

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF ENDSARS PROTEST ON NIGERIA'S ECONOMY

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Abstract

The #EndSARS protest of October 2020 stands as one of the most transformative socio-political movements in Nigeria's recent history. Initiated initially to demand the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) over widespread allegations of police brutality, extortion, and extra-judicial killings, the protest quickly evolved into a broader crusade against bad governance, corruption, and socio-economic inequality. Anhored by Nigerian youths and amplified through digital platforms, the movement not only redefined civic engagement but also exposed the deep frustrations of a generation marginalised from political participation and economic opportunities. This study examines the economic implications of the EndSARS protests, analysing how social unrest and state responses impacted Nigeria's fragile economy. Using the Relative Deprivation Theory as its analytical framework, the research links perceived socio-economic injustices to collective action and subsequent economic disruptions. Employing a qualitative research design, the study relies on secondary data drawn from government publications, financial reports, and scholarly literature. The findings reveal that the protests resulted in significant financial losses across multiple sectors, estimated at over ₦1 trillion, with Lagos, the nation's commercial hub, most affected. Retail closures, infrastructure damage, transport paralysis, and investor uncertainty collectively undermined economic productivity, deepened unemployment, and exacerbated inflationary pressures. Beyond these immediate losses, the protest highlighted structural weaknesses in Nigeria's economic governance and the urgent need for institutional reforms to restore public confidence. The study concludes that addressing youth unemployment, enhancing police accountability, and promoting inclusive governance are vital for preventing future unrest and fostering sustainable economic stability.

Keywords: Economic Implications, EndSARS Protest, Governance, Police Brutality, Youth Unemployment

Introduction

Nigeria's socio-political landscape has been deeply influenced by its post-colonial trajectory, shaped by a combination of historical, economic, and governance-related challenges since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960 (Akintola, 2010). Over the decades, the nation has experienced recurring cycles of political instability, widespread corruption, and structural economic disparities, contributing to a pervasive sense of public disillusionment. Protests in Nigeria, rather than being isolated or spontaneous occurrences, often represent the crystallisation of long-standing grievances rooted in systemic failures (Aidonjio et al., 2022). The recent wave of protests, notably the #EndSARS movement, represents a significant socio-political phenomenon that has captured both national and

international attention, highlighting Nigeria's ongoing struggle with governance, accountability, and social justice (Adiche & Iwuoha, 2022).

The #EndSARS protests, which emerged primarily from youth-led activism, were initially fueled by widespread outrage over police brutality perpetrated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit within the Nigerian Police Force accused of human rights abuses, extra-judicial killings, and extortion (Aidonojie et al., 2021). While the protests were ostensibly a demand for the disbandment of SARS and reform within law enforcement, they rapidly evolved into a broader platform for challenging systemic deficiencies in governance, transparency, and socio-economic equity (Oaihimire & Aidonojie, 2023). The movement exemplified how collective action could mobilise diverse segments of society to confront deeply entrenched structural issues, revealing the intersection of social activism, political consciousness, and civic engagement in shaping public discourse.

Beyond the immediate focus on police misconduct, the protests brought to the forefront Nigeria's endemic socio-economic inequalities. Despite the country's substantial natural resource wealth, a significant portion of its population continues to experience poverty, inadequate access to basic social amenities, and limited opportunities for upward mobility (Aidonojie & Egielewa, 2020). The youth-led demonstrations thus transcended demands for police reform, highlighting a broader struggle against economic marginalisation and systemic injustice (Adeze, 2009). By challenging the political and economic structures that perpetuate inequality, the #EndSARS protests implicitly questioned the efficiency of Nigeria's economic governance and its capacity to foster equitable development.

The implications of these protests extend beyond social and political realms into the economic domain, as public unrest and large-scale demonstrations inevitably influence investor confidence, market stability, and business operations. Reports indicate that sectors ranging from retail to financial services experienced disruptions during the protests, reflecting the intricate linkages between civil unrest and economic performance (Abuwashina, 2020). International observers also closely monitored the events, as global solidarity movements amplified pressure on the Nigerian Government to adopt reforms aligned with international human rights standards. Such global attention further underscores the multifaceted impact of protests, where domestic grievances intersect with external economic and diplomatic considerations.

The Nigerian Government's response to the #EndSARS protests revealed the complexities inherent in managing large-scale social movements. While initial concessions addressed some grievances, subsequent crackdowns highlighted the challenges of balancing public order with citizens' rights to protest (Edetalehn & Aidonojie, 2023). These interactions provided critical lessons for both policymakers and activists: the Government recognised the political and economic risks of disregarding popular demands, while youth activists learned the strategic importance of coordinated advocacy, public engagement, and leveraging media attention to influence policy (Adediran, 2020; Aluwatosin, 2020).

Given the profound socio-political and economic dimensions of the #EndSARS protests, it becomes imperative to assess their implications on Nigeria's economy. Understanding the economic consequences—from disruptions in business activities and investor confidence to long-term impacts on economic growth—provides a holistic perspective on how social movements shape national development trajectories. This study, therefore, seeks to explore and analyse the economic implications of the #EndSARS protests, offering insights to inform policy formulation and strategies to mitigate the adverse economic effects of future civil unrest.

Literature Review

Some articles had been written about EndSARS because it is a new phenomenon with an old subject matter. The agitation for the disbandment of SARS was not recent; it had been ongoing for a long time. Therefore, this part of the paper attempts to elucidate the concepts used by other authors. This is because these concepts may have a different meaning in other discussions.

Activism is by no means new to Nigerians. Before 1960, social protests were rampant. Activists challenged social issues like colonialism, slavery, rising inflation, unemployment and corruption. These protests took various forms, such as print, radio, music, and, of course, the streets. For instance, during the colonial era, a local newspaper, *Iwe Irohin* (1859 – 1867), initially set out to create a reading culture amongst Nigerians and ended up becoming a vigorous critic of the slave trade. The British Colonial Office's reaction was expected; it reprimanded the newspaper for supporting indigenous causes (Stears Business, 2020). Despite this, the paper had some successes. *IweIrohin's* journalism was a potent weapon in the fight to deliver the Egba people from the rulers of the Dahomey Kingdom, a major player in the slave trade with the British. Therefore, as early as the 19th century, *IweIrohin* demonstrated the transformative power of citizen-driven protests through journalism. Decades later, during the 1929 Aba Women's Riots (as the British named it), we witnessed 'sitting' as a primary protest tactic. The female protesters would dance and sing about their grievances outside the homes of warrant chiefs and Native court officials. In some cases, they would go so far as to plaster the properties with mud (Oshinnaiké, 2020).

These protests relied heavily on the persistence of the Aba women, knowledge of their culture and a commitment to non-violence, at least on the part of the women. These riots were not in vain and are remembered as significant markers of women-led protests in the country. They led to significant successes against the British Government, including reducing taxes and the resignation of several local stooges appointed by colonial authorities. Notably, *IweIrohin* and the Aba Women's Riots are known as effective, non-violent protests. In the case of Aba, the police, unfortunately, killed over 50 women despite their peaceful approach. Still, what these two events showed was that peaceful protesters attract more sympathy from audiences because they do not carry the collateral damage that goes with the violent protests we have seen in Nigeria's history (Stears Business, 2020). In 1966, the military took action that resulted in Nigeria's first coup d'état. This violent protest led to the death of regional leaders like Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello and Festus Okotie-Eboh. The rationale behind this protest was that the military leaders would do a better job governing the newly independent country. Unfortunately, coups succeed coups, and peace was quickly relegated to the past. Between 1966 and 1999, Nigeria experienced many coups. However, the initial claim to rid the country of the men in high and low places that sought bribes and demanded 10% was seemingly forgotten. Other protests include the labour union protest, the student union protest, and the most recent, the EndSARS protest (Oshinnaiké, 2020).

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 organisations across the globe supporting the campaign. EndSARS is a protest mounted by Nigerian youths agitating for the immediate disbandment of SARS, as a result of brutality against the public and youths in particular. Samuel (2020) stated that the mass civil protest against SARS was an outcome of prolonged and continuous police acts of torture, intimidation and extra-judicial killings of Nigerians and more especially the youths. According to Mayowa (2020), the EndSARS protest was triggered by the public's lack of confidence in SARS's ability to end robbery activities in Nigerian society. He further stated that the remote and immediate cause of the protest was a result of prolonged acts of coercion and intimidation by members of SARS towards Nigerian citizens.

Furthermore, the immediate trigger 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 driving the deceased's Lexus SUV. 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 back down until 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 youths died, and properties worth millions of naira were stolen and destroyed (Kabir, 2020). It gave young Nigerians a voice that has shattered the country's culture of deference. As the protest went viral, so did defiance of the elite in Nigeria. The trashing of the palace of the highly respected Oba, or traditional ruler, of Lagos, was symbolic of this mood. The protest has become a conduit for venting anger at the elites who have been in charge of Nigeria for decades, as well as for demanding change. Kakanda added that it raised the authorities' awareness that poverty and hardship are national security threats. In the end, it is now realised that the Nigerian Government can no longer take such outrage for granted as it has done before, and it is believed that the #EndSARS movement can achieve something.

Although Nigerians have been protesting against police brutality for a long time, the October 2020 # EndSARS protest was different for two primary reasons. One, the protest coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, when Nigerians were grappling with the attendant socio-economic realities, such as unemployment and poverty. Secondly, the protest was widely circulated on SM and received broad support from youths who spent more time on their phones and on SM during the pandemic-related lockdown. Akinyetun (2021) notes that calls for an end to SARS started in 2017. Ekoh and George (2021) observe that young people who have long been denied access to governance found their voice on SM by protesting police brutality and demanding broader reforms and inclusive governance. This led to the circulation of other hashtags such as #EndBadGovernanceInNigeriaNow and #NassSalaryCut. Even when the Government hurriedly announced the scrapping of SARS and its replacement with the Special Weapons and Tactics unit (SWAT), the protesters rejected this using another tag #EndSWAT.

Without a doubt, Instagram, Facebook, and particularly Twitter became critical for spreading messages about the protest. These platforms became a panel where users recounted their experiences and those of their friends on SM about the cases of police brutality, corruption and other injustices– thus stimulating physical demonstrations. SM made it possible for the protesters to articulate their grievances by providing video evidence of police brutality over time. It also provided them with real-time information, which sustained the coordination of the protests.

According to Spaces for Change (2021), what started as a tweet spiralled into mass action, creating new actors who demonstrated a high level of civic participation. The tweets by activists such as Aisha Yesufu, Omoyele Sowore, Deji Adeganju, Douglas Jack Agu (Runtown) and Folarin Falana (Falz) had a significant impact on participation in the protests, particularly in Alausa, Ikeja and Lekki Toll Gate. Meanwhile, in other parts of the country, notable personalities like Jeremiah Archibong, Flavour, and Phyno also contributed to the campaign, using their SM platforms to spark protests in the southeast. Just as in the 2019 Hong Kong protests, #EndSARS lacked a known leader; instead, participants coordinated virtually and organised music, medical, legal, and logistical support, meals, and supplies. They also solicited crowdfunding online, thereby sustaining the protests for a more extended period than anticipated. SM became the tool for coordinating, amplifying conversation and documenting the course of the protest. The protests were boosted by solidarity tweets from celebrities within and outside the country. Among such celebrities were Wizkid, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, Beyonce, Rihanna, Anthony Joshua and John Boyega.

Theoretical Framework

Several theories can be applied in examining the economic implications of social protests. These include the Relative Deprivation Theory (Gurr, 1970), the Frustration–Aggression Theory (Dollard et al., 1939), the Conflict Theory (Marx, 1848), the Resource Mobilisation Theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), and the Political Opportunity Theory (Tarrow, 1998). While each provides insights into protest dynamics, this study adopts the Relative Deprivation Theory for its explanatory power in linking perceived socio-economic injustice to collective action and economic instability, a dynamic highly relevant to understanding the EndSARS protest and its consequences for Nigeria's economy.

The Relative Deprivation Theory, developed by Ted Robert Gurr in *Why Men Rebel* (1970), argues that the motivation for collective violence or protest stems from perceived discrepancies between expected and achieved living conditions. This theory emphasises that individuals and groups do not rebel merely because of absolute deprivation, but because they feel relatively deprived compared to others or relative to their expectations (Gurr, 1970). The theory thus positions emotional dissatisfaction as the bridge between individual perceptions and collective unrest. Later scholars, such as Smith et al. (2012) and Walker & Smith (2002), refined the concept, expanding it beyond political revolt to encompass social, economic, and institutional protests.

The core assumptions of Relative Deprivation Theory centre around expectations, achievements, and perceptions of fairness. People evaluate their socio-economic situation by comparing it to others or an expected norm; when such evaluations reveal inequity, discontent arises (Walker & Smith, 2002). The theory assumes that widespread perception of deprivation within a population, especially when combined with limited institutional channels for redress, leads to mass mobilisation and social tension (Gurr, 1970; Nte & Akpan, 2021). Recent African studies (Aborisade, 2021; Okoli & Ugwu, 2023) have demonstrated that perceived inequalities, particularly among youth populations, are strong predictors of economic protest and social instability.

Recent empirical studies reinforce the applicability of the Relative Deprivation Theory to African protest movements. Aborisade (2021) applied it to interpret the EndSARS demonstrations, identifying how perceived socio-economic neglect and police violence intensified youth frustration. Okoli and Ugwu (2023) used the theory to explain post-pandemic unrest across West Africa, arguing that perceptions of economic exclusion and government insensitivity trigger protest waves. Similarly, Sefa-Nyarko (2020) linked youth unemployment and inequality in Ghana to collective mobilisation. However, critics such as Opp (1990) and Olsson (2020) argue that the Relative Deprivation Theory underplays structural factors such as state capacity, institutional corruption, and resource organisation, areas better addressed by Resource Mobilisation or Political Opportunity theories. Nonetheless, the theory remains a foundational lens for understanding the *why* of protests, while complementary theories explain *how* they unfold or sustain.

The Relative Deprivation Theory offers a direct framework for understanding the EndSARS movement's economic implications. Nigerian youths perceived a gap between expected governance outcomes, employment, social welfare, justice and the stark realities of unemployment, police brutality, and inflation (Aborisade, 2021). This perceived deprivation fueled mass mobilisation, leading to economic disruptions including business closures, decline in foreign investment, and infrastructure damage. By applying this theory, the study situates the EndSARS protest within a broader socio-economic context, showing how relative deprivation transitions from psychological frustration to economic consequences at the national level.

Key Issues Leading to the EndSARS Protests in Nigeria

The EndSARS movement did not emerge in a vacuum; instead, it was the culmination of years of accumulated grievances, particularly among Nigerian youths, over a wide range of social, political, and economic injustices. Below are the significant issues that ignited and sustained the protests, each supported by documented evidence and scholarly references.

Police Brutality and Extra-judicial Killings

The primary trigger for the EndSARS protests was the rampant brutality, abuse, and extra-judicial killings perpetrated by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a tactical unit created in 1992 to combat violent crime. Over the years, SARS became synonymous with torture, illegal detention, unlawful profiling of youths, extortion and murder. According to Amnesty International (2020), at least 82 documented cases of abuse were carried out by SARS between January 2017 and May 2020. Victims, often young men, were targeted for having tattoos, smartphones, laptops, or driving expensive cars—traits wrongly associated with cybercrime. “Many of these victims were beaten, humiliated, raped, or even killed in detention, without trial” (Amnesty International, 2020, :4). One of the most symbolic cases was that of Kolade Johnson, a 36-year-old football fan who was shot dead by SARS officers in Lagos in 2019 while watching a Premier League match (BBC News, 2019). Incidents like this eroded public trust in law enforcement and intensified youth anger.

Youth Unemployment and Economic Frustration

Nigeria’s youth unemployment rate has consistently remained high. As of Q2 2020, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that 42.5% of Nigerian youths (ages 15–34) were either unemployed or underemployed (NBS, 2020). Despite being the most educated generation in Nigerian history, many youths struggle with joblessness, poor wages, and limited opportunities for entrepreneurship.

This economic hardship contributed to feelings of marginalisation and systemic neglect, especially when juxtaposed with the extravagant lifestyles of political elites. The state's inability to provide decent jobs and economic mobility left the younger generation feeling excluded from the nation's development narrative. "The protest became an outlet for young people to express broader dissatisfaction with their poor living conditions and lack of prospects" (Okafor, 2021)

Poor Governance and Corruption

Corruption remains deeply entrenched in Nigeria’s political system. According to Transparency International (2020), Nigeria ranked 149 out of 180 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating a high level of public sector corruption. Citizens, especially young people, increasingly perceive government officials as self-serving and unaccountable. During the protests, demands went beyond just police reform. Youths called for accountability in public office, Budget transparency, Electoral reform, and an end to impunity for corrupt politicians. This broader discontent showed that EndSARS was not only about police brutality but about broken governance structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. “The protest revealed a new political consciousness among Nigerian youths, who now see their future tied to how well the country is governed” (Adebayo & Soyinka, 2021, :112).

Digital Literacy and Social Media Mobilisation

The rise of digital literacy and the availability of social media platforms played a crucial role in galvanising support for the EndSARS movement. Hashtags such as #EndSARS, #SoroSoke, and #LekkiMassacre became rallying cries both nationally and globally. Social media allowed protesters to share videos of police abuses in real time, mobilise protests across cities, raise funds transparently (notably by the Feminist Coalition), and attract international

attention from celebrities and global organisations. "Digital activism enabled Nigerian youths to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and amplify their voices in the global arena" (Ibekwe, 2020, p. 9)—this access to technology empowered Nigerian youths to hold the Government accountable and demand reform like never before.

Exclusion from Political Participation

Young people in Nigeria have historically been excluded from governance and policymaking. Despite being the largest demographic group, they are underrepresented in elective positions and government appointments. This lack of political voice contributed to a sense of alienation, leading to protest as a form of political expression. The EndSARS movement symbolised a generational awakening, with many youths becoming more politically aware, registering to vote, and demanding reforms. "The protest offered a new civic identity to Nigerian youths—as watchdogs, not spectators, of democracy" (Eze, 2021, p. 58).

Cases of SARS Brutality and the Factors Responsible for EndSARS Protest

Between January 2017 and May 2020, more than 82 cases of abuse, torture and extra-judicial killings by officers of SARS. In 2016, Amnesty International documented 143 complaints made against SARS officers in less than six months. People complained of beating, harassment, execution, forceful detention, sexual violence and waterboarding, etc. These are evidence of bad Government and corruption in society, which have become factors in the EndSARS protests.

Below is a detailed, factual table showing real examples of SARS brutality in Nigeria, drawn from verified reports, including those from Amnesty International, BBC, Human Rights Watch, and credible Nigerian news media. Each case includes a description, year, outcome, and citation source.

No.	Victim / Case	Description of Incident	Source / Date
1	Kolade Johnson	A 36-year-old man was shot and killed by SARS officers during a raid in Lagos in March 2019 while watching a football match. The officers were reportedly targeting someone else.	BBC News, 1 April 2019
2	Chibuike Daniel Ikeaguchi (aka Sleek)	SARS officers killed a young musician in September 2020 in Port Harcourt. He was shot while fleeing from armed SARS operatives who reportedly opened fire without cause.	Premium Times, 21 September 2020
3	Tiamiyu Kazeem	A footballer for Remo Stars FC was killed in February 2020 in Sagamu, Ogun State, after being falsely accused of being a Yahoo boy. He was pushed out of a moving vehicle by SARS officers.	Sahara Reporters, 24 February 2020
4	Ndukwe Ekekwe	In 2018, SARS officers allegedly pushed Ndukwe from a two-storey building in Lagos after arresting him without a warrant. He became paralysed from the waist down.	Amnesty International Report, 2020
5	Jimoh Isiaq	Shot dead by police during an #EndSARS protest in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, in October 2020. His death sparked national outrage.	Channels TV, 10 October 2020
6	Amnesty International Report: 82 Cases	Amnesty documented at least 82 cases of torture, ill-treatment, and extra-judicial execution by SARS between January 2017 and May 2020 across Nigeria.	Amnesty International, June 2020

7	Kofi Bartels	Journalist beaten by SARS officers in Rivers State in 2019 for filming them assaulting a civilian. He sustained internal injuries.	The Guardian Nigeria, June 2019
8	Ogbonna Nwosu	Allegedly detained by SARS for 22 days without trial in Abia State in 2018. He was tortured and extorted during detention.	Vanguard News, August 2018
9	Victim: Anonymous (Enugu)	A young man in Enugu in 2020 alleged he was tortured with electric shocks and denied access to a lawyer for 5 days during SARS detention.	Human Rights Watch, October 2020
10	Miracle	In 2017, a 23-year-old student was arrested in Awka, Anambra State. SARS demanded a bribe from his parents and tortured him during detention.	Amnesty International, September 2017
11.	Obinna Uzo	Tortured by SARS in Enugu in 2017, with melted plastic poured on his body to extract a confession. Survivor testified before the Anambra Judicial Panel	[Amnesty 2020, Panel Reports]

Source: Researcher Compilation, 2025

Effect of the EndSARS protest on the Nigerian economy

The effect of the EndSARS protest on the Nigerian economy is enormous, one of the least expected, thus unimaginable. One of them is unattractiveness. It may attract downgrades from rating agencies, as the crisis could roll back the gradual progress in economic recovery. Still, on the impact on the economy, Mutiu Yekeen, who is the Head of Corporate Communications at Primero

Transport Services (PTS) Ltd, owners of BRT Buses, said the company lost over N100 million in

Six days of protests, which have ravaged the nation's economic capital (Abuede, 2020). Also, Uwaleke and Gam-Ikon, Garba Kurfi, Managing Director at APT Securities and Funds Limited, in a note to Business A.M., said there will be some economic impacts from the protest; especially the closure of the economic nerve centre (Lagos) for over three days is a significant loss. In his words: "Remember, Lagos controls about 50 per cent of the Nigerian economy.

It is a significant loss, as this will affect all flights taking off and landing around Lagos, as well as other economic activities that have to be postponed. It is a massive economic loss. The impacts are many because most other parts of the country are linked to Lagos in one way or another. Speaking on the market expectations, Garba said, "The market reflects the happenings in the economy; however, we are expecting the market to move upward because of the Q3 results, which are expected to be better than Q2 because of the opening of the economy from Covid-19. In Lagos State, the asset set replacement cost is put at N1 trillion and will definitely be reflected in the GDP. According to industry executives and economists, the result will manifest in a fall in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP. It will fall to around 6.91% year-on-year, deepening the projected

economic contraction, disruptions in the supply chain, and a faster rise in inflation. Investment bankers

clearly stated that about N1 trillion is lost to firms. Moreover, job losses and poverty are certainly going to rise (Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry, LCCI, 2020).

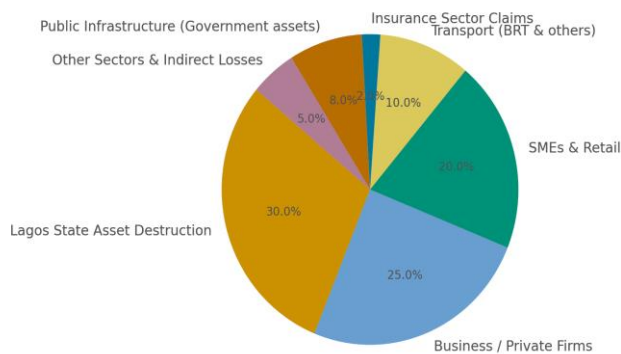
In addition, retail stores across the country were looted, and goods were carted away. In other affected areas, Airport Road, SarkinYaki, Court Road, Burma Road, and Zungeru Road,

business activities were brought to a standstill. In Plateau State, banks and shops were destroyed.

In Enugu, Youths participating in the #EndSARS protest grounded the state capital. Motorists were unable to reach their destinations on time. Thousands of youths supporting President Muhammadu Buhari and scores of others calling for an end to police brutality staged multiple protests in different parts of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, bringing social and economic activities to a standstill (BusinessDay, 22 October 2020). Other states, apart from those mentioned above, also experienced significant adverse effects on their businesses due to the EndSARS protest. A release by the Anambra State Police Command's Public Relations Officer, SP Haruna Mohammed, showed that 21 police divisions were attacked by hoodlums who disguised themselves as protesters. At the same time, seven of them were burnt down. Other government property burnt or destroyed included the High Court, Ogidi, and the Idemili North LG Secretariat, while the Zik Statue at the DMGS roundabout, Onitsha, was vandalised. Also, the nation's capital, Abuja, Kano, Oyo, Ogun and Plateau states witnessed destruction, death and looting. In Kano state, rampaging youths went after shops and homes of residents in the area, carting away valuables and setting some ablaze. Several vehicles were also burnt (Fagbo,2020).

Estimated Distribution of Economic Losses from the ENDSARS Protest

Illustrative Breakdown of Estimated Economic Losses from the #EndSARS Protest (2020)



Source: Compiled by the author from multiple reports (LCCI, 2020; BusinessDay, 2020; NIA, 2020; Fagbo, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The EndSARS protest represents one of the most defining socio-political and economic events in Nigeria's recent history. Far beyond its immediate trigger, police brutality, the protest encapsulated deep-seated frustrations over systemic inequality, economic exclusion, youth unemployment, and governance failure. It was both a manifestation of widespread discontent and a pivotal moment that exposed the fragility of Nigeria's socio-economic foundations. The movement reflected the widening gap between citizens' expectations and state performance, consistent with the tenets of the Relative Deprivation Theory (Gurr, 1970; Aborisade, 2021). As young Nigerians took to the streets, their demands transcended calls for police reform; they sought a nation that guarantees justice, dignity, and equitable economic opportunities.

Economically, the protest had multifaceted implications. In the short term, it disrupted commercial activities, supply chains, and transportation networks across major urban centres, especially Lagos, the hub of Nigeria's economic activity. The Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2020) estimated losses of about ₦1 trillion, stemming from business closures, infrastructure destruction, and investor apprehension. The vandalism of public and private property, looting of retail stores, and destruction of security formations further deepened the

financial burden on both the government and private sector (Fagbo, 2020). In a country already grappling with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, the protests compounded fiscal pressures, heightened inflation, and strained investor confidence. The disruption to critical infrastructure and supply networks revealed Nigeria's economic vulnerability to social unrest. At the same time, the paralysis of business activity for days underscored the centrality of peace and stability to economic performance.

Beyond immediate losses, the protests had long-term economic repercussions. Perceptions of instability discouraged foreign direct investment (FDI), as investors were wary of the risks posed by civic unrest and policy uncertainty. Moreover, the destruction of small- and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), which constitute the backbone of Nigeria's informal economy, worsened unemployment and poverty levels, further undermining consumer spending power. The indirect effects included decreased productivity, delays in logistics and trade, and erosion of investor trust in government institutions to ensure security and justice. These economic consequences highlight the intricate link between governance quality, public trust, and economic resilience. A society that neglects equity, accountability, and the rule of law ultimately undermines its own economic stability.

However, the EndSARS protest also illuminated Nigeria's vast potential for civic-driven transformation. The movement demonstrated the power of social media and digital activism in mobilising citizens, coordinating aid, and amplifying collective voices (Ibekwe, 2020). The role of the Feminist Coalition and other youth-led organisations in managing resources transparently reflected an emerging model of accountable and decentralised civic engagement. This evolution of digital civic consciousness could serve as a foundation for participatory governance if properly institutionalised. By revealing both the dangers of systemic neglect and the possibilities of collective action, the protest created an enduring template for future social movements in Africa.

For Nigeria to move forward, the lessons from the EndSARS protest must translate into actionable reforms. The Government must prioritise institutional restructuring of the Nigerian Police Force to ensure professionalism, transparency, and respect for human rights. Establishing an independent civilian oversight body with prosecutorial powers will strengthen accountability and deter abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Moreover, the outcomes and recommendations of the judicial panels of inquiry established in the aftermath of the protests must be implemented, including justice and compensation for victims of police brutality. Failure to do so would reinforce public cynicism and perpetuate cycles of unrest.

Equally important is the need to address the structural roots of youth discontent, namely, unemployment, corruption, and political exclusion. The Government should invest in youth empowerment programs focusing on digital innovation, vocational training, and entrepreneurship. Policies that create sustainable job opportunities and foster equitable wealth distribution will help reduce the socio-economic gap that fuels frustration and instability (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Strengthening anti-corruption agencies to operate independently and transparently will also enhance public confidence in governance.

Rebuilding public trust further requires a deliberate shift toward inclusive governance. Youth representation in political institutions and policymaking processes should no longer be symbolic but substantive. Mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, civic-tech platforms, and policy dialogues must be institutionalised to bridge the disconnect between leaders and the governed. Similarly, community policing initiatives and continuous human rights training for security officers should be prioritised to repair police–citizen relations and restore confidence in law enforcement.

On a broader level, Nigeria must leverage the energy, creativity, and resilience demonstrated by the youth during the protest to drive national development. Civil society, academia, and the private sector should collaborate to promote digital civic education, civic

engagement, and innovation-based economic policies. Strengthening social protection systems and ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, and employment will help prevent the recurrence of mass dissatisfaction. The international community and development partners also have a role to play by supporting capacity-building initiatives that promote human rights, good governance, and economic inclusion.

In conclusion, the EndSARS protest was not an isolated act of rebellion but a transformative expression of Nigeria's socio-economic realities. It exposed the cost of governance failure and underscored the need for a redefined social contract between the state and its citizens. For Nigeria to harness the lessons of EndSARS, reform must go beyond rhetoric; it must be systemic, sustained, and inclusive.

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