



Article

YOUTHQUAKE AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The #EndSARS movement in 2020 marked a shift in Nigerian youth political engagement, deviating from their perceived apolitical stance. This article explores the multifaceted dimensions of youth-led civil disobedience, shaping Nigeria's political landscape in what can be termed a 'youthquake.' Representing 70 percent of the population, Nigerian youth, frustrated by governance issues, have significantly impacted the nation's politics. Anchored in social identity theory and employing desk-based research, this study delves into events like the looting of COVID-19 palliatives, the aftermath of the October 20, 2020 #EndSARS protest, circumventing the federal government's Twitter ban using Virtual Private Networks, and protest voting in the 2023 elections, including the #Obidient mantra. These events which focused on the 2019-2023 Buhari administration were content analysed to identify embedded meanings and patterns of civil disobedience that elucidated government responses. The findings underscore a predominantly authoritarian reaction to youth civil disobedience, emphasizing the need for a democratic approach. It concludes with the imperative for the government to address genuine concerns of the youth, advocating for a more inclusive and responsive government.

Keywords: Youthquake, Youth, Civil Disobedience, Nigeria

Introduction

The global phenomenon of youth awakening is gaining momentum, particularly in Africa and notably in Nigeria. Increasing levels of unemployment and policies that hinder youth progress or are unfavourable to the growing young population have resulted in widespread frustration among the youth. Recently, this frustration has translated into a growing hostility towards democratic governments that have come into power. The constant rhetoric of maintaining hope, being patient a bit longer, and embracing a patriotic attitude in the face of government corruption, extravagant lifestyles of public officials, a lack of confidence in the rule of law, and a weak judicial system has led many young Nigerians to a bleak realization. They believe that if they continue to accept the explanations offered by the ruling class, the much-needed change been advocated by civil, sociocultural organizations, and even government bodies would never materialize (Cilliers, 2018; Hari, 2014).

Having noticed that traditional political engagement, as extensively documented in the literature, has predominantly favoured older citizens, especially in countries like Nigeria, young people are now finding alternative ways to participate in politics that better align with their demography. This youth resurgence, often referred to as a 'youthquake,' (Pickard, 2019) has sparked a notable transformation in Nigerian politics, characterized by protests, online mobilization, and notably, civil disobedience. The discontentment of numerous Nigerian youths with the government is becoming increasingly evident

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through their actions. The advent of social media, in particular, has provided a powerful platform for young Nigerians to communicate with their government representatives and, more significantly, the head of state. However, the manner in which they communicate may not always adhere to traditional African cultural values of respect and deference, which might be uncomfortable for older citizens.

Consequently, this implies that young citizens are resorting to civil disobedience against a government where many of those in leadership positions belong to the same age group as their parents or are even older. Therefore, the idea of civil disobedience aligns closely with the challenges faced by Nigerian youths and their government, particularly within the framework of democracy, despite the fact that government responses in certain cases have not been supportive or encouraging. These actions for many of Nigerian youths have been their way of engaging and participating in politics.

The current issue revolves around the rise of civil disobedience among young Nigerians, which has emerged as a reaction to government actions and serves as an alternative mode of political engagement. The increasing frequency with which the youth are turning to civil disobedience raises questions about the government's effectiveness in tackling the issues faced by its predominant demographic. The outcomes of factors such as unemployment, recurring strikes in public universities, corruption, insecurity, among others, have transformed civil disobedience into a predominant avenue for participating in the political sphere.

This article aims to explore various aspects in which Nigerian young people have participated in civil disobedience, leading to governmental reactions, especially during the recent events that can be characterized as a 'youthquake,' particularly towards the conclusion of the COVID-19 lockdown curfews across the nation. Through a desk-based research approach, this study investigates these occurrences. For each case, it delves into the event's context, elucidates the ways in which youths were involved in civil disobedience, and outlines the government's responses, ultimately examining the outcomes.

Conceptual Discourse

Youthquake

It refers to a significant cultural, political, or social change that arises from the actions or influence of young people. A 'youthquake' denotes a significant upsurge in youth involvement and political participation. This term gained prominence when it was used to describe the unexpected surge in youth voter turnout and support for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party during the 2017 United Kingdom General Election (Sloam & Henn, 2019; Huebner, 2020; Pickard, 2019)

Civil Disobedience

It is a deliberate attempt to refuse to obey a law, a regulation or a power described as unjust in a peaceful manner. It is a form of resistance without violence. The concept is attributed to Henry David Thoreau, in his 1849 essay on 'Civil Disobedience' following his refusal to pay a tax intended to finance a war against Mexico which got him a night in prison. More recently, John Rawls in his 1971 work, 'Theory of Justice', defined the concept as 'a public, non-violent act, decided in conscience, but political, contrary to the law and most often accomplished to bring about a change in the law or in government policy.' (1971 p. 1). William Scheuerman's book, 'Civil Disobedience' (2018) further

reflected on three influential theoretical models: spiritual, liberal and democratic (Cooke, 2019). The six elements that must be inherent for civil disobedience are that it must be committed consciously and intentionally; be a public act; action must be carried out collectively; must be done using peaceful methods; must be carried out while accepting the eventualities of a sanction and the action carried out must urge to 'higher principles' to justify the violation of a norm.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, posits that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from their membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This aligns with the argument for youthquake and civil disobedience in Nigeria as demonstrated in this study. As a social psychological theory, it delves into the dynamics of group interactions and self-perception, emphasizing how individuals naturally categorize themselves and others into social groups based on various attributes (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). In the context of Nigeria, particularly among the youth, this categorization extends beyond mere demographics, including shared experiences of marginalization and frustration. Hogg (2016) argues that people define their sense of self in terms of the social groups they belong to, and when individuals strongly identify with a particular group, they are likely to behave in terms of group membership.

The relevance of the theory is evident as young Nigerians, facing challenges like insecurity, corruption, police brutality, high unemployment rates, and frequent strikes in public universities, come together, in a collective response. The categorization into an 'in-group' becomes a powerful force, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity among them (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Young people are more likely than older adults to identify strongly with their social groups, and they are more susceptible to peer pressure. Additionally, youth are often less invested in the status quo and are more willing to take risks to challenge injustice. In the events examined, Nigerian youths used online platforms to form a community, plan movements and collectively took actions against the government. These actions within the group, exemplified by their commitment to uphold democratic values through peaceful protest and voting, was against a distinct recognition of an 'out-group'—the entities responsible for the perceived injustices and inadequacies (Trepte & Loy, 2017).

Methodology

The scope of the study is Nigeria, the fourth republic under the administration of Muhammadu Buhari, specifically the period from 2019 to 2023. The study employs a descriptive research design, utilizing secondary data sources to examine the specified period. Secondary data was gathered through a comprehensive review of news articles and events identified on online news platforms, including social media, particularly Twitter. Content analysis was employed to systematically analyze the gathered data. The findings are presented and discussed in relevant sections.

Dimensions of Civil Disobedience among Youths in Nigeria

In this section, we delve into the outcomes of this study, which analyze the various factors that have driven Nigerian youths to engage in acts of civil disobedience, albeit in a peaceful manner. While there have been claims of youth involvement in violent activities in certain cases, the research findings

indicate that young Nigerians largely conducted themselves in a civilized manner when expressing their dissent against the government of the day. In fact, they organized events and activities that effectively conveyed their messages to the government and other relevant stakeholders. Regrettably, as we will discuss later in some of the cases examined, government responses often involved the use of force and, in some instances, violence, as exemplified by the tragic incident at the #EndSARS Lekki Toll Gate Shooting. Nevertheless, the use of civil disobedience as a method of political participation remains a key aspect of the findings.

a. Looting of COVID-19 Palliatives Warehouses

Not long after the nationwide tension created by the #EndSARS protests, looting of warehouses in store of COVID-19 palliatives began. Precisely on October 22, hoodlums (many of whom were also youths), in viral videos attacked a warehouse at Mazamaza community in Lagos State where COVID-19 palliatives were stored. This occurred about 24 hours after angry youths discovered a warehouse where palliatives were hidden at the Oba of Lagos palace. This discovery being amplified by social media, soon played out in state government warehouses in Osun, Kwara, Ekiti, Rivers, Cross River, Delta, Plateau, Bauchi and Kaduna states as the Federal Capital Territory. These relief materials had been donated by the private sector, notably, Coalition Against COVID-19 (CACOVID) for disbursement to residents during the lockdown, to assist the government in combating the coronavirus disease in the country.

The fact that the relief materials, meant for distribution mostly during the first half of the year, were still available in October cast doubts on the transparency and accountability of state governments and created public outrage on the corruption and insensitivity of government towards its citizens (The Punch, 2020). Although, the looting of warehouses were not limited to youth, it had most of them at the fore of the activities. The incidence became quite messy in some states that several states such as Osun, Plateau, Kaduna, Abia, Rivers and Delta were forced to impose curfew to contain the violence and wanton looting perpetrated as well as making arrests of some hoodlums in Lagos and Plateau states.

It was observed, based on information from the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF), that several states had not yet received the complete allocation of relief items for distribution to the public. Some states argued that they were maintaining a strategic reserve of these items in anticipation of a potential second wave of COVID-19 (This Day, 2020; The Cable, 2020). Meanwhile, the Federal Government, represented by the Chairman of the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, distanced itself from any wrongdoing, stating that it had provided the palliatives to states for "subsequent distribution to the people." (The Punch, 2020). Notably, the Coalition pointed out that although the distribution of palliatives had commenced in April, the initial deliveries to state governments did not commence until June (Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, 2020; Haaga, 2022). However, by October 2020, a substantial portion of the relief items had been delivered but remained undistributed by the governors (The Punch, 2020).

The observations and statements indicated that the delayed distribution of relief packages lacked justification. Despite the explanations given, Nigerians remained convinced that the governors needed to address certain concerns. A lecturer from the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, Enugu state, argued that the government's decision to store the palliatives amounted to corruption, implying that the items had been essentially pilfered by authorities, leading to a situation where the public was now "re-

looting" them (The Guardian,2020). He added that the defense put forth by state governments seemed invalid because the perishable nature of items like garri and rice made long-term storage unnecessary. Ironically, some of those who participated in looting the relief packages admitted that the items were already deteriorating or completely spoiled, indicating that the goods had been stored for an extended period (The Guardian, 2020).

In Ekiti state where the government argued that it had distributed the palliatives, some youths believed that their government was being clever by half by saying that it had shared the palliatives. For instance, some youths under the auspices of Ekiti All Progressives Congress Youths, alleged that some COVID-19 palliatives were still being stored in the Government House in Ado-Ekiti, appealing to the Governor to give the people of the state (The Guardian,2020).

In Cross River state, a dramatic incident unfolded that resembled a form of upheaval. Around noon on Friday, October 23, 2020, some young individuals, suspected to be influenced by the effects of certain hard drugs, stormed the government-owned Fabrication Academy, which was still under construction. They proceeded to seize thousands of COVID-19 relief items intended for the people of the state. One of the looters expressed his frustration as he made off with his share, exclaiming, "This is wickedness; it is our food, let us pack it. Why did the government not give us since?" (The Guardian,2020). Interestingly, back in April, the state Governor had made a public announcement near the Academy, declaring the arrival of these relief supplies and even conducted a ceremonial distribution. However, following that event, no further action was taken until citizens resorted to looting. According to a resident who participated in the looting incident,

"The government of the day is wicked. People are suffering and dying of hunger yet we have food rotting away in government warehouses. We are happy the soldiers and police did not stop us otherwise it would have been bloody. On Friday they even encouraged us to pack the food items but not to burn down anything. I was able to carry two bags of rice and some tin tomatoes and three cartoons of Indomie noodles. At least it will sustain my family and extended ones for some weeks." (The Guardian,2020, p. 1)

The discovery of stockpiled relief supplies in warehouses across the nation triggered a wave of anger among the populace, particularly the youth who had recently been involved in protests against government mismanagement and corruption. The revelation of these hoarded relief items, coupled with the explanations put forth by state governments, seemed to confirm suspicions of government corruption and an apparent indifference to the struggles of the Nigerian people. Despite government warnings against such actions, citizens, primarily young people, engaged in acts of civil disobedience, and in some states, went to extreme measures by looting government properties.

In states like Ondo, where the government claimed to have distributed 95 percent of the relief items, enraged individuals, upon finding empty warehouses, resorted to setting fire to the facilities. They believed the government might have repackaged the items and distributed them as campaign materials to residents (The Guardian, 2020). Tragically, there were fatal incidents in states such as Enugu, resulting in the death of a young individual who was not part of the protesters but was searching for relief supplies.

The consequences of the youth and other citizens' acts of disobedience were evident in states like Kwara, where 71 individuals were apprehended and brought before an Ilorin Magistrates' Court on various charges, including “criminal conspiracy, trespass, mischief, voluntarily causing grievous hurt, theft and disturbance of public peace and belonging to gang of thieves.” in connection to the looting of CACOVID relief items at Agro Mall and Cargo Terminal in Ilorin (The Punch,2020).

b. The October 20, 2020 #EndSARS Protest and Lekki Toll Gate Shootings' Aftermath

Days into the #EndSARS protests by youths that rocked the country in the last quarter of year 2020, the governor of Lagos state on October 20, 2020, announced a statewide curfew beginning at 4:00 p.m. prompt to restore order in the state, which has been the bedrock and headquarter of the #EndSARS protest. As stated by the Governor,

“...peaceful #EndSARS protest, degenerated into a monster that is threatening the well-being of our society. I, therefore, hereby impose a 24-hour curfew on all parts of the state as from 4pm today, 20th October 2020. Nobody, except essential service providers and first responders, must be found on the streets...” (The Guardian, 2020, p. 1).

The curfew was later delayed to 9:00 p.m. after complaints that it was impossible to get home before 4:00 p.m. given the traffic in Lagos (Akor, 2021). Nevertheless, protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate defied the governor’s orders and refused to disperse, many stayed behind. Hundreds of mostly young protesters at the Toll Gate sat on the hot ground, waving Nigerian flags, singing the national anthem and defying the government (The Guardian, 2020). As reported by Channels Television on that day, some protesters at the Toll Gate said they would not be leaving the Toll Gate, which had been the protest ground for almost two weeks, stopping the collection of toll fees, a major source of revenue for the state government. Thus, protesters had braced themselves, prepared for when security forces would arrive.

The Lekki Toll Gate was one of the most vibrant protest locations in the country. Hundreds of people from all backgrounds showed up each day, starting on October 10, and many stayed overnight. Protesters were motivated by speeches, music, and other performances. Individuals and groups supporting the protests provided food, water, medical kits, masks, hand sanitizer, mobile toilets, raincoats, and money to cover logistics.

According to one of the protesters interviewed, he commented thus: “When it is 4’o clock we will be here, we are staying here, we are not leaving this spot. Curfew is wherever the curfew meets you is where you are meant to stay, we are going to be here, we are not armed”(The Guardian, 2020).

Similarly, one of the prominent organizer stated that, “For us, the curfew meant we should stay in place and not move around Lagos, and we were prepared to do just that”.According to another 21-year-old protester, he said, “we thought if they came and saw we were with our flags, trying to move our country forward, that they would see that... But then when they came they just acted like animals.” (The Guardian, 2020)

Unfortunately, as reported by major news outlets, between 6:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., well before the 9:00 p.m. curfew, dozens of Nigerian military soldiers, arrived in about five trucks labelled with ‘OP MESA,’ referring to Operation MESA, a joint internal security platform of the army, the navy, and the

air force in synergy with the police to complement their efforts. The soldiers trapped the protesters, using a tactic known as ‘kettling,’ then fired in the air and at the protesters (Akor, 2021).

The aftermath of the gory incidence were casualties as hundreds were forced to flee. Amnesty International reported that at least 12 citizens were killed by both the soldiers and the police in the event of the shooting while many more were wounded with the spray of bullets (Akor, 2021). While the government and the military had tried to cover up the incidence which prior to the shooting had first disabled cameras at the Toll Gate, cut off internet access in the area and switched off the lights. Thereafter, it tried to mop up evidence by carrying the bodies and cleaning up the crime scenes, hounding journalists, protesters and witnesses who had knowledge of the killings and the army after denying it was on the scene later claimed it only fired blanks to disperse protesters (Akor, 2021). The international community had condemned the killings of peaceful young protesters and asked the government to investigate the issue (The Guardian, 2020).

In opening up after much criticisms and viral video evidences which it had earlier condemned to be photo shopped, the Nigerian military stated that the Lagos state government did not notify them about the change in curfew time from 4:00 pm to 9:00pm. Remarkably, the Lagos state Judicial Panel of Inquiry on Restitution for Victims of SARS-Related Abuses and other Matters had reported that the

“...atrocious maiming and killing of unarmed, helpless and unresisting protesters, while sitting on the floor and waiving their Nigerian flags, while singing the national anthem can be equated to a ‘massacre’ in context”. Furthermore, it reported that the military “actually shot blank and live bullets directly and pointedly into the midst of protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate, with the deliberate intention to assault, maim, and kill.” (Premium Times, 2021b).

c. Boycotting Federal Government Twitter Ban through Virtual Private Network (VPN)

Following the aftermath of the president’s reaction on Twitter, one of the most used social media platforms in Nigeria, to the civil unrest created by members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) secessionist group in South East, the Federal Government banned Twitter for 222 days – from June 5, 2021 to January 13, 2022. The reason that was given through the Ministry of Information and Culture was said to have been based on a litany of problems with the social media platform in Nigeria, where misinformation and fake news spread through it have had real-world violent consequences, citing the persistent use of the platform for activities that are capable of undermining Nigeria’s corporate existence (Premium Times, 2021a). Whereas, Twitter had said that it deleted one of the President’s tweet and suspended his account on grounds that the post made by the president was against the organization’s policy on abusive behaviour. The President’s deleted tweet from his official handle @MBuhari, posted on June 1, 2021 read:

Many of those misbehaving today are too young to be aware of the destruction and loss of lives that occurred during the Nigerian Civil War. Those of us in the fields for 30 months, who went through the war, will treat them in the language they understand (Business Day, 2021).

While many young Nigerians and other citizens of the country called on Twitter to suspend the president’s account for evoking dark memories of the 1976-1970 Civil War, Twitter had only responded by deleting the Tweet, which the government thought it to be insulting. The immediate suspension of the social media platform in the country was seen as undemocratic and was strongly

resisted by young citizens, who went through VPN to bypass the restriction. This action revealed the intention of the government to regulate social media and Twitter in particular, especially since its former chief executive officer supported the #EndSARS protests against police brutality in 2020.

Following the implementation of the ban, numerous Nigerian youths resorted to using VPNs to gain access to their social media accounts. VPN, as defined, operates in a virtual manner since it doesn't require physical cables for connection. It is also private in that it ensures the confidentiality of your data and browsing activities, and it's networked, as it establishes a connection between your device and the VPN server. Consequently, it safeguards online experiences by providing privacy and enhanced security (Ghani, Farooq & Asghar, 2019). Furthermore, VPNs offer the capability to bypass government restrictions on specific applications and overcome geographic limitations imposed on websites, audio, or video streaming. Additionally, they conceal the user's actual location (Pavlicek & Sudzina, 2018; Namara, Wilkinson, Caine & Knijnenburg, 2020).

Interestingly, VPNs can enable an individual browse from another country if that server is in a different country. It would appear as though that individual was browsing from that country and can then access things that initially were inaccessible. In the event of an internet shutdown whether partial or full, VPN helps route the user's location to a different one where the internet is accessible. This has been used in similar countries where there have been an internet shutdown or social media ban in the past.

A few hours after the announcement was made, it was reported that hundreds of citizens with a significant population being young Nigerians switched to VPNs in order to boycott government's action and access Twitter (Arise News, 2021). According to The Guardian (2021), data from Google Trends on the morning of June 5, 2021, showed more than 100 percent spike in searches related to VPNs in Nigeria. Three states from the North (Plateau, Niger and Kaduna) were the top three states where VPN-related search surged followed by Ondo and Cross River states in the Southern region. Furthermore, Roux & Hanley (2021), also gathered that the switch to VPNs was so emphatic that from June 5, 2021, Nigerian topics began trending in countries popular as "exit nodes" for VPNs as observed in the Netherlands, Germany and Canada. Nigerian Twitter users deployed VPN to further protest the ban of Twitter through hasthags like #KeepitOn, #June12thProtest and #DemocracyDay.

#	Trending Topic	Time HH:MM	#	Trending Topic	Time HH:MM	#	Trending Topic	Time HH:MM
1	#June12thProtest	20:15	1	#EpidemischeLuege	18:25	1	#June12thProtest	14:40
2	Youp	16:00	2	#June12thProtest	17:30	2	Filipino	13:40
3	#KeepitOn	15:35	3	Klimaforscher	14:20	3	#KeepitOn	13:25
4	Jack	14:10	4	Antisemitismus	13:05	4	#UFC263	12:00
5	CDA-top	12:10	5	Fußball	12:35	5	#Caturday	11:45
6	Omtzigt	11:50	6	Anzeige	11:40	6	Vladdy	11:40
7	Palestijnse	11:45	7	#KeepitOn	11:10	7	Suns in 4	11:05
8	#DemocracyDay	10:15	8	Schönen Samstag	10:40	8	#8YearsToInfinityWithBTS	10:40
Netherlands			Germany			Canada		

Figure 1: Screenshot from Twitter trending topics for the Netherlands, Germany, and Canada showing Nigerian hashtags – #June12thProtest, #KeepitOn, and #DemocracyDay – trending in these regions. Source: Digital Forensic Research Lab (2021)

According to Figure 1, the topics highlighted in green boxes were issues in Nigeria that gained prominence in other countries due to VPN usage. For instance, in the Netherlands, the hashtag #June12thProtest became the top trending topic. Fuelled by the Twitter Ban and concerns over insecurity, unemployment, and governance issues, young individuals initiated the trend of #June12thProtest. This hashtag is a national public holiday commemorating Nigeria's struggle for democracy, and it was employed as a platform to organize a protest against government's decision.

The actions taken by young citizens to use VPN to connect back on Twitter showed a deliberate attempt to circumvent federal government restrictions on Twitter Ban. In fact, prior to the ban, some citizens predicted the move. In figure 2, the four screenshots from citizen's tweets highlighted how these Nigerians defiantly used VPN to spite government's restriction. In the first screenshot by @Dr_Wealth, he reacted to Twitter's decision prior to the ban, to cite the social media's African Headquarter in Ghana and not Nigeria which was the most populous in Africa stating that "as a champion for democracy, Ghana is a supporter of free speech, online freedom, and the open internet, of which Twitter is also an advocate" (Twitter Blogpost, 2021). The latter end of the tweet, which read "They could ban Twitter in Nigeria but VPN *dey* for us! This is 2021 and not 1967." The Tweepⁱ here had used the Pidgin English "*dey*" to state that VPN was readily available for them. He then stated that the year was 2021 (a democratic and more enlightened era) and not 1967 which could be seen as the year the Nigerian Civil War began.

The second tweet by @elite407_outfit had subtly mocked the government and in particular, the president, by insinuating through the reference of year 2021 that the country was now under democratic rule and not in 1983, when the president, Muhammadu Buhari had first ruled as a military head of state. It further read that although Twitter had been banned in the country, the VPN had potential of not only giving access to their Twitter accounts but also taking them to another country. The tweet ended with "you messed with the wrong generation" and a "*haha*" used to represent laughter. The tweep from his account indicating that he is a youth, mocked the government for going against its predominant population.

In the third screenshot showing the tweet by @HRH_bankeoniru, the Tweep whose account is verified as indicated by the "blue tick", called out the president and members of his cabinets to lead by example and delete their Twitter accounts. In the second line of the tweet, she compared Twitter with one of the oldest and busiest historical market in Lagos state, using a famous Yoruba saying: *Oja Oyingbo ko mo p'enikan o wa* (*Oyingbo* Market does not recognize the absence of anyone), meaning that Twitter like *Oyingbo* market with its sheer size, patronage and prominence among others, is not affected by whatever the decision the government takes on it (Onaye, 2017). She ended by spiting the president and stating that the year 2021 was an advanced era with vast number of free VPNs that could be accessed by almost everyone.



Figure 2: Screenshot of Tweet by Nigerians in Reaction to Twitter Ban

Source: Author (2023)

The fourth tweet by @EdmundOris had commented that fifty days on after the government restricted the use of Twitter, the use of VPN had become the norm.

In Figure 2, three social media influencers had suggested to their followers, how to go about getting a VPN to continue using their Twitter accounts. The first screengrab was a tweet by @DrOlufunmilayo who has a following of over 432,000, many of whom are young Nigerians, had in fact predicted two days before the federal government announced the twitter ban, advising Nigerians to go and download VPN and start learning how to use it. The other tweet by @TheHolyman_ who has about 17,400 followers, ha suggested top ten reliable VPNs in his opinion for Nigerians to download and boycott the Twitter ban. The last tweet was by @AdeolaFayehun, with a following of over 108,000. She had advised her followers in Nigeria, to download VPN and change their location to another country to continue having access to Twitter. While also commenting on the news about Twitter suspension, she described those in government as being “too childish”.

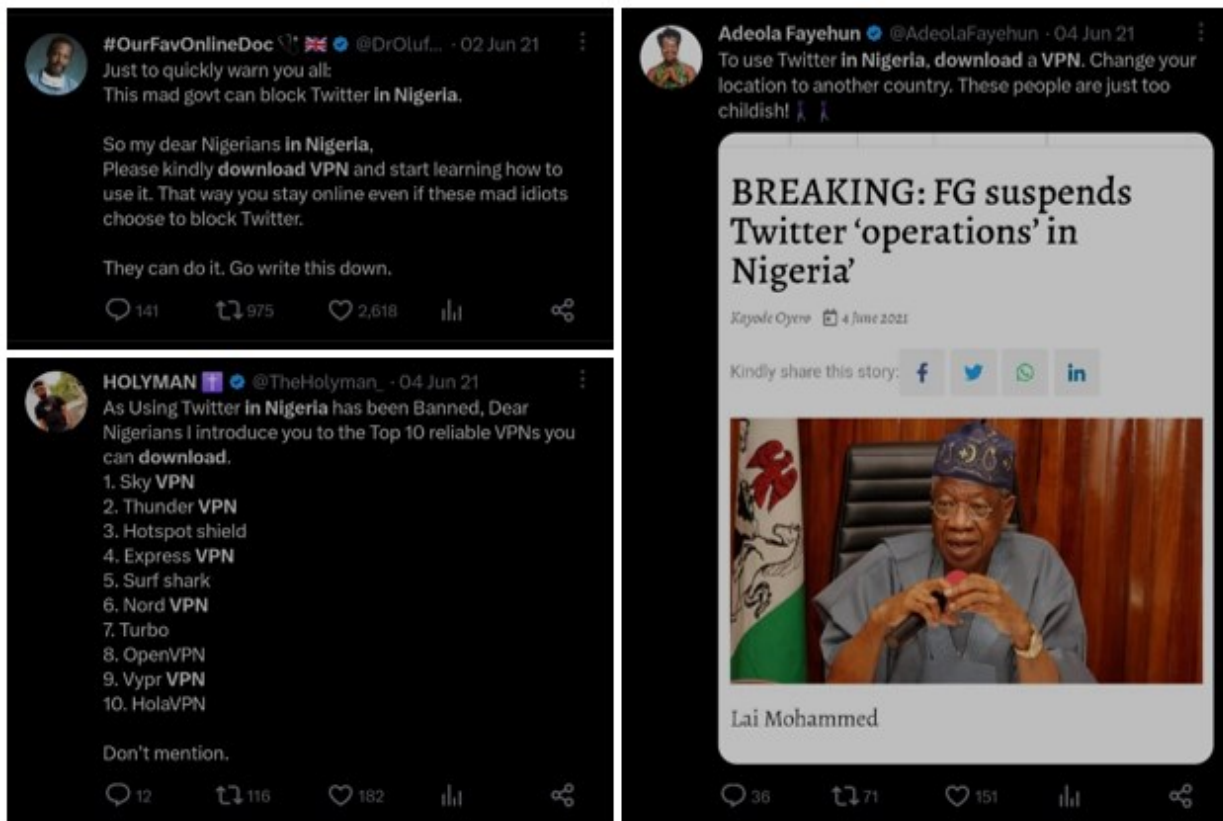


Figure 3: Screenshot of Tweet by Young Nigerian Influencers in Reaction to Twitter Ban
 Source: Author (2023)

The findings above shows how young citizens used VPNs to sidestep the federal government's restriction on Twitter in the country. Remarkably, many of the young Nigerians, particularly the influencers were not living in the country.

Findings also revealed that in response to the surge in VPN usage, the Attorney General of the Federation, Abubakar Malami had issued statement via his Facebook page a day after the Twitter ban announcement was made, for the immediate prosecution of offenders as shown in figure 3. The series of comments that followed the statement were that of ridicule and abuse of the government, offices and personalities involved.

d. Protest Voting in the 2023 General Elections and the #Obidient Mantra

Protest voting is a phenomenon where an individual voter or a collective group of voters purposefully choose a specific candidate, hoping that this candidate will emerge victorious. This decision is made to express their discontent with the available candidate choices, to reject the existing political system, or to vent their frustration with the policies of a particular political party, often the one currently in power. (Birch & Dennison, 2019). In the case of the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria, Alvarez, Kiewiet & Núñez, 2018 p. 141) described it has "Tactical Protest Voting" whereby another party is preferred over the other party to send a message of dissatisfaction to the candidate or the party.

Youth participation in the 2023 elections stemmed largely from dissatisfaction with the status quo, especially in the recent past. The generation that makes up Nigeria's youth has had to deal with unique frustrations that propelled reactions through the October 2020 #EndSARS protest, looting of COVID-

19 palliative warehouses, protests against terrorism, herders onslaughts and kidnapping for ransoms, Twitter ban, growing unemployment rate, as well as the 8-month long strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Regarding the issue of unemployment, as pointed out by Akinmoju (2023), the unemployment rate in Nigeria has consistently increased in recent years. According to the Nigerian Economic Summit Group's projections, the unemployment rate in 2023 could potentially reach 37 percent. This signifies that more than one-third of the Nigerian population could be without employment, a particularly dire situation given that Nigeria has a significant portion of the world's population living in extreme poverty.

In the area of education and the incessant ASUU Strike, it is important to note that the Buhari's administration had a record of the longest strike actions embarked upon by ASUU since 1999 and the second longest strike in Nigeria's history. This could explain the point that students (27.8 percent) made up the largest group of registered voters in the 2023 elections. The perceived widespread discontent with the state of governance galvanized the youth to directly engage with the political process beyond online activism to register and vote. There were grassroots mobilizations. For instance, youths mobilized officials from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices to register fellow youths and students for their Permanent Voters Card (PVCs) and some young citizens had to travel down into the country to register just to be eligible to vote (Akinmoju, 2023). Furthermore, online campaigns with hashtags #GetYourPVC and #WeWillNeverForget created a lot of sensitization among youths.

Accordingly, some weeks before the 2023 General Elections, INEC Chairman reported that young voters made up the highest percentage of eligible voters. According to him, there were 93,469,008 eligible voters in all on its voter register. The demography report showed that 37,060,399 or 39.65 percent of voters were between the ages of 18 and 34 while 33,413,591 or 35.75 percent are middle-aged persons between the ages of 35 and 49 (Suleiman, 2023).

Notably, as the 18 political parties conduct their primaries, especially for the presidential candidate, young Nigerians have made the February 25, 2023 elections arguably the most competitive since 1999. They have done so by rallying behind a third-party candidate, Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), who is neither young (at 61 years old) nor entirely new to Nigerian politics, having previously served as the vice-presidential candidate for the main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). However, he was viewed as an unconventional choice due to his approachability, simplicity, and his track record of fiscal responsibility during his tenure as the governor of Anambra state (Orjinmo, 2023).

The backing of the Labour Party's presidential candidate by Nigerian youths marked the inception of the '#Obidient movement,' characterized by the hashtag #Obidient. While it's important to note that support for Peter Obi extended beyond just the youth demographic, as a Christian from the South Eastern geopolitical zone, he garnered significant endorsement from Nigeria's substantial evangelical Christian community in the southern part of the country and the Igbo ethnic group who is yet to have produced a Nigerian president (Orjinmo, 2023).

Under the banner of #Obidient, nationwide rallies were orchestrated, significantly raising the political stakes and advocating for democratic change. The #Obidient movement played a pivotal role in rekindling national awareness regarding governance shortcomings while simultaneously reigniting the

hopes of Nigerians, particularly the younger generation, for the prospect of achieving political transformation (Aboh & Okoi, 2023).

According to a 24-year-old Nigerian woman who was among the leading protesters in Lagos, she described the #Obident movement as a defining moment in Nigeria's history. She commented that, '...if Nigeria continues on this downhill, it will be disastrous...we can only take so much more before the famed "Nigerian resilience" crumbles. The importance of Nigeria's stability in West Africa, Africa and the entire world cannot be over-emphasised.' (Orjinmo, 2023) In addition, the famous Aisha Yesufu, whose fist-raising photograph on the day young protesters camped outside the police headquarters in Abuja in 2020 became something of a symbol for the young protesters, remarked at one of the #Obidents campaign rally that 'They dared us to go into politics and change the government and that is what everyone is doing...' (Orjinmo, 2023)

The result of the presidential election was remarkable, although, the LP candidate's popularity was limited to the South Eastern states where he won overwhelmingly and some South South states with significant votes, his performance in Lagos state, the base of many young Nigerians and #Obidents, which was previously a significant stronghold for the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the ruling party presidential candidate, Bola Tinubu, Peter Obi secured victory by a narrow margin (with 582,454 votes compared to Tinubu's 472,606 votes). This outcome underscored the growing dissatisfaction of young and urban voters with conventional political practices (Rajvanshi, 2023).

Conclusion

The emergence of a youthquake in Nigeria, characterized by civil disobedience, is gaining momentum and is becoming recognized as a mode of political involvement. The continuous neglect of the country's predominant youth population has stirred them into action, prompting them to make demands of the current government. However, it's worth noting that the response of the government to their display of civil disobedience, as revealed in this study, has been authoritarian in nature. To effectively address the concerns of this agitated segment of the population, a more democratic approach is required. Simultaneously, the government must prioritize tackling issues that directly impact the well-being of the youth, particularly challenges related to unemployment, education, and insecurity.

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