

## **Reaction of the Nigerian State Towards Social Movements: A Study of Endsars Protest.**

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### **Abstract**

The study examined the reactions of the Nigerian state towards social movements with a focus on the #EndSARS protest. Nigeria is a post colonial state and exhibit elements of repressive character towards social movements as it occurred in the colonial era. Although myriads of social movements have been birthed to bring about social change at various stages of Nigeria's political history, they have been met with the use of brutal force by the Nigerian government. The problem is that, although Nigeria has experienced transition from one democratic government to another, it still exhibits autocratic and repressive tendencies towards social movements. This is mainly for the reason that the government perceives social movements as enemies of the state instead of necessary impetus for social change. The study relied on secondary data and adopted the Political process theory. It discovered that the repressive nature of the Nigerian state was deployed against the #EndSARS protesters, which led to shooting, maiming and killing of unarmed civilians. The study also found that the recommendation of the panel of inquiry on Lekki Toll Gate shooting is yet to be implemented. The study recommends the sanctioning of officers of the Nigerian Army and Nigeria Police culpable in the shooting and killing of protesters, training and retraining of officers of the Nigerian Army and Police Force, enhanced welfare package for them and regular interface between governments and social movements and closing the gap of distrust between government and its citizens by improving their general welfare and development.

**Key Words:** Social Movements, Protest, Nigerian state, #EndSARS, Contentious politics

### **Introduction**

Prior to the 1960s social movement theorists considered protests as undemocratic intrusion into politics, however in contemporary politics, protest is now perceived as an important adjunct of democratic politics (Oliver, Cadena-Roa and Strawn, 2003). Social movements are essentially

part of contentious politics and if properly managed serves as vehicle for development. This contention exists between two major groups in the society; the elites and masses, which can also be categorized into government and the governed. The elites seek to maintain the status-quo and protect their interest in so doing excludes the interest of the masses, while the masses seek to change it, seeking for inclusion; this relationship produces contradictions in the society. It is these contradictions that serve as vehicle for progress if properly managed. Societal progress may become elusive if the contradictions emanating from the society is not properly managed and when government response to social movements is abysmal. Department for Foreign Development (DFID, 2010), submits that exclusionary political settlements are associated with high levels of poor development outcomes.

The quest for reform in public policies and government opinion by the Nigerian masses since the colonial and post-colonial period contributed to the formation of social movements who mostly drive their demands through protests. Social movements such as, Nigerian Labour Congress, Academic Staff Union of Universities and Civil Society Organizations were formed for the main purpose of mobilizing citizens towards demanding for far reaching improvement in governance at the state and the society in general. These demands however have not been static over time as they change with the societal challenges. The colonial social movements were concerned with the liberation of Nigeria from the shackles of colonialism and attainment of independence while the post-colonial Nigeria Civil Society Organizations and Labour Unions in Nigeria are concerned with inclusion in government, replacement of authoritarian regimes with democratic governments, good governance, general welfare and development. Consequence upon the entrenchment of democratic government in Nigeria, there is a slight change in demands and strategies. Social Movement agitations now transcend demands for democratic governments into areas of security, political reforms, economic, social matters, improved education and good governance in general. This agitations has brought about a surge in protests recently in Nigeria, annual counts of protest have surge from at most a dozen in 2000 through 2012 to well over four hundred between 2013 and 2017 (Itodo & O'Regan, 2018).

Nigeria is a post colonial state, characterized with multi ethno-religious, multifarious interest groups. The inability of the Nigerian state to rise above peculiar interest and provide good governance has been a problem. The Nigerian state lacks the autonomy to translate policies into concrete development as it is perpetually hijacked by a group of political elites who perceives it as a private venture to enrich themselves. The country has witnessed the transition of one democratic government to another but this has not translated into improvement in the living conditions of the generality of its citizens. The Nigerian masses are subjected to untold hardships due to protracted and deepening economic crisis, failure of political representations and political systems as well as lack of real democracy. This is in spite of people's growing awareness that policy making has not prioritized them even when they claim to and frustration with politics and lack of trust in the existing political order (Ortiz, Burke, Berreda and Cortes 2013).

The inability to manage social movements and providesolutions to demands of Nigerian masses generates a sense of exclusion andfrustration which culminates into several civil disobedience

and street protests. Example of such protests includes; Aba women riots of 1929, Nigeria's workers protest of 1945 led by MichealImodu; which occurred during the colonial era and post colonial era includes; Ali must go protest of 1978, anti SAP protest, June 12 protest, protests against removal of fuel subsidies in the year 2000 and 2012, "say no to corruption" protest which was a response to the government's decision to pardon Late Diepreye Alamiesiya, "Our Mumu don Do" protest which was a protest demanding for the whereabouts of President Muhammed Buhari and the unprecedented End SARS (State Anti Robbery Squad) protest which occurred in 2020. The End SARS protest had the following demands: Immediate release of all arrested protesters, Justice for all deceased victims of police brutality and appropriate compensations for their families, setting up of an independent body to oversee the investigation and prosecution of all reports of police misconduct within 10 days, in line with the new Police Act, psychological evaluation and retraining (to be confirmed by an independent body) of all disbanded SARS officers before they can be redeployed and increase in police salary so that they are adequately compensated for protecting lives and property of citizens (Ogbannaya, 2020). End SARS protest witnessed demonstration and occupation of streets by protesters holding placards and banners to air their grievances across major cities of Nigeria. The protest which started on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020 and lasted for several weeks led to disruption of activities in major cities of Nigeria such as Benin, Abuja with the height of it at Lekki Toll gate in Lagos state. The Nigerian government responded by first arresting the protesters, and further by deploying the Military who shot sporadically at unarmed and peaceful protesters especially at Lekki Toll Gate (Report of Judicial Panel of Inquiry and Restitution on Lekki Toll Gate Incident, 2020).

The problematic therefore, is that while much attention has been accorded to the relationship between protest and democracy, less attention has been accorded to the role of protest in bringing about specific institutional reforms in Nigeria which has witnessed democratic to democratic transitions but still exhibits authoritarian tendencies. It is in the light of the above, that this study investigates the response of the Nigerian state to social movements in Nigeria with a focus on the end SARS protest.

### **Social Movement and Protest: A Conceptual Discourse**

Social change is an all encompassing phenomena; it includes socio-economic and political aspects of the society. Political science is a sub-set of Social Sciences; hence it is concerned with social change. Among the various factors such as individuals, groups and state that influences social change the Political Scientists perceives the state as the major determinant of social life and change (Leat, 2005). In order to bring about social change different approaches can be adopted, these include the conventional and non conventional means. The conventional means include; policies, formal institutions and democratic process, while non conventional means mostly bypasses the formal institutions into the adoption of social movements.

Protest is a sub-set of social movements, that's why Oliver, Cadena-Roa and Strawn (2003), perceives social movements and protest as politics by other means, they claimed it is now well recognized that extra-institutional and institutional politics are intertwined and interdependent.

Silva (2015), argues that movements are intricately linked to political goals, such as changes that shift the distribution of power in society, seek to generate favourable public opinion, or spread models of action through mechanisms of diffusion, seek to either impede threatening policies, demand change in existing inequitable policies, or propose policies that advance their goals for social, economic, and political inclusion. Goodwin and Jasper (2003:3), defines political or social protest as the act of challenging, resisting, or making demands upon authorities, power holders, and/or cultural beliefs and practices by some individual or group.

In an attempt to analyze the components and procedures of social movement Tilly (1978), submits that social movements possess four components of collective action: the organization, mobilization of resources, common interests, and opportunity. Collective action is a means of mobilizing group resources when people have no institutionalized means of making their voices heard, or when their voices are repressed by government. Itodo & O'Regan (2018) argued that protest don't occur in a vacuum, it is the last resort in attempts to challenge existing status-quo. Itodo & O'Regan, submitted that civil organizations in Nigeria employs three means of demands for accountability and reforms, these include; Persuasion which involve awareness raising with the use of media, using jingles, developing awareness, online social campaigns, secondly, cost reduction which entail developing the content of complicated legislative bills, authoring national action plans, building monitoring platforms or providing human capital for implementation, when neither cost production nor persuasion are enough to advance reform, activist resort to the third stage is invoked which is a more assertive efforts to twist the arms of recalcitrant decision makers, this involves the use of protest marches, in line with this Arce & Rice (2019), described protest or social movement as organized and sustained challenges.

Form the above, protest and social movements are contentious by nature, hence it is located in the area of contentious politics or protest politics. It is contentious in the sense that it involves mass mobilization for political revolution. Roller and Wessels (1996) submits that, protest and social movements are characterized by a significant increase of non-institutionalized forms of political participation, in particular of different forms of political protest. To buttress this, Bosi and Uba (2009), submits that political outcomes of protests can be divided into two broad categories: direct outcomes, such as a movement-generated change in public policy, and indirect outcomes, such as changes in public opinion on a specific issue.

The study therefore, extrapolates that protest is a struggle by individuals and groups who seek to challenge existing status quo for the purpose of achieving policy and institutional reforms, inclusion and even regime change.

### **Political Process Theory: A Framework of Analysis**

Political Process Theory (PPT) or political opportunity structure was first employed by Eisinger (1973), who adopted it to analyze the causes of the political effectiveness of protest. Political process theory is considered the core theory of social movements and how they mobilize, work to create change). It was further developed by sociologists in the U.S. during the 1970s and 80s,



in response to the Civil Rights, anti-war, and student movements of the 1960s. Sociologist Douglas McAdam, is credited with first developing this theory (McAdam, 1982). MacAdam was concerned with details of the rise and fall of the American Civil Rights Movement by examining it through the paradigm of the opportunities available by means of the established political structure, and more specifically the opportunity for social movement groups to make successful claims of grievances. He submitted that discontent over injustice exists perennially but leads to an effective protest only when external conditions are propitious. MacAdams, recognizes a resource mobilization approach superior to the psychological theories because it focuses on the amount of support available to aggrieved groups rather than on fluctuations in the level of personal discontent. He therefore argued that those who stress the importance of outside support often fail to recognize that an indigenous organizational network is a prerequisite for an effective challenge by groups that have been excluded by power. Four main scopes of political process was identified by MacAdam (1996), (i) the relative openness or closeness of the institutionalized political system; (ii) the stability or instability of that broad sets of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; (iii) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (iv) the state's capacity and propensity for repression.

Political process theory treats social movements as a type of political movement in that the origins of a social movement are traced to the availability of political opportunities. More precisely, this theory looks at the social movement in question to that of the state – or the power of the government in charge. If the government's position is strongly entrenched and it also is prone to repressive behavior, then the chances are high that a social movement might fail. If, on the other hand, the government is weak or more tolerant of dissenting behavior, then the chances are high that any social movement that is born might have the opportunity to grow and flourish (Sen & Avci, 2016). In this sense, Tarrow (2006) defines political process as consistent but not necessarily formal permanent or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements.

From the forgoing analysis, the theory of Political Process examines the opportunity the state accords to protests and social movements, which to a very large extent also determines the degree of success of such movements. The Nigerian state can be categorized as a fragile state going by the nature and character. Noriss (2006) perceives fragile states as states that are generally characterized by weak governance institutions; characteristically lack either the political will or the capacity to deliver basic public services, especially to maintain security and alleviate deep-seated poverty, they pose major challenges for the distribution of development aid and they are a risky environment. Succinctly such states possess the tendency to deploy state power against dissenting voices and protests. Therefore, political process theory is very apt for the analysis of the reactions of the Nigerian state towards social movements and protest. The state seems to be legendary in the deployment of state power against social movements and protests whenever it occurs but lacks the power to bring about development. Although there is an entrenchment of democratic governance in Nigeria, the institutions of government such as the security agencies still exhibits high autocratic tendencies towards social movements.

## **An Analysis of the Nexus between State, Citizenship and Protest**

Citizenship is the set of duties and rights reciprocally between state agents and bodies and persons defined in function of their membership in the state. Not everyone, however, is a citizen: it is only the person who meets certain conditions of nationality, age and exercise of political rights (Turner, 1993). The relationship between citizens and the state is an unavoidable one as none of them can exist without the other. Citizenship is one of the unavoidable features of the state; every citizen is a member of a state while no state can exist without citizens. The relationship between the state and citizens has been major concerns of political thinkers. Philosophers such as, Plato and Aristotle of the Greeks laid the foundation for other scholars such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Karl Marx, on the nature of the state and its purpose. The conceptualization of the state by these scholars divides the theory of the state into three perspectives. One of such classification is that the state is an organism of which men themselves are part which is therefore greater than them. The second is that state as a machine which men create for their own purposes and which is therefore no other than they are (Wayper, 1973), and the third is the state as a class. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle are believers of the state as an organism while scholars that are adherent of state as a mechanism includes Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. Karl Marx, Geatano Mosca belongs to the state as a class school of thought.

These thoughts implicitly show the ideologies, purpose and functions of the state and citizens, however in the modern state the constitution serves as a means through which the functions and relationship that exist between citizens and the state can be identified. For instance, the 1999 constitution of Nigeria guarantees the fundamental human rights of citizens and outlines the functions of government to include law making, maintenance of law and order, defense of the government and the state, maintenance of international relations, ensuring the general welfare of citizens and economic development of the people. It also states that the primary duty of government is the protection of lives and property and guarantees the fundamental human right of the citizens (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

The relationship between the state and citizens in this sense can be likened to the postulations of social contract theorist such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke who perceives the relationship between citizens and state as a social contract (Ebenstein, 1969). The question therefore is: what happens when the social contract is not kept by the state? What happens when there is a failure by the government to improve the general welfare and economic development of its citizens? Can citizens organize social movements and protest against the failure of the state? Can the citizens disobey the state on these bases? Ortiz, Burke, Berreda and Cortes (2013), submits that, rising income and group inequalities, high youth unemployment and lack of opportunity to engage in society compounded by decades of state and police corruption and violence are issues at the heart of protests against largely authoritarian governments. They further submits that social movement occur when there is people's growing awareness that policy-making has not prioritized their social welfare and economic development even when it has claimed to, many of the world's protests arise when large majorities of people feel left out, and when neither the middle classes nor the poor find public services adequate for their needs. This study therefore,

infers that civil disobedience such as street protests is usually birthed by breach of contracts or agreements by the state.

### **Nigerian State and its Response to EndSars Protest**

The Nigerian state came into existence by the forceful amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate under British colonialism and gained independence in 1960, hence, the analysis of its reaction towards social movements and protest covers the colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. This indicates that Nigeria does not only have a long history of social movements and protests but also a chequered one. As put by Adebowale (2020), agitations, protests and confrontations of any kind have always been part and parcel of the Nigerian system, way before the country got her independence in 1960, during the colonial era and till now; these actions have either led to a definite change in the system or further sparked a bigger chain of reactions.

During the colonial era, there were protests such as the Aba Women riots of 1929 which was a protest by Aba women against the exploitative tax system of the colonial administration. The reaction of the colonial Nigerian state against the Aba women rioters was very repressive, as the rioters were arrested and detained by the colonial police. This repressive nature of the Nigerian state towards protesters did not change after independence rather it was adopted by new managers of the Nigerian state. This was evidenced in jailing of the labour union leaders for embarking on a general strike in 1964 (Nwoko, 2009).

Nigeria has experienced military dictatorship which by nature detests social movements and protests. The tyrannical and unaccountable character exhibited by the nature of the military engendered formations of social movements that rose to challenge the military and demand for democratic governance. In the 1990s, organizations such as the Civil Liberties Organization and United Action for Democracy led the movement against military rule, mobilizing citizens to take a stand and organizing demonstrations in the streets (Itodo and O'Regan, 2018). These movements were met with stiff repression such as intimidation, maiming, incarcerations and killings of protesters as they were considered acts of insurrections and treasons towards regime change. Omulusi (2016) submitted that the devastating implications of the military rule brought about militarized political culture and eroded civic culture. Thus, the rule of operation became that of order, combat rather than dialogue, disregard of court orders and violation of human rights became the tenets of militarized civic culture in democratic dispensation. Succinctly, this pervasive abuse of human rights by institutions of government and the failure to deliver on democratic dividends birthed more civil organizations which placed more demands on government and resorts to street protest especially when the government acts obstinate to their demands. Therefore, this study asserts that #EndSars# protest was largely hinged and driven by two major coordinating factors, namely: pervasive human right abuse by the Nigeria Police and depressive economic conditions.

The #EndSARS protests started on October 4, 2020 following the killing of a young man in Ughelli, Delta State by operatives of SARS. The video of the incident trended on social media, leading to nationwide protests within a few days. On October 8, 2020 the nationwide street protests began across Nigerian cities, eventually assuming a global dimension as the protest rapidly spread to other cities across the world, including London and New York. Although these protests were taking place simultaneously across all major cities in Nigeria, the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos was considered a major national anchor point and epicentre of the #EndSARS protest (Iwuoha and Aniche, 2021). The protesters demanded for five major things; which were the immediate release of all arrested protesters; Justice for all those who died through police brutality and appropriate compensation to their families, An independent body to investigate and prosecute all reports or complaints of police brutality within ten days; Independent psychological evaluation and retraining of disbanded SARS officers before they can be redeployed; Adequate increase in the salaries of officers of the Nigeria Police Force as appropriate incentives for carrying out their constitutional duties of protecting lives and properties (Abati, 2020).

The Nigerian government eventually responded by setting up the Presidential Panel on Police Reforms which approved the five demands by announcing the following measures: Disbandment of SARS, redeploying and issuing directives to operatives to report to Force Headquarters for debriefing, psychological and medical examination just as the government has through the Police Service Commission (PSC) reportedly recommended 37 former members of the disbanded Squad for dismissal from service; Setting up of a new Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team to replace SARS; Encouraging state governments and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) authority to set up judicial panels of inquiry to organize public hearings in looking into allegations of police brutality with the aim of prosecuting erring police officers and compensating victims and families of victims; Expediting the passing into law the bill to reform the police by the National Assembly (NASS); Efforts at improving the general welfare and funding of the Nigeria Police Force (Ogonaya, 2020).

Rather than soothe, placate and disperse the protesters, the disbandment of SARS and police reforms led to new dimensions and demands for good governance expressed with other trendy hashtags such as #EndBadGovernance, #EndCorruption, and #EndInsecurity. In fact, the #EndSARS hashtag only trended predominantly on social media within the first 10 days of the protests (Iwuoha and Aniche, 2021). From the dynamic nature of the demands by #EndSARS, it is indicative that there is breakdown of social contract between the Nigerian government and its citizens, which has led to provocation, consequently making citizens to adopt such terms as *SoroSoke* which means speak up in Yoruba language and protest against the repressive and non-developmental nature of the Nigerian state. The unity of purpose of the protesters was further aided by the Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions. Although the rate of protests declined in the world during the first quarter of 2020 due to Covid-19 crisis which led to restricted movements and gatherings (United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2020), however, in Nigeria, the lockdown and restrictions provided the avenue to question the Nigeria social welfare towards its citizens. Palliatives that were meant to cushion the effects of Covid-19 were diverted by wealthy Nigerians at the expense of the masses.



The unabated protest was infiltrated by hooligans and miscreants who destroyed properties across major Nigerian cities. The Nigerian security agents responded by deploying live weapons against its citizens. In their study, Iwuoha and Aniche (2021), submits that there was state repression, clampdowns and abusive brutality on peaceful #EndSARS protesters through its actors-Nigeria Police Force, Nigerian Army and sponsored hoodlums, that between 10<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of October, 2020, some 29 protesters were reportedly killed by the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Police Force. They further found out that the Nigerian state consolidated its repressive nature during the #EndSARS protest in the following ways: the reported use of tear gas, water cannons, live bullets, the killings of about 15 to 20 protesters, the disconnection of CCTV camera at Lekki Toll gates before the shootings which indicated that it was masterminded and orchestrated by people in government to destroy the evidence.

A reluctant broadcast was made by President Muhammad Buhari on October 22, 2020 after much pressure from various stakeholders. In his speech the President asserted among other things that the protesters misconstrued the promptness at which they granted the demands of the protesters as a sign of weakness. This statement shows that the Nigerian state perceives itself as authoritarian state that is not really ready for reforms even in the democratic era. The deployment of arms against unarmed civilians cannot be categorized as a feature of a strong state, rather a weak one. Therefore the deployment of weapons by the Nigerian state is evidence that the Nigerian state is a weak state, which perceives social movements and protests as enemies of the state that must be clamped down, instead of perceiving them as necessary ingredients for progress.

Panel of enquiries were set up by different states ostensibly meant to address the human right abuses against the #EndSARS protesters. For instance, the Abuja panel awarded fresh ₦289 million to 74 victims (Innochir, 2022). The Lagos Panel of Enquiry which was concerned with the Lekki toll gate shootings made five key findings which are: (i) that the Nigerian Army was invited for intervention in the state and was deployed to Lekki Toll Gate on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020. At the Lekki Toll Gate, Officers of the Nigerian Army shot, injured and killed unarmed helpless and defenseless protesters, without provocation or justification, while they were waving the Nigerian Flag and singing the national Anthem and the manner of assault and killing in context could be described as massacre. The panel also found that the conduct of the Nigerian Army was exacerbated by its refusal to allow ambulances render medical assistance to victims who required such assistance. The army was also found not to have adhered to its own rules of engagement; (ii) the panel found that the Nigeria Police Force deployed its officers to the Lekki Toll Gate on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 and between that night and morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, 2020, its officers shot at, assaulted and battered unarmed protesters, which led to injuries and deaths. The Police Officers also tried to cover up their actions by picking up bullets; (iii) the panel found that the Lekki Concession Company (LCC) hampered the panel's investigation by refusing to turn over some useful and vital information/evidence as requested by the Forensic experts engaged by the panel, even where such information and evidence was by the country's admission, available on CCTV video footage of the Lekki Toll Gate on the night of 20<sup>th</sup> of October, which it tendered before the panel; (iv) the panel found that there was an

invitation of the Nigerian Army to Lagos state made by the Lagos State Government through the Governor before the hierarchy of the Nigerian Army deployed its soldiers to Lekki Toll Gate on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020; (iv) the panel found that there was an attempt to cover up the incident of the 20<sup>th</sup> October by the cleaning of the Lekki Toll Gate and failure to preserve the scene ahead of potential investigations (Report of Lekki Toll Gate Investigation of October, 2020, pp13-14).

The panel made a total of 32 recommendations, which included but not limited to; holistic police reforms covering welfare and training; sanctioning of the officers of the Nigerian Army and Nigeria Police Force respectively who participated in the shooting, injury and killing of unarmed protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate; memorialization of the Lekki Toll Gate protesters who were killed, injured and traumatized by the incident, various sums of compensation to victims of the Lekki Toll Gate incident, which must be expeditious to accelerate the healing process.

From the findings of the Lekki Toll Gate panel the Nigerian state had left its primary duties of protection of lives and property and assumed the role of killer of innocent citizens during the #EndSARS protest. The extreme detest for social movements by the Nigerian state makes it commit crime against its citizens using the security agents that were meant to protect lives of Nigerians. This is a paradox and travesty of the Nigerian state; a state that is swift in clamping down opposing views but very sluggish or inactive in the promotion of development, a state that claims to be a republic in theory but a principality in practice (Orungbami, 2021).

Furthermore, the Lagos state Government which set up the panel in the first instance is yet to implement most of the panel's recommendations. No officer of the Nigerian Police and Nigerian Army have been sanctioned, the memorialization of the #EndSARS protesters have been greeted with the same use of brutal force by the Nigerian security agents (Adelagun, 2022).

From all of the above, this study discovered that the Nigerian state has exhibited repressive tendencies towards social movement and protest since the colonial era; this was evidenced in the Aba women riots of 1929. After the attainment of independence in 1960, it was expected that there should be liberalization of social movements in Nigeria as they are supposed to be necessary impetus for social change. The study found that, although myriads of social movements have been birthed to bring about social change at various stages of Nigeria's political history, they have been met with the use of brutal force by the Nigerian government. For instance, during the Military regime social movements were formed to address issues of non-inclusion, human right abuse, tyranny, socio-economic challenges and demand for democratic governments, the deliberate disregard for the demands of these social movements often led to street protests, with resultant shooting, maiming and killing of protesters.

The study also found that since 1999 Nigeria has experienced successive democratic governments, which should translate to liberalization of social movements and entrenchment of democratic principles, but these have been elusive. It was observed that the demands for inclusion, protection of human rights, accountability, good governance still remains core

demands by the social movement in the democratic era; haplessly these demands were confronted with brutal use of naked power by the Nigerian government. It's this repressive nature of the Nigerian state that provoked investigation into the #EndSARS protest which was a major incident of protest in Nigeria.

The study found that the #EndSARS protest was carried out against the abuse of human rights, bad governance, lack of social welfare and general economic woes confronting the Nigerian citizens. Although their demand was superficially based on proscription of State Anti-Robbery Squad, the in depth analysis shows that the protesters were pent up about deepening economic situation and wanted a solution.

It was equally discovered that the repressive and brutal nature of the Nigerian state was brought to bear on the #EndSARS protesters evidenced in the shooting, injuring and killings of the protesters by the officers of the Nigerian Army and the Nigeria Police, which was reported by the #EndSARS Panel set up by the Lagos state government.

The study found that in spite of the recommendations by the #EndSARS panel for the sanctioning of the officers of the Nigerian Army and Nigeria Police, no officer have been sanctioned yet. The memorialization of the EndSARS protesters recommended by the panel was also rebuffed with brutal force as those who went for the memorial were arrested.

### **Conclusion/ Recommendations**

The study assessed the reactions of the Nigerian state towards social movements with a focus on #EndSARS protests and concludes that the repressive and brutal nature of the Nigerian state towards social movements have not changed in spite of successive democratic governments since 1999. This approach of the Nigerian state perceives social movements as a challenge instead of necessary impetus for social change.

From the foregoing the study suggests that any officer found in the shooting and killings of #EndSARS protesters and any other protesters should be made to face the full wrath of the law. This will curb the excesses and impunity of the security agencies.

It further recommends the training, retraining and social welfare for Nigeria police officers and Nigerian Army. The training should lay emphasis on the need for cordial civil-military relations, as this will bring about trust between civilians and military.

The government should close the gap of distrust between them and its citizens. This can be achieved by providing succor and prosperity for its citizens. The manifesto which serves as a means of agreement between government and citizens should not be abandoned half way by the government.

The study further suggests a regular interface between government and social movements. This will engender proper understanding and synergy between them. In this sense this interface will

change the perception of criminalizing social movements and perceiving them as enemies of the state, instead of being partners in progress.

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