

#EndBadGovernment Vs #SayNoToProtest: The Multimodality of the *Days Of Rage* Online Protests and Counter-Protests in Nigeria

Dubamo Tomere

Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

d.tomere@acu.edu.ng

and

Damilola AJAKAYE

Federal University of Kashere, Gombe

olamidelouis@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper undertakes a multimodal textual analysis of protests and counter-protests in Nigeria. As viable instruments for forcing difficult conversations, protests have a recurrent history in Nigeria with varying degrees of impact and had thus attracted studied attention from multidisciplinary strands. However, sparse focus is given the synergic force of both protests and counter-protests as strategic means of enforcing ideologically-motivated multimodal acts. This study, therefore, explores the multimodal, contextual and ideological features that characterise the construction of the *Days of Rage* protests and counter-protests in Nigeria. Through the theoretical anchorage of aspects of Kress and Leeuwen's (1996; 2006) Visual Grammar, thirty (30) protest and counter-protest images were purposively selected from August 1 to August 10, 2024 which come under the harsh tag #EndBadGovernmentInNigeria and #SayNoToProtest with the centralizing theme, *The Days of Rage*. The study revealed that both protest and counter-protest are entrenched in the contexts of anti/pro-people policy and national prevalence of hardship, (in)security, and corruption. Using the representational and compositional indices of participants, process, circumstance, informational value, salience and framing, these contexts were linked to the ideological frames of solidarism, and ingroup/outgroup polarisation among the protesters and counter-protesters. The contextual and ideological significations are foregrounded through, re-semioticisation of context of protest connected to policy divergence, lexicalized salience through capitalisation, and colour embossing to enact ideological informational value. Protest and counter-protests, in their construct, are constrained by the socio-economic and political triggers of their national enclave and are consequently underlined by connected ideologies that are contextually re-semioticised.

Keywords: Counter-protest, Days of Rage, Re-semioticisation, The Days of Rage,
#EndBadGovernment, #SayNoToProtest

1. Introduction

Many nations of the world are currently grappling with serious socio-economic and political crises, which invariably have effects on the lives of their people. In consequence, people react to these realities by seeking change or reform that would cushion the pangs of such harsh realities. One of the means of forcing the government to respond to these concerns is protest. Protests are considered viable for forcing difficult conversations to enact social change (Gallagher, Reagan, Danforth, and Dodds, 2017). In their composition and organisation, protests rely maximally on the multimodal strength of varied signification and modes with which grievances are registered. Such multimodally constructed conversations seeking to enforce social, political and economic change have come under different names in the history of Nigeria. Five notable ones that have left indelible prints in the annals of Nigeria's history are the Abba Women Riot of 1929, the Enugu Coal Miners' Strike in 1949, the Ali Must Go Protest in 1978, Occupy Nigeria in 2012, and the EndSARS Protest in 2020 (Pulse News, 2024). All these protests, although entertained to various degrees of dissenting voices, did not experience the kind of counter-protest that the *Days of Rage* protest of 2024 produced under the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Scholarly works on protests in Nigeria (Agbedo, 2012; Idiagbon, 2015; Asogwa, Edeh, Ajah, Omeh, Asadu, Ogbuabor, Ngwu, 2021; David-Ojukwu, Orabueze, and Okoye-Ugwu, 2021) have diversely interrogated perspectives, including multimodality but with no sustained interest in protests and their counter-voices. Studies on counter-protests (Gallagher, Reagan, Danforth, Dodds, 2017; Lee, 2018; Inata, 2019; Dandolov, 2020), are minimally recorded in Nigeria, with the only available references are works from outside Nigeria, devoted to addressing organisational diversification, the divergent discourses characterising them and the original protest, and the strategies of separating protesters and counter-protesters. These are, however, mostly sociological studies, paying sparse attention to the multimodal construction of these protests and counter-protests. This current study, therefore, undertakes a multimodal approach to the determination of how online protests and counter-protests are constructed in Nigeria, using the example of the recent *Days of Rage* protest.

2. Context, Protests and the Nigerian State

Various forms of self or group expression of intent and clamour for change take the form of protest, and these acts are often influenced by various reasons. Ryan, Andrew et al. (2016) noted that protest movements have a long history of forcing difficult conversations to enact social change, and the increasing prominence of social media has allowed these conversations to be shaped in new and complex ways. The global past and current events of the history of protest represent collective efforts to agitate for change in the social, political, economic, and religious issues that affect the well-being of the people (Abang & Akpan, 2021).

Right from the primitive days, protest has been a tool used by people to express their feelings in situations that affect the state of human comfort in whatever way and to speak against the government policies that are inimical to the lives of the people. As Idiagbon (2014) identifies, protests can take the form of petitions, boycotts, and physical public displays like demonstrations and civil disobedience. In the case of Nigeria, protest serves to contest the policies and acts of institutions to facilitate social change; however, it is seldom used as a means to make fresh requests.

In Nigeria, five notable protests that have had enduring consequences in the history of the nation include the Abba Women Riot of 1929, the Enugu Coal Miners' Strike in 1949, the Ali Must Go Protest in 1978, Occupy Nigeria in 2012, and the EndSARS Protest in 2020 (Pulse News, 2024). The violent rallies have shown a campaign against the British government's tax policies on women, overdue salary payments of miners, hikes in students' fees, fuel subsidy elimination, and police brutality, among others. Other demonstrations that emerged include the Niger Delta protest in the 1990s, protesting the unfairness and environmental harm caused by major foreign multinational firms' oil extraction but receiving no recompense from the government to lessen the damage. Another occurred following the 1993 general election when General Babangida Junta nullified the June 12 presidential elections on June 26, 1993, which led to the NLC's Central Working Committee meeting in Lagos on June 28. Furthermore, protests in most Nigerian institutions and colleges as a consequence of disagreement between the federal government and academic unions; student/management issues when such protests finish violently and modify academic sessions (Tayo, 2006).

Recently, Nigeria's socio-political landscape, despite its wealth and natural resource abundance, continues to struggle with sustainable development that adequately supports citizen survival and societal growth, resulting in the #ENDBADGOVERNANCE protest. Chrisman (1984) defines development as societal growth that aims to enhance people's well-being through collaborative efforts including a wide range of sectors, corporations, and other social groupings. While economic growth is an essential component of development, it is necessary to consider that social, political, and technological factors all have a role in the development of the nation, which is the struggle of the protest participants. The basics of the struggle, such as health care, education, housing, and other essential services, are part of what Naomi (1995) considers to be standard definitions of development when enhancing the community's individual and communal well-being (Naomi, *ibid.*).

The fundamental philosophy, according to Mimiko, (1998) underlying the recurrent demonstrations in Nigeria is inadequate leadership ability, typified by a lack of dedication to advancement and empathy among leaders, accentuated by pervasive corruption and indiscipline. In the above purview, the government in Nigeria as time passes is run by corrupt officials who have turned the collective treasury into a tool for self-profit accumulation rather than a means to advance the people's interests in the hands of a government that has been infiltrated by organised crime; even the best-laid plans will fall short of their full potential (Mimiko, 1998). Nonetheless, no country can separate its people's ongoing protests from the backdrop of its prevailing socio-economic and political realities. Nigeria's high unemployment rate has created social, political, economic, psychological, and security challenges that have exacerbated poverty and raised crime rates. As a result, the country's citizens have taken to the streets to express their struggle for survival, which is why the protest theme for 2024 is *Days of Rage*.

3. The Counter-Protest Politics in Nigeria

The End Bad Governance protests, popularly referred to by the hashtag #ENDBADGOVERNANCE, are a mass movement protest that took place in Nigeria from August 1 to August 10, 2024. The protests were sparked by the country's recent economic hardship, which resulted from the removal of fuel subsidies, the devaluation of the naira, an increase in electricity tariffs, and high food prices. This protest served as a call to action regarding President Bola Ahmed

Tinubu's administration's attempts to alleviate the country's economic hardships. During the demonstration, a unique type of counter-protest hashtag #SAYNOTOPROTEST was observed to counterbalance the impact of the initial protest #ENDBADGOVERNANCE of the crippling hardship caused by government policy, where the cost of living is becoming unaffordable for the citizens who then took their complaints to the streets.

In the history of Nigeria, counter-protests have never been organised to alter the mobilisation of the traditional collective action to drive the government to the negotiation table to get concessions. Counter-protests are direct actions that take place in relative proximity to a protest that is held for an opposing cause (Dandolov, 2020). However, a counter-protest assumed to be sponsored by the government against opposition demonstrators emerged to indicate their support for the government and policies that also constitute the focus of the original protest. In certain advanced nations, counter-protest organisations are employed to restrict the amount of resources available for disruptive behaviour by investing in their organisational growth (Inata, 2019).

The counter-protesters took over the mass mobilisation of the original protesters on the street who were advocating for the reversal of President Bola Tinubu's government's economic reforms, forcing the Nigerian security services to put an end to the violent attacks. But some of the government representatives, including President Tinubu, have tried to dissuade the protesters by providing financial support to the youth who initiated the movement with the multimodal usage of displaying placards and banners with slogans such as Enough is Enough, Stop Anti-Masses Policies, Hardship is Unbearable, and so on while disrupting traffic and blocking key roadways. During the nationwide #ENDBADGOVERNANCE demonstration, which called for an end to economic misery, several Nigerians were seen in Kano waving the Russian flag during the march. This was deemed treasonous by the protest organisers (The Cable, 2024).

As part of the measure to dissuade the original protest, Odeniyi (2024) reported that some demonstrators against the #ENDBADGOVERNANCE protest arrived at the National Stadium in Abuja in five coaster buses (The Punch, 2024). One of the counter-protesters claimed that he wasn't aware he was brought for a counter-protest, which is part of the administration's political gimmick. The counter-protest was such a manipulation skill used by the government to dissuade the effect of the original protest as it would affect the daily GDP of the country. The ingenuine

concern of the political class is heightened by the act of mobilising and deceiving the counter-protesters, both literate and illiterates, to carry banners and placards inscribing #Saynotoprotest, which has become an excuse for incompetence by the Tinubu-led administration. Some of the ploys by some state party leaders accounted for by the counter-protesters were the palliatives given in cash to boycott the demands of the people from the #Endbadgovernance in Nigeria protest—a pursuit of good governance that should be focused on encouraging trustworthy and competent administration.

In many parts of the world, protesters communicate their plights through various semiotic resources including language, image, music, gesture and architecture which integrate across sensory modalities such as visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic in multimodal texts, discourses and events (O’Halloran and Smith, 2011, p. 2). Multimodal discourse analysis helps the understanding of the semiotic resources or modes deployed by both protesters and counter-protesters during the *Days of Rage* campaigns to register the thematic and ideological preoccupation of the actions and counter-actions. Essentially, multimodality entails a “unique semiotic system that allows us to go beyond superficial distinctions (such as media or format) to a more complex understanding of how a mode of expression affects the contextualized exchange of meaning(s) (Snyder, 2014). It is thus conceivable because the protest and counter-protest culture in Nigeria is a highly contextualised one which needs closer investigation.

4. Statement of the Problem

Extant studies on protests have investigated how the sociopolitical context influences citizens’ political participation, describing how the economic, political institution and cultural context shape the contextualisation of protests and counter-protests in Nigeria (Dandolov, 2020; Oyebode, 2022; Abang, et al., 2021).

From the linguistic point of view, Idiagbon (2014) studies the general highlights that are central to communication in the success of any form of protest. The study examines language and images and identifies the inter-semiotic and semantic coherence in this complementary multimodal mode, and in turn the discourse type essentially reveals how the fusion of linguistic expressions and the accompanying paralinguistic cues in forms of images and symbols can effectively be employed to

pass a message. This current study is however different in that it pays attention to the counter-protests deployment of multimodal features of meaning construction in the *Days of Rage*.

On their part, studies on counter-protests (Gallagher, Reagan, Danforth, Dodds, 2017; Lee, 2018; Inata, 2019; Dandolov, 2020) have mainly been on how organizational infrastructure influences the impact of protest groups' threats by lowering the probability that a counter-protest will offset the impact of the original protest (Inata, 2019), the divergent discourses characterising protests and counter-protests, and the strategies of separating protesters and counter-protesters. These are, however, mostly sociological studies that pay less attention to the multimodal construction of these protests and counter-protests to tease out the contextual and ideological affordances underlying the demonstrations. This current paper seeks to, therefore, investigate online protests and counter-protests semiotic construct in Nigeria, using the example of the recent *Days of Rage* protest.

5. Extant Works on Protest in Nigeria

Protest discourse in the Nigerian scholarship is considerably large and complex because of the influencing sociocultural and political nuances. The papers central to the core focus of this chapter are, however, unequal in representation, as works on counter-protest in Nigeria are relatively few compared with those on protest. The scholarly works on protest (David-Ojukwu, Orabueze, and Okoye-Ugwu, 2021; Asogwa, Edeh, Ajah, Omeh, Asadu, Ogbuabor, Ngwu, 2021; Okesola and Oyeboode, 2023) have predominantly examined some of the prominent violent demonstrations in Nigeria from different analytical perspectives. David-Ojukwu, Orabueze, and Okoye-Ugwu (2021), for instance, explored transitivity and violence in #EndSars discourse to pin down the participants of the protests and the circumstances constraining those movements within the theoretical scope of Halliday and Mattiessen's transitivity model complemented with Kress and Leeuwen's image theory. Issues of human rights preoccupied the study of Asogwa, Edeh, Ajah, Omeh, Asadu, Ogbuabor, Ngwu (2021); Okesola and Oyeboode (2023), and the role of the state in the EndSars protest. The authors deployed the liberal and radical state conceptualisation mechanism in terms of theoretical anchorage, which makes the study more sociological than the currently proposed efforts. For Okesola and Oyeboode (2023), multimodality, which forms the crux of our analytical focus, was engaged in interrogating appraisal choices in selected EndSars civil protest-related memes in Nigeria. What is striking about this study is the recency and topicalization

of the varying appraisal choices that characterize the engagement of the “*Soro Soko*” [speak up] movement. They, however, did not consider the online protests and counter-protests construct, which were not as conspicuous as they are recorded in the #EndBadGovernment vs. #SayNoToProtest campaigns, also called *Days of Rage*, as this current study is detailed to investigate through the prisms of multimodality. To realise this goal, the objectives outlined are to: examine the discourse issues and contexts underlying the *Days of Rage* protest and counter-protest; examine the multimodal and ideological features that characterise the construction of the issues and contexts in the protests and counter-protests; and determine the sociocultural implication of these protests and counter-protests for the protest culture and national unity in Nigeria.

6. Methodology

Thirty (30) online protests and counter-protest posters, purposively selected from Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter, from August 1 to 10, which define the *Days of Rage* protest constitute the data for the study. These posters were divided into two categories, comprising 15 protest and counter-protest posters each. The study adopts Kress and Leeuwen’s (1996; 2006) multimodal discourse analysis informed by Halliday’s (1994) metafunction of language. Kress and Leeuwen’s (1996; 2006) is targeted at explicating the metafunction of discourse as represented in Figure 1:

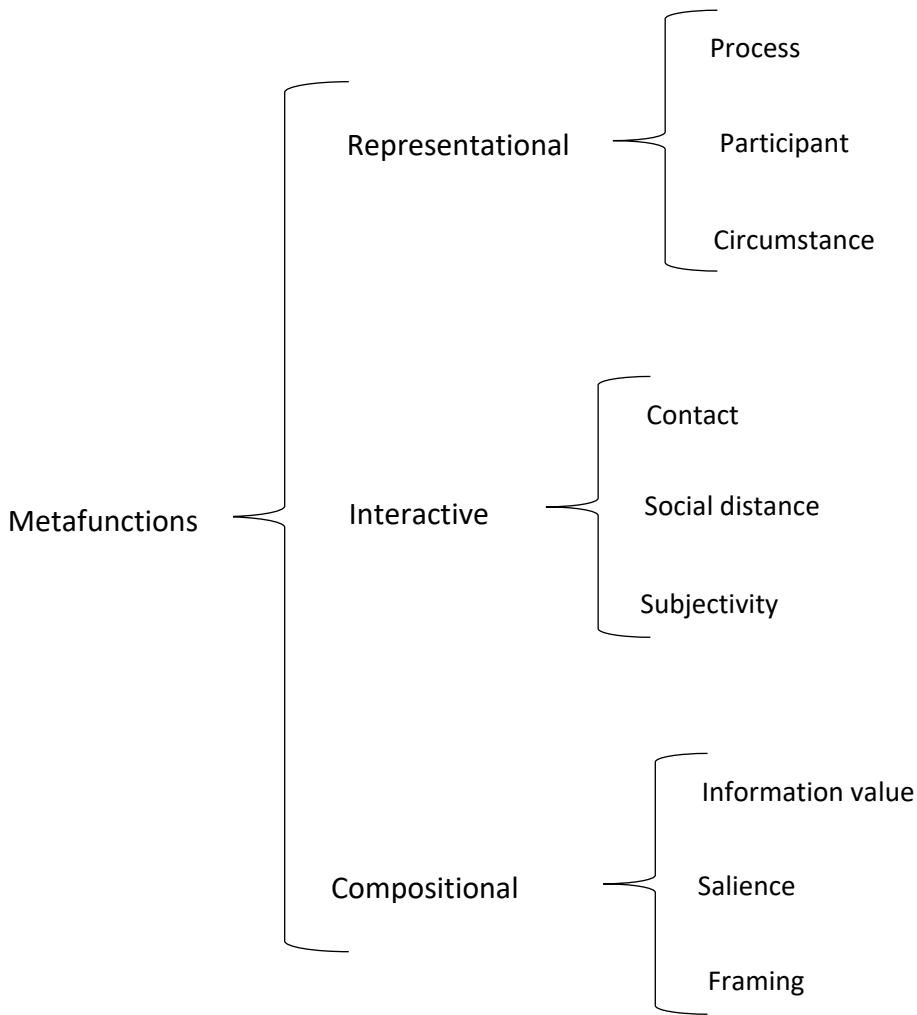


Figure 1: Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) metafunctional framework (Feng and Espindola, 2013)

The model in Figure 1 explains the importance of semiotic resources like visual images and language in serving the metafunctions of the representation of the experiential world in evincing representational meaning; participants' interaction represented in visual design and its viewers depicting the interactional meaning; and the compositional structuring of visual resources in enacting compositional meaning. Relying on the above model, this study deploys the representational, and compositional functions in analysing the selected posters as they provide sufficient tools for the interpretation of the selected protest and counter-protest posters. These adopted two metafunctions technically evoke the Hallidayian ideational and textual functions of the clause. In their model of visual grammar, Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) compositional meaning is characterised by three areas of focus, namely information value, salience and framing.

Information value concerns where the sign element is placed. Possible areas of placement include horizontal position between left and right; vertical positions connecting top-bottom and centre-margin. The left position is usually the given information (token) while the right depicts the new information (value) (see, Pramarta, 2021). Saliency has to do with prominence. It is also determined by whether the information is foregrounded or backgrounded, and it is indexed by relative size, and differences in colour sharpness. Framing refers to the dividing lines that explicitly or implicitly connect the images projected. All these contribute to the ideological orientation which underscores the meaning generated from the posters.

The representational metafunction entails the representation of the experiential world. In the sense it is captured by the systemic functional grammar, according to Liu (2019) language should be able to “represent[s] and construct[s] our perception of reality in the form of ‘goings-on’ or processes of various types, which incorporate different categories of participants (e.g. actors, goals, receivers, sensors, attributes)” In analysing images, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) divide representational meaning into two main categories of processes: narrative and conceptual. Our analysis will focus on these basic principles as evinced by the protest and counter-protest images and posters.

7. Analysis

The analysis takes a three-fold structure that first discusses the predominant issues contained in the posters and their enforcing contexts. The second fold unravels the multimodal features underlining the construction of the protest and counter-protest, while the third and final phase of the analysis explores the sociocultural (ideological) implications of the protest and counter-protest posters of *Days of Rage* protest. However, these are systemically fused into one straight analysis as presented below.

Common to both online protest and their counter-protest are issues bordering on the socio-political and economic reality of the Nigerian State. As implicated in the verbal form projected in the title of the protest, *Day of Rage*, the protest is an outburst or challenging reaction to the frustration and hardship the citizens are faced with. These posters therefore embed in them different shades of context-driven issues that orchestrate the ongoing uprising. Conversely, the counter-posts are also driven by issue-based rage in response to the protests, drawing their contexts. Considering the twin

approach to analysing issues projected in both the protests and counter-protests, we structure the analysis by starting with the context-driven issues in the Days of Rage from the analytical lenses of multimodality.

7.1.Hunger, hardship, and policy controversy in *Days of Rage*'s protests and counter-protests

The issues of hunger and policy controversy within the social and economic contexts pervade the Days of Rage protests. In the representation, both the protest and counter-protest posters acknowledge the hardship in the Nigerian state but disagree on the medium of and manner of expressing this experience. It naturally evokes ideological divides between propagandist and solidarist tendencies where protesters make claims in defence of their acts while counter-protesters also launch counter-claims in defence of their actions. Texts 1-3 exemplify these eclectic demonstrations.



TEXT 1: Protest highlighting hardship and anti-people policies

The semiotic resources or modes deployed in the multimodal construction of governmental and anti-people policies in the protest come in the form of organised images. From the compositional angle, the information value is set up in positioning of the visual modes from the left side to systematically highlight the protesters' disposition to government policies, a referential index to a particular policy and the impact on the people which serves as the old information and progresses to the specific of fuel subject (centred as the salience) and proceeds to the new informational value of "unbearable hardship". In Text 1, there is the image of two men and one woman carrying cardboards, while the woman stands in the middle. Their proxemics and the strategic standing postures as well as the order and messages in the linguistic resources displayed in the cardboard depict a fully organised text loaded with deep semantic import. For instance, the foregrounded cardboard presents the text "STOP ANTI-MASSSES POLICY, WE ARE NOT SLAVES" as receiving salience concerning the sharpness of the wine colour and the font size of the lettering. This imperative construction is directed at the government policy that put the masses in the spot of people with no rights – slaves. The progressive lettering of the message also emphasises the protester's demand for an end to such anti-masses policy which was not mentioned. With a frowned facial expression, suggesting the pain and discomfort of the masses, the man faces the woman who also held up her cardboard with the inscription "FUEL SUBSIDY MUST BE BACK". The woman's message invariably complements and validates the linguistic information of the first man about policy.

Fuel subsidy is thematised as the government's policy aimed at reducing the cost burden of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) on the people by paying for a part of the product's importation cost to minimise the cost of the product. On the day of his inauguration, Nigeria's President Ahmed Tinubu announced the removal of the subsidy, this announcement grounded a lot of things as the price of fuel skyrocketed, consequently leading to an exponential rise in the prices of goods and services. It is on this common ground that the semiotic resources of the above photo of This Day News is technically built. The woman's clamour for bringing for back the fuel subsidy abolished by the President is connected to the third man's visual information couched in the linguistic resources "#HARDSHIP IS UNBEARABLE#". The protester also brings salience to the text by carefully selecting the choice of his visual embossing of the letters. Both HARDSHIP and UNBEARABLE are printed or written in red which indexes the danger implicated in the message.

His outfit also iconises the comradeship gait by the use of the black spectacle which is suggestive of the time/weather of the protest and the grievousness of the issue being presented. In addition, all three cardboards employ capitalisation in lexicalising their linguistic mode. This is to amplify the seriousness of their demands as well as the essence of the protest which is against governmental policy and its impact on the people.

Two significant points of counter-protests are identified and explicated in the following Texts 2&3. While one admits to the hunger in the country but appeals for a no-protest solution, the other projects governmental policies that are pro-people. These are exemplified below.



TEXT 2: Counter-protest against protest

The poster above is a counter-protest launched against the #EndBadGovernance protest – a seemingly direct counter to the earlier protest poster in Text 1. In the visual mode credited to the

referent “Northern Youth Patriotic Forum of Nigeria”, the protester deploys informational value through a cardboard and red-coloured marker to present the declarative construction in the linguistic resource “We Know There is Hunger But Protest Is Not The Solution”. First, the mental process enacted through the choice “know”, validates the fact that both protesting sides agree on the looming hunger in the country. Where they are however divided is the mode of registering this plight – protest, particularly violent protest.

In addition, the linguistic mode overtly depicts a graphological salience that emphasizes two main clauses, in which the first main clause is constructed in small initial letters (We know that there is hunger...) while the second part receives prominence through the use of initial capital letters (But Protest Is Not The Solution). This implies that emphasis is placed on discountenancing the move for protest rather than the core issue of hunger is perfunctorily acknowledged. In the same breath, the counter-protest is regionalized through the northern voice under the auspices of the Northern Youth Patriotic Forum of Nigeria. This differs from the #endbadgovernance protest earlier considered which was not linked to any region of the country. A critical examination of this multimodal expression denotes that the counter-protest is a matter of patriotism to the Nigerian government and not driven by the plight of the hungry masses; hence, the resorting to ideological de-emphasizing of the discourse of hunger and the amplification of the no-protest call in the visual representation.



TEXT 3: Counter-protest, highlighting positive governmental, pro-people-oriented policies

The distribution of the information value in Text 3 places an image of the President of Nigeria as the central force of the counter-protest, which forges out the solidarity ideology. The counter-protesters have also positioned the ideal contributions (LGA autonomy, increased minimum wage and peace in Niger Delta) of the president and the real act of support he now enjoys from them (we stand with Jagaban). In this visual mode, three main pro-people-oriented policies/achievements have been thematised in the lexicalised linguistic codes: LGA AUTONOMY, INCREASED MINIMUM WAGE, and PEACE IN NIGER DELTA, which receive more salience by their upper text-top axis-placement. This triadic semiotic representation of the ASIWAJU BOLA AHMED TINUBU's governance is a direct response to the critics of the Presidency. The image is symbolically foregrounded by the Nigerian colour (green) to show hope,

loyalty and solidarist ideology, which is further reinforced by the linguistic force “we stand with JAGABAN”. The image positioning further centralises the president’s frame as a semiotic salience for the man whose government is targeted by the protests and to which the current counter-protests are launched. The Tinubu government recently endorsed the granting of Local Government Areas (LGAs) their autonomy of operation outside the absolute control of the state government under which they had been reeling for years. This is part of the achievement of the government. The administration also recently increased workers’ minimum wage to #70,000 (seventy-thousand naira) to cushion the impact of subsidy removal and its attendant inflation. In the same vein, the Tinubu-led administration also made changes to the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme in terms of change of personnel, a measure to ensure the peace of the Niger Delta which had been plagued with insurrection over the year. These issues constitute the kernel of the visual mode registered in the counter-protest poster in Text 3. This multimodal representation from the counter-protest again depicts regional solidarity, although unlike that of Text 2, it addresses national issues that bear a similar course to that of Text 1 which floated the issues of policy and hardship. Both the protests and counter-protests have a unifying point of convergence in the multimodal representations; however, the differences in their themes are connected to political and economic ideologies that underscore the spirit behind the protests. In essence, this particular counter-protest is designed to not only respond to the protester’s demands but to also recount the measures the government had put in place to mitigate the harsh effects of its policies, admissibly.

7.2. Discourse issue of (In) security in the *Days of Rage*’s protest and counter-protest

Issues of (in)security concerns evince ideologically-constructed multimodal resources, such that, both protests and counter-protests are constructed in the same premise but with highly re-semiotised contexts. Examples of this representation can be fetched from Texts 4 and 7 which address the multimodal issue of (in) security. In the two data, security is re-semiotised according to the group to which each protesting group belongs. While some of the protesters advocate for the masses’ safety or security, others make a case for the safety of the government’s properties and agencies. It therefore creates a divide in the goal of the protesting parties, resulting in multimodal incoherence and semantic undulation.



TEXT 4: Protest against Insecurity (kidnapping)

The visual mode in Text 4 draws salience on the old information token “Kidnapping is enough” (being placed at the left) and the new information value “#FUEL SUBSIDY MUST BE BACK” (being positioned at the right). The linguistic structure espoused is in the simple but inferentially imperative construction “KIDNAPPING IS ENOUGH” and thus topicalises the issue of insecurity as part of the agenda of the protest. The meaning potentially derived from the visual mode of the woman’s message is ingrained in the fact that the country has had enough of the spate of kidnapping ravaging it. Other protesters can be seen carrying cardboards with different inscriptions projecting other issues but her cardboard is the focus of this current examination as she sits at the centre of the rally. It should be observed that kidnapping protested against is not restricted to a particular region or environment; hence, it is targeted at addressing the general state of insecurity of the nation, especially.

Like a response, Text 5 below also addresses the issue of security and how “violent” protests can endanger the existing security architecture of the country, which the counter-protest group is warning against. Typical of other counter-protests, this is also pro-government ideology, giving

that a generic structure potential of “counter-protest being necessarily pro-government” apparently condemning every oppositional voice.



TEXT 5: Counter-protest against Violent Protest & State Insecurity

Carefully constructed in the visual and linguistic modes as well as multi-layered colours informing the salience of the lexicalised issues, the counter-protest linguistically encodes the message “SAY NO TO VIOLENT PROTESTS” where the act of “saying no” is painted blue signifying “love” while the act of “violent protest” is painted in red colour denoting “danger”. This semiotically implicates the informational value distribution aimed at enforcing the needed prominence. By implication, the counter-protest is inspired by the love for the country to discourage and sensitise people against violent/dangerous protests. Noticeably, the counter-protest here is organised under the aegis of the agency tagged “DEFEND NIGERIA MOVEMENT” a movement whose goal is symbolised by the salience in the clasped fist denoting solidarity. The multimodal construct or issues project eleven (11) linguistic structures that lexicalise the aim and ideology of the counter-protest movement. These are: (i) DEFENDING OUR PEOPLE; (ii) DEFENDING OUR CITIES; (iii) SAY NO TO (iv) VIOLENT PROTESTS; (v) WE SUPPORT PEACEFUL PROTESTS; (vi) PROMOTE A NEW PROGRESSIVE NIGERIA; (vii) DO NOT ATTACK THE POLICE; (viii) DO NOT HARM ANYONE; (ix) STOP SABOTAGING GOOD GOVERNANCE; (x) WE

SUPPORT RESTRUCTURING AND STATE POLICE; (xi) LET'S BE UNITED AGAINST CORRUPTION.

A critical appraisal of these linguistic structures reveals certain ideological motivations of the movement and what they stand for by their act of counter-protest. There are two major semantic imports projected in their eleven linguistic structures. The first import establishes the participants' stance as a movement and what they stand for. Secondly, they warn protesters against the destruction of lives and property. Finally, they appealed to the protesting populace and also advocated for a collective movement. The identity constructed for themselves, as a movement, presents them as defenders of their people and cities, (i-ii), supporters and promoters of peaceful protests and progressive Nigeria, as well as restructuring and State policing (iv, v, & ix). They also sternly warn violent protesters, using imperative linguistic constructions to emphasise the stop to violent protest, attacks on law enforcement agents, and citizens and sabotaging "good" governance (iii, vi, vii & viii). Finally, they issued a call for collective efforts against corruption (x). The linguistic resources deployed in calling for a stop to any act of sabotage against "good" governance and for collaboration in fighting corruption could take some time to decipher. However, the proxemics and positioning depicted in the visual mode reveal a woman in a black shirt and trousers with an electronic device at her back suggesting that she is using a microphone to address people whom she appears to be engaging in her posture and the facial gaze of the men holding the banner. Hence, it supports the advocacy role the movement is playing in its counter-protest goal.

7.3. Corruption in the *Days of Rage* protest and counter-protest

Corruption is an act of illegal or sociopolitical misconduct of individuals in authority. It could be realized in multifaceted contexts such as economic, legal (judicial), and social. Text 6 presents its representational and compositional dynamics in the *Days of Rage*.



TEXT 6: Protest against Corruption

Amidst the hordes of multimodal issues and the contexts that define the protests and counter-protests in the *Days of Rage*, corruption takes a central seat in the different semiotic modes deployed by protesters and counter-protesters in registering their petitions. In Text 6, the information value is couched in a multi-layered banner with a leading inscription harshly tagged “#EndBadGovernmentInNigeria” which implies that every issue raised within that harsh tag underscores the reason for the protest. Four issues are projected in the multi-modally constructed banner, including hunger and hardship, anti-poor policies and stolen wealth. These issues hang around corruption the root cause and are foregrounded among other backgrounded issues in the posters displayed. Hence, the caption “jail all corrupt politicians” is a stern position taken by the protesters that is drawn from the overall issue of corruption in the system and the need to curtail its agents.



TEXT 7: Counter-protest Suing for Dialogue and Condemning Opposition Voices

As represented in the counter-protest demonstration in Text 7, the recurring multimodal issue of opposition thrives as an ideological base for defending political ingroup against outgroup ideological construct in the text, as enacted through the compositional meaning generation. In Text 7, there is a counter-protest against protest and a plea for dialogue in the place of protest. Saliency in the text is constructed through the positioning from left to right of the visual mode of the counter-protest chants indexed by the opening of mouths, and organized rally indexed by the matching strides of the men in the image. While the capitalized “SAY NO TO PROTEST” is marked by the symbol “X” to establish disapproval to protest, the capitalized “YES TO DIALOGUE” is saliently enacted through the symbol “Approval Sign”. Aside from capitalization, the structure of the sentences also adds the required saliency to the semantic import of the message conveyed. For

instance, explicit and implicit imperative constructions can be found in the two structures. In the first, Say No to Protest, the subject is deleted to enforce the imperativeness of their stance, while in the second imperative structure “YES TO DIALOGUE” also demonstrates astute endorsement of dialogue over protest.

Another interesting focal point in the visual mode is the linguistic resources displayed on the poster of the third man in Hausa regalia. The linguistic inscription “OPPOSITION ELEMENTS ARE TRYING TO DESTROY OUR COUNTRY JUST LIKE THEY DID TO LAGOS DURING #ENDSARS” on the poster in hands possesses strong salience in terms of its circumspensive capitalization signifies the gradability and intensity of the issues projected. While emphasizing the OPPOSITION ELEMENTS, the other parts of the linguistic modes on the poster assume lesser prominence but add maximum salience to the issues fronted. The lexical choice of ELEMENTS as the nominal head of the group “opposition element” is a deliberate delegitimation ploy of rendering the protesters whom they counter as unknown and insignificant “things”. The narrative further resorted to the historical context in referencing the incidence of the #Endsars protest that took a destructive turn on October 20, 2020, in Lagos, leading to the loss of lives and property. The reference to #EndSars precedence hence becomes the basis for the counter-protesters to sue for dialogue rather than protest.

8. Conclusion

A critical evaluation of the protests and counter-protests of the *Days of Rage* through the analytical lens of multimodal text analysis has been exhaustively carried out in this study. It has revealed that protests and counter-protests are engendered by issues of anti-people policies, hunger, insecurity, and governance dividends while also being polarized along the lines of solidarity, projection of negative and/or positive governmental acts and appeal for peace and change. These issues are grounded in the contexts of regional politics, economic management, and partisan solidarity, forging out indices of regional interest, and national disintegrating acts. In their discursive distribution, the online protests mostly orient to problematized issues and contexts while the counter-protests foreground pro-governmental defences, peace movements and recorded achievements. General multimodal features characterising these issues, contexts and representations revealed online protests' significations indexing selected colour and participants,

capitalization and gestural postures to symbolize pain, discontent and collectivism in voice, while online counter-protests enact evidential and historical referencing, politicking and pro-governmental defences in their bid to amplify the good acts of the current administration and also enforce peaceful deliberation over violent protest. In sum, both protests and counter-protests operate in the same contexts, although often re-semiotised, with strong ideological bases for underscoring the salience of the group's subjective positions.

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