

Public Perception of the Impact of IPOB sit-at-Home Order on the Economic and Educational Development of South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: The IPOB sit-at-home order is impacting economic, educational, security, and social activities in Southeast Nigeria. However, it is not known how the entire public in the region perceives the impact of the sit-at-home order on the economy and children's education.

Objective: This study investigated public perceptions of the effect of the sit-at-home order on the South-East region's economy and education.

Methodology: The study adopted a cross-sectional research design, with a sample of 5,723 adults drawn through a convenience sampling method. We collected data using a questionnaire. Study data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Results: The results showed that the public perceives the sit-at-home order as having reduced household income, productive work hours, teaching and learning hours, and ultimately educational quality. Also, the media was perceived to be the main instrument used by the separatists to influence the minds of the public regarding their agitation.

Unique Contribution: The study proposed an integrated model for addressing the issues and the way forward.

Conclusion: When people sit at home during work hours, it negatively impacts the economy and education.

Recommendation: The study recommended, among others, the implementation of responsive strategies to mitigate the impact of separatist groups and put the sit-at-home order under control.

Keywords: IPOB; Public Perception; Sit-at-home; Southeast, Nigeria

Introduction

In recent times, South-Eastern Nigeria has been embroiled in crises, resulting in human killings, destruction of property and regretful restriction of human movement due to separatists' activities who wish to resuscitate the defunct Biafra. The bone of contention is that southeast Nigeria is still being marginalised after about six decades of the Nigerian civil war, which claimed about 3.5 million lives (Campbell, 2017 in Ikpozu et al., 2024). The sit-at-home order was forcefully imposed on the people by IPOB to agitate against the lopsided Nigerian democratic system since the end of the war (Owoeye et al., 2022), which should either be reviewed or the Igbos given the opportunity of self-rule and independence. IPOB was founded in 2012 to restore the independence of Biafra (Allison, 2017 in Ikpozu et al., 2024). However, it has turned out to generate issues that threaten lives, property, and economic, social and educational systems in the southeast (Mark et al., 2022). The negative impacts of the sit-at-home orders have been widely acknowledged in the literature. Ofoma (2023) submitted that the sit-at-home order has significantly affected economic, community security and academic activities irreparably (Abalogu & Ojukwu, 2022). The socioeconomic losses due to the sit-at-home have been enormous and could crumble the area's economy (Booth et al., 2021; Mark et al., 2022), increase poverty and jeopardise educational outcomes.

Research has projected its specific economic impacts to include loss of productivity, disruption of supply chains, loss of income, investment uncertainty and government revenue loss (Abalogu & Ojukwu, 2022; Osita et al., 2022). This can have long-term consequences for economic growth and development. Related to the above, its impacts on education, as noted by Ogunode and Chijindu (2022), include disruption of school administration, teaching programme implementation, students' learning programme, school examinations, academic calendar, and funding of basic education.

Over the years, the place of media in disseminating both positive and negative information has been established (Balabanova & Parry, 2014). In war situations, media serve as tools for communicating the war intensity (Nigussie & Kiflu, 2024). For instance, Penkala et al. (2023) reported that media influences the war narratives and how the war is experienced and understood in Ukraine. Hence, wars and social unrest could be worsened through media misinformation (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2023). In the case of the sit-at-home order in southeast Nigeria, the media may influence how the masses perceive their experiences differently. Media coverage can shape public opinion on the sit-at-home order (see Santos et al., 2022), partly because media impacts public emotions (Santos et al., 2022). Thus, the historical videos and clips shared through media tend to stir up emotions. If certain viewpoints are readily available or amplified through mainstream media, they can dominate public discourse and shape perceptions accordingly (Luo et al., 2019).

These explain why this research is of considerable interest, given that most adult and children populations in the area are at the receiving end and may have different views on how this illness affects them and the whole society. There is limited research on the perception of the masses about the impacts of IPOB-induced sit-at-home orders in different areas of livelihood in Nigeria and how the media influences these perceptions. This study investigated the public's perception of the impact of IPOB's sit-at-home order on the economy and education in Southeast Nigeria and how the media influenced the crises.

Objectives of the Study

This article explored the public's perception of the sit-at-home order's impact on the economy and education in South-East Nigeria and how the media influenced the situation. The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. investigate the public perception of IPOB's sit-at-home order on economic activities of South-eastern Nigeria;
2. find out the perception of the public on the impact of IPOB's sit-at-home order on education in South-eastern Nigeria;
3. examine the public perception of media influence on the sit-at-home order.

Theoretical basis

This study is anchored on the relative deprivation theory (RDT), which states that people who feel they are being deprived of something considered essential in their society (e.g. money, rights, political voice, status) will organise or join social movements dedicated to obtaining the things of which they feel deprived (Bernstein & Crosby, 1980). In this theory, relative deprivation has been cited as a factor driving incidents of social disorder like rioting, looting, terrorism, and civil wars. In this nature, social movements and their associated disorderly acts can often be attributed to the grievances of people who feel they are being denied resources to which they are entitled. Proponents of relative deprivation theory also argue that many people who fail to join social movements like IPOB want to avoid the conflicts and life difficulties they might encounter by joining the movement with no guarantee of a better life. Thus, we will analyse the outcomes of this study based on insight from the RDT.

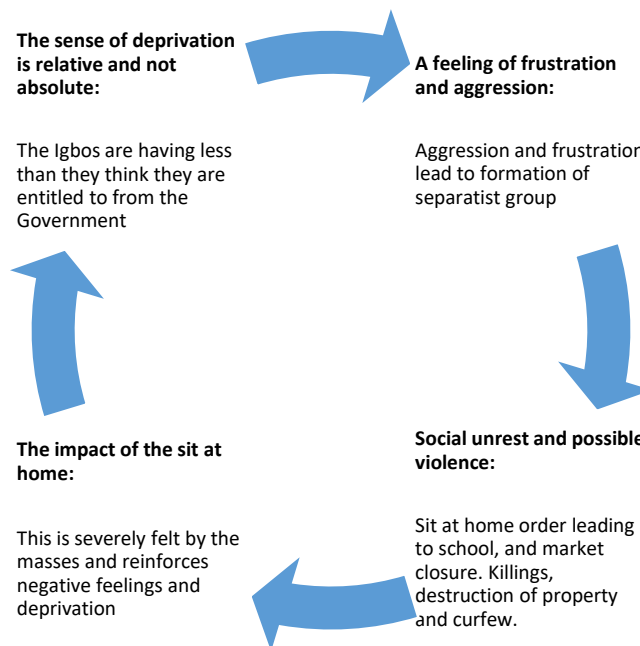


Fig.1: Diagrammatic representation of the relative deprivation theory of the IPOB's sit-at-home order.

Methodology

Design of the Study

This cross-sectional study adopted a descriptive research design, capitalising on quantitative data.

Population of the Study/ Study Area

The population for this study includes residents of the Southeast region of Nigeria, comprising the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. This population includes individuals directly affected by the IPOB sit-at-home orders, particularly those in urban and semi-urban areas where economic and educational activities are most concentrated. The study focuses on various demographic groups, including business owners, market traders, students, educators, parents, and civil servants, who represent a cross-section of perspectives on these orders' socio-economic and educational impacts. Additionally, media professionals (journalists, editors, and social media influencers) who report on and shape public narratives about these events are included, as they play a critical role in influencing public perception and the discourse surrounding the IPOB sit-at-home phenomenon.

Sample size and participants' Characteristics

A sample of 5723 adults in South-East Nigeria was used for the study. The reflected sample was made up of substantial proportions of university students, 1144 (19.98%); teachers from primary and secondary schools, 1835 (32.07%); self-employed business owners and MDs 858 (14.99%); traders/vendors, 1311(22.90%); 575 (10.06%) were media personnel and are recorded as unspecified (see fig. 2a). Within the participant sample, 57% (N = 3262) reported living with children (see fig. 2c). About 63 per cent (N=3605) were females while 37 per cent (N=2118) of the participants were males (see fig. 2a). Regarding Educational attainments, 10.94% (N=626) were with primary school certificates, 25.37% (N=1452) had secondary school as highest certificate, 37.93% (N=2172) were first-degree graduates, 13.90% (N= 795) had Masters' degree and 11.86% (N=678) had their PhD (see fig 2b).

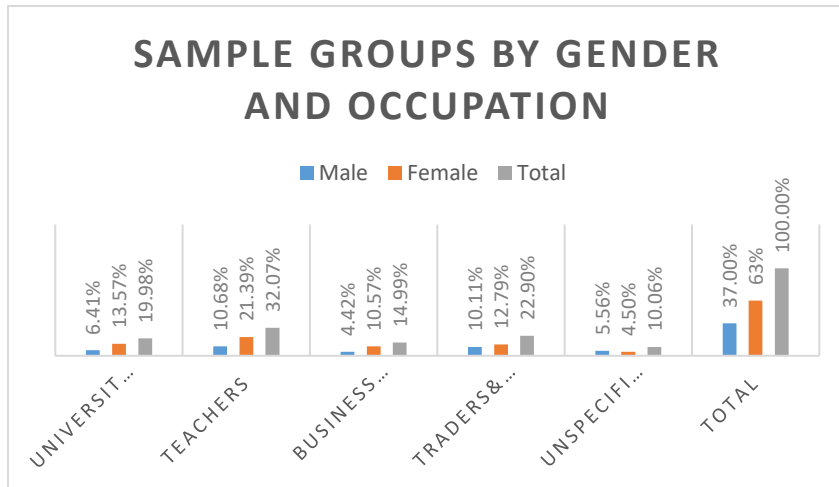


Fig. 2a: Graphical representations of the Participants' distribution by gender and Occupation

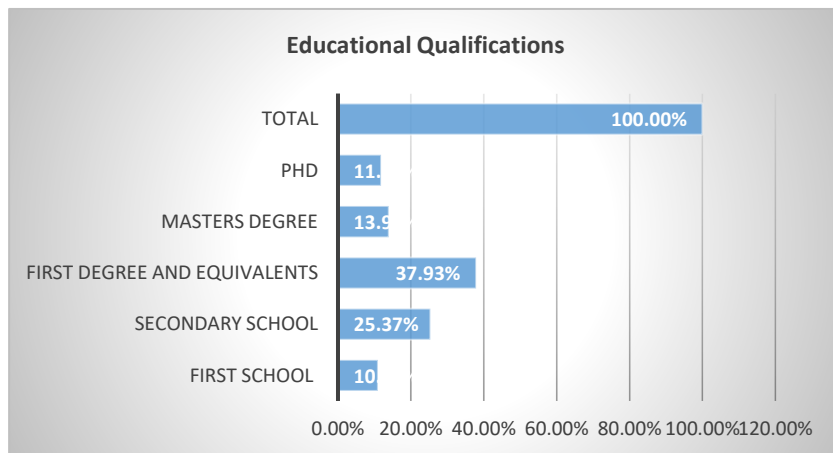


Fig. 2b: Graphical representations of the Participants' distribution by Qualification

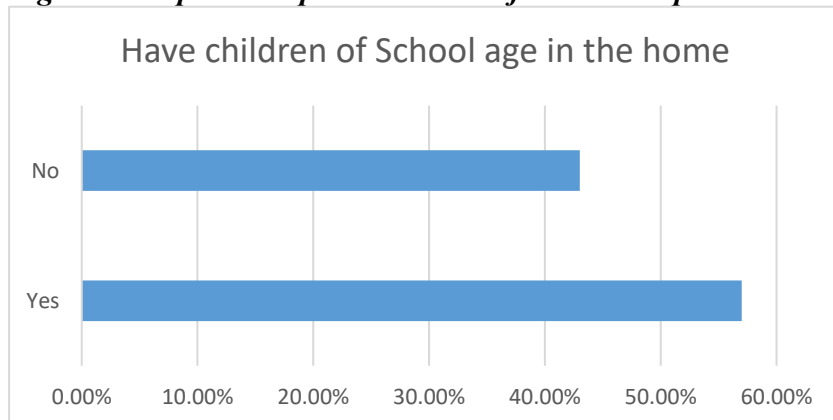


Fig. 2: Graphical representations of the Participants' distribution based on having at least a school-age child.

Sampling techniques

Participants were drawn using convenience sampling methods which were guided by the following inclusion criteria: i) adult between the ages of 30 and 70 years; ii) must be either a student, parent, journalist, social media influencer or editor employed by self, government or private organisations; iii) must be literate; iv) must give consent for data usage in the study. To sample the participants, the researchers, in collaboration with the research assistants, visited schools and public places to recruit potential participants between May 1, 2022 and August 31, 2022.

Instrument for Data Collection

A researcher-developed questionnaire was employed in data collection for this study. The questionnaire is made up of two sections. Section 1 was meant to collect data on the participant's demographic information, while section 2 contains the “Perceptions about IPOB Sit-at-home Questionnaire (PSAHQ)”. In the Demographic questionnaire, the participants were supplied information about their gender, age, job specification, and location by ticking (X) on the applicable options.

The PSAHQ was made up of three questionnaire subscales. The first subscale has 16 items measuring the perception of the economic impact of the IPOB sit-at-home order. Items of the instrument were generated from the literature. The second subscale has 14 items that measure the participants’ perceptions/views about how sit-at-home affects the education of students in the area. The participants were asked to rate their views on statements regarding the economic impacts of the IPOB sit-at-home order. The third subscale measures their perception of the impact of media, and it has five items. The questionnaire sections were rated on a 4-point scale of Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Agree = 3; and Strongly Disagree = 4.

Reliability/Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was validated by three experts in social science research and tested for internal consistency. The experts' comments and suggestions were built into the final version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was further tested for reliability using the Cronbach Alpha statistic, yielding an index $\alpha = 83.07$, showing that it is reliable.

Method of Data Analyses

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and presented in tables and figures.

Results

Table 1: Frequency Table showing the Participants’ responses on the impact of Sit-at-home orders on the economy

	N	Yes		No		Not sure	
		F	P	F	P	F	P
Sit-at-home order reduces the income level of households	5723	5522	96.5	-	-	201	3.5
Sit-at-home order reduces the productive work hours of labourers and artisans.	5723	5511	96.3	212	3.7	-	-

Sit-at-home order reduces trade and business opportunities	5723	5723	100	-	-	-	-
Sit-at-home orders cause reduced market size in the Southeast.	5723	5476	95.7	247	6.3	-	-
Sit-at-home order distorts GDP growth rate.	5723	5585	97.6	114	2.0	24	.4
Sit-at-home order disrupts local business profits.	5723	5608	98.0	111	1.9	4	.1
Sit-at-home order disrupts the business regulatory environment.	5723	5513	96.3	200	3.5	10	.2
Sit-at-home order is associated with hunger for petty traders.	5723	5586	97.6	127	2.2	10	.2
Sit-at-home order disrupts production through agriculture in South-East Nigeria.	5723	5628	98.3	-	-	95	1.7
Sit-at-home order disrupts foreign investments and local income.	5723	5606	98.0	39	.7	78	1.4
Sit-at-home orders reduce per-capital income through human resources injury and death.	5723	5650	98.7	6	.1	67	1.2
Sit-at-home order increases poverty levels in the communities.	5723	5723	100	-	-	-	-
Sit-at-home orders have brought about increased unemployment.	5723	5712	99.8	5	.1	6	.1
Sit-at-home order increases the cost of living.	5723	5368	93.8	65	1.1	290	5.1
The government's response to the sit-at-home order has effectively mitigated its economic impact.	5723	130	2.3	5513	96.3	80	1.4
Media (television, radio, newspaper and social media) influence my perception of the sit-at-home order and its impact on the economy.	5723	5526	96.6	95	1.7	102	1.8
Valid N (listwise)							

Data in Table 1 show the participants' responses to the questionnaire on the economic impact of IPOB's sit-at-home order on different profiles of the economy. Results show that sit-at-home reduces household income level and reduces the productive work hours of laborers and artisans (as indicated by 96.5% and 96.3% of the participants, respectively). Sit-at-home reduces trade and business opportunities, causes reduced market size in the Southeast, disrupts local business profits, and disrupts the business regulatory environment as supported by 100%, 95.7%, 98.0%, and 96.3% of the participants, respectively). The table further shows that Sit-at-home is associated with hunger for petty traders (97.6%, 98.3%; 98%; 98.7%, 100%; 99.8%; and 93.8% of the participants respectively); disrupts agricultural production; disrupts foreign investments/local income; reduces per-capital income through human resources injury and death; increases poverty level in the communities; increased unemployment; *and* increases the cost of living. Only 2.3% of the participants agreed that the Government's response to the sit-at-home order has effectively mitigated its economic impact, showing that its response has not been adequate for situation control.

Table 2: Frequency Table showing the Participants’ responses on the impact of Sit-at-home order on Education

	N	Yes		No		Not sure	
		F	P	F	P	F	P
Sit-at-home orders has affected the education system in South-eastern Nigeria negatively	5723	5595	97.8	-	-	128	2.2
Sit-at-home orders reduced teaching and learning hour	5723	5075	88.7	213	3.7	453	7.6
Sit-at-home order reduces educational quality	5723	5565	97.2	77	1.3	81	1.4
Sit-at-home orders affect the standards and performance of students.	5723	5351	93.5	260	4.5	112	2.0
Monday, sit at home disrupts the academic calendar	5723	5487	95.9	76	.5	198	3.5
Sit-at-home order disrupts classroom activities	5723	5368	93.8	148	2.6	207	3.6
Sit-at-home order causes exam postponements.	5723	5489	95.9	234	4.1	-	-
Teachers may not cover the syllabus because of sit-at-home	5723	5551	97.0	-	-	172	3.0
Schools that engage in Saturday classes prevent students from engaging in extra lessons.	5723	5596	97.8	-	-	127	2.2
Sit-at-home order reduces community participation in schools.	5723	5190	90.7	192	3.4	341	6.0
Sit-at-home increases truancy and loss of interest in schools	5723	79	1.4	5523	96.5	-	-
Sit-at-home increases cultism in schools	5723	5440	95.1	130	2.3	153	2.7
Sit-at-home has increased the school dropout rate	5723	5477	95.7	144	2.5	102	1.8
The government's response to the sit-at-home order has been effective in mitigating its impacts on students	5723	-	-	5515	96.2	212	3.8
Media (television, radio, newspaper and social media) influence my perception of the sit-at-home order and its impact on education.	5723	5623	98.3	-	-	100	1.7
Valid N (listwise)							

Data in Table 2 show the participants’ responses to the questionnaire on the impact of the IPOB sit-at-home order on the education of students and the school system. Data in the table indicate that sit-at-home has affected the education system in South-eastern Nigeria negatively; it reduces teaching and learning hour, reduces educational quality, reduces the performance of students; disrupts academic calendar, disrupts classroom activities; causes exam postponements (97.8%; 88.7%; 97.2%; 93.5%; 95.9%; 93.8% and 95.9%). Participants also agreed that teachers might not cover syllabus because of sit-at-home; schools that engage in Saturday classes prevent students from engaging in the extra lessons; the sit-at-home order reduces community participation in schools ((7.0%, 97.8%, and 90.7%, respectively). Only 1.4% accepted that sit-at-home increases truancy and loss of interest in schools, meaning that order is not a cause of truancy. Sit-at-home might increase cultism and increase the dropout rate (95.1% and 95.7%, respectively, attest to this). 96.2% of the participants saw the government's response to the order as inadequate in mitigating the impacts on students’ academic experiences.

Table 3: Participants’ responses on media influence on their perception of the sit-at-home order

	N	Yes		No		Not sure	
		F	P	F	P	F	P
Media coverage influences perception of the impact of IPOB sit-at-home orders	5723	5469	95.6	127	2.2	127	2.2
Media report accurately reflect the impact of IPOB sit-at-home orders	5723	1920	34	3270	56.6	533	9.4
Media’s portrayal of the IPOB sit-at-home actions encourage more crises	5723	5310	92.8	130	2.3	283	5.0
Media (television, radio, newspaper and social media) influence my perception of the sit-at-home order and its impact on the economy	5723	5526	96.6	95	1.7	102	1.8
Media (television, radio, newspaper and social media) influence my perception of the sit-at-home order and its impact on education	5723	5623	98.3	-	-	100	1.7

Media influences the perception of the sit-at-home order (95.6%); the Majority think that the media report does not report the sit-at-home impact accurately (56.6%), and 92% of the participants feel that the Media’s portrayal of the IPOB sit-at-home actions encourages more crises. Participants feel that media influences their perception of the sit-at-home order and its impact on the economy (96.6%) and education (998.3). These indicate that media influence the perception of the order on the economic development and academic experience.

Discussion

This study investigated the public perception of the impacts of the IPOB sit-at-home order on the economic and educational sectors of Southeast Nigeria. Results showed that the public perceived the order's impact on the region's economy and education as negative. Additionally, it was found that the government did not do enough to mitigate the impacts. Media portrayals, particularly social media, instigated fears and restricted movements during the sit-at-home order. The media also influenced the community's perception regarding how the sit-at-home order affected them.

This finding agrees with an earlier study by Owoeye et al. (2022), which discovered that sit-at-home had a detrimental effect on the socio-political and economic activities of South-East Nigerians. In 2022, Mark et al. concluded that sit-at-home could eventually lead to the economy's collapse in these regions. This can be viewed from the lens of Relative Deprivation Theory, which has been cited as a factor driving incidents of social disorder, such as the sit-at-home order. According to Ohagwa (2021), IPOB should not take any action that would put the people they have been fighting for in a difficult situation and make them more impoverished. In ensuring compliance, goods valued at billions of naira were destroyed (Ogunode & Chijindu, 2022). Premium Online (Ugwu, 2022) estimated that Anambra state alone loses about N19.6 billion naira each sit-at-home day. Blueprint newspaper (EgwuAgha, 2021) reported that southeast states lose N10 billion naira on each sit-at-home day. Indeed, the people of South-East Nigeria have endured immense hardship due to the sit-at-home order. Nwodo (2021) expressed the

opinion that following what the Southeast residents experienced due to the COVID-19 shutdown, they would lock down the area every Monday, exacerbating their economic situation. The findings of this study also corroborate with earlier studies (Nwodo, 2021; Ohagwa, 2021; Ogunode & Chijindu, 2022; Osita et al., 2022); Owoeye et al., 2022) stating that the sit-at-home order has crippled South-East socio-economically.

The government has been responding to IPOB's calls for self-determination with an air of superiority. According to the outcome of our study, the government has not taken humanistic measures to curb the negative impacts of the sit-at-home on the economy. This study revealed that the sit-at-home order hurts children's schooling and education through postponement of examinations, decline in academic performance, jeopardised school security and increased truancy and drop-out rates. These findings are well expected, given that most of the adult population in the study area is struggling with concerns about the decline in the quality of education and the impending children's school performances. According to Ogunode and Kolo (2021), basic school administration throughout the region has been hampered by social instability. Many pupils may avoid attending school for days or even months out of fear of being killed or abducted. The state instability throughout the zone has interfered with the student's educational plans, especially in national examinations. Several public and private schools in the area were forced to close due to the sit-at-home order, thereby causing the loss of learning time.

The terms, weeks, and academic sessions of schools are specified in the academic calendar that is prepared by the schools. Syllables and a work schedule are included in the school calendar, and due to school closures, the calendar and school programs are inadequately implemented. These are detrimental to the advancement of education as they result in periodic disruptions to teaching, learning, and other academic activities. The findings of this study also show that truancy due to sit-at-home may be associated with the trending slang in the area "that *one can do without education to earn a good living*" which has a crumbling effect on the educational system. Studies (Allafrica, 2022; Igba, 2021; Mberekpe et al., 2023; Mark et al., 2022) have submitted that the sit-at-home order affects schools and educational institutions in the zone. Enforcers of IPOB sit-at-home orders often break into schools and interfere with students' learning period (Obi, 2012). They also set fire on some of the staff and students' motorcycles.

This study indicates that the media paint pictures of the situation in a way that leads to unconditional support for the agitators, leading to increased crises. As Chan (2014) has stated, social media may lead to the haphazard encouragement of convergence behaviours. Ohme et al. (2021) coined the term "infodemic" to describe the dissemination of false information during crises and demonstrated how believing false information has an impact on involvement in such activities as crime, both directly and indirectly. Amana and Okpoko (2023) indicated that the selected newspapers did not adequately report the IPOB sit-at-home order in southeast Nigeria. While negative coverage would characterise it as disruptive to daily life and bad for the economy, positive coverage might present more functional outcomes (Osita et al., 2022). Specific points of view can dominate the public conversation and mould perceptions if they are more widely disseminated or magnified through mainstream media.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, we conclude that IPOB sit-at-home is perceived to hurt the economy through loss of business, instability, loss of family income and reduction in local agricultural practices. Sit-at-home also hurts the school system, affecting curriculum coverage and overall performance. It is also perceived that the Government is not taking enough measures to mitigate the negative impact of the sit-at-home order. Media play positive and negative roles that influence how people perceive the impact of the sit-at-home order.

Limitations of the Study

The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases, as participants might express socially desirable answers or personal biases toward IPOB or media outlets. The study is also regionally focused on south-eastern Nigeria, limiting the generalizability of findings to other regions or contexts. Lastly, the dynamic nature of media coverage and the political landscape may influence public perceptions, creating challenges in capturing a stable understanding of these impacts.

Recommendation

The study recommends that the government set and implement measures to mitigate the impact and put the sit-at-home exercise under control through dialogue and responsive strategies. Media control is also necessary to monitor how misleading information is released to the public. Collaborative input should be made between the government, media, and security agencies to ensure synergy.

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