

THE END-BAD-GOVERNANCE PROTESTS IN NIGERIA AND SOUTH EAST ZONE NON-PARTICIPATION: A DIALECTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper employs a dialectic analysis to explore the underlying tensions, contradictions, and implications of the End-Bad-Governance protests, particularly the South East nonparticipation. While attempts at the level of policy and legal reforms have been made to promote good governance in Nigeria, the correlates of corruption, insecurity, economic hardship and a sense of hopelessness have been alluded to in scholarly writings since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, as the bane of bad governance even in the present political dispensation. Application of the 'Relative Deprivation' theory, the 'Social Identity' theory, and the 'Framing' theory provided the lens through which the paper analyzed the dynamics of the End-Bad-Governance protests across Nigeria. Based on content analysis of secondary data and dialectic synthesis, the paper revealed the complex interplay between national discontent and regional identity. Thus, indicating that the End-Bad-Governance protests was a national call for a unified front against bad governance, but the South East's reluctance to participate reflects a distinct understanding of governance shaped by local historical experiences and socio-political contexts enmeshed in the rhetoric of marginalization, blame game and victimization. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering effective dialogue and action in addressing the multifaceted governance challenges facing Nigeria. This paper summed that there is need for inclusive good governance in Nigeria where leadership is 'for all' and 'with all', ensuring equal opportunity for all, protecting minority rights, respecting right of choice between alternative programmes, and essentially respecting the peoples' discretion in choosing their own leaders in elections. The paper recommended that addressing existing regional differences requires a nuanced approach that considers local grievances ventilation platforms alongside broader national issues, fostering inclusive dialogue and participation in the quest for improved governance.

Keywords: *End Bad Governance Protests, South East Nonparticipation, National and Regional Identity.*

Introduction

It is widely held that the quality of governance makes a difference for the wellbeing and growth of any country and bad governance breeds dissatisfaction and protest. Protest depicts a nonviolence and sometimes mildly violent collective actions such as demonstrations and riots (Emegha, 2024). Overall, governance determines the developmental trajectories of states as well as the everyday lives of its citizens and their actions toward the state (Adeyinka et al., 2024; Vladimir, 2022). The emphasis is that good and bad governance are products of the quality of decisions and actions by public officials, which the Nigerian citizens bemoan their predicament of experiencing more of bad governance than good. The End-Bad-Governance (EBG) protests were a series of decentralized mass protests that occurred in Nigeria from the 1st to 10th of August 2024, triggered by the dire economic situation in the country. These protests in Nigeria evolved particularly after those ignited by the #EndSARS movement in 2020, demanding end to police brutality (Ezeamalu, 2024). In 2021, there was a 20% increase in the number of organized political violence demonstrations in Nigeria which resulted in over 9, 900 reported fatalities (Emegha, 2024).

The 2024 EBG protests signified widespread discontent with government corruption, rising costs of living, hunger, deprivation and overall governance failures (Sahara Reporters, 2024). However, the South East region's non-participation in these protests raises critical questions regarding regional dynamics, gross marginalization, ethnic identity, and political agency. Suffice that a thorough analysis of Nigeria's End-Bad-Governance protests vis-à-vis the Southeast zone's nonparticipation is crucial to help understand the complex interplay between national discontent and regional identity. Quite reveling is also the fact that the dialectic position of non-involvement of the zone in the protests is a justification of their dissatisfaction of the decay of governance system rather than support of it. Insights into these dynamics are critical for fostering effective public policy and objective dialogue, proffering solutions for addressing the multifaceted governance challenges facing Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification and Succinct Overview of the Nigerian State

Bad governance is a situation where those in public office fail to adhere to principles and practices that ensure accountability, transparency, fairness, and effective oversight of their operations (Hanson-Agumbah, 2022). Specifically, it is the failure of governing authorities in a country to meet the needs and expectations of its citizens. This, entails not upholding the security of the citizens as the primary responsibility of government (Emegha, 2019). Non creation of jobs for productive economy, inadequate social amenities and sound healthcare for the citizens; nonexistence of free and fair election, and critical failure in putting an end to corruption and police brutality. Good governance, on the other hand, is associated with a framework that promotes accountability, probity and absence of systemic corruption, security of lives and property. Thus, bad governance is the exact opposite of good governance. Vladmir (2022) corroborates that corruption, implementation of unfair policies, deception, disregard for the rule of law and impunity are the indicators of bad governance.

Chukwudi and Victor (2021) sustain that bad governance can manifest in various ways, particularly with abuse of power for personal gain, leading to the misallocation of resources and loss of public trust. Some scholars describe bad governance as ‘kakistocracy’ which is governance whereby the worst people are in charge, considered corrupt and incompetent (Namo et al., 2024). Odusole and Bello (2024) buttress that the failure of a country to meet the qualifying criteria of good governance is evidence of bad governance. In a democratic setting, good governance entails that leadership should be ‘for all’ and ‘with all’, whereby the leader recognizes that he is a representative who must always take cognizance of the interest of the followers and carry all sectors along in terms of public trust (Anekwe, 2021). This implies that leadership should always consider the pulse of the people to identify their felt needs or where they are hurting, and lead to fill those gaps that would proactively prevent confrontations and contestations of marginalization in the future.

Therefore as a proclaimed democratic state, the governance in Nigeria is meant to extol the consent of the governed and protect their fundamental human rights; ensure equal opportunity for all with fundamental recognition of popular sovereignty, representativeness, majority rule, minority rights, popular consultation, right of choice between alternative programmes,

consensus on fundamental issues, and essentially respecting the peoples discretion in choosing their own leaders in elections (Adeyinka et al., 2024; Osakede, 2021). These factors are considered ideals of leadership in a democratically governed polity that seeks attainment of sustainable development. However, the poor economic index, and an increased corruption rate, perhaps is why Nigeria seems to be a failed state (Anyogu and Okika, 2024).

While these indicators are also found in other West African countries, Nigeria rated as one of the most populous countries in the world, with the total population estimated at 223.8 million people as at 2023 has not harness its strength for freedom (Trading Economics, 2024). Although with over 400 ethnic groups, comprising majorly of three core ethnic tribes i.e. the Hausas (inhabiting the North), the Yoruba (in the West), and the Igbos (in the Southeast) yet Nigeria is bedeviled by religious divides and economic stagnancy (Emegha, 2022). Economically, the country is rich in mineral resources having oil as one of its biggest exports; however, many Nigerians are poor, with lower life expectancy (just about 55.2 years), with high child mortality rate (58.23%) attributed to abysmal healthcare system via leadership failure (World Bank, 2023). Historically, Nigeria is a product of British colonial rule as the Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated in 1914 by the British government to form what became known as “Nigeria” under a colonial rule that lasted until attainment of independence in 1960 (Odusole and Bello, 2024). Today, Nigeria operates a federal system of government, with three tiers of government, viz: Federal, State and Local Governments; comprised of 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory Abuja and 774 Local Governments Areas (Oshintowokan, 2024).

Governance positions in Nigeria are manned by leaders through elections but with a marginalized zoning leadership system. Scholars argue that this does not make much sense for democracy, especially in a multi-tribal system like Nigeria where political manipulations of ethnic identity and ethnic sentiments engender ethnic contestations in resource control and allocation, power distribution, and access to key bureaucratic positions (Anekwe 2022; Osakede, 2021). Moreover, the civil war (1967–1970), and the series of military coups after the country attained independence have created a Nigerian leadership and political environment that has been unstable (Azoro et al., 2023). While some attempts at policy reforms, after the

1999 democratization, have attempted to promote good governance in Nigeria, yet bad governance is worsening in Nigeria; thereby triggering agitations and protests, specifically the End-Bad-Governance protests and agitations.

South East Nigeria and the Birth of the Republic of Biafra

The South East is the one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria representing both a geographic and political region, comprising five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo (Nwapi, 2024). Formerly known as Eastern Nigeria in the 1950s, records indicate that the South East came about with Alex Ekwueme's recommendations of the six geopolitical zones (Amalachukwu and Anozonwu, 2024). The South East is predominantly Igbo ethnically and linguistically with various Igbo subgroups and their dialects. Geographical statistics indicate that the South East is the smallest geopolitical zone with entire landmass of 29, 558km², less than Kogi state with a land area of 29, 833 km² (Emegha, 2023); but contributes greatly to the Nigerian economy due to abundance of natural resources, along with a growing industrialized economy (Nnam, 2024). Thus, Daly (2020) avers that the colonial rule divided the people along ethnic lines, and then incorporated the groups into a forced-union in a centrally governed federal state. At the regional level, a system of patronage was created along ethnic lines; while at the national level, the three ‘mega-tribes’ ruthlessly competed for state resources, as oil revenues flourished from late 1960’s. This led to a deepening rift that severed the North and the Southern Regions with the Eastern Region increasingly isolated and marginalized. Thus, with the fear of domination, federal and national elections turned into fiercely fought battles for power; ballot rigging and other forms of manipulation (Heerten and Moses (2019). This scenario has lend credence to the fact that power is not given for asking but struggled for.

The January 1966, coups and counter-coups with the associated killings that led to the installation of military rule with the highest-ranking officer General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, emerging as the head of state have kept bad blood within the Nigerian state (Okeke, 2020). Daly (2020) notes that the North felt threatened and had Ironsi captured/killed in a counter-coup which installed Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as the then head of state. Between June and October 1966 violence was at its peak with massacres against Igbos living in the Sabon Gari (the 'foreigners' quarters' of northern Nigerian towns) and subsequent riots which claimed the lives of tens of thousands, later unfolding into the civil war that began in 1967. Amid rampant fears among the Igbo, the Eastern Region began to call for more autonomy and after failed negotiations, on 30th May 1967, the East's political leadership headed by Ojukwu declared its secession from Nigeria and its independence as the Republic of Biafra.

Emergence of the Independence Movement for the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Sit-At-Home as Critical Protests

Officially the Republic of Biafra came into being as a secessionist state in West Africa that separated from Nigeria and existed from May 1967 to January 1970 same time as the civil war. There has been series of agitations ranging from MASSOB i.e. Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra, to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a group led by Nnamdi Kanu, a British/Nigerian citizen who has been advocating for the secession of southeastern Nigeria in the contemporary era (Ezeamalu, 2024). The on-going Sit-At-Home quandary is an emergent tool of IPOB introduced on Monday, May 31 2021, by an order issued by IPOB across the five states of the South Eastern Region in Nigeria for a compulsory shutdown to observe a sit-at-home order in honour of the people killed during the Nigerian civil war when the region unsuccessfully attempted to secede from Nigeria (Okoli et al., 2021).

It has become agitation and protest tool in the southeast, following the arrest of IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu who was arrested in Kenya and repatriated to Nigeria at the end of June, 2021; charged with terrorism, treason, illegal possession of firearms, etc. (Ukpong, 2021). Mondays in most southeastern parts of Nigeria are now compulsory days of incarceration as concerned people have attributed the high level of compliance to insecurity and failure of government to protect lives/properties; while others contend that ‘Ndi Igbo’ are tired of marginalization, so they demonstrate their solidarity by Sitting-At-Home to demand for the Republic of Biafra (Amalachukwu and Anazonwa, 2024).

With the emergence of Simon Ekpa in 2022 as a Biafra political activist, the agitations of the South East through the “Sit-At-Home” tool has gathered more momentum. In 2022, while in Finland, Simon Ekpa declared the activation of the Biafra Government, and in 2023 declared himself the leader of the Biafra Republic Government in Exile (Chinagorom, 2024). Nwapi (2024) reiterates that ever since the end of the civil war, the people of the Southeast have felt like a conquered territory with gross marginalization and subjugation. Anyogu and Okika (2024) affirm that the Nigerian military had maintained a conspicuous presence in the southeast, regularly clashing with nascent separatist groups. There are at least 98 military checkpoints across the five southeast states, according to the Igbo National Council, a grassroots group committed to the defence of citizens’ rights (Odunni, 2024). Critics have accused the government of treating the southeast as a ‘conquered territory’, increasing the heavy presence of armed security forces in the region and blaming the Igbo’s across the nation when tensions escalate during a protest.

National Discontent and the End-Bad-Governance Protests

Every protest stems from growing economic hardship and hunger and that of Nigeria, according to BBC News seems the "Worst economic crisis in a generation", due to record inflation on food prices (Jolaoso, 2024). Experts have linked the crisis to the execution of economic reforms, particularly the removal of fuel subsidies and the devaluation of the Naira following the removal of its peg to the US dollar, under president Bola Tinubu; a policy action allegedly designed to liberalize the Nigerian economy and attract foreign investment

(Abdulateef, 2024). The protests initially began on the 29th July 2024 as demonstrators were seen on the streets displaying placards with messages like "Enough is Enough," "Stop Anti-Masses Policies," "We Are Not Slaves In Our Country," "Hardship Is Unbearable," and "Fuel Subsidy Must Be Back. In response, the Nigerian Army on that same day blocked major roads leading to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory.

In general, the grievances to poor public services and infrastructure failures; police brutality with respect to the specific targeting of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) for abuses created a rallying point for collective action. The demonstrators were mainly driven by the removal of fuel subsidies and subsequent economic hardship via high food prices and demanded changes. Other demands were immediate reforms of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), along with renewed efforts to combat corruption among politicians (Nzereogu, 2024; BBC News, 2024).

Odusole and Bello (2024) express that Nigerians felt that the leaders were disconnected from their needs and priorities. The protesters were largely young people, who utilized social media to mobilize quickly, because of high unemployment rates, educational inadequacies, and a lack of opportunities. All these fueled the urgency of the protests. Scholars buttress that nationalistic sentiment played a major role vis-à-vis a growing sense of national identity among Nigerians, particularly among the youth, led to a sense of collective rejection of systemic injustices and a call for accountability and reform (Folashade, 2024; Nzereogu, 2024).

South East Zone's Non-Participation in the End-Bad-Governance Protests

The End-Bad-Governance protests geared at holding the leadership of Nigeria accountable, to intervene in the skyrocketing prices of food items, was boycotted by all the South Eastern states of Nigeria (Ezeamalu, 2024). Chukindi (2024) reports that days before the protests began on 1st August 2024, there were warnings by various Igbo leaders and groups, calling on the Igbo people (both those at home in the Southeast and across the country) not to join the protests. Ohanaeze Ndigbo, which is the apex Igbo socio-political group in Nigeria, made press releases dissuading the Igbo from participating in the protest. Heeding to some of these clarion calls,

the various days of the protests witnessed a total boycott by Ndigbo, and has remained so both in the Southeast region and across Nigeria (Sahara Reporters, 2024).

Meanwhile, what looked like a different kind of protest was witnessed in several parts of the South East. Reports indicate that though there were no physical meetings and movement of large numbers of people in the various cities in the Southeast, the socio-political undertone is that South easterners joined the protest, but in a different way (Folashade, 2024; Chinagorom, 2024). Chukindi (2024) reiterates that though the atmosphere of the country was tense, leading to low vehicular activities in the Southeast zone as markets, motor parks, banks and schools were closed, on the morning of August 1st 2024, yet youths formed football teams in various streets in most towns and played soccer as their own kind of protest; while others were also seen in beer parlours drinking, eating and making merry as their own protests. For south east, not participating is another form of protest, because their votes did not count during the 2023 presidential election.

Some Igbo leaders argued that the South East have long been protesting bad governance in Nigeria, especially since 2015 when the ruling All Progressives Congress came into office. Hence the Igbos had developed a sense of protests against bad government and hunger in Nigeria. The model is called the ‘Sit-at-home’ protests as the Igbos have observed this ‘sit-at-home’ model of protests for more than nine years while the rest of Nigeria looked the other way. Meanwhile the End-Bad-Governance protests were intense in some other parts of Nigeria, recording significant casualties and arrests. Abdulateef (2024) posits that the protests which fully erupted on August 1st inflicted a heavy toll on the nation, with lives lost, property destroyed, and economic activities disrupted. While the anti-government demonstrations were largely peaceful in the south, it was characterised by violence, looting, and clashes with security personnel in Kano, Katsina, Yobe, Abuja and other parts of the northern region, prompting the declaration of curfews in some of these states. Over 17 people were killed in the first three days of the protests with fatalities occurring in various locations such as Abuja, Kano, Niger, Borno, Kaduna, and Jigawa (Sahara Reporters, 2024). Amnesty International reported multiple deaths, while the Nigeria Police Force also confirmed the killing of one officer and injuries to others. Amnesty International, the National Human Rights Commission and

the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) condemned the use of force on protesters by Nigerian security agencies (Folashade, 2024).

Perception of Marginalization and Victimization of the South East

The South East has long felt marginalized by the federal government, leading to a sense of disconnection from broader national movements. Hence, despite the national context of unrest, the region exhibited notable non-participation in the End-Bad-Governance protests. The emphasis is that Federal Government policy failed after the civil war that allowed all Igbos with previous bank accounts status to draw only 20 pounds irrespective of whatever bank balance was strictly an agenda to ensure the total pauperization of the Igbos; the government disbanded and dismantled marketing Board, the sole government agency that effected the stabilization of palm produce, was a decision to kaput the massive processing palm produce businesses in the east; and the 1980s federal government decree banning of the malted barley, the main raw material for the brewing of beer and leaving it only in the hands of multi-nationals like the Nigeria Breweries and Guinness Breweries which dealt with privately owned Igbo breweries in eastern Nigeria are all issues of concern (Obioha, 2015). These marginalization stand out as the main culprits blamed for the poor state of development in the South Eastern part of Nigeria after the civil war in 1970 (Nnam, 2024; Mohamed, 2024). In federal hiring practices for civil servants, public relations strategies, top federal agency and parastatal leadership structures, military intelligence operations, and decision-making processes are kept for other Nigerian groups while qualified south easterners are left out.

On the other hand, the gross victimization of the Igbos (people of the South East), as the ‘scape goat’ in national demonstrations is evident (Ezeamalu, 2024). It can be recalled that the Southeast was one of Nigeria’s six geo-political zones that had fatalities during the #EndSARS protests against police brutality. Consequently, about a quarter of the fatalities recorded as the protesters clashed with security agencies around Nigeria in 2020 were in the southeast (Amnesty International, 2021). Most of the Igbo leaders had warned that if the Igbo joined in the protest, especially in other states/towns outside their area, the tendency was that people of other regions may skew the protest against them, and accuse Igbo of being the masterminds of

the protest, with the intention to vandalize their properties and also loot them. These leaders noted that the nonparticipation action prevented needless loss of Igbo lives, businesses, and property, as the South East have suffered so much in the past and have also borne the brunt of all the protests in the country. Therefore it would have been fool-hardy for any Igbo person to join in the protest since they have been marginalized for decades of years and nobody protested on their behalf (Chukindi, 2024; Odum, 2024).

Regional Identity and Historical Context Priorities

The South East has a distinct sense of identity and unique historical/socio-political context, marked by the Biafra War and ongoing issues related to ethnic identity; thus their skepticism about the effectiveness of protests to address their local concerns (Namo et al., 2024; Anyogu and Okika, 2024). This historical context influences their political engagement and priorities, often focusing on local issues rather than national movements. Amalachukwu and Anazonwu (2024) buttress that many Igbos feel marginalized by the central government, leading to skepticism about the effectiveness of national protests. Thus, national movements may inadequately address regional grievances. The emphasis is that many people in the Southeast region chose to prioritize local grievances over national issues; Simon Ekpa who recently claimed to be a content creator during his arrest in Finland argued that the people of the South-East chose not to join the protests due to their own decisions and resistance against certain government actions, not because of the influence of the governors (Chinagorom, 2024). Instead of engaging in national protests, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and other groups in the South East are mobilizing around issues specifically affecting their communities, especially calls for secession or greater autonomy (Ezeamalu, 2024). This approach of focusing on specific regional issues also reflects the South East desire to avoid conflict and seek independent political solutions (Chikindi, 2024).

Security Concerns

It is a strongly held opinion that the potential for violence and repression during protests is a major factor that deterred South East nonparticipation in the End-Bad-Governance protests.

Mohammed (2024) noted that given the region's recent experiences with insurgence and conflicts, they opted out as there may have been serious concerns about safety and security. There are at least 98 military checkpoints across the five southeast states, and the Igbos are already getting overwhelmed over security issues in the southeast; hence joining these protests was going to compound the problems in the region (BBC News, 2024).

The separatist group i.e. the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), said in a statement on 1st August 2024 that its security report showed that the federal government had planned a “selective elimination” of the Igbos during the protests. The group claimed that the targeting of the Igbos would be done under the guise of going after sponsors of the protests (Chukindi, 2024). There were alleged plans to sponsor criminal elements from other zonal extraction in the east to carry out violent protests to provide opportunities for the Nigerian security to launch attacks against Igbos during the protests period. In other words, the decision by the Igbos to boycott the protest in the southeast denied their oppressors the opportunity to kill, wound, arrest, detain, and imprison them (Chinagorom, 2024). Therefore the South East Zone's non-participation, particularly among the Igbos, can be attributed to regional identity, historical grievances, feelings of marginalization and that of security concerns.

Theoretical Explication

The integration of relevant social and political theories as theoretical framework provides a comprehensive lens to analyze the dynamics of the End-Bad-Governance protests in Nigeria and the non-participation of the South East zone. By incorporating the ‘Relative Deprivation’ theory, the ‘Social Identity’ theory, and the ‘Framing’ theory, is to show the complex interplay of factors influencing protest dynamics in Nigeria as well as their implications.

(1) The Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative Deprivation Theory was developed by the renowned sociologist Ted Robert Gurr in his 1970 influential work on "Why Men Rebel". The theory posits that social movements and conflicts arise when individuals or groups perceive a significant gap between their expectations and their actual conditions, leading to feelings of frustration and injustice (Kagolane and

Malatji, 2024). The key tenets of the theory center on perception of inequality, political and socioeconomic marginalization, historical context, identity and grievance (Ezema, 2023). By highlighting the gap between expectations and reality, the theory helps explain why individuals and groups may mobilize in response to perceived injustices, making it a crucial lens through which to analyze the dynamics of the End-Bad-Governance protests across Nigeria.

In terms of inequality, many Nigerians (particularly the youth) have over the years felt that their expectations for political stability, economic opportunity and social justice are not being met. This sense of relative deprivation is attributed to what fueled discontent and motivated mostly the North and South West participation in the 2024 protests against perceived bad governance in Nigeria (Abdulkareem, 2024). While this feeling of deprivation is true for the Nigerian youths; however, the South East has faced marginalization amid the economic challenges and underdevelopment, leading to feelings of gross inequality.

In context, Nigeria has a history of political instability, corruption, and economic hardship; such that the theory emphasized that ongoing struggles of various ethnic and regional groups, especially marginalized communities, can amplify feelings of deprivation, hence protests (Olaseni and Oladele, 2023). Logically, the 2024 End-Bad-Governance protests in Nigeria do reflect a collective frustration rooted in these historical grievances, and the worsening economic hardship. Ted Robert and other advocates of the Relative Deprivation theory opined that rising costs of living, inflation, and unemployment can lead to a heightened sense of relative deprivation; and if significant segments of the population perceive that their conditions are worsening compared to previous generations or neighboring countries, this could spur mass protests. The theory also holds that such protests may also reflect a collective identity among groups who feel disenfranchised, vis-à-vis collective identity and grievance (Ezeama, 2023). Suffice that this shared sense of deprivation may have unified diverse groups under the banner of the End-Bad-Governance movement, reinforcing solidarity in their quest for change.

While this theory is crucial in explaining the motivations behind the End-Bad-Governance protests in Nigeria; it barely accounts for the nonparticipation of the South East in the protest. The theory's identity and grievance factors relates to the South East's historical grievances, particularly related to the Biafra War and ongoing marginalization. Avail to say that this can

overshadow the collective struggle against bad governance perceived in the wider national context. Also if local issues (like the call for the People Republic of Biafra) are viewed as more pressing than national governance failures, this can hinder participation in broader protests. This understanding is crucial for addressing the diverse motivations and concerns of various groups within Nigeria as the country navigates its governance challenges.

(2) Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity theory was developed by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s to explore how individuals define themselves based on their group memberships (such as ethnicity, nationality, or social class) and how this affects their behaviour, attitudes, and interactions with others (Emegha, 2023; Eroglu, 2023). The Social Identity theory significantly buttress the nonparticipation of some groups even in issues that concern national interests but may not identify integrally with their communal interests. In the South East region of Nigeria, strong ethnic identity, particularly among the Igbo people, has led individuals to prioritize local issues over national protests. The Social Identity theory emphasize that when community or ethnic identity is salient, individuals might focus more on regional grievances rather than engaging in broader national movements (Hussain et al., 2024). Therefore the strong ethnic-regional identity in the South East, particularly among the Igbos, seems to have led to prioritizing ethnic issues over national protests.

The historical grievances of the South East (in a historical context marked by sidelining them from the presidency and other national benefits amid past conflicts, particularly related to the Biafra War) is termed a major influence fostering a sense of separate identity that eclipsed collective national movements like the End-Bad-Governance protests. The Social Identity theory also talks about the ‘in-group versus out-group’ dynamics; suggesting that individuals may favour their in-group (e.g., ethnic or regional group) and be wary of out-groups (Tear and Reader, 2023). Therefore the perception of a region’s interests can create a reluctance to engage in national protests, especially the Nigerian governance situation where the South East region feels their specific needs are not addressed. This goes to show that if the South East people perceive that the interests of the Igbos are not represented or prioritized in the broader national movement, they invariably feel less inclined to participate in a national protest such as the End-

Bad-Governance movement. Given past experiences of political marginalization, there may be a prevailing sense of distrust in national unity initiatives. Consequently the South East might view the protests as manipulated/dominated by other regions, further entrenching a sense of alienation and reluctance to participate.

(3) The Framing Theory

The Framing theory focuses on how issues are presented and perceived, subsequently impacting public understanding and mobilization Bassey et al., (2023). The theory was developed by Sociologist Erving Goffman in his book on “Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience” published in 1974 (Henshaw, 2024). It examines how the presentation and interpretation of issues via specific frames can shape public perception and influence social behaviour or actions toward such issues. In line with this paper, the theory looks at how the framing of the End-Bad-Governance protests influenced participation. Its emphasis is on the role of narrative construction, in the sense that the framing of protest as a national movement against a common enemy (bad governance) may not resonate with all regions equally (Bassey et al., 2023); like what happened in the South East, where local security and governance issues vis-à-vis ethnic tensions took precedence.

Also the cultural context i.e. the manner in which the protests are portrayed in media and political discourse can influence perceptions of relevance. For instance, in the context where the South East are viewed as major agitators or they feel being excluded from the narrative, this may affect participation, especially as the region has strong ethnic identity (whether as the Igbos or Biafra); thereby leading individuals to prioritize local issues over national ones. Tear and Reader (2023) affirm that this identity shapes how grievances are framed and which actions are deemed relevant. Over the past decades, the framing of governance issues in Nigeria has emphasized national narratives that do not resonate with the South East’s unique historical and socio-economic context. For example, while the North and South West have continuously held on to power at the national level, yet rising to the protests on issues predominantly affecting northern or southwestern regions. This explains why residents of the South East may perceive these protests as irrelevant to their own struggles.

Likewise the framing of state response, which depicts the anticipated government response to protests, can also influence participation. Thus, the framing of the End-Bad-Governance suggested a high likelihood of violent repression and negative consequences for the Ndigbo's, which invariably deterred individuals in the South East as well as those Igbos living across Nigeria from joining the protests, especially given the region's historical experiences with state violence. The Framing theory suggested that the media's portrayal of the protests can shape public perception whereby coverage emphasizing chaos, violence, or a lack of organization discourages participation. Also if a group feels that the media underrepresents their issues, they may opt out of participating altogether (Henshaw, 2024).

Therefore the Framing theory provides a critical lens through which to understand protests or conflict behaviours. By examining how the issues are presented and perceived, we can see that the framing of the protests, local narratives, cultural contexts, and perceptions of efficacy all played significant roles in shaping the decision of the people in the South East to abstain from the End-Bad-Governance national movements. Understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering inclusive participation in future governance initiatives.

Understanding the Dialectic Tension of the End-Bad-Governance Protests

Nigeria has refused to be a “melting pot” of culture where development of a multicultural nations will eventually turn into a state with regional development without being hooked with federal might (Emegha et al., 2019). Thus, the dialectical relationship between the End-Bad-Governance national protests and the South East's non-participation reveals several key insights, particularly the diverging perspectives on governance. Though the End-Bad-Governance protests indicated a national call for a unified front against bad governance, the South East's reluctance to participate reflects a distinct understanding of governance shaped by local historical experiences and socio-political contexts enmeshed in the rhetoric of marginalization, blame-game and victimization. The dialectic tension also points to the system of collective versus local action whereby the contrast illustrates a broader debate in Nigeria about the efficacy of collective action versus localized movements. The argument is that while national protests may offer a platform for unified grievances, they can overlook regional

complexities. Meanwhile the impact on national unity cannot be overemphasized, especially given that South East non-participation can further exacerbate feelings of irreparable division within Nigeria; thus raising major concerns about national unity and the ability to address collective governance issues. The tension likewise brings to the fore issues of bad governance and dominance by certain groups over another. It has to be stated that the responsibility of the leadership in every country, is to protect the political, social, and economic interests of the citizens by making policies and finding solutions to their problems. Deplorably, the primary goal of assuming leadership position in Nigeria now tops that of self-enrichment, to also include exerting exclusive lordship over key positions in the society, depriving some regions or groups of their rights, shutting down oppositions and forcing through policies that would enable only their own group or region to retain power for life; obviously contradictory to the notion of 'good governance and true democracy.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Movements

The dialectic analysis of Nigeria's End-Bad-Governance protests and the South East Zone's non-participation in this paper significantly revealed the complex interplay between national discontent and regional identity. This paper sums that there is need for inclusive good governance in Nigeria where leadership is 'for all' and 'with all', ensuring equal opportunity for all, protecting minority rights, respecting right of choice between alternative programmes, and essentially respecting the peoples discretion in choosing their own leaders in elections.

Addressing existing regional differences requires a nuanced approach that considers local grievances ventilated platforms alongside broader national issues, fostering inclusive dialogue and participation in the quest for improved governance. Hence, for future movements to be effective and bring about desired change, Nigerian government must embrace inclusivity, recognizing the diverse grievances and identities within Nigeria. Engaging regional stakeholders and understanding local contexts will be essential by recognizing and integrating regional perspectives, future movements can work towards a more cohesive and inclusive approach to governance reform.

Likewise bridging the divides by finding common ground between national and regional issues will be very crucial to help foster a sense of solidarity among different Nigerian communities, promoting a collective approach to governance reform. There is need to also empower local leaders and movements that can enhance the efficacy of broader national protests, ensuring that diverse voices are represented and heard in the quest for improved governance.

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