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Abstract- The classification of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a terrorist organisation has been condemned by those who felt government went overboard. The voice of these individuals and groups are so strident that it seemingly drowned the support accorded the proscription by those who believe that IPOB deserved to be so labelled. These divergent positions of newsmakers were examined since as opinion moulders they greatly influence the thinking of the populace towards any particular subject. The analysis was done within the framework of the democratic participant theory which posits that input of the people in public policy and decisions should matter. Using Google filters, the researcher x-rayed a sample of the reactions of newsmakers published online as news to answer four research questions, yielding among other things that government's designation of IPOB as terrorist organization was not popular, especially as a much more violent group – Fulani militia – recognized abroad as terrorist organization was not so classified locally. Therefore, this paper called on the authorities to be even handed when dealing with criminal groups irrespective of the part of Nigeria they come from, and advocates that government should give every segment of society a sense of belonging.

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I. Introduction

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was until its designation as a terrorist organization a self-determinist group led by NnamdiKanu. After spending about two years in prison over charges bordering on terrorism, treasonable felony and illegal possession of firearms among others, the IPOB leader regained freedom on April 28, 2017 after meeting stiff bail conditions. He was incarcerated by the Nigerian state alongside other IPOB members namely: Onwudiwe Chidiebere, Benjamin Madubug wu and David Nwawuisi, but was granted bail on health ground. Kanu, who prior to his arrest was the Director of the pirate Radio Biafra station based in London, shot himself into prominence by feeding on the sentiment of 'marginalized' Igbos as by hurling relentless insults on the Nigerian establishment and political leaders mostly from the 'oppressor' regions. In his very abusive broadcasts, he referred to Nigeria as a "zoo". But while his activities in the United Kingdom gave him a measured popularity, Kanu was turned into a "hero" and had a cult following as a result of his arrest upon return to Nigeria in 2015, and the refusal of the Nigerian government to release him in defiance of several court orders to that effect.

When eventually released from prison, the IPOB leader soon loomed larger than life to the extent that South-East and parts of the South-South was by his pronouncement shut down in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the declaration of defunct Biafra republic. This was part of the grievance of the Coalition of Northern Youths, otherwise called Arewa youths, who weeks later issued a three-month ultimatum for the Igbo to be out of the North, asking northerners in the South-East to return home.

On September 15, 2017, the Nigerian military high-command launched Exercise Operation Python Dance II in the South-East. The operation, also tagged Exercise Egwu Eke II, witnessed clashes between soldiers and IPOB members particularly when the troops started its show of force prior to the commencement of the exercise on the streets of Umuahia, which is the homestead of the IPOB leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu.

While announcing the exercise at a press conference, the Army Chief of Training and Operations, Major-General David Ahmadu, said, "Exercise Ogbu (sic) eke II has become more expedient due to spate of assassinations, even in religious places, attacks on security personnel and theft of weapons, kidnapping, armed banditry, violent agitations by secessionist groups, among other crimes that have recently bedevilled the region".

The planned exercise did not go down well with the IPOB as its media and publicity secretary, Emma Powerful, latched on to the "violent agitations by secessionist groups" reason given by the military to claim that the federal authorities launched the python dance as smokescreen to assassinate its leader and other IPOB members. He further described the operation as "wickedly undemocratic silent Jihadi war unleashed on peaceful Biafran populations in order to complete the extermination of the Igbo race under the pretext of a military exercise in a peaceful civilian environment".

Going by the suspicion that greeted the exercise, Exercise Python Dance II ran into troubled waters as there were clashes between soldiers and IPOB members with unconfirmed reports of killings and dehumanization of the Biafra proponents. On

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September 10, 2017, soldiers were said to have made an attempt to invade Kanu's family home at Afaraukwulbeku located in the heart of the Abiacapital city of Umuahia, but were stoutly resisted by IPOB members who formed a human shield around the compound.

Giving an account of what transpired, Nnamdi Kanu said,

> I was sleeping this evening (Sunday) when suddenly I was woken up by the blaring of sirens. Initially, I thought it was the Commissioner of Police who lives in the neighbourhood that was returning home. But the blaring persisted and was followed by sporadic gunshots.They wanted to bulldoze their way into the palace but IPOB members formed a human shield and resisted them. They wanted to break the shield and fired at three persons and wounded others before leaving. Everybody including children were running away in confusion.

The situation in Abia state became so tense that the state governor, Okezielkpeazu, imposed a four-day curfew on Umuahia and Aba which were the flashpoints of agitations in the state. Kanu's claim was however refuted by the Army which explained in a statement by the Deputy Director, Public Relations, 14 Brigade Nigerian Army, Oyegoke Gbadamosi, thus:

> It was a group of suspected IPOB militants that blocked the road against troops of 145 Battalion while on show of force along FMC-World Bank Road in Umuahia town, Abia State at about 6.00-6.30pm, today (yesterday).They insisted that the military vehicles would not pass and started pelting the soldiers with stones and broken bottles to the point of injuring an innocent female passerby and a soldier, Corporal Kolawole Mathew. The troops fired warning shots in the air and the hoodlums dispersed. No life was lost.

There were other clashes which reports say led to the death four IPOB members with the group stating that the four dead bodies were just the ones recovered, alleging that the troops had made away with several bodies. Kanu's younger brother was quoted as saying that 15 IPOB members were taken away by the soldiers while his father's dog was also shot dead, apparently for challenging the troops it might have regarded as intruders.

Meanwhile, after allegedly raiding the home of Kanu and discovering a large cache of arms, the military designated the group as a terrorist association, this was before the Federal Government placed a stamp of authority on that declaration. The Defence Headquarters explained that the IPOB had metamorphosed into a "militant terrorist organisation" and that it reached this conclusion after professional analysis of recent developments in the South-east.

This position was contained in a statement by the Director of Defence Information, John Enenche, who advised parents, especially unsuspecting residents of the South-East and other Nigerians to guard their wards against joining IPOB.

The Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) group, which has posed to be a security challenge in the country, has been metamorphosing from one stage to the other. After due professional analysis and recent developments, it has become expedient to notify the general public that the claim by IPOB actors that the organization is non-violent is not true, hence the need to bring to public awareness, the true and current state of IPOB. (Ugwu 2017).

On September 20, the Acting Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, Justice Abdu Kafarati, issued an order proscribing IPOB following an ex parte application by the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Mr. Abubakar Malami SAN. The gazetting of this order by the Federal Government finalized the proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organization.

II. Statement of the Problem

The classification of members of an organization or group as terrorists is one instance where the classifying authority needs the buy-in of the populace. This is because a major reason for proscribing a group is to ostracize and make the society perceived it as an enemy. Indeed, terrorism is one toga that automatically attracts ill-will to whichever organization is so identified.

Nigerians already have a fair idea of what a terrorist organization or group is. The activities of Boko Haram insurgents in the North-East have afforded Nigerians a classic definition of a terrorist organization. Hence, it would ordinarily take a lot of work to get Nigerians to see IPOB in the same light when the *modus operandi* of the Kanu-led group appears quite different from that of the Boko Haram sect and the Fulani militia ranked by the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) as the fourth deadliest in the world after Boko Haram, Isis, and al-Shabab.

In the circumstance, it may seem difficult for Nigerians nay the international community to agree with the labelling of IPOB as terrorist organization, particularly when the murderous Fulani herders which made it to the GTI,is not proscribed as terrorist organization by the same Federal Government. Yet, the people need to be carried along in the declaration of any organization as an enemy of state, so much so a terrorist organization. This is important so that the supposed terrorists who live among the civil populace will have no hiding place when federal troops come for them.

The role of civilians in asymmetric warfare cannot be overemphasized. This is why the nation's

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armed forces usually embed soft approaches like medical outreaches and other community services in their operations as a way of getting the people to side with them against the enemy. Again, the aim of declaring IPOB a terrorist organization may stand defeated if the hunted group sees that the people are not in sync with its proscription. This can prompt the proscribed organization to dare the state and continue acting as if it is a legitimate group.

It is in the light of the above that this study seeks to ascertain the pulse of the people to the proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organization, through a textual analysis of reactions published as online contents.

a) Study hypotheses

1. The Nigerian government has reasons for classifying IPOB as a terrorist organization.
2. Online news content consumers think that IPOB members engaged in activities for which IPOB was declared a terrorist organization.
3. Online news content consumers believe that the reasons given by government for declaring IPOB as terrorist organization are weighty enough for the group to be so proscribed.
4. Online news content consumers see a similarity between operations of IPOB and those of known terrorist organisations like Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen.

b) Research Questions

Based on the above-listed objectives, the following research questions were drawn:

1. What were the reasons given by the Nigerian government for the proscription of IPOB?
2. Doonline news content consumers believe that IPOB members engaged in the activities for which IPOB was declared a terrorist organization?
3. Do online news content consumers think that the reasons given by government for declaring IPOB as terrorist organization are weighty enough for the group to be so proscribed?
4. Do online news content consumers see any similarity between operations of IPOB and those of known terrorist organisations like Boko Haram sect, Fulani herdsmen?

c) Conceptual Clarification

It is necessary at this juncture to properly define major terms in the topic of this study in order for their intended meanings not to be lost to interpretations. The terms to be clarified here are those whose meanings serve as a guide to understanding the context of this study. The terms are also operational zed into a framework that brings to the fore the intended meaning of the work to the reader. To this extent, the following terms are hereby explained: analysis, online reactions, classification, IPOB, terrorist organization.

Analysis refers to the unbundling and x-raying of a development or developments into its constituent parts for the purposing of deducing some hidden facts. In this context, it is online reactions that are to be unbundled for analysis.

Online reactions refer to the reported opinion of newsmakers which can be individuals or group published in online sites as news. These opinions however must be on the declaration of IPOB as terrorist organization.

Proscription is an order or decree prohibiting and forbidding something, as well as the exclusion of that thing from the society.

IPOBis an acronym which stands for the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). On its website – ipob.org -the group said it comprises, "the original inhabitanst (sic) and owners of the Lands and Communities of Biafra and Biafraland spanning centuries of tradition and historical ancient cultural ties.They are presently located in the areas called South East, some parts of South South and Middle Belt of Nigeria".

Terrorist organizationis a group or sect that perpetrates acts of terrorism, which according to Alexander (2011) is "the use of violence against random civilian targets in order to intimidate or create generalized pervasive fear for the purpose of achieving political goals". According to the U.S Department of Defense (2002), terrorism is "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological".

d) Literature Review

Adesomoju(2017) writes that the proscription of IPOB is contained in Volume 104 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, adding that it warned that any person or group of persons who takes part "in any manner" in the activities of IPOB would be violating the provisions of the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, 2011 as amended in 2013 and would be liable to be prosecuted. He reports that the notice read in part,

> the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra are declared to be terrorism and illegal in any part of Nigeria, especially in the South-East and South-South regions of Nigeria as proscribed, pursuant to Section 2 of the Terrorism (Prevention)Act, 2011 (as mended). Consequently, the general public is hereby warned that any person or group of persons participating in any manner whatsoever in any form of activities involving or concerning the prosecution of the collective intentions or otherwise of the said groups will be violating the provisions of the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, 2011 (as amended) and liable to prosecution.

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What led to this proscription of IPOB had already been trashed in the background of the study; the military set the ball rolling when it named the group a militant terrorist organization following clashes between members and troops exercising under the Operation Python Dance II. The declaration also came in response to reported discoveries made by soldiers at the home of NnamdiKanu, the IPOB leader. As far back as 1947, the League of Nations Convention defined terrorism as "all criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or group of persons or the general public".

A terrorist organization, was defined by Disa(2016, p.11), as "an illicit clandestine organization that generally consists of planners, trainers and actual bombers/killers". Meanwhile, Chuka & Udumaga (2016) wrote that the aggravation of ethnic identity after Nigeria gained independence from Britain was as a result of the lopsided federal structure which eventually implicated on the violent ethno-political discontent prevalent during the post-colonial Nigeria. Contemporary ethnic tension and identity relation in Nigeria was worsened by the perception of some section of the society is that the military is serving the interest of the Hausa- Fulani major ethnic group since they dominate the military institution of Nigeria exercising hegemony over its major institutional structure of the security apparatus of the state (Fatai, 2012).

Writing that the military had been in power for 29years and that the Hausa-Fulani ethnic stock has, had more benefit from the federal power at the expense of other ethnic groups, Chuka & Udumaga (2016, p. 147) averred that, "The tactical alienation of the Ibo in the federal power on account of their suspicion after the Biafra attempt at secession by the federal government had continue to be a source of agitation on the part of the Ibo major ethnic group". This possibly explains why NnamdiKanu, the leader of IPOB, was able to get a good number of people from the South-East to rally round him and his agenda.

Momodu (2017) reported that NnamdiKanu inspects a guard of honour formed by his Biafran Security Service and the Biafran National Guard in military uniform, hoisted the Biafran flag, flaunted a Biafran passport and a coat of arms, and even sought for funds at the World Igbo Congress in Los Angeles in the United States to buy arms to fight Nigeria in 2015 before his arrest. Claiming that Kanu had effectively created a sovereign state within a sovereign state, he wrote:

> Out on bail, he (Kanu) upped the ante by declaring Aba as the spiritual capital of Biafra on August 27, 2017, where he stated inter alia: 'Where we are is Biafral and. Aba is the spiritual capital of Biafraland. We started in Aba in 2015 at CKC. That day, heaven authenticated our move that IPOB will restore Biafra and that's what we have come to do. We died in Aba at National High School. They shot and killed us in other places in Biafral and where they were protesting for my release. As our people rest in the grave, we'll never rest until Biafra is restored. I don't care what they say in Abuja. I don't give a damn what they say in Lagos. I'm a Biafran and we are going to crumble the zoo.

The IPOB leader was said to have used to excite his followers everywhere he went using the following rhetoric: Some idiots who are not educated said that they'll arrest me, and I ask them to come, I'm in Biafra. If any of them leaves Biafraland alive, know that this is not IPOB. Tell them what I said. Tell Buhari that I am in Aba and any person who comes to arrest Nnamdi Kanu in Biafraland will die here. I'll never go on exile I assure you. Some people talk about restructuring, are we doing the restructuring of Nigeria now? Are we doing fiscal federalism? Are we doing devolution? What we want is Biafra! Forget all the nonsense they write about us. We are not slowing down and no man born of a woman can stop us…

Momodu (2017) continued that he watched the video of some women spreading their wrappers on the ground for Kanu to walk on, and of a man prostrating to kiss his feet, stressing that "Many men and women, both young and old showered praises on him and even worshipped him… There is another video of a man describing Kanu as god-like to him and that anything he commands him to do, he would gladly do".

Not with standing this deification of their leader, Braithwaite (2017) pointed out that "IPOB is not particularly known for violence, at least not for murder, bombing and the extreme violence that is typical of terrorists (correct me if I am wrong)". She suggested that the activities of the group pales into insignificance when compared with…

> the Fulani Cattle Herdsmen, who have unleashed so much violence against innocent, defenceless rural communities in various parts of the country, senselessly and selfishly invading and destroying their farms and means of subsistence, so that their own cows can graze, killing and maiming people, raping their women, looting and carting away the little valuables that these rural people have struggled for.

Braithwaite (2017) noted that "while the military accused IPOB members of throwing stones (missiles!) at them, it was IPOB who accused the military of murdering some of its members and NnamdiKanu's family dog!" and submitted that "Proscribing IPOB, is not a magic wand, that can be waved to make the frustrations and discontent that many Igbo people feel, vanish". However, Mohammed (2017) insists that IPOB must be seen as a terrorist organization, as the group

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breeds insecurity across Nigeria and uses their divisive and inciting rhetoric to jeopardize the very social fabric that binds the people of Nigeria. According to him,

> IPOB's public announcements endanger Igbos that reside outside the South East. In claiming to speak for the Igbo, they falsely represent the group. But the public may sometimes miss this distinction. And whilst the government has taken all measures to soothe tensions, rumor still takes hold. This is a terrorist tactic we have seen through history across the world. IPOB intend to drive a wedge between the Igbo and the rest of Nigeria… The violence they have sown in the South East has the same intention. The attacks on police officers, army stations, local Hausa groups as well as the establishment of a national guard and secret service are all breeding uncertainty in the region.

A thesis by Lieutenant Harry R. Jackson of the United States Navy entitled 'Understanding Terrorism' and cited by Braithwaite (2017) identified five crucial components of terrorism thus: "an involvement of an act of violence, an audience, the creation of a mood of fear, innocent victims, and political goals or motives", and asserted that "They (Terrorists) endeavour to legitimise their activities in their own eyes, as it is to convince the public of their worthiness".

e) Review of practical studies on the issue

Shortly after IPOB was classified as a terrorist organization by the Nigerian government, one of the nation's newspapers, Nigerian Tribune carried out a survey on its Facebook page. The opinion poll yielded over 2000 comments and showed that criticisms against IPOB designation as a terror group and the deployment of soldiers to South-East on Operation Python Dance II were more than respondents cheering same moves by the authorities. An analysis of the comments however showed division along ethnic lines with most respondents from the northern part of the country supporting the actions taken by the military, contrary to the views expressed by respondents from the south.

Abdur-rahman (2013) in a study on 'Media and security in Nigeria' examined the role of mass media of communication in the coverage and reportage of security matters in particular and in informing, educating, enlightening and entertaining the populace on societal issues in general. It also interrogated the extent to which mass media practitioners adhere to the professional ethics of objectivity, impartiality and balancing while reporting security issues and recommended that the media should operate with the understanding that security is not just about the army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Customs, the Immigration but should include the country's socio-political cum economic systems, researches and all other activities that go with the normal civilian life.

A study on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria: the challenges and lessons, conducted by Oladimeji, Olusegun&Oluwafisayo (2012) found out that the terror activities of the Boko Haram sect since 1999 have created a state of palpable fear in Nigeria and beyond, even as government was said to have adopted a helpless posture which was worrisome. The descriptive study found out that insurgency was a manifestation of frustrations arising from national political, religious and economic systems while the institutional mechanism adopted in managing the crisis proofed defective.

Chuka & Udumaga (2016, p. 153) in a work entitled "Ethnic conflict in pluralist Nigeria: Entreching participatory democracy", discovered from the review of literatures "that Nigeria as a nation is riddled with a lot of ethnic conflicts. These conflicts result because of the religion and cultural diversity amongst are people. Most authors opined that these conflicts result because of a feeling of marginalization by some ethnic groups. The authors argued that ethnic conflicts is prominent in Nigeria's political sphere because many citizens do not participate in the political process and policy formulation process of the country, so they appear to be left out on the scheme of things".

In a study titled, "The Politics of 'Hope' and 'Despair': Generational Dimensions to Igbo Nationalism in Post-Civil War Nigeria", Onuoha (2014, p. 22) found out that "there is a general perception that the Igbo are neither fully part of Nigeria nor are citizens of an alternative political and administrative arrangement". The study also revealed that,

> A detailed reading of Nigeria's history since independence shows that virtually all ethnic groups in the country have a central ethnic organization committed to advancement of the collective interests and aspirations of each group. This provides the context within which the uneasy relations among Nigeria's 250 ethnic nationalities (or more) can be viewed. But the relations between the supposed 'mega ethnic-nationalities'- the Hausa Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West and the Igbo in the East- have been central to the tri-polar power struggle in Nigeria's post-independence politics.

Identifying the Movement for the Actualization for the Sovereign State of Biafra, MASSOB, and the Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo as the two groups promoting contemporary Igbo nationalism, Onuoha (2014) stated that,

> MASSOB believes it represents and defends Igbo culture and interest in a federation it perceives as structured against Igbo interest. This informs the movement's rejection of a state-led process, and explains why it latches on to ethnicity and a nationalist ideal to pursue the dream of a "New Biafra". On the other hand, Ohanaeze's conciliatory

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stance with the state with emphasis on devolution of power from the centre to the periphery, true federalism, and equal access to resources and power, power shift to the east, and ultimately, an Igbo presidency is yet to yield any substantial outcome.

The above-explored studies are the closest literature this researcher could get as it pertains to the focus of this, which is on the proscription of IPOB as a terrorist organization. It therefore means that indicates that there exists a glaring gap in literature which this study hopes to fill.

f) Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on the Democratic Participant Theory, also known as the democratization theory. It came about as an opposition to commercialization and monopoly of the means of disseminating information as well as the bureaucracy experienced in public service institutions at the time.

Aside placing greater importance on receivers' participation and full circular communication, the theory advocates that the press should be pluralistic, decentralized, bottom-up or horizontal and must have equality. Wogu (2008, p. 77) wrote that the Democratic Participant Theory believes that "people in a society should fully partake in information exchange, rather than remain just recipients of communication from mostly the government".The succinct manner this author described the theory shows its import in this study. From the Democratic Participant Theory, it can then be understood whycommunication from the government or its actions will not be overtly accepted by the citizens in a situation where that communication or action contradicts their belief or perception.

McBride et al (1981, p. 166) cited in Wogu (2008) pointed out that media democratization is a situation that guarantees the following:

i. The individual becomes an active partner and not a mere object of communication – [media programmers need to plan with, not just for, the audience]
ii. The variety of messages exchanged increase;
iii. The extent and quality of social representation or participation in communication are augmented.

III. Methodology

To get the population for this study entitled 'An analysis of online reactions to the declaration of IPOB as terrorist organization', the headline – FG(Federal Government) declares IPOB terrorist organization – was by 1:22pm on February 2, 2018 searched on Google. This yielded 239,000 results. Using filters, the tool 'Country - Nigeria' was clicked on and the results came down to 223,000. When "News" was selected among the tools, the results reduced to 2,140. Not yet done, 'Past year' under 'Recent' was selected, and the outcome was 798 posts. This became the population of study.

But given that the opinion expressed in the798 news stories on the proscription of IPOB will be too unwieldy to study, the researcher, in arriving at the sample size,was guided by the submission by Nwana (1981), cited in Okoro (2001, p. 69) thus: "if the population is a few hundreds, a 40% or more sample will do; if many hundreds, a 20% sample will do; if a few thousands, a 10% sample will do; and if several thousands, a 5% or less will do".

Considering that the population (798) is in many hundreds, 20 per cent of 798was worked out, resulting approximately in 160 as the sample size. Thus, this researcher went on to analyze the opinion expressed in the first 160 news stories on the subject. The sample was then drawn on the basis of the first 160 reports that contain opinions of newsmakers regarding the classification of IPOB as a terrorist organisation.

IV. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

While going through the first 160 published contents, it was discovered that 30 of the items were strictly news reports hence not fit to be used in answering some of the research questions as no opinion was expressed in them. These 30 items however came handy in answering some of the research questions and in the discussions of findings, hence cannot be said to be invalid. But for answering questions that is strictly on online reactions, the valid sample size becomes 130 published stories. However, all first 160 stories from the population of 798 published stories will feature in answering the four research questions of this study. The presentation of findings will be done both in sentence and through the use of tables and percentages.

Research question 1: What were the reasons given by the Nigerian government for the proscription of IPOB?

According to a statement issued by the Director of Defence Information, Mr. John Enenche, the military high command pronounced IPOB a militant terrorist organization for following reasons: formation of a Biafra Secret Service; formation of the Biafra National Guard; unauthorised blocking of public access roads; extortion of money from innocent civilians at illegal roadblocks; militant possession and use of weapons (stones, Molotov cocktails, machetes and broken bottles among others) on a military patrol on 10 September 2017; physical confrontation of troops by NnamdiKanu and other IPOB actors at a checkpoint on 11 September 2017 and also attempts to snatch their rifles; attacks by IPOB members, on a military checkpoint on 12 September 2017, at Isialangwa, where one IPOB actor attempted to snatch a female soldier's rifle.

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On its part, the Nigerian government through the Minister of Information and Culture, Mr. Lai Mohammed said the IPOB was branded terrorist organization for: stockpiling weapons through funding from foreign countries, has lust for destruction, its leader, NnamdiKanu uses divisive and inciting rhetoric such as: "If they fail to give us Biafra, Somalia will look like a paradise compared to what will happen to that 'zoo' (Nigeria)." "I don't want peaceful actualisation of Biafra"; "We need guns and we need bullets"; "If they don't give us Biafra, they will die".

In another instance, Mohammed reiterated the position of the military thus: "All I know is that IPOB has engaged in terrorist activities, viz: clashing with the national army and attempting to seize rifles from soldiers, using weapons such as machetes, Molotov cocktails and sticks, and mounting roadblocks to extort money from people, among others". Similarly, presidential spokesperson, Mr. Garba Shehu, stated that IPOB members deserved to be labelled terrorists because they have carved out a territory to themselves and have shown the willingness to invade other neighbouring states.

But lawyers to the IPOB insist that members of the organisation are lawful and non-violent socio-ethnic pressure group, largely made up of Indigenous People of Igbo extraction, and of Igbo neighboring states of Biafra region/origin. When troops on Exercise Python Dance II stormed his neighborhood, NnamdiKanu did not use the inciting rhetoric referred to by Mohammed but told reporters "They (the military and the government) want to trigger war but we won't oblige them because we are committed to our non-violent philosophy".

Research question 2: Do online news content consumers believe that IPOB members engaged in the activities for which the group was declared a terrorist organization?

Table 1: Perception on IPOB deserving terrorism tag

	Frequency	Percentage
Those who believe…	72	55
Those who do not believe...	58	45
Total	130	100

This study found out that the ills which the authorities accused members of the IPOB of perpetrating resonated with more people whose reactions to the classification of IPOB as terrorist organization were reported in the news. For instance, three members of the House of Representatives, Aiyu Madaki, Sani Zorro and Mohammed Soba, issued a joint press statement where they talked about "the murderous activities" of the IPOB. Reacting to Senate President Bukola Saraki's rejection of the proscription of IPOB by the military, the three lawmakers wrote,

> Is the senate president unaware of the more than 1,900 Internally Displaced Persons presently taking refuge at the Aba Central Mosque, the more than 800 IDPs now sheltering in the Aba central police station after the gruesome murder of its Divisional Police Officer and his men? Is the SP not aware of the killing fields Sabon Fili where innocent sellers of fruits were subjected to the gory, slow but painful deaths, or the killing of many and destruction of the property of Northerners at Oyibo, in Rivers State? What has he said about the premeditated murder of 9 other Nigerians of Northern extraction at Asaba, Delta State – all of which have been in circulation especially in the social media, in the last few days?

Also agreeing that IPOB engaged in activities for which it was labelled a terrorist organization, a group known as Coalition for the Defence of Nigeria's Sovereignty for the Defence of Nigeria's Sovereignty through its leader, Otunba Bolaji Alabi. accused NnamdiKanu of directing his members to kill Yoruba and saying the following:"No Igbo man should attend any Church where the pastor is a Yoruba man, they are criminals and fools"; "Any Igbo Person who attends any Church Pastored by a Yoruba Man is an Imbecile"; "Pastor Kumuyi should be stoned and dealt with thoroughly if he comes to Aba for his planned crusade"; "Nigeria should prepare for war, we are coming to annihilate you, my secret service is already studying the zoo and strategising".

The League of Patriotic Elder Statesmen in Nigeria were also in the news for seeing IPOB in the same light as the government with their leader, former Senate President, Ameh Ebute, warning that "IPOB sect members, led by NnamdiKanu have embarked on bile and hate campaigns against other ethnicities in Nigeria, adopting inciting or indecorous language, and laced in distasteful violent acts, intent on provoking another civil war in Nigeria". But these and the 69 other online articles which cannot all be summarized here only attested that IPOB members were engaged in what the authorities accused them of, whether those actions are germane enough to warrant a terrorism tag would be ascertained in the next research question.

Research question 3: Do online news content consumers think that the reasons given by government for declaring IPOB as terrorist organization are weighty enough for the group to be so proscribed?

Table 2: Whether reasons given by government warrants proscription of IPOB

	Frequency	Percentage
Reasons qualify to make IPOB terrorist	63	48
Reasons don't qualify to make IPOB terrorists	67	52
Total	130	100

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It came to the fore from this study that the declaration of IPOB as a terrorist organization is not as unpopular as people thought, that is judging from the slant of news articles published online. On this research question, only 52 per cent of the audience who are privileged to have their views reported online, believe that the reasons given by the authorities are not enough to classify IPOB as a terrorist organization. The remaining 48 per cent think otherwise. While it may be expected that answers to this research question go the way of the preceding one, this researcher found out that there were some newsmakers who believed that IPOB members actually engaged in the activities cited by the authorities but that those actions were not strong enough for the pro-Biafra agitators to be classified as terrorists. A Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Seyi Sowemimo SAN, was reported as saying: "I have some difficulty in classifying them as a terrorist organisation because you could also call this a political struggle, although it's not supposed to be an armed struggle. There is a tinge of criminal offence associated with it. Those that have committed offences and are members of IPOB should be charged to court under the appropriate law, but classifying the organisation as a terrorist one is not helpful."

There was also the condemnation of the manner which IPOB was declared a terrorist organization as the Senate President, Bukola Saraki said, "I wish to state that the announcement of the proscription of the group known as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) by Governors of the South-east states and the categorization of the group as a 'terrorist organisation' by the Nigerian military are unconstitutional and does not follow due process. Our laws make clear provisions for taking such actions and without the due process being followed, such declaration cannot have effect".

Nonetheless, the answer to this research question validates the Facebook opinion survey by the Nigerian Tribune which showed that more users are against IPOB designation as a terror group and the deployment of soldiers to South-East on Operation Python Dance II than those who supported both actions. It bears pointing out that also among the 67 news articles captured above is a report on the Ooni of Ife, Adeyeye Ogunwusi who stated that members of the IPOB should not be seen as terrorists because they were only seeking justice and equity. He said, "There is something that is bothering them (IPOB members), that is making them to cry. We should not throw them away".

Research question 4: Is there any similarity between operations of IPOB and those of known terrorist organisations like Boko Haram sect, Fulani herdsmen?

Answer to this research question which flowed from the third indicated that 24 of the 67 published opinions, which had disagreed that the reasons given by government for declaring IPOB as terrorist organization are weighty enough for the group to be so proscribed, (36%) went further to argue that the activities of IPOB is not in any way similar to those of known terrorist organization. On the flipside, only 10 of 63 published opinions of groups and individuals who think that the reasons given by government for declaring IPOB as terrorist organization are weighty enough for the group to be so proscribed, (16%) went further to link IPOB to other terrorist organisations. Few examples from both sides of the divide are presented below.

Writing on the murderous activities of Fulani herdsmen, Soyinka (2018) wrote, "I am not aware that IPOB came anywhere close to this homicidal propensity and will to dominance before it was declared a terrorist organization. The international community rightly refused to go along with such an absurdity". In an opinion piece, Fisayo Soyonbo asked, "how on earth can IPOB members be terrorists when notorious killers, the herdsmen, have no such designation? We are talking about a group that was named in 2015 by the Global Terrorism Index as the fourth deadliest terror group in the world. Only Boko Haram, ISIS, and al-Shabab were deemed deadlier than this nomadic group of militants". Not yet done, the essayist said, "If IPOB members are terrorists, what do we say of militants in the delta, particularly the Niger Delta Avengers, who actually did terrorize Nigeria by freely bombing oil installations, consequently plummeting oil production capacity, which in turn lowered the country's crude oil earnings".

But there is the government and other shade of opinion that see IPOB in the same light as Boko Haram, and even explained why the separatists are worse than Fulani herdsmen. Presidential spokesman, Garba Shehu had this to say,

> There is a difference between a criminal activity and a terrorist activity. Yes, some Fulani herdsmen are a criminal gang and they are being dealt with according to the law. But IPOB like Boko Haram has a territory they have carved out to themselves …as a sovereign state of its own…. They have shown the willingness to invade other neighbouring states. They have raised concerns in neighbouringKogi and Benue states. They have said they are interested in taking over Bayelsa and Rivers. That is exactly what Boko Haram has done. This is not acceptable to the law of the country.

Speaking in the same vein, a group, Coalition of Civil Society Organizations for Transparency and Good Governance stated that NnamdiKanu-led IPOB had exhibited all the characteristics of a terrorists group to the extent that it had become the metaphor for describing the southern equivalent of Boko Haram led by AbubakarShekau, adding that "Both men promised to deliver the heads of Nigerian Presidents to their declared enclaves; IPOB and Boko Haram adopted

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flags other than the green-white-green; they formed cabinets; they radicalised youths, they called for attacks on Nigeria and Nigerians; and they both declared the state and its military as their enemy."

Thus, while opinions are sharply divided on this research question, contents which do not see IPOB as being in the same mould as known terrorist organisations are more in number.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The classification of IPOB as a terrorist organization had been long in coming. Indication that the government will take that action surfaced in November 8, 2016 when the Nigerian government re-arraigned Kanu, the National Coordinator of IPOB, Mr. Chidiebere Onwudiwe; an IPOB member, Benjamin Madubugwu; and a former Field Maintenance Engineer on secondment to the MTN, David Nwawuisi, before a Federal High Court in Abuja. They were prosecuted on 11 counts, comprising terrorism, treasonable felony, managing an unlawful society, publication of defamatory matter, illegal possession of firearms and improper importation of goods. However, the fact that the Judge dismissed charges contained in counts 3, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 11 which related to the management of unlawful organisation, intention to manufacture Improvised Explosive Devices planned to be used against some Nigerian security agents and alleged improper importation of a radio transmitter, indicated that the court did not see IPOB as terrorist organization as was widely reported after the ruling was delivered.

This goes to show how debatable the classification of IPOB as a terrorist organization can be, and this study has gone a great length to analyze the sides to this debate which were summed up in answers to the research questions posed in the study. But the proscription of IPOB came long after the ruling was delivered and was predicated on more recent developments as the reasons given by the authorities.

Based on the opinion of newsmakers published on online platforms as news and article, this researcher discovered that the proscription of IPOB did not resonate with the majority, even though newsmakers who supported IPOB's designation as terrorist organisation put up a strong showing to the extent of constituting 48 per cent. Meanwhile, a popular grouse of the opinion sampled is that IPOB was tagged terrorist when the far deadlier Fulani militia recognized internationally a terrorist group was not proscribed by the Nigerian government. But the Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed insists that IPOB is a terrorist organization like ETA in Spain, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, and the PKK is in Turkey, all of whom are proscribed by the U.S. State Department.

VI. Recommendations

1. It emerged from this study that NnamdiKanu was able to galvanize a formerly nondescript group what it eventually became because he fed into the sentiment of the people who believe they were being marginalized by the government of the day. Therefore, it is recommended that government should carry about in manner that gives every segment of the society a sense of belonging. It should do this by not pandering to sectional interests and by being equitable in the distribution of public offices and resources.
2. Similarly, there is the need for all criminal groups to promptly and adequately dealt with by the security agencies. Excuses should not be made by the authorities for the murderous activities of some criminals from a section of the country while going full blast against those from other parts which seemingly does not control political party. When government and the authorities apply this double measure, they would find it difficult getting the public to back its offensive against criminal elements.
3. Groups which profess to be peaceful must eschew all acts that give them away as violent. They must not in the course of exercising their constitutionally-guaranteed rights spew hates and utterances that threaten the peace and stability of the country. While members of such group must not go out of the lines, its leaders must be extremely careful in what they say and do.
4. Elders and other leaders in the society must be alive to their responsibilities and not keep mum when youths and younger persons go out of line even in the course of venting their grievances. Parents have a duty to impress orderly conduct on their children and wards. For instance, elders who had experienced the pangs of civil war must never keep quiet when the drums of war are been sounded by those who never experienced it.
5. Government must never be quick to brand any section of its populace terrorists owing to the stigma that goes with such classification in the international arena. Developed countries are usually reluctant in issuing visas to nationals of countries where terrorists operate. Even when they grant visas to such people, they subject them to thorough checks and profiling before allowing the travelers in. Therefore, it does not pay the government or its citizens when an otherwise criminal group or recalcitrant persons are called terrorists.
6. There must be conscious efforts by government to instill the spirit of patriotism and nationalism in its populace so they would not have to refer to their country as a 'zoo' but rather own the country. The struggles of the nation's founding fathers must be

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rehashed to citizens through the reintroduction of History as a subject in the educational curriculum. The National Orientation Agency must also do more to enlighten the populace on their rights and the limitations of same, including their civic duties.

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Link to online reactions:
https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=FG+declares+IPOB+terrorist+organization&cr=countryNG&rlz=1C1JZAP_enNG770NG770&tbs=ctr:countryNG,qdr:y&tbm=nws&source=lnt&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiclrjBi9rYAhUmJMAKHZpRADgQpwUIHQ&biw=1366&bih=662&dpr=1

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