

## Governance and Youth Restiveness: Explaining the #EndSARS Protest in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Restiveness among youths globally and those in Nigeria have become a behavioral pattern which has degenerated into a topical global issue because youth restiveness portrays man's negative side of social development. This has remained one of the many security challenges facing man in the contemporary society which has resulted in destruction of properties worth millions of Naira and lost of many lives. Today, Nigeria is facing a fundamental crisis of governance that reflects a rising set of demands among its young generation; demands shared by youth elsewhere in Africa. This paper, by employing the Relative Deprivation Theory argues that the persistence violations of human rights by the Nigerian state perpetrated by the security operatives such as the disbanded SARS account for youth restiveness as witnessed in the #End-SARS protest in Nigeria. The study adopted the documentary methods of data collection and utilizes secondary sources; and relays on content analysis as its method of data analysis. The study found out that most of the victims of human rights violations were unlawfully arrested, tortured, detained and even extra-judicially killed without fair trial. On the strength of the findings, the study recommended among other things training and retraining of Nigerian security operatives in conformity with global based practices on rules of engagement and management of protestation.

**Keywords:** Governance, citizens rights deprivation, restiveness, and protest.

### Introduction

Nigeria as a new nation-state is a multi-ethnic and heterogeneous society plague with various cleavages and centrifugal forces. It is usually difficult if not impossible to attain and maintain a cordial relationship among groups in a homogenized society and even more so in a plural and nascent nation-state like Nigeria. As emergent and post-colonial state, the structures of its leadership and level of socio-political development have proved insusceptible of wielding the heterogeneous and diverse society into a strong nation-state. Consequently, Nigeria lacks the sociocultural and even political linkage necessary for preventing citizens rights abuses such as police brutality, extra-judicial killings of persons, extortion, rape, sexual assault, unlawful arrest and detention of persons, enforced disappearance and other forms of inhumane treatment by the Nigerian security operatives. This has constituted a gridlock and caused the security forces especially the police to be locked in constant violation of citizens rights with impunity in Nigeria. Problem of youth restiveness globally and in Nigeria has become a worrisome attribute of social and political life in the country, habituating in a crucial aspect of the political system which portrays man's negative side of social development (Agi, 2013). This negative development has become one of the many security challenges facing man in the contemporary society which has resulted in destruction of properties worth millions of Naira and lost of many lives (Ihuoma & Ikpa, 2013). Today, Nigeria is facing a fundamental crisis of governance that reflects a rising set of demands among its young generation; demands shared by youth elsewhere in Africa (Onubogu, 2020).

However, the doggedness of police brutality, citizens rights deprivation, state deficient, and even government violent response shows that Nigeria continues to struggle with the moral cohesion necessary to inspire her citizens (Onubogu, 2020). This is because, effective response to youth restiveness such as the End-SARS should begin with the Nigerian state and security operatives admitting that a crucial cause for the increase in violent extremism in Nigeria like the Boko Haram, was the brutality by the Nigerian security forces that failed to stamp-out (Onubogu, 2020). Consequently, Nigerian youth took advantage of failure of the Nigerian state to admit that unlawful arrest and detention, extortion, brutality, inhuman treatment, torture and extrajudicial killings by the security agents who are supposed to protect citizens but continue to drive a cycle of violence, to demand for the disbandment of SARS and reform of the Nigerian police through a protest tagged '#End-SARS' in October, 2020. The violence of Nigerian policing does not exist in emptiness, but rather, it is an inherent part of the broad failure of the Nigerian to exercise control and ensure responsiveness of all institutions of government. This is why the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2007) defines governance as the totality of exercise of control and management of a nation's economic, social and political institutions in which institutions represent the organizational rules and routines formal laws and informal norms that collectively form the incentives of public policy-makers, overseers and providers of public services. On the other hand, youth restiveness is defined as a sustained protestation marked by violence and disruption of lawful activities embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths (Elegbeleye 2005). Chika and Onyene (2010) posited that to be restive is to be unable to stay still, or unwilling to be controlled especially because one is bored or not satisfied with certain decisions, changed or existing laws considered to be unfavourable. Agi (2013) views Youth restiveness as a despicable act, a combination of actions, conducts and behaviour which constitutes unwholesome, socially unacceptable activities exhibited by a significant proportion of youths in any society which often lead to a breakdown of law and order. Consequently, restiveness among the youth has been an instrumentality used by the youth to get what they want from the relevant authority. To this end, state's response to youth restiveness is an effort that depends largely on the effectiveness of the government in tackling its domestic security and challenges of governance. This paper therefore, tends to explain governance and youth restiveness in Nigeria with focus on the End-SARS protest.

### Statement of the Problem

The aggression and violence of Nigerian security forces especially a disbanded unit of Nigerian police known as SARS does not exist in a vacuum, but a built-in part of a broader failure of the Nigerian state exercise control and ensure responsiveness of institutions of government such as the police (Onubogu, 2020). The recent restiveness among the Nigerian youth across major cities of the nation as witnessed in a nationwide protest tagged '#End-SARS' which started on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, was triggered by the demands to disband a dreadful unit of the Nigeria Police Force known as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and the reform of policing in Nigeria due to police brutality and other forms of citizens rights abuses by operatives of SARS (Ogbonnaya, 2020). The persistence deprivation of citizens rights by the Nigerian state particularly the SARS officers prompted the Pulse Nigeria, an online news media to described SARS as the police unit with license to kill (Pulse ng, 2016). This partly explains why in 2016, the International Police Science Association rated Nigerian police as the worst in the world (Onubogu, 2020). Disturbingly, between January 2017 and May 2020, Amnesty International recorded over 82 cases of citizens rights abuses by officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) arguing that Nigerians were outraged by the impunity with which SARS perpetrated horrific citizens rights abuses (Ogbonnaya, 2020).

Scholars and social commentators have advanced ideas to explain governance and youth restiveness. Scholars such as Aworawo (2000), Elegbeleye (2005), Ozuhu (2006), Ifidon and Ahiauzu (2005), Ofem and Ajayi (2008), Abdullahi (2011), Agi (2013), Induka-Ozo and Igba (2017) and Eze-Micheal (2020) among others, tend to explain the nexus between governance and youth restiveness based factors such as peer motivated excitement, jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation, unemployment and the fear of a bleak future among youth, poverty, loss of livelihood, inequality in sharing of national resources, poor leadership, corruption, and inadequate communication and information flow. Therefore, it could be argued that the trigger of restiveness among the youth is a shut-up of frustration cause by deprivation of citizens rights by the Nigerian state perpetrated by the security forces particularly the SARS operatives. This could be attributed to many years of bad governance which is evident in the failure of government to end the pattern of violence by security forces against the citizens. This is why prevention of infractions on citizens rights has remain one of the most challenging tasks of many developing nations today including Nigeria. Therefore, it is based on this observed problem that the paper tends to answer this crucial research question: Does Deprivation of citizens

rights by the Nigerian state perpetrated by a branch of the police known as SARS accounts for the End-SARS protest in Nigeria in 2020?

### Literature Review

In this study, the review of the extant literature is centered on issues surrounding the deprivation of citizens rights and youth restiveness as witnessed in the End-SARS protest in Nigeria. To achieve this, the review of extant literature is on the theme: 'Deprivation of Citizens Rights and Youth Restiveness'.

### Deprivation of Citizens Rights and Youth Restiveness

Citizens Rights like every other concept in political science does not lend itself to a single universally acceptable definition because of the profusion of meaning embedded in it. However, several scholars define citizens rights based on their epistemological foundation. Citizens rights are rights inherent to all human beings which define the relationships between individuals and power structures, particularly the state by specifying state power and, at the same time, requiring states to take positive measures ensuring an environment that enables all persons to enjoy their rights (OHCHR, 2016). Umozurike (2007) sees citizens rights as those rights which the international community recognizes as belonging to all individuals by the very fact of their humanity which are broadly expressed in the United Nations Charter as spelt out in the Universal Declaration of human rights in 1948. This declaration acknowledges equality of human persons in both dignity and rights; protects the right to life, liberty and security of person; forbids all forms of servitude including slavery in all its ramifications; and prohibits torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest, detention or exile and guarantees fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, and presumes innocence for the accused until he or she is proved guilty (Umozurike 2007). Chukwuemeka and Aghara (2010) argued that marginalization, environmental degradation and economic devastation by government trigger youth restiveness. But Chukwuemeka and Aghara (2010) did not attempt to explain how poor leadership could lead to youth restiveness. Zakaria (2006) submits that lack of job opportunities in developing countries is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequences. Though Zakaria (2006) does not look at lack of humanitarian and social welfare as causes of youth restiveness. Igbo and Ikpa (2013) outlined illiteracy, poor child upbringing, poverty, bad governance, over population, ethnic and religious crises, peer group influence, insecurity and unemployment as causes of youth restiveness.

However, Igbo and Ikpa (2013) did not see perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation as an explanatory factor of youth restiveness. Anasi (2010) argues that bad governance, inadequate educational opportunities and resources, unemployment, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate communication and information flow, and poverty are reasons for youth restiveness. But Anasi (2010) does not establish a connection between poor child upbringing, peer group influence and youth restiveness. Collaborating this line of argument, Ifidon and Ahiauzu (2005) identified inadequate communication and information flow as factors responsible for youth restiveness. Nevertheless, Ifidon and Ahiauzu (2005) did not pay attention to explain how the rising tide of unemployment as well as the fear of a bleak future could trigger restiveness among the youth. Onyekpe (2006) on his part, argues that the denial of access to qualitative education because of the exorbitant cost of acquiring education is a reason for youth restiveness. Notwithstanding Onyekpe (2006) near excellent argument, Oyekpe failed to establish a nexus between incidence of marginalization and youth restiveness. Eze-Micheal (2020) highlighted factors such as lack of access to formal education, unemployment and poverty as causes of youth restiveness. Nonetheless, Eze-Micheal (2020) did not see inadequate communication and information flow as causes of youth restiveness. Nlerum and Aligbe (2015) asserted that environmental degradation, unemployment, and corruption are reasons for youth restiveness. Thus, Nlerum and Aligbe (2015) to their tent, did not establish a link between ethno-religious crisis and youth restiveness. Mmegwa (2011) argues that character formation among youth is a factor responsible for youth restiveness. But Mmegwa (2011) failed to analyze how inadequate educational opportunities and resources could lead to restiveness among youth. Induka-Ozo and Igba (2017) submits that poor leadership, economic depression, youth exuberance, drugs addiction, poverty, unemployment and marginalization contribute to restiveness among youth. Though Induka-Ozo and Igba (2017) did not look at lack of access to formal education as an explanatory factor to youth restiveness. Micheal (2019) posits that youth restiveness is caused by factors such as illiteracy, unemployment, peer group influence, poverty and impact of single parents. Nevertheless, Micheal (2019) pays no attention to explaining how poor leadership and economic depression could incite restiveness among youth. Elegbeleye (2005) enumerated factors responsible for youth

restiveness to include peer motivated excitement, jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, and perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation. Ozuhu (2006) argues that the rising tide of unemployment and the fear of a bleak future among the youth in African countries are factors responsible for youth restiveness. Aworawo (2000) establishes a connection between poverty, loss of livelihood, inequality in sharing of national resources with youth restiveness. Agi (2013) identifies factors such as poor leadership, corrupt practices of the leaders, vicious poverty, unemployment, peer excitement, ethnic crisis and tribalism as reasons for youth restiveness. Ofem and Ajayi (2008) listed lack of humanitarian and social welfare, lack of good governance, corruption, unemployment, inadequate training programmes, lack of quality education and inadequate recreational facilities as causes of incessant youth restiveness. Abdullahi (2011) posited that youth exuberance, imitation of activities in video film, vicious poverty cycles, unemployment, and incapability of parents, families and schools to organize counselling sessions and functional education as factors responsible for youth restiveness.

### Gap in Literature

From the review of the extant literature on governance and youth restiveness, it is clear that scholars did not make a connection to the deprivation of citizens rights and youth restiveness as witnessed in the End-SARS protest in Nigeria. The deprivation of citizens rights by the Nigerian police known as SARS, induced youth restiveness which triggered the protest that eventually resulted in the disbandment of SARS by the Nigerian state in October 2020. This and other issues will constitute our point of departure and by so doing, contribute to knowledge.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Relative Deprivation theory developed by Stouffer et al in 1949 and expanded by scholars such as Davis (1959), Street and Legget (1961), Runciman (1966), and Caplan and Paige (1968). Other scholars include, Gurr (1970), Vanueman and Pettigrew (1972) and Walker and Mann (1983) among others. The relative deprivation theory is fundamentally integrated in the psychological theory of frustration-aggression explanation. The theory argues that the cause of violence lies in the individual's psychology and moved beyond individual psychology to understand collective psychology that aggravates violence (Abdullahi et al, 2016). The relative deprivation theory assumes that the greater the intensity of men or group expectations, the greater their anger when they meet unexpected or increased resistance. This theory also argues that people or group who feel they have many opportunities or ways to attain their goals, are less likely to become angry when one is blocked than those who have few or just alternative. The theory further posited that, the greater the extend of discrepancy that men or group see between what they sought and what seems attainable, the greater their anger and consequent disposition to aggression. Gurr (1970) avers that the perception of deprivation, marginalization, and persecution of individuals or group in any given society may lead to frustration and anger. He also argues that people or group rebel because they are frustrated and angered by the enormity of the socio-economic and structural inequalities, which are inextricably entrenched in the fabrics of societies.

### Theory Application

The relative deprivation theory is the most appropriate theory to use in this study because, if individuals rights are frustratingly deprived and violated, it will lead to thwarting of expectations especially making unlawful arrest, torture and detention. The goal of depriving and violating individual or group rights such as right to free movement and peaceful association and assembly lead to aggressive behaviour such as violence protest by youth as witnessed in the End-SARS protest to recover their rights or freedom. Therefore, the End-SARS protest is generated by the revolution of rising deprivation of citizens rights due to a revolution of rising expectations. The youth basic rights were violated by the Nigerian Police (SARS), and consequently youth experienced profound sense of deprivation and anger which eventually resulted in the End-SARS protest in Nigeria.

### Discussion and Findings

The violence in policing in Nigeria associated with gross deprivation of citizens rights such as police brutality, arbitrary arrest and detention of persons, extra-judicial killings, rape, sexual assault, enforced disappearance, torture, and other forms of inhumane treatment is a built-in failure of governance. This is because a state violates citizens rights either directly or indirectly by either deliberately committing such act through state-actors such as the police, judges, prosecutors or as a result of the failure of the state to prevent such infringement. In Nigeria,

cases of citizens rights infractions by the Nigerian security forces include, unlawful arrest and continue detention of Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, the leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria and his wife since December 2015. arbitrary arrest and detention of Miracle Onwe from Anambra State for Forty (40) days at SARS detention in February 2017. There was also a case of Sunday Bang an amateur boxer who was arbitrary arrested and detained for five (5) weeks by SARS officers in October 2018, a case of Kofi Bartels a journalist with a radio station in Port Harcourt, Rivers State in June 2019 and Tim Elombah, an online journalist and six of his family members in January 2018 at Nnewi, Anambra State. Others are Samuel Ogundipe, Musikilu Mojeed and Azeezat Adedigba, all of the Premium Times, a Nigerian online newspaper who were unlawfully arrested and detained on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2018 (Amnesty International, 2020). Similarly, the Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry on SARS related abuses, reported that over 12 protesters of #EndSARS were killed, 22 persons sustained gunshot injuries and 15 others assaulted on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 at Lekki toll gate in Lagos state (LSJPI, 2021). According to the report, some of the victims who were extra-judiciously killed include, Victor Sunday Ibanga, Kolade Salami, Olamilekan Ajasa, Abuta Solomon, Olakekan Abideen Ashafa, and Folorunsho Olabisi Nathaniel among others. While among those assaulted were Savior Osike Moses, Andrew Ugochukwu, and Emmanuel John.

**Table showing some cases of Citizens Rights Violations in Nigeria between 2015 and 2021**

S/N	Name	Age	Occupation	State	Nature of violation	Date
1	Miracle Onwe	23yrs	Student	Anambra	Unlawful arrest/detention	Feb 2017
2	Collings Ezenwa	35yrs	Ex-police officer	Imo	Extra-judicial killing	Jan 2018
3	Mr Adetokumbo	22yrs	Student	Lagos	Torture/ill-treatment	May 2017
4	Mr Ugochukwu	32yrs	Trader	Anambra	Extortion (#6million)	30 <sup>th</sup> April, 2018
5	Samuel Ogundipe	37yrs	Journalist	Ogun	Unlawful arrest/detention	14 <sup>th</sup> August, 2018
6	About 45 IMN members	-----	Religion group	Kaduna	Extra-judicial killing	December, 2015
7	Sunday Bang	24yrs	Boxer	FCT	Torture/ill-treatment	Oct 2018
8	Collins Ezenwa	35yrs	Ex-police officer	Imo	Extortion/confiscation of property	Jan 2018
9	Over 12 IPOB members	-----	Secession group	Abia	Extra-judicial killing	Sept. 2017
10	Samuel Eke	25yrs	Trader	Anambra	Torture/ill-treatment	14 <sup>th</sup> May 2018
11	Kofi Bartels	34 yrs	Journalist	Rivers	Unlawful arrest/detention	4th June 2019
12	Azeezat Adedigba	35 yrs	Journalist	FCT	Unlawful arrest/detention	14 <sup>th</sup> August 2018
13	John Eze	22yrs	Student	Anambra	Torture/ill-treatment	Feb 21,2020
14	Omole Sowore	50yrs	Activist/ Journalist	Ondo	Unlawful, arrest, detention/torture	Aug 2019, Jan & May 2021
15	Victor Sunday I.	27yrs	Entrepreneur	Lagos	Extra-judicial killing	20 <sup>th</sup> Oct,2020
16	Kolade Salami	26yrs	Student	Lagos	Extra-judicial killing	20 <sup>th</sup> Oct, 2020
17	Abouta Solomon	28yrs	Car wash manager	Adamawa	Extra-judicial killing	20 <sup>th</sup> Oct, 2020
18	Olamilekan Ajasa	14yrs	Student/ vulcaniser	Lagos	Extra-judicial killing	20 <sup>th</sup> Oct, 2020

19	Savior Osike Moses	24yrs	Student	Calabar	Assault	20 <sup>th</sup> Oct, 2020
20	Emmanuel John	25yrs	Entrepreneur	Lagos	Assault	20 <sup>th</sup> Oct, 2020
21	Andrew Ugochukwu	32yrs	Trader	Anambra	Assault	20 <sup>th</sup> Oct, 2020

Source: compiled by the author with data generated from AI (2020), & Lagos State JPI (2021)

In most of the cases from the table above, some of the victims were unlawfully held in SARS custody for longer time, cruelly tortured, ill-treated and even extra-judiciously executed in blunt contraventions of the principles of a fair hearing and presumption of innocence of an accused as guaranteed by Section 36 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution(as amended) as well as other regional or international treaties and protocols such as African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights ratified in 1983; International Convention on Civil and Political Rights that was ratified in 1993 that forbid citizens rights infraction which Nigeria is a state party to, including the Anti-Torture Act 2017 that was signed into law by President Mohammadu Buhari on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2017. This triggers the End-SARS protest that eventually led to the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) by the Nigerian government in October, 2020.

### Conclusion

The October, 2020 youth protest in Nigeria tagged #EndSARS, principally demonstrated exemption from ethno-religious antagonism that plague the conceptualization of the country’s national and political issues. Nigeria youths were united by a common goal to end police brutality, intimidation and persecution. The #EndSARS protest highlighted the need for youth to exercise their civil and political rights to voice out against irregularities and injustice in governance, improvement in Nigeria policing and review of their compensations to curb corruption, unlawful arrest and detention of the citizens and other forms of citizens rights abuses by the police operatives.

### Recommendations

On the strength of the findings, this paper recommended that:

- i. There should be training and retraining of all Nigerian security operatives on rules of engagement and management of protesters
- ii. Government should regularly engage with youth and be proactive and responsive in terms civil protestation or unrest
- iii. There should be complete compliance and enforcement of the Anti Torture Act that was signed into law on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2017 by Nigerian government.

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