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# The Political Consequences of the Protests against Neo-Liberal Reforms in Nigeria: The Case of OccupyNigeria Movement

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## **Abstract**

*This paper analyses the mechanisms, outcomes, and consequences of the Nigerian protest movement using longitudinal qualitative research. To go about this, the paper looks at the protests in the context of neo-Liberal reforms, the essential trigger of the movement, its objectives, and its achievements are described. The movement started on January 2, 2012 as a direct response to the Nigerian government's announcement of the commencement of full-scale deregulation of the downstream sector of the petroleum industry. The movement took public protests in Nigeria to a new level with lasting impacts on the political system. This paper observes the "non-institutional" mechanisms adopted by the protesters to achieve their objectives.*

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**Key Words:** *OccupyNigeria, protests, deregulation, political outcomes, neo-liberal reforms, strike*

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper analyses the political outcomes of the Nigerian protest movement also known as OccupyNigeria. The movement which started in January 2, 2012, was triggered by the unilateral announcement of full deregulation of the downstream sector of the petroleum industry by the President Goodluck Jonathan administration. The announcement also led to a massive increase in civil society and political activism, alongside the proliferation of several political organizations and the strengthening of already existing ones. This action led millions of Nigerian citizens powered by students' groups, labour organisations, and civil society groups to resist the reforms.

In their study of world protests between 2006 and 2013, for example, Ortiz, Saenz, Burke, and Berrada (2013) found out that a significant percentage of world protests, especially in the Third World countries in the past decade have been against neoliberal reforms, including the privatization of public enterprises, full-scale deregulation of public utilities and the implementation of various forms of austerity measures. According to Rao (2010:3-4) the protesters in the Third World countries against neo-liberal reforms "seemed desirous of a state that was robust enough to be able to stand up to, and refuse, the dictates of powerful international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, whose 'structural adjustment' prescriptions had stripped away the minimalist safety nets of overwhelmed but aspiring welfare states." The protests against neo-liberal reforms according to Ortiz et al (2013) demanded reforms such as increased government funding of social services, public utilities and reduction in corruption especially in the petroleum industry controlled by shylock and oligarchic marketers.

The movement which was described by *The Vanguard* as a unifying effort where "Christians and Muslims across tribal lines stood as one against the administration's...increase in the price of petrol" (Aziken, 2013) succeeded in achieving many of its immediate demands. This

paper, therefore, analyses the “political outcomes” (Kolb, 2007) or political consequences and the mechanisms for achieving the outcomes in the context of the 2012 protests against neo-liberal reforms in Nigeria. To achieve these, the paper attempts to provide answers to the following questions: First, what are the political outcomes or consequences of the protests? Second, what were the mechanisms or “repertoires of contention” deployed by the activists to achieve these outcomes? Both questions will be answered based on acceptable research methods deployed for this study.

This paper addresses a research gap, as current tendencies for social movement scholars exist to restrict outcomes of protests strictly to institutional outcomes thereby leaving other aspects like changes in political consciousness as a major effect of social movements empirically under-researched.

Kolb (2007) describes five ‘mechanisms’ which include: disruption, public preference, political access, judicial, and international politics through which activists may bring about political outcomes. These ‘mechanisms’ Kolb described are merely refined and useful sets of tactical categories. In addition, the mechanisms themselves are largely distilled from the broader literature on movement outcomes, and thus none of them are entirely new in the study of social movements. Outcomes from these “institutional mechanisms” can only produce “institutional outcomes” which appears to have been the basis of current scholarship in social movements. Silva (2015: 28) argues that social movements now adopt unconventional, non-institutional mechanisms to achieve political outcomes such as changes in destructive policies, improved political participation and economic inclusion. This paper, on the other hand, seeks to explore the possibility of expanding the scope of the discussion to include “non-institutional mechanisms” for achieving “non-institutional outcomes” in social movements within the context of the 2012 protests.

## **2. Theoretical Underpinnings**

Tilly (1995) has maintained that there is a strong relationship between political actors and social protests. This is in obvious response to the deprivation theorists (Berger and Milkman 2010; Jasper and Poulsen 1995; van Laer 2011; Coleman 1990; Gurr 1970; Lewis and Kraut 1972) who maintain that “People who take part in acts of civil disobedience...are discontented about something” (Muller and Jukam, 1983). Invariably, as della Porta and Diani (2006: 47) have maintained, social protests only react to changes in political culture and values and not the other way round.

Much of the scholarship on protests rests on the assumption that they have the ability to cause at least some degree of political change. The tendency for scholars to only focus on the “political process” (Tilly, 1995) as only affecting protests and not the other way round opens the arguments to “political reductionism” (Melucci, 1989). While it will be difficult to distance the influence of some “vested interests” and opposition politicians in the mobilization of the January 2012 protests, as some have alleged, it might be difficult to prove that many Nigerians welcome the Federal Government’s decision to increase the pump price of petrol. Indeed, the conventional view in the political science literature is that protests have little influence on processes producing political outcomes (McAdam and Su, 2002: 699). As Doug McAdam and Yang Su argue, this is because political scientists tend to focus on formal political institutions, to the exclusion of alternative spheres of political action (ibid). This is particularly true of those scholars operating within the liberal tradition, which, as Mouffe (2005:10) argues, is characterized by a rationalist, individualist approach that tends to underplay the importance of collective action.

Yet, even among scholars there is disagreement over the extent to which social protests can influence political outcomes and the conditions under which they do so (Silva, 2015). Some claim that, when compared to other political actors, protests have relatively little influence on processes of political outcomes (Burstein and Sausner, 2005; Guini, 2007). According to Marco Giugni (2007), protests can exert, at best, a moderate influence on public policy change.

The political outcomes of protests can be divided into two broad categories: direct outcomes, such as a movement-generated change in public policy, and indirect outcomes, such as changes in public opinion on a specific issue. Within these broad categories, scholars have developed more specific outcome typologies, focused primarily on policy outcomes (Bosi and Uba 2009: 412). William Gamson's *The Strategy of Social Protest* (1975) was the first study to examine the political outcomes of social protests. In this landmark study, Gamson was able to demonstrate that protests brought about at least some form of political outcomes almost half of the time.

However, Gramson's approach was limited in its use because, in examining a protest, relying solely on its stated goals as the main parameter to predict outcomes has made many scholars to overlook unintended forms of political outcomes (McAdam and Su, 2002; Kolb, 2007). In addition, as Andrews (2001) argues, the goals of social protests are by their nature contested by both participants and observers, thereby complicating definitions of success. A protest's goals often change as its activities develop. Over time, therefore, scholars have modified Gamson's (1975) work, discarding the success/failure approach and developing new criteria for measuring social protest-generated political outcomes (Kolb, 2007; Kriesi, Koopmans and Dayvendak 1995). In particular, scholars have begun to focus on protest outcomes, an approach that allows them to study the unintended and negative consequences of social protests as well as their successes. This paper adopts such an approach.

Yet, despite these theoretical advancements, there is still no consensus in the scholarly literature on how to define and measure political outcomes (Bosi and Uba 2009: 410) with some scholars arguing that most collective actions are aimed at intermediate level (Amenta, Caren, Chiarello and Su 2010: 290). As discussed previously, the vast majority of studies have focused on movement-induced changes in public policy, (Agnone, 2007; Andrews, 2001; Piven and Cloward, 1979) because this is one of the most obvious ways that social protests can affect political outcomes and is relatively easy to measure (Burstein and Linton, 2002). However, even those studies that operationalize political outcomes as changes in public policy use different indicators to measure the policy impact of a protest. For example, in assessing a movement's policy impact, some scholars examine passed legislation, (Burstein, 1979) while others measure public spending on a particular policy (Giugni, 2004). This paper builds on Felix Kolb's typology of political outcomes, which classifies political outcomes as either substantive (referring to policy change and changes in the political agenda) or institutional (Kolb, 2007). To these two categories, I add non-institutional outcomes as a product of 'non-institutional mechanisms' of the OccupyNigeria movement, which include changes in political consciousness and public opinion.

### **3. The OccupyNigeria Movement in the Contexts of Neo-Liberal Reforms**

To understand the emergence, causes and consequences of the 2012 protests, we must first examine the country's incursion into adopting neo-liberal policies especially those implemented by the General Ibrahim Babangida's administration in the mid-1980s. This could be referred to Nigeria's real first experiment with neo-liberalism (Harvey, 2005). The

Nigerian state has adopted hook, line and sinker the World Bank/IMF-induced neo-liberal policies, their conditionalities, and “solutions”. The boldfaced, unrestrained adoption of these policies soon led to series of socio-economic and political crises with heavy tolls on citizens’ welfare, public and political accountability, and social stability (Rao, 2010).

The OccupyNigeria movement emerged as a reaction to the dare-devil institutional corruption and severe economic problems following years of the State’s implementation of neo-liberal reforms. The pressure of austerity-economic policies induced reduction in public spending in public utilities, the social, the welfare, the education systems and the removal of subsidies on petroleum products provides added impetus to the dramatic response of the movement.

As at the end of 2011 (after the presidential election) and before the protests, a *Gallup* poll reports that about 60% do not have enough money to feed their families (Crabtree, 2012). In the same report, 40% claim they lack access to adequate shelter (Ibid). These gory figures show that Nigerians are among the poorest people in sub-Saharan Africa despite having some of the largest deposits of natural resources (*Africa’s Pulse*, 2012).

By 2012, the Nigerian public has become so dissatisfied with the economic and political order which led to an outburst known as OccupyNigeria movement. After large city square occupations in Lagos, Kano, Abuja, Port Harcourt and several foreign cites like London, New York, and Washington DC, the movement dissolved into several forms of political activism through street committees, barricades, and matches to press home its demands. According to Comrade Adekunle Ajayi<sup>1</sup>, the Acting Organizing Secretary, Automobile, Boatyards, Transport, Equipment, and Allied Senior Staff Association (AUTOBATE) there were considerable increase in non-violent protests and voluntary actions, such as obstruction of traffic, towards pressing home the movement’s demands. Many saw the protest as an opportunity to participate in politics for the first time. According to one of the groups mobilising for the protests, Enough is Enough the protests took place in about 40 cities in different parts of the world (Enough is Enough, 2012a).

The decision of the federal government to increase the pump prices of the commodity came when about 23.9% of Nigerians were unemployed in the country (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This was also the period when about two-thirds of Nigerians were living below poverty line (Ogunde, 2012). The government’s decision was largely considered “insensitive”.

Increase in food prices, rise in the cost of public transportation, and a general rise in the cost of living would be some of the immediate consequences of the new fuel policy. The policy itself, the perceived “unilateralism” of the President’s decision, and years of economic hardship, constituted immediate catalysts for the OccupyNigeria Movement (Ayobade, 2015:61).

The OccupyNigeria became largely historical because of the way in which mostly underclass Nigerians navigated questions of nation, citizenship and history both physically at the venue(s) of the protest, and virtually through social media. The primary actors in the OccupyNigeria Movement were, unlike dominant political actors, members of the Nigerian subaltern class (Ayobade, 2015). In a seeming unprecedented fashion, the protests saw thousands of Nigerians took to the streets to demand improvement of the fight against corruption, reduction in wastes in public spending and the reversal of the total deregulation

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with the author

of oil industry and other neo-liberal policies of the federal government (Cambell, 2012; Azikiwe, 2012).

On Monday, 16 January 2012 the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and other Trades Unions suspended the strike as a result of pressure from the state. On the same day, the Jonathan-led administration deployed the military to take over all the protest venues in what many Nigerians see as an act of betrayal. In his reaction, the Governor of Lagos, Babatunde Raji Fashola, SAN, criticized in strong words saying the matter was “not a matter for the military” (Enough is Enough Nigeria, 2012a).

It appears the labour leadership gave in to government’s “arm-twist” to call off the strike at a time the momentum is reaching its prime when, according to Aljazeera, it was becoming obvious that the “...unions and the government have lost control of this process,” (Schechter, 2012) and the protests are becoming more of “a referendum on Goodluck” (Ibid).

The repressions and the full-scale display of power by the state, notwithstanding, the protests continued on social media (where it all began originally), especially on Twitter.

The movement began to show signs of decline by 2014 when most of its leaders and promoters have become either distracted by series of pre-2015 election politicking or other activities like the BringBackOurGirls movement. The BringBackOurGirls activists were united in outrage over the 276 girls abducted in Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno state by Boko Haram (Shearlaw, 2015).

#### **4. Mobilization Mechanisms or “Repertoires of Contention” for the OccupyNigeria Movement**

In order to achieve their goals, the activists employed various strategies or mechanisms, or what Tilly (1995:411) describes as “repertoires of contention” by which he meant the “ways that people act together in pursuit of shared interests.” The 2012 mass protests utilized both “orthodox” and “unorthodox” measures (Silva, 2015). The “orthodox” measures included large gatherings attended by thousands of people in several centres across Nigeria (Ayobade, 2015). The protests organized by the movement were the largest since the 1980’s. Other “orthodox” measures included “disruptions” in which protesters used roadblocks, barricades and burning tires to restrict vehicular movements in major cities; there were also labour strikes in which the nation’s civil servants refused to go to work as directed by the leadership of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Joint Action Forum (JAF) and others while the protests lasted. In addition to these traditional repertoires, the 2012 protests gained national and international attention through its creative protests attended by leading musicians, theatre practitioners, social media influencers and dance to express its demands in innovative and entertaining ways (Tilly, 1995).

The “unorthodox” measures included social media activism on Twitter. Scholars have argued that social media has become central to many protests that have occurred in the past decade (Bennett, 2005). Social media can play a key role in mobilization because it facilitates access to large amounts of contacts, generates collective identities, and serves as a site for information distributions (Valenzuela, Arriagada and Scherman, 2012: 302).

Scholars are, however, quick to point out that social media does not necessarily create new forms of protest or alter traditional organizing in fundamental ways. As Valenzuela et al (2012:311) contend that activism should not be restricted to the online space. In other words, social media tends to support or facilitate traditional protest forms. In addition to using Twitter and Facebook to coordinate protests and to denounce police violence, the 2012 protests used social media as an alternative information source, a space to publish a counter-



narrative to the version being portrayed in pro-government propaganda channels. The OccupyNigeria movement benefited from the motivations provided by its key promoters. These individuals were articulate speakers and were able to communicate the movement's demands and aims to the people (*The Economist* 14 April, 2012). The charisma of its promoters, along with its creative and attention-grabbing protests, helped the movement gain widespread public support and acceptance according to *The Vanguard* (Aziken, 2013). The protesters displayed various anti-government and subsidy placards with various inscriptions with clear political meanings to register their displeasures with the reforms (*The Vanguard*, 10 January 2012). This made movement's demands make a lot of sense to Nigerians.

## 5. Methodology

For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted interviews for and analysed published interviews of some key individuals in the OccupyNigeria movement who took part in the 2012 protests. These persons are activists, labour leaders, and some current policy makers (who also participated in the 2012 movement). All these persons were chosen through what Maxwell (2013: 88) calls "purposeful selection," an approach in which "particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices." The selection process thus consisted of reading newspaper articles and talking to local contacts in order to identify the relevant informants or interviewees. This paper also made use of articles and Tweets (from the popular social media platform, *Twitter*) written by some key actors, interviews by labour leaders and activists written or granted during or after the protests.

Also, the researcher also collected data from speeches of policy makers, like the President of the Federation on important national days like May 29 (Democracy Day) and October 1 (Independence Day) when the President normally give important policy directions of his administration. The researcher coded the responses according to standard procedures. There were no pre-set codes available to the researcher; instead, codes emerged through a close reading of the transcripts of the interviews. This is what Strauss and Corbin (1990:101) refer to as an "open-coding" approach. Through the coding process, the researcher identified the central concepts that emerged from the data. He then selected quotations that illustrate the way in which interviewees discussed these concepts. The researcher conducted this analysis using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences or SPSS.

The researcher also reviewed posts on social media (specifically on Twitter) in the period under consideration to find out the views of many Nigerians since some previous studies have shown that they play vital roles in the determination of political outcomes especially during the Arab spring (Storck, 2011; Breuer, 2012).

## 6. Discussions and Analyses - Consequences, Mechanisms, and Outcomes of the OccupyNigeria Movement

In this section we shall be looking at the consequences of the protesters resorting to the use of "non-institutional mechanisms".

### 6.1 "Twitter Protests", Non-Institutional Mechanisms, and Consequences of Repressions

Launched over a decade ago by three young Americans Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams and Christopher Isaac "Biz" Stone (Grossman, 2009), Twitter is a social networking and online news platform that enable its numerous users post information about "what's happening in the world and what people are talking about right now" (Twitter, 2018). It allows users pass information by "Tweeting" or "Tweets" which are short posts limited *originally* to 140 characters but since November 2017 to 280 characters. These "tweets" can also be categorized using "hashtags" such as #OccupyNigeria to enable other users connect easily

and promote the causes there care about. The #OccupyNigeria hashtag (monitored on <https://twitter.com/search?q=%22%23OccupyNigeria%22%20&src=typd> Accessed on March 3, 2018) generated millions of tweets in during the few days from January 2-16, 2012 before the government deployed the military to occupy various protests venues. But, the protests did not stop on Twitter and other social media platforms with more tweets still coming in showing users expressing frustrations at the seeming “betrayal” of the labour unions and the intimidation from the show of force by the military in denying protesters access to the venues.

Contemporary activists have often described Twitter protests as a “leaderless, horizontal aggregates” that often resort to the use of “language of networks” (Gerbaudo, 2012: 21) to achieve their objectives. The reason for OccupyNigeria promoters adopting non-institutional mechanisms like Twitter as a platform for contemporary activism is “accompanied by the rise of forms of soft and emotional leadership, which are by and large indirect as well as invisible but nonetheless effective in giving collective action a certain degree of coherence and a sense of direction (Gerbaudo, 2012:157). Invariably, they seek to control the narrative and directions of the protests outside the institutional mechanisms like organized or centralized labour.

A Twitter user Japheth Omojuwa (tweeting under his verified twitter handle @omojuwa) wrote to his 500,000 followers (on Twitter) on 3 January 2012 “We will occupy till 2015 if we do not get what we want... #occupyNigeria” showing the protesters were not ready to give up till their demands were met. It was from this same handle that he tweeted (on 10 January 2013) how the labour leadership two of whom were Abdulwaheed Omar and Peter Esele “betrayed” on the movement. Narrating his ordeal during the lengthy negotiation that finally led to the betrayal by the labour leadership, Omojuwa, writing on his personal blog (Omojuwa.com) writes:

“Unknown to us all, the NLC Chairman had gone on Air to pull the greatest Coup on PENGASSAN. He had announced on our behalf that we were not shutting down. Funny how you are in a meeting and made a decision, only to hear a contrary thing on the Social Media who had access to TV that was to cover our Meeting!” (Omojuwa, 2013)

Omojuwa added that the government has become jittery the protests may lead to something in the range of the recent Egyptian revolution which led to the ousting of its leader Hosni Mubarak. He said “Comrade Peter Esele came to chat with us. He told us how scared the Government had become and how a Minister was even begging that the Union accepts even a marginal increase to N67 so that the President won’t be seen as weak” (Ibid).

In what looks like a direct response to Omojuwa, TUC president Peter Esele in an interview with online news platform, *YNaija*, said the OccupyNigeria movement lacked leadership. He said “The *OccupyNigeria movement didn’t have a leader*, and that is also dangerous because if you are moving into something of this magnitude, you must be able to seize the political angle.” (*YNaija*, 2013 my italics).

From the statements of these two key participants, we can figure out that the protests was not just about the labour unions strike since according to Esele, “We went into the strike action solely as a labour movement, and there was no agreement between labour and civil society about anything” (*YNaija*, 2013). This means that more positive results would have been achieved if there has been more synergy between the movement and the labour unions. The question of repression by the state also seems to have featured prominently in influencing the decision of the labour unions to call off the strike because, according to Omojuwa, “the ghost

of June 12” was still hunting the labour leaders. The labour movement ended the strike, the “Twitter protests” continued in what seem like taking away the protests of the institutional, conventional coordination of protests. For example, another influential Twitter user active during the protest, Tolu Ogunlesi (@toluogunlesi) [All tweets were monitored on the link <https://twitter.com/search?l=&q=%40toluogunlesi%20%22%23OccupyNigeria%22%20%23OccupyNigeria%20since%3A2012-01-01%20until%3A2013-04-30&src=typd> Accessed on March 3, 2018] on January 16, 2012 writes: “Time to start predicting next moves: NLC might call off the strike today or tomorrow. #OccupyNigeria” to his over 300,000 followers. In a reply to Tolu Ogunlesi on Twitter, another user (@reformerx) on 15 January, 2012 when rumours were rife about labour leaders “betraying” the movement, writes “@toluogunlesi I'm certain the change is now or never! You can't quell peaceful protesters by sending soldiers to the streets. #OccupyNigeria”. This only goes to show that that the disagreement between the “Rash tag” or social media team and the labour leadership can be a product of the battle of both factions to take over the soul of the protests with both viewing each other with suspicion and caution.

The cracks in the labour leadership has become so evident following the NLC's 11th delegates' conference in March, 2015 leading to its breaking into two factions; one led by Dr. Ayuba Wabba and the other by Comrade Joseph Ajaero in 2015. Strong indications emerged that the cracks may not be unrelated to the allegations of the “Rash Tag” or social media team that the labour leadership had worked hand in gloves with the Jonathan administration to “betray” the masses and that the labour leadership has become engaged in the intense 2015 election politicking (Suleiman, 2017).

This suspicion of the “Twitter protesters” played out in subsequent protests in 2016 when the government increase the fuel prices again; this time, to N145/litre. Joe Ajaero-led faction of the labour leadership met with the federal government team led by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Babachir Lawal and “agreed not to proceed with a strike” when the Ayuba Wabba-led faction walked out of the negotiation (Adekoya and Adepetun, 2016) effectively crippling the prospects of any protest against the hike in price. The fact that many of the “Rash Tag” team that orchestrated the 2012 movement now have appointments in the new government added to the abysmal outcome of a never-to-begin 2016 protest against neo-liberal reforms.

## **7. General Outcomes and Consequences of the OccupyNigeria Movement**

According to *Premium Times*, “Nigerians, under the banner of #OccupyNigeria, protested against misgovernment and massive corruption.” (Emmanuel and Ezeamalu, 2013). Through an analysis of the empirical evidence, this paper finds out that the OccupyNigeria movement had three key immediate political outcomes which will be discussed in this section. These include:

### **7.1 The Petroleum Industry Bill**

Even after the protests, various civil society organisations that participated in the January uprising braced themselves up for the bigger challenges of getting major reforms in the oil industry to curb corruption and loopholes in the sector. On June 28, 2012 the minister of petroleum resources, Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke made a major policy announcement when she presented the report of a technical committee of the ministry to the President at the State House which is now known as the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) with the objective of promoting “transparency, simplicity and openness” in the oil industry (PIB, 2012: 14). The introduction of the bill, many experts argued, will bring about a lasting solution to the



challenges of corruption in the sector (*Channels Television*, 2012). The bill was not passed by the National Assembly until recently when the balkanized version was passed in piecemeal. According to TUC president, “The draft of that report is almost ready. Right now, we are doing what we call ‘clean up’. Once we are done with the cleanup, we will now pass it on to the executive. The PIB will strengthen a lot of things. Government is the problem and we try to take government [of the petroleum industry] out as much as possible.” (*YNaija*, 2013). Even President Jonathan the same sentiments in his Democracy Day speech on May 29, 2012 when he said his government has “charted a new course that will ensure enduring transparency and accountability” (*The Post*, May 29, 2012).

The President made good of his promise to send the bill to the National Assembly during his October 1, 2012 speech when he said the bill “...will ensure far-reaching reforms, transparency, accountability, increased government revenue...” (*The Vanguard*, 1 October, 2012).

The fact that the Bill, whose essential objective was to tackle corruption and waste in the oil sector featured so much in the president’s speeches (including during the presentation of the 2012 budget) shows the changing consciousness in the thinking of the political leadership about addressing the issues raised during the protests.

### **7.2 Probes, Inquiries, and Institutional Reforms**

The protests threw up a lot of issues that placed the government on its toes. With the availability of information online, especially on the social media, to the youths, the state found itself for the first time in a difficult position on how to go about that. Some of the demands of the protesters is a probe into the fuel subsidy scheme and questioning the credibility of the government for not standing up to the ‘cabal’ it blamed for corrupting the scheme. Demands like these attracted the attention of the Nigerian House of Representatives led by Aminu Tambuwal. The House of Representatives launched a full probe by setting up an investigative panel to look into the allegations of fraudulent practices in the subsidy scheme and prosecution of individuals short-changing the country.

As Comrade Achike Chude, Vice Chairman, Joint Action Front (JAF) noted in his interview with *Premium Times*, he said that one of the important outcomes of the protests was that they “...eventually forced the government, not that they were interested in anti-corruption, to start the subsidy probe.” (Emmanuel and Ezeamalu, 2013).

But unlike Comrade Chude, Comrade Abiodun Aremu, Secretary, Joint Action Front (JAF) had a different view on in “...the whole thing about the subsidy thing which we have claimed over and over had been a ruse and an avenue for further looting of resources have been further exposed by the probe panels.” (ibid).

In an attempt to demonstrate its sincerity to Nigerians about its resolve to fight corruption, the Jonathan government appointed a 20-member committee called Petroleum Revenue Special Taskforce “...to determine and verify all petroleum upstream and downstream revenues (taxes, royalties, etc) due and payable to government” (Nwachukwu, 2012) headed by opposition Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) presidential candidate *Mallam* Nuhu Ribadu. When the Special Task Force submitted its report in August 2012, it was greeted with heated controversies the Jonathan’s administration was unhappy with its report. The report revealed “the NNPC also gave out N700.5million in loan to Sao Tome & Principe based on instruction from the presidency.” (*Premium Times* 17 August, 2012). As a result of the crises of confidence that met the Ribadu report, the government appears to have abandoned it.

On his part, the newly elected president, Muhammadu Buhari, in his issued the following

strong statements on his first Independence Day speech as President that his administration has taken steps “to sanitize NNPC and improve its operations so that the inefficiency and corruption could be reduced to a minimum” (*The Vanguard*, 1 October 2015). He also “ordered a complete audit of our other revenue generating agencies mainly CBN, FIRS, Customs, NCC, for better service delivery to the nation.” (ibid).

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, was also reported to have begun prosecution of at least 20 oil marketers connected with the subsidy scheme fraud. All these probes notwithstanding, none of these efforts is yet to translate to punishment for members of the ‘cabal’.

The House of Representatives’ probes into the fuel subsidy scam was what led to a bribery scandal involving the Chairman of the House Ad-hoc Committee on Fuel Subsidy Probe, Hon. Farouk Lawan and oil magnate Femi Otedola. The inglorious role he played in this period was part of the reasons he was rejected at the 2015 polls by his constituency after serving on four previous occasions (Mudashir, 2015).

### **7.3 Increased Awareness on Public Wastage, Corruption and Mismanagement**

Some of the greatest achievements of the 2012 protests were the revelation of the monumental wastes associated with the high cost of governance in Nigeria. In his speech to the nation on the removal of subsidies on petroleum products, President Jonathan said (in the heat of the protests):

“To save Nigeria, we must all be prepared to make sacrifices ... we are taking several measures aimed at cutting the size and cost of governance” (*Daily Post*, 2012). He also said “...the basic salaries of all political office holders in the Executive arm of government will be reduced by 25%.” (Ibid).

It made a lot of sense to demonstrate leadership by example during the period. The president reducing his basic salaries by 25% and those of his appointees looked by a good achievement but was that enough?

According to the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) president (at the time), the issue of wastes in the public section was becoming an issue of serious concern. He said (when President Jonathan promised to cut the salaries of political appointees by 25%) in an interview with *Encomium* magazine, he said “What we want him to do is to go in there, tackle the very serious corruption in the issue of fuel subsidy because even in the 2011 budget no more than N260 billion was appropriated for it...” (*Encomium* magazine, 2012).

On his part, famous actor Desmond Elliot (who was later elected as a member of the Lagos state House of Assembly under the platform of the newly-formed APC) on his Twitter handle (@deselliot) wondered why the president and other political appointees go about in a retune of private jets and fleet of cars when President Obama was at the same time slashing his.

In response to all these charges, the Jonathan government set up the Presidential Committee on the Rationalisation and Restructuring of Federal Government Parastatals, Commissions and Agencies, under the leadership of a retired federal civil servant, Mr. Stephen Oronsaye. The committee recommended the scrapping and merging of 220 out the existing 541 government agencies (Kupoluyi, 2016). The position of the labour unions at the time was echoed by Peter Esele who said (on the report) “Our take on it is that if there are areas that need to be trimmed ... There is a lot of wastage in the system which needs to be addressed.” (*YNaija*, 2013).

To show the level of information about wastage in public sector, a group, EnoughisEnough Nigeria published a document titled *#CutGovernmentWasteNotFuelSubsidy*. The document

listed several billions of money looted by politicians and several “security votes” spent by governors and wonders why the government keep saying there was no money to fund the subsidy scheme. The document also published the N1billion in the 2012 proposed budget for “feeding” the nation’s President and Vice President when millions of Nigerians go hungry (EnoughisEnough, 2012b).

Groups, such as the Enough is Enough Nigeria and BudgIT, founded by some young people did clause by clause analyses of the 2012 budget to expose wastages and corruption in simple languages understandable to most, if not all Nigerians during the during and after the protests hence, increasing political awareness of many Nigerians

## **8. The Non-Institutional Outcomes of OccupyNigeria Movement**

The OccupyNigeria movement had a number of outcomes that can be characterized as non-institutional. The non-institutional outcomes include:

### **8.1 Agenda Setting**

According to Joe Odumakin, human rights activist, “The gains of OccupyNigeria include the great awareness that corruption is the key issue in Nigeria oil sector and not subsidy.” An idea that arose in many of the interviews analysed was that the OccupyNigeria movement had successfully placed the fight against corruption on the national political agenda. While agenda setting is an example of what Kolb (2007) calls substantive political change, the participants’ claims of agenda setting ability can also be interpreted as a non-institutional outcome. This is because claims of agenda-setting power reveal how the protesters understand their movement’s political influence. For example, many protest participants claimed that because their movement made the fight against corruption in the oil sector a central issue on the political agenda, President Buhari, who won the 2015 presidential election, was obligated to include the movements’ demands for the fight against corruption in the oil sector in his campaign platform in order to return to power after his first stint ended as a military head of state in 1985. This shows that movement leaders perceive themselves as relevant actors in at least the first stage of the policy making process.

On Joe Odumakin’s view, he points to agenda setting as one of the “key issue” (corruption in the oil sector) movement’s main achievement. Although others like Comrade Adekunle Ajayi<sup>2</sup>, AUTOBATE’s Acting Organizing Secretary, is quick to point out that he disagrees with the reform’s content, he argues that the exposure of the “ruling class corruption” is a direct outcome of the movement. He said in an interview with the author, he said

“The Nigerian working people wanted a revolution by 2012. Those who have been with the ruling class but have been saying they are different, who now constitute the APC used everything including their agents to divert the struggle and take it away.”

An analysis of the political agenda, operationalized in the form of presidential speeches, with the frequency at which words and phrases like “corruption”, “fight against corruption”, “probes” etc are used on these platforms shows the validity of the fact that the fight against corruption has made it to the political agenda than a year before the protests. For instance, President Jonathan, in his Independence Day speech 2012 promised to put “...the fight against the scourge of corruption is a top priority of our Administration.” And that he will ensure that “*ensured that the culprits are being brought to book.*” (Ibid)

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with the author, cited earlier

## **8.2 Paradigm shift**

Almost all of the interviews analysed claimed that the protests have changed the way Nigerians think about corruption especially in the oil sector, arguing that but for corruption, there wouldn't have been the need to remove the subsidies on fuel in the first instance. Along the same lines, a number of interviewees asserted that it is now taken for granted that the price of oil should be low, almost free in Nigeria, a change perception so radical that some categorized it as a paradigm shift. While almost all of the interviews analysed claimed that the protests had challenged the neoliberal policies imposed under Jonathan, some respondents also claimed that it had challenged the neoliberal model in a broader sense. Some others, like Ajayi AUTOBATE's Organising Secretary, feel the only thing that have changed with the 2012 protests was the organizational abilities of Nigerians to resist attacks by the state.

A survey by *Gallup Polls* seems to support the fact that corruption played key roles in the subsidy regime. The survey recalls corruption was the main trigger of the protests because about "94% of Nigerians think is corrupt." (Crabtree, 2012).

According to Kola Ibrahim, secretary, Joint Action Forum (JAF), Osun state, the movement "...awoken the consciousness of Nigerians that they can revolts in unison." Although there are many ideas contained within this response, one is particularly salient. The idea that this movement is not just about corruption. Instead, corruption became the focal point around which citizens' could gather to critique the Nigerian model more generally. In other words, the paradigm shift witnessed in 2012 provoked by the protest was not limited to corruption but applied to many other aspects of Nigerian society. In this way, Ibrahim claims, Nigerian citizens began questioning aspects of the neoliberal policies that they had not before, and became aware of the power of mobilization to challenge the existing system.

Also, as Debo Adeniran Chairman, Coalition against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL) noted in his interview with *Premium Times* noted the movement was "an eye opener that Nigerians are ready for action." (Emmanuel and Ezeamalu, 2013). As we will notice, Comrade Adeniran used the word "eye opener" to mean the protests served as a paradigm shift from what used to be the case in protest in the country.

Also, public opinion data supports the assertions made by these activists. For example, polls show that almost all Nigerians think government is corrupt (Crabtree, 2012). Also, the data shows support among the Nigerian public for the 2012 protests and demands based on the public perception of corruption in the government.

Nigerians' likelihood to be satisfied with basic necessities such as roads and schools is no higher than average for countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Crabtree, 2012). This empirical evidence supports the key actors' claims that their movement transformed corruption into a key issue of public concern and altered the way Nigerians think their country's economy should function.

## **8.3 Re-definition of protest**

The data analysed made explicit claims about the ways in which their movement changed how Nigerians view protest as a means of political participation. According to Comrade Abiodun Aremu, Secretary, Joint Action Front (JAF) the protests strengthened "the resolve by Nigerians to struggle". On his part, Achike Chude, Vice Chairman, Joint Action Front (JAF) the protests "...opened the minds of Nigerians..." There seem to be a constant reminder about the consequences of protests with the protesters previous experiences during the military in what Omojuwa referred to as the "ghost of June 12". The activists seem to argue that, by taking up the protests on social media, especially on Twitter, they re-defined protests by taking the protests away from orthodox mechanisms ordinarily dominated by the

labour leadership. In the activists' view, the movement dispelled the fear that had existed around mobilization since the years of military dictatorship. The fear that the protests will be high jacked by the terror group, Boko Haram, or by politicians was just a means by the state to install fear in the minds of the masses.

When asked whether the movement has transformed Nigerian democracy, Ajayi spoke about the importance of social media to the movement. Taken as a whole, the interviews show that the key actors believe their protest has reactivated, and re-defined, social media as a "non-institutional" protests' repertoire of contention.

#### **8.4 (Re)Awakening of the citizens' political consciousness**

According to Comrade Idowu Adelakun, Lagos state chairman, Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) "...government will have increased the pump price again. But they are afraid of... protest again." One of the most interesting ideas expressed in the interviews was that the protests "emboldened Nigerians." While this is related to the redefinition of protest, the notion of an "awakening" speaks to the larger implications of the mass movement for the country's political culture. The interviewees talked about a reduction in citizen apathy and claimed that Nigerians now demand more opportunities for political participation beyond elections. For many of the activists, this was their movement's most important outcome. When asked about the impacts of the movement, Ajayi responded that there came (during the protests) demonstrated unusual unity among Nigerians of different religious faiths in their bid to challenge the state over neo-liberal reforms.

Since the end of the street protests, the key actors on Twitter or "Rag Tag" team appear to "claimed victory" for the protests. They seem to have begun viewing themselves as influential political actors capable of altering citizens' consciousness. A Twitter user Olujide 'Gbenga (@golujide) posted his views on his blog on his account on 27 January 2012. The blog post entitled, *My Fear About 2015*. The writer expressed the views that the #OccupyNigeria movement may just decide the 2015 presidential election. The writer notes that President Jonathan "demonstrates complete ineptitude and criminally weak" over his handling of the subsidy crisis and should be "charged to court after this tenure in 2015 for their failure to use everything at their disposal to stop killings and bombings..." (Gbenga, 2012). This only goes to show that the activists see themselves has having the capacity to determine the outcome of the 2015 presidential election and many have positioned themselves for that on social media.

The data from *Gallup* survey at the time shows that "government disregard for Nigerians' well-being, the president's support among the public may quickly fade." (Crabtree, 2012).

With the momentum generated by the protests, leading opposition politicians quickly merged their parties to form the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2013. Most of the leaders of these new party in one way or the other supported or promoted the OccupyNigeria protests. The party went on to win the 2015 presidential election and leading participants in the movement like Tolu Ogunlesi, Laureta Onochie, and others supporting the APC's eventual president candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari during the 2015 election and later won (Edozien, 2015).

### **9. Conclusion**

This paper finds out that the OccupyNigeria movement not only achieved its aims of economic policy reform but also had important non-institutional outcomes using non-institutional mechanisms (Silva 2015), in this case, *Twitter*. These non-institutional outcomes included enhanced political consciousness among movement participants and the general Nigerian population, and increased public concern for corruption, wastage and



mismanagement in the public sector.

The OccupyNigeria movement achieved the following outcomes: 1) The economic and oil sector reform passed by the Jonathan administration in 2012 under the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), Institutional reforms in NNPC, and the reduction in the price of PMS to N97 per litre (policy change) and the carefulness of the state about any review in the prices of petroleum products; 2) Corruption and institutional reforms became key issues on the political agenda and shaping electoral campaigns (agenda setting); 3) Several leaders and promoters of the protests were either elected to the Legislative Assemblies (for example, Dino Melaye was elected into the Senate and Desmond Elliot into the Lagos state House of Assembly), or given political appointment (for example Tolu Ogunlesi was appointed Special Assistant to the President on Social media) or formed a new political party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) which later won the 2015 presidential election (intra-institutional change); 4) The movement, and its demands, gained widespread public support among the Nigerian public (public opinion change; a non-institutional outcome); and 5) Protests participants and Nigerian citizens experienced an increase in their political consciousness (non-institutional change).

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