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Digital Activism and Political Accountability: Evaluating the Impact of #EndBadGovernance on Governance Reforms in Nigeria

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Abstract

The #EndBadGovernance Movement that occurred in August 2024 in Nigeria marks a significant event in the West African country's history. The movement was an expression of dissatisfaction by Nigerians over the country's failing economy and governance system. Using the hashtag on social media platforms, Nigerians expressed their grievances and mobilised for offline protests across the country. The study employs qualitative content analysis of posts from X to identify significant protest themes, government responses, and various forms of structural barriers that include entrenched political interests, weak institutions, and the transientness of digital activism. The findings indicate that while the movement amplified public grievances and increased civic engagement via digital platforms, it had minimal impact on governance reform. The movement showed that digital activism proved incapable of overcoming structural barriers alone, thus necessitating an integrated strategy that combined online mobilization with offline action and institutional engagement. This study contributes to the expanding discussions regarding digital activism in Africa by giving an account of how digital tools interface with civic dissent and Nigeria's governance systems.

Keywords: Digital activism, social media, political accountability, governance reforms, #EndBadGovernance



Introduction

Digital activism has emerged as a widespread and powerful tool for political engagement and social reform (Earl, Maher, and Pan, 2022), especially for countries burdened with internally complex socio-political landscapes like Nigeria (Oladebo, 2015). A recent yet prominent example of such activism is the #EndBadGovernance movement that gained momentum in August 2024. The movement emerged following initial cycles of campaigns against the reforms of President Bola Tinubu, whose administration's removal of fuel subsidies, floating of the national currency, and hike in electricity tariffs, among others, pushed more Nigerians into poverty (Hassan, Abalaka, and Ajiteru, 2024; Ewang, 2024). #EndBadGovernance expanded beyond these to calls for systemic reforms and government accountability, with some calling for a return to the existing policies before the new political dispensation (Hassan, Abalaka, and Ajiteru, 2024). Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok were used to articulate these demands while sidestepping traditional gatekeepers of information and galvanizing conversations beyond immediate local audiences.

Digital platforms have successfully democratised activism and brought users an online world for organising, mobilising, and voicing grievances. According to Tufekci (2017), social media activism is possible because it has eliminated the distances, costs, and restrictions on access that usually prevent traditional forms of protest. This is in addition to platform affordances such as hashtags, stories and trending sounds used to amplify messages and create viral effects (Yang, 2024). Hashtags are among the commonest affordances across digital platforms, and users leverage them to achieve visibility and build community (Hautea et al., 2021). In Nigeria, where the government has historically been marred by nepotism, inefficiency, corruption, and lack of accountability (Akinola and Ekundayo, 2020), digital



activism could afford collective action in instances where physical protests were repressed by the government and the ruling elites. The #EndBadGovernance protest movement in Nigeria reveals how concerned users organise and mobilise online to make their grievances known and to call for national reforms. However, the impact of such online movements is widely contested, as critics like Morozov (2012) warn against overestimating the power of online mobilisation in achieving real-world changes.

The #EndBadGovernance campaign effectively underscored the merits and limitations of digital activism. While it attracted international and diaspora attention that became counterproductive for the Nigerian government, as such visibility forced it to at least talk about the demands of the citizenry (BBC, 2024), there remains a nagging doubt as to whether or not these efforts have translated into long-standing changes in policy rather than short-lived agreements to appease protesters. The promise to address the protester's demands is perceived as an immediate result. However, the arrest of some protesters and the failure to fulfill the promises made during the protest dashed hopes about the government's sincerity in achieving the promised reforms.

This paper critically analyses the outcomes of the #EndBadGovernance movement about the wider perspective on the impact of digital activism on governance reforms in Nigeria. It draws on empirical evidence from X and theoretical perspectives to evaluate whether such campaign action brought about real reform in governance or merely reflected a transient outcry. In addition, it interrogates the role of structural barriers as established political interests, weak institutions, and digital divides as barriers limiting the impact of such movements in Nigeria.

The analysis of the campaign outcome data, such as policy changes, civic engagement levels, and governmental accountability measures, adds to the growing scholarship on digital activism in sub-Saharan Africa. Most importantly, it uses Nigeria as a frame to demonstrate both the promise and paradox of digital platforms as instruments of political change within societies whose realities are digitalizing rapidly yet remain highly unequal.

Background of the #EndBadGovernance Protest

In August 2024, Nigeria became the rallying point for mass decentralized protests under the theme #EndBadGovernance. It resulted from prevalent growing economic hardship and the removal of fuel subsidies that led to increased transportation and living costs. A living wage, electoral reform, human capital development, protecting farms and farmers, cost of governance, cost of living, and hunger are among the ten demands of the protest organisers (Uti, 2024). Coupled with inflation and stagnant wages,



the fuel subsidy removal policy mainly affects low- and middle-income Nigerians, thus worsening bad economic situations (Mohammed et al., 2024). Removing subsidies was regarded as a tipping point for mass protest among citizens already disillusioned by decades of bad governance, bribery, and failed leadership (Zipredo and Obi, 2024).

Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp were among the social media platforms that served well in mobilizing the movement (Udoinyang and Nwazuni, 2024). Activists leveraged these platforms to disseminate information in real time, amplifying their grievances to local and global audiences. The hashtag #EndBadGovernance was used on these platforms to spark solidarity among citizens from different regions and socioeconomic environments (Zachariah et al., 2024). These digital tools democratized the space of the protests, allowing ordinary Nigerians to influence the trajectory and agenda of the movement.

These protests were also deeply rooted in a deeper historical context of proven public dissent against systemic failures. Like the 2020 #EndSARS protests targeted at police brutality (Iwuoha and Aniche, 2022), the 2024 #EndBadGovernance scratched the long-standing itches Nigerians have concerning governance issues, particularly corruption, aging infrastructural decay, and lack of accountability. The protest was a manifestation of a generational shift in activism wherein digitally literate youths challenged entrenched power structures beyond social media to the streets.

The protests were decentralised; however, some regions and cities like Lagos, Kano, Abuja, Kaduna, and Port Harcourt became strategic flashpoints for large-scale offline demonstrations (Ehigiator, 2024). The protests were largely peaceful in southern parts, with most protesters carrying placards that called for governance reforms, economic relief, and transparency in public affairs but recorded traces of violence and destruction of public infrastructure in the north (Hassan-Wuyo, 2024). The government thus responded with a mixture of soothing rhetoric and repression. While government officials acknowledged the economic grievances of citizens, security forces were deployed to disperse the crowd, resulting in clashes and arrests (Amnesty International, 2024).

The protest put a spotlight on the prospect of digital activism invigorating popular concerted action in the face of structural injustices. At the same time, it threw critical questions about the potential of such movements and campaigns for effecting substantive change, especially within contexts where government is so deeply entrenched in systemic corruption and inefficiency, into substantive reforms. It's a historical moment that provides the lens to examine the nexus between digital instruments, civic engagement, and governance in Nigeria.



Theoretical Frameworks

The #EndBadGovernance movement exposes the multi-dimensional intersections of digital activism, political accountability, and the structural constraints within which governance reforms operate in Nigeria. That notwithstanding, various theories such as the networked public sphere, connective action, resource mobilization, slacktivism, and political opportunity structure theory serve to illuminate operational dynamics of digital activism and to provide critical lenses that contest its proposition for mobilizing and instigating real political change.

According to Habermas's theory of the public sphere, communicative spaces are avenues for democratic engagement and action (Habermas, 1989). This takes the form of digital spaces that serve as contemporary networked public spheres, allowing Nigerian citizens to go beyond state-controlled narratives and demand accountability. Scholars argue, however, that the same openness inherent in these digital spaces allows for the dilution of collective goals. Fuchs (2014) argues against the idea that digital spaces are by nature democratic, noting how algorithms and corporate interests usually mediate what voices get amplified. This was experienced during the #EndBadGovernance protests, as studies have shown that competing narratives counter efforts complemented by sponsored disinformation campaigns to scatter the focus of movements (Krafft and Donovan, 2020; Bradshaw and Howard, 2018; Ferguson, 2020).

The theory of connective action by Bennett and Segerberg (2013) is relevant to understanding the decentralized nature of protests. Unlike collective action in traditional understandings, this kind of collective action relies on personal engagement through the application of digital media. Even though the model reduces the barriers to mobilization, this very dependence on poorly coordinated networks may jeopardize any effective strategic initiatives in the long run. As in the case of the #EndBadGovernance movement, individual narratives and localized grievances generated an extraordinary buzz but, since they were not generally connected, undermined their collective impact. This fact corroborates the parsimonious argument by Chiluwa and Ifukor (2015), which avers that in Nigeria, digital activism tends to focus more on visibility than on structural engagements.

Resource mobilization theory by McCarthy and Zald (1977) elucidates how movements sustain themselves for accessing resources, be it financial, organizational, or technological. A digital-age-enabled real-time fundraising and coordination platform for active citizens was fully utilised during the #EndBadGovernance protests. This heavy dependence on technology for resource mobilization has become a two-edged sword. The accusation by civil society groups that the Nigerian government's



restrictions on internet access and social media usage completely disrupted the movement's momentum (Akinwale, 2024) underscores the fragility of digitally dependent movements in this regard.

The Morozov's (2011) concept of slacktivism relates to the movement. Though hashtags like #EndBadGovernance or any other similar movement conjured up massive engagement on online platforms, reliance on such symbolic acts posed a danger to their depth and sustainability. Tufekci (2017) argues that the performative contributions of online participants do little to address already entrenched issues of politics and economy, again highlighting the limits of digital activism within deep structural inequalities.

And then, the political opportunity structure theory (Tarrow, 1994) also demonstrates the relationship between external constraints and movements. The repression by the Nigerian state in the forms of arrests of protesters, social media censorship, and violent crackdowns reiterated the government's ability to stifle dissenting voices. Actions such as these exposed the failures of the governance system to the rest of the world, yet they again made visible the limits of online activism in confronting authoritarian systems without complementary offline strategies and institutional reforms (Bak, Sriyai, and Meserve, 2018; Earl, Maher, and Pan, 2022).

Research Approach

Qualitative content analysis was adopted to provide a systematic approach through which the dynamics of the #EndBadGovernance were explored using the digital contents on X. This includes posts using the hashtags #EndBadGovernance and #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria and press releases shared on X by the government. This approach allowed the uncovering of underlying themes, narratives, and sentiments that characterized the movement, providing insights into the use of digital platforms to mobilise support and shape political discourse. Similarly, the government's press releases through multimedia messages on their official and verified X handles were explored to spotlight the response to the pressure mounted by the #EndBadGovernance protest movement. X posts that used the hashtag #EndBadGovernance and government responses through press releases and multimedia messages on social media from August 1, 2024, to August 31, 2024, were analysed. Purposive sampling was used to capture diverse perspectives and user demographics.

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and recurring themes from the data. A hybrid approach was used to organize the codes, combining inductive coding derived from the developing patterns in the raw data (posts) with deductive coding based on pre-identified topics from literature. This made sure that



every aspect of the dynamics and content of the digital campaign was included in the findings. The images and multimedia contents were critically analyzed to reveal how visuals supported or contradicted textual narratives.

Findings and discussion

This research revealed significant themes that illustrate the outcomes and limitations of the #EndBadGovernance campaign from a critical point of view regarding its broader implications for the overall effectiveness of digital activism on governance reforms in Nigeria.

Coordination of offline protests

The coordination of offline protests heavily depended on social media platforms, especially X. Posts from some of the protest organisers demonstrated this. These posts from the protest organisers below communicated the time and location of the offline protest in Lagos, encouraging broad participation. They were reposted a combined two hundred and eighty-four times and seen by more than nineteen thousand X users. Many other similar posts on X communicated the venues and times for the offline protests across the country. The hashtags were used for visibility and reach by the organizers living and actively participating from different locations in Nigeria. This decentralised but coordinated way enabled the different cities, such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, to have protest hubs that functioned simultaneously. The organisers were also featured in different TV and radio interviews that were posted on X by the media platforms that interviewed them. They sometimes mentioned the locations and times for the protests in the interviews, subtly using traditional media platforms for mobilisation.

"We can't be intimidated by the Tinubu Government. We have converged at Ikeja under bridge and we await other change seeking Nigerians. The time to liberate Nigeria is Now!"⁷

⁷ Francis Nwapa (@Fnwapa) "We can't be intimidated..." X, August 1, 2024, 7.55 a.m., <https://x.com/FNwapa/status/1818903429072269318>



*"Lagos let's do this! 2day is the D-day. The right to peaceful assembly is a fundamental human right. The day we submit that right is d day we lose our humanity - it is the day we become slaves. 7am is the time. Ikeja under bridge is the take-off point."*⁸

WhatsApp along with Telegram groups served as additions to these undertakings, as participants utilized them for immediate and real-time updates like legal assistance and tracking police presence during the offline demonstrations. The post below was reposted a thousand and seven hundred times and seen by more than sixty-three thousand X users.

*"Dear Nigerians protesting today, legal assistance is ready available! Save these numbers on WhatsApp and put them on speed dial!"*⁹

Public engagement and amplified awareness

The #EndBadGovernance movement showed the ability of social media to galvanize public awareness and civic engagement. X served as a virtual town hall meeting point where citizens openly expressed grievances and coordinated offline protest activities. Visibility was amplified by the hashtag #EndBadGovernance, through which individual frustrations were turned into collective voices. Consequently, the analysis of social media posts indicated many recurrent themes that reflected underlying grievances behind the #EndBadGovernance protests. These included increasing economic hardship (rising cost of living, fuel subsidy removal, increase in electricity tariffs, unemployment), governance failures, systemic corruption, and cost of governance.

The removal of fuel subsidies, devaluation of the local currency, rising inflation, and rising unemployment were at the forefront of public outcry. Many X users shared stories of their depressing struggle to afford life's basic necessities. X posts using the hashtag mostly linked these issues to mismanagement by the government. The posts below capture economic hardship as the central driver of the movement.

⁸ Hassan Taiwo Soweto (@HTSoweto) "Lagos let's do this! 2day is the D-day..." X, August 1, 2024, 5.38 a.m., <https://x.com/HTSoweto/status/1818868836050854075>

⁹ Harry (@Chiditweets042) "Dear Nigerians protesting today..." X, August 1, 2024, 9.14 a.m., <https://x.com/chiditweets042/status/1818923140556144705>



“The crazy part about the hardship in Nigeria is that the money we have touched as young people now would be able to sustain us if we made it like 20 / 15 years ago. Money wey our parents never touched at all but still lived comfortably. This economy has rendered money useless. Purchasing power is zero. Living from hand to mouth with a sprinkle of God Abeg.”¹⁰

“Leaving the country is not a feasible option for people again. People are hungry. Inflation is at an all time high. People are being stripped of their decency.”¹¹

“The Bad Governance protest is sponsored by hunger People are dying. 1. Garri is 3,500 2. Beans is 2,200 3. 1 Yam 5,000 4. A loaf of bread 1,500 5. Rice 1,200.”¹²

“The #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protests, fueled by the nation's worst economic crisis in a generation, continue to spread across Nigeria. Demonstrators, decrying record inflation and rising food prices, are demanding an end to bad governance and economic hardship.”¹³

“Hunger not politics mainly brought people out, high food inflation is not a respecter of tribe, culture or religion”¹⁴

“This is the first time in history that we feel so defeated, the country has always been bad but this is a new low. You do not understand how cooked we are until you go to the market, do you know how crazy it is that a single man or woman earning 200k monthly is struggling to feed and do basic stuff? Do you know how insane it is for a tuber of yam to be 8K? A paint of Garri for almost 3K? The highest denomination of the country's currency cannot buy you a loaf of bread. You cannot buy ANY decent car below

¹⁰ Ugochi (@ugoccie) “The crazy part about the hardship in Nigeria...” X, August 1, 2024, 8.47p.m., <https://x.com/ugoccie/status/1819097672176841175>

¹¹ Hauwa (@Hauwa_L) “Leaving the country is not a feasible option for people again...” X, August 1, 2024, 12.12 p.m., https://x.com/Hauwa_L/status/1818970566096740821

¹² Omo Kogi (@Oladapomikky1) “The Bad Governance protest is sponsored by hunger...” X, August 6, 2024, 3.15.p.m., <https://x.com/Oladapomikky1/status/1820825935228076412>

¹³ Take it back Movement (@TIBmovement) “The #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protests...” X, August 3, 2024, 7.26 a.m., <https://x.com/TIBmovement/status/1819620855187402865>

¹⁴ Olumide Adesina (@olumidecapital) “Hunger not politics mainly brought people out...” X, August 2, 2024, 12.12 p.m., <https://x.com/olumidecapital/status/1819333040021152043>



5M and this is just to mention but a few. They are stealing our future from us before our very eyes and if we keep quiet this is going to be the end of us. Do you know how pathetic it sounds that a lot of people will never be able to afford a car or a house in their lifetime if this mess continues?”¹⁵

“Here are the Sponsors of #EndBadGovernance 1. HUNGER 2. UNEMPLOYMENT 3. INSECURITY”¹⁶

The ineffectiveness of government institutions and leaders in addressing some critical issues such as unemployment, insecurity, and poor infrastructure featured prominently in the posts. The hashtags underscored the demand for transparency and competence in leadership.

“When people say we lost over 500 billion Naira daily from protesting, I feel sad but also remind them that, in one day, when President Tinubu decided to devalue the currency and reduce subsidy our GDP slumped from over 300 billion dollars to 251 billion dollars. All his ill-thought out policies have already destroyed the nation, just imagine over 100 billion dollars shaved off our GDP in one year with massive inflation and borrowing. Also remind those Pajawiri economists that over 200% of the purchasing power of Nigerians have been eroded between 2023 to date because of inflation, especially FOOD Inflation”¹⁷

“Today, we stood together in Ibadan, showing that our voices matter and our unity can spark the change to end bad governance in Nigeria.”¹⁸

Frequent mention of corruption scandals involving public officials reflected an understanding of self-serving governance as far from the needs of citizens. Some posts emphasised this issue and linked it to the country's current economic and social challenges.

¹⁵ Silva (@Thesilvapr) “This is the first time in history that we feel so defeated...” X, August 1, 2024, 11.21 a.m., <https://x.com/TheSilvapr/status/1818955085184971113>

¹⁶ Stephen Osemwegie (@PeterObiUSA) “Here are the Sponsors of #EndBadGovernance...” X, August 6, 2024, 4.21. p.m., <https://x.com/PeterObiUSA/status/1820842675186082296>

¹⁷ Oseni Rufai (@ruffdyfire) “When people say we lost over 500 billion Naira daily from protesting...” X, August 3, 2024, 4.31. a.m., <https://x.com/ruffdyfire/status/1819576678856757416>

¹⁸ Hon. Jesugbemi (@jesugbemi4) “Today, we stood together in Ibadan...” X, August 1, 2024., 1.40. p.m., <https://x.com/Jesugbemi4/status/1818990270173634969>



“If you're looking for a Truly Confused Country...then you have one, Nigeria 36 States, 48 Ministers 41 of 48 Ministers have Corruption Cases. 9 of 11 Governors who Lost Elections are now Ministers. One Governor who was caught stealing on camera is the chairman of Ruling Party”¹⁹

Some posts pointed out the excessive and flamboyant spending of government officials who have in the past called on the citizens to live within their means and to "suffer today" for the greater good.

“He inherited a dead economy but he went ahead to appoint 47 ministers, bought jet, embarked on a white elephant project of coastal road, built VP house, bought cars for reps etc”²⁰

“The reckless spending by the ruling class coupled with high food inflation rate, has made it difficult to sell reforms to the populace”²¹

The transient nature of online activism

The transient nature of online activism emerged as one of the findings of this study. The initial enthusiasm experienced in the early days of the campaign was not sustained over time. After the first 10 days, there was a dramatic reduction in the use of the hashtag and protest-related content, reflecting a lack of structural mechanisms to keep the momentum going. Morozov (2011) uses the concept of slacktivism to argue that online participation mostly amounts to shallow engagements that cannot support lasting activism. It was observed that engagements using the hashtag were limited to reposting of content rather than extending the participation offline or further engagements in policy-oriented advocacy. The immediacy and reach of the digital sphere do not make up for the ephemerality of trends that often compromise their long-term potential for political engagement.

Similarly, the posts using the hashtags trended for weeks and became visible to X users in Nigeria and beyond. However, more visibility does not automatically mean increased accountability in governance. According to Tufekci (2017), digital platforms are wonderful at amplifying dissent and raising awareness

¹⁹ Arewa Twitter Connect (@ArewaaConnect) “If you're looking for a Truly Confused Country...” X, August 4, 2024, 10.18. a.m., <https://x.com/ArewaaConnect/status/1820026539267727500>

²⁰ End Bad Politics (@endbadpolitics) “He inherited a dead economy...” X, August 3, 2024, 11.23 p.m., <https://x.com/Endbadpolitics/status/1819861747345379648>

²¹ Olumide Adesina (@olumidecapital) “Hunger not politics mainly brought people out...” X, August 2, 2024, 12.12 p.m., <https://x.com/olumidecapital/status/1819333040021152043>



but often cannot transform that awareness into meaningful policy outcomes due to institutional and systemic political limitations. In this instance, the increased discourse on social media platforms did not lead to tangible reforms but successfully highlighted failures of governance and underscored the limits of digital activism in confronting deeply entrenched systemic political inertia.

Institutional and structural barriers

The intrinsic power structures and poorly functional institutions in Nigeria became serious impediments to the movement's impact. The country's political arena is woven and is branded with weak, corrupt, nepotistic, and nontransparent institutions, making it averse to demands for accountability. Corruption has pervaded the government so inveterately that accountability has become uncommon, making it easy for government officials to escape punishment for mismanagement and abuse of power. The entrenched nature of this administrative problem is portrayed in the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International, which consistently places Nigeria among the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International, 2023). Digital campaigns like #EndBadGovernance bring to the limelight the corrupt practices in the governance system, but without any firm anti-corruption structure in the system, such efforts hardly translate into measurable outcomes. Digital activism has also been stunted by weak institutions. Such institutions, be they government institutions or public ones, are weak and usually do not boast of independence, resources, or even the political will to innovate the meaningful change that might come through adopting a policy change (Carothers, 2014). Such a weak institutional framework restricts the capacity of digital movements to achieve long-lasting impacts since reforms are often delayed or effectively sabotaged by entrenched interests.

The digital divide adds to many of these problems, denying large parts of the populace a portrayal of what is happening online, primarily in rural areas. The number of Nigerians with access to the internet stands at 55.4% of the population (Statista, 2024). By implication, about 44.6% of Nigerians are without access to the internet and cannot take part in digital campaigns.

X posts revealed the frustration of Nigerians with the lack of an institutional framework to channel public agitation into reforms.

“This is proof that the protests are always peaceful and with good intentions until state sponsored thugs are sent to disrupt the protests. The Police in their complicity will ignore the infiltrators and start to attack Peaceful Protesters. This is how it happens not only in Lagos but in other states in the Country. At the end of the day, the



Government will then attempt to rewrite history as if it didn't happen before our very eyes. This is exactly how it happened with EndSars and the records will forever be there to point at the real enemies of Nigeria who unleashed terror and mayhem in our Society."²²

This situation is supported by Tarrow's (1994) political opportunity structure theory, which is of the view that an important factor in the success of social movements is the receptivity of the political system. Unfortunately, this has not been the case for Nigeria, as evident in some X posts analysed. Users were skeptical about the ability of the movement to yield positive results due to a lack of trust in the existing system. These institutional and structural barriers highlight the inadequacies of digital activism in challenging policies in deeply flawed political contexts.

Government response and policy outcomes

The Nigerian government response to the 2024 #EndBadGovernance movement was a blend of appeasement, repression, and symbolic gestures with few substantive policy outcomes. This combination highlighted both the potential and limitations of digital activism in seeking governance reforms within entrenched political systems.

A conciliatory tone emerged as the initial move from the government, with promises being made to the protesting citizens and the wider international community that the government was doing something to review some of the reasons for the protest movement. Public officials, including the president in a live broadcast posted on X, read a message to the people acknowledging their grievances and hinted at reforms. The President promised to set up committees to review the issues but failed to give a timeline. Even though the promises sounded like real short-term responses meant to placate the protesters, these steps were not on a trajectory of structural reform. Most of these promises were vague, left without time frames, and did not cover the systemic governance issues brought to light by the protests.

Parts of the presidential speech read, "I speak to you today with a heavy heart and a sense of responsibility, aware of the turmoil and violent protests unleashed in some of our states. Notably among the protesters were young Nigerians who desired a better

²² Mr Macaroni (@mrmacaronii) "This is proof that the protests are always peaceful..." X, August 1, 2024, 2.38. p.m., <https://x.com/mrmacaronii/status/1819004893904228763>



and more progressive country where their dreams, hopes, and personal aspirations would be fulfilled... In the past 14 months, our government has made significant strides in rebuilding the foundation of our economy to carry us into a future of plenty and abundance. On the fiscal side, aggregate government revenues have more than doubled, hitting over 9.1 trillion Naira in the first half of 2024 compared to the first half of 2023 due to our efforts at blocking leakages, introducing automation, and mobilising funding creatively without additional burden on the people. Productivity is gradually increasing in the non-oil sector, reaching new levels and taking advantage of the opportunities in the current economic ambience...”²³

Analysis of posts on X in reaction to the speech speaks to the dissatisfaction of users and the perception that the speech was not sufficient in placating the aggrieved Nigerians.

*"Protests will continue if the government does not attend to our demands. It is a shame that the president, who addressed the nation, did not address any of our demands."*²⁴

*"This is how someone summarized President Tinubu's speech: 1. I have heard you 2. I'm busy working 3. Go back home 4. Subsidy is forever gone (Forget it) 5. Continue to endure the hardship/hunger 6. Your protest is politically motivated."*²⁵

*"The broadcast is full of threatening to protesters and Nigerians who are hungry. Tinubu refuses to address hunger and hardship father, praising himself for removing fuel subsidies which has brought untold suffering to millions of Nigerians."*²⁶

Crackdowns and repression as outcomes of offline protests

²³ TheCable (@thecableng) "I speak to you today with a heavy heart and a sense of responsibility..." X, August 4, 2024, 7.05.am., <https://x.com/thecableng/status/1819977967855964475>

²⁴ EndBadGovernanceinNigeria (@endbadgovtinnig) "Protests will continue if the government..." X, August 9, 2024, 6.10. p.m., <https://x.com/endbadgovtinnig/status/1821957130850640377>

²⁵ Tony Ajah (@tonyajah) "This is how someone summarized President Tinubu's speech ..." X., August 4, 2024, 8.33 p.m., <https://x.com/tonyajah/status/1820181380841525352>

²⁶ Peter Obi Grassroots Mobilization (@PO_GrassRootM) "The broadcast is full of threatening to protesters..." X, August 4, 2024, 7.14 a.m., https://x.com/PO_GrassRootM/status/1819980087082541105



Despite the government's initial overtures, it quickly resorted to crackdowns and a repressive approach. Protesters were threatened and harassed, and some were arrested. Temporary restrictions of social media platforms would eventually disrupt the flow of information, thus weakening the momentum of the movement. These moves discouraged sustained participation in the movement. With excessive use of force by security agencies, trust in the institutions of government was eroded further and strengthened perceptions of authoritarianism, as found in the analysis of posts from X. A part in the president's speech indicated the resolve to use force.

*"As President of this country, I must ensure public order. In line with my constitutional oath to protect the lives and property of every citizen, our government will not stand idly by and allow a few with a clear political agenda to tear this nation apart."*²⁷

Similarly, a statement released by the police on X on the first day of the protest did not rule out the use of force and attempted to discourage protesters with suggestions of predicted violence.

*"It is with grave sense of responsibility that I address you this evening. You will recall that upon several indications by various groups of their intent to commence a nationwide protest on 1st August, 2024, we rolled out several warnings based on actionable intelligence at our disposal indicating that some groups were mobilizing our youths for violent protests with intent to create anarchy in the country. While some groups claiming to be mobilizing for peaceful protests were doing so with violent undertones refusing to cooperate with the Police on measures to be taken to guarantee peaceful protest. 2. On the basis of these intelligence, the Police advised that the protests should be shelved at the instant time. Where the organizers insisted on going on with the protests, they were advised to stage the protest in confined locations. This would have enabled the police provide adequate protection for the protesters and isolate the criminals whose intention was to loot and destroy in the name of a protest. This we were doing in furtherance of our duty to protect lives and property and maintaining law and order..."*²⁸

²⁷ TheCable (@thecableng) "I speak to you today with a heavy heart and a sense of responsibility..." X, August 4, 2024, 7.05.am., <https://x.com/thecableng/status/1819977967855964475>

²⁸ Nigeria Police Force (PoliceNG) "SPEECH BY THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF POLICE..." X, August 1, 2024, X, 10.33 p.m., <https://x.com/PoliceNG/status/1819124424194601135>



Posts using the hashtag on X showed that security forces, especially the police, applied the use of force to intimidate and disperse offline protesters that mobilised across the country using social media. These included multimedia content such as pictures, videos, and livestreams.

“Chaotic! A few minutes ago, Nigeria's security forces have been forced to fire multiple shots of tear gas to disperse hundreds of protesters gathering at Eagle Square in the capital, Abuja. There was a scene when daring protesters were seen chanting and marching towards the police telling them that they are hungry.”²⁹

“There's heavy military reinforcements deployed along the road leading to the Presidential Villa, also known as Aso Rock.”³⁰

“Video Clip of men in DSS uniform with guns accompanied thugs with cutlasses dispersing unarmed peaceful protesters in Abuja. The Police also discharged live bullets at Journalists & protesters at the MKO Abiola National Stadium. The @PoliceNG are yet to make a statement about this.”³¹

“Tension is seriously escalating in Abuja as protesters express anger against Police brutality. Here's one of the protesters. Sadly, he had some harsh words for the Nigerian president.”³²

The government resorted to blocking the accounts of sponsors and organisers of the protests and placing them on a watchlist to force them into backing down and cutting the financial flow necessary for sustaining logistics and mass mobilisation. Critics say such actions undermine democratic freedoms and stifle civic engagement (Amnesty International, 2021). The Nigerian government took similar action during the #EndSARS protests (Nimi, 2021). It underlines the use of state power against dissent and speaks to the kind of threats that digital activists in Nigeria face when governments weaponise economic controls against civil society movements.

²⁹ Kennedy Wandera (@KennedyWandera_) “Chaotic! A few minutes ago, Nigeria's security forces...” X, August 1, 2024, 2.47 p.m., https://x.com/KennedyWandera_/status/1819007168491782609

³⁰ ibid

³¹ Chude (@Chude_) “Video Clip of men in DSS uniform with guns...” X, August 3, 2024, 2.43 p.m., https://x.com/chude_/status/1819730899849658542

³² The Guardian Nigeria (@GuardianNigeria) “Tension is seriously escalating in Abuja...” X, August 2, 2024, 3.21 p.m., <https://x.com/GuardianNigeria/status/1819377908718202895>



“FG blocks accounts of #EndBadGovernance sponsors, places them on watchlist.”³³

Limited policy outcomes

The protests succeeded in amplifying public grievances; however, they could not translate into tangible policy outcomes. The federal government in the President’s speech nominally announced policies and plans that many protesters saw as insufficient and temporary.

“...we have secured \$620million under the Digital and Creative Enterprises (IDiCE) – a programme to empower our young people, creating millions of IT and technical jobs that will make them globally competitive. These programmes include the 3Million Technical Talents scheme. Unfortunately, one of the digital centres was vandalised during the protests in Kano. What a shame! In addition, we have introduced the Skill-Up Artisans Programme (SUPA); the Nigerian Youth Academy (NIYA); and the National Youth Talent Export Programme (NATEP). Also, more than N570 billion has been released to the 36 states to expand livelihood support to their citizens, while 600,000 nano-businesses have benefitted from our nano-grants. An additional 400,000 more nano-businesses are expected to benefit. Furthermore, 75,000 beneficiaries have been processed to receive our N1million Micro and Small Business single-digit interest loans, starting this month. We have also built 10 MSME hubs within the past year, created 240,000 jobs through them and 5 more hubs are in progress which will be ready by October this year. Payments of N1billion each are also being made to large manufacturers under our single-digit loans to boost manufacturing output and stimulate growth. I signed the National Minimum Wage into law last week, and the lowest-earning workers will now earn at least N70,000 a month...”³⁴

The much broader economic and governance reforms insisted upon by the movement—including a return to the fuel subsidy regime, reversal of the policy to float the local currency, transparency in

³³ Africa Independent Television (@AIT_Online) “FG blocks accounts of #EndBadGovernance sponsors...” X, August 6, 2024, 5.49 p.m., https://x.com/AIT_Online/status/1820864720041349242

³⁴ TheCable (@thecableng) “I speak to you today with a heavy heart and a sense of responsibility...” X, August 4, 2024, 7.05.am., <https://x.com/thecableng/status/1819977967855964475>



public spending, anti-corruption measures, and institutional accountability—remained largely unaddressed.

Long-term implications

The protests exposed significant gaps in the capacity of the Nigerian government to engage in constructive dialogue with aggrieved people. Instead of being taken as an opportunity for reform, the response of the government was a clear indication of preference for the status quo. In the absence of genuinely effective and fruitful mechanisms to address the real causes of public discontent, such discontent may continuously unleash cycles of unrest and continuous protest.

Images and multimedia content reflection of textual narratives

X users turned to images, videos, and other multimedia options to further enhance or amplify the effectiveness of their textual posts. The combination of visual and textual content emphasized the movement's messages, stirred up emotions, and initiated conversations.

Images capturing long queues of vehicles at petrol stations alongside empty stalls and price tags of basic commodities visualising economic hardship were shared with critical textual posts against subsidy removal and soaring inflation. The glaring, real-world evidence in the images portrayed the struggles seen in the texts.

Similarly, symbolic visuals such as broken chains, clenched fists, and protest banners represent calls for reforms. They repeated the demand for systemic change and were usually posted alongside the hashtag #EndBadGovernance. Crowds shouting slogans in protest or people voicing their grievances at offline protest grounds embodied visually the sentiments social media users expressed in written posts.

Also, multimedia content became yet another medium through which the movement was humanized. Hardships being suffered were accompanied by pictures or short video clips of the victims themselves, eliciting empathy and collective pity. The connection between textual narratives and visuals promoted empathy and solidarity and made the protests relevant across the borders of Nigeria.

The emotional appeal of the multimedia content made it more sharable than textual posts. Analysis showed that posts combining strong textual critique with emotive visuals or videos were at the top of the lists for most widely reposted or shared, demonstrating the power of multimedia to boost digital activism by amplifying virality.



Conclusion and recommendations

The paper critically examined the #EndBadGovernance movement in Nigeria and shed light on its outcomes and broader implications for digital activism in the country. The content analysis of social media posts that used the hashtag, including government responses posted on X handles of government ministries and media personnel, focused on exploring the potential and limitations of social media capacity as instruments for mobilizing and organizing protest in demand for political and economic reforms.

The study clearly showed that while the #EndBadGovernance digital activism had succeeded in amplifying public grievances and civic participation, it struggled to achieve governance reforms the way people wanted. The movement successfully utilized hashtags, multimedia, and decentralized coordination to galvanize local and international support over the economic and governance crises in Nigeria. In addition, increased visibility and public outcry, powerful as they might be, are insufficient to establish systemic change within contexts such as Nigeria that have deep and entrenched political resistance. Government suppression, structural barriers, and the transient nature of online activism left much to be desired. Also, the study highlighted the continuous challenges faced by digital activism in Nigeria, including but not limited to the repressive means employed by the state to stifle dissent and dampen momentum. These present the need for integrating multidimensional approaches, such as a digital-offline mobilization blending with institutional engagement, into activism.

Faced with the aforementioned challenges, the urgency of structural changes to enable civil movements to realize their objectives is emphasized. Provisions have to be put in place to strengthen weak institutions while also instituting transparent accountability mechanisms that will translate citizens' demands into substantive policy results.

Strengthening the existing legal protection of protesters is one such provision. Evidence from this study reinforced the view that digital activism usually gets silenced by intimidation, arbitrary arrests, internet shutdowns, and other violent measures that undermine civic movements and sometimes breach fundamental rights. Legal protections for protests and protesters are crucial in ensuring freedom of expression and assembly and indispensable for the proper functioning of a democracy. For instance, the resolution passed by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on the promotion and protection of human rights in the digital age (UNHRC,2016) provides a fundamental document for member states to adopt and localise. Such solidifying protections into national constitutions and legal systems would subject governments to scrutiny over upholding human rights, ensuring that protesters can



express their views and exercise their rights to peaceful protest without persecution. Nigeria's situation has more to do with the implementation of these legal protections. Chapter IV, Section 40 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, as amended, guarantees the right to peaceful protest. This protects the fundamental human right to peaceful assembly, which enables people to voice their opinions and hold the government responsible. According to the Nigeria Police Act 2020, police officers are required to maintain the fundamental rights of all citizens while providing protesting citizens with sufficient security. Civil society organizations and international bodies must ensure compliance and document cases of violation to pressure the Nigerian government. The advocacy should target independent judiciary systems to ensure these laws are implemented. International human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) may also force governments to act accordingly. Publicizing violations through digital platforms and global media can attract international condemnation that could create reputational and economic costs for the government and may motivate them to honour their legal obligations.

Also, civil society organizations (CSOs) play a key role in translating the buoyancy of online activism into real-world reforms. It gives critical organizational support, advocacy expertise, and sustained pressure on the policymakers to help ensure these campaigns produce meaningful outcomes. Strengthening CSOs through funding increases, targeted capacity development, and strategic partnerships is essential in improving their ability to complement digital activism (Carothers, 2014). These would also enhance the possibility of incorporating digital campaigns into policy-making processes, establishing structure, continuity, and links with grassroots movements. This integrated approach successfully creates a "bridge" between public dissent and systemic reform while amplifying the long-term effects of digital activism.

Importantly, hybrid activism which involves the combination of online campaigns and offline strategies would bridge the gap between online engagement and real-world change. Each space's interacting affordances create opportunities for community formation and organizing that are qualitatively distinct from those of offline or online spaces alone (Showden et al., 2021). Social media mobilization must be supplemented by grassroots mobilization through town hall meetings, petitions, and direct lobbying of legislators elected to serve in the interest of the people. Directly connecting to the policymakers with face-to-face conversations through hybrid activism legitimizes the digital movements, ensuring that online dissent translates into concrete discussions and outcomes. This model gives hold to activism that is no longer bound to virtual spaces but is directed towards long-term political accountability (Tufekci, 2017).



Addressing systemic barriers through empowerment of anti-corruption mechanisms, bridging the digital divide and comprehensive institutional reforms are key to digital activism achieving its full potential. Whistleblower protection and public financial audits by the citizens are examples of needed anti-corruption and systemic transparency initiatives (Transparency International, 2023). Institutional reforms must include reducing political interference and building governance capacity towards effective policy implementation (Carothers, 2014). The establishment of rural broadband and digital literacy programs proposed by the World Bank (2019) will be key to bridging the digital divide. Such efforts would be most effective with the backing of civil society in partnership with international organizations and the government at all levels.

These strategies provide a multifaceted approach that addresses the structural and institutional limitations and enhances the ability of digital campaigns to result in tangible governance reforms in Nigeria.

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