

ATHENA PERSPECTIVES

Fresh and Deep Dimension to the News

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1.1 Local Governance And Civil Unrest: Lessons From Nigeria’s Nationwide Protests.

Background: The Triggers for Nationwide Protests

The nationwide protests that erupted across Nigeria on August 1, 2024, and lasted for ten days were largely driven by severe economic hardships resulting from government policies such as the removal of the fuel subsidy and the floating of the naira. These policies worsened inflation, leading to widespread hardships for citizens. Despite efforts by the government to prevent the protests, they spread across various states, with varying degrees of violence and disruption.

Geographical Spread and Socioeconomic Costs of the Protests

The intensity and outcomes of the protests varied across Nigeria. While some states experienced violent unrest, others saw less disruption. In the Southeast, there was minimal participation, while states like Lagos and Ekiti in the Southwest saw relatively peaceful demonstrations due to effective crowd control measures and the government’s engagement with civil society and protest organizers to prevent escalation.

In contrast, the North witnessed widespread violence, particularly in Kano and Kaduna, and Plateau states. In these states, a combination of national economic issues and local grievances, exacerbated by the slow response of state governments, fueled the unrest. Moreover, the absence of meaningful engagement between the state governments and protest leaders contributed to the situation.

Consequently, the protests led to severe economic disruptions. The closure of businesses, looting, and vandalism resulted in losses estimated at approximately N10 billion. Among the notable casualties was the yet-to-be-commissioned Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC) Industrial Park. Beyond the financial impact, the human cost was substantial, with reports indicating that 22 people lost their lives, 175 were injured, and over 1,150 arrests were made across the country. The scale of violence and the subsequent crackdown underscored the volatility of the situation, drawing international attention and concern.

Assessing the Situation in States with Peaceful Protests



Prior to the nationwide protests, states like Lagos and Ekiti in the Southwest had experienced relatively minimal violence and fewer security challenges compared to other regions. During the protests, these states managed the situation proactively and strategically, preventing the unrest from escalating into violence.

In Lagos, the state government implemented effective crowd control measures, working



closely with civil society groups and protest organizers to maintain peace. By keeping communication channels open and actively engaging with stakeholders, the government mitigated potential flashpoints.

Zamfara and Ekiti States as a Case Study for Peaceful Protests

Despite being one of Nigeria’s most troubled states, notorious for banditry and kidnappings, Zamfara State experienced peaceful protests during the nationwide unrest. This starkly contrasts the violence that unfolded in other northern states like Kano and Kaduna. The key factor behind Zamfara’s peaceful outcome was the state government’s proactive and strategic approach, which had already built a foundation of trust with its citizens by delivering on critical promises, such as prompt salary payments, urban renewal, and the provision of basic services. Similarly, Ekiti state also stood out as a state that managed the protests effectively. The state took a proactive stance by allowing citizens to express their discontent through controlled and peaceful protests. The state government established temporary protest zones, collaborated with civil society organizations, and ensured security personnel were trained to de-escalate any tensions. This approach not only allowed citizens to vent their frustrations but also prevented the situation from escalating into violence.



Zamfara state government’s proactive steps helped in controlling the effects of the planned protests by directly engaging with protest leaders, resulting in an agreement that allowed for peaceful demonstrations. Additionally, the administration committed to supporting local farmers through the distribution of fertilizers

to help alleviate food insecurity. This constructive engagement not only averted violence but also serves as a model for how effective local governance can defuse tensions, even in the face of national discontent.

Comparing Zamfara State with Kano State

In contrast to Zamfara state, Kano state witnessed violent protests that led to the destruction of public and private property. In these states, a combination of national economic grievances and local discontent over unemployment, poor infrastructure, and unfulfilled political promises contributed to the unrest. The failure of local governments to engage with protesters or address longstanding local issues escalated the situation. In Kano, the government’s use of force to suppress demonstrations only inflamed tensions, leading to widespread destruction.

Strategic Recommendations for Policymakers

» **Strengthening Local Governance:** State governments must be empowered to address their citizens’ grievances effectively. By responding to specific local challenges—such as unemployment and poor infrastructure—state administrations can mitigate unrest. The success in Zamfara shows that localized solutions can prevent violence even in times of national crisis.

- » **Proactive Engagement with Citizens:** Governments at both the state and federal levels must adopt proactive approaches to engaging citizens. Formal mechanisms for dialogue are crucial for addressing grievances before they escalate into violence. Direct communication channels can help manage protests more effectively.
- » **Training Security Forces on De-escalation:** It is critical that security personnel are trained to manage protests in a way that defuses tensions rather than exacerbating them. Heavy-handed responses, like those seen in Kano, should be avoided in favor of non-violent crowd control methods that prioritize peaceful resolution.
- » **Collaborating with Civil Society:** Civil society organizations play a vital role in mediating between governments and protesters. By working closely with these groups, state governments can foster an environment conducive to peaceful demonstrations and ensure that protesters’ grievances are addressed constructively.
- » **Addressing Economic Grievances:** National economic policies must be implemented alongside mitigation measures that protect vulnerable populations. Providing relief for those most affected by fuel subsidy removal and inflation, such as through agricultural aid or direct subsidies, can reduce the risk of unrest.

Conclusion: The Role of Local Governance in Maintaining Peace

The 2024 nationwide protests in Nigeria highlighted the importance of effective local governance in either mitigating or exacerbating unrest. While states like Zamfara and Ekiti demonstrated how proactive, community-centered governance could prevent violence, the heavy-handed approaches in Kano and Kaduna led to disastrous consequences. The ability of state governments to engage their citizens, address grievances, and implement targeted solutions plays a pivotal role in maintaining peace and stability during times of national crisis.

BY JULIUS FUNMINIYI AJAYI



2. Issues in the News:

Top four stories on our thematic areas in Nigeria

Governance: President Bola Tinubu, on Tuesday, stated that Nigeria must either reform for progress and prosperity or continue with business as usual and risk collapse. He, however, said his administration, upon taking over the leadership of the country 16 months ago, decided to reform the political economy and defence architecture, given the critical juncture the country found itself. He lamented that Nigeria found itself in a precarious situation because of the missed opportunities and mistakes of the past while calling on Nigerians not to allow the mistakes to follow the country into the future.

For more details: <https://punchng.com/nigeria-64-we-must-reform-or-collapse-tinubu/>



Transport: The Nigerian Railway Corporation generated N537.36 million from freighting cargoes between April and June 2024. This is contained in the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Rail Transportation Data for Q2 2024 released in Abuja on Thursday. It showed that the **N537.36 million** was collected as revenue from goods/ cargoes conveyed by rail. This also increased by 206.68 per cent from **N175.22 million** received in Q2 2023.

For more details: <https://shippingposition.com.ng/railways-generates-n537-36-million-from-cargo-freighting-in-q2-2024-nbs/>



Security: The Yobe State Commissioner of Police, CP Garba Ahmed, has ordered an immediate investigation into a homicide incident involving Inspector Mohammed Bulama, attached to the Police Mobile Force, 41 Division in Damaturu the state capital. In a press release issued on Tuesday by the Public Relations Officer, Yobe Police Command, DSP Dungus Abdulkarim, said, "It was revealed that on September 29, 2024, at approximately 18:20 hours, Inspector Mohammed Bulama, 38, was involved in a heated argument with Abdulmalik Dauda (aka Baksha), 39, of Pompomari Ward, Damaturu, over an unresolved transaction at the Zango Area.

For more details: <https://punchng.com/police-inspector-stabs-man-to-death-in-yobe/>

Health: Kano indigenes have been reassured that the polio vaccine is safe hence the need for them to cooperate for the success of the ongoing campaign against poliomyelitis. The state Commissioner for Health, Dr. Abubakar Yusuf, gave the assurance while supervising the ongoing exercise in Kunchi and Tsanyawa local government areas respectively on Monday. It should be recalled that the state governor, Abba Yusuf, on September 28, 2024, flagged-off the 2024 polio OBR3 campaign in Dawakin Kudu Local Government Area.

For more details: <https://punchng.com/polio-vaccine-safe-kano-health-commissioner-insists/>



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The State governor, Abba Yusuf, on September 28th, 2024 flagged off the 2024 polio OBR3 campaign in Dawakin Kudu Local Government Area.

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3. Regional Updates

Top stories from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (BCCN)...

Niger's Oil Export Challenges:

Niger is exploring alternative oil export routes through Chad and Cameroon due to a diplomatic dispute with Benin that has stalled the Niger-Benin pipeline. This pipeline, which was intended to boost Niger's oil production significantly, has faced disruptions from local rebel attacks and



political instability following last year's coup. The junta in Niger is also considering reviving its National Oil Company (NOC) and previously rejected plans for a Chad-Cameroon pipeline tie-in as a potential solution to its export challenges.

For more details: <https://www.africanews.com/2024/06/26/niger-considers-routing-oil-through-chad-after-benin-dispute/>

Multinational Joint Task Force Success:

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which includes troops from Benin, Cameroon,



Chad, and Niger, has successfully conducted Operation Lake Sanity 2, significantly degrading the capabilities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups in the Lake Chad Basin region. This operation reflects ongoing collaborative efforts to enhance security in the area, with commitments from the African Union to support these initiatives further

For more details: <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20240808/boko-haram-and-other-terrorist-groups-activities-lake-chad-basin-region>



Trade Route Disruptions for Chad:

Following the coup in Niger, trade routes for Chad have been severely impacted, leading to economic losses. The closure of borders has blocked imports destined for Chad via Benin, resulting in significant trade disruptions and highlighting the interconnectedness of regional economies.

For more details: <https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-africa/2023/08/25/chad-all-but-deprived-of-trade-routes-after-niger-coup,110036029-art>

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