

## #ENDSARS PROTESTS AND THE IMPERATIVE FOR STATE POLICE IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The paper examined EndSARS protests and imperative for state police in Nigeria, using the secondary method of data and personal observation of the protests in Delta State, where the protests started. The paper found that the political, religious, and ethnic colouration accorded the EndSARS protests by the ruling class was the reason while EndSARS peaceful protesters in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria, were killed in cold blood, and it was also the reason while several demands of the protesters were not met beyond the disbandment of SARS unit. Hence, the need for a state police in Nigeria as a better policing option.

**Keywords: Decentralization, EndSARS, protest, SARS, state police**

### INTRODUCTION

Protest movements have become a common future of authoritarian regimes in recent times. Several protests and uprisings that occurred in late 2010 and early 2011 were centered on the democratization of some authoritarian regimes in North Africa and the Middle East. The protesters who demanded for increased political rights, economic equality, and government accountability were violently repressed by the security forces in those countries. The protest which was later described as the Arab Spring started in December, 2010, in central Tunisia against the existing corrupt authoritarian regime (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). The protests in Tunisia was instigated by the self-immolation of Benezouzi of Tunisia in 2010 (Eesuola, 2013), occasioned by maltreatment from certain Tunisia state officials. The increase in the magnitude of the protest was overwhelming and thereafter led to the forced eviction of President Zine al- Abidine Ben Ali from office, and who later flee the country in January, 2011(Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

A similar protest erupted in Egypt leading to Hosni Mubarak's handing over power to a council of senior military officers. Yemen in January, 2011, also, witnessed a violent protest against President Ali Abd Allah Sallah, which abruptly led to loss of his political base due to deflection of most of the country's powerful military and tribal elites to the side of the protesters, hence, he was forced to relinquish power in February, 2012. In Libya, demonstrations against the country' authoritarian ruler Muammar al-Qaddafi escalated owing to the support of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the protesters leading to series of air strikes launched against Qaddafi's forces. This intervention led to the protesters turned rebel taking over Tripoli, the capital city of the country in August, 2011, which was followed by the subsequent capture and execution of al-Qaddafi in October, 2011 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). There was also brutal assault by protesters against president Bashar al-Assad of Syria, who engaged in counter aggression against the protesters, leading to the death of thousands. Despite several

international intervention, the rebellion and violence have remained intractable. In Bahrain dozens of protesters were killed as government attempted to suppress a protest movement led by the marginalized Shiite Islam majority. The effects of Arab Spring spread to several countries with varying consequences, such countries that experienced it include: Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, and Oman, “where rulers offered concessions ranging from the dismissal of unpopular officials to constitutional changes in order to preempt protest movements” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

The EndSARS protest movement that occurred in Nigeria was not as successful as those of Arab Spring in terms of achievement of the demands of the protesters. This is due to the lack of effective national coverage of the protest and divisiveness of Nigerian youths over the protest due to religion and ethnicity that has become a formidable determinants of political participation in the country. On October 20, 2020, state security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters, leading to the death of twenty people and with scores of others badly wounded, in what was later described as Lekki Tollgate massacre and Black Tuesday in Nigeria. The publicity of the Black Tuesday spurred greater global awareness of EndSARS movement that occurred in the world’s largest black nation. The movement is connected to the series of anti-police brutality protests across several cities in Nigeria, in October 2020. The EndSARS movement is predicated on years of harassment, extortion, and extrajudicial killings by Nigeria’s Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Ojewale, 2020, cited in Nwakanma, 2022). The collective involvement of youths across Nigeria in the EndSARS protest correlated with the view of Nwakanma (2022), that: “Social power is harnessed for political dissent in the form of protests within communities where political awareness is developed from experiential marginalization from the state.”

By 1992, SARS was founded. While this police unit was credited with gallantry acts in the curtailment of criminalities, it was later indicted by the citizens as culprits in acts of police brutality and violation of human rights of citizens. Owing largely to the gross human rights violations and other atrocious activities of SARS, the Nigeria Police was in 2016, ranked by the World Internet Security and Police Index as the world’s worst in a global survey of 127 countries (Chow, 2020). SARS is reputed for targeting young Nigerians who display flamboyant lifestyles, under the pretense of combating fraud and cybercrimes in the country. The suspects who fall victim of SARS ill-treatment are tortured and in some cases killed extra judicially (Nwakanma, 2022). The heinous activities of SARS in 2020 culminated in mass protest calling for an end to that police tactical unit.

The task of this article is to examine the #EndSARS protest and its imperatives for re-establishment of state police in Nigeria, as it was in pre-Ironsi military administration in 1966 (Shyllom, 2008). The paper adopted the secondary method of data collection, and personal observation of the protests in Delta State, where the protests started in Nigeria. The form of secondary data adopted in the paper are the consultation of textbooks, academic journal articles, government circulars and documents, diverse internet sources, newspapers and magazines publications, and so on. The data analysis is based on textual analysis and discussion of the secondary data obtained using a descriptive methodological approach. The article is divided into various sections in order to achieve its objectives. It starts with introduction, which serves as a preview to the entire work. This is followed by the theoretical framework. Subsequent

sections encapsulate the imperatives of #EndSARS protests to state police in Nigeria. Other sections are the conclusion and recommendations.

## **THEORETICAL FRAME WORK**

The paper is anchored on two theories, relative deprivation theory and the frustration-aggression theory. The reason for the adoption of the two theories in the study is to show the stability and reliability of uniformity in social response to acts of deprivation and its related phenomena, such as frustration and its concomitant positive response of aggression and exhibition of other non-conformist behavioural tendencies. The theories and others in such categories show that there has been constancy in the ways people respond in situations of frustration and deprivation. This is evidenced from the long duration between the popularity of the frustration-aggression theory in 1939 and that of the theory of relative deprivation in 1970, a period of 31 years. This, indeed is a proof of validity and reliability of these theories, which therefore, guarantees their application in a study such as this present study.

### **Relative Deprivation Theory**

The relative deprivation theory is adopted in this paper. The theory was popularized by Gurr (1970). The theory, just like the frustration-aggression theory argues that the deprivation of the people which manifests in the form of political, economic and social marginalization lead to aggressive response against the ruling class. Relative deprivation occurs when people perceived that they are being short-changed by the authorities through comparing their accrued rights and benefits with those of their counterparts in the same organization, class or country. So, the perception of disadvantages and reduction in their share of their national cake, a term predominantly used in Nigeria and some other Third World countries to represents government provision of basic and other needs, in comparison with the shares of others, spark of wave of violence in order for the authorities to correct the identified deprivation and ensure the prevalence of a level playing field for every citizens. It is in this regard that Nwankwo and Nwanodi (2023, p.56) observed that: "Giving justification to this theory, in respect to violent agitation in Nigeria, the explanatory position of relative deprivation theory makes one to understand that the more people are subjected to deprivation, or deprived of what they consider as their rightful demands from the government of the day, the much more likely they are inclined to rebel" against the authorities perceived to have been responsible for their social and political deprivation.

In the case of EndSARS protests movement, the youths of Nigeria who were mainly at the receiving end of the brutality and rights abuses of the Nigerian police unit named SARS seek recourse to section 14, sub-section 2(b) of the amended Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which states that Nigeria shall be a country, which shall provide for and guarantee the welfare and wellbeing of her citizens (FGN, 1999), through the provision of social and other essential services, including security in all ramifications. The denial of access to these basic rights and freedoms in comparison with the youths in other clime, especially, those of the developed countries eventually sparked of the EndSARS protests movement in order for the authority to redress the deprivation and guarantee the social rights, right to life, freedom of movement, and other civil liberties of the youths in the country. The EndSARS protests was embarked upon to address the deprivation of youths of Nigeria in terms of provision of security and right of expression of their fundamental human rights.

### **The Frustration – Aggression Theory**

The violent dimension of protest usually lead to a change in public policy in favour of the aggressors, especially, in the context of massive support of public opinion, and other local and international outrage against governmental actions that have triggered the protests (Green-Riley, Kruszewska, & Fu, 2021). Protests, when deployed as instruments for expressing political views and demanding governmental accountability can be a formidable political resources (Lipsky, 1968). Protest is one foremost feature of democracy (Barber, 1984). From the views of constructivist theories and culturalist empirical frameworks, several factors leading people to embark on protests have been identified, such as: social identity, the expectancy-value of rewards, perception of efficacy, and guilt, sympathy, empathy, moral outrage, and shame (Sweetman, Maio, Spears, Manstead, & Livingstone, 2019). Most protests are actually aggressive response to frustration meted out to certain persons or groups.

The frustration-aggression theory was originally formulated by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mower, and Sears (1939). They stated that “the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression” (Dollard, et al., 1939, p. 1; Breuer & Elson, 2017). The theory argues that every form of aggression is determined by frustration. Pastore (1950) noted that the aggressive response of an individual or group of individuals is dependent on their understanding of the situation of frustration. Similarly, Dill and Anderson (1995) cited in Breuer and Elson (2017, p. 3) “looked at justification – which can be understood as the opposite of arbitrariness – and found that unjustified frustration produced more hostile aggression than justified frustration. Another study conducted by Kregarman and Worchel (1961) found that there is a reduced aggression by an individual when the frustration leading to the aggression is expected. Zillman and Cantor (1976) are of the view that aggression is usually directed to the source of the frustration. Certain aggression is not directed to the source of the frustration, except the frustration interferes with achievement goals desired by the aggressor (Green, 1968; Amsel, 1962, 1992; Harris, 1974; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b, cited in Breuer & Elson, 2017).

Aggression can increase in intensity, when the nature of the aggression is such that could be a source of solution to the frustration (Buss, 1963, 1966; Thompson & Kolstoe, 1974). It is in this regard that Ichheiser (1950) noted that certain aggressive responses to a source of frustration can be described as a defence. Other studies carried out on gender disparity with respect to aggressive tendency concluded that men are more aggressive than women (Bethencourt & Miller, 1996; Buss, 1963; Caprara, 1982; Verona & Curtin, 2006). Related studies, such as Harris (1974) found that aggressive response is strongest when the aggression is directed towards person of the same sex. Berkowitz (1989) noted that every frustration does not necessarily lead to aggression because the individuals may decide to reappraise the situation of frustration and decide not to respond with aggression.

The application of this theory to this article is based on the fact that the series of human rights abuses and several acts of repression and intimidation perpetuated by operatives of SARS, and the Nigerian police in general, against most Nigerians served as a source of frustration which eventually triggered an aggressive response on the police authority leading to a crisis earlier described as EndSARS protests movement which called for disbandment of the notorious police unit called SARS. Also, the shooting of innocent protesters at the Lekki Tollgate in Lagos by some members of the Nigerian Armed Forces reinforced the situation of frustration which led to further aggression that subsequently translated to a situation where the once

peaceful protests was hijacked by hoodlums thereby leading to a large-scale destruction of lives of police officers, and public and private property across the country, a trend that indicated the failure of the federal police and its substitution with the state police architecture.

## **PROFILE OF THE ENDSARS PROTESTS MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA**

### **Origin and Abuses of SARS**

Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was a specialized unit of the Nigeria Police Force established in 1992 to arrest the ugly trend of criminal enterprises, such as armed robbery, highway robbery, illegal possession and use of firearms, kidnapping, car snatching, amongst others (Ekwunife, Oparah, Akpan, & Thomas, 2021). For example, there was an increase in Nigeria's crime data from 244,354 in 1991 to 289,156 in 1993. The establishment of SARS in 1992, though widely criticized in recent times, had some tremendous impacts in crime reduction from 289,156 in 1993 to 241,091, in 1994, and further down to 167,492, in 1999 (Cleen, 2003, cited in UK Essays, 2018; Cleen Foundation, 2019).

But overtime, SARS operatives acted in manners that were at variance with its mandate and inimical to societal peace and progress. The operatives of SARS were indicted by the Nigerian public of gross human rights abuses, such as arbitrary arrests of innocent citizens, torture, rape, extortion, unlawful detention without trial, and series of extrajudicial killings reported across the country (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), 2021). A case was reported in 1995, of two university students, Bola Afilaka and Ayodele Adejuyibe, who were both shot dead by operatives of SARS after Afilaka refused to stop his car at a check point. Also, in 1999, a man was reported to have died in SARS custody after days of interrogation and abuse of his human rights by officers of the dreaded agency who accused him of stealing a car. In addition, the Civil Liberties Organization stated that journalists were often targeted by agents of SARS, with their homes raided from time to time, and their families harassed in the middle of the night (Chow, 2020). In response to the gross human rights abuses perpetuated by SARS, the United Nations (U.N.) Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment observed that torture is a systematic approach adopted by the Nigerian police in its operations. The U.N. Official noted that a significant part of such violations was carried out at the SARS detention Centre in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (Chow, 2020). The SARS was rated as the most effective units of the existing Federal Police system prior to the popular EndSARS protest movement. This fact therefore, indicate the progressive failure of the present centralized police arrangement in Nigeria, and the imperatives for it replacement with the decentralized state police system.

In 2010, the Open Society Justice Initiative alleged that Nigerian police perform their functions with "pervasive corruption", "destruction of evidence" and "routine extortion" (Chow, 2020). In 2012, the then Nigerian Inspector General of Police Mohammed Dikko Abubakar in an interview lamented the ills perpetuated by SARS describing the deadly police unit as "killer teams" employed to do the bidding of land speculators and assisting others in the recovery of debt. However, he insisted on eradicating corruption from the police force which has become an albatross to several attempts aimed at its reformation. For a Nigerian police chief to acknowledge the rot in the Federal Police system is a call for its replacement by a different system, such as the state police system, because if he had any panacea to the ineffectiveness of the federal police system which gave rise to SARS, there would not have been the need for public complaints of an institution he represented. In a similar development, Chow (2020), while citing Amnesty International, observed that from January, 2017 to May, 2020, there was

recorded cases of no less than 82 cases of police brutality by SARS personnel, such as torture, various forms of maltreatment, and extrajudicial killings. This claim has indeed substantiated the earlier stated view of Inspector General of the Nigerian Federal Police describing one of the defunct Federal Police unit, as “killer teams”. The above, therefore, justifies the necessity of state police in Nigeria.

Another report by Amnesty International revealed that people who are in SARS detention were exposed to excruciating pains from inhuman treatment meted out to them by SARS operatives, such as mock execution, hanging, beating, burning with cigarettes, waterboarding, preventing victims from breathing using plastic items, sexual violence, and forcing detainees to adopt very painful and mentally disturbing body position (Amnesty International, 2020, cited in Iwuoha & Anichie, 2021). Section 14, subsection 2(b) of the amended 1999 Constitution of Nigeria described the Country as a welfarist state that guarantees wellbeing, protection and security of her citizens (FGN, 1999); and the police force is one of the state apparatuses that is saddled with the enforcement of citizens’ rights violations and security. The inhuman acts perpetuated by SARS against the citizens it was supposed to protect has put a question mark on the effective performance of Nigeria’s Federal Police, hence, the agitation for a state police system in the country as currently expressed in several local media in the country. In the light of the foregoing, Ekwunife et al. (2021, p. 3) noted that SARS has been accused of unlawful arrests, the invasion of youth’s privacy by searching phones and laptops, “kidnapping, rape, humiliation, extortion, and extrajudicial killings of their victims”. The above stated heinous and inhuman acts meted out to innocent citizenry by members of the defunct SARS is a pointer to the adoption of state police structure in Nigeria.

### **The Protest**

According to Ekwunife et al. (2021, p. 1), #EndSARS protest is “a sweeping campaign led by Nigerian youths in October, 2020, agitating against the operations of the special anti-robbery squad... They view #EndSARS protest as “a decentralized social movement and a series of mass protest against police brutality in Nigeria. The slogan calls for the disbanding of the Federal Police unit called SARS. This unit of the Nigerian Police gained notoriety for its long record of human rights abuses. According to Ekwunife et al. (2021), the protest kicked-off in 2017, and it was named after the nationwide Twitter (now X) campaign against the disbandment of SARS denoted by #EndSARS. The abuses of SARS sparked of calls for its abolition. The call for end SARS was first made in 2017 when some 10,195 Nigerians submitted a signed petition to the National Assembly calling for the disbandment of SARS (Ibrahim, 2017). In a subtle resistance to the agitation for the disbandment of SARS, the then Nigerian Police Force Public Relations Officer, Jimoh Moshood disparaged the agitation as criminal in nature (Erunke, 2018). The police response to the earlier agitation for the disbandment of SARS represents the usual attitude of the Nigerian state, with regards to unrepresentativeness, brutalization, and suppression of the will of the citizenry.

Three years later, it was reported that some personnel of SARS allegedly shot a young unarmed man on 3 October, 2020, at Wetland Hotel in Ughelli, Delta State, Nigeria, leaving him injured. It was also reported that the SARS operatives who shot the man, thereafter, took away the victim’s vehicle, a brand of Lexus sport utility vehicle (SUV). Although, the police sources, however, denied the incidence despite the video footage of the incidence that went viral on the social media. The Nigerian police thereafter released a report stating that the alleged victim was actually arrested by the police but later sustained injuries when he jumped out of the

moving police patrol vehicle. The viral nature of the incidence in the social media subsequently sparked an outcry against SARS through the adoption of the hashtag #EndSARS. By 8 October, 2020, demonstrations in respect of that hashtag began to spread from the site of the incidence at Ughelli in Delta State to other parts of the country (Abati, 2020; Adeshokan, 2020; George, 2020; ACLED, 2021; Aljazeera Media Network, 2020, cited in Ekwunife et al., 2021). By October, 2020, there were over 180 demonstration activities in connection with the #EndSARS movement, 86 per cent of such demonstrations was peaceful, while an estimated 10 per cent of peaceful demonstration was met with excessive police and military repression and brutality (ACLED, 2021). The above stated incidences of police brutalization of innocent citizenry implies a lack of harmonious interaction and collaboration between the officials of the Federal Police and the citizenry. This is due to the fact that the officials of the Federal police, such as SARS are usually transferred from one region of Nigeria with a vast different ethnic background to another part of the country with different cultural background. The result of this is the distrust of the police personnel by citizens residing in their areas of operation due to problem of cultural clash between them. Nonetheless, such trend would eventually lead to the dearth of security intelligence gathering by Police officials occasioned by unwillingness of the people to volunteer security intelligent reports to the police officials for fear of the Police leaking such information to the criminals, and subsequent reprisal attacks by the reported criminals. But the establishment of state police, due to the relatively homogenous ethnic background of most states would have in no small measures addressed the above stated challenges and ensure a close collaboration between the state police officials and the citizenry.

### **Demands of the Protesters**

At the peak of the protest, the protesters made several demands as a criterion to be met by the government before normalcy and calmness could be restored in the country, they stated that failure of the government to meet up those demands would mean continuity in the nationwide protests. The various demands are stated below:

- (a) Justice of all deceased victims of police brutality and compensation to their families.
- (b) The immediate release of all arrested protesters in Nigeria.
- (c) Setting up an independent panel of inquiry within ten days that would oversee the investigation and prosecution of all reports of police misconduct in Nigeria.
- (d) In line with the Police Act, the need for psychological evaluation and retraining of all disbanded SARS officers before their re-assignment to other police units.
- (e) And finally, adequately increasing wages of police officers, so that, they can earn living wages, in order to reduce their proclivity to bribery and corruption (Vanguard News, 2020, cited in Ekwunife et al., 2021, p. 3).

The demands also included sound governance, transparency, accountability, and effective representation of citizens' interest by the government.

### **Responses of the Nigerian Police and the Nigerian State to the Protests**

The Nigerian police responded to the protest in various ways. One of its responses was the announcement of the disbandment of SARS. The protests did not stop immediately after the official statement by the Nigerian police banning SARS on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, due to the citizens' distrust of the government, since similar pronouncements were made in the past, but without adequate political will to enforce them. While assuring the protesters of the readiness to meet their demand, the police authority stated that the disbandment of SARS was only the first initiative towards ensuring a comprehensive police reform. But despite such assurances, most of the protesters were still skeptical in view of the fact that several promises have been

made in the past to reform the police force which have never been faithfully implemented, rather the challenges facing it tend to become more severe (Chow, 2020). The BBC news of 11 October, 2020, recounted how the police authority had earlier disbanded the Special Anti-Robbery Squad numerous times in the past, such as in 2014, 2015, and also, in 2017. The News agency noted that its latest disbandment on 11 October, 2020, was viewed with skepticism owing to the previous pronouncements that seemed spurious.

In a similar development, the Vanguard newspaper of 13 October, 2020, reported that the hasty establishment of another police unit in place of the disbanded SARS by the police hierarchy, just two days after its disbandment has exhibited the government lack of political will and a sense of purpose to mitigate the unlawful detention without trial, extortion, extrajudicial killings amongst others, perpetuated by the Nigerian Police Force. Chow (2020) observed that the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) established as a replacement of SARS was perceived by majority of the people as mere change in nomenclature without corresponding change in operational strategy. Since the creation of SWAT till the time of writing this research report, nothing meaningful has been heard about the so-called SWAT that was established as a replacement of SARS, nor has the incidences of crime abated in Nigeria. This shows that the Nigerian Federal Police Force is ineffective and self-serving, if there are no opportunities for them to satisfy their selfish interest alongside their official duties, they would rather not even perform their legitimate functions, except to provide security to the members of the ruling class and their collaborators. This, therefore implies that the entire activities and actions of the Nigerian Police and its sister agencies, such as the Nigerian Armed Forces, who carried out the killings of innocent EndSARS protesters at the Lekki Tollgate are undeniably geared towards regime security rather than national security which is a public good for the entire citizenry.

In addition to the police response to the protests, the Nigerian state deployed its agencies to intimidate the protesters. Agencies of the state such as the apex bank in Nigeria, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) adopted several approaches of intimidation, such as freezing the accounts of those individuals they considered as the financial sponsors of the #EndSARS protest (CSO Police Reform Observatory, 2020, cited in Iwuoha & Adichie, 2021). Beyond intimidation, the Nigerian state deployed military brutal force to crush the protesters, just as was earlier reported in this work that on 20 October, 2020, the Nigerian military forces fired live ammunition on peaceful protesters in the #EndSARS movement at Lekki Tollgate in Lagos State, leading to the death of no less than 15 peaceful protesters. This figure was contrary to that of the Lagos State Government which reported that twenty-five (25) were injured and only two (2) were dead (Premium Times, 2020, cited in Ekwunife et al., 2021). Juxtaposing the 15 protesters that was declared to have died in the Lekki incidence with the figure of 20 stated to have died by Ojewale (2020), cited in Nwakanma (2022) logically indicates that indeed there were loss of human lives in the shooting incidence. But many people believed that the Lagos State Government officials were economical with the truth with respect to the actual numbers of death recorded at the Lekki Tollgate after the shooting incidence by some members of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

Similarly, sources from the Nigerian military initially denied the claims of the killing of unarmed innocent protesters by its agents (BBC News, 2020; CSO Police Reform Observatory, 2020, cited in Iwuoha & Adichie, 2021). The sudden deactivation of the CCTV and street lights shortly before the shooting showed that the callous act by the military was premeditated (Iwuoha & Adichie, 2021). The Lekki Tollgate shooting by men of the Nigerian Armed Forces

further escalated the crisis which culminated into acts of assaults, arson, extortion, excessive torture, severe injuries, ‘fatal’ shootings, leading to high recorded numbers of death, and destruction of lives and property. The Lekki massacre triggered a violent protests across mainly Southern Nigeria by unidentified hoodlums, who hijacked the peaceful EndSARS protest by launching attacks on both the peaceful protesters and the general public. The violent protest continued unabated for a reasonable period of time amidst looting, arson, and reckless public and private property vandalisation. The violent protest led to the discovery of Covid 19 food palliatives and other relief materials that were hoarded by top political office holders and other elites in the society, including state governors who were supposed to ensure the welfare of the citizens during the Covid 19 lockdown. That trend further heightened the distrust of the government at all levels by the masses (Iwuoha & Adichie, 2021).

### **POLITICS, RELIGION AND ETHNICITY DIMENSIONS OF ENDSARS PROTESTS MOVEMENT**

The major factors that have contributed to the underdeveloped state of Nigeria, apart from Western countries imperialism (Kukah, 1993; Rodney, 1972), also manifested in the EndSARS protest. These factors are politics, religion and ethnicity (Kukah, Achebe, 2012). They in no small measures serve as manipulating instruments of the masses by the ruling class in order to perpetuate their dominance of the political process, irrespective of their introduction of bad governance and inability to use the public policy process to achieve effective public service delivery and attainment of sustainable development. In order to downplay the tension and popular support that accompanied the EndSARS protests, the government of former President Muhammadu Buhari embarked on a campaign of calumny through which it laid false accusation on his political opponents as those that instigated the EndSARS protests in order to embarrass and undermine his regime. This trend of accusing political opponents over reactions of the people to bad governance has become a recurrent decimal amongst Nigerian ruling elites.

Sometime, in 1995, as the people of Ogoni community, in the oil rich region of Nigeria’s Niger Delta were protesting the devastation and pollution of their environment by the oil exploration and exploitation activities by a foreign multinational company named Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), as well as the lack of development of Ogoni land by both the state and federal governments, despite the huge contribution of the community to the financial fortune of Nigeria. The then military Junta of late General Sani Abacha, rather than responding to the plight of the indigenous people of Ogoni land, through instituting an internationally acceptable environmentally friendly oil operating standards for the Anglo-Dutch SPDC, and at the same time embark on socio-economic development of the area as demanded by the people, the Head of the military junta rather targeted Ken Saro Wiwa, an environmentalist, and a literary icon, who also was the leader of Ogoni civil society association, known as the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), who alongside his eight other kinsmen including a university lecturer were sentenced to death by hanging based on trumped up charges in November, 1995. Similarly, the shooting of peaceful EndSARS protesters in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria in 2020, by armed military personnel of the Nigerian state, with President Muhammadu Buhari as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, who by that position directs all military deployment, and is responsible for their actions and inactions reveals a similar and enduring patterns of the Nigerian state repression to popular uprising by the masses

against the breach of social contract between the citizenry and the government controlled by the ruling elites.

In Nigeria, religion is another major challenge of nation-building and national development. Its manifestation was also observed in the EndSARS protests. The protest originally started in Ughelli Town in Delta State located in the Christians dominated southern region of Nigeria. From there it spread to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, a city that comprised virtually people of mixed identities, though with Islamic religious practitioners in the majority, since the area is closely located to the northern region of the country; but the protests movement in the city was championed mostly by activists and people from the southern region of Nigeria. So, the emergence of the protests in the southern Christian region and its widespread in that region earned it a religious colouration, hence, the northern region of Nigeria, who are predominantly of Islamic religion, and a region that produced President Muhammadu Buhari, in whose tenure the EndSARS protests erupted abstained from participating in the protests despite being victims of abuses and rights violations perpetuated by SARS, the defunct notorious Nigerian police unit. This shows the influential and impact of religion in Nigerian politics, and its propensity to shape public opinion and the political behaviour of the citizenry. This phenomenon of subjective application of religion to achieve social and political objective has been described by political scientists as weaponization of religion.

Closely related to religion as a factor that shapes political behaviour in Nigeria is ethnicity. The direction and extent of spread of EndSARS protests was also determined by ethnicity. The ethnic groups from the southern region co-incidentally originated the EndSARS protests through a spontaneous action in response to abuses of violation of human rights by the SARS unit of the Nigerian police, an ugly trend that cuts across the entire ethnic groups in the country. However, the major ethnic group in the northern region of Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups, who have held on to political rulership of the country longer than any ethnic group since independence on October 1, 1960, perceived the movement as an ethnic agenda of the southern ethnic groups to challenge their hold onto power and probably usurp their political influence and political hold on power, hence, their refusal to participate in the EndSARS protests despite the obvious awareness of the high handedness of the defunct SARS. The above analysis goes to show that politics, religion and ethnicity are potent instruments in Nigerian governance and administration, as well as, determinants of political participation of the citizenry, but which have been deployed selfishly overtime to achieve the selfish interests of the ruling class and their prebendal subjects, against the general interests and overall socio-economic development of the country.

In the light of the above, this study concludes that the political, religious, and ethnic colouration accorded the EndSARS protests by the ruling class and their ethnic and religious collaborators in the northern region was the reason while EndSARS peaceful protesters in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria, were killed in cold blood strictness by some members of the Nigeria Armed Forces. In other words, the ruling class that were of an ethnic group quite different from the ethnic group where the protests movement originated perceived the protesters as enemies of the regime and the state, rather than viewing them as citizens exercising their rights of expression and civil protests which is a fundamental human right, and which was aimed at the achievement of interest articulation. But the views of the ruling class was contrary to the objectives of the EndSARS participants, hence, the occurrence of the Lekki Toll gate massacre of the peaceful protesters. Also, the political, religious, and ethnic colouration ascribed to the protest

movement was also the factor behind the inability of the protest Movement to achieve a nationwide spread, as well as the reason while several demands of the protesters were not met beyond the disbandment of SARS unit. Therefore, the above trend and analysis indicate that the federal police system in Nigeria has outlived its usefulness, and a decentralized state police structure should be considered as a better policing option.

### **THE PROTESTS AND ITS IMPERATIVE FOR STATE POLICE IN NIGERIA**

State police is the police system that is solely owned, funded, managed, and controlled by the state governments, and with the security coverage restricted only to the state in which the state police exist. It is the devolution and decentralization of policing powers from the federal police structure to the various state governments. It has been argued that effective community policing is determined by the establishment of a state police (Chow, 2020). The creation of state police does not presuppose the absence of a central or federal police. But it implies that both the federal and state police can coexist in the same political entity but with different functions and operational jurisdictions. While the operations of the state police would be restricted to each state, the federal police would be in charge of internal security issues that cut across several states, as well as assisting immigration and custom officials in enforcing border control policies.

One major implication of the EndSARS protests movement is the empirical demonstration of the fact that the centralized Federal Police structure has outlived its usefulness and so it should be restructured to the decentralized state police system. This implication of the EndSARS protests is what forms the crux of this paper. The dreaded EndSARS protest that took place in October, 2020, is an indication that the centralized Federal Police Force in Nigeria is a gross failure as several attempts have been made in the past and present to redeem its public trust and effectiveness but all to no avail. The justification of the failure of the Federal Police by the EndSARS protests has led to rethinking the creation of state police system in Nigeria. Also, the increase in the level of insecurity of lives and property in the country in recent times has further demonstrated the failure of the Federal Police system in Nigeria.

Several unsuccessful attempts have been made to create state police from the existing Federal Police in Nigeria. For example, the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in a plenary session on the 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2019, passed the police reform bill, but the bill could not receive the presidential assent (Gbadejo, 2019). Similarly, Tony Ojukwu led presidential panel on SARS reform gave suggestion for the creation of state police in Nigeria (Abdullah, 2019). Also, a proposition for the creation of state police was put forward by the Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF) on the 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2019 (Gbadejo, 2019). But these efforts could not achieve the creation of state police in Nigeria. As at the time of writing this research article, a bill aimed at decentralizing the Nigerian police and creation of state police is currently before the National Assembly, which is the apex legislature of Nigeria. While the passage of the proposed bill into law has been favoured by the current regime of President Ahmed Bola Tinubu of Nigeria, and most members of the National Assembly, as well as the civil society and the entire citizenry. But, some state governors and Nigeria's police chief, the Inspector General of Police are opposed to the enactment of such legislation on state police creation based on the argument that the various state governors would abuse the privilege by using the state police to settle their political scores and would apply it as an instrument to witch-hunt their perceived political

enemies. How far the bill would go in translating to a legislation of state police creation in Nigeria is still a subject of debate by various interest groups who are for or against the proposal.

One major challenge of the federal police arrangement is the lack of knowledge and basic orientation of the local environment. The frequent transfer of Federal Police personnel leads to a situation where officers from a very different ethnic and religious background are deployed to a remote and strange location to enforce law and order. The cultural clash between the strange police officers and the local inhabitants of his strange environment will in no small measures hamper effective policing in those areas due to the lack of trust of the federal police that is alien to the people in the area of operation of the police officers. In other words, the people will not feel secure in given the police sensitive information in order to avert reprisal attacks from the criminals they have reported to the police, per adventure the police have to disclose the sources of their information to the criminals. This is one of the consequences of deploying strange fellows to police towns and cities in Nigeria. Hence, the need for state police that is local to the people, and which can also be trusted by them due to prevalence of cultural affinity which breeds mutual trust and confidence. While justifying the state police creation as a panacea to the Nigeria's numerous security challenges, Nwanze (2014) observed the illogicality in assuming that a police officer, who was given birth to in the far northern part of the country and had lived all his life there would suddenly become effective in the far eastern part of the country. He noted that the people in his new area of assignment will not trust him due to differences in their languages and customs. He noted that the local people are not likely to handle criminals up, to these sets of police officers, who are total strangers in the vicinity for lack of trust in connection with their personal safety from retaliatory attack from these criminals in their midst.

In another development, Nwanze (2014) observed that the poor salary and other allowances of the Federal Police brought about by the dwindling federal revenue has served as a source of demotivation to the Federal Police personnel. These challenges call for the establishment of state police in order to reduce the burden of federal government in single handedly funding the police, and to share such burdens with the state governments. Several empirical studies have proved that the state police structure is better than federal police system especially in multi religious, multicultural, and multiethnic geopolitical entity like Nigeria. For example, Skogan and Hartnet (1997) conducted a study on decentralization of police in Chicago, and a similar study was also carried out in Cincinnati, United States of America, both studies found that decentralization of police system enhanced security in a large geographical entity. Earlier study carried out by Mastrofski (1992) revealed that decentralization policy is a function of the commitment to work exhibited by police officers. In other words, the study showed a positive relationship between decentralization of police and police officers' commitment to work. It is in this regard that Roberg et al (2012) noted that team spirit amongst members of the police force and effective policing strategies are dependent on the decentralization of the police system. A related study conducted by Ayorinde and Ariguzo (2020) showed that there was exhibition of attitude of optimism by citizens of South Western Nigeria over the thought of implementation of state police in Nigeria. The above studies are substantial justification of the creation of state police in Nigeria, since the various studies stated above proved that the state police arrangement has a greater security effectiveness than the centralized Federal police system that presently exist in Nigeria.

Conklin (2007) argued that the existence of state police system is one major feature of a federal system of government. But the case of Nigeria is different, which therefore implies that Nigeria does not practice true federalism. Roberg, Novak, Cordner, and Smit (2012) observed that a multi-level police system exists in the United States of America (USA), such as citizen – police, private police and public police. They stated that the public police system consists of the federal and state police systems. They further stated that each province in Argentina has its independent police. Similarly, each of the 31 states of Mexico, they noted has its own police. They further observe that the same trend applies to India, where a state police exist for each state in the country. While giving an in-depth overview of contemporary trends in decentralization of policing, Roberg et al. (2012) further observed that there are 18,000 public police agencies in USA, with 90 per cent of the public police numbering 15,833 agencies constituting local police that ensures security at the city, town, village, borough, parish, and so on.

In support of the state police system for Nigeria, a former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo observed that the establishment of state police system in Nigeria is the basic remedy to address insecurity in Nigeria (Abolade, 2021). Also, in response to the clamour for state police creation in Nigeria, a bill for an act to amend the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in order to ensure the creation of state police scaled through the second reading in the House of Representatives on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, 2021 (Ikumi, 2021). However, this bill was later scuttled in the House due to vested interest in some regions of the country who are against the creation of state police in the country. Similarly, while lamenting the incapacity of the Federal Police to arrest the spate of violent crimes and insecurity in the country, a former Ekiti State Governor, Dr. Kayode Fayemi stated that the clamour for the establishment of state police in Nigeria is in line with true federalism, where each component of the federal system is entitled to own and control police force in its jurisdiction. He advocated that the state police should co-exist with the Federal Police within the Federation (Akinwumi, 2021).

In his reaction to the ugly trend of insecurity in the country, a former Governor of Taraba State, Nigeria, Darius Ishaka, advocated for the establishment of state police in Nigeria in order to effectively tackle the menace of gross insecurity in the country (Akinwumi, 2021). In a related development, former President Olusegun Obasanjo recounted how Columbia restructured her decentralized police system to centralized police system five years ago, and due to lack of effectiveness of the centralized model, the country has again reverted to the earlier decentralized police system. He argued that the experience of Columbia in subsequently reverting to a decentralized police structure is enough evidence that state police system is more effective and reliable than the centralized Federal policing (Akinwumi, 2021), as it is in Nigeria at the moment.

As stated earlier in this work, some critics of the establishment of state police have argued that the state police, if created would be a ready tool in the hands of state governors to unleash terror on their real and perceive enemies. They cited the experience of the First Republic to buttress this claim, where the defunct Northern and Western regional premiers used the regional police against their political opponents. However, that argument has been countered with a similar experience that also occurred under the centralized Federal Police system, where a sitting Governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chris Ngige, who was supposed to be the chief security officer of his state, was abducted in broad day light with the complicity of the centralized Federal Police Force (Eme & Ogbochie, 2014). The above illustration shows that the event of the First

Republic was not due to ineffectiveness of the regional police force, but simply leadership failure, while the event of the Fourth Republic, where Dr. Chris Ngige was adopted can simply be described as the failure of the centralized Federal Police in securing the governor from being abducted by civilians. In the context of the above stated arguments, the abuse of the police force in both the first and second republic was strictly due to leadership failure. And so should not be used to counter the efficacy of state police in the country.

## **CONCLUSION**

The issue of police brutality and human rights abuses have been attributed to the failure of Nigeria Federal Police Force, especially its most notorious former unit known as SARS, which has since been disbanded by the police authority due to several civil society agitations. EndSARS was a massive campaign led by Nigerian youths in October, 2020, denouncing the illicit, criminal, and inhuman activities of SARS, as well as demanding its disbandment. SARS was one of the units of the Nigerian Police Force created in 1992, to tackle the menace of armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom and so on, but which soon became notorious due to its involvement in corruption, extortion, and gross human rights violations. State police as examined in this article is a type of police system that is entirely owned and controlled by state governments. The theoretical frame work adopted in this work are the relative deprivation theory, and the frustration – aggression theory, both of which are centered on the fact that the occurrence of deprivation and frustration is most likely to trigger a corresponding aggressive response, such as the EndSARS protests movement.

The EndSARS protests further revealed the vulnerabilities and inadequacies of the Nigeria's Federal Police Force, and the movement has become a wakeup call for the creation of state police as a better policing option for addressing the complex security challenges in Nigeria, such as fraud, armed robbery, kidnappings, cyber criminality, terrorism, cattle rustling, insurgency, and so on. In addition, the study concluded that the political, religious, and ethnic colouration accorded the EndSARS protests by the ruling class and their ethnic and religious collaborators in the northern region of Nigeria was the reason while EndSARS peaceful protesters in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria, were killed in cold blood strictness, and it was also the factor behind the inability of the protests to achieve a nationwide spread, as well as, while several demands of the protesters were not met beyond the disbandment of SARS unit. Finally, it was concluded in the study that the Federal police system in Nigeria has outlived its usefulness, and a state police system should be considered as a better policing option.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The relevant session of the nation's constitution should be amended in order to ensure the creation of state police in Nigeria.
- The state police should be made to co-exist with the Federal police, but with each having its distinctive scope of operation.
- Only the people who are vast in the local knowledge and language, as well as people with track record of honesty and transparency would be recruited into the state police force. Every applicant should be made to submit a recommendation letter(s) from the Divisional Police Officer in his present area of residence, and from his clergy, traditional ruler of his locality, former school heads, and so on. This approach is to ensure that people of questionable characters are not recruited into the state police force.

- There should be adequate funding for such a project. In view of this, the huge amount paid to state governors as security votes should be added to the budget of the state police force, and would no longer be paid to the governors.
- The existing Federal Police training institutions should be retained by the Federal Police, and should collaborate with the state governments for the capacity building of state police force. And state governments should be at liberty to establish their training institutions if they so desire it.
- The federal police shall be in charge of interstate security and collaborating with the immigration and custom officers to ensure the nation's border security.
- There should be adequate remuneration of state police personnel, in order to be able to effectively pursue a zero tolerance to corruption in the agency.
- There should be a robust capacity building of the state police officials through the recruitment of people with sound educational background, and embarking on a process of continuous in-service training.
- Other morale boosting incentives as appropriate to a security outfit should be put in place by the various state governments.
- There should be a new revenue sharing formula between the federal and state governments, which will increase the monthly allocation of state governments in order to be able to operate the state police project effectively.
- State governments should also ensure that unviable programmes like the Religious Pilgrimage Boards that sponsors pilgrims to annual religious pilgrimage is scraped and the funding for the project deployed to funding state police project.
- The government should embark on a massive programme of nation-building so as to eradicate the crisis of identity politics, and solve the problems of ethno-religious conflicts with its characteristic divisiveness, in order to create virile nation-state inclined to peace and security.

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#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

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