# Exploring the Qualitative Impact of Protests on National Development: The Experience of Nigeria.

# By:

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# Abstract

# This qualitative study explores the multifaceted impact of protests on national development within Cross River State, Nigeria. The research utilizes a combination of personal narratives, stakeholder interviews, and community discussions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the various ways protests shape the state's development trajectory. By engaging with participants from diverse backgrounds, the study uncovers the social, economic, and political repercussions of protests and their effects on the local community. Protests in Cross River State, like in many other regions, often arise from dissatisfaction with governance, unmet social needs, or perceived injustices. Through personal stories, the study aims to understand how protests alter the everyday lives of residents, affecting their social interactions, security, and access to essential services. By capturing these experiences, the study highlights the emotional and psychological toll that protests can have on individuals and families, particularly when they lead to violence or unrest.

# On an economic level, protests can disrupt local businesses, impact employment, and deter investment, thereby influencing the state's development prospects. However, they can also spark conversations that lead to reforms, pushing policymakers to address grievances and adjust development priorities. Politically, protests can shift the balance of power, shape public opinion, and lead to changes in governance structures. This study delves into these political dynamics, exploring how protests influence policy decisions and alter the government's approach to development initiatives.

# Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on civic activism and its role in shaping national development, with a specific focus on Cross River State.

# Keyword:

# Introduction

# Protest is an instrument used to agitate for social change globally, however, despite the increasing use of protest to address socioeconomic and political grievances, there has been limited critical scholarly study of protest in the communication for development and social change (CDSC) scholarship. Protest is communication and/or a communication strategy for drawing attention to developmental and social issues that affect the well-being of citizens. Communication for development and social change utilizes various communication approaches, such as social marketing, public awareness and information campaign, entertainment-education, media advocacy, social mobilization, and many others. In addition to these approaches, protest action is situated as a communication approach for development and social change. Protest culture is engaged critically by drawing theoretically from conceptual discourses of participation, participatory development communication, grassroots bottom-up social change, social movement theory, collective action theory, and critical analysis of power. This paper also provides a framework for the use of protest as communication for development and social change by identifying types and methods of protest and ends by offering critical guidelines of how protest can be effectively used as communication strategy for development and social change.

**Protests:** The term protest does not have a universally acceptable definition. This is because different scholars and organizations conceptualize it from different perspectives. Social unrest encompasses civil disorder, acts of mass disobedience and strikes by groups of people that are intended to disrupt a community or organization (Seattle Emergency Management, n.d). According to Giddens and Sutton (2013), protests refer to the stage of frustration with existing society, which can give rise to more focused collective behaviour and social movements. Whatever the definition offered, social unrest from the point of view of the authors of this paper, is a form of collective action that has attracted much attention from researchers over the years not only as an instrument for social change but also with regards to its disruptive tendencies. Gonzalo de Cadenas, Herrero, Vidal-Abarca and & López (2015), identified four levels of social unrest. These are: (a) Vindication. This category expresses the initial level of societal unrest and covers solely, occurrences involving private persons' verbal displeasure. It does not involve deeds, but rather words such as voiced criticism, threat, accusation, and so on. (b) Protest. It denotes a rise in social unrest and involves physical acts such as protests, strikes, riots, and other types of protest by private agents. (c) Conflict. This is characterized by the highest level of societal unrest and involves acts such as armed attacks, property destruction, assassinations, insurgencies, civil wars, armed conflicts, and so on. It symbolizes the most heinous acts of civil upheaval. (d) The state's reaction. This refers to government’s (State) efforts intended at quelling societal unrest or upholding the rule of law. Based on the foregoing, it can be safely concluded that social unrest from the simplest forms such as verbal threats and criticisms to the most dangerous variants such as armed attacks, property destruction, assassination, insurgencies, civil wars, armed conflicts can subvert socio-economic development. Therefore, the scope of social unrest as used in this paper encompasses all the four levels of social unrest examined above.

## Some Causes of Protests in Nigeria

***Poverty***

Poverty continues to be a major source of social upheaval, particularly in developing countries. According to Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) poverty is the key source of discontent in many nations of the world. In Nigeria, poverty remains one of the most serious social and economic issue the citizens have been contending with. According to the World Bank (2021), prior to the Covid-19 crisis, almost 4 out of 10 Nigerians were poor, with millions more at risk of sliding into poverty because of lack of inclusion. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019), noted that 43 percent of Nigerians, or 83 million individuals, live on less than 137, 430 Naira ($381.75) every year. Not too long ago, precisely in 2018, Nigeria was first declared as the world’s poverty capital in a report by the Brookings Institution, knocking off India from the unenviable position (This Day, 2021). The country’s negative poverty profile has remained the same even in 2022.There is a strong correlation between poverty and social unrest. When people are poor and cannot meet their basic needs, it could lead to frustration and agitation. When these frustrations and agitations are poorly addressed, they could boil over into collective action. As rightly observed by Tade (2021), amid poverty, social unrest is birthed and nurtured. This is exactly the picture of what is happening in Nigeria today

***Unemployment***

Unemployment remains one of the major factors propelling social unrest in Nigeria. According to the World Bank (2021), between 2010 and 2020, the unemployment rate in Nigeria rose five-folds, from 6.4% in 2010 to 33.3% at the end of 2020, significantly affecting youth in their quest for gainful employment opportunities. The implication of the above statistics is that many Nigerians may not ably cater for their primary needs such as food, shelter, clothing etc. When this happens, the resultant consequence is that many people willing to work but unable to secure gainful employment may deviate and embrace anti-social behaviour (Tade, 2021).

***Marginalization***

Marginalization remains a key trigger of social unrest in Nigeria. A system where some social groups continue to suffer from systematic marginalization in the hands of others has the potential to breed tension and agitation. This is not new in Nigeria because marginalization has been at the foundation of the Nigerian State the very first day the colonialists yoked the northern and southern protectorates together in 1914. For example, the resurgence in the agitation about restructuring in Nigeria today is a mere reawakening of the problem that has been hibernating for the past five decades. Agitations from secessionist groups such as the outlawed Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) in South-East Nigeria over the alleged political marginalization of the Igbo nation have contributed to heating up the Nigerian polity. The group has directed a “sit at home” order in the Eastern States every Monday and members of the public obey such orders. Persistent demands from the Niger Delta region over resource control and the need to address issues of environmental degradation are central to understanding the rising tension in Nigeria. Recently, the emergence of Sunday Adeyemo popularly called Sunday Igbohoto defend the rights of the Yoruba people and demanding for the creation of an Oduduwa Republic are all indications that the current structure of the Nigerian state is deficient and in need of urgent restructuring to assuage the feelings of every section of the country especially those who have been unjustly relegated to the backwaters of the country’s socio-economic and political development.

***Police Brutality***

State institutions especially the police and the military have been implicated as drivers of some of the incidences of social unrest in Nigeria. The Nigerian police have been fingered in several human right abuses and extra-judicial killings in Nigeria. Some Nigerian youths held the EndSARs protests in 2020 in response to long-running and uncontrolled cases of police brutality in the country. The protests were products of outrage and dissatisfaction about human rights breaches, intimidation, torture, and extortion by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a special unit of the Nigerian Police Force (Dajo & Akor, 2021). The Nigerian Army is accused of killing and burying 347 members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) and other civilians in 2015. (United States Department of State, 2020). There was also no indication that any member of the military forces was held responsible for the October and December 2018 violence in Abuja with IMN demonstrators, which reportedly killed at least 42 people (United States Department of State, 2020). Furthermore, the Nigerian government's response to social unrest has been characterized by excessive use of brutal force as evidenced by the government's continued denial that no lives were lost even after the findings of the Judicial Panel of Enquiry established by the Lagos Government confirmed that there was actual massacre of innocent Nigerians during the Lekki Toll Gate killings. While submitting its report titled “Report of Lekki Incident Investigation of 20th October 2020”, to the Lagos Government on Monday, November 15, 2021, the eight-member Judicial Panel of Inquiry headed by retired Justice Doris Okuwobi, on page 13 of the report dubbed “Executive Summary” noted that, at the Lekki Toll Gate, officers of the Nigerian Army shot, injured and killed unarmed helpless and defenseless protesters, without provocation or justification, while they were waving the Nigerian Flag and singing the National Anthem and the manner of assault and killing could in context be described as a massacre… The above revelations by no less a panel set up by the Lagos State Government, eventually put an end to any denial by government officials about the killing of innocent civilians at the Lekki Toll Gate when youth under the banner of #ENDSARs protests trooped out in their numbers to voice out grievances against acts of brutality by operatives of the Nigerian Police Force.

**Impact of protests on Socio-economic Development in Nigeria**

Social infrastructure is a major catalyst of economic growth and development especially in developing countries. Infrastructural facilities such as good roads, railways, health, water, energy among others can stimulate societal transformation. The African Infrastructure Country Diagnostic (AICD, 2011) examined more elaborately the key role of infrastructure in accelerating socioeconomic development by stating that infrastructure adds a net contribution of 1% point to Nigeria’s improved per-capita growth performance in recent years. It has also been estimated that Nigeria would need to spend $14.2 billion or earmark 12% of her Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the next decade to address her infrastructural deficit (AICD, 2011). The above facts underscore the importance of social infrastructure in stimulating economic growth and development. Even though social infrastructure requires significant financial investment in both construction and maintenance, there is growing concern about the rising incidences of social unrest on social infrastructure and its cascading effect on economic growth and development in both developed and developing countries. According to Renn, Jovanovich and Schroter (2011) social unrest damages or dislocates critical social utilities. In Nigeria, protests caused by the Boko Harm insurgency, farmers and herders’ conflict, ethnic and religious conflicts, #EndSARs protesters, IPOB, and Niger Delta militants has caused massive damage to critical social infrastructure that took decades to build. In North-East Nigeria for instance, conflict in the region has destroyed 75 percent of water and sanitation infrastructure (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 2017). UNICEF (2017) stated that in Northeast Nigeria, at least 496 classrooms have been destroyed while1392 classrooms were damaged but repairable.

Similarly, Olasupo (2020) stated that the #EndSARs protests in 2020 resulted in the damage of 205 key national security assets, corporate facilities, and private property. The riots also resulted in the looting and destruction of 71 public warehouses and 248 private establishments throughout 13 Nigerian states (Olasupo, 2020). In the same vein, the Nigerian government has claimed that separatist groups such as the Independent Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) through its paramilitary outfit code named the Eastern Security Network (ESN) was responsible for the destruction of eighteen (18) INEC offices and 164 police facilities (Ejekwonyilo, 2021). The significance of the preceding revelations is that civil unrest can disrupt social infrastructure, resulting in a negative impact on socioeconomic development regardless of location.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) plays a critical role in stimulating and accelerating economic growth and development. According to Bitar, Hamadeh, and Khoueiri (2019), FDI inflows boost technology transfer, local company productivity, and financial capital requirements, resulting in job creation and economic growth. Despite the enormous importance of FDI to economic growth especially in developing countries, social unrest has become a major obstacle to the flow of FDI in Nigeria. According to the US Department of State (2020), security remains a major concern to investors in Nigeria due to the high rates of violent crime, kidnappings for ransom, and terrorism. Social unrest lowers confidence and increases uncertainty (Vaskov, Pienknagura, and Ricci, 2021). The Seattle Emergency Management (n.d), also noted that cities that are prone to social unrest could be stigmatized and consequently lose investments and tourism. As a result of this, no investor would want to invest in an environment where their investment cannot be protected. Looking at the rise in the incidences of social unrest and tension that comes out of Nigeria, many international investors are afraid investing in the country. They would prefer to invest in environments where such investments can be protected. Onyebuchi (2018) echoed the above sentiment when he stated that several significant investors have fled Nigeria for nations with more secure and stable atmosphere thereby leaving the Nigerian economy gasping for breath. Empirical evidence from a study of the most attractive economies for the location of FDI from 2007- 2009 showed that Nigeria was listed among the 40 most attractive economies for the location of FDI (UNCTAD, cited in Onyebuchi, 2018). The report placed Nigeria in the fourth position in Africa, behind South Africa, Egypt and Morocco. Today, the situation is completely different. According to the 2018 UNCTAD World Investment Report, FDI inflows into Nigeria decreased by 21%, while capital flight increased by 8% (Adenyuma & Onyeche, 2019). One of the reasons for the decline in FDI is the rising incidence of social unrest which has literally chased investors away to other more secure and investment friendly neighboring African countries notably, Ghana and Rwanda.

Protests can severely disrupt economic activity through the destruction of productive assets, diversion of resources, death and injury to the population, and damage to health and education facilities (UNDP, 2021). According to Vaskov, Pienknagura, and Ricci (2021), social unrest leads to a decline in economic activities especially in countries that face post low growth figures prior to social unrest as well as those that experienced above average growth before the event. In Nigeria, a World Bank (2016) assessment estimated cumulative GDP losses from 2011 to 2015 at $6.21 billion ($3.54 billion in Borno, $1.57 billion in Adamawa, and $1.1 billion in Yobe).

The Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI, 2020), for instance, confirmed that the Nigerian economy lost 700 billion Naira (N700 billion) within 12 days of the EndSARs demonstrations. Likewise, Akinkuotu (2020) also claimed that the EndSARs demonstrations caused the Lagos State government to lose N234 million in revenue because of the Lekki toll gate closure. According to the report of a survey conducted by SB Morgan (SBM,2020) involving 180 business owners in the aftermath of the #EndSARs protests, majority of the respondents representing 91% of business owners agreed that their businesses were affected by the protests while 98% agreed to losing customers and revenues within the period. The report stated further that 43% of respondents lost over 1 million Naira to the looting while 26% lost between N500,000 -1 million. The report concluded that the protests resulted in business owners being unable to meet their debt obligations, destruction and looting of shops, and the general slowdown of business deals which they fear would take a while to pick up. Social unrests negatively impact on export receipts and oil production in Nigeria. According to Onime (2018), the activities of militants and the violent agitations for resource control in the Niger Delta have led to the destruction of oil installations, incessant pipeline vandalism, oil theft and bunkering, resulting in the persistent decline in export receipts and oil production.

Incidences of social unrest greatly interfere with the way people interact. The movement of people is restricted whenever curfews are imposed by the government. Acts of social unrest such as protests and riots, as well as strikes, usually disrupt the movement of people from one location to another thereby restricting social interaction at social events and other engagements. In Nigeria, social unrest occasioned by the issuance of quit notices by different ethnic groups for instance, has greatly affected relationship among different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. According to Howell (2004) social unrest affects peaceful coexistence and alters social relations among groups. This is very common especially in countries that are heterogeneous such as Nigeria with diverse ethnic and religious groups.

## Protest Culture and Social Change

Various types of protest action and mass mobilization have been effective in drawing public and state attention to grievances from ordinary citizens and civil organizations from national to local community levels. Protest culture is an attitude and a form of expression that reflects the human traits and desires for reasonable well-being through motivation, agitation, and activities that draw attention of location of societal power to these desires and agitation. As such, protest bears inherent traits that are essential for development and social change:

* They are usually grassroots-oriented by reflecting participation of citizens at local levels who mobilize to make their grievances known.
* Protest and mass mobilization generally tend to be participatory in nature; participants are visibly engaging in protest actions.
* While the collective action of individuals is core element of mass action, individuals can equally single-handedly protest certain issues.
* The optics of mass protest usually draw attention of sites of power – at local, national, and international levels.
* Importantly, protests are emancipatory.
* They reflect human aspiration to maintain or achieve well-being consistent with humane existence.
* They are universal, not peculiar to certain regions or groups.

When *Time Magazine* named “The Protester” as Person of the Year 2011, it reiterated the power of protest and protesters in social change, that the action of individual(s) can incite protest that would lead to major political change, topple dictators, and engender global waves of dissent.

Although protest culture is universal and occurs in all social classes, it tends to occur more among the poor, the oppressed, the deprived, the disadvantaged, those that bear brunt of political and social conditions, and in regions with history and occurrences of political and socioeconomic inequalities, which may result in socioeconomic developmental challenges. These challenges are present in developed, as well as developing countries. Take the protest culture in South Africa as an example. South Africa experiences one of the most frequent rates of protest in the world, in fact some (cf. Runciman [2017](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR31)) assume the country may be the protest capital of the world. Although there is no dedicated database for protest action in South Africa, there are speculations and debates that there are about 30 protests per day in South Africa (Williams [2009](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR44); Bhardwai [2017](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR3)). Irrespective of the uncertainty of daily protest rate figure, it is uncontested that there is a strong protest culture in South Africa. But protest as tool for social change has always been essential to South Africa’s pre and post-apartheid eras. The struggle for freedom from the apartheid regime was emboldened by various protest actions and social movements (Solop [1990](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR38); Kurtz [2010](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR18); Brown and Yaffe [2014](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR4)). Many forms of protest actions were adopted by ordinary citizens and activists to fight the apartheid regime, these range from mass demonstration, funeral marches as platform for protest, music – singing and dancing, civil disobedience (such as Sharpville 1960), stay-aways, boycotts, etc. Often these protests were confronted by state violence using the military and the police forces. Internationally, anti-apartheid movements in the UK and the USA were actively using many forms of protest to agitate for the end of apartheid. Take, for instance, the Non-Stop Picket at the South African Embassy in London where the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group maintained a continual presence every day and night at the South African embassy from 1986 until just after the release of Nelson Mandela in 1994 (Brown and Yaffe [2014](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR4)).

The protest culture has also persisted in post-apartheid South Africa. Irrespective of the huge achievements of the post-apartheid government in addressing the socioeconomic inequalities and the provision of basic utilities like waters, electricity, and housing, there is still high poverty and unemployment rates, lack of access to municipal and state services, and elective representatives have become self-seeking. All these contribute to a general nature of protest in South Africa, characterized as the *rebellion of the poor* ( Alexander [2010](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR1)). Protest in South Africa is diverse and undertaken by mostly different urban groupings such as labor unions, the unemployed, poor shack dwellers, students, local communities, and ordinary residents with a largely focus on socioeconomic inequalities and justice (Nyar and Wray [2012](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR25)). Additionally, many social issues around gender abuse and violence, poor state service delivery, access to health services, land and housing, water, electricity, sanitation/waste, and affordable education have been some of the drivers of protest actions.

## Limitations and Criticisms of Protest

While evidence abounds in many countries about how protest actions have drawn attention and awareness to social issues, and how authorities have reacted by addressing protesters’ concerns at local and national levels, there are challenges, limitations, and questions regarding the efficacy of protest. There is the criticism that beyond visible demonstration of discontent, protests do not achieve much change. As Heller ([2017](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR14)) cautions, “protest is fine for digging in your heals. But work for change needs to be pragmatic and up to date”. Heller provides practical cases to question the effectiveness of protest: first, the 2003 global protest against American prospective war in Iraq didn’t stop the invasion of Iraq; about a decade after Occupy Wall Street protest, no US policies have changed as a result of the protest; in spite of the active Black Lives Matter protests, a majority of the law-enforcement officers were not indicted, of those that were, three were found guilty and only one to date has received a prison sentence; and the international Women’s March following Donald Trump’s election did not stop the inception of the new administration (Heller [2017](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR14)).

Another criticism is that protests are not long-lasting or consistent tool of social change. They are ephemeral in nature, and as such they do not leave lasting impression, rather they are fleeting and ritualistic. Srnicek and Williams ([2016](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR39)) note that protest rise easily rapidly through mass mobilization of large people and then fade away to be replaced with a sense of apathy and another protest. They argue that protests have become a symbolic theatrical narrative with people and the police playing their respective roles. Similar criticism also follows online activism, which is considered a low involvement form of protest. *Slacktivism* describes the low-involvement trend of people protesting or supporting a cause online, it is criticized for being a culture that creates a feel-good feeling of being an activist through the clicking of a mouse rather than the hard and arduous work of physically getting involved through education, lobbying, negotiation, mobilizing, and planning. Although such online action tends to boost the morale of those actively participating in a protest and it has huge value in promoting a cause, being able to “like,” “share,” and “tweet” support for a cause is considered a low-cost involvement with an imagined sense of active engagement.

Another challenge to the use of protest for social change is the occurrence of violence. The destruction of public infrastructure and private properties during protest tends to distract from the genuine discontent that motivated the protest. While the use of violence through destruction of certain public infrastructure and objectionable artifact has been used effectively in pursuit of social change, the sight of protesters throwing bricks, shattering windows, setting public buildings such as libraries and schools on fire have created an image of protesters as unruly mob. But violence is not only perpetrated by protesters, but security forces’ also unabashed use of violence in order to manage protest often tends to instigate violence response. Police use of violence create a huge challenge to protest actions and reflect the high handedness nature of the use of state power ranging from close range pepper spraying of students who refused to move during protest action in California, USA, to the sad and disturbing use of live ammunition against striking miners in South Africa killing 34 mineworkers and leaving 78 seriously injured.

State restriction could also be a challenge to the use of protest for change. Through legislative mechanisms, policies and regulatory frameworks states have developed guidelines to manage protest. These guidelines range from the process requesting permission to protest to requiring adherence to guidelines on what is and not permissible in protests. Take the Regulation of Gatherings Act in South Africa as an example, as a regulatory framework, this Act undeniably locates power to the state to manage protest actions. This generates genuine opposition that the state may use its power not only to avoid violent protest but also to determine the shape of and how people protest. For instance, Chapter 3 section 8 (7) of the Act states: “No person present shall at any gathering or demonstration wear a disguise or mask or any other apparel or item which obscures his facial features and prevents his identification.” The state also has the power to impose limitations on the rights of assembly and to protest in cases of public security and use of violence. But state restrictions are equally attempts to balance citizens’ rights to protest with national security, public order, health and safety, and the right of no protesting citizens.

## Theoretical Approaches to Protest as Communication for Social Change

The Frustration/Aggression theory provides the theoretical underpinning for this research. In 1939, John Dollard and colleagues established the frustration-aggression theory, which was later refined by Berkowitz and Aubrey (1962). It appears to be the most typical explanation for violent criminal behavior, as well as related behaviours such as social unrest and disturbances, which may be caused by a lack of demands being met (Ugwuoke, cited in Odoma and Akor, 2019). Frustration, defined as the state that arises when circumstances interfere with a goal-response, typically leads to aggression. Aggression, according to this notion, is the outcome of a person's attempts to achieve a certain goal being blocked or frustrated. It goes on to say that when the source of the dissatisfaction cannot be confronted, the violence is directed at an innocent target. The responsibility of every government is to provide the enabling social, economic and political environment for people to get by in life. In many cases, such enabling environment hardly exists. For example, every year, Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions churn out hundreds of thousands of graduates. Many of these graduates have little or no prospects of securing paid employment in the already saturated Nigerian labour market (Odoma & Akor, 2019). What is more, many poor and vulnerable people are confronted with existential challenges. Faced with such bleak future, the natural tendency is for such people to become frustrated. This probably explains why since Nigeria’s return to civil rule in 1999, the country has witnessed a rise in the incidences of civil unrest, religious, ethnic and communal conflicts with devastating impact on human lives and property. Furthermore, insecurity has led to over 70,000 deaths in Nigeria between 2012 and 2020. The activities of the Boko Haram insurgents, Independent Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Militants and more recently, the #EndSARs protests have serious implications on Nigeria’s socioeconomic development. The foregoing disturbances may not be unconnected with bottled up anger and frustration.

The relevance of the frustration-aggression theory derives from the thesis that the triggers of social unrest in Nigeria such as poverty, police brutality, insecurity, marginalization, etc. appear to be the by-products of various frustrations encountered by many Nigerians, particularly the youth and the poor, in their socio-cultural, economic and political environments. Social unrests and their spinoff impact on Nigeria’s socio-economic development can be explained as the outpouring of accumulated anger, frustration and grievances motivated by trust deficit between the citizenry and the government, unemployment, poverty and general deprivation.

### Peaceful Assembly

Peaceful Assembly is global framework that describes the rights of citizens to protest. Underlining the concept of peaceful assembly is *freedom of assembly*, which provides legislative consent for citizens’ right to protest. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association is a fundamental human right that is important in highlighting the power of citizens to participate collectively in shaping opinions, ideas, and processes in society. This concept is enshrined in the human rights declaration and constitutional framework of many states. For example, the article 20 (1) of the UN Declaration of Human Rights captures this right, and “the right of the people peaceably to assemble” is included in the First Amendment of the constitution of the United States. In the South African context, Section 17 of the Bill of Rights makes it explicitly clear: “Everyone has the right, peacefully and unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions.”

This right to assembly offers three essential qualities for democracies. First, it helps create space for collective politics. A collective voice has a higher chance of getting its message across than a singular voice, especially in systems where power is concentrated in few hands. Second, it permits citizen to meet and deliberate, which allows citizens to share ideas and talk to one another. Third, this right is essential for those who feel that their demands are not being given serious consideration by the state or institutional authorities (Woolman [1998](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR45)). In addition to the constitutional framework, states may develop regulatory framework for protest. The regulation usually provides conditions and processes for organizing protest and the power of the state, in the most extreme cases, to prohibit a gathering.

Three important theoretical concepts shape the legislative framework of protest actions: assembly, association, and gathering. While gathering and assembly connote similar meaning, there is a difference between freedom of assembly and freedom of association. While freedom of assembly guarantees freedom to protest in public spaces, freedom of association provides the right to join a labor union, clubs, societies, group of people to assembly, or meet with people. As a result, the freedom of association makes the freedom of assembly more effective.

### Protest as Communication

*Protest is communication*. This assertion is based on the empirical analysis that protest is a tool for communicating grievances and contestation. It is a visible way of communicating support or opposition to certain ideology or practice. Protest as communication can be analyzed from two perspectives. One, as already explained, protest is inherently a communication about certain grievance. Two, protest actions utilize various tools and genres of communication and forms of media in communicating discontent and grievance. *Protest is performance.* The performance may be action of a single person or collective action of individuals. As Ratliff and Hall ([2014](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR29)) note, “protesters, as actors, take the world stage as protagonist (or antagonists, given one’s point of view) in performative dialectics, collectively struggling to control the framing of issues and opponents to foment social change, retain challenged power structures, and/or achieve social justice” (p. 270). As performance, *protest is an “art”* in two ways. Protest utilizes artistic practices, such as street drama, paintings, graphics, images, and many forms of artistic displays. Also, protest is metaphorically an art form that involves a skillful and strategic performance that uses various sensory techniques to invoke emotions for social change (Ratliff and Hall [2014](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR29)).

The use of *music for protest* is a strong example of how protest can invoke people’s emotion to “get up, stand up, stand up for your rights!”. As Ruhlig ([2016](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR32)) notes, “songs are more than intellectual stimulating texts; they help to create *emotions* stimulating atmosphere of community and solidarity that very often draws on the power of utopia and stimulates people to dream” (p. 60). Globally, songs have been used in protest actions. Protest and socio-political songs aided African-Americans in the trajectory of historical fights for freedom (Trigg [2010](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR42)). Freedom songs are historical in the USA from the abolitionist era to civil rights period. Freedom songs also known as struggle songs in South Africa are a form of oral arts that are nonfictitious but also performative in nature. They are a form of resistance and persuasion; they are used to resist the injustice of the apartheid system, as a method of self-persuasion, and to rouse others to grow indignant against an unjust system that oppressed them (Le Roux-Kemp [2014](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR19)). Movement, procession, theater, sacred and religious performances, public speeches, and many symbolic and cultural activities are all elements of performativity and communicative practices that are used in protests.

*Forms of communication media are tools of protest.* Protesters use various forms of communication media and technologies such as broadcast and print media (community media, pamphlets, banners, posters, etc.). The revolution in digital technologies has provided new and advanced ways of using information and communication technologies for protest in two ways: one, ICT tools, such as mobile phones, the internet, social media and web platforms, are critical for coordinating protest actions. Two, these are actual spaces of protest actions, exemplified by virtual/online protest and social media activism.

### Participation, Power, and Social Change

Participation is an essential theoretical concept relevant to analysis of protest. In democracies, participation is core to citizens’ involvement in shaping the functioning of the political system. The theory of participatory democracy reveals that the representative institutions at the national level are not sufficient for effective democratic system; as such, citizen’s participation in all levels is necessary. As Pateman ([1970](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR26)) notes, for a democratic polity to exist and function, it is paramount for a participatory society to exist. A participatory society is where citizens can participate in decision-making process at macro- and microlevels of society and be able to communicate and exercise their opinions and ideas. Pateman notes that if individuals are to exercise maximum control over their lives and their environment then authority structures must be organized in a way that individuals can participate in decision-making. Jensen et al. ([2012](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR17)) distinguish two forms of political participation: one is representative political participation exemplified by voting and political party activities and the other is extra-representative political participation such as active involvement in activism. Bean ([1991](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR2)) had equally asserted that mass political participation may also take the form of political protest.

*Protest is participation.* It is a form of participation that reflects the actions of individuals in speaking out about or against ideals and processes that have influence in shaping their well-being. It is a form of social involvement in decision-making about principles that shape their lives as citizens. Carpentier ([2011](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR7)) identifies minimalist and maximalist forms of political participation. While minimalist form tends to focus on the role of citizen to participate in electoral processes of representative delegation of power, maximalist participation is not limited to sphere of election of representatives, it is a broader and continuous form of participation. This resonates with Thomas’ ([1994](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR40)) macro participation (relating to national political spheres of a nation) and micro participation (relating to local spheres of school, family, workplace, religious formations, and local community). Carpentier ([2012](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR8)) also notes the essence of power in participation, this highlights the distribution of power in society and the power to include or exclude in decision-making. Power is exhibited in the complexities of the dominant political authority organs and in the counter-power of resistance by ordinary citizens (such as in protest).

The concept of participation and its relevance for social change influences the analytical and practical processes of communication for development and social change. The participatory model of development and social change emphasizes the liberating ideology that people should be active agents in decisions and processes for social change that impact their lives, that development involves the active “self” and strategies that stimulate people for action at the grassroots local level rather than a top-down, national, international dictates of what social change means to local agent. This analysis is dominant in the participatory model of development and social change; it is a counter discourse of a bottom-up approach rather than the top-down modernization paradigm of early development discourses and processes (Servaes [1999](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR34); Huesca [2008](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR15)).

*Power* is the over-arching concept in the analytical discourse of participation and social change. To understand the concept of power, as Foucault ([1982](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR12)) suggests, is to comprehend power relations in society. For Foucault, to understand power, and power relations in society, it requires taking forms of resistance against different forms of authority, a form of antagonism to different forms of power. So, “in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations” (Foucault [1982](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8_132-1#ref-CR12), p. 780). For instance, to understand an aspect of the feminist protest will be to question (an opposition to) the power of men over women. Protest is often a form of resistance and oppositional strategies that highlights the power of the individual to participate in society. It provides voice to the people. *Protest is voice as power and participation. “*Voice” is multidimensional. Voice is power to project opinion; it is visibility; it is recognition and communication.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, protest action is centered as a global strategy in the pursuit of development and social change. In the scholarship of communication for development and social change, the use of protest does not feature prominently as a communication tool. The attempt here is to assert protest as communication, and more importantly, to locate protest and mass mobilization as relevant components of communication tools for development and social change.

Protest is a very old approach to show discontent, but it has often been limited to the political sphere. Asserting protest as communication helps to situate it as a viable way, not only to show discontent, but a strategy of giving visibility to causes, promoting certain ideals, drawing attention to various social challenges to the human condition, and demanding that sites of power pay attention. The inherent characteristics of protest, as visible manifestation of citizens’ constitutional right to assembly, as communication, as empowering form of collective action and participation, as grassroots bottom-up mechanism for advocating for change, and a form of citizen’s power to demand change, make protest a critical tool of communication for development and social change. While acknowledging challenges and limitations of protest actions, there are many instances where protests have yielded results, some immediate and others after long and persistent actions. These results are evidenced in political decisions, economic actions, and improvement to citizens’ welfare ranging from changes in political order, access to health services to affordable access to education.

But success of protest action tends to be influenced by political and economic atmosphere. Although they are conditions for protest actions, entrenched state political position in politically repressive regimes and the seemingly embedded nature of neoliberal economic agenda and the naturalized attitude towards exploitative capitalism tend to diminish the success of protest actions. Irrespectively, protest allow members of communities at macro- and microlevels to mobilize for collective action, create visibility for their grievances, demand responses, provoke behavioral change, and request policy formulation in pursuit of a better well-being. All these describe the essence of communication for development and social change.

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