

The Politics of Disruption: Disrupting Polity to Influence Policy in Nigeria

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Abstract : The surge of social protests sweeping through the globe is a contemporary phenomenon. Yet the phenomenon in itself is not new. Thus, various scholars have over the years developed conceptual frameworks for evaluating it. Adopting and adapting some of these frameworks this paper begins from a purely theoretical perspective exploring the concept and content of social protest within the specific context of Nigeria. It proceeds to build a typology of the phenomenon in terms of form, actors, origin, character, organisation, goal, dynamics, outcome and a whole lot of other variables that are context relevant for evaluating it in an operationally useful manner. The centrality of the context in which protest evolves is demonstrated. Adopting Easton's systems theory, the paper builds on the assumption that protests emerge whenever and wherever political institutions and structures prove unable or unwilling to transform inputs in form of basic demands into outputs in form of responsive policies. It argues that protests in Nigeria are simply the crystallisation of opposition in the streets. Protests are thus extra-institutional politics. This is usually the case, as elsewhere, where there is no functional institutionalised opposition. Noting that protest, disruptive or otherwise, is an influence strategy, it argues that every single protest is a new opportunity for reform, for reorganisation of state capacities, for modifying rights and obligation of citizens and government to each other. Each reform outcome is, however, only a temporal antecedent. Its extensity gives signal for the next similar protest event. Through providing evidence on how protests in Nigeria create opportunity for reform, for more accountable, more effective governance, the paper shows the positive impact of protests and its importance even in the consolidation effort for the nation's nascent democracy. Data on protest events will be based on media reports, especially print media.

Keywords : democracy, dialectics, social protest, reform

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