**THE #ENDSARS SPONTANEOUS PROTEST IN NIGERIA:**

**A WARNING SIGN FOR IMPENDING REVOLUTION.**

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**Abstract.**

*Police brutality is a recurring decimal in Nigeria. This angered the youths and led to spontaneous protest under the hash tag ‘#EndSARS’ which means End Special Anti Robbery Squad. The tradition of not doing the right thing or not taking prompt action by government on pressing issues affecting the citizenry is a clear act of weakness and insult to the collective intelligence of the people. Protest should not be the only language that the government understands. This paper captured conceptual clarifications such as #EndSARS, spontaneous protest and revolution. The paper also looked into government approach/actions, Black Tuesday, reactions of some foreigners and celebrities, social media influence, inspiration from Black Lives Matter Movement in the United States of America. The paper also highlighted sustaining factors of the protest (Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, ASUU strike, frustration as a result of bad governance, lack of trust) the paper further looked into impending revolution, gains of the protest, aftermath of the #EndSARS protest hijacked by hoodlums leading to loss of lives and property, looting of warehouses of both government and private individuals. Recommendations were given at the end of the paper before conclusion.*

**Key Words:** #EndSARS, Nigeria, Police, Spontaneous Protest, Revolution.

**Introduction**

Protests have always been a feature in Nigeria’s history of socio-political struggles even when it is seen as an anomaly by those in authority. For every civil protest before now, it is either the government is stopping the march before it starts through phony Court injunctions or authorities are quelling it with security personnel after it kicks off.

Every society or nation has its peculiar problems and Nigeria is not an exception. However, response to societal problems varies. Some governments are proactive while others are not. It is natural for people to complain and react when they are in pains. People’s reactions can be peaceful or otherwise while government response can be civil or brutal. The use of excessive force by state actors using the instrument of state coercion on peaceful and armless protesters is condemnable and dead-on-arrival. Worthy of note is that the #EndSARS started online, went viral and overlapped to the streets. When the youths are taken for granted, anarchy is inevitable. The unemployment rate in Nigeria is a potential indicator that the future is bleak if urgent steps are not taken to address the ugly situation.

**Conceptual Clarification**

**#EndSARS:**  it is a hash tag which means End Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) SARS is a special police unit that was created in 1992 to combat armed robbery and other serious crimes. #EndSARS is a movement which started on the social media and overlaps to other media houses and physical street protest.

**Spontaneous Protest:**

Within the context of this paper, spontaneous protest means a strong dissatisfaction or objection especially by a group or groups of people on anti-people/anti-democratic tendencies whose actions are not apparently contrived but sudden or without warning arising from momentary impulse.

**Revolution**

According to *Collins Dictionary*, “a revolution is a successful attempt by a large group of people to change the political system of their country by force”. *Dictionary.com* sees revolution as “a radical and pervasive change in society and the social structure, especially one made suddenly and accompanied by violence”.

There are conceptual concepts as to how to distinguish revolution from resistance or opposition to existing political authority. However, revolution can take the form of arms struggle to topple a government or widespread protests in order to ensure radical change in the society or country.

It is important to have background knowledge about the origin of Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) and its antecedents. Worthy of note is that Nigeria Police was first established in 1820. In 1930, the Northern and Southern Police forces merged into the first national Police Force called the Nigeria Police Force (NPF.) In 1992, the Special Anti Robbery Squad was formed.

According to Malumfashi (2020)

*By the early 1990s, armed robbers and bandits were terrorizing Lagos and Southern Nigeria. Police officer, Simeon Danladi Midenda was in charge of the anti-robbery unit of the Criminal Investigation Department in Benin, Southern Nigeria, at the time. He had some success in combating armed robbery, earning a recommendation from the then Inspector General of Police. With crime on the rise in Lagos, Midenda was transferred there and tasked with uniting the three existing anti-robbery squads operating in the former Federal Capital into one unit in a bid to break the stronghold of armed gangs. As the new Sheriff in town, equipped with 15 officers and two station wagons, Midenda formed an amalgamated unit and named it Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in 1992.*

It is important to note that SARS operated only in Lagos for ten years but by the year 2002, its operation spreads to the 36 states of the Federation and FCT, Abuja. Its mandate included arrest, investigation and prosecution of suspected armed robbers, murderers, kidnappers, hired assassins and other suspected criminals. Most Nigerians were dissatisfied with the way and manner the Police, especially SARS personnel are carrying out their operations. It must be noted that SARS helped a lot in combating crimes, especially in the Western part of Nigeria and the North East. The dreaded kidnapper; Chukwudi Onuamadike also known as “Evans” was arrested by SARS in 2017 after the Police spent five years tracking him.

However, things changed from good to bad and bad to worse as SARS men progressed in error through their Gestapo-like modus operandi. Malumfashi (2020) stated thus:

*Emboldened by its new powers, the unit moved on from its main function of carrying out covert operations and began to set up road blocks, extorting money from citizens. Officers remained in plain clothes but started to carry arms in public. Over time, the unit has been implicated in widespread human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention and extortion. SARS officers then allegedly moved targeting and detaining young men for cyber-crime or being “online fraudsters”, simply on the evidence of owning a laptop or smart phone and demanding excessive bail fees to let them go*.

Protests against SARS gradually grew since 2017, gaining momentum through social media platforms but snowballed to street protests in 21 states including Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The protesters are patriotic Nigerians for standing up to demand for justice and end to Police brutality. The Inspector General of Police IGP M.A Adamu disbanded the unit on Sunday 11th October, 2020 after days of spontaneous demonstrations against SARS by Nigerian youths.

The disbandment, however, is a pyrrhic victory for the youths, as one of them, Jimoh Isiaq was shot dead on Sunday 10th October, 2020 during the #EndSARS protest in Ogbomosho, Oyo State, while many others were attacked and arrested for protesting against Police brutality. Wahab (2020)

After banning SARS, the protesters issued 5-points demand to the government, thus:

1. Immediate release of all arrested protesters
2. Justice for deceased victims of police brutality
3. Appropriate compensation for families
4. Setting up an independent body to oversee the investigation and prosecution of all police misconduct (within 10 days)
5. In line with the new police Act, psychological evaluation and retraining (to be confirmed by an independent body) of all disbanded SARS before redeployment and increase in salary of police.

**Government Approach/Actions**

Initially, the government appears to take things for granted, thinking that the protesters are just disgruntled elements who will get tired in some hours and fizzle out of the streets. Surprisingly, it waxed stronger on daily basis. Having weighed many options after being shocked by the rate at which the protest was going, the government had to accept the five-point demand of the protesters.

The Presidential Panel on the reform of the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) Okayed the five-point demands of the #EndSARS protesters. In a swift reaction, on Tuesday, 13th October, 2020, the Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Adamu announced the formation of a new police unit to replace the banned SARS. The IGP has set up a new Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team that will fill the gaps arising from the dissolution of the defunct SARS. Prospective members of this new team will also undergo psychological and medical examination to ascertain their fitness and eligibility for the new assignment. They are to commence training at the different police tactical training institutions nationwide. Ndace (2020)

The #EndSARS protest continued with spontaneity across many cities in the country despite scrapping SARS. The protesting youths still kicked against SWAT because they find it difficult to trust government pronouncements or promises which often end on paper without implementation. The protest is unique because no political party or politician led or gathered the youths. The youths gathered on the first day, 8th October, 2020 on various streets and continue to gain momentum on daily basis. The protesters kept demanding for more reforms in the country to end corruption, insecurity, kidnapping, banditry and the likes.

On 15th October, 2020, the National Economic Council (NEC) directed Governors of the 36 states and FCT to immediately establish state-based judicial panels of enquiry to receive and investigate complaints of police brutality or related extra-judicial killings in order to ensure justice to all victims of the defunct SARS and other police units. The panels as stated by NEC should include representatives of youths, students, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and chaired by a respected retired state High Court Judge.

In a dramatic twist, some Northern Governors frowned at the decision to disband SARS because they felt SARS operatives in their states assisted in containing the increasing spate of killings, armed robbery, cattle rustling and other crimes in the north. Northern Governors cautioned that the baby should not be thrown with the bath water. Instead, they were of the view that SARS should be reformed and not disbanded. In an attempt to end the #EndSARS protests, there was a ban on street protest in Abuja, yet the protesters defied the curfew and gathered momentum. 24 hours curfew was imposed in more than 10 states due to violence and disturbance of public peace orchestrated by hoodlums across the country.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) secured a Court order to freeze the bank account of twenty young Nigerians reportedly over their involvement in the protests. The CBN, passed down the order to six financial institutions directing them to “freeze forthwith all transactions on the 20 accounts on the list annexed to the CBN’s application as Exhibit A and all other bank accounts of the defendants and respondents for a period of 180 days pending the outcome of investigation and inquiry being conducted by the Central Bank of Nigeria” Alabi (2020)

**Black Tuesday**

Tuesday, 20th October, 2020 is popularly known as ‘Black Tuesday’ due to the alleged killing of peaceful #EndSARS protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos. The protesters believed that singing the National Anthem and holding or waving the Nigerian flag will give them immunity against state brutality but some of them ended as victims/casualties. Several videos circulating on the social media space showed crowds gathering at the Lekki Toll Gate where the protesters camped for over ten days.

Witnesses told the BBC that uniformed men opened fire and soldiers were seen barricading the protest site before the shooting, and Amnesty International received reports that shortly before the shootings, CCTV cameras at the Lekki Toll Gate were removed by government officials and the electricity was cut in an attempt to hide evidence. Video footage showed protesters singing the National Anthem in the dark, the noise of gunfire as people ran away from the scene. According to Amnesty International, at least 56 people died across the country since the protests began, with about 38 killed on Tuesday alone. Haynes (2020)

The Governor of Lagos State Babajide Sanwo-Olu ordered an investigation into the military’s action at the Lekki Toll Gate. He confirmed more than 20 injuries but said that no one was killed. The military denied the shooting earlier and later said it was invited by the Lagos State government. The report of the investigative panel will unravel the details of what truly transpired.

**Reactions of Foreigners and Celebrities**

The Lekki shooting and other places in Nigeria prompted comments and condemnation from many people and organizations around the world. British-Nigerian born actor John Boyega, Anthony Joshua, Odion Ighalo, Mesut Ozil, Beyonce, Rihanna, Kanye West, Celine Dion, Akon, Drake, Trey Songs, threw their weight behind the #EndSARS protest via the social media. The United States of America Democratic Party Presidential candidate (now President-Elect) Joe Biden, former US Presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton also tweeted calling on President Muhammadu Buhari to stop killing young #EndSARS protesters. The UN Secretary General via a Spokesman condemned the killings and called for investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the killings.

On 22nd October, 2020, the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo condemned the act and welcomes an immediate investigation. Twitter’s Chief Executive, Jack Dorsey also threw his weight behind the protest alongside other prominent people outside Nigeria. In Nigeria, many celebrities keyed into the #EndSARS campaign. They include but not restricted to: DJ Switch, Kate Henshaw, M.I, Davido, Wizkid, DJ Spinall, Rude Boy, Mercy Eke, Mr. P, Olamide, Aisha Yusuf, Don Jazzy, Yemi Alade, Flavour, Falz, Burna Boy, Jackie Aina, Phyno, Zoro, Tiwa Savage, Rhema, Kaycee, Orezi. Notably, Davido presented the 5 points demands of the #EndSARS protesters to the Inspector General of Police in his office. Flavour gave the 5 points demands to the Enugu State Government.

**Social Media Influence**

The social media is a driving force for the #EndSARS protests across the country. Once information is posted via the social media, the tendency of such information going viral is large. Many people posted shared videos or re-tweeted messages and videos of police brutality which drew the attention of many in the social media space.

The social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube etc became rallying points for contacts, mobilization and fundraising in support of the #EndSARS protest which metamorphosed from online condemnations to massive street protest. The #EndSARS protesters even established an online radio platform known as ‘soro soke’ which means ‘speak up’ in Yoruba language. “The CEO of Twitter, Jack Dorsey to donate bit coins to the organizers” Terkula I. (2020)

**Inspiration from Black Lives Matter Movement**

The Black Lives Matter Movement gradually started in 2013 when George Zimmerman who shot and killed African American, Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2013. The Black Lives Matter Movement is an outcry by activists which began as a hash tag (#BlackLivesMatter). The killing of George Perry Floyd Jr. by a white police officer (Derek Chauvin) on 25th May, 2020 sparked outrage especially when video of how the police man knelt down on his neck and eventually died, and previous ones like Tamir Rice, Laquan MacDonald and John Crawford in 2014, Freddie Gray and Walter Scott in 2015, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Terence Crutcher in 2016, Awton Rose in 2018 and other instances of brutality. “The recent Black Lives Matter Protests peaked on June 6, when half a million people turned out in nearly 550 places across the United States…” Buchanan (2020)

This Movement gave the #EndSARS protesters in Nigeria an inspiration to cry out for justice and put an end to police brutality in Nigeria. The impetus it gave to Nigerian youths cannot be downplayed. They watched how it went on in the United States of America and borrowed a leaf. It prompted them to act in a similar manner in order to air their grievances against the recklessness of those who are meant to protect them.

**Sustaining factors of the #EndSARS protest**

Many people, especially government officials underrated the potency of the protest. Some thought it will not last for more than a day or two and the youths will get tired and go back home but it turned out not to be so. Some of the factors that sustained the protest include but not restricted to:

* **Lockdown as a result of Covid-19**: The dreaded Corona Virus pandemic which spreads across the country led to the decision to restrict people’s movement in most parts of the country upon activation and promulgation of the quarantine Law. The lockdown lasted for months. The lockdown was eased but schools and other economic activities were shut down and most youths became idle and disenchanted because of skewed and insufficient provision of palliatives to the vulnerable groups.
* **Prolonged ASUU strike**: Prolonged strike action by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria collapsed academic activities. Even when the Covid-19 lockdown was completely eased, virtually all students of government owned Universities were unable to go back to school for studies. When schools are closed, the streets become classrooms and lecture theatres for airing discontent.

“ASUU has been at loggerheads with the Federal Government since it initiated a nationwide strike action on March 23rd, 2020 over Integrated Payroll Personnel Information System (IPPIS) as well as disagreement pertaining to the revitalization of Universities and earned academic allowance.” Olasupo (2020) ASUU is insisting on the usage of University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS) as the payment platform instead of IPPIS. The Union’s strike action lasted for eight months in November, 2020. The closure of schools which kept students at home contributed largely in sustaining the protest.

* **Frustration as a result of bad governance**: Frustration by the youths on bad governance in Nigeria also sustained the protest. Nigeria dethroned India as the country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty. “In Nigeria, about 86.9 million people live in severe poverty, which is about 50% of its entire population…this is partly due to the mismanagement of oil business and the presence of corruption” Seattle (2020). The youths are angry with the way things are going on in the country. Insecurity, unemployment and economic hardship in Nigeria frustrates people to a very large extent which fuel agitations. “According to the National Bureau of Statistics, as of the second quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate in Nigeria stood at staggering 27.1 percent and the unemployment rate at 28.6 percent of the 21.7 million unemployed, young people (aged 15 to 34) account for a whopping 34.9 percent of the 22.9 million underemployed Nigerians” Ojewale (2020) this is a clear signal of future trouble if youth unemployment is not urgently addressed.
* **Lack of trust**: A good number of the protesters don’t trust the promises made by government. Some key government officials in the current government criticized and protested against Goodluck Jonathan’s regime for removing fuel subsidy but ended up doing same after forming government at the centre.

Some erring Policemen are often not prosecuted to serve as deterrent to others. Notably,

The Nigerian Police Force has ordered the promotion of Deputy Commissioner of Police, Ibrahim Danjuma to Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG) in 2018 after being controversially acquitted in 2017. An officer responsible for the extra-judicial killing of five auto spare parts traders and a young woman on 7th June, 2005 in Apo, Abuja. The victims, Ekene Isaac Mgbe, Ifeanyi Ozor, Chinedu Meniru, Paulinus Ogbonna, Anthony Nwokike and Augustina Arebu were on their way back from a night club when they were stopped at a Police checkpoint and murdered by a contingent of Policemen led by Ibrahim Danjuma. Nasiru (2020)

Many are of the view that scrapping SARS and forming SWAT won’t make any difference, as erring Police officers may not be sanctioned appropriately. The subsequent arrest of some notable faces during the #EndSARS protest and freezing the account of 20 young people after the protest piped down further confirms why the youths don’t trust the government on their pronouncements.

Another incident of extra-judicial killing occurred on Thursday, 19th September, 2020 at the Three Arms Zone, Abuja when the convoy of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila was passing, a security personnel attached to the Speaker shot Ifeanyi Okereke, a newspaper vendor. “In a statement Friday night, Peter Afunanya, DSS Public Relations Officer, said the culprit is one of its personnel deployed to the Speaker as a security detail. The officer has been suspended and taken into detention” Odunsi (2020). This incident occurred after the #EndSARS protest which is a clear signal that Police brutality will not be put to an end by mere declaration.

**Gains of #EndSARS Protest**

The #EndSARS protest led to the following gains:

* It led to the scrapping of Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) and a new unit named Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) was set up to replace the dreaded defunct SARS with the promise not to integrate officers from the disbanded SARS into SWAT.
* #EndSARS protest exposed the hoarding of Covid-19 palliatives across the country in different warehouses. The discovery was made when hoodlums that hijacked the protest went on looting. The #EndSARS protest exposed the flippancy of some government officials.
* The protest forced government to set up judicial panel of enquiry to listen to cases of Police brutality with the aim of ensuring justice for victims and families of the deceased as a result of trigger-happy nature of some SARS personnel.
* It exposed businesses and properties without insurance cover. Those who lost their structures that were not insured will to a very large extent regret not insuring their properties.
* The #EndSARS protest has awakened government from its slumber in terms of lackluster attitude towards the Police. The demand for proper remuneration of Policemen by the protesters is a welcome development.

**The Aftermath of #EndSARS Protest**

The #EndSARS protest which started on a peaceful note was later hijacked by hoodlums. The Lekki Toll Gate shooting aggravated the situation. Angered by the shooting of protesters, hoodlums wrecked havoc.

*With the alleged shootings and killings at Lekki toll gate, the peaceful protesters withdrew, and what was left was a spectacle of riotous and destructive behavior. Everything degenerated very quickly. Earlier in Benin, Edo State, there were reports of the escape of prisoners from two prisons: the Benin maximum prison and the Oko prison. This would eventually become a pattern as there were reports of attempted jailbreaks in Ikoyi and Kirikiri prisons, Lagos and successful jailbreak in Okitipupa, Ondo State…* Abati (2020)

The Palace of the Oba of Lagos was attacked. The shoes, Staff of Office and other valuables were carted away by miscreants that hijacked the peaceful #EndSARS protest. The Nigeria Police Force Public Relations officer lamented the level of destructions across the country. According to Mba (2020) a total of 51 civilian fatalities and 37 civilian injuries were recorded while 22 Policemen were gruesomely murdered and 26 others injured by the hoodlums. 205 Police Stations, many private facilities were vandalized or set ablaze.

However, the Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed said the unrest left 57 civilians dead, 269 private/corporate facilities burnt/looted/vandalized and 81 government warehouses looted, 6 Soldiers and 37 Policemen were killed in unprovoked attacks. The Minister insisted that the Military fired a blank bullet at the Lekki Toll Gate and not even at protesters but into the air. Odunsi (2020). The series of accusations and counter-accusations on the Lekki Toll Gate alleged shooting of protesters raises eyebrows. The wave of violence and looting of warehouses where Covid-19 palliatives were hoarded became almost a vogue. Some private warehouses and business outfits were looted and vandalized by hoodlums.

**Impending Revolution**

The massive turnout of protesters and their tenacity is a warning sign for a possible revolution or mass action by youths in future if the hardship faced by the youths is not addressed. “the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria has gone through all the initial stages of a full scale revolution as seen in the French, American, Orange, Red and Velvet Revolutions” Abati (2020)

The spontaneous nature of the protest with no leadership is possibly a leaf borrowed from the protests in Hong Kong which lasted for over six months. The Arab Spring, the Sudan uprising, the Mali coup, Amaravati protests, Lebanon, Venezuela, Thailand, Peru protests and others around the world is a motivating factor for uprising against injustice, Police brutality, economic hardship and corruption. Engaging the youths in meaningful ventures, ensuring security and economic diversification to cater for the growing population of poor people in Nigeria will go a long way to forestall an uprising or revolution in the future.

A Snap Poll released by Abuja-based Opinion Research Think-tank, Africa Polling Institute (API), on the #EndSARS protest has revealed that 6 in 10 Nigerians (61%) expressed support for the recent protest. The Snap Poll has clearly articulated that the #EndSARS protest has significant citizens support, which goes beyond grievances against Police brutality, but represents a general public dissatisfaction with the current state of the Federation including the Federal Capital Territory has highlighted the scale and depth of poverty, hunger and social exclusion. Bell (2020)

The vandalism, looting and wanton killings by hoodlums who hijacked the protest is a warning sign for a possible revolution which must be averted through good governance and ensuring the sanctity of human lives. Violent revolution in Nigeria will surely lead to loss of lives, property and cripple our economy in a devastating manner.

**Recommendations**

* Extra-judicial killing of innocent Nigerians should be stopped. The youths were tired of incidences of extra-judicial killings, hence, the spontaneous protest across the country.
* Profiling of people and harassment by security personnel should be completely banned both in words and action.
* The welfare of the Police should be properly taken care of in order to motivate them and avoid the temptation of extorting money from people.
* Those engaging in cyber crime and other related criminality should be dealt with within the ambience of the Law and clampdown on criminal elements should not overlap to innocent citizens.
* Street protests should not be done by completely blocking others from using the road. People with serious medical condition may die as a result of complete blocking of roads.
* Shooting peaceful protesters is completely undemocratic. The Lekki Toll Gate saga of Tuesday 20th October, 2020 further sparked wild reactions that led to mayhem.
* Hoarding food in government warehouses while people are hungry should never reoccur. If Covid-19 palliatives were not looted, the warehouses across the country wouldn’t have been looted by hoodlums.
* Youth unemployment should be properly addressed. The more unemployed youths we have, the bigger the tendency of high rate of crime in the society.
* Protests should have leaders for proper coordination and engagement with government. When it was time for reaching compromise with government on how to go about the demands of the protesters, there were no leaders from the end of the protesters for government to engage.
* Youths should convert the success of the protest into political gains in order to mobilize themselves to aim at elective positions in at the Federal, State and Local Government levels so as to change the system for good than standing on the fence complaining.
* Any attempt by government to gag the media will backfire to a very large extent. The social media opened the door for citizens’ journalism which gives information quicker than mainstream media. However, fake news merchants or proponents should be sanctioned appropriately.

**Conclusion**

The sanctity of human lives has to be a top priority for everyone. The Police is suppose to be a friend to the citizenry, but when reverse is the case, it raises and diminish people’s confidence on the Police. The scrapping of SARS and formation of SWOT is viewed by many as mere case of old wine in a new bottle. The conduct of Police should be an ideal one in order to restore the confidence of the public.

The need to reinvigorate the Nigeria Police cannot be overemphasized. Confidence building is also key because most people no longer trust government pronouncements, this was demonstrated by the #EdndSARS Protesters when they refused to vacate the streets even when government pleaded through various channels until the Black Tuesday saga which later snowballed into vandalism, arson, murder and looting of warehouses across the country. It is crystal clear that the social media is a rallying point for youth mobilization not only in Nigeria but across the world. The #EdndSARS campaign gained wider acceptability not just because of Police brutality but it was more of a public outcry for better governance in the country.

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