



Sit-At-Home Syndrome and Economic Degradation in Southeast Nigeria: An Assessment of Enugu State

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of the "sit-at-home" directive on economic degradation in Enugu State, Southeast Nigeria. Driven by the agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the weekly Monday sit-at-home order has severely disrupted socio-economic activities in the region. Anchored on the Relative Deprivation Theory, the study utilized a descriptive survey research design. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 400 residents and market traders in Enugu State, yielding 305 valid responses (76.25% return rate). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings reveal a strong consensus that the directive has caused severe economic instability (62.3%), reduced productivity (48.8%), massive revenue loss (91.5%), and discouraged both local and foreign investment (91.5%). Viewed through the lens of Relative Deprivation Theory, the study concludes that while the collective action was born out of perceived political and economic marginalization, it has paradoxically accelerated the absolute economic deprivation of the region. The study recommends inclusive national dialogue, security sector reform, and the establishment of protected economic buffer zones to restore commercial activities.

Keywords: Sit-at-Home Order, Economic Degradation, IPOB, Enugu State, Relative Deprivation, Marginalization.



Introduction

The Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria is historically recognized as a major commercial and entrepreneurial hub, contributing significantly to the national economy through trade, manufacturing, and informal sector activities. However, the region's economic trajectory has faced severe disruption due to the "sit-at-home" order enforced by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Initially adopted as a non-violent protest strategy to demand the release of their leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the directive has evolved into a weekly economic paralysis accompanied by security crises and the activities of non-state armed actors.

While existing literature has extensively explored the political and security dimensions of the IPOB agitation, there is a distinct knowledge gap regarding the empirical measurement of its direct impact on local economic degradation, particularly at the state level. Enugu State is selected for this study because it serves as a critical commercial and administrative nerve center in the Southeast. Its high concentration of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and major markets makes its economic paralysis a reliable indicator of the region's broader economic decline.

Therefore, this study seeks to empirically assess the extent to which the sit-at-home directive has contributed to economic degradation in Enugu State. The specific objectives are to: (1) ascertain the extent to which the order contributes to economic instability; (2) examine its impact on productivity, investment, and state revenue; and (3) understand the behavioral responses of citizens through the lens of Relative Deprivation Theory.

To achieve these objectives, the study poses the following research questions:

- i. How has the sit-at-home directive contributed to economic instability in Enugu State?
- ii. To what extent does the order reduce productivity and discourage investment?
- iii. How does the directive impact state revenue and the financial capacity of residents?



Literature Review

Conceptualizing Economic Degradation in the Context of the Sit-at-Home Order

Economic development is broadly understood as the sustained improvement in the quality of life, creation of wealth, and responsible production of goods and services (International Economic Development Council IEDC, 2021; McKinnon, 2021). Conversely, economic degradation in this study refers to the systematic decline in these indicators, manifesting as business closures, supply chain disruptions, and revenue depletion.

The Southeast region, particularly Enugu State, relies heavily on daily commercial activities. Ugwuanyi and Onyebuchi (2021) note that the sit-at-home order has led to a 30% decline in economic activity due to lost trading days. The enforcement of the order, often accompanied by violence from non-state actors, has created a "toxic security environment" that deters both foreign and local investors (Orogun & Nafiu, 2020). For instance, major commercial hubs like the Onitsha Main Market have witnessed massive capital flight, with traders relocating to neighboring states like Delta, thereby shifting economic prosperity away from the Southeast (Eze & Nwosu, 2022).

Empirical Review and Knowledge Gap

Previous studies have documented the financial toll of the unrest. Eze and Nwosu (2022) estimated a N50 billion revenue loss for the Enugu State government between 2021 and 2022. Similarly, SBM Intelligence (2022) reported that SMEs in the Southeast lost between N655 billion and N3.8 trillion over a 24-month period due to lost working days. Nwakoby and Edeh (2024) further linked the order to reduced agricultural distribution, exacerbating food insecurity.

While scholars like Adibe (2022) and Egwemi (2022) have examined the political and infrastructural consequences of the agitation, there is a scarcity of empirical, survey-based research that quantifies the direct perceptions of economic degradation among the local



populace in Enugu State. This study fills that gap by providing primary data on how the directive affects daily economic survival and state revenue.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT), originally propounded by Stouffer et al. (1949) and expanded by Runciman (1966). RDT posits that collective action and social movements arise not from absolute poverty, but from a perceived gap between societal expectations and actual realities. When a group feels deprived of valued resources compared to a "reference group," it generates feelings of injustice that can trigger collective action.

Operationalization of RDT in this Study

To effectively analyze the sit-at-home phenomenon, RDT is operationalized across three components:

Cognitive Component: This explains the root causes of the agitation. IPOB supporters perceive a discrepancy between the Southeast's contributions to Nigeria and the region's receipt of federal infrastructure and political representation.

Affective Component: This explains the emotional response. The perceived marginalization generates frustration, anger, and a sense of injustice, which translates into mass compliance with the sit-at-home order as a tool of protest.

Behavioral Component: This explains the economic disruption. The collective action (the sit-at-home) is the behavioral manifestation of relative deprivation. However, this study argues that this behavioral response has inadvertently resulted in the absolute economic degradation (SME closures, revenue loss) that the aggrieved group sought to avoid.



Methodology

Research Design and Scope

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design. This approach is appropriate as it allows for the collection of quantitative data to describe current economic realities and public perceptions regarding the sit-at-home directive in Enugu State without manipulating the variables. The scope is delimited to Enugu State, focusing on the economic impacts of the Monday order between 2021 and 2025.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The target population comprises SME owners, market traders, and transport workers in Enugu metropolis. A sample size of 400 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across major commercial hubs like Ogbete Main Market and Artisan Market.

Instrument, Validity, and Reliability

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Sit-at-Home and Economic Degradation Questionnaire (SHEDQ)." Face and content validity were established through expert review. Reliability was tested via a pilot study, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Analysis

Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 360 were returned. After screening, 55 were discarded for improper completion, leaving 305 valid copies (76.25% return rate) for analysis. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to summarize respondent views and address the research questions.



Findings

This section presents the primary data collected from the 305 respondents in Enugu State.

Table 1: Sit-at-home directive contributes to economic instability in Enugu State

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	190	62.3
Agree	85	27.8
Undecided	10	3.3
Disagree	16	5.3
Strongly Disagree	4	1.3
Total	305	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 indicates that a vast majority of respondents (90.1% combined Strongly Agree and Agree) believe the directive is a primary driver of economic instability in the state. Only a marginal 6.6% disagreed with this assertion.

Table 2: Sit-at-home directive reduces productivity in Enugu State

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	149	48.8
Agree	65	21.3
Undecided	4	1.3
Disagree	53	17.4
Strongly Disagree	34	11.2
Total	305	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.



The data in Table 2 shows that 70.1% of respondents agree that productivity has been significantly reduced. The higher number of undecided and disagreeing responses (29.9%) compared to Table 1 may reflect the resilience of the informal sector, where some traders attempt to operate covertly to maintain minimal productivity.

Table 3: Sit-at-home directive results in loss of revenue in Enugu State

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	112	36.7
Agree	167	54.8
Undecided	0	0.0
Disagree	18	5.9
Strongly Disagree	8	2.6
Total	305	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 3 reveals an overwhelming consensus (91.5%) that the order has resulted in massive revenue loss for both the state government and individual residents. The absence of undecided respondents underscores the visible financial strain experienced by the populace.

Table 4: Sit-at-home directive discourages investment in Enugu State

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	129	42.3
Agree	150	49.2
Undecided	0	0.0
Disagree	16	5.3
Strongly Disagree	10	3.3
Total	305	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026.



As shown in Table 4, 91.5% of respondents agree that the unstable business environment has discouraged both local and foreign investments. This aligns with the empirical reality of capital flight from the Southeast to more secure regions like Asaba and Lagos.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from Tables 1 to 4 establish a strong empirical consensus that the sit-at-home directive is a primary catalyst for economic degradation in Enugu State. The 90.1% agreement on economic instability and the 91.5% agreement on revenue loss validate the estimates provided by Eze and Nwosu (2022) and SBM Intelligence (2022), who documented billions of naira in losses.

Theoretical Interpretation

Viewed through the lens of Relative Deprivation Theory, the severe compliance rate and subsequent economic shutdown represent a complex paradox. The cognitive and affective components of RDT explain why the movement exists: supporters feel a genuine sense of political and economic marginalization compared to other regions. The sit-at-home order is the behavioral manifestation of this grievance. However, the findings of this study highlight a critical contradiction: the collective action intended to protest relative deprivation has inadvertently accelerated absolute economic deprivation. By shutting down the very markets and SMEs that sustain the Igbo economy, the behavioral response is harming the reference group it claims to protect.

Alternative Explanations and Context

While the sit-at-home order is the distinct regional variable triggering human capital flight and supply chain collapse, it is necessary to acknowledge alternative explanations for the economic decline. National factors, such as the removal of the fuel subsidy, high inflation rates, and foreign exchange volatility, have compounded the vulnerability of Enugu's economy. Nevertheless, the survey data isolates the sit-at-home directive as the unique,



localized catalyst that has transformed national economic hardships into total regional paralysis. The "toxic security environment" (Orogun & Nafiu, 2020) created by the enforcement of the order is what ultimately forces businesses to relocate, distinguishing Enugu's economic decline from national trends.

Conclusion

The sit-at-home directive in Southeast Nigeria, initially conceived as a protest mechanism against perceived political marginalization, has mutated into a severe tool of economic self-sabotage. This study empirically demonstrates that in Enugu State, the order has caused profound economic instability, decimated SME productivity, triggered massive revenue losses, and driven away critical investments. The application of Relative Deprivation Theory reveals that while the agitation is rooted in legitimate feelings of marginalization, the chosen method of protest is counter-productive, deepening the very economic deprivation the agitators seek to eradicate. Sustaining this syndrome will only result in the total economic collapse of the region and the permanent relocation of its commercial hubs.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following policy interventions are recommended:

i. Inclusive National Dialogue

The Federal Government should initiate an unbiased, truth-seeking dialogue with all Southeast stakeholders, including traditional rulers, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, and youth groups, to address the root causes of perceived marginalization (the cognitive component of relative deprivation) without preconditions.

ii. Security Sector Reform

State and federal security agencies must adopt community-policing models that protect civilian lives and commercial assets. Law enforcement must operate within constitutional limits to avoid actions that fuel the affective grievances of the populace.



iii. **Establishment of Economic Buffer Zones**

The Enugu State Government, in collaboration with market unions, should establish secure, designated economic corridors and markets that are insulated from the enforcement of the sit-at-home order. This will allow SMEs to operate and prevent total economic collapse.

iv. **Youth Empowerment and Redirected Agitation**

State governments must intensify community-based skills acquisition and entrepreneurship programs. Engaging the youth in productive economic activities will reduce their susceptibility to recruitment by non-state armed actors and redirect their energy toward regional development.

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