



Beyond The Protests

*...towards governance reforms
after #EndBadGovernance*

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01.

Introduction



Civic participation lies at the heart of democratic governance, reflecting the active involvement of citizens in shaping public policy, societal norms, and governmental accountability. This participation can manifest through voting, public consultations, and sometimes dissent when conventional channels fail to address societal grievances. Civic disobedience, particularly protests, has emerged as a crucial catalyst for social transformation worldwide, serving as a powerful expression of collective dissent against oppression, inequality, and injustice. Throughout history, significant protest have prompted substantial changes in societal norms

and governance structures, including pivotal moments such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the global climate strikes led by youth movements such as Fridays for Future, and the Arab Spring^{1 2}.

The transformation of societal structures through protests is complex. The rise of digital communication technologies has significantly altered how protests evolve, allowing for rapid information dissemination and mobilization. This has led to a surge in movements and protests characterized by “leaderless” structures in countries like Kenya, Tunisia, and Bangladesh, where decentralized coordination, often facilitated by digital platforms, emerges as a defining trend, demonstrating adaptability and resilience against authoritarian countermeasures^{3 4}. This shift indicates a growing disillusionment with traditional political structures and a desire for more direct forms of engagement. Often at the forefront of these protests, the youth express their frustrations over economic inequality, political repression, and social injustice, using protests to articulate their demands for change.

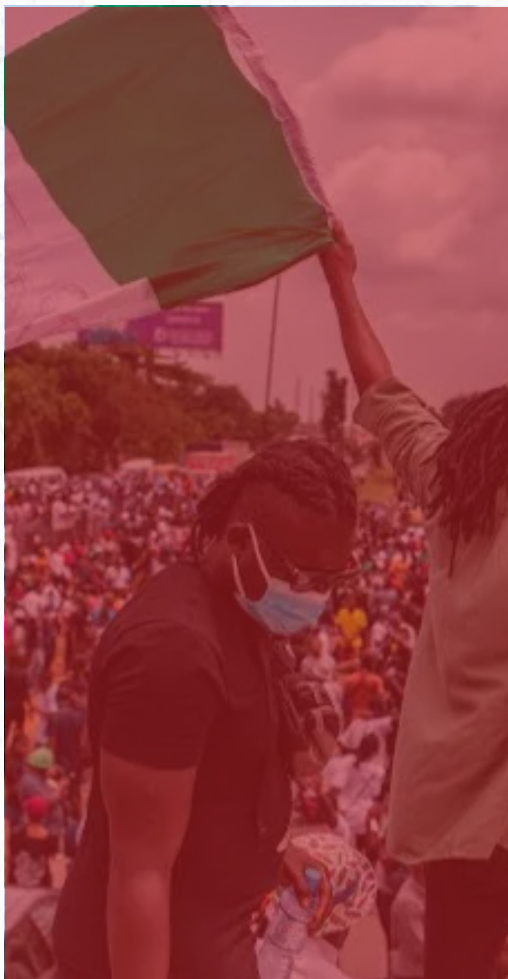
This is not far from the recent trends of protest in Nigeria—specifically, the #EndBadGovernance protest which represents a continuation of Nigeria’s protest tradition, fuelled by frustrations with governance deficits, systemic corruption, and dwindling socio-economic opportunities. Emerging after the #EndSARS protests, this protest has transcended specific grievances, addressing the broader governance landscape that perpetuates inequality and impedes progress. The protest underscores the growing discontent among Nigeria’s youth, who constitute a significant portion of the population yet remain marginalized in decision-making processes.

Despite the surge in protest activities globally, studies have shown that most protests do not lead to significant, sustained changes in public attitudes or policy outcomes. For instance, a comprehensive analysis revealed that only a tiny fraction of numerous protests led to lasting shifts in public opinion or voting⁵. Initial spikes in social media activity often dwindle within days, highlighting the challenges of maintaining it⁶. Hence, the need for this study.



02.

Rationale for the Study



The #EndBadGovernance protest is emblematic of a broader pattern of youth-led civic engagements in Nigeria. This study aims to understand the complexities, motivations, and implications of the protest within the Nigerian socio-political and economic landscape. By exploring the protest's dynamics, the study seeks to provide insights into its impact on governance, democracy, the rule of law, and the role of digital platforms in shaping collective action.

Research Objectives:

1. To critically examine the origins, evolution, and regional dynamics of the #EndBadGovernance protests, with a focus on understanding the root causes and the socio-political context that fuelled the movement.
2. To evaluate the implications of the #EndBadGovernance protest on Nigeria's governance structures, democratic processes, and human rights, particularly in light of the government's response and security tactics.
3. To assess the role of social media in shaping the protest, the influence of digital and non-digital platforms in mobilizing support, the progression and the eventual suspension of the protests.



03.

Methodology

Research Design, and Data



Research

To address the research objectives comprehensively, the study employs a mixed methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques. The methodology was designed to provide a multidimensional understanding of the movement, allowing for data triangulation to enhance reliability and depth of analysis.

1. Qualitative Component:

- o **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** The FGDs engaged a diverse range of participants, including political analysts, social scientists, human rights activists, media professionals, and security experts. Participants were selected purposively to ensure representation from all six geopolitical zones and key stakeholder groups. Discussions focused on regional disparities, government responses, and the role of social and traditional media, with the transcripts subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights.
- o **Content Analysis:** A qualitative review of media narratives, government reports, and policy briefs to understand framing and public perception.

2. Quantitative Component:

- o **Social Media Sentiment Analysis:** Data was collected from social and non-social media sources from 1st July 2024 to 11th August 2024, when the hashtag gained prominence and started trending on the trend log. The social media platforms included Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. Non-social media data comprised news articles and opinion pieces discussing the #EndBadGovernance protest. Relevant hashtags such as #EndBadGovernance, #EndBadGovernanceNow, and #EndBadGovernanceProtest were used to identify and retrieve data.
- o **Comparative Analysis:** Quantitative comparisons of government and security agency responses across regions, drawing on metrics such as arrest rates, human rights violation reports, and resource deployment.

Highlights of the study

- Protests in Nigeria are often perceived as a reflection of political discontent, yet the complexity and ambiguity surrounding it not only shape public perception but also influence how protests are utilised, interpreted, and responded to by both citizens and the government. Some of these includes:
 - Protests have often been perceived as the action of those incapable of engaging in conventional political processes rather than as a legitimate political tool.
 - Widespread but flawed belief that protests are not a form of political participation and are instead a threat to national security.
 - Both the government and citizens frequently reduce mass action or civil disobedience to mere street protests, neglecting its potential as a tool for social negotiation and transformation.
 - Protests are traditionally used by the oppressed to negotiate freedom, and oppressors are not disposed to using the same tool to manipulate protests to weaken resistance.
- Protests have been part of Nigeria's political culture since the 1920s, driven by poor service delivery, exclusion, and bad governance. Yet, the factors that drive protest persist and exist in the fourth republic.
- The spread of protests globally, which can be termed as the reaction to liberal democratisation and neoliberal economic policies, mirrors similar dynamics in Nigeria. While economic reforms are not bad in their entirety, poorly managed reforms often drive citizens to seek alternative forms of economic and political solutions.
- Material conditions and marginalization patterns from the colonial era persist in the post-colonial era, with little change in government responsiveness to citizens' needs.
- Marginalized groups, including youth, women, PWDs, and labour unions, increasingly see protests as a viable form of political participation due to limited opportunities in formal systems.

- Economic hardship was a significant factor that sparked #EndBadGovernance protests : President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration's abrupt removal of petroleum subsidies, currency floating, and reliance on market-driven foreign exchange rates plunged millions into poverty and deepened inequality. The Tinubu administration's economic policies, while aimed at structural adjustments, disproportionately affected people experiencing poverty, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities and triggering nationwide unrest.
- The Leadership Dynamics of #EndBadGovernance protest:
 - *The #EndBadGovernance protest lacks formal leadership structure in theory, not in practice.*
 - *While leaderless protest creates a chance to respond urgently to specific events or systemic failures that require social change, the lack of a centralized leadership structure makes sustaining momentum and gains difficult.*
 - *Successful leaderless protests, like the Arab Spring, relied on specific, measurable, and attainable goals. The lack of coherence in the #EndBadGovernance protest demands limited its effectiveness.*
 - *Like the #EndSARS movement, the #EndBadGovernance protest achieved temporary gains but failed to sustain them due to the absence of formal leadership structures.*
- Despite periodic concessions and promises of reform, Nigeria has failed to institutionalize formalized channels for citizen-government dialogue, perpetuating a cycle of unrest and suppression.
- Protests must be recognized as a legitimate means to negotiate political and social spaces, especially for marginalized groups. Until protests are accepted as legitimate political action with structured engagement platforms, they will remain fragmented and misunderstood.
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the government have done little to sustain post-protest dialogues or prepare citizens for this informal political channel.
- The absence of deliberate citizen engagement platforms often leads to incoherent and numerous demands during protests, as seen in the

#EndBadGovernance protest.

- In the fourth republic, pre-2015, responses to protests were less coercive, allowing for marginal dialogue between citizens and the government. In contrast, the post-2015 era has seen predominantly coercive responses to mass actions, fostering an environment where state anarchy emerges as citizens feel unheard.
- Nigerian youths are increasingly socially conscious and politically active, leveraging social media and ICT platforms to organize protests. However, sustaining momentum remains a challenge.



04.

Conclusion & Recommendations



The #EndBadGovernance protest reflects the growing demand for accountability, transparency, and reform in governance and public administration. It underscores the frustration of citizens with systemic issues such as poor governance, police brutality, and the lack of electoral justice. However, the movement also demonstrates the resilience and capacity of the Nigerian people, especially its youth, to advocate for change and demand a government that serves their interests.

To achieve sustainable progress, a collaborative and inclusive approach is essential. The government must prioritize dialogue, im-

plement meaningful reforms, and commit to human rights and democratic principles. Security agencies must adopt community-focused policing strategies and act as protectors of civil liberties rather than enforcers of repression. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and media outlets must amplify concerns, promote advocacy, and ensure transparency. Protest organizers and movement leaders must remain unified, strategic, and focused on long-term objectives. Influencers, public figures, and the international community can provide critical support by spreading awareness, countering misinformation, and holding stakeholders accountable.

By addressing challenges holistically and fostering collaboration across all sectors, the #EndBad-Governance protests can pave the way for a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic Nigeria. The lessons learned from these protests can serve as a roadmap for civic engagement and advocacy, empowering citizens to shape their governance and protect their rights and freedoms actively.

Based on the data and trends observed from Day 1 to Day 10 of the #EndBadGovernance protests and historical trends, several rec-

ommendations can be drawn to address the emerging issues, dynamics, and insights. These recommendations focus on improving the efficacy of the movement, addressing challenges, and ensuring sustainable progress.

- **Formalised Citizen Engagement:** The government must establish, engage, or promote inclusive and accessible platforms for citizens, particularly marginalised groups, to engage in meaningful dialogue and policy-making processes.
- **Post-Protest Dialogues:** Civil society organisations should prioritise post-protest engagements to sustain the momentum of movements (demands) like #EndBadGovernance and channel them into actionable outcomes.
- **Non-Coercive Responses:** Security agencies need to adopt less confrontational approaches to protests, fostering trust and encouraging constructive dialogue between citizens and the state.

- **Youth Empowerment:**

Youth-led movements should focus on leadership training, coherent messaging, and grassroots mobilisation to strengthen their impact and resilience.

- **Government Reframing of Protests:**

The state must shift its perception of protests from threats to legitimate political actions, recognising their role in a vibrant democracy.



Endnotes

1. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/06/todays-protest-movements-are-as-big-as-the-1960s/613207/>
2. 3.5.2 Protest and Social Movements in Modern History (ca. 1800–1900): <https://books.openbookpublishers.com/10.11647/obp.0323/ch38.xhtml>
3. <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2020/06/leaderless-protest-strength-weakness>
4. <https://history.stanford.edu/news/leaderless-decentralized-protest-strength-and-weakness-warns-civil-rights-scholar-clayborne>
5. <https://www.library.hbs.edu/working-knowledge/do-protests-and-social-movements-sway-voters-not-really-except-for-one>
6. <https://econreview.studentorg.berkeley.edu/the-power-of-protests/>

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