

**AN OVERVIEW OF ENDSARS PROTEST: INVESTIGATING THE DESTRUCTIVE  
EFFECTS ON HUMAN LIFE AND PROPERTY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study overviewed the EndSARS protest, investigating its destructive effects on human life and property. The study mentioned that the EndSARS protest, which began in October 2020 in Nigeria, was a movement driven by the youth to demand the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police notorious for brutality, unlawful arrests, and extrajudicial killings. In the quest to carry out this study, several subheads were also taken into consideration, such as the concept of protest, an overview of EndSARS protests in Nigeria, causes of EndSARS protests, effects of EndSARS protests on human life and property, and remedies to protests in Nigeria. The study mentioned the causes of the EndSARS protest to be: police brutality and extrajudicial killings, failure of previous police reforms, economic hardship, and youth unemployment, among others. The study further mentioned loss of life, destruction of public property, looting, and vandalism of private property as the effects of the EndSARS protest on human lives and properties. Furthermore, it highlighted police and security reformation and economic empowerment, among others, as the remedies to persistent protests in Nigeria. The study concluded that the EndSARS protest resulted in significant loss of lives, destruction of properties, and widespread economic damage. One of the recommendations made was that the government should offer compensation and psychological counselling to victims and affected families as providing support will help address the trauma caused by the violence and ensure justice for those affected.*

**KEYWORDS:** EndSARS, Protest, Destruction, Human Life and Property

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**INTRODUCTION**

The End SARS protest, which began in October 2020 in Nigeria, was a movement driven by the youth to demand the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police notorious for brutality, unlawful arrests, and extrajudicial killings. The peaceful protests started as a social media campaign, quickly gaining global attention, with #EndSARS trending across platforms. The protesters sought not just the dissolution of SARS but also broader police reforms, better governance, and accountability in Nigeria's public institutions. However, the peaceful protests soon took a destructive turn, resulting in significant damage to human life and property (Adeyemi & Okonkwo, 2021).

The protest, initially non-violent, became chaotic after the events of October 20, 2020, when the Nigerian military reportedly opened fire on protesters at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos, leading to several deaths and injuries. This tragic incident, now referred to as the "Lekki Massacre," marked a turning point in the movement. It sparked widespread anger and triggered a wave of violent clashes between protesters, security forces, and criminal elements who hijacked the protests. The escalation of violence led to the destruction of government buildings, police stations, private businesses, and

infrastructure across major cities in Nigeria (Nwankwo & Oduah, 2021).

The destructive effects of the End SARS protest on human life were grave. Numerous individuals lost their lives, both from the protester and law enforcement sides. Innocent civilians, including bystanders, were caught in the crossfire, and there were reports of severe injuries and psychological trauma among survivors. The widespread violence also left many families in mourning, with some searching for their missing loved ones. According to Nwafor (2022), the exact number of casualties remains disputed, but the effects on the victims' families are long-lasting, leaving an indelible scar on Nigerian society.

In addition to the loss of life, the economic impact of the protests, particularly the destruction of property, was significant. In Lagos, which was the epicentre of the protests, several public and private properties, including banks, shopping malls, and media houses, were vandalised or set ablaze. The Nigerian government estimated that the destruction caused by the protests resulted in billions of naira in losses. Key public infrastructure, such as government offices and police stations, were also destroyed, leading to a breakdown in law enforcement and public services in some areas (Onyema & Esen, 2022).

The aftermath of the End SARS protest highlighted the deep-seated frustrations of the Nigerian youth with the nation's leadership and institutions. The economic losses, coupled with the human cost, exposed the fragility of Nigeria's socio-political system. Many analysts argue that the protest should serve as a wake-up call for the Nigerian government to address systemic issues such as unemployment, police reform, and the marginalisation of the youth. The protest, though destructive, has also been seen as a pivotal moment in Nigerian history, raising awareness about the need for meaningful reform (Eze & Adekunle, 2021).

The End SARS protest had far-reaching consequences for both human life and property. While it began as a peaceful demand for change, it tragically morphed into a violent and destructive movement that left a significant toll on Nigeria. The loss of lives, destruction of properties, and emotional trauma experienced by victims are lasting legacies of the protest. It remains crucial for the Nigerian government to engage in genuine reforms to prevent similar incidents in the future, ensuring a safer and more just society.

### **CONCEPT OF PROTEST**

A protest is any of the many ways that people and organisations choose to voice their discontent with the status quo in politics. Protests frequently involve large-scale activism that happens outside of the established legislative process, like boycotts, civil disobedience, and demonstrations. Protests are marches held in public as a way to hold and show dissatisfaction. On a worldwide scale, they are regarded as legitimate ways to get involved in politics. Through protests, the public can gather knowledge that has been distributed secretly and communicate it to decision-makers. Protest is an invaluable way to speak truth to power (Eesuola, 2015).

Protest can be caused by numerous reasons as mentioned by Nikejah, Udoh and Essien (2016) can be caused by unemployment which can inject negative impact on the youths including the urge to protest. Protestants can express their disapproval of the current political system in a number of ways, most often through large-scale activity conducted outside of the established legislative procedures. Examples of this include boycotts, civil disobedience, and protests. The term "protest" more commonly refers to forms of mass political activism that take place outside of traditional parliamentary channels, such as demonstrations and marches, labour stoppages, boycotts, and other tactics that combine direct action, persuasion, and noncooperation with political, economic, and

social institutions. Protest can also be registered through voting, letter writing, campaign contributions, membership in interest groups and political parties, and other traditional means.

According to Chisom (2021), protests have often inspired positive social change and improved protection of human rights, and they continue to help define and protect civic space in all parts of the world. Through facilitating direct involvement in public affairs, protests enhance representative democracy and foster the growth of an informed and involved populace. They give people and groups the ability to voice their disapproval and complaints, to exchange ideas and opinions, to highlight problems with governance, and to openly demand that the government and other powerful institutions address issues and take responsibility for their actions, as demonstrated by the Nigeria Youths' protest against police brutality.

Some of the most influential social movements have been propelled by protests, which have revealed wrongdoing and abuse, called for responsibility, and encouraged people to hold out hope for a better future. Making ensuring that institutions of power recognise our human rights has been made possible through protest. Nampoothiri (2024) affirmed that protests are a feature of both democratic and non-democratic regimes.

In recent years, protest has expanded in scope, importance, and influence, turning into a vital tool for expressing political opinions and applying pressure for social and political change. Globalisation makes it possible for groups to adopt and disseminate new strategies and ideas across borders, which is what has led to the proliferation of protests. Protesting is a valid and essential means for communities in democracies to demand change on matters that decision-makers overlook. Protests can take many different forms, such as boycotts, demonstrations, and blockades, which make up a repertoire of grievances that is always being added to. Digital repertoires of dispute (social media, online petitions, digital sit-ins, Twittering) are also being implemented with the advent of new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

### **An Overview of EndSARS Protest in Nigeria**

The EndSARS movement, which gained significant momentum in 2020, represents a major protest against police brutality in Nigeria. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notorious unit within the Nigerian Police Force, faced widespread accusations of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and torture. This protest highlighted critical issues regarding governance, police reform, and youth activism in Nigeria (Olaniyan, 2022).

#### ***Origins and Background***

**Establishment and Role of SARS:** SARS was established in 1992 to address armed robbery and violent crimes. Over the years, however, the unit became notorious for its involvement in various forms of abuse, including extortion and illegal detention. As noted by Fagbemi (2022), the unit's practices led to increasing public outrage, particularly as reports of abuse become more frequent and severe.

**Public Outrage and Early Protest:** While earlier protest against SARS did occur, significant action was not achieved until 2020. Social media platforms, especially Twitter, played a crucial role in mobilizing support for the movement. The hashtag #EndSARS became a central rallying cry for activists and garnered international attention. According to Amadi (2023), social media was instrumental in organizing and amplifying the protests, highlighting the rule of digital platforms in modern activism.

#### ***The 2020 Protests***

**Triggering Incidents and Mobilization:** The movement gained substantial momentum in October

2020 after a video surfaced showing SARS officers allegedly killing a young man in Delta state. This incident triggered nationwide protest across major Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt. The protest were characterized by peaceful demonstrations, organized rallies and extensive social media campaigns demanding police reforms and justice for victims.

**Protests and Demands:** The EndSARS protests were driven by specific demands:

1. **Immediate Dissolution of SARS:** Protesters called for the disbandment of SARS due to its abusive practices.
2. **Justice for Victims:** Protesters demanded accountability for SARS officers involved in brutality and justice for the victims.
3. **Compensation for Families:** Compensations for the families of victims who were unlawfully killed or detained was also a significant demand.
4. **Independent Oversight of the Police:** The creation of an independent body to investigate and oversee police misconduct was widely demanded by the protesters.
5. **Psychological Evaluation and Retraining of Officers:** Protesters also called for a thorough psychological evaluation and retraining of former SARS officers to prevent further abuses.

**Government Response and Escalation:** In response to the growing protests, the Nigerian government announced the dissolution of SARS on October 11, 2020. However, this move was met with skepticism, as previous promises of disbanding SARS had not been followed by meaningful reform. Despite the dissolution, protests continued as demonstrators believed that disbanding SARS was not enough without border reforms. The climax of the protest occurred on October 20, 2020, when security forces allegedly opened fire on peaceful protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, a tragic event that supposedly led to multiple casualties.

#### ***Post-Protest Impact***

**Judicial Panels and Accountability:** Following the protests, the Nigerian government established judicial panels to investigate police brutality and recommend reforms. However, these panels faced significant criticism for their slow progress and lack of tangible outcomes (Thomas, 2024). Despite high expectations, the judicial panels were not able to meet the public's demand for swift justice and accountability.

**Political and Social Impact:** The EndSARS movement had a transformative impact on Nigerian political and social landscape. It illustrated the power of youth activism and social media in driving large-scale social movements. The protest also sparked broader conversation about governance, corruption and the state of human right in Nigeria. Moreover, the movement's legacy continues to inspire civil society efforts to push for greater accountability in Nigerian policing and governance.

**Continued Activism and Future Prospect:** Despite the disbandment of SARS, the broader issues of police brutality, corruption and governance remain unsolved. The EndSARS protests paved the way for continued activism and social engagement. The movement empowered a new generation of Nigerians to challenge systemic issues, signaling that protests could re-emerge if meaningful reforms are not implemented.

#### **Causes of EndSARS Protest**

The EndSARS protest, which erupted in October 2020, was driven by several key factors that were not only rooted in police misconduct but also in deeper social, economic, and political issues. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police Force had long been accused of human rights abuses, and the movement against SARS became a symbol of the demand for broader reforms in governance and justice.

- **Police Brutality and Extrajudicial Killings**

The most immediate cause of the EndSARS protest was the widespread reports of police brutality and extrajudicial killings committed by SARS officers. According to Obasanjo & Adigun (2020), SARS officers routinely violated the rights of Nigerian citizens, especially young people, through arbitrary arrest, extortion, torture, and even murder. These violations continued unchecked for years, fostering deep public resentment. The unit's history of brutal actions against civilians, often with little accountability, sparked widespread outrage. As noted by Johnson (2022), the culture of impunity surrounding the Nigerian police force allowed SARS officers to operate without fear of punishment, making it difficult for victims to seek justice. This long-standing issue of police brutality became the focal point of the protest, with Nigerians calling for the unit's immediate dissolution.

- **Failure of Previous Police Reforms**

Another critical cause of the EndSARS protest was a failure of the previous attempts to reform the police system. Although there had been multiple promises from the Nigerian government to reform SARS, these initiatives were often superficial and did not address the root cause of the problem. Olatunji & Adekunle (2023) argue that the government's ability to implement meaningful reform to curb police abuses resulted in the lack of public trust in the police force. The consistent failure to address systemic problems within the police force, including corruption and abuse of power, led to public frustration, which manifested in the EndSARS protest.

- **Economic hardship and youth unemployment**

Economic conditions in Nigeria, particularly high youth unemployment and poverty, also contributed to the EndSARS movement. Nigeria's youth faced significant challenges, including limited employment opportunities and widespread economic inequality. These economic hardships compounded the grievances against SARS, as young people were disproportionately targeted by the police based on their appearance or economic status. SARS officers often profiled young Nigerians driving cars or carrying expensive gadgets, assuming they were involved in cybercrime (Adebayo & Ojo, 2021). This sense of economic disenfranchisement fuelled the protest, with the youth demanding not only an end to police brutality but also broader reforms to address unemployment and economic inequality.

- **Social Media and Global Awareness**

The rise of social media played a significant role in mobilising support for the EndSARS movement, both within Nigeria and internationally. According to Nwosu & Eke (2020), platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook enabled young Nigerians to share their experiences of police brutality and coordinate protests across the country. Hashtags such as #EndSARS became viral, amplifying the movement's message globally and gaining the attention of international celebrities, activists, and media outlets. Social media also allowed for the rapid dissemination of police violence during the protest, making it difficult for the government to downplay the extent of the problem. The visibility provided by social media empowered protesters and kept the momentum of the movement alive, even in the face of government opposition.

- **General Mistrust in Government Institutions**

Finally, the general mistrust in Nigerian government institutions fuelled the EndSARS protest. According to Akinola & Taiwo (2020), years of corruption, poor governance, and a lack of transparency created a climax of distrust between citizens and the government. Many Nigerians felt that government institutions were incapable of delivering justice or protecting citizens' rights, and the police were seen as enforcers of the state's corrupt practices. The EndSARS protest became a

broader call for accountability, transparency, and good governance, as citizens demanded not just police reform but a change in how the country is governed. The movement became symbolic of the larger struggle against systemic oppression and the demand for a more just and equitable society.

### **Effects of EndSARS Protest on Human Life and Property**

The End SARS protests in Nigeria, which began in October 2020, had significant and wide-ranging effects on human life and property. These protests were fuelled by grievances against police brutality, especially the misconduct of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), leading to nationwide demonstrations. Below is a detailed look at the effects.

#### **Effects on Human Life**

**Loss of Lives:** The Nigerian military allegedly opened fire on peaceful protesters, sparking outrage both within Nigeria and internationally. Despite denials by the Nigerian government, multiple eyewitnesses and video footage confirmed the incident.

**Injuries and Trauma:** Hundreds of protesters sustained injuries during confrontations with the police and military. Many of these injuries were caused by the use of live ammunition, tear gas, and physical force by security forces.

**Human Rights Violations:** The End SARS protests revealed deep-rooted issues of human rights abuses by the police. According to reports from Human Rights Watch, security forces used excessive force to quell the protests, and there were numerous reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions of protesters. These actions were widely condemned by international bodies, further damaging the government's reputation regarding human rights.

#### **Effects on Property**

**Destruction of Public Property:** In the aftermath of the protests, anger over the government's handling of the situation led to widespread vandalism and destruction of public properties. Several police stations, public transportation systems, and government buildings were set on fire or heavily damaged. Lagos, Nigeria's economic capital, was one of the hardest-hit cities. The destruction of police stations further weakened the already fragile law enforcement structure, creating a sense of insecurity in many affected areas (Amnesty International, 2020).

**Looting and Vandalism of Private Property:** During the protests, many private businesses were looted and destroyed, particularly after the Lekki Toll Gate shooting. Warehouses holding COVID-19 relief materials were raided, and shopping malls, stores, and other establishments suffered substantial damage (Human Rights Watch 2021). The economic impact of these acts was severe, with business owners losing billions of Naira in assets.

**Economic Disruption:** The protests led to economic paralysis in major cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. Curfews were imposed, leading to the closure of businesses, markets, and banks for several days. Many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) were hit hard by the disruptions, resulting in substantial financial losses for both business owners and employees. The long-term economic impact is still felt today, especially among small business owners who struggled to rebuild (The Guardian 2020).

#### **Remedies to Protests in Nigeria**

Protests in Nigeria, such as the End SARS movement, have highlighted deep-rooted issues within the country, ranging from police brutality to socio-economic challenges. To effectively remedy protests and reduce the likelihood of violent unrest, a holistic and multi-faceted approach is required (International Crisis Group, 2021). Below are key remedies that can address the root causes and effects of protests in Nigeria.

➤ **Police and Security Reforms**

**Accountability and Oversight:** One of the primary demands of the End SARS protests was accountability for police misconduct. To address this, the government must establish independent oversight bodies that can investigate police abuses, hold officers accountable, and ensure transparency. Instituting measures that prevent impunity, such as prosecuting officers involved in human rights violations, will help rebuild trust in law enforcement.

**Professional training and capacity building:** Training has always been an important aspect in governance as mentioned by Ekanem, Afia, Ekong and Udoh (2024) training provides a systematic improvement of knowledge and skills, which in turn helps the trainees to function effectively and efficiently in their given task on completion of the training. Regular training of police officers on human rights, deescalation techniques, and community engagement is crucial. Strengthening the professionalism of the police force through better pay, improved working conditions, and psychological support can reduce the risk of abuses. In addition to all these, as mentioned by Ekong, Udoh and Akpan (2024) this training will lead to competency which is an important factor in effective service delivery.

➤ **Economic Empowerment and Social Welfare**

**Job Creation Programmes:** High youth unemployment is a major contributing factor to protests in Nigeria. The government should implement targeted economic policies that create sustainable jobs, especially for young people, through vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, and support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This will reduce frustration and give people a stake in society.

**Social Welfare Programmes:** Expanding social safety nets, including health care, education, and social assistance programmes, is vital in addressing the economic inequalities that often fuel unrest. Improved access to quality education and healthcare will reduce the economic pressures that contribute to protests.

➤ **Dialogue and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

**Engagement with Civil Society:** To prevent violent escalations, the government should engage directly with civil society groups and activists through established dialogue platforms. Dialogue mechanisms should include regular consultations with youth leaders, activists, and community representatives to discuss grievances and propose solutions before they lead to mass protests.

**Mediation and Peace building Initiatives:** Establishing independent peace building commissions to mediate between protesters and government authorities can help prevent conflicts from escalating. These commissions should include neutral third-party facilitators to ensure objectivity and trust from all sides.

➤ **Judicial and Legal Reforms**

**Strengthening the Judiciary:** The judicial system must be empowered to handle cases of police brutality and misconduct efficiently. Ensuring the independence of the judiciary and expediting the handling of human rights violations can help foster accountability and justice for victims of state violence.

**Legal Protections for Protesters:** Clear laws protecting the right to peaceful assembly must be enforced. Governments should respect international legal frameworks regarding the treatment of protesters, ensuring that they are not subject to arbitrary arrests or excessive force.

➤ **Electoral and Political Reforms**

**Electoral Reforms:** Many protests in Nigeria are linked to dissatisfaction with governance and political leadership. Comprehensive electoral reforms, such as ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections, are essential to address grievances related to governance failures. Strengthening democratic institutions and improving voter confidence in electoral processes will reduce the frustrations that lead to unrest.

**Inclusion of Marginalised Groups:** Greater inclusion of marginalised groups, such as women, youth, and ethnic minorities, in decision-making processes can help create a more representative and just political system. Empowering these groups politically and economically can reduce the tensions that fuel protests.

➤ **Improved government transparency and communication**

**Proactive Governance:** The government should adopt proactive measures to address societal challenges and communicate policy actions transparently to citizens. Regular updates on reforms and development plans, alongside open discussions on issues like police reform, will foster public trust.

**Freedom of Information:** Ensuring that citizens have access to information about government activities through laws like the Freedom of Information Act can help reduce misinformation and the distrust that often fuels protests.

**CONCLUSION**

The End SARS protest, which began in October 2020, started as a peaceful movement demanding the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and broader reforms in Nigeria. However, after the Lekki toll gate incident, where the military allegedly opened fire on protesters, the movement turned violent. This resulted in significant loss of lives, destruction of properties, and widespread economic damage. The protest highlighted deep-seated frustrations with governance and the police system. It is now viewed as a pivotal moment in Nigerian history, emphasising the urgent need for systemic reforms.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The government should offer compensation and psychological counselling to victims and affected families. Providing support will help address the trauma caused by the violence and ensure justice for those affected.
2. Comprehensive police reforms are necessary, including better training, strict oversight, and independent investigations of misconduct. Transparent prosecution of law enforcement officials who violate the law is essential to rebuild public trust.
3. The government should create platforms for ongoing dialogue with the youth, ensuring their inclusion in decision-making processes. This will address frustrations and promote a peaceful, progressive society.

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