The Socio-Economic Context of EndSARS Impasse in Democratic Nigeria, 2017- 2022

By

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Abstract

Numerous protests have taken place in both developed and developing nations. However, Nigeria and other developing nations witnessed more protests. Protests have become a recurrent decimal since the resurgence of democratic governance in Nigeria. EndSARS is one of the severe and most recent protests in Nigeria. Numerous scholarly studies have been done on the EndSARS. However, those studies lack historical context and did not address the dimension of an impasse. In light of the aforementioned, the study's focus is on the socio-economic context of the EndSARS impasse in democratic Nigeria between 2017 and 2024. Using both existing and oral historical sources, the study delves into the historical context and the factors that necessitated the EndSARS. It goes into more detail about the official responses and socio-economic ramifications. The status quo following EndSARS has also been examined. The analysis comes to the conclusion that revolution (EndSARS) does more harm than good to the economy and society.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Context; EndSARS; Impasse; Democratic Nigeria

Introduction

Social protest has been more chaotic, less predictable and increasing globally in recent years. Social protest is a form of political expression aimed at bringing about social or political change by persuading the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of the general public or the policies of a government, organization or institution. There have been several protests or social movement activity ranging from the

student movement, the civil rights movement, the peace movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement, pensioners protests, human right protest, to protest against electoral malpractices etc. Protest had been considered to be an undemocratic intrusion into politics. In the wake of the movements of the 1960s, protest is now seen as an important adjunct to democratic politics and a significant factor in the transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes (Mustapha, et al, 2022:168).

The highlights how social demonstrations have evolved into a channel through which the general public of a nation can voice their concerns about actual or perceived social injustices. It is against this background that the Nigerian youth launched the EndSARS movement. The demonstration was sparked by numerous public accusations that a particular Nigerian Police Force (NPF) unit has consistently violated human rights; these allegations added credence to the numerous accounts of police brutality connected to NPF personnel. Given the public's pre-existing animosity towards members of the NPF and the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in particular due to incidents of police brutality, a large-scale public protest took place in 2020 with the main demand being that the NPF unit be abolished. It is important to remember, nevertheless, that since the protest occurred in 2020, literature has been produced to fill in the information gaps and address the scholarly gaps regarding the event. As a result, a great deal of current issues surrounding the EndSARS protest have been examined, but not much has been done to examine the socioeconomic background of the EndSARS standoff in Democratic Nigeria, 2017–2022.

This paper explores the issue under examination against this background. The Introduction, conceptual clarification, history of the EndSARS protest in Nigeria, socio-economic effect of the EndSARS protest, reactions/responses from Government and stakeholders, post-EndSARS status quo, and conclusion and some proposals on the way forward are the seven components that make up this article.

Conceptual Clarifications

In order to provide clarity on the arguments and problems to be made in the discourse contained in this chapter, the analysis of this paper is based on three

essential concepts: socio-economic, the EndSARS Impasse, and democratic Nigeria. This section defines these concepts. Socio-economic context is a word designed to explain how economics and society interact, highlighting how particular social or societal factors influence economics and how economics influences society. Ashford (2015) claims that the word socio-economics has been in use for more than a century. He pointed out that when economics became recognised in academia as a field apart from its historical roots in the earlier "political economy", its use increased starting in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The word socioeconomics has been used in a variety of settings and with different definitions. However, beneath all of the different interpretations is usually the belief that the increasingly abstract principles of neoclassical economics—which shape modern economics, economic ideology, politics, and public discourse—cannot be isolated in their influence from the more nuanced reality of social context. Likewise, socio-economics is a normative as well as a positive science. It is devoted to the empirical, reality-based method of knowledge acquisition. Both deductive and inductive reasoning are respected. But instead of upholding the image of a wholly positive science, it also freely acknowledges the policy importance of research and education and aims to be self-aware of its normative implications. Socio-economics is open to a variety of viewpoints that treat economic behaviour as involving the whole person and all facets of society within a constantly evolving natural context, even though it sees questions of value as inextricably linked to individual and group economic choices (Society of Socio-Economics, 2016).

Another term defined in this chapter is EndSARS, which basically refers to a social revolution that happened in Nigeria, namely in 2020. EndSARS was essentially a protest organised by young people in Nigeria who wanted the Nigerian Police Force's Special Anti-Robbery Squad unit abolished due to their abusive and exploitative behaviour while performing their official duties (Edafe, 2021). According to (Ochi and Chinoso, 2021), the inception of EndSARS can be traced back to 2017, when activists such as Segun Awosanya started advocating on Twitter for the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The Nigerian National Assembly received a petition in the same year from 10,195 signatories requesting the complete dissolution of SARS (Ibrahim, 2017).

October 8, 2020, saw the start of nationwide demonstrations against police brutality following the release of a video in early October purporting to show police officers from the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) shooting and murdering a young man in Southern Delta State, Nigeria. Protests demanding that the government dissolve SARS broke out all over Nigeria, despite the country's officials rejecting the reports. On social media, more videos of injustice and police brutality were posted. Following social media rallies on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter by celebrities and activists, people in Lagos and Abuja began calling for an end to SARS within a few days. Concerned about the dust the demonstrations had produced, the Nigerian government promptly declared SARS to be dissolved.

In the context of this study, Democratic Nigeria is a sovereign state that is run by the Federal Republic of Nigeria's constitution, which serves as a democratic mechanism. As a result, Nigeria is a democracy that is governed according to democratic principles and has access to all of its attributes. But the emergence of the EndSARS protest and other odd occurrences related to Nigerian democracy have consistently created a concerning environment that raises questions about Nigeria's sustainability as a democratic state.

History of EndSARS Protest in Nigeria

Nigerian citizens have always protested; throughout the years, the nation has seen a great deal of protests resulting from various agitations that have afflicted the populace. Thus, the EndSARS demonstration emerged as the most recent nationwide demonstration. Whatever the case, in 2017 Nigerian activists, young people, and celebrities staged a nonviolent nationwide protest in the streets to draw attention to the brutality and extortion of SARS and to call for the organization's dissolution. Using the hashtag #EndSARS, the protests spread to social media as well (Ogundipe, 2017).

A video that showed a SARS police officer shooting a young Nigerian in front of the Wetland Hotel in Ughelli, Delta State, on Saturday, October 3, 2020, went viral online. The young man's Lexus SUV was purportedly taken away by the police officers. The #ENDSARS hashtag trended on Twitter as a result of the trending video, which incited public outrage on social media (Okon, 2020). Monday, October 5, 2020, saw the emergence of another story about SARS agents killing

Daniel Chibuike, a 20-year-old promising artist known by his stage name Sleek, in his area, right before the #ENDSARS hashtag took up on Twitter. According to reports, Sleek and a companion were seated outside a hotel when SARS officers approached them, causing them to run away. As Sleek sprinted through a shop, the SARS men reportedly shouted "thief" as they pursued the two and shot Sleek. (Lambo, 2020) His friend was taken into custody.

National ENDSARS protests began on Thursday, October 8, 2020, following weeks of indignation and fury over images and recordings of extortion, harassment, and police brutality in Nigeria. Along with other activists and celebrities, young Nigerians led the protests in various locations. In several locations, like as Abuja and Osun, the Nigeria Police Force broke up the protests by firing tear gas, deploying water cannons, and shoving at innocent, unarmed protestors. Jimoh Isiaq passed away as a result in Ogbomoso, Oyo State. On Wednesday, October 14, 2020, the End SARS demonstrations continued, with youths across Nigeria ramping up their demands for police operations to be more accountable and reformed.

Up until October 20, 2020, when the military intervened and killed nonviolent protestors at the Lekki toll gate, the protest was carried out in a peaceful manner. The people began calling the incident the Lekki toll gate slaughter shortly after it happened, and October 20, 2020, was designated as the #EndSARS Memorial Day. It is important to remember that thugs violently hijacked the protest and used a violent strategy right after the troops attacked the demonstrators. Nigeria and its government's commitment to defending basic human rights have gained international attention as a result of the recent development. During the peak of the demonstration, a number of social media pundits counselled the young protestors to choose their leaders in order to legally build upon the progress the demonstration had made thus far. In order to promote national peace and unity, they wanted the elected leaders to hold talks with the government at all levels, which seemed uneasy and would give in to pressure to not only listen to the protesting youth leaders but also to approve all of their demands (Moshood, 2020). The EndSARS protest's timeline is shown in the table below:

2020 #EndSars Protests Timeline culled from Wada, 2021
1. Started in 2017 incident trigger unknown. 2. Revitalized after alleged shooting and injury of a young man on 3 October, 2020. 3. Protests started 8 October, 2020, in several cities across Nigeria. On the same day, protesters in Lagos gathered at the residence of the state governor where they spent the night into 9 October. 4. 9 October, Lagos State legislature held an emergency session on the protest and issued a seven-point resolution most of which tasks the federal legislature in Abuja to probe SARS, protect protestors, guard against youths abuse, proscription and replacement of the Unit SARS with a new unit to operate with a clear code of conduct. 5. 10 October, 2020, BBC reported Nigerian Police have begun to use tear gas to disperse protesters in several cities. 6. 11 October, 2020, protesters listed a five-point demand for the Nigerian government to meet. 7. 11 October, 2020, The Nigerian Police announced the dissolution of the SARS squad. The government also committed to the other four demands of the protesters. 8. 13 October, 2020, The public relation officer of Nigerian Police announces the setting up of a new unit named SWAT, which was to start operating a week later. 9. October 15, 2020, protest prohibition in the nation capital was announced after a meeting of Capital area security council under the chairmanship of the Federal Capital Minister. 10. October 20, 2020, the protesters who were reported to have defied the Lagos state curfew and gathered at the Lekki Toll Gate were allegedly shot by military officers.

Socio-Economic Effect of EndSARS Protest

The EndSARS demonstrations got off to a peaceful start, but on October 20, 2020, protestors were killed at the Lekki Toll Gate by the military, which altered the protests' dynamics and gave rise to violence that had a significant negative socioeconomic impact on the nation. For example, the demonstration had a

negative impact on the domestic economy. The Lagos Chamber of Commerce Industry study broke down the EndSARS protest's financial impact as follows:

> In Lagos state, assets replacement cost is put at N1trn, and will definitely manifest in the GDP. According to industry executives and economists, the result will manifest in a fall in real Gross Domestic Product, GDP. It will fall to around 6.91% year-on-year, deepening the projected economic contraction, disruptions in supply-chain, and faster rise in inflation. Investment bankers clearly stated that about N1trn is lost to firms. More so, job losses and poverty are certainly going to be on the rise, retail stores across the countries were looted and goods carted away. The long list of destroyed public and private property in Lagos includes AjeromiIfelodun Local Government secretariat; Palace of the Oba of Lagos; Lagos High Court, Igbosere; Oyingbo BRT terminus; Ojodu Berger BRT terminus; Vehicle Inspection Office, Ojodu Berger; Lagos State Public Works Corporation, Ojodu Berger; Lagos City Hall and Circle Mall, Lekki; numerous luxury shops in Surulere, The Nation Newspaper, TVC, and Shoprite Lekki. The destroyed BRT vehicles cost $200,000 each, while 57 of them cost $100,000 each, all totaling about N3.9 billion. According to the police, the 25 stations burnt in Lagos are Orile, Amukoko, Layeni, Ilasamaja, Ikotun, Ajah, Igando, Elemoro, Makinde, Onipanu, EbuteEro, Pen-Cinema, Isokoko, Alade, Cele, Igbo-Elerin, Shibiri, Gbagada, Onilekere, Makoko, Daleko, Asahun, Makinyo, Amuwo-Odofin, AntiKidnapping, Surulere. Other police stations that were vandalized but not burnt were Ojo, Ojodu, Mowo, PPL, and Morogbo (LCCI, 2020).

Fagbo (2020) provided information regarding the socio-economic impact of the EndSARS protest, pointing out that the protest had a significant detrimental impact on enterprises in numerous states across the nation. According to a statement issued by SP Haruna Mohammed, the public relations officer for the Anambra State Police Command, thugs masquerading as demonstrators stormed 21 police divisions, setting seven of them on fire. Other government buildings that were damaged or burned were the Zik Statue at the DMGS roundabout in Onitsha,

the High Court Ogidi, and the Idemili North LG Secretariat. In addition, there was devastation, death, and looting in the Plateau states, Kano, Oyo, Ogun, and Abuja, the capital of the country. Rogue teenagers in Kano State attacked local businesses and residences, stealing items and setting some on fire. Along with the destruction of assets of reasonable value, several cars were also set on fire.

On October 20, 2020, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) froze the bank accounts of prominent participants in the ENDSARS protest, indicating another negative impact on the economy. It is important to remember that the CBN did not provide a valid explanation for why participant accounts were frozen. Consequently, all accounts associated with twenty protest banking participants associated with Access Bank plc, Fidelity Bank Nigeria, First Bank of Nigeria, Guaranty Trust Bank, United Bank for Africa, and Zenith Bank were placed under post no debit (*Punch Newspaper*, 2020).

Socially, the protest spread beyond Nigeria's borders when Nigerians living abroad staged demonstrations in the United States and Europe, which had a significant social media impact. The Nigerian diaspora in Europe, the Americas, Oceania, and other parts of Africa organised international protests when the protest became popular on Twitter with the hashtag #EndSARS. Celebrities from Nigeria and the Nigerian diaspora expressed support on social media and participated in the protests; the demonstrators promised to keep going until their demands were satisfied (Ekwunife, Oparah, Akpan, and Humble, 2021).

According to Ekoh and George (2021), the protest gave young people who had long been denied access to government a platform to express themselves on social media, where they protested police brutality and called for general reforms and inclusive governance. This led to an increase in the number of hashtags calling for changes to the way things must be done in the nation. Because of this, even after the government abolished the SARS and replaced it with the Special Weapons and Tactics unit (SWAT), young people and protestors rejected the new unit using the hashtag #EndSWAT. In light of this, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter in particular became effective platforms for raising awareness of the protest and served as safe spaces for Nigerians to discuss incidents of police corruption and brutality. They also mentioned how social media became the source of news and

information about the EndSARS protest, in addition to allowing protesters to voice their dissatisfaction through the dissemination of live video recordings of police brutality across the nation over the years.

Similarly, Ekwunife, Oparah, Akpan, and Humble (2021) wrote that a number of well-known celebrities, including football players Marcus Rashford, Odion Ighalo, and Mesut Ozil, as well as Cardi B, Rihanna, Trey Songz, Big Sean, Jidenna, John Boyega, Kanye West, Drake, Diddy, and Lewis Hamilton, posted comments about the protest on social media. On the international scene, Black Lives Matter activists also demanded justice for Nigerians' treatment during the protest in relation to police brutality, and they sent and signed letters to President Buhari expressing this desire. Black Lives Matter Co-Founder Opal Tometi organised the letter, which called on President Buhari to release the detained protestors. Stars including Alicia Keys, Donald Glover, Mark Ruffalo, Kerry Washington, and authors Reni Eddo-Lodge, Naomi Klein, and Afua Hirsch signed the letter. Greta Thunberg, a well-known campaigner, also signed it. Generally speaking, (Raji, 2024:6) regretted that:

> With the aftermath of the arson and vandalization in Lagos State, the state government had estimated a sum of One Trillion naira which equals to the 2020 budget of the state for reconstruction/rebuilding Lagos. These monies are public money which ought to be channeled into other area of the economy and infrastructural development. Meaning, economically, Lagos state may witness a state of stagnation in its economic and infrastructural developments for years. There has been confirmed report from Lagos and Kwara states to support private investors/individuals whose properties were looted for financial support; these monies are also public money which should have been channeled into other sector of the economy. Furthermore, the burning of BRTs by arsonists have reported to contribute to high cost of transport, delay in travel time among others on Lagosians and not on the government officials. There had been of loss of innocent lives and properties, increase in armed robbery, police arms have been stolen and in wrong hands, schools and other parastatals had been closed in some states, citizens cannot go for

> their means of livelihood, inflation as set in among others. These negative effects which graced the peaceful protest had undermined the achievement made by the protest so far. The loss of the protest is farfetched than its gain. Hence, there is no gainsaying to conclude that the EndSARS protest accumulate more loss than gain.

Considering the aforementioned, it can be concluded that the EndSARS protest had a disastrous impact on Nigeria's socioeconomic growth. It is clear that the protest had a positive social impact and raised awareness of some of the civil issues that have beset Nigeria and its youth in particular over the years. This was particularly true when it came to uniting the youth to advocate for youth inclusion in governance and the necessity of restructuring the nation's institutions and the federal polity as a whole. However, from an economic standpoint, the demonstration was disastrous since the demonstrators essentially damaged the nation's tiny economic development indexes, which had been developed, hindering the nation's economic growth.

Reactions/Responses from Government and other Stakeholders

Jeremiah (2023) claims that the government initially ignored the protest, but as tensions around it grew, the government made an appeal for the protestors to leave so that it could review and take into account the demands made. In response, the protestors added five more demands to their initial request for the country's SARS to be dissolved. The protesters resumed their hiatus, halting all social and economic activities in the nation, but the government did not respond to their demands in a timely manner. In response, the government banned public demonstrations and processions and implemented curfews in certain states. He added that:

> Amidst the destruction across the nation, President Muhammadu Buhari addressed the nation and was negligent on the unlawful shooting of the protesters at the Lekki toll gate. Several meetings were held between the representatives of the federal government and other stakeholders including State Governments. The federal government after a series of meetings with the state governors resolved to establish judicial panel of inquiry on police brutality with a view to pacifying the protesters. To further curtail the effects

> of the protest and hooliganism some state government rolled out several incentives to the youths. In Cross Rivers State for instance, the government issued a directive for the employment of 20,000 youth into the state and local government civil service. It also asked the Cross Riverian students in the CRUTECH to suspend payment of school fees as a measure to support the #EndSARS protest (Jeremiah, 2023:203)

Similarly, governors approved various sorts of incentives to appease the youth and reduce tension. Because of this, Lagos State resembled the protest capital, with a large number of demonstrators. A list of roughly 20 police personnel who are now being prosecuted for charges connected to the state's violations of human rights was released by Governor Sanwo Olu. The federal government then agreed to the protestors' five demands, abolished the SARS unit of the NPF, and started taking action to address the demonstrators' demands for order, promising to completely restructure the police force through a series of comprehensive reforms (Jeremiah, 2023).

The worldwide community was crucial in the response, in addition to the government's reaction or response. Following the illegal killing of unarmed protestors at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, the international community responded. The United States government issued a warning to its citizens living in Nigeria to avoid areas of interest that the protestors were occupying, and the United Kingdom abruptly announced the closure of its visa application centres in Nigeria. Likewise, the US Mission in Nigeria shut down its Consulate General in Lagos and conducted a thorough assessment of its travel guide. When Joe Biden was the Democratic Party's nominee for president in the US, he pleaded with Muhammadu Buhari, the president of Nigeria, to put an end to the brutality against demonstrators in his nation (Jeremiah, 2023).

Post-EndSARS Status Quo

After everything is said and done, protests always leave their imprint; the EndSARS demonstration left some trash for the nation. For example, (Okenwa, 2021) contended that the global perception of Nigeria was negatively impacted by the outcome of the ENDSARS protest. The demonstration shone a focus on Nigeria

and raised questions about the country's human rights record and the government's involvement in it. The government's handling of the protests and the use of excessive force by security forces exposed some of the internal issues facing the nation, which aside from violations of human rights also include corruption and poor governance. These issues typically damage the nation's reputation as a regional power. To sum up, Nigeria is a leader in West Africa. However, the #EndSARS protests raised concerns about the nation's capacity to guide and control social and political unrest, underscoring the necessity for increased collaboration among West African nations in tackling issues related to governance and human rights (Daramola, 2021).

The protest also has ramifications for the future because the movement resulted in the conclusion of SARS; nevertheless, the public was not particularly fond of the way the protest was handled, leaving many, feeling disillusioned and forlorn. But in the end, there was a better rapport between the police and the public, fewer instances of police harassment, and more instances of officers being fired for noncompliance. As a result, the Nigerian Police Force fired 31 officers for misbehaviour within 18 months of the EndSARS protest (Odenyi, 2022).

The nation's growing issue of rising unemployment and its incapacity to utilise its abundant human resources came to the attention of the world through the EndSARS protest. Nigerians have been migrating in large numbers to the Global North, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and Italy, as well as to nearby nations like Ghana, South Africa, and Gambia, among others, in quest of a higher standard of living since the 2020 EndSARS protest. Due to insecurity and economic uncertainty, many Nigerians in the diaspora who are of retirement age have reconsidered investing in or returning to Nigeria. These socioeconomic issues, which were supported by the EndSARS protesters, have an impact on both the immigration and migration rates (Akinwotu, 2023).

Summarily, it is important to highlight that the Nigerian government has been acting insincere during the Post-EndSARS era. This has shown itself in a number of ways, including a lack of citizen trust, a persistent pattern of broken promises, a lack of political will, a lack of honesty and transparency, a lack of citizen

engagement and education, needless bureaucracies, corruption, youth employment, a deteriorating economic and financial environment, and improper coordination of the country's armed forces, particularly the police. Some of the young people in Nigeria who are demanding for reform were not even born when these issues, particularly police brutality, first arose. As a result, in order to address the issues that plague Nigerian residents in general as well as police brutality specifically, proactive and nonviolent processes must be used (Raji, 2024).

Conclusion and Some Proposal on the Way Forward

The EndSARS issue in democratic Nigeria has been examined in the paper's socioeconomic background. In doing so, it acknowledged that rising instances of police brutality across the nation were the cause of the EndSARS protest. Demonstrators took to the streets, calling for the dissolution of the SARS unit and a reform of the police force. They said the squad was notorious for engaging in covert operations, particularly aimed at young people. It stated that the Nigerian government ignored the protests during the early stages of the EndSARS movement. However, after the military was called in, they shot and murdered defenceless demonstrators without permission, which escalated the demonstration. After that, thugs with destructive and looting intentions took over the protest. The study found that the demonstration had a detrimental impact on Nigeria's socioeconomic growth. Analysis has been done on the government's and stakeholders' responses and reactions to put an end to the damaging protest. In addition, the status quo following EndSARS has been examined. From this, it was proposed that the protest had only ever caused destruction in all its manifestations, save for the one notable victory of compelling the government to dissolve the NPF's covert SARS unit. It is appropriate to draw the conclusion that a failed revolution does more harm than it does good. In light of this, the study suggests some potential policies.

First and foremost, protest is a fundamental component of all civil societies and a prerequisite for democracies. According to international and local law, protesting is a legitimate form of speech (Jeremiah, 2023). In a democratic society, dissent can take several forms, such as protest. Law enforcement and legislation are two ways to handle protest. The state's primary responsibility when there is nonviolent

protesting is to control the gatherings to prevent criminals from seizing control of them and from escalating the sincere agitations into chaos. This might be achieved by offering the demonstrators security protection and first aid in the event of an emergency. In light of this, it is advised that the Nigerian government allow for the implementation of constitutional due process while managing protests in order to prevent the development of violence and the loss of life and property, as was the case during the 2020 EndSARS rally.

Secondly, the Nigerian government should make an effort to be appropriate and responsive to the demands of its constituents. When a situation reaches the stage of public protest, the government ought to promptly engage with protest leaders in order to identify the underlying cause and quickly resolve the demonstrators' reasonable demands. In short, in cases this urgent, bureaucracy should be avoided.

Thirdly, demonstrators ought to behave in a civil and social disobedient manner as stipulated by the constitution. It is important to remember that the goal is to improve the nation, hence protest organisers should strongly oppose the destruction of lives and property. As a result, it should be illegal to use arson igniters, and before the protest day, the police should be informed about the nature of the demonstration.

Last but not least, the government should order the National Orientation Agency and the Ministry of Information to make it their mission to inform the nation's citizens and civil security agencies about the constitutional provisions regarding protests. This will allow for a peaceful environment between protestors and law enforcement officials regarding how to interact with one another in the event of civil protests in the nation.

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