

PROTESTS AND THE CHALLENGE OF ADDRESSING UNRESOLVED SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ISSUES IN NIGERIA’S 2024 “END BAD GOVERNMENT” MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Nations exist because of the people, and the people make democracies endearing. Public protest has remained a basic right and important activity in a democracy. Over the years, Nigeria has faced numerous environmental, political, and socio-economic problems begging for attention and answers. The government seems unperturbed about finding lasting solutions to these challenges as the political leadership is more concerned with capturing and holding on to power. In the long run, the people have resort to protests demanding solutions to these recurring societal challenges. This study interrogated protests and the challenge of addressing unresolved socioeconomic and political issues in Nigeria’s 2024 “End Bad Government” Movement. The study adopted David Easton’s System theory as a theoretical framework for analysis and the secondary method of data analysis. Thus, the study examined whether bad leadership and unresponsive governance result in protests in Nigeria, and whether suppression of dissenting voices results in protests in Nigeria. The findings revealed that bad leadership, infringement on rights and inability to access basic social amenities, among others, have often resulted in protests in Nigeria. Also, insensitive leadership significantly affected protests, and in most cases, affects government policies. The study concludes that protests have ignited conversations about governance, accountability, and human rights in Nigeria. The “End bad government” protest also created awareness of social issues, activated civic activism necessitated by political consciousness and engagement, leading to policy reforms. As such, comprehensive reforms, when put in place to ensure that rights are protected, the well-being and welfare of the people are realized, and basic social amenities are accessible, will surely prevent protests in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy; Dissent; Governance; Protests, System theory

Introduction

A social system comprises units that are themselves entities, and each of these units performs many roles in complex societies where it exists. Therefore, the quality of social interaction and the adaptive and problem-solving possibilities of the entire society directly affect the responses of the units comprising the whole. Democracy has continuously been described as a type of government, highlighting the central place of the people as the government itself and also beneficiaries of the policies and programmes of the government. As such, it cannot be negated that the people, as the main focus of every democracy, remain what makes a democracy endearing and acceptable among alternatives (Ndubuisi & Uduma, 2025). Though democracies have written constitutions and courts as referees, they can only function and endure in countries where these written constitutions are supplemented with unwritten laws or codes. When these societal codes are swept aside, they ultimately result in societal anomalies, which in most cases, lead to agitations.

Thus, for every inaction or action, there is always a reaction, and this is so especially in cases of anti-people policies and leadership that is not in touch with the aspirations and needs of the people (Obasanjo, 2024). Agitations and protests have arisen in most cases due to social and civil discontent arising from indifference from the government and a deviation from welfare-driven governance. Protests have historically enabled some of the most potent social movements, bringing abuse and injustice to light, calling for responsibility, and encouraging people to hope for a better society. The citizens have inalienable rights, such as the freedom of expression and dissent, and in cases where the welfare of the citizens is not considered, these inalienable rights may be put to good use.

Through expressions and agitations in the past and present, the people have helped by lending their voices in shaping society for the better. The 1930 Salt March against British colonial rule in India, the pride marches that followed the Stonewall Riots in 1969, and the Black Lives Matter protests in recent years have all highlighted how compelling the people's voice through their expression and agitation has been, in constantly shaping our society for the better. There are countless cases where people came together because rights and liberties were trampled upon (Tharoor, 2011; Walsh & Write, 2019; Hatfield, 2023).

Therefore, it is inarguable that peaceful protests can have many effects, such as raising awareness, building support, achieving political goals and facilitating change in policies or programmes through pressing for reforms. In many nations, protests have ensured

that the people are heard and that democracy reflects the people as active stakeholders and not just onlookers, remotely controlled and exploited by the political elites. For example, in South Korea, peaceful demonstrations led to the impeachment of South Korean President Park Geun-hye (Sang-Hun, 2017). It is observable that in developing countries like Nigeria, protests overtime have always centred around insecurity, poor governance, exclusion from political decision-making, unemployment, high costs of living, inequality, hunger, corruption, and leadership weaknesses, and there has not been thorough commitment to address these issues (Akpofa, 2010; Obasanjo, 2024). Protests in Nigeria have always ended up pitching the people as enemies of the government in power, with little or no attention given to the reasons for the protests (Daghagba, 2009; Ejike, 2024).

Over the years, issues like bad governance, kleptocratic leadership, corruption, rise in the cost of living, infringement on the rights of citizens and more, have remained motivators of agitations by the people for action by the government, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. According to the Multidimensional Poverty Peer Network (2022), the highlights of the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) survey for Nigeria reveal that with a population of over 200 million people, 63% of persons living in Nigeria (133 million people) are multidimensionally poor. The National MPI is 0.257, indicating that poor people in Nigeria experience just over one-quarter of all possible deprivations.

In the case of Nigeria, just like most developing countries of Africa, the political leadership in most cases are observed to continuously dish out wishy-washy policies and programmes to address the call for action by the people, and the most embarrassing thing about these programmes and policies is that the people continuously are alienated from governance as these actions by the government have failed to address these critical concerns raised by the people (Aborishade, 2012). In the case of the “End bad government” protest, the following were identified as the specific issues that led to the protest: the removal of fuel subsidy and its resultant inflation and rise in cost of living, high cost of food prices, social inequalities, increasing unemployment and poverty rate, security challenge, and the laissez faire approach of government towards addressing these growing concerns. Thus, the specific demands made by protesters to the government range as follows: a stop to anti-masses policies, return of fuel subsidy, creation of employment opportunities, improved security of lives and properties, and comprehensive policy reforms. All these are puzzles yet to be solved by the Nigerian leadership.

The Concept of Protest

In democratic societies, protest is a legitimate and necessary means for the public or members of communities to seek redress for issues that decision-makers or leadership have ignored. It is a social mechanism for seeking redress in contentious situations, especially between communities, a group or groups, and the government or leadership. Protests seek to bring about social or political change by influencing the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of the public or the policies of an organisation or institution, or even government (Loya and Macleod, 2011). Lavender and Peets (2022), explain that Protests are expressions of discontent or disapproval towards a particular idea or course of action, be it political or social, taking place across media, spaces, countries, and constituencies. This involves protesters organizing protests to voice their opinions and views in an attempt to influence public opinion (Shuman et.al, 2023). While protests exist in the form of systematic and peaceful campaigns for the realization of interests, there are cases where protests turn violent and go beyond government control, leading to destruction of properties, hurt, and even loss of life (Jones and Smith, 2021).

Methodology

The paper adopted a secondary data analysis method, focusing on a review of the literature through secondary sources of data obtained from books, journals, newspapers, websites, and government publications. Thus, this identifies patterns, themes and gaps in the provided literature related to specific research questions presented in the study.

Theoretical Framework

Protests have been described as holding dissents or expressing discontent through public marches (Eesuola, 2015). In most cases, protests are aimed at creating required social awareness to social issues, and necessitating civic activism intended to ensure policy reforms. The expression of dissent, ventilation of anger or resistance against a particular phenomenon or policy direction through riots, demonstration or strikes, seeking for attention encapsulates protests. Thus, considering the instrumentality of protests in a democracy, the study adopted the System Theory by David Easton for a deep understanding of the correlation between protests and resolving socioeconomic and political issues, especially the 2024 “End bad government” protest in Nigeria.

Easton (1953), analytically viewed the political system as integrating parts with functions and roles, through which social policy is formulated and executed. The system consists of inputs in the form of demands and supports coming from the people, and these are analysed and processed through the system to emerge as output (decisions, actions, policies and programmes) constituting the authoritative allocation of values for the wellbeing of the people by the political leadership (Ndubuisi & Uduma, 2025).

Considering Easton's analysis of how society functions, it has been argued that political stability would require a level of system maintenance. This can be realised depending on the level of attention given to the demands made into the system as reflected in programmes and policies of political leadership. Hence, considering the analysis of Easton, it can be argued that demands made into the system can also be in the form of protests or agitations since these reflect the expectations of the people from the political leadership manning the political system.

Demands and supports constitute the two principal categories of the input made into the political system. Every responsive and responsible leadership will reflect, to an extent, if not totally, the demands made on the system as it affects its policies and programmes. In a democracy, the quality of social interaction and the adaptive and problem-solving possibilities of the entire society directly affect the responses of the units comprising the whole political system. Demands made into the system can emanate from pressure groups, political parties, associations, and others (Davies, 2018). In most cases, these demands do not initially emerge as agitations or protests but highlight the welfare needs or aspirations of the people. In cases where these demands are not attended to or reasonable impacts are not seen in policies and programmes of government to address these demands, a protest or agitation, which in most cases may be violent or non-violent, may ensue. Therefore, for a level of stability to be realisable, the welfare needs and aspirations of the people as reflected in programmes and policies of government or political leadership are important and to an extent determine how responsible and responsive a leadership is.

Analytical Overview of Protests in Nigeria

Social and civil discontent arising from the indifference and a deviation from welfare-driven governance in which the people are involved often results in agitations for a change for the better, expressed through protests. Citizens have inalienable rights, such as the freedom of expression and dissent, and may put them to use when and where necessary to

ensure their concerns are considered. In developing countries like Nigeria, reoccurring agitations have always centred around issues such as insecurity, poor governance, exclusion from political decision-making, unemployment, high costs of living, inequality, hunger, corruption, and leadership weaknesses, and no matter the body language of the political leadership towards addressing these issues they keep resurfacing again (Akpofa, 2010; Obasanjo, 2024).

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (As amended) have remained commitments both within the international and local conventions acknowledging the right to freedom of expression and dissent as depicted in peaceful protests (Human Rights Committee, 2019). While protests remain one of the mediums to ensure that leadership entrenches purposeful dialogue towards finding answers to questions about the security of lives and properties, accountability, fairness, equity, justice and social wellbeing, if not handled well, can pose a security threat to society (Ives & Lewis, 2019).

Protests are collectively embarked upon with unity of purpose and shared concerns for the well-being of society and the need to address an identified societal problem (Davenport, Johnston and Mueller, 2005). When protests are embarked on and a follow-up assessment is done with facts that highlight that after the protest has taken place, the issues of concern for the protest persist, showing that nothing tangible has been done to address them, such a protest can be described as an unsuccessful protest. Protests and demonstrations in Nigeria, since 1929, have focused on societal issues but have revolved mainly around social, political, and economic factors determining the well-being of the Nigerian population (Aniche & Iwuoha, 2022). Since Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the demand for the government to show responsibility and accountability has echoed repeatedly.

Table 1: List of Protests in Nigeria and Areas Affected

S/N	YEAR	PROTEST	AREA AFFECTED
1.	1929	Aba Women Protest (addressed reductions in women's economic independence, discriminatory levies, and the establishment of warrant chiefs as local authorities)	South-South and South-East
2.	1947	Abeokuta Women's Union Protest (addressed disproportionate taxes on individuals, particularly in Abeokuta)	South West (Abeokuta)

3.	1978	Ali-Must-Go Protest (addressed the unilateral hike in fees and levies for the canteen and student Residence halls.	Nationwide
4.	1989	Anti-SAP Protest (addressed the IMF-induced Structural adjustment program)	Nationwide
5.	1993	June 12 Protest (addressed the annulment of the 1993 Election won by M.K.O. Abiola)	South West, but visible nationwide
6.	2001	Implementation of Sharia law Protest (addressed the implementation of Sharia law in the country's northern region)	North
7.	2003	Increase of Petrol Price Protest (addressed the deliberate increase of petrol price by the government)	Nationwide
8.	2012	Removal of Fuel Subsidy Protest (addressed the removal of fuel subsidy)	Nationwide
9.	2014	Bring Back Our Girls Protest (addressed the illegal abduction of female students from a school in Chibok.	National and International
10.	2016	Biafra Agitation Protest (addressed the agitation for the secession of Biafra)	South-East
11.	2018	Minimum Wage Increment Protest (addressed wage increment)	Nationwide
12.	2020	END SARS Protest (addressed police brutality, corruption and bad governance)	Nationwide
13.	2023	Naira Scarcity Protest (addressed the scarcity of Naira due to the CBN Naira redesign policy)	Nationwide
14.	2024	The End Bad Governance Protest (addressed high cost of living, the elimination of fuel subsidies, corruption, rapidly rising inflation, executive abuses)	Nationwide

Source: Okwuwada, 2025

The End Bad Government Protest: A Search for Answers to Nigeria's Socioeconomic and Political Problems

Poverty is an economic state where people experience scarcity or lack of necessities such as food, healthcare, sanitation, education, and assets. The main factors that cause poverty in sub-Saharan Africa include: inadequate access to employment openings, no access to physical assets such as land and capital, inadequate access to the means of supporting rural development in poor regions, poor access to markets where goods and services can be vended, the low endowment of human capital, degradation and reduced productivity, inadequate access to assistance for low and middle class, and the victims of transitory poverty, and eventually failure to involve people in the design of development programmes that directly affect their living standards (Obadan, 1997).

Adeyemi, Ijaiya, and Raheem (2009), posit that Nigeria, like many other Sub-Saharan African countries, has been ravaged by poverty, considering the declining per capita income, increasing hunger, rising unemployment, and environmental degradation. Despite all the efforts made by various governments in Nigeria to provide solutions to the plight of the people through the various poverty alleviation programmes, the economy has remained limping.

Over the years, issues like bad governance, kleptocratic leadership, corruption, rise in the cost of living, infringement on the rights of citizens and more have remained motivators of agitations by Nigerians for action by the government in power. In recent times, there has not been a clear demarcation of the ugly experiences of the military era and the brutal stifling of the voice of Nigerians on their demand for welfare-driven governance. The transition to democratic rule has ushered Nigeria into democracy, even with redundant institutions and a culture that should have strengthened the democracy. It has been observed that the resultant effect of Nigeria's dysfunctional leadership and its endemic corruption has remained an unending cycle of poverty, unemployment, insecurity and decay of social institutions such as education and health institutions.

Opp (2009), describes protests as a sustained challenge of actions and policies of power holders in the name of the disadvantaged population living under the influence of these power holders. The "End bad government" protest was caused by issues related to the removal of subsidies resulting in inflation, rising living costs, increasing food prices, increasing social inequalities, increasing unemployment and poverty rate, and security challenges. The laissez faire approach by the Nigerian government to address these issues have fuelled unrest, necessitating a call requesting for action by the government. The protesters' demands include a stop to anti-masses policies, the return of fuel subsidies, measures to create employment, improved security, and comprehensive policy reforms. Though the "End bad government" protest created awareness to social issues, much impact regarding the demands made by the protesters have not been recorded. The subsidy removal is still in place with its resultant rising inflation and rise in cost of living. Prices of food have not reduced and the nation is still battling with increasing cases of insecurity. The Nigerian government is yet to show commitment towards addressing the concerns raised during the protest through embarking on a comprehensive policy reform.

Since May 2023, Nigeria has struggled with unprecedented economic hardship following the removal of fuel subsidy, which was introduced in the 1970s to ensure the affordability of petrol and help the naira increase in value (Angbulu, 2024). Though the Nigerian President and his handlers keep reassuring the Nigerian masses that the policies are meant to reposition Nigeria for economic growth and are long overdue, there has been a huge gap between the reality of this statement, considering the ostentatious lifestyle of the people in government and the widening poverty gap among the masses.

As the masses are enmeshed in untold hardship and the future is shaky, agitations and requests to alleviate the people's pain have increased. It is on record that with the end of fuel subsidy on 29th May 2023, as announced by President Tinubu, by June 2023, inflation rose to 22.8 percent, and by May 2024 it increased to an alarming 34 percent, and 34.2 percent by June 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics Report, 2024). With the surging increase of inflation, implied high cost of food items and the ravaging insecurity challenge chasing farmers away from their farms in the North Central region and other parts of the nation, the reality of the hard living conditions facing the Nigerian population led to the hunger protest, also known as #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protest (Maclean & Alfa, 2024).

It becomes imperative to speak truth to those in authority, soliciting action in areas that affect the Nigerian people. Therefore, it is inarguable that solving Nigeria's insurmountable socioeconomic cum political problems is hinged on effective and responsible leadership, accountability, people-centred representation, effective policy articulation, and implementation and evaluation mechanisms.

Conclusion

Issues like bad governance, kleptocratic leadership, corruption, rising cost of living, infringement on citizens' rights, and more have often fanned the embers for agitations and protests, demanding actions from the government in power. The effect of Nigeria's indifferent leadership and the menace of corruption have led to an unending cycle of poverty, unemployment, insecurity and utmost decay of social institutions like the education and health sectors. The "End bad government" protest was necessitated by increasing economic hardship and inflation, increasing poverty and unemployment, and most especially, a lack of commitment to comprehensive policy reforms to address these issues, which have lingered over the years. Hence, the call to stop anti-masses policies, return the fuel subsidy, create employment and improve security by protesters was a request for a change which is long

overdue. Comprehensive policy reforms in Nigeria to address the concerns for these protests will emphasise welfare-driven policies and programmes intended to better the lives of the Nigerian masses. Also, accountability, justice and fairness must be promoted in all spheres of society, regardless of class or status.

Recommendations

Throughout history, people have protested their displeasure with policies infringing on their right to personal freedom and well-being. Protests have remained a viable tool to promote social inclusion and fairness through dialogue and engagement between political leadership and followers. Protests can be strategic towards getting answers to Nigeria's humongous unsolved socio-economic and political problems. Thus, considering the need to find answers to how protests like the 2024 “End bad government” protest can help address unresolved socioeconomic and political issues in Nigeria, the paper recommends the following:

- i. The right to protest should not be seen as a threat to democracy, but its lifeblood, ensuring inclusiveness.
- ii. The government and the civil society should encourage platforms for amplifying marginalised voices, building coalitions and mobilizing support through digital activism.
- iii. Protesters should show openness to dialogue and negotiation during protests to achieve the desired purpose for these protests.
- iv. Focus on clear intersectional issues, advocating for policy changes should be paramount during protests.
- v. The Nigerian government must embrace and adopt a new approach to governance, going beyond protest management and focusing more on citizens' engagement, continuous dialogue, inclusiveness and continuous consultation.
- vi. The Nigerian government, through its policies and programmes, should show commitment towards addressing the unemployment challenges, thereby creating opportunities for human capital development.
- vii. Political and economic elites in Nigeria should show commitment towards accepting and promoting policies of greater social inclusion.

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