

STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC DETERMINANTS OF THE ENDSARS PROTEST IN NIGERIA: AN EMPIRICAL EXPLORATION

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Abstract

The EndSARS protest is a social movement that started from the youth of Nigeria, who were disenchanted with the rampant police brutality, corruption in the police force, and the overall socioeconomic morbidities of the Nigerian state. Previous research has looked at the protest through the lens of police misconduct, digital mobilisation and youth activism, but there is little focus on the multiple structural and systemic causes that all contributed to the development of the protest. This study is an examination of the structural and systemic factors behind the EndSARS protest in Nigeria, specifically on policing, political and economic factors. The study adopts a perspective based on the Relative Deprivation Theory which suggests that EndSARS protests were not only a response to police brutality but an amalgamation of long-standing grievances stemming from institutional failures, marginalisation and loss of faith in the government. A mixed methods research design was used, including both quantitative and qualitative methods, namely structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. A total of 359 questionnaires were administered, six key informant interviews were conducted, and six in-depth interviews were conducted with relevant participants in Lagos State which is the central location of the protest. The study identified factors in policing as the key reasons for the protest, with the main grievances being police brutality and SARS extortion. The study also revealed that the lack of good governance, corruption, unemployment and hardship in the economy were all factors that contributed to the general discontent that underpinned mobilisation. The study finds that a broad movement towards reform in policing, governance and socioeconomic inclusion is necessary to deal with future social unrest.

Keywords: Endsars, Governance, Police Brutality, Political, Protest, Youth

Introduction

Interpersonal relations between citizens and police are an essential aspect of democratic governance and state legitimacy. The police function in democratic societies to uphold law and order, protect life and property and preserve the rights of citizens within the framework of the rule of law (Tyler, 2006; Jackson et al.,

2012). The legitimacy, accountability, and procedural justice of police are seen as key dimensions of police institutional effectiveness that lead citizens to cooperate with police agencies (Tyler, 2006; Bradford et al., 2014). But if policing institutions come to be associated with corruption, abuse of power, and human rights violations, people lose trust in the police, tensions rise, and citizens may resort to collective action to vent their grievances (Tankebe, 2009; Aborisade & Gbahabo, 2021).

The issue of police misconduct has been a concern in Nigeria for decades and has been extensively documented by scholars, human rights groups, and civil society organisations (Alemika, 1988; Human Rights Watch, 2010; Amnesty International, 2020). The Nigerian Police Force has been noted for its corrupt practices, brutal and extortionist operations, unlawful arrest, torture and extra-judicial killings (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 2010; Aborisade & Gbahabo, 2021). These concerns came to the fore in connection with the work of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which was created in 1992 to tackle armed robbery, kidnapping and violent crime (Amnesty International, 2020). Although the major motivation for establishing SARS was a perceived increase in insecurity, there were many reports of it conducting widespread human rights abuses, particularly against young Nigerians, who were frequently profiled according to their appearance, use of smartphones, laptops or perceived affluence (Amnesty International, 2020; Aborisade & Gbahabo, 2021). These practices engendered significant resentment among citizens and fostered a sense of insecurity, as the institution meant to provide security became a source of insecurity (Tankebe, 2009; Aborisade & Gbahabo, 2021).

The EndSARS protest that started in October 2020 was a culmination of years of public discontent with police brutality and institutional impunity. The protest, sparked by the SARS operatives' killing of a young man in Delta state, quickly morphed into a pan-Nigerian movement demanding the dismantling of SARS and reforms in the Nigerian security sector (Amnesty International, 2020; Nwangwu et al., 2022). The movement was notable in its scale and geographical reach, but also because it was mostly youth-led and decentralised, with social media platforms, including X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp playing a key role in mobilising and coordinating the movement (Iwilade, 2022; Chilwa & Ifukor, 2022). Digital activism enabled the mobilisation of local grievances, resource mobilisation, protest coordination, and the attraction of international attention, moving the protests into the global social movement stream (Iwilade, 2022; Chilwa & Ifukor, 2022).

While police brutality was the immediate cause of the protests, several scholars have suggested that the EndSARS movement was an outgrowth of entrenched issues and systemic problems in Nigeria's society (Nwangwu et al., 2022; Obadare, 2023). The protest was sparked by longstanding governance issues, high youth

unemployment, extreme poverty, social injustice, corruption, insecurity, and loss of public confidence in government institutions (Agbibo, 2015; Lewis, 2007; World Bank, 2023). The reintroduction of democratic governance to Nigeria in 1999 brought hope for political accountability, economic development, and better living standards (Osaghae, 1998; Agbaje & Adejumo, 2006). Nevertheless, despite 21 years of uninterrupted democratic government, deep pockets of socioeconomic deprivation, poor infrastructure, poor public service delivery, and limited opportunities for meaningful political engagement remain among the country's population (World Bank, 2023; Afrobarometer, 2022). This has therefore led to heightened disillusionment with governance outcomes, especially among the youth, who make up a large percentage of Nigeria's population (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021).

In Nigeria, unemployment, underemployment, and economic insecurity have disproportionately affected youths (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021; UNDP, 2021). Feelings of marginalisation and exclusion have been driven by the lack of economic opportunities to accommodate a fast-growing youth population (World Bank, 2023). Relative deprivation theory states that collective action is more likely when individuals perceive a large disparity between their expectations and social and economic realities (Walker & Smith, 2002). In the same way, political process theory holds that social movements emerge when citizens feel that existing political institutions are not adequately addressing their grievances (Tarrow, 2011; McAdam, 1999). The EndSARS protest was a blend of the two theoretical approaches, as protesters reacted to police brutality and to a series of grievances linked to economic problems, governance inadequacies, and injustice in institutional processes (Nwangwu et al., 2022; Obadare, 2023).

Moreover, corruption has been one of the most endemic problems that governance and development in Nigeria have been facing (Joseph, 1987; Agbibo, 2015). A variety of studies have shown that corruption negatively impacts state institutions, impedes service delivery, undermines public trust in government, and adds to social inequalities (Lewis, 2007; Transparency International, 2023). The EndSARS movement had significant backing from various groups in society due to public perceptions of corruption in political and security institutions (Nwangwu et al., 2022). As protests continued, the demands shifted progressively from the police to good governance, accountability, economic justice, and respect for human rights (Amnesty International, 2020; Iwilade, 2022). The shift indicated that the movement was more about structural issues and had nothing to do with SARS activities.

While there have been numerous publications on the EndSARS movement, research has largely focused on social media activism, youth mobilisation, police reform, and state responses to the movement (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2022; Iwilade, 2022; Nwangwu et al., 2022). Although these studies have deepened our

understanding of the dynamics and outcomes of the movement, there has been scant empirical focus on the interplay of political, policing and economic factors that all played a role in its development. Furthermore, many of the research studies that have been conducted so far have been mainly secondary data sources, media reports, and content analysis, leading to a need for empirical investigations that would capture the perspectives of citizens, as well as the viewpoints of key stakeholders on the structural and systemic causes of the protest.

To bridge this gap, this study explored the various factors that contributed to large-scale social mobilisation during the EndSARS protest. Without understanding the root causes of social unrest, future expressions of public discontent may arise, threatening social unity and democratic consolidation. Therefore, this study examined the structural and systemic determinants of the EndSARS protest in Nigeria. This study utilised both quantitative & qualitative data to empirically analyse the structural/systemic factors that stimulated the EndSARS demonstration in Nigeria.

To achieve this aim, the study seeks to:

- i. examine the political factors that led to the EndSARS protest.
- ii. explore the policing factors that influenced the EndSARS protest.
- iii. ascertain the economic factors that led to the EndSARS protest.

Literature Review

Historically, social protest has been a vehicle for marginalised groups to protest against what they see as unfairness, seek accountability, and discuss their interactions with political institutions. At a global level, modern movements of protest have been increasingly emerging in response to structural inequalities, economic exclusion, a lack of trust in institutions, and discontent with governance systems. In a study of protest movements worldwide from 2006 to 2013, Ortiz et al. (2013) noted that many protests in developing countries were in response to neoliberal economic policies such as austerity, deregulation, the weakening of social welfare states, and the privatisation of public services. Their research shows that contemporary protest can not only be a response to a particular event but part and parcel of a longstanding grievance, stemming from a wider socio-political context. Likewise, in Rao's (2010) analysis, protest movements in developing societies have often been in response to policies recommended by international financial institutions, especially if they are seen as harming citizens' welfare and making life more unequal for them. Protests are, therefore, a way for citizens to voice their discontent with the state, demand better public services, criticise corruption, and demand greater accountability from political institutions (Ortiz et al., 2013).

In Africa, protests have been influenced by poor governance, democratic deficits, corruption, and the curtailment of citizens' political participation. According to Ochi and Mark (2021), many of the protests in Africa are responses to longstanding

grievances against political systems that have increasingly resorted to both constitutional and unconstitutional methods to hold onto power, thereby creating a very restricted space for citizens to influence political processes. The EndSARS protest has been one of the most important moments of Nigeria's modern democratic history, if not the most. The movement, which was started to protest police brutality by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) against the youths of its operations with allegations of the killings in October 2020, quickly expanded to demand political accountability, social justice, institutional reform and economic inclusion (Amnesty International, 2020; Nwangwu et al., 2022). Although SARS abuses were the immediate cause of the protests, the scholarly debates surrounding the protests increasingly go beyond a discussion of police abuse to a broader and more complex discussion. Instead, the protests signified broader structural and systemic tensions within Nigeria's political, economic, and security systems (Obadare, 2023; Iwilade, 2022). Therefore, it is important to examine the historical context of policing in Nigeria, governance failures, economic marginalisation, and the predominant issue of the state's legitimacy, which informed citizens' grievances and mobilisation as a pretext for the EndSARS movement.

Researchers on EndSARS have noted that the movement was a decentralised, youth-led, and digitally coordinated social movement that posed a threat to traditional political mobilisation strategies in Nigeria (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2022; Iwilade, 2022). The EndSARS protest was different from traditional protests involving political parties and civil society organisations; instead, this movement relied heavily on social media platforms to mobilise participants, spread information, organise activities, and garner global attention. Through this digital character, citizens, especially the young ones of Nigeria, were freed from the traditional political structures, thereby establishing a place to voice grievances, an alternative place for them. But scholars warn that social media was not the main driver of the movement; rather, it was a means to amplify existing frustrations stemming from institutional failures (Iwilade, 2022).

The EndSARS protest in Nigeria is a modern-day case of how several structural factors can combine to produce a large-scale collective protest movement. While the immediate cause of the protest was the killings and human rights abuses allegedly perpetrated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police, scholars believe that the protest was an outgrowth of the various grievances over the Nigerian State and the Nigerian Institutions (Ochi & Mark, 2021; Adetola, 2022). Initially formed as a special police squad to tackle violent crimes, SARS was linked to torture, unlawful detention, extortion, extrajudicial killings and abuse of power, especially against young Nigerians (Amnesty International, 2020). The number of incidents of harassment and intimidation of citizens by SARS officers also made citizens feel that the very security institution that was meant to keep them safe had become a cause of insecurity. The important thing is that the protest was not only about police reform but had grown to encompass issues of

governance, corruption, economic woes and institutional failure, as highlighted by Ochi & Mark (2021) and Adetola (2022).

The policing aspect of the EndSARS protest illustrates the security institutions' problems in Nigeria; their roots date back to the era of the Armed Forces. A history of human rights abuses by security agencies in Nigeria has been associated with the colonial and military traditions of policing, in which security agencies were created primarily to serve the interests of the state rather than those of citizens (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). Amnesty International (2015) reported several incidents of human rights violations by Nigerian security forces, such as claims of rape, torture, unlawful detention, and excessive use of force by the military. Likewise, Nkasi (2020) asserts that Nigerian security agencies have been used as tools of state control by terrorising demonstrators, harassing journalists and silencing dissenters. Overall, these patterns suggest that the SARS-related incidents of police brutality were not an isolated incident of institutional failure, but rather were part of a larger issue of accountability, citizen protection and the state-citizen relationship.

One of the key aspects that fuelled public rage during the EndSARS protests was the government institutions' lack of accountability and the absence of real police reforms. However, while successive Nigerian governments have made numerous promises to reform the Nigerian police, most of these pledges have not led to a significant improvement in police behaviour and accountability mechanisms (Adetola, 2022). Amnesty International (2020) noted that there was limited evidence of prosecutions of SARS officers whose actions were alleged to infringe on human rights, despite the Anti-Torture Act being enacted in 2017. Further, the repeated announcement that SARS was being dissolved, coupled with no real institutional change, added to the public's lack of trust in government actions and confirmed the impression that these actions were more symbolic than substantive (Ochi & Mark, 2021). The ongoing protests following the government's announcement of SARS's disbandment, therefore, show that the protests have morphed into broader disaffection with the entire governance structure in Nigeria. In addition to policing issues, the literature also highlights two key structural issues to account for the EndSARS protest: economic hardship and youth marginalisation. Various socioeconomic problems have been recorded in Nigeria, including unemployment, poverty, poor infrastructure, poor social services, and unequal opportunities (Omoju & Abraham, 2014). Youth Nigerians who make up a large part of the country's population are disproportionately affected by these challenges, which persist despite their significant contribution to the country's population, limited opportunities for employment and economic security (Yusuf & Benisheikh, 2021). The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020) reported rising unemployment rates in Nigeria, with millions of the population said to be unemployed or underemployed. The high unemployment rate among youths has

led young Nigerians to feel frustrated, excluded, and hopeless, creating a conducive environment for youths to mobilise in groups (Yusuf & Benisheikh, 2021).

The political factors that motivated the EndSARS movement have been the subject of much academic research. In a democracy, people are expected to have ways to voice their grievances and influence public policy (Diamond, 1999). Many studies, however, have indicated that Nigeria's democratic institutions have failed to deliver on citizens' expectations since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999 (Osaghae 1998; Lewis 2007). Yet, public confidence in government institutions is low, with many perceiving corruption, elite capture, and a lack of accountability within them (Afrobarometer, 2022). In the current context, Joseph's (1987) notion of prebendalism retains its significance regarding the nature of the political use of the office in allocating resources and patronage networks, and its failure to serve the collective good. These governance practices lead to citizen alienation and to the lack of legitimacy of government institutions. Agbiboa (2015) suggests that poor governance in Nigeria has led to the disintegration of the relationship between the state and society, and that citizens are generally discontent with the inability of political institutions to resolve their problems. The EndSARS protest, then, therefore, was not just about policing but about a lack of democratic accountability and government responsiveness.

The economy closely relates to these political challenges, as it has influenced youth experiences in Nigeria. Unemployment, poverty, inequality and economic exclusion are generally regarded as important factors contributing to social unrest and protest participation (UNDP, 2021; World Bank, 2023). Nigeria has one of the largest youth populations in the world, but many young people face challenges in employment, entrepreneurship, and economic mobility (NBS, 2021). According to the United Nations Development Programme (2021), youth unemployment and underemployment have played a major role in the frustrations and sense of exclusion among young Nigerians. This can be explained by the relative deprivation theory, which holds that people become discontented when they believe their life opportunities do not meet their expectations (Walker & Smith, 2002). The limited economic opportunities, poor governance, and structural inequalities in Nigeria are impeding the educational attainment and aspirations of many youths (World Bank, 2023). The EndSARS protest, therefore, became an opportunity to collectively express these frustrations. If economic grievances were a significant factor in supporting the protests, this was evident in the broad participation of young people in the movement.

Social media and digital activism was one of the important elements that enabled mobilisation during the protest. While digital mobilisation was an essential part of the movement's success, several scholars warn against giving social media the credit for the protests. Iwilade (2022) emphasises that social media was used as a mobilisation platform but not as its origin for collective action. The issues that led

to participation were mostly structural, ranging from police violence to economic deprivation and governance shortcomings. Therefore, digital activism must be seen as a tool for expressing protesters' frustrations, not as the cause of the protests. In addition to the nature of mobilisation, literature has also examined the effects of the protest. The EndSARS movement sparked debates on police reforms, accountability, the political consciousness of youth, citizens, and the state. The government announced the dissolution of SARS, but scholars argue that the action was largely symbolic, as big systemic changes were limited (Amnesty International, 2020; Aborisade & Gbahabo, 2021). Moreover, the protest revealed the erosion of the legitimacy of State institutions and brought to the fore the willingness of Nigerian youths to oppose and question the government's authority and demand accountability (Obadare, 2023). The protest's consequences also brought to the fore the themes of democratic responsiveness, state repression, and the future of youth activism in Nigeria.

However, most of the existing literature has addressed the causes of EndSARS as separate issues, mainly concentrating on police brutality, corruption and unemployment. These explanations are significant, but they offer little insight into how each element came together to engender collective action. The current research is a contribution to the literature by investigating the structural and systemic causes of EndSARS through an integrated approach to policing, political, and economic aspects. This study is unlike other studies that examined digital activism or police misconduct; it was empirical and examined the convergence of several grievances to produce one of the largest protest movements in Nigeria.

Empirical research on EndSARS activism also bolsters the view that many interconnected factors played a role in the movement's genesis. The survey-based analysis and indicators of political participation conducted by Nwangwu et al. (2022) revealed that participation in the protests was highly correlated with complaints of governance problems, feelings of injustice, and calls for institutional accountability. Likewise, Iwilade (2022) discovered that the shift was a response to broader issues of citizenship, political inclusion and democratic responsiveness. Chiluwa and Ifukor (2022), in their discourse analysis of social media content, noted that within a short time, the conversation shifted to corruption, unemployment, insecurity, and political reform, in addition to police brutality. This was shown by Aborisade and Gbahabo (2021), who found that exposure to police abuse had a significant effect in fostering mistrust of state institutions and the adoption of collective action. In addition, Obadare (2023) posits that the protest movement was intergenerational, posing a threat to the existing political framework, and also exposed the rising demand of young Nigerians for accountability from politicians.

Although these have been valuable achievements, there are some gaps in the current literature. First, many studies concentrate on 'social media activism' and

'digital mobilisation', leaving answers to key questions about the wider structural conditions that facilitated the protests to the margins or even unaddressed (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2022; Iwilade, 2022). Second, there is a lack of studies examining the interplay between political and economic factors, policing failures, and the subsequent mobilisation beyond police brutality (Amnesty International 2020; Aborisade & Gbahabo 2021). Third, the studies conducted were limited to secondary data, media reports, documentary analysis, and online data, thereby limiting direct access to citizens' perceptions and experiences (Nwangwu et al., 2022). Fourth, although emerging evidence suggests that these factors are interrelated in various ways, there is little empirical integration of political, policing, and economic determinants within a single analytical framework.

In this light, there seems to be a lack of literature that centres on the total analysis of the structural and systemic factors of the EndSARS protest. Most existing research has examined one aspect of the movement, such as police brutality, youth activism, social media mobilisation, or governance issues, but has not empirically examined how political, policing, and economic factors contributed to the formation of the protests. Moreover, very little research has been conducted using a mixed-method approach to integrate quantitative evidence with the qualitative insights of citizens and key stakeholders. This study aims to fill this gap by empirically examining the political, policing, and economic factors that led to the EndSARS action in Nigeria. This study combines elements of questionnaire survey, in-depth interview, and Key Informant Interview, thereby enabling it to provide a holistic picture of the structural and systemic backdrop that propelled one of the most important social movements of the democratic dispensation in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the premise of Gurr's (1970) Relative Deprivation theory. The theory posits that Collective protest is theorised in terms of people's feelings of disconnect between what they expect their society to be like and what it is. Gurr (1970) states that when these feeling of frustration and deprivation lead to collective dissatisfaction, particularly when members believe that current institutions are unable to solve the problems. This is because EndSars protesters were reacting not just to police brutality but to other forms of exclusion, joblessness, corruption, insecurity, and failure in governance. The theory thus offers an account of how grievances were built up and how they became collectively mobilised.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study was a descriptive, analytical, and cross-sectional design, which is an empirical study of the structural and systemic determinants of the EndSARS protest in Nigeria. This design was suitable for this study, as it aimed to describe and analyse the political, policing,, and economic

factors that led to the emergence of the protest at a specific time, as well as to capture the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A mixed-methods research methodology was used, combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques to provide an overall picture of the phenomenon. In social research, where complex social realities need to be quantified and measured numerically while also explored for meanings, experiences, and explanations, mixed-methods designs are especially useful (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The study used a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, with a quantitative component following a qualitative component. The qualitative part of the survey,, including In-depth Interview (IDI) and Key Informant Interview (KII), was first conducted to gain a glimpse of the factors that led to the EndSARS protest, with the aim of obtaining a contextual understanding of the protest. Results from the qualitative phase helped develop and improve the structured questionnaire for the quantitative phase. It allowed the study to identify themes that emerged from all participants' experiences and then determine how common those experiences are in a larger population (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The sequential approach was considered suitable because social movements like EndSARS have many determinants that cannot be explored using only measurable variables (Bryman, 2016).

The reason Lagos State was purposively chosen for the study was that it is the epicentre of the EndSARS protest,, which featured the largest demonstrations, public mobilisations, and the most interactions between protesters and state authorities (Iwilade, 2022). Lagos was chosen for the study because it gave us an ideal environment to examine the impact of political, policing, and socioeconomic conditions on the movement's participation. The study population consisted of people who were aware of, witnessed, or were involved in the EndSARS protests, and key stakeholders with institutional and professional knowledge of the issue.

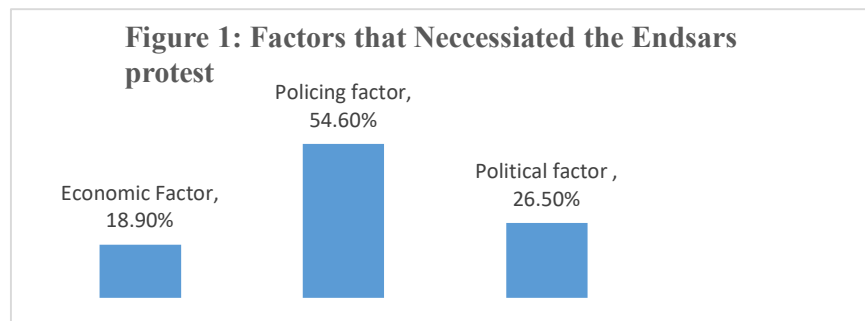
The sampling procedure used to select the participants was a multi-stage sampling. The first step was a conscious decision to select Lagos State because it has played a prominent role in the protest. In the second stage, one Local Government Area (LGA) was selected from each of the three senatorial districts using a simple random sampling technique. Therefore, the Local Government Areas of Ikorodu, Eti-Osa and Ikeja were chosen. The last step was to use systematic and simple random sampling of individuals who responded to the questionnaires to increase representativeness and minimise selection bias (Babbie, 2020). A purposive sampling method was used for the qualitative part of the project to select participants who could provide detailed accounts of the causes, experiences, and implications of the protest (Patton, 2015).

Three instruments were used to collect the data: structured questionnaires, IDIs and KIIs. In total, 359 questionnaires were administered to respondents across the

selected LGAs, and six IDIs and six KIIs were conducted with participants selected for their direct experience, knowledge, and expertise of the EndSARS movement. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data from IDIs and KIIs were analysed thematically. They used thematic analysis for the following reasons: it is a systematic approach for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The findings of both strands broadened the validity and depth of interpretation using methodological triangulation as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). All ethical issues, such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation, were respected throughout the research process.

Results And Discussions

Factors that led to the Endsars protest



The figure above that policing was the major factor that led to the EndSARS protest. Figure 1 depicts that the major factor that necessiated the EndSARS protest was policing factors (54.6%).

Table 4 Political Factors that influenced the Endsars protest

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Political factor that propelled the Endsars protest		
Bad governance	188	52.4
Government Corruption	56	15.6
Inadequate lack of social amenities	27	7.5
Political interference	41	11.4
Unstable political system	47	13.1
Total	359	100.0

Source: Field work

The table 4 depict that bad governance (52.4%) was the major political factor that propelled the protest. The findings from the interviews showed that there was

corruption and bad governance were part of the factors that led to the Endsars protest even though the protest was not politically motivated. However, findings of this study showed that the major political parties tried to hijack and politicise the protest at some point.

Emerging from one of the respondents:

“There were no political demands made by youths, don't forget that these were desperate youths, they were not members of any political platform. The End SARS was mainly an hashtag, was mainly the hashtag that became, that became the convergence vehicle of people who were host to police brutality in our country, for me as a, a witness participant and as a lawyer who has the opportunity of defending you know, End SARS cases in tribunals the judicial panels across our country, no political demands were made on the streets of our country, no political demands made at judicial panels at I had opportunity of participating as a lawyer in Oka, in Anambra State, Enugu, Owerri, to some level in you know, in Port Harcourt, I never had the opportunity of flee sleeping presence in Port Harcourt but I have lawyers from my law firm who went to Port Harcourt to defend Ends SARS cases, it's not true, the whole question of politicisation became an issue that friends of these government you know used, you see look, when you want to hang a dog you know, you hang a, you hang a band around his neck and, and that was what the regime tried to you know but it failed spectacularly”

(Kii/ Male/ Human right Activist/ Lawyer)

Another respondent corroborated the above:

“I doubt if there is anything political in it, I think you know, the way the country is when issues like that occur, the political office holder sees opposition at the other end of it, so asking me there is nothing political there, because I was involved and I can say I never saw anything political there”.

(Idi/Male/Student/Lekki)

The Endsars protest was also influenced by the failure of governance in delivery good governance and the institutionalized decay and the discontent with government.

One of the respondents stated that:

“you would agree with me that Nigeria is an underdeveloped country and our government has failed

us and due to the failure of the government to provide the basic the basic need of the people in the society, so the people see the endsars as a medium, as a veritable tool, as an instrument as a platform to express their grievance to let the government understand their yearning and how the government has failed them, which led to the ENDSARS”

(Kii/Male/Youth Leader/Journalist/ Ikorodu)

Another respondent opined that:

“There are several factors of which most the highest of them, the most prominent of them is discontent, you know once the people get so discontent or distrusting of the government to the point where things that they've been complaining about over the years have continued without any remorse without any sign that anything is going to be better, people get despondent and there will be hitching to have the entirely system collapse so that they can start a fresh. is about police brutality, it's about discontent, it's about government lack of transparency and accountability as far as the prosecution of the culture of impunity is concerned within the police institution, but of course because of that impunity, because remember, police themselves are not, they didn't fall from the sky, they are not alien, they are a members of our society and because impunity is a culture in Nigeria as a whole, so whether you are in custom, you are road safety or whatever, you will exhibit that impunity, the uniform you are wearing will make it and amplify impunity and also the citizenry who wear no uniform the moment they have an opportunity to show that they are a force they will do worse than the people in government and that was exactly what played out during the End SARS protest, so it was a mixture of discontent to the government and a lot of other vices that also do that”

(KII/Male/Member Lagos state Endsars panel of Enquiry/ Police reform Advocate/ Eti-Osa)

Table 5 Policing factor that propelled the Endsars protest

Deficiencies in the operation of SARS	29	8.1
Extra judicial killing	15	4.2
Lack of political will to prose	33	9.2
Police brutality	144	40.1
Poor Reward system for police o	7	1.9
Rising Insecurity	22	6.1
SARS Extortion	109	30.4
Total	359	100.0

Source: Field work

In terms of policing factors, police brutality (40.1%) and SARS extortion (30.4%) were the two notable policing factors that propelled the protest. The study findings from the interviews show that the EndSARS protest was a protest that was mainly influenced by police brutality and extortion.

Emerging from one of the respondents:

“From the police angle I would say that the youth who are at the receiving end, they have experienced a lot from the police angle, a lot that I mean here, I am talking about the police brutality, I'm talking about the extortion, I'm talking about the poor relationship between the police and the youth in the society, and on that basis, the youth take advantage of the endsars protest as a means to express their yearnings, as a way to let government understand how they felt about the poor attitude of the police in the society, that is police angle”.

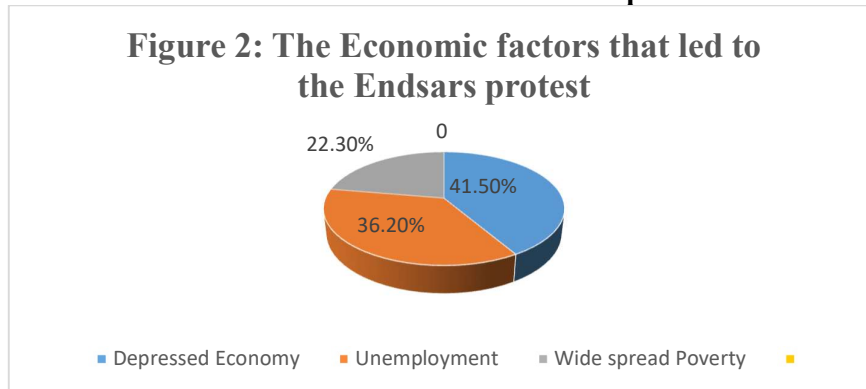
(Kii/Male/Youth Leader/Journalist/ Ikorodu)

Another respondent posits that:

“it's a movement about ending police brutality in our country, the victimization of those arrested by the police, those who have the opportunities of reengaging with the law at the level of law enforcement and the rights that abridged in the cause of engaging with the law, that level of law you know, law enforcement, when Nigerian youths went into the streets in 2020 it was basically to protest police brutality because increasingly for many years we have had Nigerians albeit youths arrested by the, by the police not arraign and just disappearing in that tolls or holes that police stations had become, had become in our country so when the youths walked into the streets in 2020 they were forced by the circumstances that they are, that they found themselves”

(Kii/ Male/ Human right Activist/ Lawyer)

Economic Factors that necessitated the Endsars protest



Source: Field Survey

The study shows that 41.5% and 36.2% affirmed that depressed economy and unemployment are the two notable economic factors that propelled the Endsars protest. The qualitative study revealed that the poor state of the nation's economy and the high rate of unemployment and poverty in the country also played a part in the protest.

Emerging from one respondent:

“Economic factor in the sense that generally the state of the economy is not palatable, it wasn't palatable at a time, we were just recovering more or less recovering from COVID lockdown, most of the palliative were not in place, people lock them down somewhere for their own, for their own purposes and where people were been, people were been directed to where those things were lockdown and they were going to burgle the place, steal it back from those who stole it from them, so, of course that on one end begin to speak to economy and politically issues, and the fact that ASUU strike was on as at that time, student were at home, they were doing nothing and then, there were hunger in the land, and there was anger in the land, so when you put all these things together, it begins to create an emotional explosive situation which begin to create a theatre of the absurd for the people, so with that, if there is an agenda that you can back with money they will be volunteers, willing able volunteers, willing to participate in such things, so it actually facilitated the fact that there was money back protest or happening in the name of End SARS that is also very popular, it was easy to mobilize people”

(KII/Male/Member Lagos state Endsars panel of Enquiry/ Police reform Advocate/Eti-Osa)

Another Respondent opined that:

“well, from my own point of view I feel it’s because of the rate of unemployment in and the corruption in the country so far is quite alarming and another thing is the way our politician is treating us is very bad, you'd see them come out with so many campaigns promises and at the end of the day it's a different thing entirely , I feel this whole thing made the whole system to be a bit difficult and the youth are quite unhappy, because imagine you going to school, spending more than years in school and at the end of the day you come about and there is nothing to show for it at all. So there is nothing to show for it, so there is nobody in his right sense that won't be angry or be upset about this whole thing, so I guess that is what actually”.

(IDI/Male/Self-employed/Obalende)

Black lives matter protest and the Endsars protest

The findings from this study showed that the Black Lives Matter protest in the United States has no bearing on the End SARS protest in Nigeria. Despite both protest groups fighting against institutional injustice, the study could not pinpoint a direct link between the two causes. EndSARS protest was about police brutality, while Blacklives matter was about racial injustice.

Emerging from one respondent:

“That's the mistake a lot of people make, the first End SARS protest made was in 2017 and I think that way before the Black Lives Matter protest, if I'm, if I'm not mistaken, so that happened in 2017, but unfortunately not a lot of people came out, there was an End SARS protest, I spoke at that event and I think I was even the only lady who spoke at that event, and, the Polices at the end of the day, they had so many other protest supporting them, and that they had protesters in their camp so I do not think that that Black Lives Matters protest was of influence on the issues of Police ahh at the End SARS protest, it it was something that had come to a place where people were tired, people were actually pushed to the wall”.

(Kii/Female/Human Right Activist/Trader)

Table 6: Cross tabulation of Factors that necessitated the Endsars protest and Educational qualification

		Educational qualification								Total
		HND/Deg	Master	ND/NCE	No formal education	PhD	Primary	Professional	SSCE	
Economic factors	Count	38	5	6	0	0	0	1	18	68
	%	17.9%	12.5%	15.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	29.0%	18.9%
Policing factors	Count	113	29	17	1	2	1	0	33	196
	%	53.3%	72.5%	43.6%	100.0%	66.7%	100.0%	0.0%	53.2%	54.6%
Political factors	Count	61	6	16	0	1	0	0	11	95
	%	28.8%	15.0%	41.0%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	17.7%	26.5%
Total	Count	212	40	39	1	3	1	1	62	359
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	59.1%	11.1%	10.9%	0.3%	0.8%	0.3%	0.3%	17.3%	100.0%

It is shown that a larger proportion of the respondents 54% indicated that policing is the factor that necessitated the EndSARS protest. This connotes that issues such as police brutality, SARS extortion and human rights abuses by men of the police force fuelled the protest. Also, regarding education, the majority of the respondents 59.1% are HND/Degree holders, which makes them very enlightened and knowledgeable. Further cross tabulation between Factors that necessitated the protest and educational qualification revealed that among the HND/Degree holders, policing factors (53.3%) propelled the protest, 72.5% of the Master's holders claimed that it is policing factors, 43.6% of the ND/NCE holders stated that it is policing factor while 53.2% of the SSCE holders also stated that policing factors caused the protest.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study showed that the protest to end SARS was not a single-issue protest but rather a confluence of policing issues, political grievances, and socioeconomic problems. The quantitative results, however, show that the most significant factor influencing the protest was policing (54.6% of respondents' answers). This finding corroborates extant literature on the immediate provocation of EndSARS as police brutality, abuse of power and institutional impunity in Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2020; Ochi & Mark, 2021). The salience of policing factors indicates that, in the end, the protests evolved into calls for broader governance reforms, but they were rooted in citizens' negative experiences with policing institutions.

In particular, it was found that police brutality (40.1%) and SARS extortion (30.4%) were the most salient policing problems influencing the protest. This discovery resonates with Aborisade and Gbahabo's (2021) assertion that Nigerian youths have had several encounters with law enforcement officers in the past involving harassment, unlawful detention, extortion, excessive use of force, etc. Likewise, Amnesty International (2020) noted that SARS operations were linked to human rights abuses, such as torture and extrajudicial practices, across the board. The qualitative results also support this conclusion since the respondents highlighted that the EndSARS movement allowed young Nigerians to voice their pent-up frustrations over the years of negative relationships with the police. This implies that the protest is not only a response to one incident but the result of a long-term failure of the policing institution.

The study, however, shows that policing issues had to be addressed within a broader context of political and institutional deficiencies. The study revealed that the most important political factor affecting the protest was bad governance (52.4%), followed by corruption (15.6%), unstable political systems (13.1%) and political interference (11.4%). This discovery aligns with Adetola's (2022) assertion that EndSARS reflected Nigerians' underlying grievances with Nigeria's governance system and its failure to address their concerns. Likewise, Ochi and Mark (2021) indicate that the protest was a result of the government's inefficiency, corruption and deficient accountability structures. The interview results also show that there was no sense of a political agenda, party allegiance, or opposition politics among the participants, but rather a reaction to governance failures. This is crucial because it debunks attempts to portray EndSARS as a politically orchestrated protest. Instead, the results indicate that political factors played an indirect role via institutional shortcomings and loss of public confidence.

The study's results on economic determinants also reinforce past literature that has focused on the impact of socioeconomic difficulties on collective grievances. The results indicate that the most important economic factors associated with the protest were depressed economic conditions (41.5%) and unemployment (36.2%). This aligns with Yusuf and Benisheikh's (2021) proposal that youths in Nigeria face a significant challenge: limited opportunities to improve their social status, and the high rates of unemployment or underemployment. The qualitative results also reflect an increase in economic frustration during COVID-19 due to the hardships of lockdowns, unemployment, and the government's perceived lack of sensitivity. This confirms the premise of the relative deprivation theory, which holds that collective protest is more likely when people feel a discrepancy between what they want and the socioeconomic conditions they face (Walker & Smith, 2002).

An important aspect of this is that the Black Lives Matter movement did not directly influence the EndSARS movement, thereby adding a dimension to the

uniqueness of the Nigerian protest. Both movements were focused on institutional injustice and police brutality, but the EndSARS was believed to have come from years of pent-up discontent instead of outside pressure. This finding contradicts the belief that all protest movements in Africa are extensions of movements elsewhere in the world and reinforces Iwilade's (2022) argument that the EndSARS movement was about the experience of citizenship, exclusion, and state failure. The challenges were still Nigeria-specific, despite the facilitation of visibility and mobilisation through digital platforms.

Additionally, cross-tabulation revealed that the protest's major motivator reported by respondents was largely the same across educational categories. This is important as it indicates that perceptions of police misconduct transcend educational and social classes and are not exclusive to one group. Another reason for the high proportion of HND/Degree-qualified respondents (59.1%) is the high level of participation of educated Nigerian youths who, though educated, are still facing insecurity, unemployment, and institutional frustration in Nigeria. This is consistent with Adetola (2022), who posited that most EndSARS supporters were educated youths frustrated by failures and limited opportunities in the system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria was not just a response to a single incident, but a reflection of structural and systemic issues and challenges. All prior studies had focused extensively on police brutality as the immediate trigger of the protest. However, this study shows how the movement emerged through broadly interconnected police, political, and economic factors that combined to form the basis for citizen mobilization. While police brutality, SARS extortion and human rights abuses were the immediate causes of the protest, the findings show a struggle to articulate a political grievance and to situate the protests within the larger context of socioeconomic struggles.

The study thus concludes that the EndSARS movement was an aggregate response to entrenched institutional weaknesses and shortcomings, especially in the security system, including cases of impunity, excessive force, and lack of accountability. Economic problems were a major factor in the development of the protest. There was general frustration and marginalisation due to high unemployment, poverty, economic difficulties and few opportunities for young Nigerians. These socio-economic factors exacerbated the grievances and created a broad platform for the support of the EndSARS movement. Hence, the protest was the result of a systemic set of conditions, in which failures of policing, failures of governance, and economic exclusion reinforced one another. The Relative Deprivation Theory offers complementary explanations of how accumulated grievances, institutional failures, and political opportunities had their way of transforming individual frustrations into collective struggles. Incorporating these theoretical frameworks with mixed methods empirical evidence adds more depth to the literature regarding

the structural and systemic foundations of the #Endsars protest and pushes beyond only explanations from the police brutality angle or media narratives. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that the Nigerian government should adopt police reform in the country that engages accountability, trains officers further on human rights, and creates mechanisms for independent civilian oversight, while ensuring all criminal complaints against officers are investigated promptly and offenders prosecuted. In addressing the root causes of civil disturbance, the government will also better the governance of Nigeria, check corruption, provision better livelihood opportunities for the growing youth population, and create institutional platforms for meaningful citizen engagement, thus providing legitimate avenues for grievances to be expressed and reducing the likelihood of mass protests in the future

Additionally, government bodies need to build sustainable structures to engage citizens and to listen to and respond to their concerns before they inevitably become a broad-based protest movement. To avoid further crises like EndSARS, it is necessary to address the structural causes of citizens' discontent, rather than just the immediate causes of public unrest. The government must cease victimising and oppressing young people; instead, it should provide employment opportunities and empower the youth. The Nigerian government should adopt police reform in the country that engages accountability, trains officers further on human rights, and creates mechanisms for independent civilian oversight, while ensuring all criminal complaints against officers are investigated promptly and offenders prosecuted. In addressing the root causes of civil disturbance, the government will also better the governance of Nigeria, check corruption, provision better livelihood opportunities for the growing youth population, and create institutional platforms for meaningful citizen engagement, thus providing legitimate avenues for grievances to be expressed and reducing the likelihood of mass protests in the future.

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