

The prospects of
BIAFRA 2.0

About SBM Intelligence

SBM Intel is an Africa-focused market intelligence and communications consulting firm focused on addressing the critical need for market data and big data analytics. We employ various methods of data collection. Our Data Collection Methodology team advises on data collection methods for all ONS social and business surveys. With clients both within the business and the wider government community, we aim to provide expert advice on data collection procedures and carry out research leading to improvements in survey quality.

Since 2013, we have provided data analytics and strategic communication solutions to clients across various sectors in Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, the UK and France. In 2015 we became a partner to Stratfor, an American geopolitical intelligence firm that provides strategic analysis and forecasting to individuals and organisations around the world, including the various US departments and agencies like the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Since the partnership came into effect, several SBM Intel generated reports have been published on Stratfor's website.

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Facing up to the obvious blunder of the merely audibly attractive term “no victor, no vanquished” is something Nigeria needs to come to terms with. Wars hardly ever end in a stalemate. One party will leave the field as vanquished and end up with a bruised ego, seeing the other side as a result, as a perpetual bully. This is currently the case. As we see regularly in boxing bouts, calls for a rematch will not be uncommon and such calls, if not handled properly, will more than likely succeed.

Biafra 1.0, which renamed an existing region that had a single administrator was akin to renaming and secession attempt by a state governor in today’s geography. Biafra 2.0 on the other hand, has no such clear homogeneity and will be very unlikely to achieve it to the scale Biafra 1.0 did. This has not however, stopped the pro-Biafra movement from growing louder in its calls for a secession of parts of modern Nigeria.

Outside the South East geopolitical zone however, other than nostalgic sentiments of what would-have-been, the emotional cries for a Biafra 2.0 have not been well substantiated against the economic backdrop and as such, makes it difficult to garner any support or indeed, advocacy from other than a few with seemingly obvious political motivation.

The release from detention of Nnamdi Kanu following his fulfilment of his bail conditions marked a turning point in the trajectory of the pro-Biafra movement of which he has become a leading symbol. Just two years ago, Nnamdi Kanu was unknown to most Nigerians. Even within South-East Nigeria, some saw him as an abrasive presence on the airwaves because of his incessant spewing inciting vitriol against Nigeria and other enemies of “Biafra” on the pirate station, Radio Biafra. His arrest, detention and prosecution for treason transformed him from a somewhat marginal figure into a prisoner of conscience. It gave the pro-Biafra movement, a personality that could embody its aspirations and made Kanu, something of a living martyr.

The federal government’s handling of Kanu’s case and its general management of the pro-Biafra movement in the South-East have proven to be strategic blunders which ended up raising the profile of both the man and his cause. The larger question though, is what

accounts for the resurgence of pro-Biafran populism almost fifty years after the end of the civil war? Why has the idea of Biafra drawn legions of supporters notably from generations that were born after the end of the civil war?

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is only the latest iteration of pro-Biafran mass movements dating back to 1999. That year, a little known lawyer named Ralph Unwazurike, founded the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and began a campaign for the revival of the defunct republic. In the beginning, Unwazurike and his organisation were an unknown quantity and drew little mainstream media attention. He described himself as a Gandhian pacifist whose goal was the establishment of an independent Biafran state through peaceful means. MASSOB’s activism was restricted to sensitization campaigns, radio and online propaganda and trafficking in memorabilia. It gained national attention when in 2004 and 2005 large numbers of ethnic Igbos responded to its calls for a sit-at-home civil disobedience campaign to observe ‘Biafra Day’, which paralysed commercial activities in the South-East, parts of the Niger Delta, notably Delta North and the Port Harcourt area, and even in Igbo-dominated markets elsewhere in the Federation.

The Federal Government reacted to MASSOB with typical disproportion. Unwazurike was arrested and jailed while scores of MASSOB members were extra-judicially killed. In the years that followed, younger elements within the broader pro-Biafra movement rebelled against Unwazurike’s leadership, dissatisfied with his enduring pacifism which they termed as cowardice in the face of unwarranted and iron-fisted brutality of the Nigerian state. In March 2014, a group calling itself the Biafran Zionist Front, BZF, attempted to invade the Enugu State Government House, an attempt that resulted in a four-hour gun battle with security forces. They were repelled.

Kanu and IPOB represent the organised expression of a more militant pro-Biafran tendency that has emerged among a younger generation which believes that Unwazurike’s gradualist engagement with the Nigerian state has failed. The popularity of Kanu’s tirades on Radio Biafra indicates a groundswell of support for this sentiment. IPOB is fuelled by other factors, chief among which are, a pervasive local sense of alienation and marginalisation usually articulated as the lack of federal programmes and projects in the South-East geopolitical region. This conviction has deepened

since the inception of the present administration. President Muhammadu Buhari's Freudian slip early in his term - remarking that zones which had delivered only 5 percent of votes cast for him - widely seen as a veiled reference to the South-East - could not expect to get the same level of federal attention as zones that supplied 97 percent of his electoral bounty, confirmed suspicions that the perceived marginalisation of the South-East would intensify under his administration. The documented extra-judicial killings of pro-Biafra protesters by federal security forces and the increasing militarisation of the region, especially last year's Operation Python Dance, have only further compounded this sense of alienation and very likely drawn even more people into the ranks of IPOB.

Kanu's release came after calls by some South-East politicians and governors for his release. This marks a major turning point. In the past, the pro-Biafra movement had been either completely ignored by the region's mainstream politicians or at best tolerated as an irritant expression of youthful exuberance. The growing grassroots popularity of Kanu and IPOB seems to have awakened the political elite in the region to the pro-Biafran movement's potential as a political force. There is a nascent recognition in official circles in the zone that the pro-Biafran movement can no longer be ignored. It is a group to either be courted, co-opted or compromised.

This raises more questions about the extent of the pro-Biafran movement's appeal. Protests have been recorded in Igbo-speaking parts of Delta State, for example, but the extent to which separatist sentiments exist elsewhere in the Niger Delta is open to question. This question is related to the broader issue of what exact geographical and cartographical form a possible Biafra 2.0 would take? In other words, is Biafra 2.0 to be a resurrection of the defunct secessionist enclave which was the Old Eastern region and thus including parts of the present South-South zone (or Niger Delta region)?

This is an important question given the historic animus between minority ethnic communities and their Igbo neighbours and the lingering fears of Igbo hegemony. Will Biafra 2.0 include Igbo-speaking parts of the Niger Delta while leaving out non-Igbos so that it emerges as a pan-Igbo construct? Or will it simply cohere with the geographical limits of the present South-East geopolitical zone? How these questions are answered will provide insights into the long-term strategic political and economic

Timeline of major events associated with pro-Biafra agitation since 1999

1999	MASSOB founded in Okwe, Imo State
2005	MASSOB reintroduces Biafran Pound currency
2005	MASSOB asks Igbo people to stay at home on "Biafra Day". Order largely obeyed, leading to arrest of MASSOB founder
2007	MASSOB founder released
2009	MASSOB releases Biafran passport
2011	MASSOB founder and 280 others arrested in Enugu
2012	16 MASSOB members killed in Anambra
2013	50 corpses found in Ezu River. MASSOB claims the bodies are their members killed by the police
2013	President Goodluck Jonathan brands MASSOB as one of three extremist groups threatening the security of Nigeria along with Boko Haram and OPC
2013	MASSOB splinters, hotheads form BZF to pursue cause by violent means
2014	BZF attacks Government House, Enugu. Leader arrested.
2014	Radio Biafra heralds the formation of IPOB, starts broadcasting into the South-East and South-South
2015	25 MASSOB members arrested in Anambra during anniversary of the organisation, one killed
2015	IPOB leader arrested in Lagos
2015	IPOB leader granted bail, but government fails to release him, leading to protests in Abuja
2016	Large pro-Biafra protests in South-East and South-South. Up to 150 protesters killed by the military
2017	IPOB leader freed on bail

viability of Biafra 2.0.

Kanu's release from detention is both a political and legal victory for the pro-Biafran movement but where does it go from here?

Three options are open to it. First, the movement can continue along the lines of peaceful protests and disruptive civil disobedience and attempt to wear down the state through sheer consistency of pressure. Its own experience however suggests that this will place it at risk of even more brutal suppression by the state authorities - an outcome that could lead to either its extermination or to its radicalisation with even more combative elements emerging to adopt a strategy of reciprocal violence.

Secondly, the movement could go underground and take up armed struggle to realise its objectives. One of the main problems with this option is that the pro-Biafra agitators lack a weapon that they can strategically leverage in the same way that militant groups in the Niger Delta have exploited the presence of Nigeria's energy infrastructure. Among the broader Igbo population, there is also no enthusiasm for guerilla conflict or a reprise of the civil war especially in a region that still bears the horrific scars of that conflict from five decades ago. There is also nothing to suggest that Biafra 2.0 would be any more militarily achievable than Biafra 1.0 was.

A third option would see the pro-Biafra movement decide to marshal its impressive numbers, organisation and resolve and enter the domain of mainstream politics. As the thousands of young men and women who have voluntarily risked their lives to participate in pro-Biafra protests show, there is no shortage of dedication to the cause within the ranks of the movement. Although the numerical strength of the pro-Biafra movement is unknown it is clear that it commands a popular allegiance that mainstream political parties simply do not elicit. What if it were to transform this following into electoral capital? What if the movement were to mobilise itself as an electoral force and aim to capture states in the Igbo heartland? Gaining control of one or two states in the region would enable it to consolidate itself as a genuine political alternative to the region's mainstream political elite. It would also provide an opportunity to demonstrate an aptitude for constructive governance that would serve as an attractive prelude to its intent for Biafra 2.0.

The movement's choice of option depends ultimately on whether its leaders perceive its goals as ideas that can be realised through strategic gradualism

and pragmatism or through radical urgency.

A question that lingers would be that if the Federal Government were to sit with IPOB leaders, if there's any such thing, and ask how EXACTLY they want their request granted, what would their answer be? As we say, "the devil is in the detail" because calls for a referendum remain largely idealistic as such a political tool is neither contemplated in the current Constitution nor does it exist in our legal framework.

Perception of Biafra 2.0

Over the course of a week in May 2017, SBM Intelligence sent correspondents to interview people in all the states in the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones. We also conducted an online survey open only to indigenes of those zones.

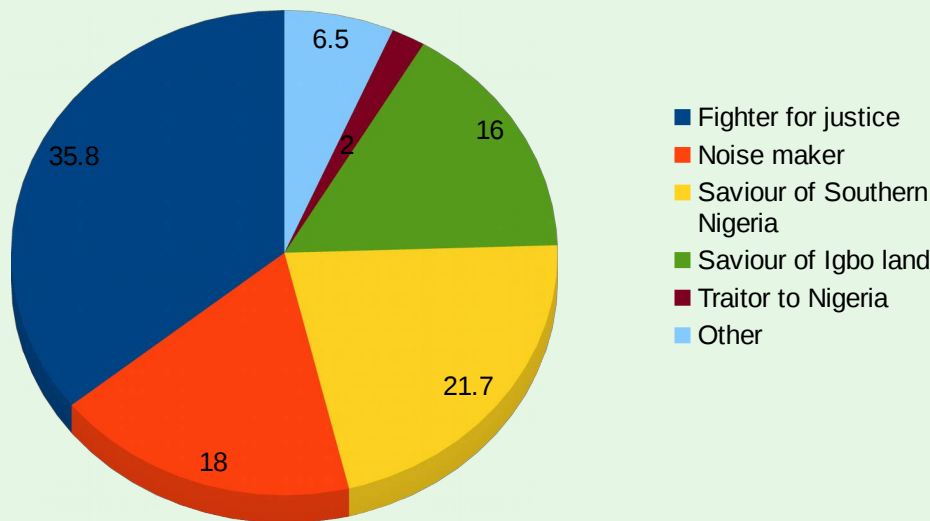
The survey had a total of 489 valid responses, and a quick scan of the results shows an increased perception of Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of IPOB, as having been treated unfairly by the Federal Government.

In total, 35.8% of respondents see Kanu as a freedom fighter, while the

Looking at the survey results on a granular, state-by-state basis, it is clear that Kanu's experience at the hand of the government has greatly caused him to be perceived as a freedom fighter in the Igbo heartland and to a lesser degree in the South-South. Exactly half of the respondents from Bayelsa see him as some sort of freedom fighter, and with the exception of Delta state (34.6%), this number goes up for all the other states in the South-South geopolitical zone.

However there remains a significant number of people who continue to view him as a charlatan and such sentiments can be explored to cast doubts on his sincerity and commitment to really obtaining change for the South-East. Unexpectedly, this sentiment is particularly strong in Abia state where exactly half of the total respondents expressed reservations about him.

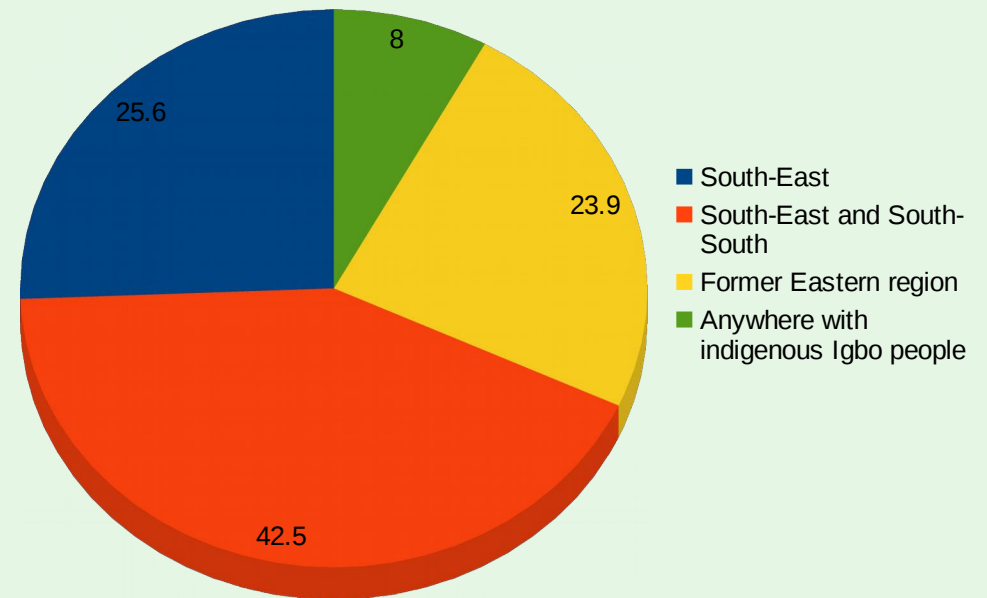
Who is Nnamdi Kanu to you?



second largest proportion, 21.7% see him as a saviour for all of Southern Nigeria. This is in marked contrast to an earlier survey in which most of our respondents saw him as a noise-maker. Now, those seeing him as a charlatan comprised just 18% of respondents.

On the issue of whether the Niger Delta should be a part of any future Biafran state, 65% of respondents think that the Niger Delta's right to self determination should decide the question.

Where do you consider to be part of Biafra?



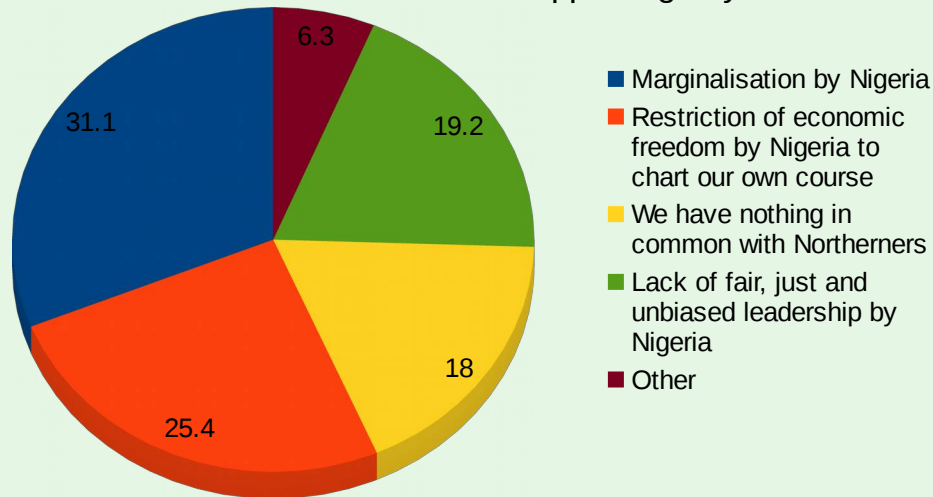
Most respondents in the South-East considered Biafra to include the South-South and Civil War Biafra. Surprisingly, a significant portion of respondents in the South-South agreed. A total of 42.5% of all respondents

believe that both regions should make up a future Biafran state.

However, just under half, 49.3%, of the total respondents still believe that the way forward for the Nigerian state is as one country, but with “true federalism” being practised, in place of the unitary system they believe is currently in place. This thinking is supported by the fact that the largest number of respondents, 31.1%, believe that their regions (South-East and South-South) are being marginalised by the central government.

Our interpretation of this is while there is significant growing support to a separate Biafran State in the South-East, most people are still more inclined to a united Nigeria with true federalism or some other arrangement that grants greater autonomy to the regions, leaving the door open for conversations around the restructuring of our nation. This is clearly the direction to go.

What makes the idea of Biafra appealing to you?



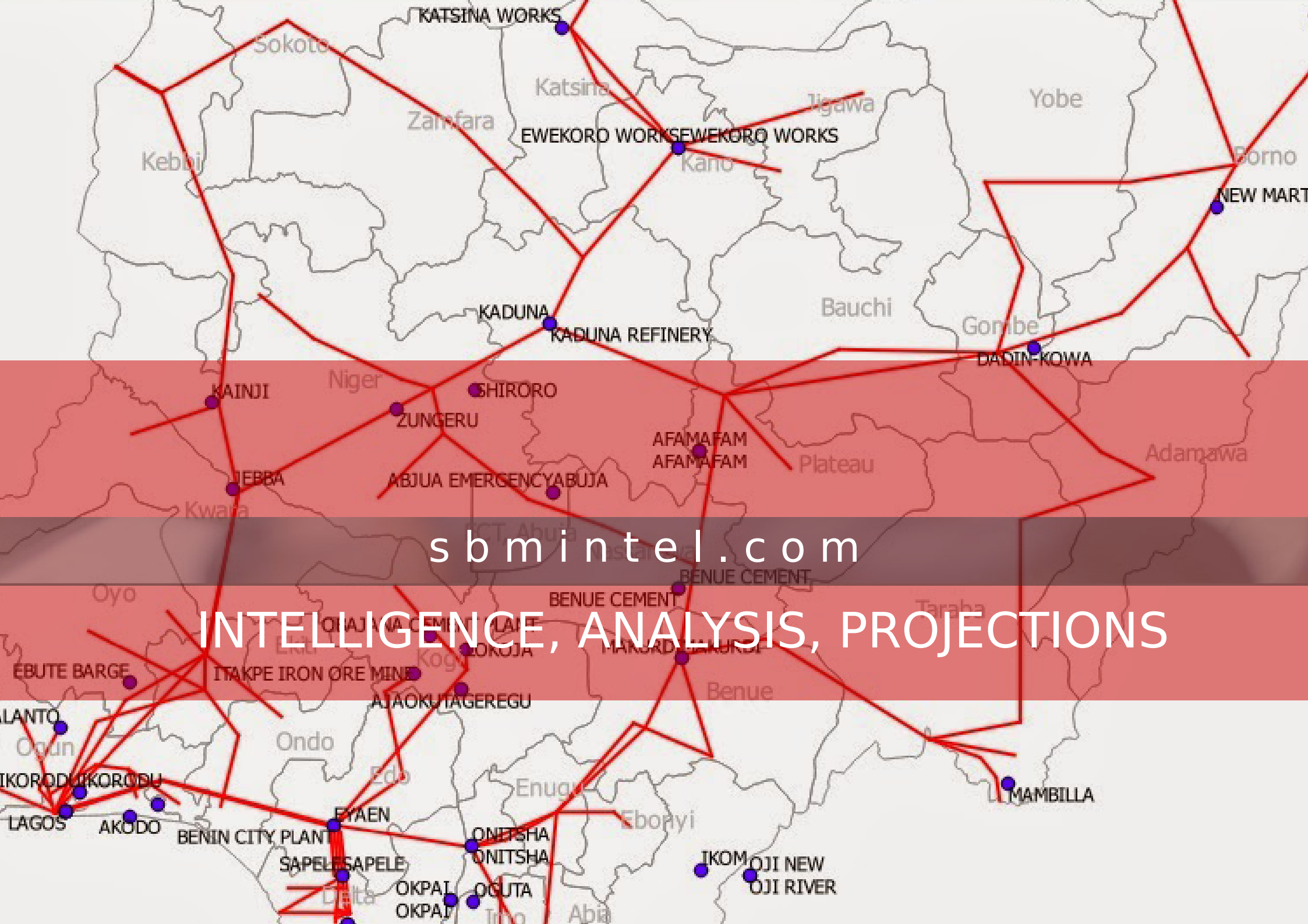
Most respondents spoke of unfair leadership, perceptions of marginalisation, and restriction of economic choices, as the key reasons they currently find an idea of Biafra appealing. These are factors that can be resolved by focused and visionary leadership and does not require the force of arms to win over these respondents and by extension the larger populace in the two regions.

Conclusion

Our survey reveals that in general terms, there is rising support for a Biafra in the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones. However, those who support secession are not yet in the majority. More people are inclined towards a restructuring within a united Nigeria. Considering that Aba has been an epicentre of IPOB protests, we found that in Abia State in particular, support for Biafra is relatively low compared with the rest of the South-East. A deeper interrogation of that showed that new economic initiatives may be responsible for the renewed belief in their prospects within Nigeria.

Support for the idea of Biafra is greater in Delta State than it is in the other South-South states. We believe that because of the presence of a large Igbo speaking community, with respondents in Delta North almost unanimous in support. However, respondents in Delta Central and Delta South are also leaning towards the idea because of increasing hardship, and rising cases of conflict with herdsmen, most of whom are from the North of the country.

A key point is to note the reasons for support. These are issues that do not require military force for the government to fix and win the people over. Creating martyrs and symbols as is being done with Nnamdi Kanu, and will be done if military forces kill more protesters is counterproductive and will only further strengthen the perception of oppression and marginalisation that fuels the separatist sentiments, winning over those who today do not support it. The government must make use of a policy/diplomatic approach in solving the problem, targeted at winning hearts and minds more than anything else.



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