

# The Colonial Origin of the Nigeria Police Force and the Endsars Protest: The Need for a People Police

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## Abstract

The Nigeria Police being the principal law enforcement and the lead security agency in Nigeria, charged with maintenance of law, order and protection of lives and properties of the people, has its origin from the British colonialist who upon their arrival, established a guard of thirty members in 1861 by the Consul of Lagos colony. By 1894 the Niger Cost Constabulary was established, and the establishment of Lagos police in 1896 which lasted till it was regionalized and nationalized in 1960. Many years after the departure of the British colonialists, the colonial character of police that was nationalised at independence remained with the Nigeria police force to this day giving rise to the protest against police brutality and abuse of human rights in October 2020, by the youths who feel that the police force need to be reform in order to perform its duty better. The paper is descriptive and historical in nature with data drawn from secondary sources. Anchoring our discourse on the post-colonial state theory, findings amongst others revealed that; the Nigeria police has remained a willing and dangerous tool in the hands of ruling elites that replaced the departed colonialist used to shut up citizens from voicing out their displeasure of some government policies, programmes and actions through the use of naked force to disperse peaceful assembly and protest, and even arresting and detaining citizens especially the youths on peaceful EndSars protest which was even aimed at reforming and improving the welfare of the police force. Also, at every slightest provocation or argument the police are known to kill the citizens either in their custody or at checkpoint, protesters, and opposition political leaders are usually intimidated, harassed, arrested and even detained. The paper recommends amongst others that there is need to reform the Nigeria police force from seeing itself as a tool to protect the elites and their interests, to seeing itself as originating from the Nigerian people and hence, to see the security and welfare/wellbeing of the people as their primary responsibility.

**Keywords:** Nigeria Police Force, Post-colonial State, Police Brutality, EndSars Protest, Police Reform

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## I. Introduction

The police are a recognized and indispensable organization of modern state charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order and an instrument of social control in society. They are the most visible and closest arm of the criminal justice system. They are agents of the executive arm of government empowered to enforce the law and ensure social order through the instrumentality of legitimized use of force. The police are the principal law enforcement agent of the state. The police are men and women organized by the state as a paramilitary force with the sole purpose of defending the status- quo that is, to enforce the laws, values and ideologies that justify, legitimize and defend prevailing distribution of power and wealth in society (Alemika, 1993 31-32).

The Nigeria Police being the principal law enforcement and the lead security agency in Nigeria, charged with maintenance of law, order and protection of lives and properties of the people, has its origin from the British colonialist who upon their arrival, established a guard of thirty members in 1861 by the Consul of Lagos colony. By 1894 the Niger Cost Constabulary was established, and the establishment of Lagos police in 1896 which lasted till it was regionalized and nationalized in 1960. Many years after the departure of the British colonialists, the colonial character of police that was nationalised at independence remained with the Nigeria police force to this day giving rise to the protest against police brutality and abuse of human rights in October

2020, by the youths who feel that the police force need to be reform in order to perform its duty better. The unit or arm of the police that is accused of the highest form of human right abuse is the special anti-robbery squad (SARS).

Set up in the early 1990s to combat incidences of armed robbery, SARS, a unit under the Nigeria's police force has over the years metamorphosed into a force associated with harassment of innocent citizens, extortion at gunpoint, and extrajudicial killings of suspects. The policemen under the SARS unit utilised all the powers within their reach to exploit people and brutalize those that were not complying with their financial and other forms of extortions (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2020). Even though there were numerous outcries by hundreds of Nigerians who had fallen victim of the nefarious activities of the police, the leadership of the Nigerian police did virtually nothing about it. SARS officers acted with impunity; they engage in armed rape, extrajudicial killings and various acts of torture such as the one that occurred in Delta State (George, 2020); thereby defeating the rationale for its establishment.

The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Nigeria was established to address insecurity and crimes in the nation. Rather than achieve their stated objective, they began profiling and harassing young people which led to wrongful arrests, brutalization and loss of innocent lives. In response to the recent deaths instigated by SARS officers, anti-SARS protests erupted across the nation and around the world. Two weeks later, 12 unarmed protesters were shot dead at Lekki Lagos State on October 20, 2020 by members of the Nigerian Army and Police, after the state declared a 24 hour curfew (Chisom, 2021).

The right to life granted Nigerians by the Constitution has been taken away and the society is daily regaled by reports of pogrom and fratricidal carnages meted to the people by kidnappers, bandits, militants, insurgents, terrorists, herdsmen attacks, and Police brutality. The paper examined how the brutalities of the SARS against the citizens it is supposed to protect, is a continuous manifestation of the character of colonial police which appears to have remained embedded in modern Nigeria's police through the activities of the unit and the reaction of the Nigerian youths wish metamorphosed into the ENDSARS protest around major cities of Nigeria. The paper is divided into nine sections namely; introduction, theoretical review of related literature, theoretical framework, special anti-robbery squad (SARS) unit of the Nigeria police, the 2020 ENDSARS protest in Nigeria, causes of the ENDSARS protest in October, 2020, government response to the ENDSARS protest, the need for a people police, and conclusion and recommendation

## **II. Theoretical Review of Related Literature**

### *2.1 The Nigeria Police Force and Its Statutory Functions*

In 1930, the northern and southern police forces emerged into the first national police force; called the Nigeria Police Force. This was headed by an Inspector General of Police (IGP). The following years saw further changes in the organization of the force, such as the introduction of regional commands to reflect the federalism of Nigeria. Responsibility for maintaining law and order was now shared by federal and regional governments. When Nigeria became an independent country in 1960 from the British, the same basic structures was retained. Thus, the Independence Constitution (1960) and the Republican Constitution (1963) provided for local police force and the Nigeria Police Force. The military seized power on 15th January 1966 and dissolved the local police forces, as a result of negative roles attributed to the forces during the First Republic (1960-1966). By this time, public perceptions of the police were firmly grounded in their experience of the use of the police force to extend colonial domination (Idowu, 2013).

Today, Nigeria has a centralized police force, as entrenched in the 1999 constitution. Section 214 (1) of the 1999 constitution stipulates that:

There shall be a Police Force for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and subject to the provisions of this section no other police force shall be established for the federation or any part thereof.

Successive Nigerian Constitutions since 1979 have provided for the existence of the Nigeria Police Force alone. The composition, establishment and operational control of the Police Force are clearly stated in the Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979, 1989 and 1999 (1999 CFRN:214-216). These provisions which are reinforced in the Police Act and Regulations (LFN, 1990: 359) classified the duties of the Police to include: prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders, preservation of law and order, protection of life and property, enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged and the performance of such military duties within or without Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of the Act or any other Act. The aforesaid functions are also endorsed by the Criminal Procedure Act (CPA) and Criminal Procedure Code. The section 4 of the Police Act provides that:

The police shall be employed for the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are charged, and shall perform such military duties within or without Nigeria as may be required ... (emphasis added).

Members of the Nigeria Police Force have statutory powers to investigate crimes, to apprehend offenders, to interrogate and prosecute suspects, to grant bail to suspects pending completion of investigation or prior to court arraignment, to serve summons, and to regulate or disperse processions and assemblies. They are also empowered to search and seize properties suspected to be stolen or associated with crime, and “to take and record for purposes of identification, the measurements, photographs and fingerprint impressions of all persons...”, in their custody (Sections 19-26 of Police Act). The Nigeria Police remains the most discussed of all security outfits in Nigeria. And its corporate image has never been so called to question as it is in recent time. Thus, the Nigerian Police has been variously criticized by both the general public and public officials in the exercise of their duties and responsibilities. And one of the vices the police are accused of is corruption which undermines the effectively and efficiently of their functions (Ibrahim, 2016).

## 2.2 *The Colonial Origin of the Nigeria Police Force*

Historically, Nigerian Police grew from the relics of the colonial police system, which was aimed at controlling the people and imposing the colonial authority and rule on the people. In essence, the Nigerian police grew as an occupation force from the colonial time (Rafiu & Kola, 2020). The first form of organized police service in Nigeria was enunciated in April 1861, when the British consul charged with the administration of the colony of Lagos, among other things, authorized to form a consular guard to help in the maintenance of law and order in the colony. Much later, in 1863, the 30 man consular guard became known as the Hausa Guard, due mainly to the fact that they were all made up of Hausa people. This 30 man consular guard was in 1879 regularized by an ordinance establishing a constabulary for the colony of Lagos. The ordinance earned it the Hausa Constabulary. The Hausa Constabulary was mainly military in nature, but still performed some civil police function. In 1896, the Lagos police force was created and armed like the Hausa Constabulary. For the areas now known as Edo, Rivers and Cross River state, a Niger Coast Constabulary, modeled on the Hausa Constabulary was formed (Eleonu & Madume, 2019).

With the proclamation of Northern and Southern protectorates in 1900, the Royal Niger Constabulary was split into the Northern Nigerian Police Force and the Northern Nigeria Regiment which eventually gave birth to Nigerian Army (Igiebor 1986).

The Northern Nigeria Police in the words of Membere (1982:13) was reorganized and enlarged in 1903. The name again changed in 1906 to Northern Nigeria Constabulary and expanded. A further reorganization took place in 1908 and its name changed again to Northern Nigeria Police with its strength reduced. In 1914, the Southern and Northern protectorate was amalgamated but, the South and North had its own police force until 1st April 1930 when the two separate police from the North and South were merged to form the present Nigeria Police Force (NPF) under the police ordinance No 2 of 1930 with its headquarters in Lagos (Membere, 1982; Eleonu & Madume, 2019).

The desire to administer colonies in an authoritarian manner as possible on a tight budget discouraged the establishment of large, European-style police forces. Corporal forms of punishment, which had the virtue of being cheaper than incarceration, lasted well into the twentieth century for that reason. The “thin white line” of colonial officers who controlled vast territories set a precedent for skeletal police administration, which some postcolonial states carried on. Independent governments that expanded their police forces, like Nigeria, would later be compelled to pare them back as part of the austerity measures the IMF and the World Bank mandated in the 1980s (Fury & Daly, 2020).

The Hausa recruits were disliked by the natives and by the Europeans they were expected to police and only had the government to depend on. The injunctions in both letters stressed the advantages of the approach, indicating that it was a deliberate policy of the authority. The purpose of this practice was to alienate the police from the community they served to ensure that such officials when deployed to execute punitive expeditions would act as an army of occupation (Alemika 1993:187–219; Alemika 1998:161–76; Ahire 1991; Onoja, 2006). Perhaps the focus on alienation was informed by the stage of the development of the colonial enterprise. The wisdom in employing the Armed Hausa police was demonstrated in their use in bloody encounters in the rural districts close to Lagos colony and at times abroad. In missions described as dangerous the Armed Hausa police showed its mettle (Tamuno 1970:18–19; Onoja, 2006). Thus the philosophy of policing bequeathed to Nigeria differed from what prevailed in the metropolitan country.

In essence, there was a colonial interest in ensuring hostility and violence between the police and the citizens. They were not established, as in the metropolitan country, as agents for promoting the rule of law, human rights and community safety and individual security or for delivering social services (Alemika & Chukwuma 2000:31; Onoja, 2006). The training provided for these men was in consonance with the role envisaged for them. The training was based on the fact that the exigencies of colonial rule required a much more passive relationship between the police and the public than it did in Great Britain (Clinard & Abbot 1973:216; Onoja, 2006).

According to Ahire, the training and orientation of the British police was deemed to be unsuitable for service in the colonies (Ahire 1985:114). Thus all appointments made to the police force (locally and from Britain) were of persons who could show that they had had military training in the armed forces of the crown or that they were ex-officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary (ibid.). Indeed, the model for colonial policing was provided by the RIC programme, which had been adapted to the conditions in Ireland with its heritage of rebellion and opposition to British rule. This was summarized when it was admitted that the really effective influence on the development of colonial police forces during the nineteenth century was not that of the police of Great Britain but that of the Royal Irish Constabulary (Jeffries 1952:30).

The job description for the colonial police, which determined selection and training until the 1930s, was for a force capable of ensuring public safety – not against the criminal in the ordinary sense, but against disturbance and unrest among primitive tribes that was less than open rebellion, and of a political rather than a criminal character. It was a requirement, according to Ahire, that responded to the specific state of the Nigerian social formation (Ahire 1985:118; Onoja, 2006).

The Nigeria police standing orders unequivocally spelt out the objective of training that:

... emphasis is put on drill as the means of instilling obedience, discipline and self control. Officers and men are required to model their drill standards on those of the military infantry, as the force is itself a semi-military organization... It is essential that every constable should be able to use his rifle with a fair amount of accuracy, for if a man is totally unable to shoot, he is useless to the force (NPSO 1932:45–46).

The current Nigerian police, which was created in 1930 was a carryover from the colonial police in existence since 1820 (OSI and NOPRIN, 2010). The emergence of an independent Nigeria could not change the character of the police force. The political squabbles of the 1960s could not allow an independent police force devoid of political manipulations. However, the military coup, and subsequent military rule that lasted 29 years (with civilian interregnum between 1979 and 1983), until 1999 which ushered in the current civilian experiment, changed so many things, including the character of the police (Rafiu & Kola, 2020).

After Nigeria became an independent country in 1960 and eventually a republican country in 1963, one would have expected that the new police force, with Nigerians at the helm of affairs, should have had better relations with the public. However, the situation was not totally different from the colonial era as the image of the police did not improve significantly. Rotimi (2001) observed that one of the factors which made the postcolonial police similar to the colonial era was their involvement in partisan politics. In the First and Second Republics, the police were used by politicians to harass their opponents. Having lost confidence in the police, members of opposition parties resorted to the use of thugs as their bodyguards for personal protection. Consequently, the postcolonial police further alienated the people they were meant to protect as more emphasis was placed on law enforcement than protection of lives and property (Ikuteyijo & Rotimi, 2014).

### 2.3 *Colonial Origin of the Human Rights Abuse by the Nigeria's Police*

The British inspired police was an instrument for suppression, oppression, subjugation and exploitation of the local people. They were awful instrument at the beck and call of the exploiters. Its emergence as a force in the hands of the imperialist was to whittle down the insurgence and opposition against the colonizer (Eleonu & Madume, 2019). In Nigeria, the formal policing organization created by the British was meant to protect their lives and property which was in no way extended to people. Their emergence enabled the “white” to oppress the people and cat away their valued resources. They were instrument of exploitation and violation of the right of the local people. The police was a weapon in the hand of the rich against the poor and have remained so till now.

The protection of the lives and property of the local people was not in the mind of the colonial masters. Instead, the colonial police was chiefly for the protection of the lives and property of the colonial masters. The colonial police was an instrument of coercion and oppression in order to manipulate and exploit the people and their resources. The colonial police was policing the colonial master, protecting their lives and property, and enforcing their obnoxious laws, which was in its entirety, alienating and oppressive. The police officered and commanded by the British, according to Imobighe (2003 p79), did not change after independence. Rather than shed their colonial heritage, successive post-independence government simply sharpened the oppressive instrument of the police for the promotion of their own selfish interest. Before our encounter with and subsequent immersion into the world capitalist economy, the various ethnic groups whether big or small had an age long internal arrangement and mechanism for the maintenance of social order in their various enclaves (Eleonu & Madume, 2019).

The establishment of today's Nigeria police came as a result of 30-person consular guard under the authority of the then governor of British West Africa in October 1861. In 1861 governor of Lagos colony, McCoskry, organised and established the nucleus of the first police force- Hausa constabulary of 30 men (Tamuno, 1970; the Nigerian police, 1981). This formation marked the beginnings of the first modern police in the history of Lagos. It was also the first modern police force in the territories later designated Nigeria by the

British (Tamuno, 1970). In 1879 there was the establishment of the constabulary of Lagos colony, with the appointment of the first commissioner of police in 1896. There come the royal Niger constabulary in 1886 which was established by the royal Niger Company for the northern territories. The British colonialist established the police institution for the purpose of advancing the European colonial commercial and strategic interests against the natives especially in the colony and the protectorates (Odikalu, 2004). Allure (1991) argue that the emerging ruling class in colonial Nigeria was a foreign and illegitimate one which sought to dominate and exploits the indigenous people in the interests of its own metropolitan (British) economy. The effort of this foreign ruling class to subdue the indigenous people and to impose a careful surveillance over them in order to forestall any popular resection created an obsession with the policing of public order.

The prevalent attitude of the people is that the sight of police is considered synonymous with trouble (Alemika& Chukwuma, 2000:47–8) cited in Onoja (2006). This is partly because the police preoccupations or routine work revolve around stop and question/search, arrest, crime investigation, detention, prosecution and crowd control, and armed combat against violent criminals and guarding the rich and powerful. In fact, respondents to a survey opined that the sight and smell of trouble excite the police because of the prospect of what they can make for themselves and that there is a competition between the officer class and the ranks. The ranks are willing to settle out of station and at a lower rate since the initiative would be taken away from them on reaching the station (Onoja, 2006).

The attitude of the police described in the foregoing is the product of the training or lack of it offered them, the welfare programme and the kind of equipment provided. It is common knowledge to hear that police are underpaid and that the little they collect is subject to different exactions and irregular taxation in corrupt practices by their superiors and ministry officials (Newswatch 2002:38–48). Most policemen stay outside the barracks, and most of the barracks were still those inherited from the colonial authority. The ones built during the Shagari administration are in such a dilapidated state that they are best seen than described.

Police are constantly complaining about lack of equipment, a fact compounded by the poor maintenance culture prevalent among Nigerians generally. Operational vehicles, when they are available, have no fuel in them and complainants are compelled to provide money for fuel and materials to register complaints. The various Federal and States' special anti-crime bodies have abandoned their mission of safeguarding the safety of the public to collecting levies from motorists and colluding with criminals. The amount collected varies according to the units. At the top of the scale are the Federal Highway Patrol Teams, equipped with Toyota Land Cruisers, then the Police Mobile Patrol and the Joint Military Police Task Force, in this order while down the scale are the ordinary police who are palpably aware of their status among motorists and can therefore accept anything offered. The amount pegged for the Federal Highway Patrol is non-negotiable for the different categories of vehicles (Onoja, 2006).

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

Our discourse in this paper is anchored on the theory of the post-colonial state as propounded by Hamza Alavi (1979). Alavi (1979) in his analysis of the states of Pakistan and Bangladesh provided an important starting point for analysis of the state in post-colonial societies. Alavi premised his argument on the historical specificity of post-colonial societies, which he noted as; a specificity which arises from structural changes brought about by the colonial experience and alignment of classes and by the superstructures of political and administrative institutions which were established in that context, and secondly from radical realignments of class forces which have been brought about in the post-colonial situation. In general, the propositions developed by Alavi in his analysis of Pakistan and Bangladesh prove most illuminating when applied to the Nigerian experience. Alavi argued further that the postcolonial state is over-developed in relation to the economic structure over which it presides in the sense that it is characterized by a strong relatively autonomous and military bureaucratic oligarchy.

The theory of the postcolonial state best explains the colonial character of the Nigerian police as manifested in SARS highhandedness in discharging its duties. Human Rights were certainly not a central feature of the erstwhile colonial administration of the country. Many of the atrocities committed against Nigerians in that dispensations were inconceivable in the metropolis. Such atrocities were disguised as necessary incidents of the civilizing mission of the colonialists". Also, Ake (1996) writing on the nature and characters of the colonial state and why Human Rights were necessarily not part of the state policy, states that, the power of the colonial state was not only absolute but arbitrary. The colonial situation was not unlike, Hobbes pre-political state, in which all claims are arbitrary and all rights are only powers. In the essential military situation of imposing and maintaining colonial domination, the colonizers had no choice but to reject in principle any restriction on their use of power. The colonial state in its entirety and dealings with their subjects was absolute and arbitrary, so was the police. The post colonial state and its police force still wear the mark of absolutism and arbitrariness, a negation of the human rights of her citizens (Eleonu&Madume, 2019).

#### **IV. Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) Unit of the Nigeria Police**

One of the basic responsibilities of the government in all societies is to ensure the safety of life and property of its citizens. Section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Constitution), states that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. Special Anti-Robbery Squad popularly known as SARS was a segment of NPF saddled with responsibilities of curtailing armed robbery and other related crimes in Nigeria. The special anti-robbery squad (SARS) was established in Lagos State in 1992 as a response to the activities of the notorious armed robbers in the state (Malumfashi, 2020). It was a unit in the Nigerian Police which comprised a group of policemen specifically trained and equipped to combat violent crimes. It was established as a faceless police unit to carry out undercover operations against armed robbers (Oloyede & Elega, 2019).

Within two decades of its establishment, the unit spread all over the states of the country. The spread of the unit with no appropriate structure led to some of its unruly characteristics. SARS evolved from a special outfit created by different state Commands to address specific violent crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, communal violence and religious violence. In each state, SARS is under the Criminal Investigation Department of the Police Command. SARS was a special police unit set up decades ago as Nigeria, the most populous African country, battled with rising levels of crime and kidnappings. Initially, it was successful in reducing cases of violent crime but more recently the unit had been “turned into banditry”, according to Fulani Kwajafa, the man who set up SARS (Yusuf & Benisheikh, 2021). To an average Nigerian, the word police is synonymous with corruption and SARS had been endlessly speculated to be riddled with corruption, instead of combating corruption (Adepetun, 2020). Wyse (2001:26) as cited in Eme, Okoh and Okeke (2009), adds that:

...officers attached to Lagos state special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and other states within the federation, are said to be excessively rich. And the police authorities know this. Apart from abetting some robbers who pay them heavily in order to maintain and service contacts, the unit is alleged to be engaged in using some innocent suspects as baits for other criminals who can pay the price. People arrested innocently or for trivial offences such as wandering in not unholy hours of the day, taken to SARS are sometimes presented and detained as robbers while the real criminals who can pay the price are let off the hook. A police inspector attached to SARS adds... in SARS, we see real money, not this ‘kobo-kobo’ business police men outside see: but the only thing there is that you see blood every day (Wyse, 2001:26).

Despite the human rights and constitutional provisions, however, ill-treatment remains routine practices by SARS officials. It is also believed that corruption in the Nigeria Police has been exacerbated by poor working conditions, inadequate logistic and working facilities. These have greatly undermined the operational efficiency of the police to prevent and control crime in Nigeria. These and other reasons prompted the EndSARS protest in Nigeria (Yusuf & Benisheikh, 2021).

Torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other forms of cruelty by SARS officials against Nigerian youths are prohibited in all circumstances under the Nigerian law (Sections 4, 8, 10 and 11 of Anti-Torture Law 2017). In June 2020, Amnesty International released a report that documented at least 82 cases of torture, ill-treatment and extrajudicial execution by SARS between January 2017 and May 2020.

#### **V. The 2020 EndSARS Protest in Nigeria**

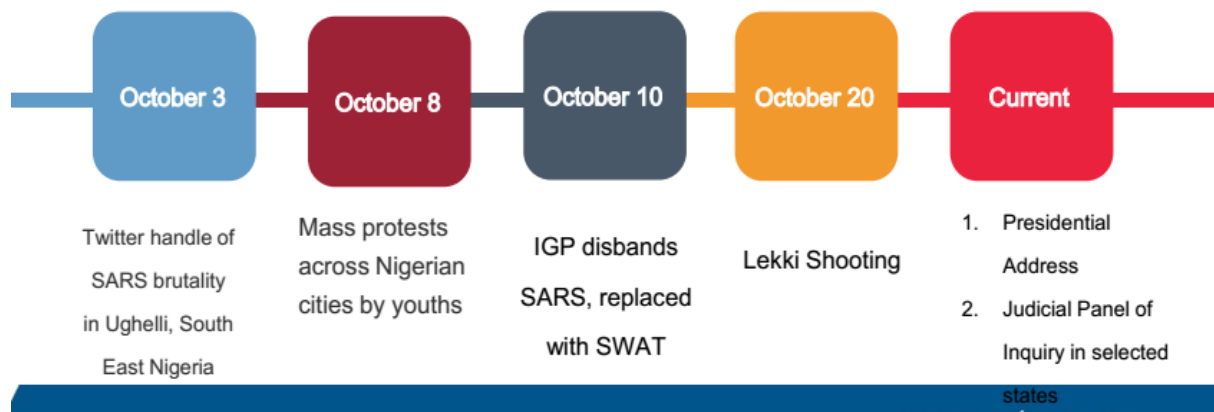
Nigeria has witnessed numerous protests in the past. However, the EndSARS protests attracted massive national and global attention with numerous political, business, entertainment, and religious leaders and organizations across the globe supporting the campaign. The EndSARS movement saw a majority of Nigeria’s marginalized youth — who make up 35.6% of the total population — participate in one of the largest demonstration movements since the country’s democratic transition in 1999 (National Bureau of Statistics; New York Times, 13 November 2020). The slogan EndSARS called for the disbanding of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a “notorious” unit of the Nigerian Police with a long record of abuses (Vanguard EndSARS Protest and Centralized Police System in Nigeria 3 Newspaper 2018). The protest which takes its name from the slogan started in 2017 as a Twitter campaign using the hashtag #ENDSARS# to demand the disbanding of the unit by the Nigerian government (Thisday Newspaper, 2017). The social movement was not only a rallying call for comprehensive police reform, but also became a symbol of hope and change, teaching participants three key lessons. The EndSARS movement primarily demonstrated freedom from the ethno-religious tensions that usually plague the framing of Nigeria’s domestic security and political issues. Young Nigerians in all six geopolitical zones united around a common goal to end police intimidation, oppression, and brutality. Demonstrations were held in at least 25 of the country’s 36 states, with events recorded in Lagos, Abuja, Rivers, Enugu, Kano, and Plateau. Second, it showed young Nigerians that it was possible to have an accountable and transparent civil society that is responsive to the needs of its citizens (ACLEDA, 2021).

The catalyst for the October 2020 protest was the death of a young man during “a stop-and-search operation,” which the cops have said didn’t involve SARS officers. The protest escalated and turned violent in

October 2020. The EndSARS protests attracted massive national and global attention with numerous political, business, entertainment, and religious leaders and organizations across the globe supporting the campaign.

The immediate trigger of the ENDSARS protest was a video that showed a SARS officer shooting a young motorist in Ughelli, in Delta state, pushing the body out of the car and drove the deceased's Lexus SUV. Citizen protest started toward the beginning of October, with Al Jazeera (October 9 2020) revealing that "thousands of people took to the streets" on October 13. Within days, crowds of young people gathered in Nigerian cities to demand the abolition of SARS (Samuel, 2020). Nevertheless, the youth movement took to the streets and vowed not to backdown before substantial change was made. The protests spread into many states across Nigeria and are centred in the largest city, Lagos. The protest of EndSARS started peacefully in the process and it turned to violence where many innocent's youths died and properties worth millions of naira were stolen and destroyed (Kabir, 2020). The protests created a powerful movement that appeared to shake those in power (Yusuf & Benisheikh, 2021).

**Figure 1. Timeline of the 2020 ENDSARS Protest**



### 5.2 *The demands made by ENDSARS Protesters:*

The protesters refused to back down from their protest, insisting on some demands, and until they are met, they will continue with their protests. Below are some of the demands listed for the Nigerian government to actualise as noted by Ikeji(2020):

- a) Justice for all deceased victims of police brutality and compensation for their families.
- b) The immediate release of all arrested protesters in Nigeria.
- c) Setting up an independent body within ten (10) days that would oversee the investigation & prosecution of all reports of police misconduct in Nigeria.
- d) In line with the Police Act, the need for Psychological evaluation & retraining of all disbanded SARS officers before they are reassigned to other units.
- e) And finally, adequately increase their wages.

However, the EndSARS Protesters' demands for wider political reforms generally attracted state repression and clampdown instead of leading to positive change. It was reported that during the protests, acts of police brutality, stifling of voices of dissent, clampdowns on civic freedoms, and military shootouts at peaceful, innocent and unarmed EndSARS protesters with live bullets were perpetrated by agents of the Nigerian state without any pushback (CNN, 2020; CSO Police Reform Observatory, 2020; Iwuoha&Aniche, 2021).The figure below shows the pictures youths protesting against brutality by the SARS unit of the Nigeria's police.

**Figure 2, Night protest in one of the Nigerian cities**



Source: Rafiu and Kola (2020)

**Figure 3. Day protest in one of the Nigerian cities**



Source: Rafiu and Kola (2020)

**Figure 4. ENDSARS Protesters at the Alausa Bus Stop in Ikeja**



(Rafiu& Kola, 2020)

As the protest went viral, so did defiance of the elite in Nigeria who all along have been benefiting from the mis-governance in the country. The trashing of the palace of the highly respected Oba of Lagos, was symbolic of this mood of the youths in the country. The protest has become a conduit to vent anger with the elites in charge of Nigeria for decades and demand change. Kakanda added that it brought awareness on the part of the authorities that poverty and hardship are national security threats (Yusuf & Benisheikh, 2021).



### 5.3 *International Dimension of the Protest*

International protests were organized by the Nigerian Diaspora in Europe, the Americas, Oceania, and elsewhere in Africa (Pulse Nigeria October 12 2020). Many Nigerians and Nigerian Diaspora celebrities gave supportive statements on social media and took part in protest, while demonstrators pledged to continue until the demands were met (Goal.com 2020). Social Media On the 9th of October 2020, the #ENDSARS# hashtag trended globally on social media. ENDSARS protest, which started on the 8th of October 2020, was still ongoing in major cities across the country and has attracted international mainstream media attention.

## **VI. Causes of the EndSARS Protest in October, 2020**

In all democratized societies, the protest against unruly behaviour in governance has been a recurrent issue. People who intend to demonstrate their annoyance against perceived failures of the government or the state accomplish their aims by mobilizing people that support their intentions (Adekoya, 2021). Despite the numerous challenges facing the Nigerian youths, the Nigerian Police were not helping matter in this situation. They become known for their violent harassment of innocent young Nigerians and forced the Nigerian youths to withdraw money from ATMs and make a transfer under duress by the Nigerian police.

Furthermore, there are various examples of people who have been raped, harassed, flogged, extorted, injured or killed by the unit of SARS (Amnesty International, 2020). They further, reported that SARS has been responsible for "at least 82 cases of torture, ill-treatment, and extra-judicial execution" in a stretch of a just over three years, primarily targeting young, poor men. These cumulative challenges that put Nigeria youths to form many movements to removed themselves out of nefarious exploitation, harassment, extortion, extrajudicial killings, rapes and other ill-treatment perpetrated by Nigerian police against young Nigerians. The figure below shows one of the numerous cases of Nigerian youths being brutalised by the police.

**Figure 5. Nigerian youth being beaten by members of the Nigeria's police force**



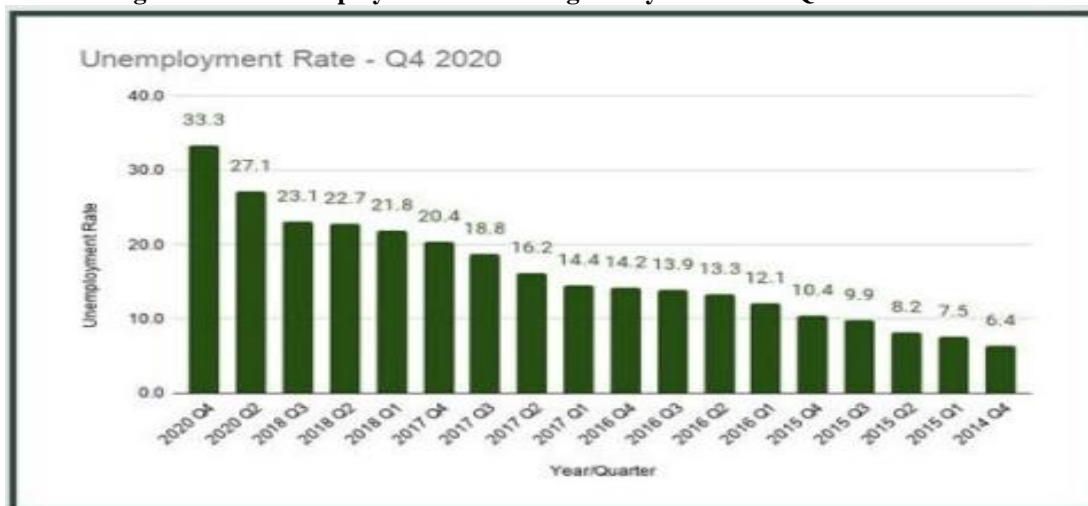
Source: [www.businessday.ng](http://www.businessday.ng) (2020)

Historically, it is the user of these nefarious forces, the Nigerian police meted to the members of Boko Haram that led to the escalation of Boko Haram insurgency for more than a decade. Apart from the police brutality young Nigerians are, therefore, most affected by government policies that have led to a lack of jobs and meaningful sources for livelihood. Other triggers include the lavish lifestyle of political leaders. The government budgets more money for the members of the National Assembly than for health and education. These are some of the challenges confronting and affecting the Nigerian youth and they used the End SARS protest to express their anger and dismay (Yusuf & Benisheikh, 2021).

Youths are the backbone of development of any given society. No rational community will afford to neglect the contribution of its teeming youths because they are the vital resources of development. The neglect of this group of human resources is no doubt the most pernicious of wastes, which can militate against the development of efforts of the nation (Oday & Okoye 2014; Yusuf & Benisheikh, 2021). Unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria are combined at 55.7%. This means that the total number of Nigerians who are unemployed and underemployed as of 2020. The most pathetic situation, the worst-hit are Nigerian youth with over 13.9 million currently unemployed. Youth between the ages of 15-24 have about 6.8 million Nigerian out of job and another 7.1 million unemployed. Consequently, NBC, (2020) further revealed that Nigerian's youth

population eligible to work is about 40 million out of which 14.7 million are fully employed and another 11.2 are unemployed. To put things into context, the Nigerian youths unemployed are more than the population of Rwanda and several other African countries. Additionally, NBS (2020) stated that the youth Population is also about 64% of total unemployed Nigerians suggesting that the most agile working-class population in the country remains unemployed. Consequently, this assertion may not be unconnected with various agitation, antisocial vices and criminal act engaged by youth in Nigeria Yusuf & Benisheikh, 2021).

**Figure 6. The Unemployment Rate in Nigeria by the Fourth Quarters of 2020**



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, (2021)

Contrary to the fiat setting up its modus operandi, SARS officers have been alleged to profile young Nigerians, mostly males, based on fashion choices, wearing tattoos on their body, and putting on hairstyles that may not appear conventional for male folks, especially young boys. They were also known to mount illegal road blocks, conduct unwarranted stop-and-search, arrest and detain without warrant or trial, rape women, and extort young male Nigerians for driving exotic vehicles and using laptops and expensive phones such as iPhones. Nigerians have shared both stories and video evidence of how officers of SARS engaged in extrajudicial murder, theft, rape, torture, unlawful arrests, humiliation, unlawful detention and extortion of Nigerian citizens, and sexual harassment of women and brutalizing of young male Nigerians. The human rights abuses were documented in trending videos on social media. Regrettably, a large section of the victims of the abuses of SARS has been young male Nigerians (Ekwunife, Oparah& Akpan, 2021).

## **VII. Government Response to the ENDSARS Protest**

### *7.1 Announcement on the Disbandment of SARS*

As the protest continued, the national governments responded by calling in riot police, while the Lagos State Governor instituted an assumed harsh 24-h curfew. In response to the public outcry on police brutality, the Inspector-General of Nigeria Police made an official announcement disbanding SARS and replacing it with a new force to be trained by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). This announcement was not taken seriously by Nigerians because the disbandment of SARS by the federal government had been made many over the previous four years, causing citizens to question whether this particular announcement or order would actually be upheld (Ekwunife, Oparah& Akpan, 2021).

### *7.2 Imposition of Curfew and Deployment of Security Agents*

On the 20th day of October 2020, the “Lekki Tollgate Massacre” occurred. Following violent escalations which included attacks by agitators against both protesters and police, the Governor of Lagos State, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, declared a state-wide 24-h curfew, effective from 4:00 PM WAT on October 20. Despite the curfew, the demonstrators near the Lekki tollgate did not disperse. Mr. Ahmed, who had been attending protests since Thursday, said people remained seated on the ground, chanting slogans and waving their flags, as at least a dozen trucks arrived with police and military units. There were already ominous signs. Witnesses reported seeing people dismantle streetlights and remove security cameras that would have recorded what was to come next.

A few hours later, it was reported that armed men of the Nigerian Army arrived at the scene of the protest and opened fire on peaceful and unarmed protesters, thereby resulting in a disputed number of deaths. A

clip of the shooting videoed by a brave Nigerian youth, DJ Switch, trended on the Internet showing how live rounds of bullets were being shot at innocent protesters who crouched on the ground, holding hands together and singing the Nigerian national anthem. There were also reports that at least 50 other people were injured. However, the Lagos State Government later reported that the shooting resulted in up to 25 injured and only 2 dead (Premium Times 2020). Despite the fact that the curfew was extended till 9:00 PM, soldiers of the Nigerian Army started shooting before 7:00 PM (The African Media 2020; Amnesty Organisation 2020).

### 7.3 *Central Bank of Nigeria and ENDSARS Protesters' Bank Accounts*

On Tuesday, October 20, 2020, the Central Bank of Nigeria obtained an ex parte motion to freeze the accounts of notable participants in the ENDSARS protest. In an exclusive report by Peoples Gazette, court documents showed that the Central Bank of Nigeria failed to give any justification for the freezing order. Twenty protesters banking with Access Bank plc, Fidelity Bank Nigeria, First Bank of Nigeria, Guaranty Trust Bank, United Bank for Africa, and Zenith Bank had all accounts linked to them placed under "post no debit" (Punch Newspaper 2020b).

### 7.4 *The formation of Panels of Enquiry across 25 States of the Federation*

The formation of the panels of enquiry across most states of the federation were done by the same ruling class which still harbours and manifest the character of the colonial state and that have also failed to address the root cause of the ENDSARS protest. So the implementation of the recommendations of the panels is at the whims of these same politicians, without any law compelling them to do so. Also, some of the issues the Panels addressed were beyond the power of the state governments. For instance, if the panels indict federal agencies like the police, army, or federal appointees, such indictments or recommendations will carry no weight unless the federal government decides to implement them. But the federal government under whose control and authority the police discharge their duty has not taken any efforts to set up any inquiry or implement reports of previous enquiry. On the other hand, most of the basic demands of the protests, including psychological evaluation of SARS officials, prosecution of SARS officials already indicted, and improvement in welfare of the policemen and women have not received any serious and immediate attention from the government. Worse still, brutality, arbitrariness, illegal arrests, extortion, etc. which have become the hallmark of the Nigerian Police before the #EndSARS protests have remained unabated.

Iwuoha and Aniche (2021) further noted that amidst the raging #EndSARS protests, the Nigerian government, through security agencies, further consolidated its repressive character in the following ways:

- The reported use of tear gas, water cannons, live bullets, and other forms of brutal force by the police (George, 2020a, b; CSO Police Reform Observatory, 2020).
- The reported sponsorship and recruitment of political thugs and hoodlums to infiltrate and discredit the peaceful protests to make it appear violent so as to fulfil the rules of engagement as a *causus belli* or justification to use force (Abati, 2020; George, 2020a, b).
- The imposition of twenty-four-hour curfews by various state governments.
- The fining of Channels Television, AIT, and Arise TV 3 million Naira (nearly \$8,000) each by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) over their 'unprofessional' coverage of the protests. The government even considered closing down the internet and social media.
- The 20.10.20 Lekki Shooting by the Nigerian Army was estimated to have claimed between fifteen and twenty lives, which received its own equally widely used hashtag #LekkiMassacre.

Video evidence showed that more shootings were carried out by the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Police on the unarmed protesters. Some people also attacked and burned buildings, vehicles, and TV stations and raided the Oba of Lagos' palace (BBC News 2020; Ekwunife, Oparah& Akpan, 2021). Following the Lekki 'Massacre' the protest turned violent when it was finally hijacked by hoodlums who unleashed mayhem on the protesters and the general public. There were massive looting, arson, and wanton destructions of public and private properties. Several police stations were burnt down, and many security agents (especially the police) were killed. The discovery or looting of palliative warehouses where palliative and relief materials were hoarded was perhaps a further indication of the people's distrust of the governments at all levels in Nigeria (Iwuoha&Aniche, 2021).

## **VIII. The Need for a People Police**

But the character of the SARS also reflects the battered nature of the police and the ineptitude of the police authority, and indeed Nigerian government. It is not accidental that despite overwhelming evidence that SARS has become a rogue organization, the police authority refused to end its inglorious reign or prosecute its members. On five different occasions between 2015 and 2020, Nigerian Police authorities claimed to have either reformed SARS or disbanded it. Yet, the reign of terror continued, while no SARS officer was reportedly prosecuted for the crimes (Amnesty International, 2020). The crimes committed by SARS are not only against

the Nigerian constitution and laws, and various regional and international conventions to which Nigeria is a signatory, but also run against various rules, orders and directives of the police authorities. Many of the pronouncements for reforms made by police authority only end up as mere publicity stunts, as many of these pronouncements are not backed with action at the operational levels of the police structure. This is not unexpected given that the police as an institution is inept and many of its officers, including senior officials, corrupt.

While the character of the SARS and the failure of the police authority to rein it in reflects the inept nature of the police as an organization and the lack of solutions by the government, the public disenchantment with the activities of SARS also impacts negatively on the citizens' trust and confidence in the whole police as an organization and government. It is therefore not strange that #EndSARS movement became even more determined when the Nigerian government claimed to have disbanded the organization. It also underlines why the protests grew rapidly from disbandment of SARS to protests against bad governance. This conduct by the Nigerian Police is coming on the heels of the #EndSARS protests which were precipitated by the historical abuse of citizens by men and officers of the Nigerian Police especially those of the now defunct Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), and the aftermath of which is yet to fully die down. It is highly regrettable that the Police in particular continue to carry on business as usual despite being in the eye of the storm in recent times and in disregard of the wide outpouring of condemnation by Nigerians at home and abroad as well as foreign nationals and international organisations about the misconduct of some of their officers. This gives the indication that the Police hierarchy has failed to get the message and therefore there is need for a holistic Police reform of the Nigeria police.

For a people police to have an inroad in Nigeria there is need for a complete paradigm shift *from* the traditional model of policing to a more people oriented policing that stresses community partnership, decentralization of powers, and proactive policing. The policing model should be that of partnership with less emphasis on regulatory powers and sanctions with greater reliance upon compromise and cooperation that would serve the public better rather than the traditional model of policing (Gbenemene & Adishi, 2017).

For the community police that would likely emanate from and among the people to be acceptable to the same people and effective in the discharge of its functions, there is need for a major reform of the structure and function of the government institutions such as the granting of autonomy to the state judiciary and the state Houses of Assembly. As this would enable these institutions perform effective oversight and control over the people's police. The police have to live up to the laws and functions that established it; which among other things include the detection and prevention of crimes, protection of lives and properties of the people (not the elites only), and the maintenance of law and public order in the society.

## **IX. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The Nigeria police has remained a willing and dangerous tool in the hands of ruling elites that replaced the departed colonialist used to shut up citizens from voicing out their displeasure of some government policies, programmes and actions through the use of naked force to disperse peaceful assembly and protest, and even arresting and detaining citizens especially the youths on peaceful EndSARS protest which was even aimed at reforming and improving the welfare of the police force. Also, at every slightest provocation or argument the police are known to kill the citizens either in their custody or at checkpoint, protesters, and opposition political leaders are usually intimidated, harassed, arrested and even detained.

There is need to reform the Nigeria police force from seeing itself as a tool to protect the elites and their interests, to seeing itself as originating from the Nigerian people and hence, to see the security and welfare/wellbeing of the people as their primary responsibility. The government should prioritise its investments in education and youth empowerment to engage the country's teeming youths.

The EndSARS was birthed by gross human rights violations and sheer disregard for human life by the police; therefore it is very imperative that government must make effective policies that will enhance human rights protection to address the many problems the campaign has highlighted.

The Nigerian government must also realise that things cannot continue the old way, with the youths. Government must involve the youths in all issues pertaining to their interests, and stop profiling them criminally. Youth engagement and inclusion is not optional but a necessity in the 21st century.

The Nigerian authorities must go beyond lip service to ensure there is real reform within the Nigeria Police Force with an emphasis on the new unit that replaced SARS also known as SWAT. These reforms must translate into holding police officers suspected of torture to account, ending torture, unlawful detention, extortion, extrajudicial execution and other human rights violations that SARS officers have been known for across Nigeria

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