

# Nigerian Economic Crisis Underlines Mass Demonstrations

Under the theme of ending bad governance, youth take to the streets in response to the rising inflation as the Tinubu government unleashes wave of repression

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*After weeks of anticipation, the #endbadgovernance campaign began on August 1 amid the worsening cost of living situation in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Africa's most populous state.*

*The largely youth-led protests were met with fierce repression resulting in 13 deaths, many injuries and more than 700 arrests.*

*These demonstrations spread throughout various regions of the country with the commercial capital of Lagos and several northern areas including Kano state experiencing the largest numbers of people turning out to voice their displeasure with the current system. **President Bola Tinubu**, who took office during 2023, ordered the police and military to crush the demonstrations.*

Image: The official portrait of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the President of Nigeria (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)



Tinubu did not address the people of Nigeria until the fourth day of the demonstrations. In a televised speech on August 5, the president urged people to halt their protest actions saying that his administration had enacted reforms which would provide relief for youth and working people.

The president said he understood the hardships facing the people of Nigeria and urged those demonstrating in the streets to exercise restraint. Tinubu claimed that his administration had heard the concerns of the people, yet he decried the violence taking place inside the country.

Rather than accept the realities of the situation in Nigeria which has sparked violent acts by impoverished people, several spokespersons for the government have accused what they described as “criminal elements” hijacking the peaceful protests for reforms. However, such an explanation did not condemn the brutal repression carried out against the #endbadgovernance organizers.

Police used teargas and live bullets against unarmed protesters. Demonstrators and journalists were fired on by law-enforcement agents while the military was deployed to assist the police in arresting, injuring and forcing people off the streets.

After taking office in 2023, the Tinubu government lifted subsidies on fuel, electricity and other consumer goods which triggered the drop in the value of the national currency, the Naira, prompting high rates of inflation. General strikes erupted in October and later in May when trade unions demanded a hike in the minimum wage.

Nonetheless, the announcement of a higher minimum wage in May had almost no impact on the ability of Nigerians to purchase essential goods and services. After August 1, the #endbadgovernance demonstrations highlighted hunger as millions are incapable of purchasing staple foods.

Marches in urban areas such as Lagos, featured people walking with empty pots to symbolically illustrate the dramatic increase in the prices for food. The cost of food has risen sharply, further inflaming the attitudes of workers, farmers and youth.

Organizers for the recent demonstrations accused the president of being indifferent to the plight of the Nigerian people. The lifting of subsidies for essential goods and services was said to be designed to enhance foreign investment inside the country.

However, the social impact of these neoliberal policies on the majority of Nigerians has been catastrophic. People are being pushed to seek solutions outside the framework of capitalist restructuring.

The demands of the demonstrations were to reimpose the subsidies on fuel and other consumer goods. There was a strong emphasis on ending the disparate salaries and benefits for the wealthy government officials and corporate executives while raising the living standards of the workers, farmers and youth.

[An article published by the Nigerian Vanguard newspaper](#) on August 6 highlighted the sentiments among the activists organizing against bad governance and hunger saying:

“Meanwhile, the Campaign for Democratic and Workers’ Rights, CDWR, yesterday, said President Bola Tinubu does not appreciate the level of suffering and hopelessness in the country. CDWR, in a statement by its National Publicity Secretary, Bosah Chinedu, said ‘President Tinubu increased the price of petrol and electricity tariffs astronomically including the floating of the Naira and hiked school fees, monstrous hardship has been imposed on Nigerians, crushing many Nigerians into deeper poverty and misery. The

ideal expectation from a listening and sensitive president is to reverse all the anti-people reform policies but that did not come from Tinubu. CDWR demands the reversal of all anti-people policies.”

Utilizing repressive measures to force people off the streets cannot lead to a peaceful resolution to the demands being put forward in Nigeria. Neither will the tear gassing, arrests and killings of young people resolve the crisis of food insecurity. The current crisis requires sweeping economic programs aimed at breaking with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) restructuring initiatives adopted by the Tinubu government.

## **Apportioning Blame on Russian Interference**

Following the same pattern of attempting to delegitimize the #endbadgovernance movement, the government also has been blaming the Russian Federation for instigating the mass demonstrations and unrest. In the northern city of Kano, photographs of demonstrators carrying Russian flags created much consternation among government officials.



Nigerians carrying Russian flags during hunger protests (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

There were those demanding major changes who also sought to make an appeal for the overthrow of the Tinubu administration. These activists are reflective of sentiments witnessed in other West African countries particularly in the Sahel sub-region where several states have ousted pro-western leaders while establishing closer ties with Moscow.

High ranking governmental and security officials in Nigeria warned against anyone carrying Russian flags saying this is tantamount to treason. The police have arrested activists carrying Russian flags while a tailor was apprehended for allegedly manufacturing these

products.

[The Nigerian Punch reported](#) on these developments noting:

“Protesters in their numbers had been seen waving Russian flags around the busy Kano-Zaria Road, Hadejia Road and near the Nyanya bridge, a suburb of Abuja, among others. Aside from protesting the economic hardship occasioned by the removal of fuel subsidy, the demonstrating youths also called for the intervention of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. Viral photos and videos showed demonstrators waving the flags as they chanted in Hausa, ‘We don’t want bad government.’ On Monday, protesters in Kaduna were also seen waving the Russian flags and chanting in Hausa, ‘Welcome, Russia; Welcome, Russia.’”

In this same article, there are quotes taken from participants in the demonstrations who carried Russian flags or are in support of greater involvement by Moscow. Those interviewed indicated that the western imperialist states such as the United States and Britain have historically failed the people of Nigeria.

The Punch went on to report that:

“When one of our correspondents asked one of the protesters why they were flying the Russian flag, he said they wanted Nigeria to embrace the Russian government’s style of leadership like some of the countries in the West African region had already done. ‘The American and British governments are the ones teaching all our leaders how to kill Nigeria’s economy. We are tired of them. Nigeria is tired of their wickedness and hypocrisy. So, like Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, we want Nigeria to embrace Russia. We like Russia’s style. They are better than USA and Britain, who have nothing for the people except our leaders, who are benefitting from them,’ the protester stated. Russia, an Eastern power currently mired in a cold war with the West, has been blamed for the unconstitutional changes of government in West African countries Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso and others.”

However, the decisions by the now Alliance of Sahel States composed of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to expel French and U.S. military forces were carried out after the seizure of power by army officers who had close ties with the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and the now-defunct French-led Operation Barkhane. These new regimes expressed their frustration with Washington and Paris saying that these imperialist military units had actually worsened the security situation in West Africa.

The new Sahel Alliance has formally broken with the imperialist-allied Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) now headed by Nigerian President Tinubu. This same leader had threatened to mobilize a military force to invade neighboring Niger to reinstall ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, who was overthrown last July by the Committee to Protect the Homeland (CNSP), which enjoys broad public support.

## **Nigeria Must Embark Upon an Independent Course**

Since the assumption of power by the Tinubu government during 2023, the president has accepted the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank prescriptions for Nigeria. Consequently, the elimination of subsidies and the rise of runaway inflation are a direct result of the interference of international finance capital in their internal affairs.

[Nigerian Vanguard newspaper reported](#) in February on the impact of the IMF and World Bank emphasizing:

“The twin organizations have become more active and quite audacious since President Bola Ahmed Tinubu came to power on May 29, 2023. They are like predators, ready for the kill.

While Nigerians are hungry and their anger is beginning to boil over into street protests due to the stifling economic policies of the Tinubu administration, these organizations are praising Tinubu to the high heavens and telling him to tighten the noose round the necks of the people.”

Therefore, rather than accuse “criminal elements” and “Russian interference” for the current crisis, the Tinubu government has only themselves to blame for implementing anti-people economic policies. In order to reverse the present course of infrastructural decline and mass impoverishment, Nigerians must sever their dependency upon imperialism and draft a program for reconstruction based upon the interests of the youth, workers and farmers inside the country.

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Featured image: Nigerians carrying Russian flags during hunger protests (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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