

Policyweekly

| Red Flags from the #EndBadGovernance Protest in Nigeria



Policy Recommendations

- 1** The Federal Government should instruct the arrest, investigation and prosecution of whoever is involved in the ethnic hate messages.
- 2** There is a need for the government to work through its relevant departments to put in place measures that directly address the reasons for the protests.
- 3** There is a need for synergy among all levels of government to restore citizens' trust and hope.
- 4** The government should address the problems of local refineries and private large-scale and modular refineries to address the high cost of internal oil consumption since the rising cost is tied to the cost of petrol.
- 5** Strategic communication should be improved to popularise policies that could directly ameliorate citizens' sufferings.
- 6** The government should invest in training and equipment for the nation's security forces to circumvent the careless use of live bullets that lead to loss of lives.
- 7** Arrested individuals who are proven to have been involved in arson, vandalism, and other forms of criminality should be made to face the full weight of the law.

Introduction

Several federal government economic policies since May 2023 have rubbed off adversely on the citizens. These policies include the removal of the oil subsidy, increase in fees paid in public tertiary institutions, increase in electricity costs, increase in several taxes and levies, floating the nation's currency (the Naira) in a free market, which occasioned a significant nosedive in its value and consequential impacts on the purchasing power of citizens in Nigeria's economy that is mainly import-dependent. The consequences of these policies have been a spike in the general cost of living, as prices of commodities have hit the roof. Overwhelmed by these rising costs without a corresponding increase in earnings, Nigerians gave a month's notice for a nationwide protest, which actually commenced on August 1 and has entered its fourth day at the time of writing.

As the protest progresses, some disturbing signals that bear urgent attention and swift response emerge.

These include, firstly, ethnic profiling, hate speech and invitations for a protest specifically targeting an ethnic group. The message is circulated through an X (formerly Twitter) social media handle, Lagospedia, which invites Lagosians and every Southwest stakeholder to prepare for a massive protest of [#Igbomustgo](#). The handle demands one month from its published date for the Igbos to leave Lagos while calling on Yorubas living in the South East to relocate back to the South West. The second red flag is the degeneration of the protest to violence in some states. In Kano state, for instance, the protesters looted and set ablaze the newly constructed [Park by the National Communications Commission \(NCC\) for digital innovation skills in information technology](#), which would have been commissioned in a few days. The protesters also looted shops along Zaria Road in Kano. A section of [Tafa Local Government Area of Niger State](#) and two cars were set ablaze together with vandalism of properties. Arson and looting of public and private properties also took place in [Kaduna and some major towns in Jigawa, such as Gumel and Dutse](#). In [Pokiskum Yobe State](#), protesters burnt seven mass transit buses. The looting spree also affected several shops in [Gombe State](#), [Mararaba in Nassarawa State](#), and a rice warehouse in [Edo State](#).

More disturbing is the death toll from the hunger protest reported across the country, including [six persons shot and killed in Niger State](#). Three deaths were recorded in [Kaduna State](#), two persons were killed in [Jigawa State](#), and four died in Maiduguri as a result of the protest. Besides, the atmosphere created an opportunity for a [bomb attack which killed 20 persons in Kawuri village of Konduga LGA, in Borno State](#). While the above account is profoundly worrying, it is not exhaustive about the losses of lives and properties in the protests.

There is yet a third red flag, namely an

[invitation for a military takeover](#), and fourthly, a demonstration with a [Russian flag](#) and even a plea that Russian authorities should intervene in the matter. The message here is quite concerning, taking into account Russia's recent relations with a few West African countries that recently had military coups and also exited from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In this week's edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly, we explore these emerging issues from the [#Endbadgovernance](#) protest, their implications and possible pathways to manage the country out of the tensions.

The Issues and their Possible Directions

The gamut of issues that connect with the nationwide protest are concerning because of their possible implications. The [#Igbomustgo](#) protest proposed by unscrupulous elements is quite disturbing. It again opens up the common tensions between the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups in terms of political relations. During the [2019](#) and [2023](#) general elections, there was ethnic targeting of the Igbos in Lagos. A group interpreted the [#EndSARSprotest](#) in Lagos as Igbos' ploy to destroy Lagos. In the ongoing [#endbadgovernance](#) protests, efforts are being made to blame the Igbo for being its instigators, even as they opted to remain indifferent to it. As the hunger strike approached, Igbo leaders admonished their people not to participate, and they duly complied. However, the non-compliance appears to offend their traducers as they still find grounds to make scapegoats of them. Like Arendt (1951) wrote in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, antisemitism was a catalytic agent for the Nazi movement and the establishment of death factories. The Recent African experience in Rwanda started with media hyping of hatred and the ultimate application of the final question. Having fought a civil war, Nigeria is not supposed to take behaviours that

could create another large-scale human catastrophe for granted. The condemnation of the hateful behaviour by the Governor of Lagos State and the respected socio-cultural organisation, Afenifere, as well as President Tinubu's generic reference to it in his 4th August broadcast signposts official rejection, but more is surely expected as mere condemnation has never been enough to deter the merchants of violence. The culprits should be seen to be properly subjected to the law because future conflicts will likely continue on the structure of hatred that their activities leave behind.

Regarding the degeneration of the protest into looting, arson and violence, the government must carefully manage the tensions carefully and responsibly. However, the body language of the national leadership is quite important in this direction. However, the nationwide president's address did not provide a definitive response to most of the protesters' demands. It outlined the president's programmes, provided a firm warning against continued demonstrations and alleged in [paragraph 5](#) that the protest was out of a political agenda to tear the country apart. It also promised opportunities in government [policy directions](#), such as the Compressed Natural Gas initiative to reduce expenditure on petrol, the establishment of the Nigerian Credit Corporation to support Nigerians acquiring consumer goods, the student loan scheme and more. These policy directions are certainly laudable. However, their lofty potentials do not respond to the immediate concerns of the protestors, like lack of food, high cost of electricity, high tariffs, etc. How these demands are addressed in the short-run, medium, and long term is key to assuring people that their demands will be met and, therefore, persuading them to call off the demonstrations. Unable to see these reassurances, protesters are still organising to [continue into the fifth day](#) because the address sounds like the proverbial medical attention that failed to stop the

haemorrhaging of the patient.

The [death toll placed around 40](#) is already very high and disturbing. It is partly a result of the derailment of the protest with vandalism, robbery and arson and partly a function of quick resort to extreme measures by officers of the law. It is quite worrying that the Digital Innovations centre that was just completed in Kano State was robbed by hoodlums and partially razed. The burning and efforts to burn public and private properties in Jigawa, Niger and a few other states are unwarranted excesses for which the state needs to step up security forces and materials to curtail. This could be done without easily resorting to killing. The use of live ammunition should be the very last resort. Similar protests are taking place in the [United Kingdom](#). Policing lessons could be drawn from how they manage their protests. Of course, this warrants some investments in the security sector as law officers may be constrained to use guns and bullets if they are the only working tools they are provided with. The dominance of the strategy of extreme punishment bears the potential for escalation of the conflict.

Further worrying dimensions of the fallout of the #Endbadgovernance protest is the invitation by a group of protesters for a military takeover. This demand is surely ill-informed. Yet, the government cannot afford not to be careful in managing the tension with specific practical policies that attend to both food scarcity and other necessities that have gone beyond affordability. Thus, people call for military rule with the expectation that their misery would be better addressed by dictatorship since policies under civil rule are unable to support their conditions of survival. It is possible that recent experiences of military coups in neighbouring African countries and the populist bearing of some of the leaders underpin the misplaced desire for a military 'messiah.' Joining this demand for military rule with the wave of Russian flags

is particularly instructive because of the recent relations between Russia and the three neighbouring countries that recently came under military rule. In addition to these possible linkages, there is also a need for increased vigilance on the trajectory of the protest.

Recommendations

1. The Federal Government should instruct the arrest, investigation and prosecution of whoever is involved in the ethnic hate messages, particularly the promoters of #Igbomustgo through the Lagospedia X (formerly Twitter) handle and make known the outcome of the process to deter further such actions from any part of the country.
2. Considering the absence of clear steps to address protesters' grievances, the government should work through its relevant departments to put in place measures that directly address the reasons for the protests. The heads of such government departments should clarify that their measures are targeted at addressing hunger and high living costs.
3. Governments at all levels should engage with the populace. The current situation needs a synergy among all levels of government to restore citizens' trust and hope. Trust in government is at an all-time low, with the government at the centre being the worst hit. Rebuilding confidence, trust, and hope in the Nigerian state is very important in dismantling the protest mindset culture.
4. The government should address the problems of local refineries and private large-scale and modular refineries to address the high cost of internal oil consumption since the rising cost is tied to the cost of petrol.
5. Some government policies, like intervention through the Nigerian Credit Corporation, are not well known to the masses. Strategic communication should be improved to popularise policies that could directly ameliorate citizens' sufferings.
6. Law enforcement under conditions of crises is usually quick to resort to extreme measures. This is probably due to lack of other equipment for engaging protesters. The government should invest in training and equipment for the nation's security forces to circumvent the careless use of live bullets that lead to loss of lives.
7. Arrested individuals who are proven to have been involved in arson, vandalism, and other forms of criminality should be made to face the full weight of the law.

Conclusion

The #Endbadgovernance protest in Nigeria is similar to the history of food riots in Europe, in which France had over 700 people between the 1690s and 1789. [England](#) had over 100 food riots between 1756 and 1801. While Nigerians demonstrate against bad governance, the main immediate trigger is hunger, which proceeds from stringent economic neoliberal policies that are crushing to the citizens. Curiously, as the protests are taking place, divisive communal politics is also emerging to undermine both the essence of a peaceful protest and national cohesion. The type of anti-immigrants and anti-Islamic sentiments that are being used in the UK by far-right agitators to attack Muslims and immigrants is also being applied to mobilise an ethnically targeted attack in Lagos. Also, the protest has degenerated into looting, arson and violence with a consequential high-handed response from government forces that has led to several deaths. Following a presidential speech that offered little hope

to the protesters, they have started expressing a desire for a military regime and support for external intervention. The exit routes should consider short, medium and long-term steps for practically addressing the grievances of the agitators.

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