

## **HUMAN SECURITY AND THE 2024 END BAD GOVERNANCE PROTEST IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria has witnessed a significant surge in protests advocating for human security and an end to bad governance in years ago including 2024. The end bad governance protest was a response to the persistent challenges faced by citizens, which includes the widespread poverty and hardship as a result of anti-people policies of government such as fuel subsidy removal without proper measures to mitigate the effects which pose a serious threat to human survival. This highlighted the fragility of human security thereby amplifying public outcry. This study adopted Expo-facto research design and relied on secondary data (books, journal articles, conference papers, internet materials etc.) subjected to content validity, before analyzing qualitatively. The use of qualitative analysis helped the researcher to embark on an indebt study of the subject matter. Among the findings are that, the protests could not achieve its set objectives and that the policies which caused the protest were not really bad but the implementation was the problem. However, the protest was not without impacts among are; that the protest undressed the government for all to see her nakedness to the extent that the government's machineries could not defend the government convincingly. Another is that though, the protest did not directly achieve its set goals but served as a reminder to our kleptomaniac politicians, that if the youth are ready to take over, they will and that democratic power belongs to the people.

**Keywords:** Human security, Bad governance, End Bad Governance protests, Economic hardship

### **Introduction**

Human security remains an underexplored yet critically important concept in social science research, despite its centrality to understanding the root causes of contemporary social unrest, protests, and revolutions across the world, particularly in Africa and Nigeria. Unlike traditional notions of security that prioritize military strength and territorial integrity, human security emphasizes the protection and enhancement of human well-being through sustained investment in food production, healthcare, political and economic stability, and reliable access to basic social amenities. As Kerr (2007) notes, genuine human security encompasses seven vital dimensions: food, health, economic, political, environmental, personal, and community security. When these pillars are neglected, citizens often resort to protests and other forms of social upheaval to express dissatisfaction and demand accountability from their leaders. Against this backdrop, this study sets out to examine the root causes of the 2024 "End Bad Governance" protests and to ascertain whether the protests achieved their intended objectives.

In Nigeria, the consequences of neglecting human security have become increasingly apparent. On August 1, 2024, the nation witnessed the #EndBadGovernance or #EndHunger protests—the first major mass demonstration under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who had been in office for only fifteen months. These protests erupted in response to widespread frustration over abrupt government policies, including fuel subsidy removal, naira floating, and increased

electricity tariffs, coupled with the government's reluctance to cut its own administrative costs despite worsening economic hardship. As reported by national newspapers such as Vanguard (2024), the fallout included skyrocketing transport costs, unchecked food inflation, deepening poverty, widening inequality, escalating unemployment, and entrenched corruption. These conditions underscored the failure of the government to adopt citizen-focused policies that safeguard human security, prompting the youth and marginalized citizens to mobilize for urgent governance reforms and economic justice.

However, the government's reaction to these protests, characterized by the use of force, arbitrary arrests, and human rights abuses, raises critical concerns about the state's commitment to protecting the very essence of human security it claims to uphold. This study, therefore, interrogates the extent to which the erosion of human security fueled the #EndBadGovernance protests and evaluates whether these protests achieved their intended aims of holding leaders accountable and driving policy changes. The study deepens understanding of how weak human security fuels civic resistance and shapes the dynamics of governance and accountability in Nigeria's contemporary socio-political landscape.

### **Human Security and Bad Governance: A Systematic Review of the Literature**

Human security is fundamentally a people-centred concept that aligns closely with the ideals of human rights and human development, premised on the notion that the individual human being irrespective of race, religion, creed, or nationality, is the primary object of concern (Dorn, 2005). It aims to protect fundamental freedoms, which is freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity that constitutes the essence of human existence (OCHA, 2010). Specifically, freedom from fear entails shielding individuals from threats to their physical security and integrity, including violence from states, groups, or other individuals. Freedom from want addresses economic, social, and environmental dimensions that ensure people can meet their basic needs. Freedom from indignity seeks to uplift the quality of life, enabling individuals to pursue opportunities and choices that empower them. These elements collectively shift security thinking from a state-centric to an individual-centric paradigm, articulated through seven dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security (Johns, 2014). Scholars like Abdullahi, Bakar, and Bashir (2022) emphasize that human security is often most visible in its absence, manifesting through social grievances and conflicts when people's basic freedoms and rights are unmet. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994) highlights this by defining human security as safeguarding individuals against chronic threats like hunger, disease, and repression, and Alkire (2003) reinforces that this approach transcends traditional notions of national security by focusing on the well-being of people and communities. In Nigeria, the relevance of human security is particularly acute, given persistent poverty, insecurity, and governance failures, which Olojo (2019) links directly to recurrent social unrest and mass protests.

Conversely, the literature on governance clarifies that the concept of bad governance is the antithesis of good governance. Aning (2016) describes bad governance as the state's failure to fulfil societal needs optimally and to manage public resources responsibly. This view is echoed

by Coker and George-Genyi (2014), who argue that bad governance becomes evident when a government performs poorly in meeting citizens' needs despite having resources at its disposal. Characteristics of bad governance include ineffective and inefficient institutions, lack of transparency, poor responsiveness, absence of accountability, inequity, elitism, non-participatory policy processes, disregard for the rule of law, and policies that fail to build consensus (Owoye & Bissessar, 2009). These features highlight a systemic failure in the relationship between state institutions and the governed, leading to mistrust, grievances, and, ultimately, civic resistance.

Taken together, the interconnectedness between the absence of human security and the prevalence of bad governance offers critical insight into why protests like the 2024 #EndBadGovernance demonstrations erupted in Nigeria. When governments neglect people-centred security and fail to ensure inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance, citizens are compelled to express dissatisfaction through protests, unrest, or even revolutions. The Nigerian case illustrates that without addressing fundamental issues of human security and tackling entrenched governance deficits, society remains prone to instability and recurring demands for reform, highlighting the urgent need for policies that prioritise both the security and well-being of the populace.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts the youth bulge theory coined and popularised by scholars such as Gary Fuller (1995) and Henrik Urdal (2006) to explain the nexus between human security and 2024 End Bad Governance protest in Nigeria. The youth bulge theory is a demographic and sociopolitical concept that explains how a disproportionately large share of young people within a population can significantly shape a country's stability, governance, and development trajectory. The theory posits that societies with a high percentage of youth, particularly those aged between 15 and 29, are more likely to experience social unrest, political violence, and even civil conflict if the socio-economic environment fails to meet their growing aspirations and needs. This core idea is rooted in demographics: sustained high birth rates over time produce a population structure heavily skewed toward the young, intensifying competition for scarce resources like jobs, education, housing, and healthcare. When governments and economies cannot keep pace with these demands through inclusive growth, responsive governance, and sound policies, frustration and feelings of marginalisation build up among young people. With energy, extensive networks, and an increasing sense of collective identity, often amplified by digital technology, this disaffected youth cohort is more inclined to mobilise for protests, join radical movements, or push for political upheaval (Cincotta et al., 2003; Urdal, 2006).

Importantly, the youth bulge theory does not inherently label a youthful population as a threat; rather, it frames it as a potential double-edged sword. If properly harnessed through deliberate investment in education, job creation, civic engagement, and good governance, a youthful population can be transformed into a powerful demographic dividend, driving innovation, economic productivity, and sustained development. Conversely, when public institutions fail to

provide meaningful economic opportunities, social protections, and channels for political participation, this same demographic advantage can become a trigger for instability, as evident in many developing contexts, including Sub-Saharan Africa. The theory thus provides a critical framework for understanding the linkages between population dynamics, human security, governance quality, and sustainable development. It underscores the urgency for governments to adopt people-centred policies that address the root causes of youth discontent, thereby preventing the frustrations that so often fuel protests, criminality, and extremism.

This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to explaining the relationship between human security and the #EndBadGovernance protest in Nigeria. Nigeria's demographic structure exemplifies the youth bulge: over 60% of the population is under 30 years old (National Population Commission, 2023). In theory, this large, vibrant youth population could drive economic growth and innovation, but in reality, Nigeria's chronic governance challenges which among others include corruption, economic mismanagement, and limited political inclusion have undermined the potential benefits. Persistent human security deficits, including food insecurity, high unemployment, widening inequality, inflation, and poor access to essential services, have turned this demographic dividend into a source of instability. The August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protest starkly illustrates this dynamic: triggered by government policies such as abrupt fuel subsidy removal, naira devaluation, and rising electricity tariffs, the protests reflected deep youth frustration with worsening economic hardship and perceived elite impunity. Digitally connected and increasingly politically conscious, Nigeria's youth rapidly mobilised to demand accountability, better governance, and improved living conditions. In essence, the Nigerian experience demonstrates how the youth bulge amplifies the consequences of weak human security and bad governance, demonstrating that when governments neglect the fundamental pillars of human security, which include economic security, food security, personal safety, and political participation, the resulting disillusionment can quickly escalate into widespread social unrest.

### **Methodology**

This study employs an ex-post-facto research design, also known as "after-the-fact" research, which is particularly suited for examining the relationship between independent and dependent variables when the data has been collected and the phenomenon under investigation has already occurred (Asika, 1991). The study relied heavily on secondary data from various documents, which include books, journals, articles, conference papers, unpublished dissertations, and online materials. These sources were obtained from Nigeria libraries and other relevant archives, ensuring that the data reflects the specific socio-political context of Nigeria. Before being analyzed, the secondary data were subjected to content validity checks to ensure the reliability and relevance of the information. This rigorous process helped ensure that the data used in the analysis accurately represents the dynamics of social unrest in Nigeria.

### **The 2024 End Bad Governance Protest in Nigeria**

The "End Bad Governance" protests in Nigeria were primarily driven by widespread dissatisfaction with the government's inability to provide basic services, upholds the rule of

law, and address corruption. According to Agbese (2024), these protests were a culmination of years of frustration among citizens who felt marginalized and ignored by their leaders. The hash-tagged “#EndBadGovernanceProtest or #HungerProtest” formally began on August 1<sup>st</sup> 2024 and ended on Saturday, August 10, 2024. The final three days of the demonstrations were somber, dedicated to mourning and honouring the brave souls who lost their lives in the struggle. Against all odds, the organisers of the #EndBadGovernance protests made good their threat on August 1, 2024, when they trooped out with other Nigerians to protest against hunger, hardship and the suffocating economic policies of the administration of President Bola Tinubu. All over Nigeria from Lagos to Abuja, Kano, Port-Harcourt, Benin, Aba and Abeokuta, they spoke with one voice to the Government that people are hungry suffering. However, like Adegboruwa remarked, that the response of Government to the protest before the D-Day was predictable blackmail, threats and attempts to suppress the campaigns. The security agencies became confused, and began to speak with different voices. Whilst the Police claimed that the organisers were faceless and unknown, the Department of State Security stated that they were known agents of foreign mercenaries trying to destabilize the nation, (Adegboruwa, 2024).

Hence, fears were expressed in many quarters that there has never been any peaceful protest in Nigeria. It is either the protest is hijacked by hoodlums, or disrupted by hired thugs. The #EndSARS experience was used as example when lives were lost and property destroyed beyond contemplation. But, of course, that is not correct, President Tinubu was a leader of the opposition in 2012 but supported and encouraged the Occupy Nigeria protests against fuel subsidy removal which was peaceful.

The #EndBadGovernance protest in Nigeria was not triggered by a single event, but rather, by a complex interplay of factors, chief among them the public’s growing frustration with the Government’s handling of both the economy and national security. This toxic combination of economic mismanagement and pervasive insecurity led to unprecedented levels of hunger, anger, and poverty across the nation. The immediate catalysts for the protest was the removal of fuel subsidies and the sudden decision to float the Naira, the two policies whose poor execution only exacerbated the nation’s already dire economic situation. These policies, rather than providing relief, plunged the country into deeper economic turmoil, igniting a wave of discontent that had been simmering for years.

According to Effiong (2024), the #EndBadGovernance protesters articulated clear and urgent demands aimed at tackling the root causes of Nigeria’s worsening socio-economic conditions. Chief among these demands was the reversal of recent economic policies, specifically, the protesters called for the reinstatement of fuel subsidies, reduction in electricity tariffs, and stabilization of the national currency, arguing that the abrupt subsidy removal and currency floating had driven up transportation costs, inflation, and general hardship. They also demanded a significant reduction in the cost of governance, criticizing the extravagant spending and bloated bureaucracy that deplete resources needed to improve citizens’ welfare. Furthermore, the protesters insisted on increased budgetary allocations for health and education, viewing investment in these sectors as vital to strengthening human security and ensuring equitable

access to quality services. They called for comprehensive electoral reforms, including the implementation of the Hon. Justice Muhammed Uwais-led Electoral Reform Committee's recommendations and the compulsory use of electronic transmission and collation of election results to boost transparency and public trust. Collectively, these demands reflect a broad call for accountability of leadership, social justice, and a governance system that genuinely prioritizes the needs of ordinary Nigerians.

### **Root Causes of the Protests**

The 2024 End Bad Governance Protest in Nigeria was fundamentally driven by deep-rooted structural problems that have burdened the country for decades. One of the primary causes was the widespread prevalence of corruption, which has consistently weakened governance and hindered sustainable development. As Ibeanu (2022) observes, corruption remains deeply entrenched at various levels of government, resulting in the misallocation of public resources and a growing distrust of state institutions. This systemic corruption, further highlighted by Nigeria's persistently poor ranking on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, fueled the anger and disillusionment that inspired citizens to demand accountability through protest.

Alongside corruption, Nigeria's worsening economic conditions played a crucial role in mobilizing citizens to the streets. Economic hardship has become an everyday reality for millions, with high unemployment and relentless inflation worsening poverty and lowering living standards. Adeola (2023) explains that when people struggle to meet basic needs and secure a decent livelihood, despair often escalates into social unrest. In this context, many Nigerians felt compelled to voice their frustration and push for economic policies that would alleviate their suffering and foster economic stability.

Political exclusion also significantly contributed to the eruption of the 2024 protests. For years, various ethnic groups and regions across Nigeria have felt marginalized and excluded from meaningful political participation and decision-making processes. According to Nnoli (2024), such exclusion breeds resentment and drives communities to seek alternative avenues, such as protests, to make their voices heard and to demand fair representation. This sense of alienation strengthened solidarity among diverse groups, uniting them under a common demand for more inclusive governance and equitable political engagement.

The 2024 End Bad Governance Protest was not an isolated incident but rather a manifestation of accumulated public frustration over corruption, economic distress, and political marginalization. The convergence of these factors created fertile ground for widespread civil disobedience and collective action. Ultimately, the protest symbolized the people's resolve to challenge the status quo, hold leaders

### **Government's Response/Presidential Broadcast**

The protest commenced on August 1, 2024 as was initially planned. The turnout was massive, the spread was unprecedented and the support was overwhelming. To this background, the government was thoroughly rattled, especially with the outcome from the Northern part of the country. The response was then to sponsor thugs to disrupt the protests, especially in Abuja

where buses were dropping anti-protest protesters at the same venue of the main protest. By afternoon of the first day, the protests had turned violent in some locations in Kano and Borno States, with recorded cases of mass looting and destruction of property. Some deaths were already recorded, and it was escalating. This surely was not the intention of the organisers of the protests the concomitant effect of which would mean that the protest wouldn't last ten days. The protest eventually entered its Day Two on August 2, by which time, it was manifest beyond any doubt that trouble was brewing. It had cases of further looting of warehouses, confrontations between supporters of the Government and the protesters, and cases of looting of the property of private persons. Some prominent supporters especially Barrister Adegboruwa (SAN) made personal appeal to the protesters to call off the protest and embrace dialogue with the Government, based on their charter of demands, vacate the protest grounds so as not to give room for the violence that was brewing, as the protests had got out of control, especially in the Northern States, where some protesters were seen waving the Russian flag. Like Effiong lamented, 'regrettably, the Government resorted to wild propaganda and unwarranted attacks on the protesters. The mindless killing of protesters, the use of teargas and thugs to attack and disrupt peaceful protests, arrest and detention of organisers of the protests, and the general deployment of unjustifiable force to intimidate Nigerians for expressing their frustrations with the horrible state of the country, stands condemned, (Effiong, 2024).

President Tinubu's response, which focused more on his administration's achievements than directly addressing the protesters' demands, has left many feeling that their concerns were not truly heard. The heavy-handed response from authorities, including intimidation and arrests of protest leaders, echoes past government reactions and only deepens the distrust between the people and those in power.

### **The Impact of End Bad Governance Protest**

The impacts of the protest cannot be overemphasised. One of the important impacts of the protests is that, it exposed the stark socioeconomic disparities and regional dynamics between the North and South of Nigeria. The protests highlighted the fact that the challenges facing the country are not uniform; they vary significantly from one region to another. While the South has seen relatively more economic development, the North remains mired in poverty, underdevelopment, and insecurity. This was evident few hours into the protest. The disparity according to Peterside (2024) is a ticking time bomb, and if left unaddressed, it could lead to even greater unrest in the future.

Another impact is that, the protest undressed the government for all to see her nakedness. It portrayed a glaring spotlight on the deep and pervasive discontent, with the current administration's handling of the economy and governance more broadly. The protests delivered a clear and unequivocal message: the issues of corruption, the need for governance reform, and the demand for higher-quality leadership. The Government's ineffectiveness in engaging with young people and the broader citizenry was laid bare for all to see, highlighting a significant disconnect between the rulers and the ruled. This disconnect is not new, but the protests

brought it into sharp view, while galvanising public opinion against poor governance and demanding greater accountability from those in power.

For Barr. Effiong, the important impact of the end bad governance protest was that 'In the end, the youths of our country have demonstrated again, that they are capable of confronting the forces that are holding Nigeria down' (Effiong, 2024). Though, the protest did not directly achieve its set goal but its impacts were clear. The protests served as a reminder to our kleptomaniac politicians, that if the youth are ready to take **over**, they will and that democratic power belongs to the people.

### **Achievements of the Protests**

Assessing whether the "End Bad Governance" protests achieved their set objectives involves examining the immediate and long-term impacts of the demonstrations.

1. **Increased Awareness:** The protests successfully raised awareness about issues of governance and human rights in Nigeria. Scholars like Okafor (2024) argue that the protests brought international attention to Nigeria's governance issues, prompting discussions on accountability and reform.
2. **Government Response:** Following the protests, the Nigerian government announced several reforms aimed at addressing some of the grievances raised by protesters. However, as documented by Okwu (2024), the effectiveness of these reforms remains to be seen, with many citizens expressing skepticism about the government's commitment to change.
3. **Continued Activism:** The protests have galvanized a new generation of activists and civil society organizations focused on promoting good governance and human rights. According to Ugochukwu (2024), this sustained activism may lead to more significant changes in the long run.

### **Discussion of findings**

The first finding of this research paper borders on the causes of the protest. It was discovered that, human insecurity led to the end bad governance protest in Nigeria. The evidence of this finding is traced to some of the objectives of the protest which were, reversal fuel subsidy, increased electricity tariffs, floating of the currency, and control of food inflations

The second finding borders on the outcome of the protest. It was found that the objectives of the protests were not achieved. The protest which had, reversal of fuel subsidy, increased electricity tariffs, floating of the currency, reduction in the cost of governance; increased budgetary allocations for health and education; electoral reform, control food inflation as objectives could not achieve any. Unlike some past protests such as OccupyNigeria movement in 2012 which altered President Goodluck Jonathan's subsidy removal agenda, the #EndSARS protests in 2020 had SARs Unit of the Nigerian Police disbanded but the end bad governance protest was very different.

Another finding is that, the policies which triggered the protest were not really bad but the implementation was the problem because the federal government did not put in place the measures to cushion the negative effects of the policies on its citizens. Removing the ghost

subsidy is actually good for our economy for reinvestment in others sectors such as transportation, food production among others but the implementation was problematic. This finding corresponds with scholars' assertions that Nigeria problem is not lack of policy but policy implementation (Moseh, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

The 2024 End Bad Governance protests in Nigeria were sparked by longstanding challenges of corruption, deepening economic hardship, and widespread political exclusion. Although the protests succeeded in raising significant national and global awareness and pressured the government into making some immediate responses, their enduring impact on governance and human security remains uncertain. To transform this momentum into lasting improvements, both the government and the citizenry must remain vigilant and committed to tackling the root problems that drove Nigerians to the streets in the first place.

Addressing these challenges requires the government to implement robust anti-corruption measures to rebuild public trust and ensure fair distribution of resources. Equally crucial are pragmatic economic reforms aimed at alleviating poverty and inequality, controlling food inflation, and improving living standards. Investing in education and skills development for youth will provide pathways out of economic despair and reduce the lure of protests as a means of seeking redress. Strengthening the electoral system to ensure credible and transparent elections will also enhance political inclusion and reduce the frustration of marginalized communities. By prioritizing human security through these measures, Nigeria can reduce the risk of recurring civil unrest.

Furthermore, the government must institutionalize proactive dialogue with citizens, particularly the youth who played a pivotal role in the protests. Open and continuous engagement will help resolve grievances early and renew trust in governance. Comprehensive police reforms should also be prioritized, focusing on de-escalation techniques, mandatory human rights training for officers, and investment in non-lethal crowd control tools to protect the rights and safety of peaceful protesters. Ultimately, by respecting freedoms of expression and assembly and ending excessive force, Nigeria can progress toward a more just, inclusive, and secure society that aligns with the vision that inspired the 2024 End Bad Governance movement.

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