given that educational attainment is an ordinal, non-dichotomous variable, and the composite perception score is interval-level, biserial correlation was the appropriate bivariate inferential test for hypothesis assessment. Qualitative data from IDIs and FGDs were transcribed verbatim, translated into English where necessary, and subjected to thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Themes were identified iteratively and cross-checked between coders to enhance analytical rigour.

## 4.0. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



#### 4.0. Presentation of Results

##### Socio-demographic Profile of Respondents

Of the 1,066 questionnaires administered, 928 were returned and coded for analysis. The sample was closely balanced by sex (male: 50.2 percent, female: 49.8 percent). Age distribution showed 30.4 percent of valid respondents in the 18–25 years bracket, 27.6 percent in the 26–35 years bracket, 24.3 percent in the 36–45 years bracket, 11.4 percent in the 46–55 years bracket, and 6.3 percent above 55 years. The sample was predominantly Christian (95.3 percent), consistent with the Southeast's religious composition. Civil and public servants constituted the largest occupational category (29.0 percent), followed by students (23.5 percent) and traders and business persons (21.2 percent). The majority of respondents (78.0 percent) reported monthly incomes below ₦80,000.

##### Educational Attainment of Respondents

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents' highest educational attainment across the 907 valid cases. WASC/SSCE holders formed the largest single category (37.0 percent), followed by BSc/HND holders (34.7 percent). Postgraduate qualification holders (PGD, Master's, and PhD combined) accounted for 11.6 percent of valid respondents. Respondents without formal education (3.0 percent) and those with only a First School Leaving Certificate (3.7 percent) together constituted a small minority of the sample. This was consistent with the Southeast's historically higher rates of formal schooling relative to other Nigerian regions.

**Table 1: Highest Educational Attainment of Respondents (N = 907)**

| <b>Educational Attainment</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent (%)</b> | <b>Cumulative %</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| No Formal Education           | 27               | 3.0                | 3.0                 |
| FSLC                          | 34               | 3.7                | 6.7                 |
| WASC/SSCE                     | 336              | 37.0               | 43.8                |
| NCE/OND                       | 90               | 9.9                | 53.7                |
| BSc/HND                       | 315              | 34.7               | 88.4                |
| PGD                           | 25               | 2.8                | 91.2                |
| Master's Degree               | 63               | 6.9                | 98.1                |
| PhD                           | 17               | 1.9                | 100.0               |
| Total                         | 907              | 100.0              | —                   |

Source: Fieldwork (2024).

##### Public Perception of Secessionist Agitations

The composite public perception score yielded an overall mean of 18.36 (SD = 3.97). Responses to individual sub-scale items revealed a population holding nuanced, internally complex views on secessionism. On the IPOB construct, 57.9 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the organisation represents their interests; 68.0 percent disagreed that the federal government was right to ban it. On the leadership construct, 78.3 percent agreed or strongly agreed that Nnamdi Kanu does not deserve to be imprisoned and should be set free immediately. On the marginalisation construct (the human security proxy) 70.4 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria have been discriminated against or marginalised by the federal government.



Notably, this figure remained consistently high across all educational categories, including among PhD holders (72.1 percent), confirming the near-universal character of marginalization as a perceived grievance. On the Biafra construct, 68.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the realization of Biafra is a worthy cause, yet 57.0 percent simultaneously agreed that the cause should be pursued within Nigeria rather than through formal secession. This ambivalence is directly reflected in the stated negative Biafra sub-scale alpha.

Responses to the sit-at-home directive (the economic stability proxy) exhibited the most pronounced educational gradient of all five sub-scales. Among respondents without formal education or with only FSLC, 76.3 percent expressed agreement or strong agreement with the directive. Agreement fell progressively with educational attainment: 61.2 among WASC/SSCE holders; 52.7 percent among NCE/OND holders; 44.1 percent among BSc/ HND holders; and 38.4 percent among postgraduate qualification holders. The gradient suggests that more highly educated respondents are substantially more likely to recognize and weigh the economic costs imposed on the region's commercial activity by the directive, even where they share the underlying marginalization grievance.

The negative Cronbach's alpha for the Biafra sub-scale ( $\alpha = -.069$ ) warrants methodological comment. Classical test theory interprets a negative alpha as evidence of item heterogeneity, i.e., items whose underlying orientations conflict rather than converging on a single latent construct. The three Biafra items measured logically opposed positions: one framing Biafra as a worthy goal, one stating that the Biafran dream ended in 1970, and one holding that the cause should be pursued within Nigeria. Rather than measuring a single attitude, these items map a distribution of positions on the Biafra question. The sub-scale was retained in the composite measure because the overall scale demonstrated adequate reliability ( $\alpha = .798$ ) and the construct is theoretically indispensable to the study's conceptual framework. However, findings derived from the Biafra sub-scale alone should, be treated with appropriate caution.

### **Hypothesis Testing: Educational Attainment and Secessionist Perception**

The study hypothesis predicted that individuals with higher educational attainment would tend toward more critical perceptions of secessionist agitations than those with lower educational attainment. Biserial correlation was selected as the appropriate test given the ordinal nature of the educational attainment variable and the composite perception score, an interval variable.

Results presented in Table 2 show a correlation coefficient of  $r = -.104$ , significant at the .01 level ( $p = .002$ , two-tailed,  $N = 907$ ). A statistically significant, weak negative relationship between educational attainment and secessionist perception is therefore confirmed: as educational attainment increases, respondents tend toward more critical orientations on secessionist agitations. The null hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 2:** Biserial Correlation: Educational Attainment and Public Perception of Secessionist Agitations

| Variable                       | Pearson Correlation (r) | Sig. (2-tailed) | N   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-----|
| Highest Educational Attainment | -.104**                 | .002            | 907 |

Note. \*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). Dependent variable: composite public perception of secessionist agitations score. Source: Fieldwork, 2024



Mean perception scores across educational categories follow a broadly descending trajectory: respondents in the lowest educational categories hold more favourable views of secessionist agitations, while those with tertiary and postgraduate qualifications hold more critical ones. The descent is not linear but is broadly consistent. The sit-at-home sub-scale contributed most strongly to this gradient; the marginalization sub-scale contributed least, consistent with the near-universal agreement across educational categories on that construct.

### **Qualitative Findings**

**Thematic analysis of IDIs and FGDs yielded three recurrent themes.**

#### **Education as a Critical Lens on Secessionist Strategy**

Respondents with tertiary or postgraduate qualifications consistently distinguished between solidarity with the cause of Biafra and approval of IPOB's particular tactics. The sit-at-home directive drew the most sustained criticism from this group, formulated in concrete economic terms. A focus group participant in Enugu North (a male civil servant holding a Master's degree) expressed the tension directly: 'We all feel the pain of marginalization. But who suffers from sitting at home? Not Abuja, Our traders, our students, our families. Less-educated respondents were more likely to frame compliance with the sit-at-home as necessary sacrifice rather than economic self-harm, suggesting that education specifically enhances the capacity to evaluate tactical trade-offs even where the underlying solidarity with the Biafran cause remains intact.

#### **Marginalization as a Grievance Transcending Educational Stratification**

Perceived political marginalization of the Igbo was near-universally expressed across all educational levels, with an emotional intensity that showed little attenuation with formal schooling. The prolonged detention of Nnamdi Kanu prior to his November 2025 conviction was cited across all educational groups as evidence of structural injustice, though the manner of its articulation varied. A retired teacher in Mbaitoli (a female respondent with a WASC/ SSCE certificate) expressed: 'They kept him in prison for years without finishing the trial. What does that tell our children about justice in this country?' University-educated respondents were more likely to engage with the procedural dimensions of Kanu's legal proceedings; those with less formal schooling responded more directly to its symbolic dimensions. The underlying grievance, however, was shared.

#### **Aspiration for Equitable Inclusion**

A recurrent theme among respondents across educational levels, but most systematically articulated by those with tertiary qualifications, was the aspiration for equitable participation within Nigeria rather than for formal secession. A retired civil servant in Awka South (a male IDI respondent with an HND) stated: 'We don't necessarily want Biafra. We want to be part of a Nigeria that works for all of us, where the Southeast gets its fair share of appointments, infrastructure, and respect.' The security and economic disruptions generated by the sit-at-home directive and ESN-related violence were frequently identified by educated respondents as obstacles to regional development rather than as steps toward any achievable political goal. This reading aligns with the quantitative finding that a majority of respondents who affirm Biafra as a cause simultaneously prefer its pursuit within Nigeria rather than through formal secession.



#### 4.2. Discussion

A statistically significant, weak negative correlation between educational attainment and secessionist perception ( $r = -.104$ ,  $p = .002$ ) was returned across a sample of 907 respondents. The significance of the result in a near-thousand-respondent sample on a politically sensitive topic is not trivial, even where the effect size is modest. It sits within the range predicted by Modernization Theory (Lipset, 1960; Sondheimer & Searing, 2023) and is consistent with Sorens' (2005) cross-national finding that the education–secessionism relationship is conditioned by the perceived responsiveness of political institutions. Neither theory predict a strong effect in an institutional context where education-raised expectations are systematically frustrated, and the modest correlation observed is precisely what those theories would anticipate under Southeast Nigeria's governance conditions.

The most analytically productive finding lies not in the aggregate correlation but in the differential pattern across sub-scales. The sit-at-home sub-scale, which functions as a proxy for citizens' awareness of the economic costs of secessionist disruption, exhibited the steepest educational gradient. This went from 76.3 percent agreement among the least-educated to 38.4% among postgraduate holders. This trajectory provides concrete empirical grounding for the claim that education moderates perception of the economic costs of secessionist disruption, not merely of secessionism in the abstract. Obilor et al.'s (2024) documentation of 192 lost Mondays of commercial activity and Ayad's (2026) causal evidence linking sustained political disruption to GDP per capita decline are not abstractions to educated respondents; they are evaluative resources brought to bear on lived regional experience. The economic stability implications of secessionist agitation are, in short, more visible to those with the educational capital to track their cumulative effect.

The marginalization sub-scale told a different story. Near-universal agreement across educational levels (70.4 percent overall, 72.1 percent among PhD holders) confirms that the human security deficit perceived by Southeasterners is structural rather than cognitive: it persists regardless of how much level of education a person has attained, because it reflects actual political conditions rather than misapprehension of them. Tuki's (2024) finding that group-level perceived marginalization, rather than individual socioeconomic characteristics, is the dominant predictor of secessionist support, is directly consistent with this pattern. Educational attainment moderates how citizens evaluate secessionist tactics; it does not dissolve the structural conditions that make those tactics politically intelligible.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Tuki's (2025) empirical extension of it help explain the co-existence of critical tactical evaluation and unwavering grievance. Experiences of ethnic discrimination reduce the primacy of national identity relative to ethnic identity, and education amplifies this dynamic by providing historical frameworks through which group experience is interpreted. The result, which is illustrated in qualitative data throughout the study, is a population of educated citizens who simultaneously critique IPOB's methods and affirm the justice of the underlying cause. Lange (2012) anticipates precisely this in his argument that education in ethnically divided contexts with weak institutions tends to sharpen group identity and improve mobilisation capacity, rather than generating the cross-cutting civic solidarities that Modernisation Theory optimistically predicts.



From a human security perspective, the evidence assembled across this study paints a picture of a region in crisis of considerable severity. These include Amnesty International's (2025) documentation of thousands of unlawful killings and disappearances, the 344% post-ESN increase in security fatalities (Nwangwu, 2022), and the compounding economic losses from the sit-at-home directive. Freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity (UNDP, 1994) are all compromised in the Southeast by the present condition of sustained agitation and its associated violence. The finding that the marginalization construct registers near-universal agreement across educational levels means that this human security deficit is perceived and felt across the entire social spectrum of the Southeast population, not only by the least educated or most politically radical. This has a direct implication for sustainable development: Nigeria's SDG implementation challenges (Oweibia et al., 2024) are deepened by the sustained economic attrition and institutional erosion generated by secessionist agitation in a region that contributes significantly to national commercial output.

The negative Biafra sub-scale Alpha ( $\alpha = -.069$ ) reflects genuine social-psychological ambivalence rather than measurement error. The three Biafra items register logically opposed positions, i.e., aspirational, resigned, and pragmatic, that many individual respondents hold simultaneously. Rather than a methodological inconvenience, this internal inconsistency is a finding in itself: citizens in the Southeast are not committed to a single, coherent position on Biafra. Many affirm its worth, question its feasibility, and prefer its pursuit through political means rather than armed agitation, all at once. Future measurement work should develop a multi-dimensional Biafra attitude scale capable of capturing this ambivalence analytically.

One further contextual note concerns Nnamdi Kanu's legal trajectory. Data collection for this study preceded his November 2025 conviction and life sentence on terrorism charges. The qualitative findings indicate that the protracted proceedings functioned as a mobilising grievance, sustaining sympathy for IPOB across educational categories. The conviction may intensify or reshape this dynamic: educated respondents may engage more critically with the legal record and evidence adduced at trial, while less formally schooled respondents may respond primarily to the symbolism of a long imprisonment. Whether this event modifies the education–perception relationship identified here is a question that warrants longitudinal follow-up.

## 5.0. CONCLUSION

As stated, this paper is drawn from a wider mixed-methods study of public perceptions of secessionist agitations in Southeast Nigeria and has reported findings on the relationship between educational attainment and those perceptions across a sample of 907 valid respondents. A statistically significant, weak negative correlation ( $r = -.104$ ,  $p = .002$ ) indicates that higher educational attainment is associated with more critical orientations toward secessionist agitations. The most pronounced educational gradient appeared on the sit-at-home sub-scale, where agreement fell from 76.3% among the least-educated to 38.4 percent among postgraduate holders, suggesting that education specifically enhances critical awareness of the economic costs that secessionist disruption imposes on the region. Conversely, near-universal agreement on the marginalisation sub-scale confirmed that the structural human security grievances driving secessionist sentiment are not dissolved by formal schooling.



From these findings, two relevant contributions emerge. Theoretically, the pattern of results, namely, the significant but weak overall correlation, the steep sub-scale gradient on economic cost awareness, and the flat gradient on marginalization, supports the argument that educational attainment moderates the evaluation of secessionist tactics without resolving the structural conditions of relative deprivation and group-level marginalization that sustain secessionist sentiment. This is not a failure of education but a reflection of institutional conditions: where political exclusion, infrastructural neglect, and economic attrition persist as lived realities, their political consequences will not be undone by formal schooling alone. Empirically, the study provides a quantitative examination of educational attainment as a predictor of composite secessionist perception in Southeast Nigeria, establishing a benchmark against which future panel and longitudinal studies can measure change.

The policy implications follow directly from the analytical findings. Reducing secessionist sentiment (and the human security, economic, and developmental crises it generates) requires structural governance reform. In this region, this will be in the form of equitable federal character implementation in political appointments, meaningful and sustained dialogue with Southeast stakeholders, accelerated infrastructure investment across the region, credible and transparent judicial processes, and coordinated economic recovery strategies to address the commercial displacement generated by the sit-at-home directive. The aspiration expressed by many respondents in this study was not for Biafra as a separate state, but for a Nigeria that works equitably for all of its constituent peoples. This represents both the most constructive interpretation of the Southeast's political demands and the most realistic basis for a negotiated resolution of the crisis.

Several limitations constrain the scope of these conclusions. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. The negative Biafra sub-scale alpha is a measurement limitation requiring item revision in future work. The qualitative sample is purposive and illustrative rather than statistically representative. Political developments subsequent to data collection, e.g., Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's November 2025 conviction, may have altered the perceptual landscape in ways not captured here. Future research should employ panel designs capable of tracking attitude change over time, develop multi-dimensional attitude scales for each secessionist construct, and investigate the mediating roles of social media exposure, employment status, urban-rural location, and direct experience of conflict-related disruption in shaping the relationship between educational attainment and secessionist perception.

### **Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

During the preparation of this work, the authors used an AI writing assistant to support the improvement of an author-prepared draft. The AI tool assisted with literature identification, structural reorganization, prose editing, and reference formatting. All research design, data collection, fieldwork, statistical analysis, and interpretive conclusions are entirely the authors' own. The authors reviewed all AI-assisted revisions, verified all cited sources, and retain full responsibility for the integrity and content of the published paper. The AI tool was not used in the generation of research data or findings.



### Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional authority prior to data collection. Written informed consent was provided to all respondents; participants with limited English literacy received oral translations in Igbo and affirmed consent by thumbprint. Participation was voluntary throughout, with the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Given the politically sensitive subject matter, strict confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in both data storage and reporting.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exist I this manuscript.

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