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#### Language

The demonstrations by thousands of young Nigerians against police and regime brutality, which spread across Nigeria in October 2020, became a significant news story. The national and international interest was due partly to the initial surge of support in Lagos and across the country, but there was also shock over the brutality of the government's response. Over 60 deaths of protesters in three weeks were reported and many hundreds were also injured. The army fired directly at peaceful demonstrators and the police transported thugs (mainly from the north of the country) to attack protesters.

The protests and the official response reflected the fact that Nigeria, despite a strong economy, has had a troubled political record of internal conflicts and authoritarian military rule since independence in 1960. It has over 250 different ethnic groups, and is divided between Islam and Christianity. The main political fault line is between the Islamic north, which has become a stronghold of the military, and other areas. The attempt by the Igbo people to create an independent Biafra in the south-east led to the bitter and destructive Biafran war from 1967-70. Although since 1999 Nigeria had formally become an electoral democracy, the military still tend to control major economic resources and to dominate government. President Muhammadu Buhari, in power in 2020, has a background of military intervention in politics.

The initial focus of the October 2020 youth protests was the routine brutality of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), which had already been strongly criticized both within Nigeria and by international human rights bodies. Amnesty, for example, published two extremely critical reports in 2016 and 2017. The protests began online in 2017 with the #EndSARS campaign, but they had little political impact on the government until early October 2020. Then thousands of young Nigerians took to the streets, initially influenced by calls for demonstrations by two Afro-Pop musicians. Lagos was the centre of the protests, but there were similar demonstrations in cities across the country and transcended ethnic and religious divides. The protesters also received active support from civil society bodies, notably the Feminist Coalition, which helped to initiate the protesters and provide food and medical aid and funds for legal costs. The demands of the demonstrators rapidly extended to misuse of government funds and lack of jobs for the young. The demonstrations were generally nonviolent, but in Lagos some people reacted angrily to the brutal suppression of protest by burning down buildings linked to the federal and regional government.

The demonstrations ended after October 2020. The government seemed initially to be taken aback by the mass protests, and the Vice President made a broadcast early on which seemed to promise that SARS would be disbanded. But after October the government turned to suppression of unrest. One tactic was to suspend the bank accounts of media organizations and civil society groups that had given publicity and support to the protests. This move was countered by the affected organizations turning to use of bitcoin, which the authorities could not directly control. One unanticipated outcome has been that by the summer of 2021 Nigeria has more trade in bitcoin than any country except the US.

Impressive as the October 2020 demonstrations were, it is not clear that they have achieved any long-term success in reducing the corrupt and arbitrary nature of Nigeria's government. The promised disbanding of SARS did not take place. Political attention has also been diverted to areas of social and political violence in different parts of Nigeria, especially in the north which is threatened by militant armed Islamic groups who have repeatedly attacked schools and kidnapped pupils - especially but not exclusively girls.

The references listed below cover various aspects of the 2020 protests, including possible weaknesses, and some assessment of their longer term impact.

[Nigeria: Crackdown on Police Brutality Protests](#) [1], Human Rights Watch, 2020

Provides a close examination of the development of the anti-SARS protests, especially between 8-15 October 2020.



See also: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-54508781> [2]

Akinwotu, Emmanuel, [Just Stop Killing Us. Young Nigerians Rise Up](#) [3], *Guardian Weekly*, 29/10/2020, pp. 15-16

Provides an overview of the reasons for the protests and the initial government response.

See also: Akinwotu, Emmanuel, 'Nigeria Tried to Ban Bitcoin. How Did It Work Out?', *Guardian Weekly*, 13 August 2021, pp.25-6.

Akinwotu explains the rising use of bitcoin by the tech-savvy young, and notes how the government clamp down after October 2020 on bank accounts of those supporting the anti-SARS protests fueled this trend.

Ashoka, [When Police Brutality and Digital Rights Collide - Lessons from Nigeria](#) [4], *Forbes*, 20-11-2020,

Forbes discusses with Ashoka fellow, Gbenga Sesan, how both offline and online mobilization contributed to the build-up of the End SARS protests. The discussion also includes the intersection of police brutality and digital rights in the light of accusations that SARS officials were arresting individuals working in start-ups and stealing their data.

See also: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/endsars-young-nigeria-protest-p...> [5]

Aung, Nelly, [Nigeria's Next Generation Protest Movement](#) [6], *Foreign Policy*, 28/11/2020,

Aung reports on the protests that erupted in Nigeria on 2 October 2020, after a video circulated showing a man killed by police. The protests broke out three years after the online campaign #EndSARS was launched, demanding an end to the squad's indiscriminate violence against young people. She notes the role of two Afro-Pop musicians and feminists in promoting protests, and the rapid extension of demands to encompass misuse of public funds, the unemployment crisis, poor economic infrastructure and bad government.

Aveni, Tofe, [One Step Forward. Two Steps Back. Nigeria: Has the #EndSARS Movement Come to an End?](#) [7], *The Africa Report*, 2021, pp. 6

The author compares the Nigerian movement with Black Lives Matter and discusses within the wider context of Nigerian politics EndSARS has not been successful.

Dambo, Tamar ; Ersoy, Metin ; Auwal, Ahmad Muhammad ; Olorunsola, Victor Oluwafemi ; Olonode, Ayodeji ; Arikewuyo, Abdulgaffar Olawale ; Joseph, Ayodele, [Nigeria's hashtagEndSARS Movement and its Implications on Online Protests in Africa's Most Populous Country](#) [8], *Journal of Public Affairs*, 2020

This article looks at the claims on social media by Nigerian youth of police abuse, which is well documented in the three-year online EndSARS campaign. The authors examine the limitations of the campaign, which lasted three years with little success. They explore the main themes of the campaign and consider how Nigeria's political environment can hinder successful movement activism.

Dickson, Ajisaffe ; Ojo, Tinuade Adekunbi ; Monyani, Margaret, [The impacts of social media on the #EndSARS youth protests in Nigeria](#) [9], *International Conference of Information Communication Technologies enhanced Social Sciences and Humanities 2021*, 2021

The increasing impact of digitalization, especially in Africa, has transformed political, social, economic and business activity. There is therefore a need for rigorous academic debate about the effectiveness of social media platforms for citizen activism. This study focusses on the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria to explore strategies and mechanisms used to try to influence government. The authors conclude that the movement may inspire youth-led



movements elsewhere, but also examine how the nature of the Nigerian state resulted in an abrupt end to the protests.

Gaskia, Jaye, [Understanding Nigeria's #EndSARS movement](#) [10], rs21, 26/10/2020,

This article examines how the historical and class character of Nigeria has fueled repression and exploitation, and contributed to the indiscriminate violence used by SARS and its lack of accountability. It also explains how the #EndSARS movement developed.

Ndifon, Naomi, [Nigerian Women vs SARS: A Coalition against Police Brutality](#) [11], Black Women Radicals, 2020

This blog highlights the activism of the Feminist Coalition, a group of young feminists who were at the forefront of the youth movement against police brutality. They helped initiate the public protests and provided food, security, mobile toilets and ambulances, as well as hospital services and bail arrangements for protesters.

Ojewale, Oluwole, [Youth protests for police reform in Nigeria: What lies ahead for #EndSARS](#) [12], Brookings, 2020

Ojewale argues that the EndSARS protests, which incorporate demands for human rights and greater democracy, provide an outlet for marginalized young Nigerians to express their grievances against the government. The excesses of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad and the failure of the government to address them, despite promises of reform, are at the top of the list. This blog provides an in depth analysis of the movement and its causes, and discusses how the protests might affect the 2021 election.

See also: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/10/police-protest-power-and-nigerias-y...> [13]

Okunna, Chinyere, [#EndSARProtest. Re-thinking Nigerian Youth and Government Policies](#) [14], AfriHeritage Policy Working Paper, African Heritage Institute, 2021, pp. 15

Young people, who comprise nearly 34 per cent of Nigeria's, population of over 200 million, are of central importance to its future. This paper examines the 2019 Nigerian National Youth Policy, and argues that #EndSARS was not only a protest against police violence, but 'a desperate reaction' to the long term failure of governments to 'make Nigeria a livable society in general, and to achieve genuine youth development in particular'.

Onubogu, Oge, [Protests Test Nigeria's Democracy and its Leadership in Africa](#) [15], United States Institute of Peace, 2020

After the explosion of the anti-SARS protests, this analysis argues that the way the Nigerian government responds to these emphatic demands for government accountability and an end to police violence will influence similar struggles across much of Africa, and impact especially on the young.

See also: <https://urbanviolence.org/why-nigerias-youth-are-protesting-for-police-reform/> [16]

Orabueze, Florence ; Ukaogo, Victor O. ; David-Ojukwu, Ifeyinwa ; Eze, Godstime Irene ; Orabueze, Chiamaka I., [Reminiscence on #EndSARS protests of 2020 in Nigeria](#) [17], Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, Vol. 13, issue 1, 2021, pp. 1-15

This study of the #EndSARS protests that shook Nigeria in October and November 2020 considers how far they can be related to more violent acts of insurgency such as Boko Haram. The study adopts a historical framework and draws on qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore how endemic governmental corruption and 'the re-enslavement and recolonization' of citizens' by political leaders has led to youth rebellion. The authors conclude that protest and violent forms of revolt will not cease until the deep-seated causes are tackled.



See also: Oloyede, F. and A.A. Elegba, (2019) 'Exploring Hashtag Activism in Nigeria. A Case of #EndSARS Campaign'. Conference Proceedings: 5th in Communication and Media Studies (CRPC 2018) Famagusta. Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, pp. 1-7.

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**14:11):**<https://civilresistance.info/section/h-campaigns-against-government/h4-movements-against-government-violence-authoritarianism-2>

#### Links

[1] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/nigeria-crackdown-police-brutality-protests> [2] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-54508781> [3] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/just-stop-killing-us-young-nigerians-rise> [4] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/when-police-brutality-and-digital-rights-collide-lessons-nigeria> [5] <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/endsars-young-nigeria-protest-police-brutality> [6] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/nigerias-next-generation-protest-movement> [7] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2021/one-step-forward-two-steps-back-nigeria-has-endsars-movement-come-end> [8] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/nigerias-hashtagendsars-movement-and-its-implications-online-protests-africas-most> [9] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2021/impacts-social-media-endsars-youth-protests-nigeria> [10] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/understanding-nigerias-endsars-movement> [11] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/nigerian-women-vs-sars-coalition-against-police-brutality> [12] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/youth-protests-police-reform-nigeria-what-lies-ahead-endsars> [13] <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/10/police-protest-power-and-nigerias-young-democrats> [14] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2021/endsarprotest-re-thinking-nigerian-youth-and-government-policies> [15] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2020/protests-test-nigerias-democracy-and-its-leadership-africa> [16] <https://urbanviolence.org/why-nigerias-youth-are-protesting-for-police-reform/> [17] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2021/reminiscence-endsars-protests-2020-nigeria>