

# NIGERIA NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE OF #ENDBADGOVERNANCE NATIONWIDE PROTEST

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## Abstract

Protests inherently attract media attention and protesters significantly rely on media coverage to communicate their demands to authorities. However, the manner in which the media report on protests critically shapes public perception, support and governmental response. Using the Protest Paradigm (PP) theory, this paper discusses how the mass media predominantly portray protests and protesters in a negative light, thereby delegitimizing their actions and diminishing their platform to voice demands. This paper examines the validity of the PP theory within the context of Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the #EndBadGovernance nationwide protest. Stories of four Nigerian newspapers - *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Premium Times*, and *Vanguard*, dating 1st July to 5th August, 2024 were content analyzed. Findings cap to indicate that media coverage of the #EndBadGovernance nationwide protest aligns with basic assumptions of the Protest Paradigm theory, which frame protest primarily through the lens of rioting, with an emphasis on violence, clashes, and property destruction. This portrayal depicts protest as a negative event to be discouraged, rather than as a legitimate exercise of citizens' rights crucial for strengthening governance and democracy. The paper concludes that the media coverage of the #EndBadGovernance nationwide protest in Nigeria was sensational which denied protesters the needed support and voice to contribute to advocating for social change in Nigeria. The paper recommends the Nigerian Union of Journalists and media regulators should work to foster news reporting that recognizes the democratic role of peaceful protests, thereby discouraging media practices that reinforce negative stereotypes.

**Keywords:** Bad governance, democracy, protest, social change, newspaper coverage

## Introduction

Nigeria is a country with diverse natural resources and human potential. Aside from crude oil, the nation is blessed with other resources such as coal, palm, tin, and several others, as well as 70.8 million hectares of fertile ground that support all kinds of agricultural activities in all parts of the country (FAO, 2021). Ideally, Nigeria should be one of the most developed nations in the world (Okoi & Iwara, 2021). However, bad governance is exemplified by a high level of corruption in public offices, unemployment, mismanagement of resources, weak governance institutions, and a lack of vision and political will at all levels of governance, which have continually made Nigerians wallow in abject poverty and hardship (Nwogbo & Akhakpe, 2021; Alozie, 2015). Several developmental indexes and ratings described the country as the world headquarters of poverty (Agidi, 2023). The situation in the country has contributed to several social menaces such as armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, and fraud of all kinds, especially online fraud known as yahoo-yahoo, perpetrated by the youth (Nwagwu & Enwelum, 2024).

The increasing rate of hardship and recurrent political disappointments have forced many young Nigerians to migrate to other countries, especially the United Arab Emirate (Dubai), the United Kingdom, the United States, and many others, including African countries like South Africa. The massive migration of Nigerian professionals like medical doctors has led to a popular lexicon in the country known as the “JAPA” syndrome (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). In the past, the political class used religion and ethnicity to divide the Nigerian youth, making it difficult for them to mobilize themselves and demand good governance. However, in recent times, the Nigerian youth have become more conscious of their rights and the need to come together to demand excellent governance. This was seen during the popular #ENDSAR protest, which engulfed the nation in 2020, leading to the disbandment of the popular police arm known as the Special Anti-Robbery (SAR) squad, which was known for human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022).

The #ENDSAR protest, along with other protests in several African countries, especially the recent one in Kenya, served as impetus for Nigerian youth to protest against inadequate governance,

and this led to the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protest. The protest was a nationwide outcry concerning increasing hunger and the hardship caused by the removal of petroleum subsidies, which led to a high cost of living amidst poor salaries and wages in both the private and public sectors, among other factors. The protest saw widespread participation across many states, such as Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, Borno, Plateau, Rivers, Sokoto, Katsina, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Delta, Edo and FCT Abuja despite earlier efforts by the government and threats by security agencies to stop the protesters. The protest drew considerable attention from the media, both within and outside Nigeria. Media coverage is critical to the success of any protest; however, the protest paradigm argues that the mass media frequently portray protests and protesters in a negative light, specifically as disruptive to the status quo rather than demanding or enhancing social accountability (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). This study questions the validity of the protest paradigm hypothesis in light of Nigerian newspaper coverage of the #EndBadGovernance protest.

Past studies (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; McLeod, 2007; McLeod & Hertog, 1999), show that the mainstream media coverage of protests is often skewed against protesters; the media often portrays the protesters as deviant and disruptive, thereby delegitimizing the reasons for their agitations. This type of portrayal has a negative effect on the audience's perception of protest as well as the stakeholders' responses to the protesters' demands. The #EndBadGovernance nationwide protest in Nigeria is the latest protest driven by the youth due to discontentment over increasing economic hardship coupled with corruption among Nigeria's political elites. The manner in which the media reported the protest has not yet been documented. A number of studies (Alfred, Maidin, Ugbor, Ezegwu, Ikusemiju, Celestine, & Apuke, 2024; Jibril, 2011; Egbunike, 2015; Okeke, Okwumba, Ezeah, & Gever, 2019) on media coverage of past protests in Nigeria abound. These studies looked at media reportage of previous protests like the #ENDSARS, #BringbackOurGirls, and #Occupy, among others, unlike the #EndBadGovernance nationwide protest, which has been a new development. In interrogating the media coverage of the #EndBadGovernance protest in Nigeria, this paper explains how selected Nigerian national newspapers, particularly *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Premium Times*, and *Vanguard*, reported the protest in a manner that projects its legitimacy. The paper also evaluates how the

newspapers align their reportage of the protest with the protest paradigm hypothesis, where protesters are seen as rioters and destructive. On the whole, the overarching research questions for this paper include: What are the different frames employed by Nigerian newspapers in their coverage of the #EndBadGovernance protest? What is the tone of newspaper coverage regarding the #EndBadGovernance protest? What are the sources of stories about #EndBadGovernance in Nigerian newspapers? The paper is structured as follows: a review of relevant literature on newspaper coverage of social movements, the theoretical framework guiding the study, the research methodology employed, presentation of data, discussion of findings, and finally, the conclusion and recommendations.

### **Newspaper Coverage of Social Movements in Nigeria**

Mass media and, in particular, newspaper coverage of social movements have attracted significant attention in research. Scholars around the world have investigated patterns of media reporting of social movements, particularly protests, and revealed different findings. Scholars (McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Leopold & Bell, 2017; Brown & Harlow, 2019) found the existence of structural and organizational biases inherent in the manner in which mainstream media, including newspapers, report social movements, revealing that the mainstream media often marginalize and delegitimize protest and protesters, a development that often creates an imbalance between protesters and the media. According to the Frame Works Institute (2017), during protests, the media traditionally employed more episodic frames than thematic and contextual frames, which would have helped the citizens see a given protest as appropriate collective action. Corroborating, Smith, John Clark and Bogulsaw (2001) found that the media often sensationalise protest actions more than conveying the issues that led to the protest. Corroborating studies (Ortiz *et al.*, 2005; Reynolds-Stenson, 2018) established that the presence of violence, security agents like police, repression, and property damage strongly increase the likelihood of gaining media coverage; as such, sensationalistic reporting is prominently done by the mass media while reporting protests.

Within Nigerian media scholarship, a number of studies regarding media coverage of social movements, including diverse protests, exist. For example, Bala (2019) investigated the coverage of the Bring Our

Girls Campaign by the *Daily Sun* and *The Guardian* newspapers. The study's findings revealed very low coverage and a negative portrayal of the movement by the newspapers. This negative presentation of the movement can contribute to weakening the support of Nigerians towards issues leading to the protest, which was aimed at forcing the government to intensify efforts towards the release of schoolgirls kidnapped by terrorists. Another study was conducted by Egbunike (2015). The study examined the frames used by the media, particularly the *Nigerian Tribune*, *the Guardian*, and *the Daily Sun* newspapers, as well as the social media in the #Occupy Nigeria Protest of 2012. The findings revealed that traditional media gave the protest more representation than social media in framing the protest's motivation using diagnosis and prognosis frames. In another study, Alfred *et al.* (2024) investigated Nigerian newspapers' reportage of the #Endsars protest with the aim of ascertaining the extent of adherence or non-adherence to the protest paradigm. The study focused on the *Punch*, *Daily Post*, and *Vanguard* newspapers. The study showed that the riot frame was mostly used in reporting the #Endsars protest, while the protest target's voice was heard more in the reports than that of the protesters. However, Jibril's (2011) study on the framing of the "Bring Back Our Girls" (BBOG) campaign by Nigerian online newspapers, particularly the online versions of the *Daily Trust*, the *Punch*, *Vanguard* newspapers, and online-based medium *Sahara Reporters*, indicates that the campaigners and their sympathisers received dominant attention as sources of stories and that the newspapers made concerted efforts to cover the campaign positively rather than succumbing to the traditional protest paradigm hypothesis.

Furthermore, Oso *et al.* (2009) studied press coverage of the protests against former Nigerian President Obasanjo's Third Term Agenda, with a focus on the *Guardian*, *Punch*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Sun*, and *Vanguard* newspapers. Findings revealed that the press took the stand of the protesters by overwhelmingly portraying the agitation in a positive light and more or less demonising the pro-Third Term as anti-democratic. Okeke *et al.* (2019) examined the media framing of secession agitations by the Indigenous People of Biafra with a focus on *The Vanguard*, *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *Thisday* newspapers. The results showed that most of the newspapers examined cited official sources. It was also found that less attention was paid to the causes of the agitators.

In sum, existing research on media coverage of protests in Nigeria showed inconsistent outcomes. Some studies align with the tenets of the protest paradigm that delegitimize social protests; others argue that the media have been objective and positive in their reporting of protests. Considering the inconsistency in the research findings, it has become expedient for more studies to establish media representation of the protest and how that could shape public opinion regarding the legitimacy of the protesters.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on the protest paradigm theory. The theory emerged from media studies and sociology in the late 20th century. Several scholars contributed to Protest Paradigm Theory; key among them are William A. Gamson, Todd Gitlin, Gaye Tuchman, David A. Snow, and Robert D. Benford. In their different studies, these scholars articulated the depiction of social movements and protests by the media (Lee, 2014). The theory explains the patterns and biases in media representations of protest and all kinds of social movements. Basically, the theory asserts that the mass media traditionally portrays protests and protesters in a negative light, emphasising violence, disruption, and deviance rather than the issues and grievances that motivated protesters to engage in a given protest. The theory also argues that the mass media are more interested in reporting sensational aspects of protests, such as clashes with police or property damage (Brown & Harlow, 2019). Also, the theory assumes that the media seldom use official sources like police and government officials while reporting protests; this act thus contributes to a biased portrayal of protests and protesters, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the protest and the rights of the protesters (Lee, 2014). Furthermore, the Protest Paradigm Theory hypothesises that media often use episodic frames while reporting protests, thus treating the protest as an isolated event rather than part of a broader issue of social concern (Brown & Harlow, 2019).

Several studies in the past decade illustrate the presence of the protest paradigm in media coverage of several protests, ranging from Australian newspaper coverage of the 1999 anti-World Trade Organisation protests in Seattle (McFarlane & Hay, 2003) to U.S. newspaper coverage of Occupy Wall Street (Xu, 2013). Also, studies (Di Cicco, 2010; Leung, 2009) that used different frameworks to study

media coverage of protests ended with results consistent with the tents of the protest paradigm. However, most prior studies that tested the theory were carried out in western countries. Considering the fact that the media in developing nations like Nigeria operate dominantly within the developmental media framework, it is important to test the protest paradigm within the Nigerian landscape. As a result, the current study tested the protest paradigm theory in light of Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the nationwide #EndBadGovernance protest.

### **Research Methodology**

The researcher used content analysis to examine newspaper stories about the #EndBadGovernance protests. The International Media Newspapers (2016) says there are a total of 28 national dailies in Nigeria. The sample size of this study was made up of four newspapers. These are *Daily Trust*, *Punch*, *Premium Times*, and *Vanguard*. These newspapers were selected based on their frequency of publication, wider reach, and geographical spread. The period covered by this study was July 1st, 2024, to August 5th, 2024. This period covered the pre-protest build-up, early mobilisation, and active protest period, which invariably led to more high media reports. The universe of the study is articles with a word protest in the headline and published within the period of study. The articles were collected from the web pages of the newspapers as well as a Google search using the following keywords: #badgovernanceprotest, hunger protest, *Premium Times*, *Punch newspaper*, *Daily Trust*, and *Vanguard*. Research assistants reviewed a number of articles to identify the relevant ones, out of which 201 articles identified, and a sample size of 168 articles was determined with a 95% confidence level at a  $\pm 5\%$  margin of error while stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure that all the selected newspapers were represented in the selection of the articles content analyzed. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, the intercoder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa and Krippendorff's Alpha (McHugh, 2012), with the reliability test showing a high agreement of 0.8 for Cohen's Kappa among the three trained coders. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical tools.

## Results and Discussion

The study revealed that out of the 85 editions, The *Daily Trust* had 22 stories (25.9%), The *Vanguard* had 20 (23.5%), The *Sun* had 17 (20%), and The *Punch* had 26 (30.5%). The researcher and three trained coders reviewed each story and attested to their relevance. This process resulted in a total of 128 items that were content analyzed, indicating significant media attention to the protest. This significant coverage is expected, as protests, being a form of conflict or crisis, naturally attract media attention. However, the primary focus of this study is not just the volume of coverage but also how the media treated stories regarding the coverage.

### RQ 1 Protests frames, description, examples and frequencies

Frames	Description	Example	N (%)
Riot	focusing on the deviant behaviour of the protesters, clashes with security, looting, and destructions	“Hunger Protest: Public, Private Properties Looted, Set Ablaze” <i>DailyTrust</i> , 2nd August, 2024.	46 (27.3%)
Episodic	<b>Treating the protest as an isolated event</b>	“Police recover loot from Kano protests, continue search operations”... <i>Daily Trust</i> , 3rd August 2024.	9 (5.4%)
Thematic	<b>Treating the protest as a part of broader social problem in Nigeria</b>	“SPOTLIGHT: Beyond economic hardship, these are other issues protest organisers have raised” <i>Premium Times</i> , July 30, 2024	25(14.9%)
Human Interest	<b>Focusing on personal experiences of protesters or victims of the protest</b>	“Kano residents seek end to #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protests” <i>The Punch</i> , 4th August 2024	15 (8.9%)
Security, Law & order	<b>Emphasize the impact of the protests on breakdown of law and order and possible hijacking of the protest by hoodlums.</b>	“Hoodlums Hijack Protest in Kano, Loot Shops, Offices” <i>DailyTrust</i> , 1st August, 2024.	31(18.5%)
Human Rights	<b>Focus on police brutality or suppression of free speech and movement</b>	“‘I Swear To God, I Will Kill’, How Policeman Threatened” #EndBadGovernance Protesters. <i>Daily Trust</i> , 4 <sup>th</sup> August, 2024.	9 (5.4%)
Prognostic	<b>Emphasis on what is to be done and suggests remedies.</b>	“A fresh look at Nigeria’s major problems” <i>The Punch</i> , 27th January 2019	22(13.1%)
Economic Impact	<b>Focus on losses of business revenue and cost of security</b>	“#EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protest grounds economic activities in Lagos” <i>The Punch</i> , 1st August 2024.	11 (6.5%)

Note. % = percentage of the total, n=168



Table 1 above presents the descriptive statistics of the frames used in reporting the #EndBadGovernance protest. Majority (27.3%) of the reports riots frame, focusing more on the protesters' deviant behavior, clashes with security, looting, and destruction of public and private properties. Also, 5.4% took the form of an episodic frame, treating the protest as an isolated phenomenon rather than part of a systematic problem in the country, whereas 14.9% of the articles used a thematic frame, treating the protest as a part of a broader social problem in Nigeria. Furthermore, the human interest frame, which focused on the personal experiences of protesters or protest victims, accounted for 5.4% of the total items analyzed. The security, law, and order frame, which emphasized the impact of the protests on public safety and the need to maintain law and order, had 18.5%, and the human rights frame had 5.4%, whereby the focus was on police brutality or suppression of free speech and movements. The prognostic frame emphasized the solution to end the protest; the frame had 13.1% of the total items, while the economic frame, which emphasized business revenue losses and the cost of security, had 6.5%. It can be inferred that though the newspapers employed diverse frames to report the protest, the major emphasis was on the riot frame, thus making the protest look more violent. This posture taken by the media can add to tension and aggressive tendencies on the side of security, thereby escalating the situation.

### RQ 2: Protest tones, description, examples and frequencies

Variables	Description	Example	N (%)
Positive	Depict the protest favorably emphasizing its legitimate and peaceful conduct of the protesters.	<b>"#EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protest: Listen to Nigerians, NRM tells FG" <i>The Punch</i>, 2nd August 2024.</b>	61 (36.3)
Negative	Depict the protest unfavorably or in bad light emphasizing on its negative consequences.	<b>"Protest not best option to end hardship, CSO tells Nigerians"</b> <i>The Punch</i> , 15th July 2024.	84 (50)
Neutral	Present a balanced view showing a clear positive or negative bias	<b>"Protest: Head or Tail, We May All End Up Losers" <i>Daily Trust</i>, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024.</b>	23 (13.7)

Note. % = percentage of the total, n=168

Table 2 presents the tone of the newspaper coverage of the #EndBadGovernance protest. Only 36.3% of the content analyzed presents the protest in a positive light, emphasizing its legitimacy and peaceful conduct by the protesters, whereas 50% of the stories show

the protest in a negative light, emphasizing negative consequences such as clashes with security agencies and the destruction of lives and properties. Also, less than a quarter (13.7%) of the items analyzed had a neutral tone, showing both the positive and negative aspects of the protest. The significance of the outcome is that the newspapers focused primarily on the negative aspects of the protesters rather than the positive. This media presentation has the potential to delegitimize the protest, re-echoing the protest paradigm's assumptions.

**RQ 3:** Protest sources of stories, description, examples and frequencies

Variables	Description	Example	N (%)
Official Sources	Government officials, police, military, and other authorities	“The Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, has urged all groups planning to participate in the proposed nationwide protest to submit their details” <i>The Punch</i> , 1 <sup>st</sup> August, 2024	85 (50.6)
Protesters	Participants and leaders.	<b>“#EndBadGovernanceInNigeria: We can’t take it anymore, protesters vent frustration”</b> <i>The Punch</i> , 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2024	14 (13.3)
Independent Experts	Academics, analysts, NGOs, and other independent commentators	“Reveal your identities if sincere about protest – CSOs tell organisers” <i>Vanguard</i> , 31 <sup>st</sup> July, 2024	40 (23.8)
Traditional & Religious leaders	Clergies, Imams, local community ethnic and tribal leaders.	<b>“Inter-religious council urges end to #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protests”</b> <i>The Punch</i> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> August 2024	29 (17.3)

Note. % = percentage of the total, n=168

Table 3 presents protest sources for stories. The results revealed that official sources, which comprised government officials, police, military, and other authorities, were the dominant source (50.6%) of protest stories published by the select newspapers. The number of protester sources quoted was very minimal (13.3%), while independent expert sources made up of academics, analysts, NGOs, and other independent commentators were quoted in 23.8% of the stories. Furthermore, traditional and religious leader sources were quoted in 17.3% of the stories analyzed. This finding suggests that protester sources were not largely heard. This goes to indicate that the

journalists reporting for the selected newspaper heavily depend on official sources. This act could affect the objectiveness and factualness of the media report of the protest, whereby only government opinion derives media narration of the protest, thereby making the media more of a tool in the hands of the government to maintain status rather than serving as platforms for both parties to air their grievances towards national development.

This study investigated newspaper coverage of the #EndBadGovernance protest in Nigeria, focusing on *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Premium Times*, and *The Vanguard* from July 1st to August 5th, 2024. The analysis reveals that several features of the protest paradigm theory—where emphasis was majorly given to issues of violence clashes with security, looting, and destructions—as the rioting frame was dominantly used in reporting the protest while the legitimate factors that led to the protest were de-emphasized. This finding corroborates earlier findings by Alfred *et al.* (2024) that Nigerian newspapers' reportage of protests, particularly the #Endsars protest, aligns with the protest paradigm hypothesis, where the riot was emphasized over other frames, including the prognosis of the protest issues. Similarly, the results support prior findings by Brown and Harlow (2019), which revealed that the mass media have a penchant for reporting sensational aspects of protests, such as clashes and property damage, rather than the substantive messages and demands of the protesters. This finding also confirms an earlier assertion by Reynolds-Stenson (2018) that, in any mass movement, the presence of violence and the destruction of properties strongly increase the likelihood of gaining media coverage. This shows that despite the quest for social responsibility and developmental journalism ideals for mass media in developing nations, Nigerian journalists still crave more sensational stories that will attract audience attention rather than significantly influence positive change.

Also, it was found that the protesters' voices were not adequately heard in the reportage, as the majority of the sources of the protest stories reported by the newspaper were government officials, especially the Nigerian police. This finding supports that of Okeke *et al.* (2019), who revealed Nigerian newspapers often depend on official sources while reporting social movements or protests. The lack of visibility of the protesters as news sources might be linked to the economy of the media, whereby the government and officials,

especially powerful politicians in Nigeria, owned most of the media outlets and used them for political propaganda, commercial purposes, and to maintain the status quo. In the same vein, Brown and Harlow (2019) earlier argued that the mainstream media industry is built within some form of structural and organizational biases that make it serve as tools for social marginalization against the poor or masses. This is also consistent with the hierarchy of social struggle assumptions that highlight the presence of deeper power structures and social forces that influence newsroom practices, behaviors, and coverage, ultimately contributing to the preservation of human subjugation (Brown & Harlow, 2019). This observed phenomenon, especially in developing countries, is responsible for the growing adoption of new media platforms like Facebook and Twitter by protesters. The new media are more accessible, more engaging, and void of structural control and gatekeeping; hence, they serve as viable tools for protesters to mobilize themselves and make their voices heard regardless of the posture of the mainstream media.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study confirmed the manifestation of the protest paradigm assumption in Nigerian newspaper coverage of the #Endbadgovernance protest. It was established that the media in Nigeria majorly framed the protest through lenses of violence, clashes, looting, and destruction while downplaying legitimate issues of hunger, hardship, the high cost of living, and other social problems that led to the protest. This sensational approach to reporting protests in the country denied the protesters the needed support and voice that would have contributed to advocating for much-needed social change. This is an indication that the mainstream Nigerian newspapers ultimately contribute to limiting the people's ability to legitimately exercise their rights regarding social movements while at the same time contributing to persistent political suppression in the country. This development calls attention to the need for professional and regulatory bodies like the Nigerian Union of Journalists to initiate and implement trainings on protest reporting that will create the consciousness in the journalist to strive for balanced and comprehensive coverage of protests that amplifies the voices of all stakeholders in a manner that will contribute to national development.

While the study contributes to knowledge of the protest paradigm within the Nigerian media landscape, it is not without some limitations. Specifically, the study was based on a small sample size of protest stories from the digital archives of only four newspapers. This will pose a challenge to the issue of drawing generalizations regarding the media reportage of protest movements and the prevalent protest paradigm; therefore, more studies with larger sample sizes and approaches such as critical discourse analysis of the text or language of reportage are needed in order to unravel certain hidden power relations and messages embedded in the reportage of protest movements and social movements in the country.

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