

Stakeholders' Perception of Endsars Crisis in Southwestern Nigeria

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Received: 11.02.2026 | Accepted: 07.03.2026 | Published: 12.05.2026

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.20133947](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20133947)

Abstract

Original Research Article

This study determined stakeholders' assessment of ENDSARS crisis in southwestern Nigeria. It adopted the survey research design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 40 stakeholders from each of the five states in southwestern Nigeria, making a total of 200 respondents. In all, 200 respondents participated in the study. One research instrument was used for data collection: Questionnaire on Stakeholders' Perception of EndSARS Crisis ($r= 0.75$). Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of percentage, mean, standard deviation. Findings of the study revealed that 42% of the stakeholder attest that EndSars protest was a political agenda (27%) revealed that the youth over deed themselves (34%) attest that EndSars protest is a waste of life and property (39%) attest that EndSars protest achieved it aim and 47% attest that EndSars protest is one of the best protests in Nigeria so far. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that Government, whether Federal, State or Local government Governments, in collaboration with security agencies, Civil Society Organisations and traditional/religious institutions should create avenues and listen to the millions of voices calling for police reform and see an opportunity to transform relations between police and communities. The disbanding of SARS and establishment of SWAT as pronounced by the Inspector General of Police should be backed up with action, signaling a reform by prosecuting officers involved in brutalizing the masses.

Keywords: Stakeholders, Government, EndSARS Protest, Police brutality.

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Introduction

A basic human right and a necessary component of democratic societies is the ability to demonstrate peacefully. Human rights are moral precepts and legal requirements that set expectations for how people should be treated. They are protected by both domestic and international law and are widely acknowledged. These rights are inherent and unalienable; they belong to every individual only by virtue of being human. Regardless of age, gender, language, religion, nationality, race, or any other

status, they are equally applicable to every individual. Fundamentally, human rights aim to protect everyone against serious social, legal, and political injustices. Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the right to education, and protection from torture and cruel treatment are a few examples of these rights. This larger framework of human rights activism gave rise to the End SARS movement. End SARS is a decentralized social movement and a series of large-scale demonstrations against Nigerian police brutality. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a contentious branch of the Nigerian



Police Force that had been extensively accused of misconduct and abuse, was to be disbanded, according to the slogan "End SARS." The movement called for a halt to the unit's claimed extrajudicial executions, torture, extortion, harassment, and other types of unjustified violence.

In order to pressure the Nigerian government for change and accountability, the protest started in 2017 as a social media movement, especially on Twitter, using the hashtag End SARS (Salaudeen, 2017). Following additional claims and widely shared films claiming abuses by unit members, the campaign saw a resurgence in October 2020. Along with substantial participation and lobbying on social media, this revival sparked large-scale street protests in major Nigerian cities. Nigerians in the diaspora and sympathisers in other cities around the world also planned solidarity protests. Concerns regarding purported human rights abuses connected to SARS were brought to light by reports from groups like Amnesty International. The organization documented allegations of arbitrary arrests, torture, harsh and humiliating treatment, and other abuses in its 2016 report. It also detailed dozens of episodes in 2020 where members of the squad were accused of extrajudicial killings, mistreatment, and arbitrary detention. All things considered, the EndSARS demonstrations highlighted how civic participation, responsibility, and the defense of fundamental human rights are intertwined in a democratic society.

The campaign's main goal was to inspire broad public opposition to the Nigeria Police Force's (NPF) Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a division created to fight violent crimes including armed robbery. But as time went on, the unit was the focus of multiple accusations of misbehavior and abuse. The hashtag End SARS helped the campaign, which blended offline mobilisation and internet action, acquire popularity on social media. More than 10,000 Nigerians signed a petition calling for the dissolution of SARS as part of the lobbying activities, and it was later delivered to the country's National Assembly. The petitioners referenced numerous claims of violence, extortion, harassment, and wrongful incarceration, especially against young Nigerians. Many individuals believed that

little significant reform occurred, despite reports that the National Assembly, the National Human Rights Commission, the Inspector General of Police, and even the Vice President launched interventions.

The ongoing dependence on the Police Act of 1943, which detractors claimed gave police officers extensive discretionary powers, made matters worse (Ujene, Orji & Obianger, 2018). When a video purportedly showing SARS agents shooting a young Nigerian and fleeing in his car went viral on social media on October 3, 2020, tensions increased. Widespread indignation was sparked by the video, which turned the already-existing online campaign into a national protest movement with international implications. Coordinated protests, mostly spearheaded by young Nigerians, had started in several locations by October 7, 2020. Despite the fact that most participants characterized the protests as peaceful, there were reports of clashes between demonstrators and security guards in multiple places. According to accounts, the police used live bullets and tear gas to scatter protesters. According to reports, these accidents caused fatalities and injuries in many sections of the nation (Oshinnaik, 2020). Along with demands for accountability, justice for victims of suspected extrajudicial executions and extortion, and more extensive reforms aiming at fostering transparent and responsible governance, the demonstrations' main demand remained the dissolution of SARS (Okon, 2020).

As a result, protests have persisted, and the Nigerian government has persisted in its practice of brutal repression, which includes the murder of protesters. International protests have been held in support of the events in the nation, and the movement has become more critical of the government's response to the protest, which was headed by President Muhammadu Buhari (Makinde, 2020). SARS officers have been accused of profiling young Nigerians, primarily males, based on their hairstyles, body tattoos, and fashion choices that may not seem typical for guys, particularly young boys, in violation of the fiat establishing its *modus operandi*. Additionally, they were known to rape women, perform unauthorized stop-and-searches, erect

unlawful traffic blocks, arrest and imprison people without a warrant or trial, blackmail young Nigerian men for using laptops and fancy phones like iPhones, and drive exotic cars (Kazeem 2020). Stories and video proof of SARS officers' extrajudicial murder, theft, rape, torture, unlawful arrests, humiliation, unlawful detention and extortion of Nigerian residents, sexual harassment of women, and brutality of young male Nigerians have been shared by Nigerians. Trending videos on social media revealed the violations of human rights (Ujene and Orji-Egwu 2018). Unfortunately, young male Nigerians have made up a significant portion of the victims of SARS atrocities (Wayback Machine 2020a).

Over the years, there have been numerous attempts to reform SARS in an attempt to solve the issue that prompted the ENDSARS protest, but none of them have been successful thus far. Even though the government has dissolved the Department multiple times, they have always managed to re-establish themselves and continue to wreak havoc on Nigerian society. Amnesty International is still keeping track of extrajudicial executions and illegal killings that occur inside the Armed Forces, including the SARs. The government's integrity is questioned in relation to the way they have been managing SARS. There has been little progress in the government's efforts to combat SARS' abuse of power thus far. There are also questions regarding Nigerians' protest choices because they are perceived as a way for criminals to take over and wreak havoc on the community. This study ascertained stakeholders' perceptions of the ENDSARS issue in southwest Nigeria based on this gap. The purpose of this study was to ascertain how stakeholders in southwest Nigeria perceived the ENDSARS situation.

Statement of the Problem

Mass demonstrations against police brutality in Nigeria are part of the decentralized social movement known as ENDSARS. The slogan demands the dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a "notorious" Nigerian Police force with a lengthy history of misconduct. Additionally, it is a movement advocating for the cessation of

police brutality in Nigeria committed by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notoriously abusive and unjustified violent unit of the Nigerian police force. The campaign's goal was to incite widespread opposition to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a division of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) tasked with responding to violent crimes and armed robberies. There have been other attempts to reform SARS over the years in an attempt to address the issue that prompted the ENDSARS protest, but none of them have been successful thus far. The government has dissolved the Department multiple times, but each time they have resurfaced and caused further damage to Nigerian society. In the context of the Armed Force, particularly the SARs, Amnesty International continues to record extrajudicial executions and unlawful killings. Regarding the government's handling of SARS, there are questions about its honesty. The government's SARS decisions to date have not produced any fruitful outcomes. As a result, this study ascertained how stakeholders evaluated the ENDSARS situation in southwest Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The following are the objectives of the study:

- i. to examine the perception of stakeholders on causes of End SARS protest
- ii. to examine the stakeholders' perceptions of the End SARS protest

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the stakeholders' perception of the causes of End SARS protest?
2. What are the stakeholders' perceptions of the End SARS protest?

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 40 stakeholders from each of the five states in southwestern Nigeria, making a total of 200

respondents. In all, 200 respondents participated in the study. One research instrument was used for data collection: Questionnaire on Stakeholders’

Perception of EndSARS Crisis ($r= 0.75$). Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of percentage, mean, standard deviation.

Results

Research Question1: What is the stakeholders’ perception of the causes of End SARS protest?

Table 1: Perception of Stakeholders the causes towards End Sars Protest

Variable	SA	A	U	D	SD
Perception about the causes End Sars	F (%)	F (%)	(F) %	F (%)	F
Unified Agenda	78 (39)	85 (42)	10 (5)	17 (9)	10 (5)
High unemployment, poverty rate	55 (27)	45 (22)	5 (2.5)	70 (35)	25 (12.5)
Absence of formal leadership structure	61 (31)	69 (34)	10 (4.9)	29 (14.1)	31 (16)
Protest devoid of partisan politics	53 (27)	79 (39)	5 (2.4)	40 (19.6)	23 (12)
Buhari long silence	94 (47)	61 (30)	5 (1.7)	32 (16)	14 (7)

SA- Strongly Agree A-Agree U-Undecided D- Disagree SD- Strongly Disagree

Results from the table below revealed that 42% of the stakeholder attest that EndSars protest was a unified agenda (42%), absence of formal leadership, (34%) attest that absence of formal leadership structure, 39% attest that End SARS was caused by protest devoid of partisan politics and 47% attest

that EndSars protest was caused by Buhari Long silence.

Research Question 2: What are the stakeholders’ perceptions of the End SARS protest?

Table 2 Perception of Stakeholders on End SARS Protest

Variable	VT	T	RT	NT
Perception of Students Parental Care	F (%)	F (%)	(F) %	F (%)
End SARS protest is politically inclined	78 (39)	85 (42)	10 (5)	27 (14)
The police deserve the attack given to them	95 (48)	55 (27)	10 (5)	40 (20)

Government could have handled the matter better	55 (27)	45 (22)	5 (2.5)	95 (47.5)
End SARS protest achieved its objectives	61 (31)	69 (34)	10 (4.9)	60 (30.1)
End SARS protest is a complete waste of time	53 (27)	79 (39)	5 (2.4)	63 (31.6)
The police intentionally brutalize citizens	94 (47)	61 (30)	5 (1.7)	46 (23)
At times I wonder if the government are aware of all the police brutality	78 (39)	85 (42)	5 (1.7)	37 (19)
EndSars was a political agenda	78 (39)	85 (42)	10 (5)	27 (14)
The youth over did themselves	55 (27)	45 (22)	30 (15)	70 (35)
EndSars waste of lives and property	61 (31)	69 (34)	41 (20.9)	29 (14.1)
EndSars protest achieved its aim	53 (27)	79 (39)	28 (14.4)	40 (19.6)
EndSars protest is one of the best protests in Nigeria so far	94 (47)	61 (30)	19 (2.4)	32 (16)

VT- Very True T-True RT- Rarely True NT- Not True

It was revealed from the table below that 39% of the stakeholders attest that End SARS protest is politically inclined. It also revealed that 48% attest that the police deserve the attack given to them, 47% revealed that the police intentionally brutalize citizens and 42% also attest that at times they wonder if the government are aware of all the police brutality.

Discussion of Findings

Perception of Stakeholders towards the Causes of End SARS Protest

The results of this study showed that the End SARS protest severely damaged Nigeria's already precarious economy. An oil economy was already in danger of going into recession as it attempted to recover from the devastation caused by the Covid-19 outbreak. After the End SARS protests began, Nigeria's economy has lost around N700 billion, according to the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI, 2020). According to Fagbo (2020), as the demonstration continued, the people's short-

term financial problems started to worsen. A clear indication of its influence was a decline in consumer expenditure on non-essential items. Major roads were closed as a result of the protest, which also stopped economic activity at Nigeria's main airport. The protest shut down major activities of Nigeria's busiest airport with major roads blocked and economic activities brought to a halt.

Perception of Stakeholders on End SARS Protest

It also turned out that the EndSARS protest had a seriously detrimental impact on businesses in states other than the ones listed above. According to a statement released by SP Haruna Mohammed, the public relations officer for the State Police Command, 21 police divisions were attacked by thugs posing as demonstrators, and seven of them were set on fire. The High Court Ogidi, Idemili North LG Secretariat, and the Zik Statue at the DMGS roundabout in Onitsha were among the other government buildings that were burned or destroyed. Additionally, there was death, devastation, and

looting in the states of Kano, Oyo, Ogun, Plateau, and Abuja, the nation's capital. In Kano state, renegade teenagers attacked local businesses and residences, stealing items and burning several. Additionally, a number of cars were set on fire (Fagbo, 2020). The results of this investigation showed that stakeholders were tasked with maintaining public safety and decorum throughout the End Sars demonstration. To ensure that the protest was not interrupted or taken over, soldiers and other security personnel were stationed at strategic locations where the demonstration was taking place in addition to the police.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that the End SARS protest successfully accomplished its primary goal, which was the Nigeria Police Force's dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). In this sense, the movement is among the most significant civic engagements in the modern democratic history of Nigeria. The demonstration greatly increased public conversation on human rights, police accountability, young political involvement, and governance reform, even beyond the policy outcome. It was a turning point in citizen-led advocacy, especially in the deliberate use of digital platforms to spur national and international collective action. But the report also shows that the protests had significant effects on the economy. Together, the interruption of economic operations, the implementation of curfews in a number of states, the destruction of both private and public property, and the brief closure of companies put a great deal of strain on Nigeria's already precarious economy. The intricate relationship between public opposition, government action, and country stability is shown by these economic repercussions.

By providing a sophisticated knowledge of stakeholders' perspectives on the End SARS epidemic in Southwestern Nigeria, this study also enhances previous research. By looking at the opinions of important players, such as young people, law enforcement, company owners, civil society members, and youths, the study offers important insight into how the protests were seen in various

institutional and social contexts. It draws attention to conflicting accounts of legitimacy, influence, accountability, and reform results. Overall, the study makes a significant contribution to the conversation about Nigerian social movements, democratic engagement, and conflict resolution. In addition to chronicling the End SARS protest's immediate successes and repercussions, it places the movement in the context of larger discussions about responsibility, governance, and sustainable national development.

Recommendations

Government, whether Federal, State or Local government Governments, in collaboration with security agencies, Civil Society Organizations and traditional/religious institutions should create avenues and listen to the millions of voices calling for police reform and see an opportunity to transform relations between police and communities.

The disbanding of SARS and establishment of SWAT as pronounced by the Inspector General of Police should be backed up with action, signaling a reform by prosecuting officers involved in brutalising the masses.

Governance and the justice system should also be reformed. Once meaningful reforms are implemented, the rights of citizens will be truly guaranteed within a thriving economy.

The Federal and State Governments should as a matter of urgency, address youth unemployment by investing in their employment through the creation of sustainable economic opportunities for young people in the country thereby, growing the economy.

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