



## END-SARS PROTEST AND THE CORRUPT POLITICAL ELITES IN NIGERIA: A LITMUS TEST

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### Abstract

*The study examined End-Sars Protest and the Corrupt Political Elites in Nigeria: A Litmus Test. It unraveled the causes of the problem by evaluating how it has affected the economy with the aim of attenuating its negative consequences. While adopting secondary data and content analytical method of data collection and analysis, the study observed that the level of atrocities of SARS is more acute than their primary function of protecting lives and properties. Findings also reveal that, the Police Act does not provide any guidance on the exercise of these responsibilities, and the scope of the powers of the Police remains largely ambiguous. This glaring gap in the law has led to a situation where SARS officers are not aware of the scope of the lawful exercise of power and consequently violate constitutional provisions and fundamental human rights of the citizens; The need for a proactive and violence-free process that must be adopted to address these problems of not only Police Brutality but all the problems plaguing Nigerian society has been determined as a result of this glaring legal gap, which has caused armed officers to act unlawfully and violate constitutional provisions and fundamental human rights of the citizens they are expected to protect. In the final submission, the study recommends that the state should create jobs for the vast number of young people who are unemployed and enhance the welfare and working conditions of the Nigeria Police.*

**Key words:** Nigeria Police Force, Special Anti-Robbery Squad, Protesters, Government, Corruption.

### Introduction

According to World meter, Nigeria will have a population of over 207 million in 2020, making it the most populous country in Africa. A few political schools of thought refer to the nation as the "giant of Africa" and believe it to have the largest economy on the continent. Nevertheless, despite all of these positivity's, the nation is beset with a wide range of issues, including police brutality and extrajudicial murders among others, as well as poverty, environmental pollution, unemployment, corruption, poor governance, and instability. These issues have grown over the nation's recent years of independence. This has sparked uproar against the government ranging secessionist, restructuring among many other reforms.

Police is one of the most complex jobs all over the world (Ogbette, Idam, & Kareem, 2018), this is because their sole responsibility is to protect lives and properties. However, some Nigerians have suffered as a result of the police's violent tactics. Aborisade and Obileye (2018) claimed that police brutality includes torture, harsh interrogation methods, and other egregious violations of human rights. The Nigerian citizens are brutalized, mistreated, and mistreated harshly in a variety of ways, including beatings, indiscriminate shootings, maiming, and killings, as well as the use of unnecessary restraints like handcuffs and leg chains, the use of firearms against suspects and innocent members of the public, the torture of suspects to coerce confessions, and extortion of rewards (Abiodun, Oloyede, Ademola, Abah & Kehinde, 2020).

Additionally, Amnesty International (2016) has recorded instances of torture, the majority of which were captives held by SARS. The police abuse detainees and suspects using a variety of violent tactics, including sexual assault. Amnesty Worldwide (2016). Former prisoners have described being tied and held in uncomfortable postures while being kicked and beaten with machetes, gun butts, boots, fists, electrical cables, animal hides, and other objects. 14 Others recount being shot in the limbs, being beaten by police while being held, breaking many bones, or being made to perform excruciating exercises. Particularly sex workers claim that the police have rounded them up and raped them (Abraham, 2019) One police officer alluded to sexual assault by officers as a "fringe perk" of some patrols, while recognizing that it happens frequently.

A devastating documentary about Nigerian security agencies' use of torture methods was released by BBC Africa in February 2020 (BBC News Africa, 2020). The Taby approach was highlighted in the video as being widely and consistently employed. The method entails forcing the arms back and tying them at the elbows, cutting off the victim's access to their hands' blood supply and rendering them immobile. The body is then twisted into a triangle by having the feet tied behind them. Suspended victims can have their entire body weight transferred to their arms. To make the pain worse, a large block, typically made of wood or concrete, is frequently placed on the victim's back. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad, the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Mobile Police, the Nigerian Air Force, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps, and other Nigerian security agencies were all named as being involved in the documentary.

The government has been urged to implement numerous changes but has taken no significant steps to stop the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) men from committing crimes. The severity of the crimes committed by some NPF members exceeds their basic duty of defending people and property. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a tactical section of the NPF established in 1992 to combat crimes involving robbery, motor vehicle theft, kidnapping, cattle

rustling, and guns, has proven more ruthless to law-abiding Nigerians than the criminals they were meant to combat. Public outcry has been sparked by this atrocity and others in the past and in the present Baba, Njidda, and Abbo (2020).

EndSARS began as a campaign to abolish the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police Force, a division known for its brutality and abuse of human rights. It was first employed in 2018 to spread awareness of claims that SARS agents had engaged in violence and exploitation (Magdalene, 2020). Although the government declared structural improvements to SARS, the alleged exploitation of breaches of human rights persisted. On social media in October 2020, it was reported that SARS agents shot a youngster in the street in Delta State without provocation despite the shooting being disputed by the Nigerian Police (BBC News, October 16, 2020). In this specific instance, more recordings of police shootings were uploaded on social media, which was insufficient to calm the public's ire. Celebrities and activists organized a support campaign on social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and within a few days, demonstrators were lining the streets of Lagos and Abuja calling for the end of SARS. The Nigerian government quickly declared the dissolution of SARS under pressure from the media attention the protests had brought forth. However, in light of similar statements made by the government in the past, this action did not go far enough to placate the demonstrators. For instance, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) declared in December 2017 that SARS had been forbidden from conducting stop and search operations as a result of several harassment reports. The IGP openly re-announced this restriction in 2018 and 2020, demonstrating the futility of earlier directives (Fayehun & Isiugo – Abanihe, 2020). In a similar vein, the interim president of Nigeria said in 2018 that SARS will undergo reform and that the National Human Rights Commission would look into any allegations of abuse. Shortly after this declaration, the creation of a centralized FSARS (Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad) that would report to the Inspector General of Police rather than the state

Commissioners of Police was announced. Only a few weeks later, the IGP announced the dissolution of FSARS, declaring that the organization will revert to its previous decentralized structure and state commissioner control (Jacob Olatunji et al., 2020). Protesters added to their list of demands, requesting reparations for SARS brutality victims, police officer retraining, and trials for convicted SARS personnel in light of previous practices and disappointments.

The protests have drawn compassion and support from all across the world, with world leaders like US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and UN Secretary-General António Guterres tweeting their support. Other public figures, including politicians and celebrities, have endorsed the protests or called for an end to the government crackdown on demonstrators by using the hash-tag or making references to the movement. Among them are former U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton, incoming American president Joe Biden, heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua, midfielder Mesut Ozil of Arsenal, and American artist Kanye West. The hash-tag #EndSARS was the top trending subject on Twitter for many days in October, and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey introduced a unique emoji for the effort (Magdalene, 2020).

The protests' reach, fundraising, organizing, and message focus were significantly impacted by the young Nigerians' internet prowess. They combated misinformation, coordinated operations with protestors across the nation, shared information in real time, and documented significant incidents like attempts by hired thugs and pro-government forces to sabotage the protests and the tragic shootings in Lekki on October 20 (Onubogu, 2020). The Feminist Coalition and the mothers' organizations of Sars victims played a crucial co-coordinating role in the campaign's demand for openness and accountability for victims of police brutality. Women were at the center of this movement (Okunola & Mlaba, 2020). The broad objective of the study is to appraise End-Sars Protest and the Corrupt Political Elites in Nigeria: A Litmus Test. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Assess the role of social media's in creating political awareness to Nigerians during the End-Sars Protest.
- ii. Examine the factors that lead to End-Sars Protest in Nigeria.
- iii. Determine the perceived effects of Police brutality and extrajudicial executions in the nation, particularly against young people
- iv. Government efforts to curb it.

## Survey of Literature

### The Nature and Characteristics of Corruption in Nigeria

The term "corruption" has been given many definitions; probably as a result of the widespread attention it has gotten in society and the fact that academic circles have overused the phrase. The broad definition of corruption is a perversion of a transformation for good or bad. Specifically, breaking the law for one's own benefit and financial gain is considered corruption or corrupt behavior (Adebayo, 2013). Additionally, corruption is the illicit pursuit of riches, power, or personal advantage at the expense of the general public, as well as the abuse of governmental authority for personal gain (Lipset & Lenz, 2000).

Additionally, corruption is a behavioral style in which a person deviates from the official obligations of a public role for personal (gains) related to (personal, close family, private clique, pecuniary or status gains). It is a behavior that contravenes laws and prohibits the use of certain sorts of (duties) for personal gain in terms of influence (Nye, 1967). This term covers actions like bribery (using a reward to influence someone in a position of trust's judgment), nepotism (granting favors based on personal connections rather than merit), and misappropriation (illegally using public resources for personal gain) (Banfield, 1961). According to Osoba (1996), corruption is an anti-social conduct that grants improper benefits to people in violation of legal and moral norms and hinders efforts to raise the standard of life for all people.

Different people have different definitions of corruption. However, it is a "...abuse of authority and public trust and misuse of official positions and responsibilities for self-serving aims, whether for personal, private, or collective benefit" within the context of politics and government (Jega, 2005). It involves a behavior that transgresses, veers from formal guidelines and practices governing the conduct of public office holders for personal gain (cited in Kano, 1982). Through the use or abuse of public institutions, it enabled at the level of governance.

Even though some of these definitions of corruption date back more than a decade, recent events in Nigeria, where billions of dollars and naira have been found to have been stolen from the government, have brought these definitions back into sharp focus. Some people in Nigeria may view this as the primary way to quickly amass fortune. A significant portion of the Nigerian, no, African populace' degree of poverty and misery has been further exacerbated by corruption, which takes many different forms.

Because corruption affects all facets of human interaction and activity, its scope is typically broad and extensive. In order to maintain clarity and focus, this paper limits its discussion of corruption to that which occurs in both political and administrative positions, i.e. the civil service. Political corruption, according to Ekumankama (2012), is the use of public office by politicians to amass massive fortune for themselves, as well as the use of their political position to realize the "sit-tight syndrome" without letting others join in. Abuse of a granted political monopoly is another name for political corruption (Ekumankama, 2012, 29).

Other types and expressions of corruption are included below for simplicity and understanding: Bribery, extortion, fabrication of results, forgery, and perjury, facilitation payments, fraud, kickbacks, and election fraud, such as rigging, stuffing vote boxes, etc. nepotism, cash-for-budget, blackmail, tax avoidance, smuggling, currency forgery, corrupt gifts, illicit arms trafficking, trafficking in stolen goods, gratifications, abuse of office, settlement, sexual harassment,

fronting, budget paddling, etc (Ekumankama, 2012; Aluko, 2009, Lawan, 2009).

All of the aforementioned forms of corruption, when practiced by individuals holding public office, politicians, or bureaucrats, violate and subvert the democratic process.

### **Nigerian Police History and EndSARs Protest in Nigeria**

After more than a century, in 1930, the northern and southern police forces were combined to become the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), which had originally been founded in 1820 as the Police. Anti-robbery was one of the NPF's main responsibilities at the time, and the unit (anti-robbery unit) functioned separately as a component of many states' criminal investigation departments. By the early 1990s, banditry and armed robbery were frightening Lagos and other southern regions of Nigeria, necessitating the establishment of SARS. At that time, Mr. Simeon Danlandi Midenda, a former police commissioner, oversaw the criminal investigation department's anti-robbery squad in Benin. He had a track record of success stopping armed robberies, which led to the then-inspector general of police recommending him. Mr. Midenda was relocated to Lagos due to the rise in crime there and in other southern regions of the country, and given the task of bringing together the three existing anti-robbery teams and reducing the crime rate there. A combined NPF unit known as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was founded in 1992 by Midenda, and was armed with 15 officers and two station wagons (Adegoke, 2020; Adebawale, 2020).

Even before some of the contemporary Nigerian youngsters demanding for their reform, the NPF, particularly the SARS, were harsh. In other words, these issues have existed for a long time. Numerous stories about the illegal and inhumane SARS actions have appeared in the local and international media, both confirmed and unsubstantiated. According to a report published in 1997 by the Nigeria Country Report on Human Rights Practices and Labor, two security guards were detained at their place of



employment in mid-1996 by SARS agents from the Lagos branch on suspicion of aiding a robbery that had occurred there. The two guards' remains were later discovered at the mortuary in January 1997; no one was ever charged with anything for their deaths or their arrest. On the basis of presumptions and suspicions, they were detained. According to the same organization's 2005 annual report, a SARS agent killed a bus driver in Obiaruku, Delta State, in October when the driver refused to give the agent a bribe. The agent was terminated and detained for murder (Adebowale, 2020; Arnold, 2020).

After several years of operation, the anti-robbery squad (SARS) increased in size and power. However, with the rise of cultism in the majority of Nigerian colleges, the rate of poverty, youth unemployment, school dropouts, and internet fraudsters (locally known as "Yahoo Yahoo") have all increased. SARS agents invaded campuses in Nigeria in 2009, making some arrests that were successful but also harassing and hurting innocent persons. The Federal University of Technology, Akure's Student Union denounced SARS operative 2017's extortion and harassment of one of its students (a 100-level student). According to the Student Union, the student who SARS agents accused of cybercrime was the victim of an extortion attempt for \$5,000. There are numerous reported and unreported cases of SARS agents abusing students' human rights in Nigeria (Banka, 2020; Samuel, 2020; Chisom, 2021).

Amnesty International accused the Nigerian Police Force of violating human rights and announced in May 2010 that it would be suing the Nigerian Police for such violations. Amnesty International claimed that SARS operatives in Borokiri, Port Harcourt, had arrested three cyclists and held them for more than a week while "beating them every night with the butt of a gun and iron belt." Then-Inspector General of Police Ogbonna Okechukwu Onovo was ordered to produce a SARS officer who had killed a 15-year-old student at his high school by a Federal High Court in Enugu State on May 20, 2010. The SARS officer claimed that the teen was misidentified as a kidnapper. On July 27, 2010, Sahara Reporters published a lengthy editorial

describing how SARS and other police groups had earned \$60 million via extortion and roadblocks in just 18 months (Sahara Reporters, 2020). Even the NPF was not exempt from her men's misdeeds. Vanguard News claimed on June 4, 2011, that the NPF had prevented one of its SARS agents, Musa Agbu, from attempting to bomb the Force headquarters in Abuja (Banka, 2020; BBC, News, 2020).

The first significant public outcry against SARS operators' infringement of human rights occurred in 2015 as a result of a string of abuses of such rights and other erratic behavior. On August 7, 2015, the then-inspector general of police (Solomon Arase) moved to break the squad into two units in an effort to check and balance their excesses in response to public uproar following a series of incidents. These units were the Operational Unit and Investigations Unit. The Inspector General of Police's reforms did not, however, stop the SARS operatives' "dark rogues" and "black sheep" from continuing to violate people's rights. A separate study from Amnesty International detailed numerous instances of SARS agents violating people's rights, including coercing confessions, denying them food, severely torturing them, and harassing them, among other things. In the course of carrying out their constitutional obligations, SARS agents exhibit a high level of incompetence since they rarely handle criminal cases according to ethical standards. Random gunshots were fired during an operation to apprehend kidnappers in the Lagos State neighborhood of Ijegan and Alimosho, but one of the bullets tragically struck a pregnant woman who was said to have died instantly. Civil unrest followed, with two of the officers apparently being attacked on the spot by an enraged mob. A radio journalist in Nigeria's Rivers State named Kofi Bartels, 34, captured video of three police officers and SARS agents punching a guy in April 2019. These testimonies, along with numerous others, have been the source of conflict regarding police brutality around the nation (Fayehun, & Isiugo – Abanihe, 2020; Mayowa, 2020).

EndSARS began in 2017 as a grassroots movement opposing police brutality in Nigeria and urging reform of the police. The catchphrase demands that SARS

agents be eliminated. In 2017, a Twitter campaign with the hashtag #ENDSARS called for the Nigerian government to dissolve the SARS agents and restructure the whole Police Force. This was the beginning of the protests (NPF). Few days after Nigeria celebrated its 60th anniversary of independence in October 2020, the EndSARS campaign saw resurgence, there were massive protests taking place across the country's major cities, and there were approximately 28 million tweets using the hashtag. Nigerians submitted verified and unverified accounts of SARS agents' involvement in kidnapping, murder, theft, rape, torture, unlawful arrests, humiliation, unlawful imprisonment, extrajudicial killings, and extortion in Nigeria on social media, along with images and videos as proof. SARS officers have allegedly targeted young people based on their fashion choices and the types of electronic devices they used, set up illegal road blocks and searches, arrested people without a warrant, harassed or raped them, and demanded money from young people in Nigeria who were driving while using iPhones, laptops, and other high-end technology (Zoaka, 2019). The Federal Government of Nigeria has announced at least twice in 2020 that the SARS agents will be reformed in response to the growing public uproar. The Nigerian youths flocked to the streets to protest against police brutality, extrajudicial executions, and the continuation of SARS operations, among other things, but with no adequate action taken and no clear directions coupled with the growing police violence. Some state governors, including those of Lagos, Oyo, and Rivers, among others, joined the youngsters in the center of the protest to reaffirm their support for them and hear their demands as the number of marches and demonstrators increased across the nation (Onubogu, 2020; Osha, 2020).

### **Nigerian Government Policy Response**

Due to the unexpected turn of events, the Federal Government disbanded the NPF's SARS unit in response to the protesters' main demand and promised to address and carry out other demands on their list. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and other tactical squads, including traffic inspections, will cease

operations immediately, according to an announcement made by the Inspector General of Police on October 4th, 2020. The Inspector General of Police abolished SARS a week later on October 11, 2020, and shortly after that, the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team was created (Guardian Newspaper, 2020). The EndSARS protest did not cease nationally owing to lack of confidence in political and governmental promises, with many stating that similar promises had been made in prior years, development of the new unit (SWAT) in spite of the outrage, as well as many other unforeseeable causes. In order to punish guilty rogue personnel, the Nigerian President declared the dissolution of the police unit (SARS) and ordered state governors to establish a judicial panel of inquiry to consider incidents of killings and abuse by SARS officers (WANEP, 2020). All requests to terminate the protests were, however, rejected by the demonstrators. Many state governors, including Lagos and other states, had called for the protests to be stopped. Following their meeting with the Nigerian President on October 18, 2020, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate of Nigeria, Senator Ahmad Lawan and Senator Femi Gbajabiamila, respectively, appealed to the youth to put an end to the widespread demonstrations and make room for negotiations. This came after a number of attempts by the Inspector General of Police to communicate with the youths. The administration made numerous attempts to put an end to the demonstration, but it persisted and many people flocked to the streets across the country.

The federal government ordered each of the 36 states in the nation to establish an investigation into the incident; as a result, on Tuesday, October 27, 2020, Lagos State established an 11-member panel, which included two protestors' representatives. Six months were allocated to the group to present its report. The terms of reference included:

- i. Listen to all victims of SARS abuse or the relatives of victims and gather their testimony
- ii. Determine whether compensation should be paid

iii. Determine whether officers should be recommended for prosecution

iv. Make recommendations for ensuring that abuse doesn't occur again.

The police reform measures implemented thus far by the previous and current administrations are going in the correct path, but Nigerians aren't happy about it because they haven't seen or felt any beneficial effects from the reform programs. The demonstration is being held because many Nigerians continue to be brutalized, killed, wrongly accused, and detained by some members of the Nigerian Police.

### **Methodology**

This study is both explorative and contextual, that is qualitative in nature. This paper employed a qualitative research method. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researchers to gain insight into the organizational structures and settings, social processes, and poignantly underscores the importance of the personal narratives on the lived experiences of the respondents (Strauss, 1994). The inductive properties of flexibility and amenability available in qualitative methodology allow the researchers to discuss the issue through their personal and lived experiences as Nigerians through acquired knowledge about traditional systems of governance. In essence, the paper, which is theoretical in nature, extracts its arguments from documentary sources of data such as legal frameworks and other related policies, journals, textbooks, articles, magazines, dissertations, research reports, and relevant materials and publications from the internet related to the study. In its presentation, it attempts to broaden the discourse with relevant theoretical framework, result/findings, discussion and conclusions that are largely derived from extant literature and field survey on the subject matter.

The study ensured the validity of the instruments by making sure that the contents of the instruments are consistent with the objectives of the study. Also, efforts were made to ensure that all aspects considered

relevant to the study are adequately covered. Therefore, in order to ensure this study possesses high validity, external criterion method was adopted and was achieved by checking how correct the findings of a particular instrument is by comparing the results with existing knowledge as well as the findings of the research. These methods described above were carefully employed so as to ensure that the study is highly reliable and valid.

Finally, in order to ensure that the instruments are reliable which will in turn enable a dependable and objective deduction, inferences and conclusions, internal consistency method was effectively adopted. This was achieved by crosschecking information alongside other sources of data collection and by ensuring that the facts and figures collected from other sources mentioned earlier are accurate and would remain the same if the collection is repeated over time.

### **Results and Discussions**

#### **New Twist of End sars Protest (The Impact of the Endsars Protest to Nigeria)**

The EndSARS, EndSWAT, and EndPolice Brutality htags were used as part of the demonstration to demand an end to police brutality and the newly formed SWAT team. In numerous sites across the country, hoodlums who were supposedly recruited by the government interfered with the protest (Ward, 2020). The demonstration was evolving into civil disturbance in states like Oyo, Edo, Enugu, and Abuja, among others (Ochi, & Mark, 2021). The Correctional Center (Prison) in Benin City, Edo State experienced a prison break on October 19, 2020, during which several prisoners were set free. In response to the new development, the governments of various states, notably Edo and Lagos States, enforced curfews in an effort to reduce a public threat (Okunola & Mlaba, 2020). But after the state government had earlier enforced a curfew, there was a shooting on the evening of Tuesday, October 20, 2020, at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos State. More violence and civil unrest were prompted by this incident in many of the nation's major states. Numerous police stations, infrastructure

facilities, BRT terminals, and buildings belonging to official organizations, including the Nigeria Port Authority, among others, were burned and defaced throughout the nation. Later, this turned into widespread public robbery of government warehouses where Covid-19 palliatives were kept, as well as of private companies/investors like ShopRite, shopping centers, FemTech, and others across the nation, particularly in state capitals (Ward, 2020; Ochi, & Mark, 2021; Okunola, & Mlaba, 2020).

This recent change in the course of events from peaceful protest to widespread looting of both public and private property and civic unrest is alarming. Do we truly have an answer to the question, "Did we really win the battle on police brutality?" Analysis of the civic disturbance and widespread looting, among other things, shows that the protest against EndSARS has caused significantly more loss than gain. Yes! SWAT has been established, but SARS has been dismantled. The adage "a known devil is more acceptable than an unknown angel" comes to mind, notwithstanding the NPF's attempts to defend its activities. The state administration of Lagos State estimated a price of one trillion naira, which is equal to the state's 2020 budget, for the aftermath of the arson and vandalism in Lagos. These funds are public funds that should be used to enhance infrastructure and other sectors of the economy. In other words, Lagos State's economic and infrastructure growth may experience years of standstill. According to verifiable reports from the states of Lagos and Kwara, money from public funds that should have gone to other areas of the economy has instead been used to help private investors and individuals whose assets have been robbed (Ochi, & Mark, 2021).

Furthermore, it has been claimed that the burning of BRTs by arsonists contributed to the high cost of transportation and delays in travel time for Lagosians rather than government officials. Innocent people's lives and property have been lost, armed robberies have increased, police weapons have been stolen and are in the wrong hands, certain states have shuttered schools and other parastatals, preventing citizens from going to work, and inflation has taken hold, among

other things. The peaceful protest's unfavorable side effects have weakened the progress that has been gained thus far. The protest's gain is more improbable than its defeat. There is therefore no reason to doubt the conclusion that the EndSARS protest results in more loss than gain (Okunola, & Mlaba, 2020).

### **Factors that fuel Nigeria's End-Sars Protest**

Nigeria had previously had a number of protests before the Endsars. The EndSARS protests, however, have stood out because they have received more attention, earned a national and international audience, and have received open support from the entertainment sector, religious groups, and several other organizations throughout the world. It's interesting to note that the protest had demonstrated the youths of Nigeria's strength and abilities. While Samuel (2020) had suggested that the widespread civic unrest over SARS was sparked by police brutality, particularly towards young people. In addition to the aforementioned, numerous other immediate and distant reasons of the uprisings have been thoroughly identified by researchers, and some of them have also been covered in this study. Fundamentally, the protest was held to denounce the long-term, persistent, and despicable behavior of SARS, including extrajudicial killings, intimidation, and a culture of indiscriminate torture of the youth population. Beyond the aforementioned, it was a demonstration against the nation's general wrath, especially against the elite in Nigeria, whose leadership styles, in the eyes of the country's larger youth population, had perpetuated the nation's pauperism, unemployment, and poverty status through criminal activity and political racketeering. The destruction of the Oba palace, a revered traditional monarch of Lagos whose hallowed residence should be protected, clarified the underlying symbolism that, when allowed to fester, poverty poses a threat to national security. Given this context, it is important to pay close attention to some of the factors that acted as cannon fodder for the crisis to flourish because they have the potential to perpetuate it in the future if the concerns, difficulties, and aspirations of the youth are not appropriately handled.



## **Nigeria's Fragmented Institutions and Precarious Sovereignty, 1999–2022**

No other nation has performed as poorly as Nigeria during the history of contemporary Africa. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to comprehend how and why a once-prosperous nation lost its way to the point where its welfare, national interest, and sovereignty are at risk due to the leadership's administrative misconduct, insatiable elites, non-state actors, and exogenous circumstances.

Following its liberation from British rule in 1960, Nigeria quickly rose to prominence as a continental hegemon with a notable presence in the world order, rather than just a sub-regional power. She had a huge quantity of natural and human resources, which added to her grandeur and importance. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and standard of living in Nigeria were formerly higher than those in some Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and Caribbean nations. Additionally, there were few instances of political excess, administrative incompetence, and activities that crossed the barrier between private and public life. The majority of public institutions were productive (Turnbull, 2021).

Nigeria was a safe and secure nation, despite the occasional banditries, governmental rascality, and middle-of-the-road illegalities. Additionally, many of the leaders in the National Assembly and the Judiciary from the 1960s to the mid-1980s were on par with many nations in the Global North in terms of stature and level of competence. Despite this, Nigeria was not a "perfect country," and following the coup in 1975 that overthrew General Yakubu Dan-Yumma Gowon, things started to deteriorate slowly. Following the brief rule of General Murtala Mohammed (July 30, 1975 – February 13, 1976), the country began to rapidly descend into political and economic limbo (Adamolekun, 2002; Edoh, 2003).

Between February 13, 1976, and May 29, 1999, self-centered and egotistical men who mostly surrounded themselves with people of dubious morality and dubious backgrounds ruled Nigeria. The rot had

started, and the bottom-of-the-barrel race had picked up speed. However, the majority of Nigerians were unaware that beginning with the Fourth Republic in 1999, things would deteriorate and take a gloomy turn. It has been one deteriorating and destructive presidency after another since then, with each president appearing to have outdone and outranked their predecessors in terms of the agony they inflicted on the nation. The majority of the time, the national assembly is characterized by self-rewarding, indolence, parochialism, and badly written laws. Furthermore, it is impossible to say that the court is superior to other branches of government at any level (Igwe, 2010; Oshiomole, 2010).

The Nigerian judiciary once enjoyed widespread respect and recognition on a global scale. That's not the situation anymore. Currently, the body appears to be ignorant of the constitution's provisions and to be against the rule of law. It seems like justice is now a commodity. It is a chamber that condemns low-level offenders and everyday criminals to prison while handing out lenient sentences to high-level criminals, unrepentant thieves, and totally dishonest politicians. Cases may also be postponed for years or dismissed on flimsy technicalities. Election petitions are either resolved slowly over time or in ways that go against the law or previous precedent (Acheoah, 2018).

Years of theft, irresponsible conduct, moral and ethical decay, and wastefulness contributed to the country's and its ruling institutions' decline. Nigeria has divided into a society with fractured sovereignty and an uncertain future as a result of the aforementioned. Otherwise, how could one explain what has happened to Nigeria and its citizens—and what is currently happening? What are the underlying reasons of the nation's issues and challenges? Is the Constitution of 1999 at fault? A dishonest political structure? An unworkable federal structure? Advanced manipulation? Numerous outside variables? How can Nigeria stop such nonsense and crimes from happening? What are the long-term repercussions for a nation that is simultaneously mired in gloom and social anarchy?

The Endsars movement serves as a simple reminder to the leaders to uphold the criteria outlined in the legislation of social contract, which was signed jointly by the people. This is required in light of the adolescents' venomous outbursts during the protest, which made the political elite uneasy, frightened, and on the run. Furthermore, the youth's protest reflects their awareness of their entitlement to call for a fundamental overhaul of Nigeria's political system. It goes without saying that the crisis is a result of the intense rage and enduring irritation felt by citizens over unmet expectations and blatant institutional collapse (Igwe, 2020). As was said above, the adolescents' willingness to fight was nothing more than a display of a lack of trust in acts of authority.

### **Insufficient resources and unfavorable working conditions**

The Nigerian Police are observed to have weak capabilities for conducting scientific and intelligence investigations. Police barracks are in poor condition, are under-resourced, and are not suited to handle the volume of complicated crimes that need to be investigated. Inadequate working tools are another issue, in addition to the bad apples in the Force. There are some Nigerian police stations without a comprehensive forensic investigation, a fingerprint database, or enough funding for investigations. There are just two forensic laboratory facilities in Nigeria and a small number of forensic police staff, hence the forensic capacity is incredibly low. The Nigeria Police is now having trouble carrying out its statutory obligations due to a shortage of funding and resources for security-related issues. Additionally, it has been proven that the Nigeria Police's inefficiency and corruption are typically caused by the operatives' subpar pay and working conditions. Officers lack the essential security tools they need, such as handcuffs, advanced weapons, and bulletproof jackets. These are some of the factors that make it difficult for them to capture rebels and armed robbers in the nation (Abiodun et al, 2020, p.59).

Despite the perilous nature of the job, the police force in Nigeria is one of the lowest paid. Unprofessional

behavior frequently seen within the Nigerian Police's rank and file has continued to be mostly driven by the poor state of the agency. Over time, the force's incentive program has not exactly been stellar. For instance, before the late President Umaru Yar'Adua's administration increased salaries by 100 percent, the average take-home pay for a police constable was N10, 000, which was made up of N5, 000 in salary, N2, 000 for housing, and N3, 000 for other expenses. A Corporal made roughly N13, 000 over the same time period, but following the raise, they made between N27, 000 and N28, 000. Similar to a Sergeant, who used to earn N15 000, now earns N31, 000 thanks to the rise. Inspector's pay increased to N55, 000 after the salary hike. With the rise in pay, Assistant Superintendents of Police at the officer level made between N80, 000 and N85, 000 per year. The pay of Superintendents of Police and their Deputies, who were also affected, increased to between N90, 000 and N100, 000 each. Because of the low morale it had caused among its members and the way it encouraged them to engage in immoral behavior, poor pay in the police force has long continued to draw criticism from the public. One of the demands listed by the #ENDSARS Protester was this. In addition to low pay, problems including certain officers staying in the same job for too long, favoritism and tribalism, parochialism, and inadequate housing have all impacted how well the Force's personnel work (Alozie, 2019).

### **Poverty and Joblessness**

Since poverty and unemployment have plagued Nigeria's population, especially the youth and graduates of higher education institutions for many years, some of them have become eager recruits for criminal groups. Sheikh Ahmed Gumi revealed that "in his endeavor to talk with bandits in Kaduna State, he identified a graduate of ABU Zaria among the bandits and one of their commanders can speak English fluently" in order to support the aforementioned claim (Gumi, 2021). This helped to partially explain why insecurity was on the rise in Nigeria, particularly in the northeast and north-western regions where "endemic poverty and unemployment"

are problems. Statistics show that 91,885, 874 people in Nigeria live in extreme poverty, making Nigeria the country with the highest rate of poverty in the world, according to the World Poverty Clock (Sahara Reporters, 2018 cited in Mashi & Katsina, 2019). According to Dr. Yemi Kale, the Statistician General of the Federation, the Northwest and Northeast geopolitical zones had Nigeria's highest rates of poverty, with 77.7% and 76.3%, respectively. He also predicted that the rate of poverty in the regions will continue to rise (Nigerian Tribune, Tuesday 14 February, 2012). Additionally, compared to those in the southern part of the country and the average citizen, 80.9% of people in the Northwest of Nigeria live in squalor, according to 2015 estimates from the United Nations on the multi-dimensional poverty index (UN, 2015 cited in Abdullahi, 2019).

According to International Crisis Group (2020), Nigeria's Northwest has the country's highest rate of poverty. The poverty rate in all seven Northwest states in 2019 was higher than the national average of 40.1 percent, with Sokoto (87.7 percent), Jigawa (87 percent), and Zamfara leading the way (74 percent). The zone currently has Nigeria's highest percentage of out-of-school children, including those who never attend school, which results in cohorts of young people without formal education (ICG, 2020).

According to the aforementioned statistical evidence, many families lack access to decent healthcare, education, and basic security of life, and a sizable portion of young people in the Northwest lack prospects for meaningful employment. Some of these unproductive adolescents have become cattle rustlers and rural bandits in the area as a result of these (Abdullahi, 2019). Nigeria's unemployment rate is 23.1%, while the young unemployment rate is 55.4%, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019). There can be no security when unemployment and poverty are rising. As Liolio (2012) correctly noted, the structure of the local economy and degree of poverty will determine how successfully people are recruited into the organization. This demonstrates that the increase of armed banditry and other security issues plaguing Nigeria are largely a result of the high

rates of poverty and unemployment. Unquestionably, the youths saw EndSARs as a way to overthrow the system that doesn't support their interests.

## Corruption

Countries around the world have been struggling for a very long time with the inherent problem of corruption. It has contributed to and maintained the levels of poverty that the majority of those who are less fortunate are currently experiencing, particularly in emerging nations like Nigeria whose institutions are vulnerable to manipulation. Given its prevalence and systemic character, corruption issues in Nigeria require a whole society strategy to reform rather than the jamboree of creating anti-corrupt institutions. The SARS' corrupt practices and broader governance failings in general led to the violence that broke out (Onubogu, 2020). It has rotted away in every nook and corner of governance and has even given the criminal elements inside the security services more confidence. The nation is endowed with both natural and human resources, but many of the masses live in constant poverty as a result of the wealthy few who frequently wage simultaneous and cooperative attacks against the nation's wealth.

In spite of Nigeria's more than 20 years of democratic practice, the country has not yet reached uhuru in the maintenance of democratic administration. The ravages of the wicked cancer of corruption in the body politic have continued to put strain on this nation, among other things. The occurrence of corruption has made it difficult for Nigeria to establish effective and respectable democratic governance. Corruption is just one of the problems that have plagued the Nigerian government since democracy was restored in 1999. There are a number of persistent issues, including interethnic and interreligious strife, poverty, illiteracy, insurgency, insecurity, unemployment, electoral violence, and election rigging. However, because electoral rigging is also a manifestation of corruption at that level, the phenomenon of corruption is at the heart of all the aforementioned issues. The Nigerian Police Force is completely corrupt. They extort money from a variety of persons, including commercial bus,

taxi, and motorcycle drivers, in addition to collecting bribes. When the SARS agents are "in severe need of money for their weekends," they routinely storm various sites, including movie theaters, nightclubs, and cyber cafes, to make illegal arrests in order to raise some money. In Nigeria, several incidences of bribery and corruption are frequently recorded, and this is typical in some cases when criminals and armed robbers leave for their activities during the day and at night. The SARS agents just take payments from these "men of the underworld" and release them once they go on the prowl for their activities. It is believed that some of the corrupt SARS agents are assisting in the proliferation of arms and munitions in Nigeria (Abiodun et al, 2020, p.59).

Seventy percent of the Nigerian Police/SARS officers lack the necessary training, skills, and qualifications to perform their jobs in a professional manner. Therefore, the nation is burdened with a sizable number of unqualified, inadequately trained, and under-equipped officers and troops, many of whom don the Force's prestigious uniform, which is in poor condition. Currently, the cops are forced to collaborate with unsavory personnel. There is a shortage of resources and overcrowding in the police training facilities (Abiodun et al, 2020, p.57). Despite the fact that there was no central leadership or structure to organize the demonstration, EndSARS was a singular event. EndSARS protesters opposed the idea of having a leader or spokesperson from the beginning. Perhaps a lack of trust among them in their decision-making is the cause of this. Despite the fact that there was no central leadership or structure to organize the demonstration, EndSARS was a singular event.

### **Politics of Marginalization/Exclusion**

Youth street action is very much driven by the politics of brotherly deprivation and exclusion of youth, a viable sector of the society that may inform such strong views. In a nation where the majority of young people cannot claim to eat three square meals a day, there are some in positions of power who lavish wealth on unimportant and mundane items. A severe issue will inevitably arise in such a situation sooner or later.

Youths are not given a voice in politics and are not given importance in the creation or execution of policies. Today, it is no longer news that the government allocates more funds for National Assembly members than for health and education, which have a direct impact on the overall wellbeing of the public (Umar, 2021). As a result, Nigerian politics are based on factionalism and pursuing individual interests at the expense of the country's progress. As a result, trust between the governed and the governing has completely broken throughout the nation. The oppressed believe that politics now is more about leaders using it as a blatant opportunity to plunder the nation, amass riches, and install their own people in key positions than it is about delivering public benefits. The attitudes of many leaders in modern times do not support this; on the contrary, politics has become primarily about who gets what and how. As a result, the youth saw EndSARS as a golden opportunity to voice their complaints, happiness, and rage against the appalling conditions in the nation.

### **Discussion of findings**

Findings from the study indicate that, organized action in Nigeria has historically favored centralized representation, typically in the form of unions for farmers, workers, and students as well as professional organizations and trade associations. The #EndSars demonstrations followed a different format, emulating the other "leaderless" movements that have surfaced around the globe in recent years.

The study shows that, despite serving as the movement's sort of symbolic capital, Lagos, it became clear from this study that the protests were truly national in nature and decentralized away from any one region or group. Nigerians from 21 of the 36 states, as well as supporters from the diaspora in London, Johannesburg, Washington, D.C., and other places, took part in protests.

The study found out, localized organizing that reflects Nigerians' reality in their local areas should be what propels the establishment of mediating organizations given the various forms of bad governance across the



nation that the #EndSars protests attempted to address. However, the demands of Nigerian political organizing should not be focused exclusively on concentrations of power like the main cities and state capitals if the broader patterns that arose during the protests are to have any impact for the 2023 elections.

The study shows that, the #EndSars movement included a cross-section of Nigerians, but Lagos emerged as the demonstrations' primary hub and produced the movement's most prominent narratives and organizers. The forums and collective platforms that emerged during the protests show how important it is for Nigerians from all socioeconomic backgrounds, geographic areas, and communities to be inclusive.

The study found that mediating mechanisms needed to be created to include voices that might not be well-represented within Nigeria's online population and to broaden constituencies. Even while Nigeria's governance issues may be identical in scope everywhere, they differ in how they are expressed, and these institutions that mediate disputes should take these distinctions into account. In Zamfara, solutions that would work in Abia might not be transferable, and vice versa.

Findings from the study indicate that, efforts to address Nigeria's numerous problems cannot wait until 2023, and neither can Nigerians. Young people should be urged to register to vote, join political parties, and participate in other institutional political activities, but these initiatives should also focus on creating long-lasting civic institutions that enable young people to participate in political systems and actors beyond Election Day.

From this study, it was concluded that while increased youth civic engagement does not ensure better governance, it does increase the likelihood of closing the wide gap between those who make policy and those who must live with its consequences. And that serves as a good starting point.

Finally, only time will tell if this style of mass engagement in Nigeria spreads and becomes the norm, but the establishment was taken aback by its spontaneity, message discipline, and organizing skills. This helps to explain the harsh reaction that put an end to the protests as well as the state's ongoing repression of both important organizers and common protestors. More than a few protesters are still missing, and many more are still in custody. Others had their passports seized or had their bank accounts suspended.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the situation warrants concern and immediate action must be taken. However, a number of factors, including a lack of proper coordination, the spread of false or unverified news on social media and print media, a lack of mutual trust, dishonest politicians, and a lack of tactical moves, have undermined the entire process and exacerbated the protest into a state of civil unrest on the part of the protesters. The Nigerian government's shortcomings include, among others: a lack of citizen trust, a pattern of making empty promises, a lack of political goodwill, a lack of honesty and transparency, a lack of citizen engagement and education, needless bureaucracies, corruption, youth unemployment, a deteriorating economic and financial environment, and improper coordination of its armed forces, particularly the Police. These issues, particularly police brutality, have bedeviled Nigeria even before some of the young people in Nigeria began demanding for reform. Therefore, a proactive and nonviolent approach must be used to address not only the police brutality issue but also the myriad other issues that haunt Nigeria like a devil's curse.

The following suggestions are too crucial to the life and well-being of our embryonic democracy in order to prevent violence and improve the survival of democracy through free, fair, and credible elections in Africa:

- i. The systemic violation of civil and political rights by the police and other branches of the government must first be addressed. All law enforcement personnel need

to begin receiving extensive human rights training, according to the government. Additionally, officers should be routinely evaluated for their adherence to human rights, and offenders should be brought to justice.

ii. The government needs to encourage young people to start their own businesses. To do this, the Executive is requested to work with the National Assembly to pass an Act that would establish the Youth Entrepreneurship Fund, which would give interested and active adolescents with financial assistance for starting new firms or investing in already established ones.

iii. The government needs to work on enhancing the welfare and working conditions of Nigeria Police personnel. The current improvements should be kept up, and more should be done to enhance the conditions for these officers' services.

iv. The government did not intentionally shoot protesters, and the police, not the army, should have been in charge of putting an end to domestic violence. As a result, the president should be on top of his game and act within the bounds of his job.

v. The government should work tirelessly to free Nigerian young from the pernicious hold of idleness

and redirect their energies toward economically productive endeavors.

vi. Popular democracy requires responsible leaders and informed followers who understand the link between democratic practices and socioeconomic development. These leaders and followers must place an emphasis on democratic accountability, ensure the protection of human and peoples' rights, and ensure that opposing viewpoints are represented in the political process.

vii. Good governance is the most effective treatment for corruption. Whatever measures are implemented, they should encourage effective leadership, accountability, and control. The only framework that would permit a fair level of symbolic consistency between policy frameworks and their execution is the one described here.

viii. In light of corruption's negative impacts, the government must go beyond platitudes and make real measures to combat it. One approach to achieve this is to really punish corrupt individuals in accordance with the law. No matter who is involved in corrupt actions, the law must be applied. At the risk of being repetitive, Nigeria's leaders at all levels would need to demonstrate political will in order to move beyond rhetoric.

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